**Creating Trust and Community: Participation in Tough Conversations In a Peace Education Program**

**Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Community, Youth,**

**and Education Studies Major at Clark University**

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Abstract

The following thesis attempts to address how relationships of trust prove to be significant in having “value-laden” conversations. In order to study this, I implemented a peace education program with a curriculum that I designed. The purpose of this program was to encourage discussion based learning and trust even when disagreement arose. Ultimately, I learned from this process that there was a lot to learn from elements of facilitation, participation, community and conflict. In particular, I used metrics of “talk moves” and facilitation tools and changes in participation in order to gauge changes in comfort of participants which I linked to trust. Trust was often reflected in community interactions or based on community structures already in place. Even in moments of conflict, pushback between peers became evidence of comfort in disagreement and opportunities for participants to learn with each other. These noticings culminated to create a few concrete findings. They embodied themes of facilitation, participation, community, and conflict.

Acknowledgements

I want to give brief thanks to all the people who helped make this thesis happen. First of all Claire Schaeffer Duffy and Gina Kuruvilla at the Center for Nonviolent Solutions who did so much to help me in the early stages of learning about peace education and developing a successful curriculum of my own, I am so grateful for your continually willingness to help me grow. At Angel’s Net Foundation I am so grateful for their willingness to work with me and take a chance on a new program and allow me to simultaneously do research with the amazing students.

At Clark I am thankful for our amazing CYES cohort who I was able to learn and grow with and perhaps create a community of trust of our own. And of course, our advisor Sarah Michaels who led us all through this whole process the entire way. I was so grateful to all the support that came from all my fellow classmates and friends that were there through the praxis creation and implementation and the thesis writing process.

Most of all I am thankful to all the kids who were willing to engage with me in the peace education program and take the time to commit to some really interesting conversations that taught me a lot. I grew to know all of them so much better over the course of our work together and I am so grateful to each of them.

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**Introduction and Research Questions**

*As someone who would have identified as a relatively shy child, participating in class or other types of group discussions did not always come easy to me. Even now I am not always prepared to participate on a whim. During the pandemic, I decided to attend a club zoom meeting on a subject that I thought might be interesting. I did not know anyone in the club but wanted to give it a try and see what it was like, so I showed up with my camera off. After a brief introduction they announced that we would be dividing into break out groups to discuss some of the issues that they were interested in. Immediately my anxiety spiked. I had not mentally prepared to participate and as a result promptly left the meeting to avoid doing so. Some of this could be chalked up to the zoom format and the overall stress of online learning during the pandemic but at the same time it was just general social anxiety of participating in small groups.*

*When I am in turn now leading discussions, I think of how to avoid instilling this feeling in the participants of my own program. As I have been learning, “change moves at the speed of trust” and I think perhaps conversations act similarly. I share my slightly awkward, slightly embarrassing experience in order to highlight what might go through someone's head when required to participate in front of a group. Had I been more comfortable in the group I might have stayed and pushed myself to participate. But with no one I knew and nothing from the group keeping me there I chose to leave. The idea that trust is at the basis of many of these moments is something that I instinctually believe but also something that I have seen to be true through various experiences.*

The way that we participate in spaces that require discussion and dialogue are oftentimes based in trust. When moments of conflict arise, how we choose to participate can have a significant impact on the result of that conversation. Given the current state of interpersonal and intergroup conflicts and violence in the country, it is well recognized that there’s a need for educational spaces for youth that center on peace-making and nonviolent solutions to problems (Ben-Porath 2003﻿, Brantmeier 2011). By creating educational and discussion-based spaces about peace and conflict resolution, addressing these moments when violence does arise becomes more accessible and achievable.

In order to make this happen, I created a curriculum with the help of the Center for Nonviolent Solutions to be implemented specifically at the afterschool program at Angels Net Foundation, a Worcester non-profit serving African immigrants and refugees in Worcester. The Center for Nonviolent Solutions became a resource for me as I created this curriculum. I worked with the Center for Nonviolent Solutions; a small Worcester based nonprofit focused on education based practices around nonviolent solutions.

I implemented the “peace-building” curriculum that focuses on conflict resolution and peace-building techniques. With support from the Center, I developed a curriculum that was based on many different peace education resources and a few members’ extensive knowledge. At Angels Net Foundation, I worked with a small group of students (ages 9-13) in an afterschool program activity time where I led and encouraged discussions about peace, restorative justice, and nonviolent solutions to problems through this curriculum. My project seeks to identify what indicators of trust and relationships of trust are evident in thoughtful, productive conversations among peers.

My research questions specifically are:

1. What evidence of trust is there among participants, and with me as facilitator, in key discussions?
2. What seems to be happening in discussions that participants and I identify as being about “value-laden?”
3. What conversations produce dialogue between peers which allow for disagreement? When does this occur? What does this disagreement look like?
4. What framing questions or discussion strategies, or topics seem to support productive dialogues or trust among participants?

These questions guided my project as I consider how trust is at play when disagreement is happening within discussions. The goal of these discussions was to orient them towards value-based issues that encouraged participants to engage with their own values as well as those of their peers.

In doing this project, I hoped to create a space where the participants cultivated trust between each other and with myself as a facilitator/researcher, as we discussed topics of peace-making and nonviolence. Before beginning the praxis, I hoped to learn how trust might lead to open dialogues that allow for more progress in the subject matter. In actually implementing it, I realize that perhaps it might go in the reverse as well, that the peace education content might impact feelings of trust as well. Understanding what characteristics of dialogue are necessary to effectively engage across differences in cultural backgrounds, opinions or beliefs helps me better understand what is necessary in facilitating productive discussion more often and in a variety of spaces.

I specifically wanted to implement this research around trust with the topic of peace studies and conflict resolution practices because I feel that trust goes hand in hand with the core of many of the methods of restorative practices discussed in the curriculum. When students are equipped with the skills to manage conflict nonviolently, studies have shown positive results in regard to mutual trust, "human needs for security, identity and meaning" and senses of hope ﻿(Danesh 2006﻿﻿). My hope is to more deeply unpack the kinds of discussions that work to support trust and collaborative meaning making.

With this praxis project, I hoped to fill gaps in my understanding of what brings these participants to actively participate in the program and advocate for their thoughts and positions/values. I think that this ties so well with the Peace Education Program because addressing and managing conflict requires many of the tools and skills I examined in terms of discussion and dialogue.

In general, my goals for how I and others might benefit from this project is based on a deeper relationship of trust between participants (including myself) and that participants gain a more nuanced understanding of what peace is. I hope that as a result of this work, that participants strengthen the tools of engaging in peaceful conflict and that they become more aware of some of the methods of peace that we discuss. As I used practitioner inquiry methods (observations, audio recordings of discussions, and self-report surveys and interviews), I made efforts to gain an understanding of what is required of facilitators and participants in order to have productive conversations dealing with peace-making and nonviolent solutions to conflict.

**Ethnographic Description**

# **Center for Nonviolent Solutions**

Although it is not the site of my research, The Center for Nonviolent Solutions plays a significant role in this praxis project. Specifically, they equipped me with the needed tools to create the curriculum that I eventually enacted. I have been building a relationship with them since March of 2021. The Center for Nonviolent Solutions is a small Worcester based nonprofit whose mission is “To provide education and resources to help people in the Worcester Area to understand nonviolence and peacemaking as a way of life and to reject the use of violence in resolving conflict.” Additionally, the organization cites their vision to be that they “envision communities where conflicts are resolved nonviolently, and where the skills for building a culture of peace are widely known and used to foster greater understanding, harmony, and justice.” A relatively recent organization, the Center received recognition as a nonprofit in July 2010. In the last decade they have hosted speakers and provided resources in order to further their mission of education in nonviolence for communities in Worcester. They have partnered with other peace centered organizations to identify a curriculum that can be used to educate youth and adults on nonviolence that I plan on implementing at my site. They were able to provide me with the opportunity to participate in a Kingian Nonviolence Training for a couple weeks over the summer. This provided the basis of my curriculum. In particular, I worked closely with Claire Schaeffer-Duffy, the program director, and Gina Kuruvilla, a member of the board. Claire was wonderful and provided connections and interesting resources and any support I needed throughout the process, even before it had fully taken shape. Gina worked closely with me to develop the curriculum down to the last minute. Both at times observed sessions of the program.

# **Angel’s Net Foundation**

Angels-Net Foundation is a local nonprofit whose mission is to, “empower and support immigrants and refugees to successfully adjust to their new culture in the Greater Worcester community through education, programs and partnerships.” The Foundation runs an afterschool program for kids between the ages of 5 and 18. My research took place specifically in their after school program where I worked 3 days a week between 2:30 and 5:30. I worked with Angels-Net this past summer (2021) and began research this September. This afterschool program takes place in a space within Wesley Methodist Church that the organization rents and has a total of 15-25 participants regularly. When kids arrive, we spend time on homework help and fun activities as well as providing snacks to the kids that Friendly House provides.

For my Peace Education Program, I am specifically working with seven kids between the ages of 9 and 13. All are themselves African immigrants or refugees or children of immigrants or refugees. Many of the participants have close ties to other members of the afterschool program and/or the staff.

There were seven participating members in my Peace education program, four of whom consented to be a part of my research. All four of the participants who consented had some familial connection to an employee at Angels-Net Foundation.

**Consenting Participants**

**Mark**- 13 yrs. old, Son of the founder of the organization, Very talkative, 8th grade

Mark is the oldest of the participants in the Peace Education Program. He is the son of an employee at the larger Angels-Net Foundation and therefore has been coming to the afterschool program pretty much since its creation. He is extremely outgoing and often appears comfortable talking with everyone at the program whether that be other kids or staff. He has self-proclaimed that he is more likely to act than walk away when it comes to conflict but as I see him in our peace program, he is an opinionated and intelligent boy who feels comfortable stepping in when he sees something that he doesn’t think is right.

**Owen**- Twin of Andrew, Very quiet, Son of one of the employees, 12 yrs. old, 6th grade

Owen is one of the twins in the program. He and his brother Andrew are the son of another employee who has been at the organization for many years. Both twins are extremely quiet in tone and in terms of outgoingness, but Owen is the more outgoing of the two. By the end of the program, Owen was eager to participate in program activities that required talking and was easier to hear when he spoke.

**Andrew**- Twin of Owen, Very quiet, Son of one of the employees, 12 yrs. old, 6th grade

Andrew is Owen’s twin brother and I realized that he was the quieter of the two. He seemed passionate about schoolwork and enjoyed science. He and his brother are the sons of one of the employees at the organization.

**Tara**- Both mom and grandma work at ANF, 4th/5th grade, outgoing but not always as active in participation

Tara is a fifth grader who is extremely passionate about her stories and fighting for justice for the people getting picked on at school. At times this means that she herself does not get along well with everyone at school and at times complained about bullies. As one of the younger participants in the group, sometimes it was the older ones who engaged more with discussions and at times it seemed as though T was more interested in drawing her pictures. When she did participate it was often in the form of a story.

Nonconsenting Peace Program Participants:

X1- 5th grade girl

X2- 5th grade girl

X3- 2nd grade girl

These brief descriptions of each of the kids just shows a few of the ways that these kids are connected or not and their basic descriptions. There is a culture of built in community in some ways in the program already. Many staff members bring their kids to the program and there is a casual format of programming where we as staff work with whatever kids of the program need support. If one staff member has to run an errand or help our boss with something I might step in and supervise that group as well as my own. If more kids were missing from my group, I might take on more from another age group. Even though they might be divided, most of the kids have opportunities to interact with kids of different ages and get to know most of the staff.

# **The Peace Education Program**

## Rationale for Selecting a Discussion-Based Curriculum that Centered Values and Trust

The first step of this praxis project was creating and enacting the curriculum itself. My interest in trust and value-based discussions with youth predated my interest in peace and conflict studies as the basis for my curriculum. I chose peace education as my vehicle for examining trust for a couple reasons. In part I wanted to choose something that did not have added associations with traditional schooling. If I had done a math learning workshop or something like that, the lessons that we worked on would more likely remind the participants of a traditional classroom setting where they would normally learn similar content. Since I was trying to move away from traditional classroom practices towards discussion-based learning, I wanted to make a distinction.

Peace education is not something typically taught in schools, and although I was giving some tangible information in lesson format, the majority of our learning was based in discussion and dialogue practices where peer learning and listening were important aspects. This dynamic was reliant on participants' willingness to participate in the structure of discussion that I was laying out that they might not be used to in their classrooms at school. This is another reason that centering our discussions around peace lent itself to preparing for success. It is not a subject that is often discussed in school and therefore kept a certain distance from the feeling of a traditional school setting. The content of our discussion centered around students’ experience and values rather than facts derived from rote learning that many other school subjects use as the basis for their disciplines.

By supporting the group to engage in different “participation structures,” such as independent work time, small groups, then the whole group, it allowed students time to decide what they thought before having to share (Phillips, 1972). While working in small groups, they had to understand why they thought the way that they did in order to justify it to their peers. Some values it was easier for the entire group to agree on while others lent themselves to moments of pushback and negotiation. I attribute this to the value based nature of many of our topics. When a personal value was central to the session's discussion or topic, it allowed participants to engage with issues they were passionate about and were willing to engage with. Additionally, these topics often allowed for multiple perspectives which meant there was potential for disagreement even when no one was wrong. By focusing on discussion based learning it gave each participant opportunities to practice engaging in this way.

## The Centrality of Martin Luther King Jr.’s Six Principles of Nonviolence

Much of the curriculum, as Table 1 shows below, was based on the speeches and teachings of Martin Luther King Jr. We spent a day on each of MLK’s Principles of Nonviolence, basing activities and discussions around each one and discussing what it might look like to live by these principles. I present them separately from the curriculum overall due to the frequency which they are referenced throughout the data. By outlining them here, I hope to provide content and background understanding – because these six principles served as a basis for many of the discussions discussed in transcript form while also giving a feel for the values that were highlighted through the Peace Education Program.

### Principle 1: Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.

*This is the first principle discussed and it sets up nonviolence as a lifelong commitment that requires active participation on the part of its actors. It emphasizes that a nonviolent life requires practice and courage. Martin Luther King Jr. taught that achieving a peaceful community and the ideal that he was describing was not for the faint of heart.*

### Principle 2: The Peaceful Community is the goal for the future.

*This principle establishes that this is the end goal for there to be a community where solving conflict with nonviolent strategies is the norm. It is the goal that in this community others are working to uphold it too.*

### Principle 3: Attack problems, not people.

*This principle has that nice ring to it and a simplicity that helps kids remember it. Actually enacting it is easier said than done. This principle encourages those who attempt to follow the principles to address the problems that arise rather than the people who argue for them. It suggests what Martin Luther King Jr. called agape, a form of compassion for other people, a brotherly love that overpowers the issues that arise.*

### Principle 4: Do what is right, even when it is difficult.

*At times doing the right thing does not always come easy. Achieving the “beloved community” as Martin Luther King suggests, is just the same. It requires smaller acts of nonviolence and doing what is right despite other factors that might sway a person to act otherwise.*

### Principle 5: Avoid hurting the spirit and body of yourself and others.

*This principle breaks down what Martin Luther King Jr. means when he says nonviolence. Not only does he mean to avoid physically hurting others, but also to avoid spiritual or mental harm as well. And this is not limited to what you enact onto others. There is plenty of harm that we bring upon ourselves that this principle suggests should be avoided as well.*

### Principle 6: The universe is on the side of justice.

*Perhaps the most difficult one for me to contextualize on my own and while explaining it to others, this principle encapsulates the sentiment that justice will ultimately prevail and in turn it will be in favor of what is good. It may not be immediate or even quick but ultimately there is something driving the world towards peace. In other words, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice” (King 1958).*

These principles were not the only focus of the program, but they created a substantial part of the program and created a more cohesive understanding of peace by breaking it down into these 6 principles.

