

Connected: Facilitating Transformative Online Dialogue in Peace-Building, Reconciliation and  
Global Citizenship Education Programs

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## ABSTRACT

### **Connected: Facilitating transformative online dialogue in peace-building, reconciliation and global citizenship education programs**

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Since the 1990s, globally networked learning environments (GNLEs) have emerged as pathways for dialogue, connecting classrooms from around the world. Although it was initially hoped that bringing diverse populations together online would naturally foster the inclusion of disparate voices and viewpoints, it is now widely acknowledged that online communication may just as easily reinforce pre-existing social arrangements as challenge them. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation was to explore how GNLEs developed for civic and peace-building purposes conceptualize dialogue and address power inequalities. Data include multiple case studies grounded in interviews, journal and news articles, and policy and curriculum documents. Data were analyzed using a critical theory framework and a decolonizing global education checklist in order to identify potentially colonizing assumptions behind these programs. Findings from this research suggest that despite some examples of shallow and apolitical approaches to intergroup or intercultural dialogue, there are also many ways that online learning environments can be conducive to facilitating transformative and decolonizing learning experiences.

This dissertation makes ten recommendations for implementing a critical approach to dialogue online. These recommendations include how to frame, structure and facilitate online dialogue through asynchronous forums and videoconferencing. In addition, the recommendations speak to the importance of addressing social and political issues while constructing learning environments that are conducive to the expression of marginalized viewpoints and forms of expression. Recommendations also address how online channels for communication and interaction can be used to address epistemological, linguistic and technological hegemonies often present in global education initiatives. These strategies include, for example, the incorporation of digital imagery and storytelling, as well as wikis that help visualize conflicting narratives and understandings of history. In addition, acknowledging and openly exploring the implications of having a dominant language for communication is necessary as is addressing differential access to technology between groups, including those excluded from online intercultural dialogue opportunities.

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## Dedication

To those who were with me in spirit: my grandparents May and Jean Fournier and my mom Patricia Sylvester.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Since the 1990s, globally networked learning environments (GNLEs) have emerged as pathways to facilitate dialogue between students from around the world. Although it was initially hoped that bringing diverse students together online would naturally foster the inclusion of disparate voices and viewpoints, it is now widely acknowledged that online communications may just as easily reinforce pre-existing social arrangements as challenge them (Atkintude, 2006; Dooly, 2011; Gregerson & Youdina, 2009; Helm & Guth, 2010; Herring, 2001; Zembylas & Vrasidas, 2005). Given a general absence of research on how GNLEs currently conceptualize and mediate intergroup and intercultural dialogue (Austin & Hunter, 2013), the following research presents seven case studies on platforms that facilitate dialogue. These case studies represent educational initiatives from around the world working to connect Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadian students, Arab and Jewish students in Israel as well as students in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The other four programs are more broadly conceived and connect countries from around the world. Grounded in the assumption that in order to be empowering, dialogue must acknowledge and work to transform inequalities, this research analyzes the data according to Gurin, Nagda and Zuñiga's (2013) critical-dialogical framework and corresponding facilitation principles as outlined by Nagda and Maxwell (2011) and Agabria and Cohen (2000). As well, Andreotti's (2006; 2012) frameworks for critical and decolonizing conceptions of global citizenship education are applied to the results in order to highlight the potential of these spaces to challenge power dynamics while also providing a framework for recommendations for the evolution of this field.

### **Background**

Although there is much debate as to why citizenship education often fails to engage students, many academics and researchers have pointed to the fact that current conceptions of citizenship often fail to connect with the actual experiences of learners (Osler & Starkey, 2003). As stated by Bachen, Hernandez-Ramos and Raphael (2012):

Preparing people to act solely as citizens of a nation-state seems inadequate in an age of greater economic, political, and social interdependence of nations; huge increases in migration; and the rising power of supranational institutions (p. 2).

In fact, current literature suggests that many young people see themselves as having shifting identities; feeling that they belong to more than one ethnicity or country (Hébert & Wilkinson, 2002; Osler & Starkey, 2003; Tawil, 2013; Williams, 2007). This extension of citizenship outside of the traditional boundaries of the nation-state has led to new and evolving conceptions of global citizenship (Richardson & Abbott, 2009).

What being a global citizen might entail with regards to rights and responsibilities, however, is contested terrain (Schulz, 2007; Tawil, 2013). Andreotti (2006) warns that emerging approaches to global citizenship education in North America promote:

a new ‘civilising mission’ as the slogan for a generation who take up the ‘burden’ of saving/educating/civilising the world. This generation, encouraged and motivated to ‘make a difference’, will then project their beliefs and myths as universal and reproduce power relations and violence similar to those in colonial times (p. 41).