**Peace Education Curriculum Overview**

In what follows I provide an outline of the entire curriculum as it was carried out. It is important to note that it is not completely as I drafted it when I first sat down to do so with Gina, a board member for the Center for Nonviolent Solutions. Each session I made small adaptations to the curriculum as I saw fit based on the time we had and the way the program was going that day. The main structure of the program revolved around Martin Luther King Jr.’s six principles of nonviolence. I used many resources to develop the curriculum but in particular I took the exact phrasing of these principles from the “Nonviolence Education Curriculum for Educators: Grade 3-12.” It cites “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence” where these principles originated and explains them in ways that are concise and easy to comprehend. In Table 1 below, I provide an outline of the flow of the curriculum, with the dates of each session, the overall topic of the session and the flow of activities.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Session | Date | Topic | Curriculum Outline |
| 1 | 9/27 | Introductory Session | * Icebreaker: Story behind your name? * Explanation of what the course is going to look like, overview and introduced research as well * Values activity   + I broke them up into groups of 3-4   + Approx. 5-10 minutes individual time   + Approx. 10-15 minutes student led group discussion time, to agree on values   + Return to whole group to discuss how the process went for all groups * Closing question: What does peace look like to you? What does peace mean to you? How do you define it? |
| 2 | 9/30 | What is Peace? | * Opening discussion question: What do you think of when you think of peace?   + Draw for 10 minutes then share and discuss * Guiding question 2: When are conversations productive? (this was more related to my research than to the peace education program) * Discussed assent forms and my research process * What do you know about Martin Luther King Jr.? . . . we are going to be using a lot of his thinking when we talk about peace * Concluding question: Think about violence and nonviolence for next time . . . |
| 3 | 10/04 | Defining Terms | * Icebreaker: Share highs and lows from the weekend * What did we talk about last time? * Return to last week’s closing question: What is violence? What is nonviolence?   + Broke into smaller groups to discuss, approx. 5 min   + Came back and made a T chart as a group * Positive and negative peace, defined * Gave research survey in the last 10 minutes |
| 4 | 10/12 | Principle 1 | * Introduce Martin Luther King’s 6 principles of nonviolence * Principle 1: “nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people”   + Broke up into small groups to discuss * Is courage necessary for peace? * Research survey in last few minutes |
| 5 | 10/14 | Principle 2 | * Reviewed from last session * Established 2nd principle: “The Peaceful Community is the goal for the future” * Discussion of community and what that looks like * Drawing/writing time of what these communities looks like * Perspective Talking worksheet: Page S-10 from the Creating Peace workbook * Make connections back to the 2nd principle, their overall lives |
| 6 | 10/18 | Conflict Escalator | * Review of the last session: community and courage * Levels of conflict/ conflict escalator   + Did this in a more lecture style format at first * Worksheet on pg. 49   + Individual work time then share * Who do you go to when you want support in a difficult situation? * What do you have to do to de-escalate? What is necessary for this to happen? * What is one thing you learned today? |
| 7 | 10/25 | Principle 3 | * Review from last time/ previous sessions * Introduce 3rd principle: “Attack problems, not people” * What do you think when you hear that? What could they mean by that? * Skit activity   + Break into two groups   + Rehearse and then share with other group   + Then each group did a second scenario * Explained with each skit that was done what type of conflict it was based on pg. 54 (where I got the skits from) * How does this connect back to the principle? |
| 8 | 10/27 | Principle 4 | * Review from previous session * Shared 4th principle: “Do what is right even when it is difficult.” * What does this look like? What do they mean? * Rosa Parks poem: I am only one person pg. S-50   + Read together out loud   + Write their own in a similar format * Gave context for the historical event of the bus boycott * Connect to the principle |
| 9 | 11/01 | Principle 5 | * Reviewed previous sessions * Gave them time to finish up their poems from the previous session * Introduced 5th principle: “Avoid hurting the spirit and body of yourself and others.” * What do you think this means? How does it relate to peace? * Discussion of self-care and taking care of yourself in terms of conflict spaces * Shared a one minute meditation video * How do you take care of your mind and self? |
| 10 | 11/03 | Principle 6 | * Reviewed previous sessions * Introduced 6th principle: “The universe is on the side of justice.” * What do you think this means? * Individual or group research time on different social movements * Questions I put on the board to get them thinking to look up and later discuss * Share with the group what they learned * Share more context and fill in gaps of each historical event * Relate back to 6th principle |
| 11 | 11/08 | Misc. Review | * Introduce 6th principle again because most had missed it * Brought in context from the news * Skits, with two alternative endings one with negative conflict one with positive conflict * What have you learned from the peace program so far? |
| 12 | 11/10 | Wrapping up the 6 principles | * What were the 6 principles and what did we learn from them? * Do you think these principles are everything that is necessary for peace? Are we missing anything? * Draw what they think a peaceful community looks like   + Work time   + Share with group, think about compared to the last time we did this at the beginning * We should start thinking about our final project . . . |
| 13 | 11/15 | Final Project planning | * Developed skit for final project   + Pair work   + Then work as a group * Does it reflect all that we have learned? What absolutely needs to be included? Etc. |
| 14 | 11/17 | Project planning part 2 | * Continued planning skit * Assigned roles * Started filming |
| 15 | 11/23 | Film Skit Part 1 |  |
| 16 | 11/25 | Film Skit Part 2 |  |

Table 1: Curriculum Flow



Image 1: Conflict Escalator

## Topics that Stuck

Several key ideas, terms, or principles became salient, and participants would refer back to a previous principle or conversation and bring that into the current discussion. These topics that students gravitated towards were not always one of the six principles though. I was not always sure what made these particular things stick in their heads but the principle “attack problems, not people” (Session 7, Principle 3) and my introduction of the “conflict escalator” (Session 6: Conflict Escalator) were things that really stuck with them and they continued to bring up. The conflict escalator comprises three levels of conflict, normal, pervasive, and overt. These terms were new to many of the students, but they quickly associated the difference between each level to other situations and discussions we had. Perhaps there was something catchy and simple about phrases such as these. Whatever the explanation, I assumed some level of interest and engagement when I would see participants contextualizing the topics, we had finished with discussions we were having later.

# Some lessons required activities that were not based in discussion. At times this meant time to write or draw about a given topic, making skits with small groups, or writing poetry to name a few. I attempted to use activities that allowed all participants to be creative in whatever way they wanted but also at times, I pushed them to try something new or think in a different way. I would ask them to draw or describe what they thought a peaceful community would look like to them and I would get a wide range of methods, responses, ways of explaining what they created. Often these activities stimulated discussion among the group. The different mediums of learning allowed for different participants to learn in whatever way was most comfortable for them. I wonder if this flexibility of learning style allowed for students to retain lessons since they were engaging with it in creative and personalized ways.

Positionality and Identity

Working at an organization that targets African immigrants and refugees it is not surprising that all the participants in the program are Black. Moreover, I am the only white staff member in the afterschool program. There are other staff who are not Black, but they all identify as people of color. As the only white person I am an outsider with respect to race/identity. Other staff are all members of some marginalized identity or other even when they are not Black themselves.

Luckily, I worked at Angels-Net all summer and built relationships with other staff and most of the participants I have been working with this fall. In that way I am more of an insider. When I started this summer, it was the first time the program had been running in person since before COVID. Because of this, there was only one staff member who had seen the program run in person in the past. I helped create the new structure and held a significant role in coordinating the program and getting to know all the kids since I worked 5 days a week 10-4:30.

An important part of the dynamic at the program is the way in which many of the people involved have been there for years or have some relation to other people within the organizations’ community. For example, my boss started working there about the same time that I did because the founder of the organization is a friend of hers. Since she started, her granddaughter has been attending camp and her daughter in law started working there too. This is one of many examples of connections like this. I came into the program with none of these connections.

Many of these participants are children of immigrants or refugees or are immigrants or refugees themselves. This is an experience that I am unfamiliar with in my own life. The way I have seen it manifest within the space we are working in is the community of support that surrounds the program. This is something I see a lot with the parents and staff more than the kids. At times there are familial expectations based on the parents’ experiences that my parents never put on me. It seems to be a big emphasis that they know what career path they want to be on already and that they will be able to make good money from it in a way that was not enforced in my home in the same way. I bring up this difference because I think that it is important to acknowledge the difference here that stems from lived experience and class distinctions as well as community and family values.

This impacted the way that I went about examining and processing my data because it frames the way that I make assumptions and decide what is important. To some extent the combination of these factors provided me with a more academic approach to many of the ways of collecting data. Since my positionality was as someone who was an outsider in some ways but someone growing in the community in other respects towards being a part of the community, I spent more time thinking about the relationships that were starting to form in a relationship building manner. At times I stepped back to learn from them because I could not speak from my own experience. I treated them as experts.

Literature Review

Peace and conflict can be studied at various levels ranging from international and structural issues to institutional to interpersonal. With such a vast difference in setting and scope, the approach surrounding peace education can vary greatly as well. I specifically focused on peace education in school settings for much of my literature review and in order to contextualize my own research. I divided my literature review into three themes that encompassed the sections that follow. First, I considered the individual experience of peace education and some of the theories behind the individual impacts. The following topics focus on the curriculum of peace education on a larger scale. I then consider the impact or outcomes of the educational process as a result of these things. Because this focus on trust building and community development is more specific in nature, I also reviewed research not specifically focused on peace education. Ultimately, formatting it in this way I hope to outline the research that is out there in a way that reflects the goals of my research and the significance of the research.

# Getting Situated

I began my review of the literature on peace studies with Galtung (1969), a primary thinking about peace and conflict studies. He established the difference between positive and negative peace and outlined the distinctions with violence in order to not overload the term with meaning. Galtung set the stage for the analysis of conflict and being able to productively discuss conflict resolution. Much of his research was focused on examining the conflicts themselves, often looking at international conflicts. When looking at other literature, Galtung is often mentioned as a foundational resource in their work.

When I looked to researchers in peace education settings there was a common theme of targeting communities where violence was prevalent within the community. As I compared this to my own work, I recognized this as a slight difference in setting. Although the community surrounding the afterschool program that I am working with is an important aspect that informs my research, I am not working with them because of anything related to their previous experience with violence. Often the research in the field is working to heal and reconcile community tensions and build trust when it has been broken. This is not something I had to address. Instead, I entered a community where many of the participants had a certain level of community ties. Some had familial ties to the organization, and many had friends already in the program. Having a smaller scope than many of these programs I am more focused on the community we build among participants and the relationships between them rather than how what we discuss might affect an entire community.

These sources gave great examples of community efforts towards building trust even when struggle was present. In my work, I instead was able to focus on a few relationships and deepening the interpersonal and specific interactions that impacted these relationships of trust. By not having our program be based around conflict, it felt like the discussion was more educational and preemptive rather than reacting to an actual conflict. This meant that I was building trust from a more neutral playing field rather than one where conflict had created divisions between individuals.

# The Interdisciplinary Nature of Peace Education

Different scholars have generated various terminologies to address the interdisciplinary nature of peace education and the necessity for this bringing together different aspects of learning and social study to strengthen the teaching of peace education. Tocci and Moon define the process as “nonviolencing” whereas Danesh refers to their process as “Integrative Peace Theory.” Both work to describe this theme of actively working towards peace by reflecting on the space you are in and the many different contexts that they are situated in. For there to be positive peace in a community, there are many things that must be present beyond just peace education. Just like Maslow’s hierarchy of needs must be met, within the curriculum it is important to include all the ways in which, “peace is a psychosocial and political as well as a moral and spiritual condition” (Danesh 64). It requires understanding that peace is connected to poverty, community relations, religion and many other facets of social structure. Seeing as peace education is working to discuss the basic underpinnings of human interaction and community development, it makes sense that it is a constantly malleable subject. Bajaj (2015) echoes this sentiment in the methods of inquiry as well, saying that, “Critical peace educators argue that contextualized forms of peace education are those that are engaged in constant and meaningful conversation with other fields and traditions of critical inquiry (such as critical pedagogy, postcolonial theory, critical race theory, and human rights education, among many others)” (Bajaj, 2015, p. 4). The ways in which we approach peace education must be critical, according to these scholars in order to continue to shape the programs in ways that are meaningful and productive to enhancing the way people approach conflict. While “critical inquiry addresses power, inequality, and injustice,” critical peace education attempts to incorporate a social justice lens to the peace education curriculum(Charmaz 2017, 35). This requires a reflexive process and a critical examination of what and how things are being taught. Bringing in a variety of different disciplines like this field tends to do, assists in creating this complex and critical approach.

# Integrative Theory of Peace (ITP)

This theory is the basis of H. B. Danesh’s article *Towards an Integrative Theory of Peace Education (2006)* which establishes this theory as one that unifies many other peace education practices. He explains that:

“The Integrative Theory of Peace (ITP) is based on the concept that peace is, at once, a psychological, social, political, ethical and spiritual state with expressions at intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup and international areas of human life. The theory holds that all human states of being, including peace, are the outcome of the main human cognitive (knowing), emotive (loving) and conative (choosing) capacities (Danesh, 1997; Huitt, 1999a, b) which, together, determine the nature of our worldview”(Danesh, 2006, p. 63).

What I see Danesh suggesting is the relationship between many different disciplines that are relevant to the study and implementation of peace. Whatever shapes our worldviews is based in the many facets of how we conceptualize our society and ourselves and this can in turn be applied to discussions of peace. As I am implementing this Peace Program centered around peace education and nonviolent negotiation, not only do I want to consider what I will be teaching in terms of content, but also what I will be teaching in terms of leading by example and encouraging through my own actions. By understanding that so many facets go into understanding peace and conflict and how it is present in so many different spaces, it leaves a lot of room for flexibility but also uncertainty. This is what Danesh is trying to address. More specifically, Danesh cites unity as a concept that he thinks is key to this, explaining how it:

“is similar to the process of creating a state of health, rather than trying to deal with the symptoms of disease. The unity paradigm provides a developmental framework within which various theories of conflict—biological, psychosocial, economic and political—can be accounted for and the diverse expressions of our humanness can be understood (Danesh 2006, 69).”

By looking at things in unity, I hope to enhance how we have our discussions of peace in our small group. I hope to reflect that in my position as facilitator and encourage others to do the same. I know that I am limited by my experiences and my knowledge and that I am not an expert in each of these possible fields of crossover. I know that I am looking at this through a community development related lens rather than a psychological or even an economic one. This does not mean though that I am not aware of their relevance and I hope to actively work to acknowledge the intersections of these fields in my program and research.

# Nonviolence Pedagogy, Nonviolencing

In “*Non-violencing: Imagining Non-violence Pedagogy with Laozi and Deleuze,”* Tocci et al. (2020) use the term nonviolencing to establish nonviolence outside the binary that is currently set up in comparison to violence. Basing their theorizing on Laozi and Deleuze, they establish the fluidity of peace education and break down how we think of violence as a concept. The theorists that they base their own work on look at the Eastern Western binary of practice as well. Titling their pedagogy as nonviolencing, it is more active than labeling a categorical nonviolence. But this is not to say that what they are establishing is activism. An important aspect of this theory is examining nonaction. As I understand it, it is how leading by example and how random elements of leadership can factor into a peaceful community. Since there are so many factors in what makes something peaceful, violent, or nonviolent at so many levels of analysis, as the Integrative Theory of Peace suggests, sometimes there are ways of achieving it without explicit nonviolent tactics. The complexity and fluidity of it is what they are trying to capture with this theory.

# Student Autonomy

I understand student autonomy to be a major theme throughout the research. Often the literature addresses the importance of recognizing the whole individual as a key part of creating an environment where peace education is successful. For example, Ardizzone (2007) states that:

True education comes through the stimulation of the child's "powers" as demanded by social situations. These powers are what make youth act as members of a unified group; they can begin to see themselves as part of and instrumental to the welfare of the entire group (Ardizzone, 2007, p. 53).

Ardizzone uses this point to structure her larger argument of social responsibility which I will address in the following section. She argues that education becomes the most effective when we recognize the child’s power. As I look at the relationships of trust being built within my own site, I am looking to these researchers to enhance my understanding of how encouraging this autonomy might relate to trusting relationships. I attempt to encourage autonomy among my participants by basing my curriculum mainly around dialogue centered activities. I am basing this on my own assumptions about when and where trust is built and what I think will most effectively engage participants. Citing his own previous scholarship, Bajaj (2015) addresses this point of agency in peace education by saying that:

Central to critical peace education projects and research is a dynamic and relational understanding of the role of human agency in influencing structural and cultural forms of violence that limit the full realization of human rights by all people(s) (Brantmeier and Bajaj 2013). Scholars of critical peace education also resist the forces towards regulation, universalization, and the development of rigid norms and standards for what peace education ought to be. (Bajaj and Brantmeier 2015, p. 3)

Human agency as a whole is critical to how we develop a peaceful community and when we educate students on creating peace it is important to exemplify the community that we are trying to create. Bajaj (2015) ties the importance of agency to the actual curriculum development of these programs, specifically the universality. I identify this as the interdisciplinary nature of peace education.

# Social Responsibility

Another theme I saw throughout the literature is a call to social responsibility within the curriculum. Often peace education is tied to recognizing and resisting present social oppressions. When discussing present conflicts, whether local or global, part of this means discussing with the participants how they as individuals might address the issues in their community. An example of this is outlined by Ardizzone (2007) in four steps, referencing John Dewey’s as well as Freire’s work:

Dewey (1938) states that this purpose [of resisting present social oppressions] is formed through: 1) observation of surrounding conditions, 2) knowledge of what has happened in similar situations in the past, and 3) judgment, which puts together what is observed and what is recalled to see what they signify. These three criteria are the seeds of critical consciousness. Freire builds upon this framework by adding that education must include the opportunity to take action” (Ardizzone, 2007, p. 54).

Ardizzone then concludes, “that one has a responsibility beyond oneself, is central to the idea of social responsibility” (Ardizzone, 2007, p. 54). I attempt to reflect social responsibility with an emphasis on dialogue where each participant is able to engage meaningfully with the discussion and the ideas that we are contemplating. Our final project is a student-generated project that requires teamwork and critical thinking on how they want to reflect on their learning and generate new material to share with their peers and others.

Other researchers emphasize the importance of social responsibility in terms of activism. Zembylas (2018) states that, “The goal of critical peace education is to empower young people to engage in practices and activism that increase societal equity and justice, which, in turn, foster greater peace” (Zembylas, 2018, p. 1). The way that valuing human autonomy and human rights like Bajaj (2015) discusses is integrally tied to the ideas of social responsibility and activism discussed here. Not only is it important to focus on the participants in our education programs but also to create a sense of empathy and understanding of other people who are oppressed within a community and advocating for a more peaceful community.

# Collaborative Learning

Much of the current literature on collaborative learning environments, particularly when focused on trust, seem to be mainly dealing with post-secondary education or some workplace settings. In one of these examples, Johnson et al. (2007) introduce the concept of social interdependence. This is the idea that individuals’ goals are in some way influenced by others. This idea is broken down into a positive, negative or absent relationship. When thinking about the way that students participate in dialogue based settings, the goal is to encourage these relationships of positive interdependence. This can be described as, “when individuals perceive that they can reach their goals if and only if the other individuals with whom they are cooperatively linked also reach their goals and, therefore, promote each other’s efforts to achieve the goals” (16). Positive interdependence requires mutual benefit, but this is not always the case. It seems to be a concern in much of the literature that group work can at times be ineffective in producing productive learning environments. Tolmie et al. (2010) discuss how group learning can have connections to both cognitive and social learning, but it also depends on contextual differences such as student backgrounds and relationships between peers. In thinking about a discussion based learning method, I look to incorporate moments of participants working together and discussing in the interest of shared learning.

# Bringing It All Together

Examining other thinkers in the field caused me to notice trends that emphasized the importance of student autonomy, the flexibility and interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum, and an emphasis on social responsibility within the curriculum as well as other theories of peace and trust in classroom settings. As I think specifically about trust, I am informed by other peace educators in the ways that they have shaped their own programs and how they have reflected on the work that they have done. I have not seen someone as focused on trust specifically as I am but the importance of community is embedded in all of these points that I highlighted here. Going forward I hope to argue that trust is an integral part to what is happening in these spaces that makes peace education successful in effective change.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

I consider my conceptual framework to be the lenses that I use in both designing/enacting my Peace Education Program, as well as in analyzing and making sense of what happened. Initially I establish my own terms as I understand them from the basis of my experience as well as a culmination of the literature I have interacted with. The sections that follow are drawn more directly from scholarship but create a foundation for the findings that are to follow. In this section, I focus on the 3 key ideas: 1) the concepts of trust and comfort (the most foundational lens), 2) community (and a community-centered model), and 3) Engaged/Engaging Discussion.

Before this, I want to define some key terms that I used throughout this thesis and are relevant to my conceptual framework.

**Trust-** I want to begin with how I define trust. It is the basis for much of my praxis project and was particularly critical in looking at my data. I define trust as a level of comfort between two or more people that allows people to feel at ease participating as themselves – fully present and authentic.

Often this requires relationship building or some previous relationship in order to establish trust, but trust can also be built – moment by moment through interactions. It is an important element in lots of spheres of work (such as therapy, medicine, construction work) but in education, it is (in my view) the absolute center.

**Productive discussions**- productive discussions are when something is gained for some or all of the people participating in the discussion based on the conversation and talking and learning from others. This could be anything from tangible knowledge, a new perspective or an opportunity to enhance discussion skills. The notion or goal of productive discussions links trust, community, and the key concepts of “talking for understanding” and “special listening.”

**Value-laden topics**- These are topics that people care about deeply. In conversation or discussions, they provoke emotional responses, strong commitments, and authenticity. They often surface individuals’ experiences, knowledge, and personal values. They are often moral or political in some way. They often prompt participants to engage honestly and authentically and provide opportunities for pushback (as defined below), differing perspectives and a need for clarifying one’s position.

**Pushback**- when one individual disagrees with another in order to make their position known. Often this looks like presenting an alternative argument to the one they are responding to or questioning why they think the way they do or their line of reasoning.

These terms are contextualized by the way that they create meaning in relation to each other and are important to setting the groundwork for what is to come. The next section examines the three key concepts that create a basis and lens for my thinking around this praxis.

# Trust and Comfort

In my definition above, I use comfort as a metric with which to define my term. I realized that it is more than just part of the definition as it kept recurring in my findings. While trust for me entails a level of comfort between people, comfort has feelings of very little worry or overthinking, minimal stress in terms of the given interaction. While I suggest that comfort is an element of trust, I would also suggest that trust is an element of feeling trust as I just described. I find that participants' level of comfort while participating or while with our specific group of people was significant in evaluating trust in this project. Throughout this thesis, both terms will surface frequently.

One aspect where I feel that these terms are often interchangeable is when discussing a student's comfort with participation in terms of the shyness/outgoingness or introvertedness/extrovertedness spectrum. I attempted to establish a norm of discussion-based learning when implementing the Peace Education Program. I differentiate between comfort and outgoingness because someone who starts out as super shy may not get to the same level of outgoingness at any point because it is not in their nature, but as their level of comfort or trust in the group increases, they may choose to participate more. In an article that compares introverts versus extroverts while having argumentative discussions, Nussbaum (2002) suggests that, “introverted students prefer more cooperative modes of argumentation than do extroverts” (183). In other words, he suggests that introverted students are less likely to be comfortable pushing back in conflictual conversations. This is a significant claim in regard to levels of comfort that a participant might feel to participate in such a way. In addition, introvertedness versus extrovertedness may mean that participants engage in conversations in different ways that are significant to consider when approaching discussion based learning. Manning and Ray (1993) suggests that an outgoing participant might use a more open sequence rather than a closed sequence that a more introverted participant might use (181). Open sequencing involves open ended responses that could lead to further discussion whereas closed sequencing gives more textbook answers and has limited expansion on the topic. I argue that trust and comfort have important intersections with this work due to the fact that they can have a significant impact of shifting the responses of an introverted participant, especially over time.

This is where I consider the work of adrienne maree brown. She suggests that “change happens at the speed of trust.” Trust is something that must be built and it does not always happen quickly. Often it requires growth and change that happens over repeated interaction and slowly gaining comfort with the new community. The two scholars listed in the paragraph above focus on these initial interactions with a person, when they are new to the group. I think that Brown identifies a key facet of many interactions: change. As this change happens, there is the opportunity for individuals to show up differently as they participate.

The last element of trust that I use to inform my discussion of trust comes from an Instagram post of an activist, Rachel Elizabeth Cargle, that I had been following for over a year. She posted the following thought:

“Building trust within ourselves is a rigorous practice.

It's a relationship with our fears, our gut, our intuition.

When we trust ourselves, we get to a point of believing that no matter what life throws at us– everything from the realllly good to the reallllly bad– that we have the internal tools like courage, discernment, creativity, gratefulness and grit to move through it.

We build this by being in communication with our mind (rationale), heart (desire) and value (moral compass) as we move through the world.”

* Rachel Elizabeth Cargle, Feb 17 on Instagram

When I first read this quote, my instinct was that it was relevant to what I was working on. Although the main focus of my research has been about examining trust between individuals, I realized that some of what I was identifying as examples of this trust required exactly what the quote is tapping into, a surredness of self and thinking of this as an active effort.

Examples of pushback made me think about confidence and willingness to be vulnerable and share or argue. Not only did this require trust among individuals, but also trust in one's own ideas and willingness to take a chance that others' responses to what you have to say may not be positive. She cites characteristics like “courage, discernment, creativity, gratefulness and grit” as key to moving through whatever life throws at you. She acknowledges the multifaceted aspects of individuals’ “mind (rationale), heart (desire) and value (moral compass)” which drives and shapes and BUILDS these characteristics and this trust. The way that she laid out this description felt so fitting because it was so clearly divided into sections. Especially the parts described in parentheses highlight aspects of the program I chose to implement and why it was so conductive to trust.

# Community

As I consider the frameworks that influence the work that I am doing with the peace education program, I also have to think about frameworks that are more focused specifically on my research and the participants. I aim to have a community centered, community conscious approach to my research. I looked at research by Tremblay et al. (2018) that focused on “Community Based Participatory Research” for inspiration. This article engages with community based efforts in a research study that benefited from engaging with social issues with a community oriented lens. The fact that my site is at an organization targeting African immigrants and refugees has an impact on the way that community is created and functions in the space. Working there this past summer I have seen the way in which community is key to the program functioning in a very informal and personal way. This will impact how our own community is formed and I want to be conscious of that. I believe it will play a significant role in my research since community and trust are so closely tied. The peace education program is aiming to teach interpersonal skills and encourage difficult conversations and builds on multidisciplinary content as mentioned with the integrative peace theory and the nonviolencing pedagogy. Because of this, the way that the actual program is conducted will be a universal part of all the content. In other words, it will be relevant to consider how their actions as a community function in other intersectional aspects of the project. I plan on a mainly discussion-based form for the project as part of this community-centered model.

# Engaged/Engaging Discussion

Through work with Sarah Michaels and Sarah Cramer and studies by scholars interested in classroom talk (Park et al., 2020; Michaels & O’Connor, 2012; Alexander, 2018), I have developed an understanding of certain methods to encourage student participation that have influenced how I facilitate group discussions. “Talking for Understanding” – a term coined by teacher-researcher Sarah Cramer, is based on the idea of engaging students in discussions in a way that really gets at making sure the students understand the content and are motivated to enhance their own and their peers’ learning. This requires certain “talk moves” on the part of the teacher in order to encourage talk among the students. These are simple statements or questions such as: “Can you say more?” “Who thinks they understand and can put into their own words what X just said?” “Why do you think that?” or Do you agree or disagree and why?” Similarly, I used many similar moves to encourage discussion when I am working with my group. Moves such as asking for a student to rephrase what they said, or repeating back an idea, as well as giving students time to think on their own and in a group are all methods to encourage students to really interrogate their own thinking. There are also talk moves that encourage students to interact with each other and engage with students in dynamic ways.

This also relates to another concept, “special listening” (developed by youth researchers researching their own classroom discussions) that focuses on students hearing and interrogating ideas in the classroom rather than focusing on reciting the right answer or just bringing up their own new point that may not relate to their peers. Park et al. (2020) argue that “special listening” is key to a productive classroom space.

The culmination of the above concepts and theories allow me to frame the work that is to come in a way that I can make sense of it. By formatting it into three clear sections of 1) Trust and Comfort, 2) Community, and 3) Engaged/Engaging Discussions, I was able to organize my thinking in a way that addresses the foundations of my thinking while also engaging with literature that makes important connections and expands on context within the field.

Methodology

My methodology section explains beyond simply the method with which I approached my research process. First, I establish my Research Approach and Epistemological Stance, specifically that of Practitioner Inquiry and Interpretivist Epistemologies. The next section explains my Data Collection in terms of both the sources of data and the way that I organized it. I then explain my Approach to working with the data. For me this means identifying the processes I used to reduce my data and my choices I made when analyzing. Finally, I explain the transition From Analysis to Findings and clarify how I will be Structuring the Findings.

# Research Approach and Epistemological Stance

In carrying out this praxis project, I saw myself as a “practitioner-researcher” and drew on the tradition of practitioner inquiry (citations, such as Ravitch, (2014) and [Lytle and Cochran-Smith,](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gBm4twiGFKOQ-zHp57lx7IGmtKhn-7KT/view?usp=sharing) 1999). This means that I was observing and collecting data in a space where I was participating in a normal educational setting where I did research in order to gain a deeper and more thorough understanding of the subject of my research. I chose to use this method because I feel that it is important to minimize the amount that I am intruding on the site that I work in. I hope that the data I collect will be non-intrusive to the rest of the afterschool program that is not participating in the program and the work I will be doing with them otherwise. This is part of practitioner inquiry as well, that I would be doing something in that space even if I were not there for research. I am working with these kids first and doing research second. In addition to this, I draw on Interpretive/Social-Constructivist epistemologies in the way I carry out my research. This paradigm asks questions like, “What’s meaningful here? What makes a difference? What can I learn here?” These questions encourage a stance that allows for the research to be shaped by what I discover with and from those participating in the research. I am not looking to prove hypotheses in the same way that a positivist might in the natural sciences. Instead, I am analyzing data to understand what is meaningful to me and to the participants I am learning with and from.

# Data Sources and Data Collection

The following forms of data collection and methods were approved by Clark’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). I used the following procedures in my data collection:

1. **Audio Recordings of Group Discussions**: Audio recording has become the most important part of my data collection methods. I recorded every session and identified parts to transcribe based on the depth of the discussions and the content that came up. Since my program is mainly discussion based, audio recordings are a significant part of documenting what happens in the program, specifically group discussions. Since I am hoping to identify characteristics of trust, much of the content that I am finding helpful is in how they speak to me and each other organically and not prompted by a specific question whether that be in a survey or an interview. As my primary source of data, I have been audio recording all of the 16 sessions. This does bring challenges of sorting through large amounts of data to see what is useful although I do reference field notes in order to identify interesting points of discussion.

2. **Field Notes**: Following each program session, I recorded my observations and any notes to document what happened in that particular session. These have been helpful for keeping track of what the curriculum actually was for any given day as well as highlighting interesting noticings and moments I had throughout a session. Since the recordings are limited to audio recordings, field notes allow me to record things that I see or for some other reason is not communicated through audio recording. They also allowed me to quickly record my reflections on a given day’s events.

3. **Surveys**: Originally, I planned that I would collect three surveys at the beginning (survey 1), middle (survey 2), and end (survey 3) of the program where the participants would be asked questions relating to the course content as part of the after-school program curriculum. After starting at my site, I realized that surveys were not the most productive medium for collecting data. I gave participants two surveys, and both generated short answers that provided brief answers that might be better acquired other ways. After this realization, I shifted away from surveys and instead incorporated survey questions into more collaborative activities and into discussion based situations that would be caught on the audio recording, in some cases making a more conscious effort to use non-writing focused methods of data collection, such as art. I had chosen to do surveys in the first place because I wanted to give participants the space to answer questions where not every other participant would know their answers if they did not want to, and so that I would have more individualized responses from every student to the same questions. I had thought this might be helpful to be able to compare different participants' responses independent of each other. The shift presented challenges of putting more emphasis on audio recordings, and transcription. Since I was only removing a data collection method, there was no need to edit my IRB. I instead utilized the other methods that had already been approved to the best of my ability in order to accommodate the information I was hoping to gather despite the more limited scope of data collection.

Below in Table 2 I created a chart that details which type of data was collected on a given day.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Session | Date | Topic | Participants Present | Audio Recording | Field Notes | Analytical Memo | Survey | Transcript |
| 1 | 9/27 | Introductory Session | A,O,M,T,X1,X2,X3 | no | yes | yes | no | no |
| 2 | 9/30 | What is Peace? | A,O,M,X1,X2,X3 | yes | yes | yes | no | no |
| 3 | 10/04 | Defining Terms | A,O,M,T | yes | yes | yes | yes | no |
| 4 | 10/12 | Principle 1 | A,O,M,T,X1,X2  (X1,X2 leave early) | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| 5 | 10/14 | Principle 2 | A,O,M,T,X1,X2 | yes | yes | no | no | no |
| 6 | 10/18 | Conflict Escalator | O,A,M,T | yes | yes | yes | no | no |
| 7 | 10/25 | Principle 3 | O,A,M,T,X1,X2 | yes | yes | no | no | no |
| 8 | 10/27 | Principle 4 | O,M,T | yes | yes | no | no | yes |
| 9 | 11/01 | Principle 5 | O,A,M,T | yes | yes | no | no | yes |
| 10 | 11/03 | Principle 6 | O,A,M,X1,X2 | yes | yes | no | no | no |
| 11 | 11/08 | Misc. Review | A,X1,X2 | yes | yes | no | no | no |
| 12 | 11/10 | Wrapping up the 6 principles | O,A,T,X1,X2 | yes | yes | yes | no | yes |
| 13 | 11/15 | Final Project planning | A,O,M,T,X1,X2  (X1X2 both leave within first few minutes) | yes | yes | no | no | no |
| 14 | 11/17 | Project planning part 2 | O,M,T  (X1,X2 leave early)  (A arrives last 10 min) | yes | yes | no | no | no |
| 15 |  | Film Skit part 1 |  | yes | no | no | no | no |
| 16 |  | Film Skit Part 2 |  | yes | no | no | no | no |

Table 2: Data Collection Types Chart

As Table 1 suggests, some days, significantly more data was collected than others. On October 12th, I collected every form of data that I was using. Almost every day has audio recordings, and every week has an analytical memo even if it was not for each session that week. By laying it out like this, I hope to give a more detailed depiction of my timeline in terms of research and data collection that the outline of the curriculum itself does not provide. I hope that this gives context as to where in the span of the program a particular piece of data comes from. It is important to note that the days with more data collection do not always coincide with the days that have more substantial analysis for this thesis.

# Approach to Working with the Data

## Data Organization

My main source of data are audio recordings of each session, supplemented by fieldnotes, as well as the planned curriculum and lesson plans I used and minimal surveys. From the audio recordings, I transcribed portions that I determined were relevant due to themes that arose and moments where the participants show interesting moments I wanted to further analyze. My field notes taken following each session and weekly reflective analytical memos allowed me to capture my thoughts and feelings about sessions and record data that I observed that might not come through in an audio recording. I kept a detailed record of the curriculum planning that I did and the lesson plans that I ultimately created (with the help of the Center for Nonviolent Solutions). Early in the program, I took a couple surveys and throughout the program the participants did a variety of written work that also informed my data collection. With sixteen sessions, this meant a significant amount of data to sort through. In organizing my data, I developed a data inventory, which included two charts, both organized by date. One that was more broadly focused on key noticings and moments, the other more specific, including detail of each data type (each usable segment of data from a single session).