This dominant “soft” approach to global citizenship glosses over the root causes of global inequality by dismissing them as being related largely to a lack of resources and skills. From this perspective, inequality is addressed and remedied by “developed nations”, in the name of the universal values of tolerance and equality. By failing to critically address the complexities surrounding global inequalities, Andreotti (2006) suggests that these approaches to global citizenship do little more than reinforce feelings of privilege and cultural supremacy in northern students.

In particular, the lack of analysis related to power relations and knowledge construction in dominant conceptions of global citizenship education have led to educational practices that “unintentionally reproduce ethnocentric, ahistorical, depoliticized, paternalistic, salvationism and triumphalist approaches that tend to deficit theorize, pathologize and trivialize difference” (Andreotti & Souza, 2011, p. 1). In an attempt to address concerns of “colonization” through an externally devised and western conception of global citizenship education, many contemporary scholars have insisted that citizenship and peace education curriculum must be grounded in the ability to engage in critical dialogue on local and global levels (Andreotti, 2006; Banks, 2008; Blades & Richardson 2006; Brantmeier & Lin, 2008; Merryfield, Lo, Po & Kasai, 2008; Ross & Lou, 2008; Tupper, 2007). This approach to pedagogy requires students to understand that knowledge is constructed within a particular time period, context, culture and experience. As such, the dialogical process involves establishing the space for students to reflect on their:

epistemological and ontological assumptions: how they came to think/be/feel/act the way they do and the implications of their systems of belief in local/global terms in relation to power, social relationships and the distribution of labor and resources (Andreotti, 2006, p.49).

From this vantage point, the dialogical process is about guiding students from varied parts of the world to explore and question assumptions that they likely take for granted including those surrounding the conceptualizations of democracy, development and citizenship.

Andreotti and Souza (2011) call on educators to view global citizenship education as a means to engage students with “the complexity, plurality, inequality, and uncertainty of our interdependent lives in a finite planet” (p. 1). Andreotti (2012) suggests that as teachers:

- We need to understand and learn from repeated historical patterns of mistakes, in order to open the possibilities for new mistakes to be made.
- We need more complex social analyses, acknowledging that if we understand the problems and the reasons behind them in simplistic ways, we may do more harm than good.
- We need to recognize how we are implicated or complicit in the problems we are trying to address: that we are all both part of the problem and the solution (in different ways).
- We need to learn to enlarge our referents for reality and knowledge, acknowledging the gifts and limitations of every knowledge system and moving beyond “either ors” toward “both and mores.”
- We need to remember that the paralysis and guilt we may feel when we start to engage with the complexity of issues of inequality are just temporary, as they may come from our own education/socialization in protected/sheltered environments, which create the desire for things to be simple, easy, happy, ordered, and under control (Andreotti, 2012, p. 23).

This kind of global citizenship education supports students in moving from “naïve hope” to “skeptical optimism” as they are encouraged to face the complexity of social issues with curiosity and courage as they acknowledge current inequalities and explore a range of possibilities for addressing them (Andreotti & Pashby, 2013, p. 433). This process, suggest

Andreotti and Pashby (2013) involves facilitating a space in which students can learn “how to be open, to relate beyond the need for common causes or identities, and to be taught in a plural world where justice starts with the forms of relationships we are able to create” (p. 433). As pointed to by Bruns and Humphreys (2005), if students are to truly understand global issues, they must grapple with them in a way that connects to their everyday lives while also considering the impact on others. Thus, one of the significant challenges for faculty is to develop opportunities for students to not only learn first-hand about the process of globalization, but to challenge and re-evaluate their own cultural perspectives, building shared learning and knowledge across traditional boundaries. The development of global citizenship curriculum, however, often fails to include the types of dialogue experiences that such an outcome would require.

Many proponents of global citizenship education insist on the need to prioritize the integration of GNLEs as a means to connect students worldwide (Austin & Anderson, 2008; Austin & Hunter, 2013; Truong-White & McLean 2015; United Nations, 2010). Despite the proliferation of platforms designed to connect classrooms for the purposes of dialogue, there is a significant gap between the empirical research on developing intercultural competence online and the largely theoretical body of literature that points to issues related to global citizenship education. This is concerning because, as stated by Atkintude (2006),

just as this medium can be a conduit for change, it can also, without forethought, careful criticism, and analysis, be a conduit for antisocial elements we do not want proliferated.

Critics of the Internet have argued that the Internet only connects the privileged and that its very presence is indicative of the globalization of capitalism (p. 35).