Broad chart:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Topic | Curriculum Outline | Participants Present | Important Noticings and Moments | Link to closer data analysis of day |

Specific chart:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Speakers | Interesting Moment | Data Type | Major Themes | Research Question Addressed/ So what? | Connect to conceptual framework |

## Data Reduction

When reducing my data, I reviewed my field notes which provided a good general overview of all the sessions and highlighted significant moments based on things that might be worth further analyzing in light of my interest in “productive collaborative discussions,’ such as examples of sharing personal anecdotes, pushback, individuals’ shifts in participation, or simply surprising or interesting moments of participation by one or multiple students. My general chart featured every session because it also included a curriculum outline but I only chose to do a closer analysis of days that had one or more of these interesting moments. From there, I examined shifts over time and when there were patterns or themes among the pieces of data that I had identified. Themes that did not have substantial evidence to analyze were highlighted and ultimately cut from my main source of analysis. Each aspect of data also was considered in terms of my research questions and which questions each piece of data might help answer. Some were helpful for multiple and some for only one.

## Data Analysis…to Themes

I went through a few stages of sorting and analyzing my data. Initially, I planned to divide the sections by themes based on key moments that recurred or stood out to me – moments where personal anecdotes were shared, moments where Andrew participates and why, moments of self-reflection and personal growth, and pushback and discussions of conflict styles. I decided on these initial moments/themes based on the bits of data I planned on analyzing – hoping that I would see more clearly why I had identified them as worth analyzing. I then realized that some of the stories that arose fit within the six principles of nonviolence that I had structured as part of the curriculum. I experimented with sorting my data in this manner. I developed multiple drafts with different sub-headings and different orderings of sections.

Ultimately, I divided my findings into four major themes: facilitation, participation, community, and conflict. Although there was crossover with some elements, these themes emerged organically as I sifted through my data and analyzed key moments. When I discussed my findings with my cohort these were the themes, I kept finding myself talking about.

After I have presented all my findings, I attempt to draw everything together in a section titled, Implication of my Findings. I consider how all these noticings, themes, and findings create an important picture of trust building while having value-laden conversations in the Peace Education Program.

Findings

# **Introduction**

In the following section I divide my findings into four subsections: 1) Facilitation: My Role, 2) Participation and Growth, 3) Community: Developing and Present, and 4) Conflict and Pushback. Each attempts to address a separate aspect of what I extrapolated from my data, although some moments analyzed in one section could have been analyzed in one or more of the other sections. The first section, “Facilitation: My Role,” focuses on my role as the creator and implementer of The Peace Education Program. As I considered my choices of questioning and discussion leading, the issue of trust (by and for participants) was a recurring theme. This led me to see the importance of “Talking for Understanding” which highlights tools for facilitating classroom talk and engaged participation. The second section focuses on “Participation and Growth”. In particular, it discusses how various participants initially chose to participate and the growth that occurred over the course of the program. I utilize the scope of different participant stories to highlight interesting moments of participation. The third section, “Community: Developing and Present,” considers community connections already in place when the program began and those that were established among the group as the program progressed. I found that trust, among other factors, contributed to us building community together. The final section focuses on the moments when conflict arose and when a participant's ideas were met with pushback. This section, titled “Conflict and Pushback,” takes a closer look at instances where this occurs, examining the way that trust might play a role in making pushback and disagreement positive and at times effective.

Each of these sections is organized the same way – with “Getting Situated,” “Data and Commentary,” and ending with “Bringing it All Together.”

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# **Facilitation: My role**

## Getting Situated

In this section I focus on my choices in discussion leading, the way I position myself, and other aspects of my own role as facilitator. When beginning curriculum planning and thinking about actually implementing it, I knew that I wanted to base my program in dialogue and discussion. With this focus, I was aware that I needed to be adaptable. Rather than just simply reading off questions or giving a worksheet, I needed to react to students' responses. In order to make conversations feel natural, as if they were happening organically or student-driven, the way I asked and responded to questions had an impact. I worked with key ideas from “Talking for Understanding” with a focus on community building – in order to make sense of what I did to facilitate a space that encouraged the goals I wanted. These goals were based on efforts to promote student autonomy, community building, and trust.

## Talk Moves

I based many of my facilitation choices off how I might instinctually facilitate a conversation but also what I have learned through the method of “Talking For Understanding.” I tend to intuitively or instinctually ask questions that I feel might lead the conversation down an interesting line of learning or balancing the voices who have talked through various shifts in methods such as pair sharing or individual think time. In terms of “Talking For Understanding,” this entails “talk moves” and ways of speaking on both the part of me as facilitator and on the students. This is all in hopes of engaging students with conversations where they are seeking to expand their knowledge for the sake of knowledge. It attempts to go beyond the “banking method” of education that entails teachers “depositing” information into students' brains rather than truly communicating information or engaging students (Freire 1993). An example of this could be students reciting a definition of a word from a science textbook for an assignment, (instead of defining the concept for themselves to be able to understand it in a bigger context) or a teacher teaching only for the purpose of their students passing a state standardized test.

In contrast, Talking for Understanding allows me as the facilitator to explain and examine specific functions of our discussions through the employment of specific choices in phrasing and discussion formats. There are many variables that impact the success of a discussion but the “talk moves'' that I employ is something that I can closely trace. When enacting the program, I was acting under the assumption that productive disagreement requires dialogue which requires the majority of members in the community participating. Productive Disagreement is similar to productive discussions for me in a lot of ways, but it is when conflict arises. When a disagreement is productive, it mainly remains within normal levels of conflict. If it does start to escalate beyond that, the group or me as facilitator must be able and willing to work through it towards something that can have a positive impact in some way. I did not want only those who already felt comfortable speaking to be the only ones who were speaking by the end of the program.

I associated this participation with comfort in the space and within the students’ own mind and the students having an interest in the topic and the people of the program. It was based on the idea of respect for me and their peers and I based a lot of my choices as a discussion and program facilitator off of what I had learned with teacher-researcher, Sarah Cramer, who coined the term “Talking for Understanding.” Her framework of Talking for Understanding outlines “talk moves” to encourage and observe classroom discussion where the students were actually listening to each other and responding to other ideas rather than just simple responses. Similar “talk moves” from other scholars describe similar relationships between peers and teachers in classroom settings. Although I never intentionally used these resources when facilitating the program, looking back I find that most examples happened at some point or another throughout our discussions.

|  |
| --- |
| **Goal One: Help Individual Students Share, Expand and Clarify Their Own Thinking** |
| 1. Time to Think - Partner Talk - Writing as Think Time - Wait Time |
| 2. Say More: “Can you say more about that?” “What do you mean by that?” “Can you give an example?” |
| 3. So, Are You Saying…?: “So, let me see if I’ve got what you’re saying. Are you saying…?” (always leaving space for the original student to agree or disagree and say more) |
| **Goal Two: Help Students Listen Carefully to One Another** |
| 4. Who Can Rephrase or Repeat? “Who can repeat what Javon just said or put it into their own words?” (After a partner talk) “What did your partner say?” |
| **Goal Three: Help Students Deepen Their Reasoning** |
| 5. Asking for Evidence or Reasoning “Why do you think that?” “What’s your evidence?” “How did you arrive at that conclusion?” |
| 6. Challenge or Counterexample “Does it always work that way?” “How does that idea square with Sonia’s example?” “What if it had been a copper cube instead? |
| **Goal Four: Help Students Think With Others** |
| 7. Agree/Disagree and Why? “Do you agree/disagree? (And why?)” “What do people think about what Ian said?” “Does anyone want to respond to that idea?” |
| 8. Add On: “Who can add onto the idea that Jamal is building?” “Can anyone take that suggestion and push it a little further?” |
| 9. Explaining What Someone Else Means “Who can explain what Aisha means when she says that?” “Who thinks they could explain why Simon came up with that answer?” “Why do you think he said that?” |

Table 3: Goals and Moves, The Inquiry Project: Bridging Research & Practice

In the example above, points 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 were things that I saw regularly occur when I was working with the program and things that I instinctually implemented in my own interactions with the participants. I did not look at this until after I had finished the program and realized that asking students to rephrase or explain what others had said was not something I had done often. Honestly, it would have felt more like quizzing them in a way that would not have felt natural, especially with the goal of trying to create a space where participants trusted me and themselves to speak to the group.

Interpersonal talk was key, when looking at what traditional schooling practices impress upon students, one of the community norms I wanted to create was an informal atmosphere that allowed for students to have autonomy over the space. When students directly addressed each other rather than looking to me for permission, I assumed that they were engaged enough in the topic to want it to flow as a conversation and were not worried about any norm of checking with an authority figure before speaking. To me, I interpreted these moments as genuine interest in the content and understanding each other and a confidence in their position in the space. When students talked directly to each other they were often asking questions or clarifying the others point. These were moments that I tried to encourage and allowed space for throughout our discussions.

Most of the talk moves outlined above emphasized the importance of the speakers and their peers truly understanding the topic being discussed. By giving them time to think on their own or with their neighbors they had more time to be sure of their thought, get things framed in a new way or just draft out what they wanted to say if they were nervous about speaking in front of a group. Questions prompted by me were intended to elevate a point they were starting to make or steer it towards the content of the class in a way they may not have considered. At times, I attempted to push them out of their comfort zones with the groups they discussed with, who they had to partner with and think with. I knew that they were comfortable with their friends but my goal was to create trust between all participants, not just rely on the relationships that had already existed and already had a certain layer of trust.

At times I used prompting questions in order to expand discussions and encourage a dialogic style of discussion. This brief segment happened during a discussion of MLK’s principle, “avoid hurting the spirit and body of yourself and others.” I had just asked Owen a question about “how [. . .] we make sure we don’t hurt ourselves in the process” of a conflict and he had said “Apologizing?”. This followed:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Time | Talk |
| 1  2 | Lily | 15:16 | Mmmm, so does that mean … you did something wrong and you apologize to make the situation better? |
| 3 | Owen | 15:22 | [shakes head no] |
| 4 | Lily | 15:23 | No? What does that mean? Could you tell me more? |
| 5  6 | Owen | 15:31 | Uh it could make the person think like, think that they won and. . .uh . . . |

Transcript 1: November 01, 2021

Commentary:

In this example, in Line 1, I do a few different things. At first, I clarify and ask “so does this mean…?” I am hoping to clarify for my own understanding, but also so that others understand as well. But I do something else as well. I put into my own words what he might mean, as a kind of “revoicing” of what I think he might be meaning. BUT, from previous encounters, I’ve come to know that Owen tends to directly answer my questions without expanding or adding additional information. So I chose to ask the question in a way that I knew he would disagree with, hoping that it would prompt him to say more.

I asked if it was because he had done something wrong, a common situation that would require an apology. Based on similar conversations around a similar topic I knew Owen’s stance on conflict and the styles that he chose to employ. When Owen shakes his head (in line 3), in response to my question, I realized (in the moment) that it would not necessarily lead to more of a response. I had asked a question that he could answer with a simple yes or no. So I pushed further (line 4) asking him if he could tell me more.

In reviewing many of my transcripts, I realized that, particularly with Owen, I gave him the option to say *no* to questions like these. In this case I asked if he *could* rather than *would* share (an offer rather than a request or demand). At other times I might ask him whether he would like to share or not, making sure to verbally say the *or not* part rather than letting it be implied. This was my effort to make the space more comfortable and accessible for him (and all of the participants). Promoting autonomy and agency among the participants was key, whether they were sharing an experience they had at school, criticizing how boring my program was, or coloring or standing while they worked. In this case, in line 4, I asked two questions: “What does that mean? Could you tell me more?” specifying *what* I wanted him to tell me more about, since I wanted to know what *he* meant instead of what I had suggested. Although doing this in one instance would not necessarily make a difference in a student’s comfort or response, repeated use of such a practice established an expectation and a routine/norm for the space. It helped that some students set examples of giving an expansive response easily.

Ultimately, I have come to see that the way that I approached teaching (or facilitating) the program had an impact. I created a dialogue based-structure (activities and guiding questions) that encouraged discussion and disagreement. And I also used specific “talk moves” and questions to support the participants to feel comfortable voicing their ideas and expanding on them. I tried to avoid a dynamic where I was the teacher, and they were my students. I had the ideas, and they were supposed to write them down and learn them. The combination of these methods created an environment where the foundation for trust could be constructed.

I’ve drawn on work on talk moves, Talking for Understanding, and ideas such as “special listening” developed by academics, classroom teachers, and even youth researchers investigating classroom talk (Michaels & O’Connor, 2012; Park et al., 2021). In analyzing the ways that students responded to many of the moves I used, I’ve come to see that a certain level of trust is required, and that that trust has to be created collaboratively between me and the students, and also between the students themselves, in large part through talk.

## Bringing it all Together

The notion of Talking for Understanding has been particularly helpful because it oriented me simultaneously to teacher talk moves as well as to the moves that students make. It has helped me to identify moments of engagement and participation – even small interactions – and it’s helped me see how participants are working in conjunction with each other in order for these moments to be successful and engaging.

This kind of talk both depends on trust and helps build trust. It is a collective process. It’s an interactional achievement, but also a tool that is used to promote student generated participation and engaged learning within a group. Talking for Understanding can create a strong base from which trust can build and community based learning methods can be encouraged. That is why the next section shifts to a deeper discussion of participation and growth.

# **Participation and Growth**

## Getting Situated

In my opening vignette, I describe my own struggle with participation. It is something that most people at one point or another will feel anxious about. With the way our current education system is structured, participation is encouraged in very limited ways. Often it is not till students are older when discussion is encouraged in the classroom. The classroom learning often looks pretty different from conversations as they are had outside the classroom or just casually among friends. Often a teacher asks a question and students raise their hand if they want to share the right answer. Often the teacher talks the majority of the time and the questions asked look for a *specific “correct” answer*. With the Peace Education Program, I hoped to disrupt this norm in the ways that I facilitated, as discussed above. This led me to focus more closely on, not just how the youth responded to me, but how they participated more broadly, and with each other.

I've been particularly interested in participation because I see a critical link between participation and growth over time in student autonomy. By autonomy, I mean students' willingness to voice their own ideas, step up, speak out, challenge someone else's view, or even become more confident -- that is, "come out of their shells" if they seem shy or reluctant to participate. The examples in this section often exemplify moments of individual or collective growth as we enacted a discussion based approach in the Peace Education Program. I characterized something as growth when they moved their behavior towards learning efficiently more often. At times an individual would show growth through engagement with the program or others in a way that only enhanced their own experience, and I considered this individual growth. At other times growth was as a group as the way we interacted was fleshed out and there were changes that further enhanced the group’s or part of the group’s ability to learn together.

As they grew more comfortable participating, I saw them reflect on how they did so. In moments such as these it was in relation to their peers around them. Their participation affected how others participated and how they participated, not only with me and the program, but with each other. Over time, I saw a shift from my more direct facilitation towards more participant-lead interactions and more free flowing discussions. And yet, these more free-flowing conversations were still focused and relevant to the topics of the program curriculum. I sense more comfort in engaging in the content and their peers without my prompting. It seemed to stem from a growing comfort with the group of people in general.

In the following sections, I highlight examples of participation that show evidence of development and growth in a variety of individuals. I examine these moments closely in hopes of better understanding the participants’ thinking behind their actions in the group setting and their comfort in doing so.

As I have come to better understand participation, trust and comfort are linked. In looking closely at how the students are participating, I am also interrogating the trust required to participate at all. Moreover, I explore the meaning of participation for the students themselves, as they reflect on the program and their participation in it.

By starting with The Story of Owen, I highlight how Owen grapples with participating despite some struggles, and then move on to how his behavior shifts (Owen’s Turning Point). Owen’s participation is complicated by his relationship to his brother Andrew and it is important to consider their participation as a unit as well (Andrew and Owen’s Participation Together). Mark contrasts with Owen in a lot of ways but ultimately, The Story of Mark shows a very different level of outgoingness, but similarly links participation to autonomy and growth. All these examples are included in order to provide a picture of our discussions and each participant's role in them. Their roles are fluid, but I capture them here hoping to tell a story of the group growing – as levels of trust grow over the course of the program.

## The Story of Owen

When I had worked at the summer program at Angel’s Net in the months leading up to implementing this program, Owen and his twin brother Andrew were participants. I was able to get to know them and see them in action. From this, I had the sense that both Owen and Andrew were what you might call “quiet” or “shy” kids. They would stick together even in larger groups and both talked softly, sometimes so softly that it was hard to hear what they were saying. I slowly built a certain teacher/student type relationship with them, asking about homework, seeing if they needed help.

Getting to know them within the Peace Education Program was a new way to engage with them. Through multiple session discussions it became clear to me that Owen was the more outgoing of the two. I started to get a sense of what he was thinking through surveys, but he was still very quiet to begin with in group discussions. Most examples of Owen speaking came from a direct question that I used to prompt the conversation. Sometimes that would mean asking all participants to share a particular answer, sometimes I would ask him to respond directly by name.

In an early survey where I asked all the participants to describe how they typically participate in group conversations he wrote, “I don't really conversate because I am shy but I would Just ask the regular "how are you?" or "how are you doing?'' I was struck by the reflexivity that he showed in his answer, especially when paired with an additional written response where he stated that he was unsure whether or not he would describe himself as a trusting person because, “I don't really know myself and there is a lot to learn.” Both of these responses suggested to me that Owen was willing to share – at least with me – the way that he was thinking of himself. And he was thinking about the answers deeply, going beyond a one word response that I saw from some of the other participants.

He was not very comfortable speaking in front of the group, but that did not mean that he was not engaging with the ideas that we were talking about. When I did prompt him to share, he was willing to but did not often participate without prompting. I had an assumption that he would engage independently more frequently if he were more comfortable in the group. Beyond that, I thought that if he trusted those around him, he would be comfortable sharing.

Owen shared some of his feelings about participation and speaking up in a poem he wrote during one of our activities on October 27th.

One person can speak up

One person can inspire

One person will look up,

One person may not

One person

Some background: Owen wrote this poem in Session 8 – Principle 4 We had just been discussing Rosa Parks and had read a poem in the same format that Owen used. The poem discussed her contribution to the civil rights movement. From there I asked that everyone create a poem of their own that reflected or was inspired by the one about Rosa Parks. Owen’s poem featured elements of action, “speak up” and “look up.” But it also suggested that “one person *may not*” do those things. His survey response (mentioned earlier in this section) revealed a little bit about this as well in that he said he did not participate often because he was shy. I take the culmination of these things to mean that Owen is a relatively reflective individual. He understands that he is shy and understands that there is more to learn about himself. He seems to think that this is key to trust and participation and the questions that I asked in the survey. I would suggest that despite the suggestion that he does not quite know himself, there is some growth over the course of the program. He wrote this poem about half way through the program while the survey response was written in the second week. In both cases he seems more comfortable sharing through writing than he does through speaking out loud. For example, at the beginning a typical response Owen would make would be direct and brief, often after I had requested directly that he share. At the point that the poem was written he elected to help read aloud that day and participated more than he had early on in the program. This remained true as we saw more pushback and interest in participating in activities unprompted. Rachel Elizabeth Cargle discusses how, “Building trust within ourselves is a rigorous practice. It's a relationship with our fears, our gut, our intuition.” Upon seeing this quote, I was able to contextualize some of the ways that self-confidence and shyness versus outgoingness was related to trust in this project. Trusting oneself as this active task is something that I can see exemplified in Owen.

Owen’s participation on this day occurred right as it felt there was a shift in his behavior in terms of participation. I deemed it in some sense him “coming out of his shell” as he got more comfortable with the group. Both the content of his poem and his willingness to share with the group suggested something was different from his initial shyness or at least the way he participated despite his shyness. Owen is pretty self-reflexive and his conception of himself as shy plays a role in how he interacts with the group. He speaks up less frequently than some of the other participants but shifted over the course of the program in a way that was significant.

I interrogate the way that Owen participates in the program because I showing up to the conversation at all is what starts discussions. Each person participated in different ways and it impacted the way in which the conversations progressed. In these particular interactions with Owen, I saw him make choices about his own participation that required trust in himself and trust in his peers and the program. This is significant because he comes off as so soft spoken. As I saw him engage in the program, his interests became clear and his position in different discussions and topics did too. By sharing these and building connections, it seemed as though there was growth in participation and in his engagement with the content.

Owen’s participation and the choices he made of whether or not to do so were largely based on his level of shyness. When a child is shy it is often more difficult for them to share in group settings. This is where I considered the work of Nussbaum (2002). In his article titled, “How introverts versus extroverts approach small-group argumentative discussions” he examines the ways that the two aforementioned groups act similarly or differently when faced with a disagreement. Particularly since the topics we were discussing encouraged sharing and at times explaining personal values that others might not share this was something that felt relevant to the work I was doing. In particular there was a significant difference in some students being very introverted while others were extremely outgoing. In the study, Nussbaum argued that, “introverts prefer coconstructive modes of argumentation in contrast to conflictual modes'' (p. 185). He suggests that “An introvert occasionally criticized a solution by pointing out a problem or negative constraint with a proposed solution (shown in the table as a "negative reason"), but the students then worked together to redesign a solution” ( p. 185). He suggests that introverted people are less likely to disagree with their peers. I want to complicate his thinking. While this still may be true during initial interactions, the instances I saw throughout the program showed pushback from introverts and continued pushback on certain issues. I suggest that as introverted participants become more comfortable within a group, they are more comfortable pushing back and having these more argumentative moments. In order for a more introverted person to engage in conflictual participation a certain amount of trust in both themselves and their peers seemed to be necessary. This is relevant to the Story of Owen because he identifies as a shy and introverted person, but I saw him participate in ways that Nussbaum might typically expect from an extrovert and his comfort level grew.

When a participant is shy and does not easily participate in group conversations, it can take time to develop a rapport that encourages participation. Each student has internal motivators and allowing them the opportunities to reflect on their own participation as well as giving them ample opportunities to participate however they are comfortable can empower them to take on the participation themselves. Developing this autonomy can coincide with developing trust within one’s one mind as well as in the group setting. With confidence comes participation.

## Owen’s turning point

Doing this praxis, I was reminded that participation is not static. Even before Owen shared the aforementioned poem, he had been changing the way that he participated in the group over a period of a couple sessions. There seemed to be a turning point in Owen’s participation following the session on October 18th, two sessions before the previously discussed session. On this day there is the first discussion of apologizing as a way to avoid conflict. This turns into a recurring theme over the course of the next few sessions. In this specific moment, Owen and his brother Andrew both agree that apologizing can be a good way to avoid someone being mad at you.

In my field notes I described how after being given time to write a list of how one might deescalate a situation they were asked to share. Gina Kuruvilla, a member on the Board of the Center for Nonviolent Solutions, who I worked with closely to develop the Peace Education Curriculum and came to observe sessions from time to time, was observing this day. She stepped in to push back on their ideas a little bit. In my field notes I described that, “They shared taking apologizing as a way to de-escalate, Gina brought up that there are some cases where apologizing might not be the way to de-escalate in every situation.” The way that they were thinking about it suggested that they wanted apologizing to be a tool to avoid rather than a tool to repair harm. The twins participated together and were in agreement that this was a good way to de-escalate conflicts. Even though Gina pushed back on their ideas it was not clear whether they were convinced. It became even more clear that this was a moment of interrogation for Owen when he brought up the discussion again with Mark in a conversation about Martin Luther King’s fourth principle, do what is right even when it is difficult. His participation here is significant to me because it felt like a turning point. Before this, Owen tended to wait until prompted to speak and often felt more comfortable with fact based additions to the conversation. Both Owen and his brother seemed to really engage with our discussion of the conflict escalator. This was one of the few times that I chose to share information in a more lecture style format. I had attempted to avoid this for most of the program because I felt that discussion was really key to what we were doing and how I would encourage them to share and participate in ways that they were comfortable speaking. It was interesting then, that this was when they seemed most engaged. I believe that they had a certain level of comfort with this lecture because of the similarity of the style to a school environment since school often is taught more as a lecture to large classes. Both twins had repeatedly shared their interest in school and their enjoyment of homework etc. Knowing that there was a clear answer to the level of conflict I was referring to and a definition that they could associate with it seemed to be comfortable to them. They seemed excited to give me the right answer for example when asked to identify which level of conflict a certain scenario might be. I had not realized quite the extent that this was true until this point. In terms of Owen, he was able to get comfortable with the way that I format the program, which focused more on sharing personal opinions rather than facts. I was asking them to share what they thought was true rather than what they knew, or a book told them. After this initial discussion of apologizing as a de-escalation tool, I saw a commitment by Owen to participate in ways that were not based on rote memorization or book based knowledge.

On 10/27, Owen offered to read a poem aloud to the group. At the time I remember being excited because he normally did not respond to larger requests for participation. When asked directly he would give an answer but, in most cases, when I asked if anyone wanted to share he would not raise his hand. Reading aloud is something that I tend to assume that people do not like to do, both from my own experience and stereotypes. Mark had already read the first paragraph, but I asked if anyone would be willing to read next and without much hesitation Owen offered despite there being others who might have also offered. This is significant because he did not often participate in this way before this point. Owen seemed interested in the poem especially considering the creativity with which he engaged with the assignment to write it for himself. By offering to read he extended an opportunity for others to see that he trusted them and to see that they in turn would engage with him as he participated. The fact that the way he participated shifted suggests that something was encouraging him to engage despite his “shy” personality. As he continued to participate his comfort seemed to grow.

To me it was significant that there was this shift in these moments because it seemed as though he was reacting to something that was happening within the program, whether that be the curriculum itself or the way the participants acted and the way the program was enacted. As his participation shifted trust was developing. I highlight this moment with Owen in part as a case study of his growth throughout the program but also to suggest that when there are many opportunities to participate and get comfortable doing so, trust follows. Covey suggests that it is important to move at the speed of trust. That is why it is not simply one moment. There are a series of moments that create these opportunities to grow in oneself and within the program.

## The Story of Andrew

As it became clear through his interactions with his twin, Andrew was even quieter than his twin. It was interesting to look back at the survey responses to see that he had said that “In an area that I am not used to, it might take me some time to participate. But I would be okay with them sharing my thoughts'' when asked about discussions in new spaces and sharing thoughts with the group. This section shows a growth in community on the part of Andrew in fact that perhaps some of the ways he participated were bids for community, requests that he be a part of what we were creating and that others engage him in the topics.

Part of the way that I had learned to engage quieter participants was with activities and thinking time, letting them know I would be calling on them, so they were prepared and giving them the option to pass on answering at all. These were often the ways that I encouraged Andrew to participate. I saw him participate differently at the start of our session on October 25th. We were reviewing what we had previously talked about the week before to get this next session going. In that previous session, I had given one of the most lecture style sessions out of the entire program. We had discussed the conflict escalator and I had used a poster board to show the escalator and identified and labeled the various levels of conflict. The majority of other lessons I had were very set on encouraging discussion as the main form of learning, and even in the rest of that section we had further discussion based learning. I felt like a teacher-student dynamic lesson was the best way to teach the conflict escalator but at the time I still had reservations about teaching them in this way when I was really prioritizing differentiating this experience from a formal educational setting. Interestingly enough this was the first time Andrew decided to participate without direct prompting. At various times before this point, both Andrew and Owen had expressed their enjoyment of school and studying and often were still working on schoolwork during our programming. They seemed most comfortable talking about school and this is where I was able to engage them most in conversation. Despite my hesitation about shifting away from my typical format this seemed to be where Andrew had the biggest takeaway from this lesson. On 10/25 when we reviewed that class he remembered and felt confident enough to share the specific terms he remembered even after almost a whole week between these two particular sessions. He seemed very prepared for the fact based nature of that particular lesson based on his response and engagement with it (as opposed to the value based nature of the majority of my lessons). It was also a type of lesson where he very much understood the expectations of participation when rote based memorization was required and a known answer question was asked. He knew that when he raised his hand and shared that I could respond “yes that is correct,'' rather than a question where I asked what they thought, and he didn't know the answer I was looking for since there was not one. Before this point the majority of his participation in the program required me asking a question to the whole group, a couple people raising their hand to answer and once they had shared opening it up to those who had not yet spoken to add on. Some activities I would let them know that I expected them all to share while others I asked “Andrew, would you like to share?” Here he felt comfortable enough and interested enough to share without being asked. He knew that it was a moment where I was interested in having people share and he knew that he could confidently share the answer.

A different example that highlights a new way that Andrew participated occurred a few sessions later on November 11th. This was when the program was starting to finish up and we were considering what they had learned about peace over the course of the program. This particular moment with Andrew is a marker of one of the final substantive sessions of the program. Most of the participants had been coming relatively consistently over the previous eleven sessions and interacted with each other outside of our scheduled program time. I had seen many participants in the larger program get to know each other better and talk more. It was hard for me as an observer to tell this about Andrew since he is very shy. At this moment we were talking about the summary of all the principles in summary after giving each one its own day of discussion. I asked participants if there was anything else that needed to be on that list of principles and used it as a segway into a conversation of what they had learned from the program. I had asked some participants to share by directly addressing them, but I had not specifically directed a comment at Andrew. While Tara was using an extended personal anecdote to talk about what she had learned from the program, Andrew raised his hand. The exchange can be seen in the following transcript.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Time | Talk |
| 1  2 | L |  | (to another participant while T is talking): I think I saw A’s hand and then I'll come to you. |
| 3 | T |  | . . . |
| 4 | L | 17:10 | A were you going to say something? |
| 5 | A | 17:15 | I learned that there was more to peace than I thought there was. |
| 6  7 | L |  | So so, what was different? What did you think it was before and then what do you think it is now?. . .What changed? |
| 8 | A |  | I thought it was just no violence but there's actually more t- |
| 9 |  |  | [Background chatter] |
| 10 | L |  | Sorry, there's more what? |
| 11  12  13 | A |  | There was more than just nonviolence like . . .what we learned like how to escalate down an argument [L:good]and like the .. . (unclear) person and stuff. |
| 14 | L |  | Thank you for sharing. |

Transcript 2: November 11, 2021

This was a moment where Andrew directly stated what he had learned from the program. Much of the ways that Andrew had previously participated had been reliant on Owen participating as well, a fact or rote memorization based answer, or being directly prompted by me. Here he shared, if not necessarily a personal value, a personal point where his knowledge had grown that was individual to him. I would like to claim that putting this out on display was something that he had not previously done or particularly liked to do. Through sharing, he expressed that he had learned by contrasting what he had previously thought and what he had come into the program assuming with what he now knew to be true. He expressed that he had learned how to de-escalate an argument which showed an added complexity to his knowledge on the subject. Perhaps this point of gained knowledge was a point of pride. I cannot know for sure what made him decide to participate at this point, but I know that it made me excited to see the growth not just in his knowledge but also his comfort in our program space. Not only did he explicitly state what he had learned about peace, I also think that he showed some growth in the way that he participated as well. The shift from these two moments are just brief snapshots of his behavior but they were in ways that required a certain level of trust in self and others.

Although Andrew’s participation was less frequent, it taught me more about accommodating how different participants felt comfortable participating than some of the others. Since more traditional methods of learning were where he was comfortable, that is what he was able to contribute to the group. I did not always provide many opportunities to do this because I was so interested in encouraging discussion based learning. Despite the fact that I did not give him many opportunities to participate as he might have liked, over the course of the program he learned to participate in more opinion and value based discussion as we did more and more of it.

For some students, participating in discussion based learning can be difficult and a significant adjustment from how they are used to in an educational setting. This is the time to support their learning of discussion based participation with trust. Creating a space where they feel in charge of their education and comfortable enough to try something new is key. When this comfort is present, students have the opportunity to expand their participation.

## The Story of Mark

Unlike Owen and Andrew, Mark was an extremely outgoing participant. Mark provided the opportunity to examine participation with someone who did it often. Since he did this from the beginning, what made his participation interesting was more in the how he did it rather than if or when he did it. I quickly got to know Mark when he would easily make small talk and joke with me, and my coworkers in addition to his peers. When we began the Peace Education Program, I felt that I already had a pretty good sense of what he was like and his survey response reinforced that impression to some extent. In response to a survey question asking him to describe how you usually participate in conversations Mark gave a bulleted list stating he typically participated by “talking, answering and asking questions, sometimes disagreeing (NICELY).” The part that does become significant to my analysis is his last point. I had less of a sense of how he might disagree with his peers before starting my research, but I soon would see it was something he did relatively often. There were many occasions where he would respond to a peer with “I would like to disagree with that” or some other similar phrase. The fact that he put “nicely” in bold letters was something that I thought was important to include in the data. In his own verbal reflections throughout the program, Mark was very engaged with the content of the Peace Education Program.

He tends to be self-reflexive and engaged with the topic of our conversation. For example, when we wrote poems based on Rosa Parks, he struggled saying in my field notes that, “I asked Mark how it was going, He said it was difficult because he struggles with doing this so it wasn’t super relatable.” The rest of the conversation went as follows:

10/27

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Time | Words |
| 1 | L | 25:42 | Any thoughts on the poem? |
| 2  3  4  5  6  7 | M | 25:45 | yes . . . Its good ya, mosta most of most of the situations I've been through, and like all the principles all these like you know all these principles you know like how to be strong and you know like not walk away from a situation, how to be strong in some certain situations, I'm not good at that! So [L: mmm] I don't know how to relate to that experience. |
| 8  9 | L | 26:10 | So maybe someone you'd like to be like? An example of what you want to follow? |

Transcript 3: October 27, 2021

He went back to work and spent time writing asking about meanings and spellings of various words. The poem he wrote goes as follows:

I am only one person

What can one person do?

Smart

Resilient

And always true to his faith

Intelligent

Persevering

. . . . (illegible word)

And always knowing how to think outside of the box

Dad

Even when he was struggling with an activity, I presented him with, he would work with me to explore in a different way. Ultimately, he took inspiration from his father for this poem as someone he aspired to be like and who he thought embodied the characteristics we were discussing. I had initially checked in with him at this moment when he made a thoughtful “hmm” noise while working. This clued me in to the fact that he was grappling with something about this assignment.

His writing of the poem gives some insight into his engagement with the curriculum and his flexibility and engagement with his own thinking. Part of what made this clear early on was his outgoingness. At the same time, it allowed him to participate in many of the talk moves referenced above. A moment that I found really interesting was when, after multiple moments where he had been the first to talk and where he had talked a lot, he paused before speaking again. He said that he knew he had been talking a lot and wanted to give others the opportunity as well and didn't want to take away from others' space. This moment was something that I really appreciated and used it to open up the question to the larger group. This talk move required an interest in the success of the other students around him that Talking For Understanding aims at.

He seemed interested in not only engaging with the material himself but also that his peers do the same. Early on in the program we had discussed as a group, norms and expectations that we wanted to have. I explained that I thought it is important to include the expectation that we all “take space and make space”. This means that there is a balance among the group to take space, to be present and participate but also recognize when you have already taken a lot of space and to instead make space for others to participate. It requires self-reflection and check in evaluation of where you are at any given point in a discussion. It is not to say that a person should always be doing one or the other but instead that it is beneficial to find the nuanced balance between the two and encourage others to do the same. This is exactly what Mark does in these moments. A drawback for me on reflection of the program overall is the lack of returning to these norms after the original discussion, but like this exemplifies, it did not mean these norms were not followed or present at various times during the program. In this case, Mark’s engagement and the way that he went about it suggested to me that he was comfortable with the group and the program. This comfort and high participation seems to be a precursor of trust. The reason I suggest this is because his outgoingness also seemed to mean that he was often the one to share personal experiences or open up about the topic we were discussing in a way that required a certain level of vulnerability.

Many of the times that Mark spoke in the group he was comfortable not raising his hand. This was again a sign of comfort to me and a departure from traditional classroom culture that I tried to prioritize. When I reference “traditional schooling/classroom setting” I am referring to what most people in the US experienced in primary and secondary school. It often looked like a teacher at the front of a room, with authority over twenty to thirty kids who would be required to raise their hands to speak and reinforce the power dynamics in place. By not ever expecting that of this program I wanted to encourage trust through connecting with the students as somewhat more equal. I still played a role as a facilitator of the program, but I encouraged them to take an active role in discussions and kept a relatively informal relationship with them, convincing them not to call me “Miss” pretty early on. Part of this meant sharing my own experiences if I expected them to share any of their own and discussing around a large group table. Not only did I encourage them to speak out as the discussion flowed, I was flexible with how they interacted with our space as well. Other staff at times had expectations that they do not draw during the program or needed to stay sitting but I encouraged them to do what they needed to be present. I knew that we were doing this after they had been at school all day and did not want them to be doing more of the same if they were not comfortable.

This was not always perfectly executed though. At times it was still important that I managed who was speaking and that each person who wanted to share could, as can be seen in the transcript below. Before this transcript I had commented on Tara falling asleep and that it was not everyone's most energetic day when Mark apologized for not being able to give an answer and asked me to restate the question.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Time | Talk |
| 1  2  3  4  5 | L | 35:20 | How bout we just shift the question a little bit, so ... Do you think that you need to be courageous to do all this stuff? To have arguments with people and have them be peaceful. Do you need to be courageous; do you need to be really strong and brave to fight with your friend and do it well? |
| 6  7  8  9 | M | 35:40 | Mm? Mm . . . .m I don’t think you have to be brave to fight, or to have an argument with your friend but if you have an opinion and you and to defend that opinion your gonna talk about it and your gonna say hey this is what I think- |
| 10  11 | L | 35:58 | Like to- like to, in order to focus on doing it nonviolently, does that take courage? |
| 12  13  14  15  16 | M | 36:06 | Mm, hmm, ya I mean it takes strength, cause usually when people start to get into arguments and things like that, they blow things out of proportion and they can blow out so ya it takes a little bit of you know strength for you know him, him or her not to push my buttons and go say something. (mumbles) |
| 17  18  19 | L | 36:25 | Ya there we go. That's a good point. So, what do you guys think? Is it hard to be nonviolent and peaceful as you argue? (4 seconds of silence) is it hard to not get mad at your friend? |
| 20 | M | 36:42 | Um ya ya I just had that experience (T talks over) |
| 21  22 | T | 36:44 | To my, to my true friends, yes, to the friend I was talking about before . . . |
| 23 | L |  | Well do you get in arguments with your true friends? |
| 24  25 | T | 36:55 | No, I never get in an argument with my true friends [L:mm] but my friend at tr-- who wastes something. . .YES |
| 26  27 | L | 37:00 | Well do you think youuur, do you think you could have an argument with your true friends and it still be ok? |
| 28 | T | 37:07 | Uuh sometimes yeah (L:yeah?) |
| 29 | M |  | I think it's possible (quietly) |
| 30  31  32  33  34  35  36 | T | 37:12 | Plus, usually cause we don't really have arguments I've never had an argument with with my friend but usually [friends name] I get in arguments with, cause she cause she's been like scammed a lot of times and so I’m like just if your being scammed then get a private server and like do something else or do something else like play a new game or something [L:so you were frustrated] and she was like No! I don’t I don’t want to play a new game. |
| 37  38  39  40 | L | . . . . | (summary)I address O and A playing games on their school computers saying that if they are doing homework it's fine but if they are done, I would prefer if they close the laptops. I tell them that they can play games in 15 minutes once the program is done . . . |
| 41  42  43 | T | 38:14 | I got a new game called World's End club . . . .[talks for . . . about the game and her mom selling games so she can get a new one] off track talk. |
| 44  45 | M | 38:40 | (mumbles quietly while T is still talking) Are we still talking about . . .? |
| 46 | L | 38:42 | Yes, we are. What, Do you have something to add? |
| 47  48  49 | M | 38:46 | Umm . . ya I think you can . . .I mean, like, I'm sorry since she ranted for so long to- [T: I wanna have . . .] I kinda forgot the questions. |
| 50  51  52  53 | L | 38:55 | Ya ok so we were talking about how you can have arguments with your friends and how it can be it can take a lot of work for those conversations to be peaceful, you said you had something happen today? |
| 54 | M | 39:08 | I wouldn't call him my friend, he’s my classmate [L:ya] uh |
| 55 | T | 39:11 | Ca- I want cinnamon rolls! |
| 56  57 | L |  | We’re talking about something right now, and M was talking, and he needs some time for us to hear what he has to say ok? |
| 58 | M |  | I gave it to [T: I want a cinnamon roll] you guys want to share. |
| 59  60 | L |  | You're going to have to ask Miss Y about the cinnamon roll or your mom, but I think that's for later okay? |
| 61 | T | 39:29 | I think my m- |
| 62 | L |  | Can we finish what Mark was saying Tara please? |
| 63 | T | 39:32 | Ya (says quietly) |
| 64 | L | 39:34 | Thank you. |
| 65  66  67  68  69  70 | M | 39:35 | Ok [L:did you lose it again?] no [L:ok] uhh ok [O: you forgot?] no so uh like today uh was a pretty stressful day one person you know, he won't stop talking and you know, sometimes it ticks you off to the point where you want to say bro! just like just shut up or be quiet you know, but I have to like take some sort of strength for me to like you know M go on with your day ya. |
| 71  72 | L | 40:10 | So, do you just ignore it, or do you end up saying something calmly or do you. . .? |
| 73  74  75  76  77  78  79 | M | 40:16 | I'm gonna be honest with you. I can be, I'm a nice person but sometimes if somebody like pushes, like, I think we are all nice people, at some point in time but if somebody starts to tick you off to the point where like there no return, when I mean no return, I mean like you start to get seriously mad now you're gonna say something [L:mm] and I’m not gonna lie I say a lot of things on a daily basis. I'm not, nothing bad I just you know tell . . to be quiet. |
| 80 | L | 40:50 | Well so that kinda relates to levels of conflict. |
| 81 | M | 40:53 | Levels ya. |
| 82  83  84  85  86  87  88  89  90  91  92 | L | 40:55 | Ya that sometimes you can have a conflict and have it be like just a funny argument, you guys disagree but it doesn't matter, sometimes it gets a little more than that, are you keeping your laptop away? And the the way that they describe it is normal levels of conflict, pervasive and overt, which are a lot of big words, but it is basically the difference between . . . the difference between like having fun, and then arguing and not feeling happy (hi angel) and then when you actually get so angry that you like I don't know you get in a physical fight, you're so angry and you're so mad and you are just screaming at each other that's overt. . . So, we are going to talk about that in the next couple days. How do we work down the steps . . . |

Transcript 4: October 12, 2021

While a super interesting discussion came from this moment, it required that I shift the focus to the topic that I had originally presented. At some moments it is a more subtle suggestion about the discussion or in this case I directly address Tara asking, “Can we finish what Mark was saying Tara please?” (line 62). Mark had expressed his interest in sharing what he had to say as a side comment while Tara is still talking rather than addressing her himself. In this case he defaulted to my authority as facilitator.

This is an example of both Tara and Mark sharing personal anecdotes. Tara gets off track when another participant is playing games on his computer and wants to share. What I find so significant about this transcript is the moment where Mark draws the discussion back to our topic. In line 20 he had said “Um ya ya I just had that experience” before Tara talked over him to share her own experience. In line 44 he quietly says, “Are we still talking about . . .?” in reference to our original topic answering the question “Do you think that you need to be courageous to do all this stuff? To have arguments with people and have them be peaceful” (lines 1-3) This suggested that Mark was interested in keeping the conversation on topic. Mark wants to share about his day because he feels that it relates to what we are talking about. In doing this he makes clarifications to the point of the type of person that he is.

Overall, Mark very quickly showed signs that he was comfortable speaking with me and his peers without much stress. Very early in knowing him he made talk moves where introduced moments of deepening relationships. At times he openly shared his struggles such as in this transcript while at other times he has more one on one interactions where he asks for advice etc. in an open and honest manner. The ways that he chose to engage highlight the importance of “talk moves” and the way that facilitation and “participation structures” are significant to building relationships and trust in moments where difficult discussions can arise (Phillips 1972).

Not only was I excited by this transcript because of his interest in the content, but I was interested because of his choice to engage as a result of his interest. Every participant had the option to sit silently and not participate. Even if the content had really peaked his interest, he could have expressed that through other forms such as writing. I prioritized discussion and Mark willingly added to the conversations. He engaged with content and with discussions of the way the conversation was going at that particular moment.

It is often assumed that talkativeness and outgoingness indicate interest and engagement from a student or discussion participant. Mark exemplifies how there is more than just extrovertedness that is important to a productive discussion. Part of what was so significant about these moments is the way that he was interested in “talking for understanding.” The phrases he chose and the way he spoke suggested he was interested in gaining the knowledge rather than just giving a textbook answer and part of that was an interest in others learning in similar ways.

What this says to me more generally is that when we encourage engagement and genuine interest, engagement goes up. When it goes beyond “banking education” topics are malleable to students and so is learning overall. Creating an opportunity for such engagement impacts student participation no matter what level of comfort they started in. In contrast to “banking education,” a community and independent student model allows for participants to get excited to gain knowledge and learn for themselves and encourage their peers to learn with them (Freire 1993). As much as teacher and student talk moves are significant to participation, there has to be trust in order for this learning to be enacted this way. It requires trusting that engagement is not always visible participation until trust is created. This is a process. But it is one that can produce excited and engaged learners.

## Bringing It All Together

I found that at various moments my attention and interest was drawn to the way that both Owen and Mark reflected on their own behavior. In order to grow you often must learn from your own experience and behaviors. In these moments of self-reflection that they chose to share with the group, I saw growth in how they chose to participate. They allowed this to be a community experience, embracing the community centered model that I approached the program with. I emphasized discussion and these two embraced that. It looked very different for each of them which is why I presented various participants and their experiences participating. As I mention in my conceptual framework, I was interested in student autonomy. I feel that participation independent of my prompting is a sign of student autonomy. When they are participating in relevant discussions amongst each other or engaging because of their own interests, it seems that they hold some autonomy in our space. The informal nature of our discussions and the small size of our group lent itself to success. This is something that I felt developed over the course of the program as trust was built between participants.

Participation can be a marker of connections being made between an individual and the content, the facilitator, or their peers. As these connections are made, these become more comfortable interactions to repeat, especially when that individual feels as though it was successful. This builds trust with the group and hopefully encourages independent and autonomous students.

# **Community: Developing and Present**

## Getting Situated

From the beginning I knew that I wanted to orient the Peace Education Program around discussion. This was in part because I knew that basing the learning in the participants' discussions would mean that we were in turn basing the learning of the experiences that they would share as a result. These discussions would be based on value based topics that are a product of the Peace Education curriculum. Because of this, I would be relying on their experiences and their relations to each other. Some might have shared experiences and others would be learning about new perspectives. Either way, relying on discussion focuses on these interactions and I centered this as a powerful tool in creating trust. When there begins to be bonds of community, there begins to be relationships that rely on trust especially as they grow. There are some community ties that are easily formed, while others take longer to develop. In the following section I differentiate between elements of community that were in place before the program started, those that developed as the program progressed.

Part of what I work so hard to create is a sense of community and trust through the choices I make to enact the curriculum I planned. It is important, though, to acknowledge that there is already a community present before the program started, some that I was involved in and others that I did not have access to at all. Either way, the relationships that are already in place impact the community that we build within the program. At times what I do impacts community and other times it originates from the participants and their interactions with each other. The wide variety of origins of community means that there are many ways worth considering their significance and different ways to create meaning. Either way I want to examine a few of the ways that community was developed over the course of the program and consider the ways in which this impacted trust and willingness to participate in difficult conversations. In the section to come, I first examine the relationship between Andrew and Owen and the small community that is created by the fact that they are twins. The following section considers another concrete community tie, the significance of religion in the lives of these participants. The Story of Tara depicts her use of personal anecdotes in order to make connections and the role of storytelling in creating and connecting to community. All show the importance of the relationships and bonds that are present among groups and how important they are in terms of trust.

## Andrew and Owen’s participation together

Owen and his twin brother Andrew have a relationship that is closer than any other in our Peace Education Program. Their participation was often intertwined. In some respects the relationship between the two of them is significant to the crafting community for them but it is rooted in how they participate due to their shyness. In a lot of ways, they have a small community that consists of each other. In what follows, Their joint participation exemplifies the significance of having a trusted support when participating.

On 11/01 we discussed the principle of protecting the well-being of yourself and others. At a moment when Tara was starting to fall asleep, I transitioned the conversation to self-care and how that related to this principle. I had a one minute guided meditation video to share with them asking if they had ever done meditation or yoga. Some said that they had learned about it in gym class at school. At this point, Andrew and Owen added that they had heard that yoga was demonic. When I showed some doubt and questioning, Owen quickly pulled up an article on his Chromebook that cited a pastor saying something along those lines. I was thrown off by this but assured them with the help of a volunteer Gina that none of what we were talking about or doing was demonic. What was even more significant to me than the content of our discussion was Andrew’s participation in it. This was an example of the twins participating in tandem with each other, which is how I often say Andrew participates. Owen is the more outgoing of the two despite his still quiet nature and Andrew relied heavily on fact based answers and personal anecdotes shared with his brother in order to add to the conversation without direct prompting. Another example of this was later on 11/10 when they shared about a fight they had witnessed at school. I had asked for examples of conflict which prompted them to mention the fight. The two added onto each other's points with additional details. When I asked further questions about the event Andrew responded seemingly excited and sure of his storytelling. In this particular interaction, he spoke more times that he normally would and seemed more excited to do so. When they said that the principal tackled the kid to break up the fight I asked if there was another way that situation could have played out and Andrew decidedly said no. This interaction was significant because of his confidence in his answer and his independence from his brother.

As both these examples show, Andrew seemed more comfortable when his brother was also sharing. Their relationship as twins made them closer than any other pair in the program. They spend most of their time together and share an incredibly strong bond of trust between the two of them. By participating together, the pressure was not on either one of them for everyone to be watching them in the same way that sharing alone might. Examples with the twins were unusual in the fact that there were a lot of shared experiences that they could speak about together in a way that is not as frequent for friends or even siblings that are separated by a few years. In the case of these two, their home and school lives are more similar than most people might have to another person. Whereas friends might have overlapping experiences at school or siblings might have overlapping experiences at home, the twins have both. Working together relieves some of the stress that comes from shyness. Their shared experiences make it easier for the two of them to do this. When the two of them participate in a conversation together the dynamic is different than if either one had chosen to participate alone. They have a community of two within the community of the group creating a certain complexity to understanding their participation.

These two exemplified how trust impacts participation because of the contrast between their participation when they are together versus when they have to participate independently. Although I have already discussed Owen’s independent participation above and it was clear that he was engaged in interesting moments of participation without Andrew, there is a level of comfort that the twins provide for each other that made participation easier. They had their own small community between the two of them. They know they have each other to rely on so sometimes they don't branch out as much. The first time Andrew was absent from the program was when a major shift in Owen’s participation happened. Some of their shared interactions happened after this moment but seeing Owen without the security of his brother allowed him to further engage with the group.

On a larger scale, not everyone one will go into a discussion setting with a trusted twin, sibling or friend. Having a known variable in a new setting can be comforting and understanding these relationships in relation to the larger group and community that is being created can give insight into the ways that trust is built. When there are not built in relationships, there is a community that needs to be developed and trust that needs to form in order to encourage participation among the group. Simultaneously, the relationships that already exist must integrate and inform the feeling of community and trust that are being built.

## Role of religion

A large source of community for many many people around the globe, and it is one that tends to be pretty defined early in many people's lives. This is true within this community as well. Although it is not the source of the community ties seeing as there is no religious affiliation of the organization itself, the participants in the program all express the importance of religion to them personally. At times it seemed to be a motivation for some participants within our discussions surrounding peace and the fact that many students shared common ties to religion made conversation and community relatively fluid.

In the very first session, I began with an interactive value activity that required that participants identify, share and compromise around their personal values. This particular worksheet listed options that were targeting students in middle school or younger. The values revolved around family, school and other common topics. This activity allowed them to start the program off as an expert of what they were talking about because only they knew what they valued. They were given independent time to complete the first part of their activity but were then asked to discuss as a group and identify shared values. Now what they were an expert on was being pushed to fit with the values of others. There was some dissent and much more variety than I had been expecting, but there were some commonalities at least in the group that I observed, which was comprised of half the class. They all had selected the value “to feel a good connection to God or a higher spirit.” The entire assignment was focused on finding shared values and this was one that all participants could relate to. This commonality arose at a few points throughout the course as well.

On a certain level I was unsure of how to discuss religion with them because it was not one of the values I had selected on my own sheet. It was never something that had to be a difference in values, but it had always been something that I was taught should be kept extremely separate from teaching. I felt unsure how to approach it when this was a point of community for many of the participants. For example, when Andrew and Owen had heard that yoga was demonic, Gina contextualized her response with a certain acknowledgement of their faith while still disputing the point itself. This is just one example of how at times the topic of God seemed to find its way into our discussion. It was something that happened more than I was expecting and often had more context and created ways for participants to relate and make connections that I expected. I to some extent felt like an outsider to their community.

But as much as I was an outsider to their religious community, the root of many aspects of it were something that I could understand and relate to. Throughout the program, Mark referenced doing the right thing in the context of religion. It seemed that for him, as it seems to be for many people, there was a moral obligation to what is right because it had a significance to his religious community. This community emphasized the importance of duty to your community to do good and it was clear that it was a strong influence on Mark. For example, in his poem that is in its full form in the section The Story of Mark, he has a line that references her father who he says is “always true to his faith.” The poem overall described his father as his role model making it clear that this is a characteristic of his father that he admires.

Religion is just one example of an institutional community tie. When there are communities formed and subgroups as well there can be cross over when new groups are formed. Evaluating what ties are already in place when entering a new community or group can be a helpful tool in leveraging trust and comfort that is already in place to further enhance bonds between people. When there are other differences that feel divisive it can be meaningful to identify the similarities of a group of individuals, especially something that can be so impactful in shaping people's values as religion might be.

## The Story of Tara, Personal Anecdotes

In the following section, rather than focus on one common element that creates community, I shift to a specific discussion tool that I noticed was used often to create connections between the content and the individuals/community. Starting early on in the program, participants would share personal anecdotes when a discussion question would relate to their own lives. By sharing stories and experiences they contextualized the topics for themselves and their peers based on their own lives. In the process, they also opened up to the group in a way that required trust and deepened relationships.

I gave the first survey on the third session of the program hoping to gauge where participants were at as a jumping off point. Tara responded “Trust others, be kind” when I asked if she felt that she was a trusting person. This well encapsulates how I think of Tara as a person and as a participant. Often, she was excited to share what had happened in her day and engage in group activities. The story of Tara is closely tied with the use of personal anecdotes and storytelling. At times, her stories helped her engage with the content that we were talking about. Other times she focused on the narrative of the storytelling in a way that prioritized her narrative over contextualizing it with the group conversation.

In a smaller group discussion Tara brought up examples of social movements she had seen on TV that led to an interesting discussion about the nurses who had been on strike at St. Vincent’s hospital here in Worcester. This was an example of where the context that she shared was a really interesting tangent that provided a great example for discussion. When we discussed what the community was and what their own communities looked like, Tara shared her experience living near a local college. She added additional details considering how quiet it had been when COVID-19 had started and how her community was disrupted when there were parties hosted by students living nearby. Each of these moments, she engaged with the topics or questions I asked by explaining an experience that she could talk a lot about because she had learned about it somewhere else or had experienced it herself. Tara is not the only one to participate in this manner, but she was certainly the one to do it most often. The comfort with which she told her stories suggested a trust in the group and an interest in painting a picture for us of the event that she was sharing.

At times she was very insistent on finishing her story even when it was no longer related. When I noticed this trend early on, I wondered if it applied to other participants and what this meant about trust and having positive conversations where there was disagreement. What made individuals share personal anecdotes and why did they come up so much in the context of this specific program. I hypothesize that personal anecdotes allow the speaker to be an expert in what they are talking about in a way that a hypothetical or abstract issue does not. When people feel confident that they know what they are talking about they feel more comfortable sharing. In the case of Tara, even if she did not engage with every aspect of the lesson that day, sharing a story allowed me to engage with her and pull out the bits that were relevant with probing questions and my own analysis. When a personal anecdote is shared it perpetuates a cycle of trust. Not only does it take a certain amount of courage to be present and participate and share a personal story, once it is shared, community is further developed, and it becomes easier to share again in the future. You learn how the community reacts when you share and, in our case, often find that their reactions are not actually that scary. It extends to the listeners as well. When they know their peers are willing to be vulnerable about their own lives and feelings it encourages more people in the group to do the same. In an early survey response, Tara answers the question “How do you feel being part of a discussion in a new space? Do you feel comfortable with new people sharing your thoughts?” by saying that “I would be trusting them not to tell.” She explicitly uses the word trust as she did in an additional response mentioned above. In that case she was restating in some ways the question I had posed. The repetition of the word trust suggested that it was something that she associated with the topics I was surveying them about. She responded to a question about sharing, with ideas of trust. She said that when she shares was expecting certain things from those she was sharing with, that they respect her privacy. In turn she stated that she would trust them to uphold that even in a new group of people.

Personal anecdotes are cyclical to the nature of trust. By sharing a personal anecdote, it both builds and requires trust. There is something in the nature of this curriculum that lends itself to storytelling. I ask for examples of time things have happened in their own lives in reference to whatever topic we are discussing. In addition to my explicit requests for sharing personal anecdotes, what I have been calling the “value-based nature” of the curriculum and the way that I encourage dialogue opens up many opportunities for participants to think about and share examples from their own lives.

When personal anecdotes are shared, individuals share a piece of themselves and have a level of vulnerability. By doing so, bonds that are already in place can often be reinforced and it creates opportunities for new ones to easily form. By sharing stories, it is easy to find commonalities that might not have been previously identified or, in moments of disagreement, to hear all the context of the alternative perspective with real context that might give more insight through storytelling. Personal anecdotes are so helpful when using discussion-based learning methods since they perpetuate the cyclical nature of requiring and building trust simultaneously.

## Bringing It All Together

The way that the group interacts as a whole is a key part to what makes up the community of the program. Each of the participants, all of whose stories have now been shared, had different ways of adding to the group dynamic and interacting with different members of the group including me. All of the participants had at least known each other since June, and we started the program on September 27th. They had a certain level of community going into the program that had not been a guarantee when planning the project without a specific site in mind. The particular grouping of participants and their relationships to each other made a difference to community dynamics when relationships had already been started before my Peace Education Program began.

Community is one of the places we often see bonds of trust highlighted. As the kids highlighted in some of their work and drawings, community often involves family and people around us. Some connections are there long before arriving in a space while others are formed as new groups of people come together in spaces such as this program. Often these relationships develop and grow over time and result in trusted loved ones. It does not mean that there is no conflict though, often those we have close relationships with, like a sibling, are the people we fight with the most, the people we feel most comfortable criticizing. Even when the relationships are not familial, community impacts the way in which you speak to others. There are many variables that make up the connections of any community but here I highlight a few key moments where community stood out to me.

# **Conflict and Pushback**

## Getting Situated

When community has been developing and participation has been high there is also the potential for conflict. In the case of this project, the curriculum encourages disagreement to some extent with the value based nature of discussions about peace and conflict. When people are discussing things that they hold personal values in it is possible for conflict to arise. There are different ways that this can happen and different tools that can be employed. When there is a foundation of trust as the previous sections contextualize, pushback can be an interesting tool that both results from and increases trust. The following section grapples with issues of conflict and moments when it arose over the course of the program. First the difference between good and bad conflict is discussed, then I explain the importance of conflict through the section titled No Need for Agreement. The last and most significant subsection of this part is where pushback is discussed. Here I look at a series of interactions between Owen and Mark, where they continued to disagree over a series of days on very similar issues. Ultimately, these moments of disagreement provide opportunities for growth and evidence of trust.

## How to Differentiate Between Good and Bad Conflict

The way I have been contextualizing difficult discussions throughout my project has been under the assumption that we can make them productive if we employ the practices I had been discussing. But not every conversation is a good one and not every conflict is a good one. I tend to define a conversation as productive when “something is gained for some or all of the people participating in the discussion based on the conversation and talking and learning from others. This could be anything from tangible knowledge, a new perspective or an opportunity to enhance discussion skills.” as I describe it in my conceptual framework. Conflict can be bad when people’s feelings are hurt, and it is not addressed or there is no effort to set things right. According to the conflict escalator, when there is no progress and people are at a pervasive or overt level of violence (see image pg. 16), it becomes harder and harder to hear and acknowledge the other person's perspective. Having the knowledge to take steps back down the escalator can be key in making these discussions successful. This is why peace education was a great vehicle for creating and addressing these types of conversations. The curriculum often returned to this theme.

## No Need for Agreement

It seems that at times there are expectations that conflict comes to a resolution, especially if we are to suggest that it was a productive or positive discussion. In practice there are times when conversations do not happen that way. Some of the discussions we had finished with everyone feeling the same way they did from the start or the conversation never really ended but instead morphed into something different. An example of this is when Owen and Mark continually brought up differences in their conflict styles. Each time the topic was brought up it was clear that neither person had changed their position on the issue. Mark still felt that it was easier to get into fights and felt it took courage or effort to not engage with someone he disagreed with, while Owen continued to feel that avoiding conflict altogether would be easier. These conflict styles are based on each person’s values and personalities and it was never likely that one could or should be convinced that the other is correct, but it was at the root of a lot of the points where they pushed back on each other's thinking. In these instances, once an opinion was stated, the other would either ask a question or state an alternate opinion based on the fact that they would have answered differently. Often either by prompting or independently, this would lead to the second speaker explaining their thinking and how it contrasts the others. None of the conversations that were had escalated beyond normal levels of conflict. Often, I saw participants who seemed genuinely interested in trying to understand the others’ point in a conversation even when they knew that it was different from their own. As these two sections have suggested, it is important to consider that conflict does not mean that there is ultimately agreement while also considering that “good” conflict does not mean that there is a conclusion.

## Pushback

A trend that I saw over the course of the program was specifically with participant Owen. This participant is one of a set of twins who both began the program extremely quietly, even after I had had an entire summer to develop relationships with them. They tended to speak extremely quietly and limit their conversations to each other and their dad who works at Angels-Net and occasionally their peers and friends. Owen was always the slightly more outgoing of the two and more likely to ask questions for the two of them.

As the program progressed, I noticed a shift from me always having to ask them directly, by name and after others had spoken to get participation, to Owen electing to add in after I asked a question to the group and responding directly to his peers when the conversation became more direct and engaged between the two. I identify this as an example of growing confidence and trust in oneself and their peers. The shift in comfort level about speaking in front of the group is something that I believe can be attributed to him feeling more trust between the members of the group. There are two ways in which I saw this manifest specifically. First, he is willing to push back and disagree with a peer when he does not understand their point and second, he shares a personal anecdote that relates to the content of the program. Both these points are things that I noticed across multiple participants, especially the latter of the two.

An example of push back can be seen in this section where we are discussing MLK’s fourth principle: “do what is right even when it is difficult.”

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Time | Talk |
| 1  2  3  4  5  6 | M | 4:32 | I think it means maybe like uh let say an example of umm maybe like uh say like an argument or like a problem, so I think so like I think that's what it means if you ever hear the term to be the bigger person, I think that it connects to like when you uhh that if you get into an argument with somebody you have to have the strength to like walk away and be like okay . . . |
| 7 | L | 4:52 | Is walking away what they mean by doing what is right? |
| 8  9  10  11  12 | M | 4:58 | Well, that could be the answer tooo on how on how the problem is . . . Like let's say you know someone’s picking on you . . . most people want to retaliate than like you know walk away from the situation so that could be uh that could be, it could apply in different situations but like, you know it's usually good to be like the bigger person. |
| 13 | L | 5:24 | mhm . . . okay I saw you had you had your hand up too ( said to O) |
| 14 | O | 5:30 | Uh I'm not sure . . . I wasn't sure how … |
| 15 |  |  | Background noise |
| 16 | L |  | L - Sorry there's a lot of people talking. Can you say it louder? |
| 17  18 | O | 5:39 | I wasn't sure how walking away from a problem you had was having strength . . . [more background chatter] |
| 19 | L |  | mm ok so is that a question? [M:C- Can I . . .] What do you think? |
| 20  21  22  23  24  25  26  27  28 | M | 5:49 | I was gonna object to that? So, like let's say right? If you're someone’s picking on you right? You want to most likely retaliate and say something mean back to him, but you don't want to do that because let's say the consequences, you’d get in trouble, or in general it's just bad! So, you know it's better to just to be the bigger person in that situation and that requires strength you know? Because you have the urge to like [background chatter] call him or her something like . . . be like . . . oh oh you dadadada but you know like it takes a lot of strength to be like ok let me just . . . |
| 29 | O | 6:32 | But what if you didn't want to do that? How is that . . . |
| 30  31  32  33  34 | L |  | Oh, so you are saying what if your instinct is to walk away? Maybe that means strength is standing up for yourself, maybe it's saying, “I disagree with you” or “that hurt my feelings.” There’s different ways for it to be strong but it is choosing to do the thing that you think is the most right even if it's hard for you. Does that make sense? |
| 35 |  |  | O nods |

Transcript 5: October 27, 2021

Among many examples of push back I've seen across sessions, this one demonstrates several important things. I find it interesting because of the way in which both Owen and Mark both state their positions on the issue and go about expressing their opinions about the other point of view. The points where Mark says, “I was gonna object to that?” (line 20) and Owen says, “I wasn't sure how . . . ” (line 14) and “But what if you didn't want to do that? How is that . . .” (line 29) were important parts for me. In the case of Owen, he asks questions as a way to express his difference in view and continues to ask when Mark has objected to his initial concern. Mark uses similar phrasing in other transcripts and seems very comfortable explicitly stating disagreement, following it with explanations of his position. Despite these two having relatively different levels of comfort with participation, they both show their engagement with the conversation by asking for more clarification and sharing their personal positions. They respond directly to each other rather than addressing me as a facilitator, showing a certain distance from a traditional classroom setting.

In one of the sessions the next week, the topic came up again, this time Owen explained how he might avoid harm in situations of conflict. Again, in this section, Mark states clear disagreement and shows how he explains his position clearly and asks Owen a direct question in order to better understand him. Even when Owen is unsure of how to clarify, there is a certain respect that they seem to have, even in Owen’s discomfort to speak up at times. This discussion was based on a larger conversation surrounding principle 5: “Avoid hurting the spirit and body of yourself and others.”

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Time | Talk |
| 1  2  3  4 | L | 14:20 | You know what I mean? If we are trying to have peaceful situations but there's arguments going on, how do we make sure we don’t hurt ourselves in the process? What are some ways that we could do? What does that mean? |
| 5 | M |  | Hmm . . . |
| 6 | L |  | Making you think? This is a hard question. |
| 7 | M |  | (mumbling) Interesting, very interesting . . . .ya that’s hard. |
| 8 | L | 14:54 | That's okay if it's hard. |
| 9 | O | 15:00 | Apologizing? How does that protect yourself? |
| 10 | O |  | O mumbles |
| 11 | L | 15:11 | What? |
| 12 | O | 15:12 | . . . so, the person can calm down? |
| 13  14  15 | L |  | mmm so does that mean. . . you did something wrong and you apologize to make the situation better? ... [o shakes his head] no? What does that mean? Could you tell me more? |
| 16  17 | O | 15:31 | Uh it could make the person think like, think that they won and. . .uh . . . |
| 18  19  20  21  22 | L | 15:38 | mm but did you do something wrong or did you just hope that they would feel better because you apologized even though you didn't do anything wrong? [O nods] ya? . . .okay so I’m gonna come to you in a second [to M?] but let's think about this, so yes T is this related to O’s point or your own point? |
| 23 | T | 15:58 | uh my point? |
| 24  25  26  27  28  29  30 | L | 16:00 | ok so I am going to come to you in a second, I want to finish this thought. Umm so [Miss G arrives] umm so when you say that, you are saying like okay, this person is really mad at me because I am doing something different than they want, you just apologize and that protects you? . . .yes, okay well there's also to be thinking about that last principle that we talked about last week, about courage [M:just] that's what you were going to say? |
| 31  32 | M | 16:41 | I was gonna object to that because he said like protecting yourself, what do you mean by that? (to O) |
| 33 | O | 16:50 | uh because you uh . . . |
| 34 | L | 17:01 | It's okay. |
| 35  36  37  38  39  40  41  42 | M | 17:03 | trying not to avoid not trying not to avoid hurting yourself and others, right? Okay. . . but just because you apologized doesn't make the situation any better it could- ya of course if you apologize to somebody ya they’re gonna be like ok . . but deep down they could still be hurting from that because you said something you know, bad, and then even af- even even if they like don't really feel like it, even if you apologize, they might still say something rude about you, even though you are trying to protect yourself in that defense. |

Transcript 6: November 01, 2021

This next section was a few weeks later after this conversation of silence versus saying something continued to come up. Often, I noticed that Owen would come into it with the same position, that silence would be the most efficient way to avoid conflict. It seemed to be an idea that was somehow connected to his core values based on the fact that he could not be convinced of the other position in the previous brief conversation. Despite understanding what Mark was suggesting, Owen continued to feel this way because it would be his personal reaction to the event. An example of Mark pushing back on this can be seen in the last line (lines 35-42) of the transcript above. At this moment Mark takes the time to have a more extended response. In lines 32-33 he had asked the question, “protecting yourself, what do you mean by that?” directly to Owen explaining his reasoning and thinking in lines 35-42. He starts by restating Owen's claim in the first sentence and then says okay as if confirming both with Owen and with others that there is an understanding. After a brief pause, he switches by saying “but” and makes his own claim. He says, “if you apologize to somebody ya they’re gonna be like ok . . but deep down they could still be hurting from that because you said something you know, bad, and then even af- even even if they like don't really feel like it, even if you apologize, they might still say something rude about you, even though you are trying to protect yourself in that defense.”

Mark speaks to the idea of authenticity and meaning your apologies. The example he creates applies Owen’s idea to an example that makes more sense for him, even though Owen meant something slightly different. Mark creates a situation where harm is caused and apologizes because you have said something wrong, but it still does not protect you from them saying something mean in return. In this example it creates a reason for the other person's continued meanness. In line 16, Owen explains that he thinks apologizing is the solution whether you have done something wrong or not because, “it could make the person think like, think that they won . . .'' Owen sets up a binary of winning and losing an argument. Compared to Mark’s story, Owen does not know that he had done anything wrong that required an apology in this hypothetical scenario, as he confirms by nodding in line 20. Both Mark and Owen are constantly bringing their own perspectives, experiences and values into the discussion. With the way that Mark asks questions at the end of this transcript, he is not attempting to dismiss Owen’s perspective.

He is respectful in the fact that he questions with an interest in gaining more knowledge of Owen’s perspective while stating his own and attempting to create a shared understanding of the content. There are moments where Owen hesitates or pauses. At times he does not finish the thought and I ask questions to expand on or confirm what he is saying. Despite this, he is still making his view clear despite pushback. This in itself is a form of disagreement between the two of them, although it was a very agreeable, normal level of conflict. But Owen does not apologize or back off in any other way despite suggesting that he would do so. He does not feel as though he needs to let Mark feel as though he has won, because he does not feel as if he needs to protect himself, as we were discussing. In contrast, he feels, even if not completely, some level of comfort in order to continue the conversation as it does.

In the following transcript, we spent the session wrapping up the six principles. The particular conversation below participants had been asked to draw what they thought peace/ a peaceful community looked like. I asked if they wanted to share what they drew. The conversion that follows brings up the fact that Owen tends to be “shy” and results in an interesting conversation that links to our discussion of peace as well.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Time | Talk |
| 1 | L | 45:05 | Do you want to share or no? |
| 2 | O |  | inaudible response |
| 3 | L |  | (laughs) okay . . . |
| 4  5  6 | O |  | so I drew people holding hands ... and then I drew examples, I mean I wrote examples of peace on the top. [T(?): laughing in background] |
| 7 |  |  | [Indistinct chatter] |
| 8 | ? |  | Madness combat? |
| 9 | O |  | Yes. |
| 10 | L |  | What's that? [Indistinct chatter] Wait, what is it? |
| 11 | O |  | Uhh madness combat. |
| 12  13 | L |  | ok so it has combat in it. Isn't that . . .X1 what are you doing? [laughter continuing in background] |
| 14 | X2 |  | XXXX |
| 15  16  17  18  19 | L |  | Okay, interesting ... so you used characters from a . . .show with, without peace, with violence right? Did you do that on purpose? [O: agrees] Why did you do that? That that they like had been violent but now are peaceful? [O nods] Nice! Very cool. . .interesting I don't know anything about those characters. |
| 20 | O | 46:14 | That's how they look in the show. |
| 21 | L |  | ah. . . . T will you share yours? It's so colorful! |
| 22 | T |  | How do you know it's so colorful? |
| 23 | L |  | I can see it a little bit. Now I can't see it . . . |
| 24 | X2 |  | XXXX |
| 25 | L | 46:37 | (to O) Do you like to talk much? |
| 26 | O |  | No but peace can be silence . . . |
| 27  28 | L |  | Ok but remember . . . is it the absence of saying important things? Like when is, when is silence peace? |
| 29 | O |  | When uh um when I mean when there's no sound. |
| 30  31 | L |  | Ok so silence is when there's no sound but is it, is silence always peaceful? |
| 32 | O |  | no. |
| 33 | L |  | no. |
| 34 | ? |  | Indistinct question |
| 35  36  37  38 | L |  | one second, I'm still, one second, we are still talking about something, and then we will come to you. . . So, what's the difference? When? . . . I like that, when is silence good and when is silence bad in terms of peace? |
| 39  40  41 | O |  | Uh silence can be good when like uh for example people are meditating and it makes them peaceful, but silence can be bad when . . . I'm not sure how silence can be bad. |
| 42 | L | 47:45 | okay well what about . . .what do you guys think? |
| 43  44 | O |  | I remember the example that you gave us like when the silence, the silence given to the new student because he had no friends. |

Transcript 7: November 10, 2021

I included this transcript in part because it returns to the theme of silence and its relation to peace. Beyond that though, in line 25 I ask Owen “Do you like to talk much?” to which he responded, “No but peace can be silence . . .” This is significant because this is the moment where he brings up the previous topic. His use of the phrase “No but” is very firmly a disagreement to at least part of what the other participant had been suggesting and the question I had been asking. He clearly clarifies and brings up a point that seems to be related to his value system. Again, in lines 42 and 43 there is a similar interaction where I open up the conversation to see if anyone else has any input after he had stated he was unsure, saying, “I'm not sure how silence can be bad.” He brings in what he remembers from a previous session in order to further think with me about the idea despite the fact that he said he was unsure. Both of these moments show Owen pushing to understand within the discussion and using his autonomy to do so. This is a moment where his comfort pushing back highlights his growth to me.

By showing all three of these transcripts I hope to illuminate how this was a recurring discussion around the same theme. Although towards the end I did attempt to guide our discussion when I recognized that it was returning to the same topic, for the most part I attempted to encourage peer to peer dialogue by asking questions like “what do you guys think?” and rephrasing what participants said in questioning, clarifying manners. Not only were there similarities throughout these transcripts, but there was also growth. Owen starts this third conversation with “no,” a firmer statement of his position, shifting from questioning to pushing back on what others had said about his position.

The combination of these three transcripts paints a picture that any one of them could not do on their own. I define pushback as “when one individual disagrees with another in order to make their position known. Often this looks like presenting an alternative argument to the one they are responding to or questioning why they think the way they do or their line of reasoning.” In this case the particular issue that these two are pushing back against each other about keeps coming up. Each time that it does, both Mark and Owen hold their original position despite having previously tried to come to a common agreement in previous conversations. In part this is because the content of what they are discussing is reliant on them sharing their personal approaches to conflict which are based in some of their core values around how they act towards others. I think that this particular set of conversations is an example of productive dialogue despite the fact that they disagree because they continue to feel comfortable pushing back on the other at a normal level of conflict and they continue to try to understand the others opinion. Examples of these efforts to find understanding can be seen when Mark asks “he said like protecting yourself, what do you mean by that? (to Owen).” He comments on what he heard and asks for further explanation directly from Owen. Other times a question is asked to me about the topic in general or someone provides an alternative opinion. There are many ways in which dissent occurs among the group but in these moments, I have exemplified here, the extended discussion about Mark and Owen’s conflict styles really established the significance of pushing back in ways that build, require and maintain trust.

## Bringing It All Together

The moments of pushback on conflict that are described above exemplify a relationship of trust in moments where participation was critical to the type of conversation that they were having. These moments feel like a culmination of the above sections, there is influence of facilitation and “Talking For Understanding”, participation and community in various moments of this analysis. It seems that these two were able to engage in such a discussion in a way that highlights the trust between two and considers the elements that make up conflict as it arises in discussion based settings.

# **Implication of Findings**

Each of the themes discussed in this section shed light on a different aspect of the interactions that took place over the course of the Peace Education Program. This does not by any means encompass all that there is to say about it but highlights key takeaways from the program. I purposefully gave each participant a story, giving a small insight into what each of these participants was like in regard to the program.

As I return to my research questions I started with and consider the themes I outlined in this section, a few final thoughts come to mind. As a reminder, the questions seen here:

1. What evidence of trust is there among participants, and with me as facilitator, in key discussions?
2. What seems to be happening in discussions that participants and I identify as being about “value-laden?”
3. What conversations produce dialogue between peers which allow for disagreement? When does this occur? What does this disagreement look like?
4. What framing questions or discussion strategies, or topics seem to support productive dialogues or trust among participants?

Ultimately, I think this finding section highlights many moments of trust and moments where the trust between the group or participants within the group were expanded. I feel that the above sections highlighted the pushback that happened in these “value-laden” conversations and the trust that was necessary in order for that to happen.

By looking at the significance of facilitation in trust building I found that it could be used as a tool to make participants feel comfortable in a space and with a community in a way that allowed me to push back on their comfort zones. Doing so allows them to grow in terms of their participation and how they approach difficult conversations. For me, facilitation with a focus on discussion based learning meant that I ultimately wanted to encourage interpersonal talk between participants that required less direct facilitation from me. By encouraging this particular learning format, I distanced our experience from a traditional classroom learning style of rote based practices creating a space that emphasized comfort and informal learning in order to create trust.

I found participation to be an aspect of trust building that resulted from the facilitation discussed above. The way this manifested for each participant could look very different depending on their personalities and their levels of outgoingness versus introvertedness. But regardless of this, growth was shown as they engaged with the value laden content of the peace education program. The way that they participated individually and together over the course of the program showed purposeful commitment to engagement that built trust through building these practices together.

This is where having and building community was so significant to trust. Again, finding that comfort in the spaces that we were working in allowed for the bounds of their comfort zones to be expanded. While some community ties are brought in by participants that they have been a part of their entire lives, like religion, new communities form as new relationships are formed in new spaces. For this particular group, sharing stories created a cycle of trust. By both requiring and creating trust, sharing personal anecdotes became a way to engage with the curriculum while students participated in discussion in ways that they were comfortable.

While many of these findings around trust did not include conflict, they created a strong base for when conflict did arise. The value laden nature of the peace education curriculum was based on each participant having a personal value based on a given topic from their own experiences. Discussing these often and with a discussion based structure created positive conflict that encouraged learning and growth. At times this conflict looked like pushback, participants pushing their peers to say more, explain differently, or challenge their own positions. These discussions did not always lead to agreement but allowed trust to form as they saw respect from their peers even in moments of disagreement.

Many of these broader findings have overlap between the various sections. Ultimately, they all speak to trust improving difficult conversations in an effort to make them productive. The lessons that these themes and these findings ultimately culminate to can be summarized in a few broader points:

These participants were not just learning because I put the information in front of them. I focused on avoiding the “banking” method of education and instead promoted discussion based learning. With these discussions I got to take more time listening and reflecting on students' thoughts and moments of participation than I otherwise would have, and I had more responses to work with than I would have if I had not focused on encouraging this type of learning. As the program progressed it became easier for participants to engage with this format as they became more comfortable with the process itself and the group.

The Peace Education Program was based on value-laden topics. Because of this fact, there were opportunities for participants to explore their own values, have them challenged and hear the perspective of others. In conjunction with the discussion based approach discussed in the section above it provided a space where sharing was common, often through personal anecdotes and pushback and trust was encouraged and created and they were encouraged to disagree and state their beliefs.

Finally, this would not have been possible without flexibility. A lot of the time I was meeting students where they were at. Each participant was a different level of shy or outgoing and had different participation habits. As I asked them to accommodate my program and our discussions, I also had to be there to support them as they attempted to do so. It took me trusting them and setting norms of what our shared space looked like when we were there working on the Peace Education Program.

Conclusion

As this thesis draws to a close there are a few things left to be said. I want to begin with the limitations, these were moments of learning and opportunities for growth. I did not always have the opportunities to address the issues as they arose in the project, but they still were takeaways that were significant to this project. Following that, I will consider the larger implications that might come from this work. Finally, I will end with my personal takeaways and a thank you to the amazing kids that were participants in this work.

# Limitations

Like many research projects of this scope and many programs similar to mine, consistency in participant numbers was something that was a struggle throughout the process. Since organizations began opening in person again since COVID-19 there have been lower numbers of participants(find actual source). Having few participants was helpful in some regards since I was focused on discussion based lessons, but even with the participants that were present, consistent attendance was not guaranteed. Luckily, the majority of consenting participants were relatively consistent, but a few nonconsenting participants missed many sessions meaning that we often had to catch them up on missed information.

Because this was part of an afterschool program, part of what was expected by parents was that their children would be able to get homework done and get help with said homework. Oftentimes, the older participants would still be completing homework as we began the program. I felt that it was important that they prioritize their work but also needed to commit that time to the program in order to meet my own requirements. Often, we did not start until up to 10 minutes after our intended start time in order to give them more opportunity to have focused work time. When we did begin, I would not always have everyone's full attention. I did not ever want to or feel comfortable asking them not to do their work and often encouraged them to do so but at times the people actually in attendance that day were not always the same as those participating in the activities and discussions.

In terms of the actual research methods, there is a part of me that wishes that I had continued doing the surveys. After the first two surveys I felt that they were not getting much engagement and that I found discussion to be more important. I planned to shift to asking the same questions in a discussion format. Putting that into practice was less effective than I had hoped. In part this is due to the flexibility I gave to discussions, but I wish that I had kept at least a final survey or some aspect of them since looking back at them was more helpful than anticipated. I realized upon reflection that at least the initial survey provided insight that would have been interesting to compare over time. I let my concern for format and lack of lengthy responses shape the way I gathered research too quickly.

The last shortcoming that I want to mention is the conclusion of the project. As we came to the close of the program attendance really started to drop off. Some of the planning days for the final project only had half of the participants present. We planned a skit that exemplified themes from the program and began filming it but ultimately it never got finished. The program was coming to a close as the holidays were coming up and we were missing a few scenes because people had been gone. There were multiple days where we filmed, filling in the gaps. When there were only a few scenes left, everyone had winter break and I went home for three weeks. When I returned to work, some of the people we needed for filming did not come back to the after school program at all. Most people had forgotten about the project all together. I attempted to piece together some makeshift product of their hard work, but it was not the final product I was hoping to create. They had all done such hard work over the course of the program and towards the final project and I was not able to share it with them.

# Larger Implications

At the beginning of this thesis, I outline Martin Luther King Jr.'s 6 Principles of Nonviolence. King based his thinking on the Beloved Community, an ideal of the future where a community could be based in nonviolent practices and “agape”- appreciation, respect and love for your fellow community members. The research that has been done here attempts to emulate the goals that he outlined in these six principles and share the lessons they provide.

With the data that has been accumulated in this praxis I hope that it is something that could be considered or contextualized in other spaces whether that be based around peace education or some other topic. The idea of having difficult or “hot topic” conversations is often not something people are excited to do but it often arises anyway. Like anything, managing these situations requires skills that can be practiced and learned. Often these conversations are improved by trust, and I believe that starting with trust will get us far in most situations.

I hope that this thesis has provided more tools for having and handling difficult conversations whether it be in a classroom setting, a work environment or any moment of discussion facilitation. This work highlights what discussion-based learning can look like and how it can impact the relationships of the participants and their engagement with the curriculum. For those who are passionate about making these discussions happen, I hope that this thesis gives inspiration and a reminder that building trust takes time but that it is at the heart of making a conversation productive.

Additionally, I hope the curriculum itself might be helpful to the Center for Nonviolent Solutions, it would not have happened without them. I hope that the connections I made with various other practices outside of typical peace education are something that can enhance the subject and the way that we share it.

# Personal Takeaways

This entire process took place over a period of 18 months, from the most basic idea for the project to the final project, this thesis. Over that time, I found myself excited, worried, or stressed, sometimes all three and more at the same time. This process taught me many things, for example, how to write a paper longer than fifty pages, but my greatest takeaways came from the time I got to actually implement the Peace Education Program with the kids.

By taking on this project I was required to examine my own understanding of nonviolence and how I feel that it should be incorporated into educational spaces, whether traditional or not. I realized that there are various assumptions others make about what peace education is and what that means we are discussing. Working with these kids and developing this program really emphasized for me how much peace education can encapsulate. I know that I grew to know each of the participants in the Peace Education Program a little better with each session. This was a process that took time, and I am grateful for the many sessions that we were able to have to learn together. As I got to know them, I feel the trust I built with them grew and I can only hope that they felt the same.

I am deeply appreciative of these kids that I was able to work with for their willingness to work with me and put themselves out there when we met each week. I saw each one learn and often they were doing it together. So, to Andrew, Owen, Tara and Michael, thank you so much!

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