Atkintude (2006) goes on to insist that educators and researchers have a responsibility to be vigilant and critical so as ensure that the “debate rages as to whether we are using the technology to its best advantage” (p. 35). Lamy and Goodfellow (2010) further highlight the importance of critiquing international online collaboration initiatives by asking “historically-informed questions about whose interests the practice might serve and how its hidden power relations might be deconstructed and understood” (p. 130). Given a relative lack of research on how GNLEs can facilitate intergroup contact for civic and peace-building ends (Austin & Anderson, 2008; Austin & Hunter 2013), there is a need to interrogate the ways that these platforms conceptualize and mediate dialogue and the extent to which power differentials are acknowledged and addressed in order to determine the ways in which technology can be used to its “best advantage”.

## **Problem Statement**

The need to fully explore the current and potential role of GNLEs for facilitating dialogue in peace-building and global citizenship education curriculum has been expressed by international organizations, scholars and educators from around the world (Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna 2006; Austin & Anderson, 2008; Bachen, Raphael, Lynn, McKee & Philippi, 2008; Dutt-Doner & Powers, 2000; Firer, 2008; Ghodarti & Gruba, 2011; Johnson, Zhang, Bichard, & Seltzer, 2011; Laouris, 2004; Middaugh & Kahne, 2009; Rheingold, 2008; Tawil, 2013; United Nations, 2010). Despite the promise of GNLEs to bring a diversity of students together for the purposes of intercultural and intergroup dialogue, research on the use of technology in peace-building and citizenship is “in its infancy” with “sporadic applications” (Laouris, 2004, p.69) and “lags far behind practice” (Salomon & Nevo, 2001, p. 2). Given the capacity of internet-based communications to just as easily reinforce pre-existing social arrangements as challenge them (Atkintude, 2006; Dooly, 2011; Gregerson & Youdina, 2009; Helm & Guth, 2010; Herring, 2001; Zembylas & Vrasidas, 2005), international web-based interactions need meaningful pedagogical models (Ligorio & Veermans, 2005) that take an explicitly critical and decolonizing approaches to global citizenship education and dialogue (Bali, 2014; Eijkman, 2009; Lamy & Goodfellow, 2010).

## **Purpose of Study**

The following research describes and analyzes the pedagogical models from seven GNLEs from around the world that facilitate intergroup or intercultural online dialogue. Presented as case studies, information on these programs was collected from interviews, journal and news articles as well as policy and curriculum documents. In order to address the potentially colonizing impact of these programs, they are analyzed using Gurin et al.,’s (2013) critical-dialogical framework and corresponding facilitation principles (Agabria & Cohen, 2000; Nagda & Maxwell, 2011) which have been designed and tested to facilitate the development of critical capacities and commitments to social change. Andreotti’s (2012) framework for decolonizing global education initiatives is also applied in order to help frame the discussion and guide recommendations.

### **Primary Research Questions**

1. How are online learning environments that aim to develop peace-building, intercultural and/or civic competence and engagement conceptualized/designed to support intergroup/intercultural dialogue?
2. How are group-based differences/power differentials/inequalities understood and addressed in portal design, curriculum and facilitation?

### **Significance of Study**

There is little research available on how intergroup/intercultural dialogues are facilitated in online environments. As sites designed to connect students worldwide get integrated into courses it is imperative that educators and curriculum developers explore the implications and assumptions in their design and pedagogy. Without holding these programs up to the standards of a critical and decolonizing conception of global citizenship these dialogues may do little more than reinforce feelings of superiority by dominant groups, and frustration from disadvantaged groups. By adopting a critical stance to the analysis, however, this study aims to help educators and designers work towards developing transformative online learning environments that support reconciliation, global citizenship and peace.

### **Assumptions, Limitations and Scope**

My assumption coming into this research is that a primary role of education at all levels should be to develop critical thinking and citizenship skills. Although in my own institution, critical thinking is limited to the idea of finding the “strongest” (i.e. most “rational”) arguments, my belief is that being critical also means challenging the supremacy of the rational and exploring issues through different lenses and through different ideas of what constitutes evidence and knowledge. Further, although in my North American teaching environment we generally refer to citizenship skills as limited to political actions within the nation state, including voting, writing letters and joining political parties, I feel strongly that this definition needs to be broadened. As will become evident in the next chapter, I believe that the education system should capitalize on the possibilities that are available through technology to connect students and facilitate transformative discussions on political and social issues.

My primary assumption with regards to the methodology is that the participants being interviewed answered the questions honestly. In addition to assuming that answers were truthful, it is very possible that they were at the same time biased, as the interviewees likely wanted to present their programs in a predominantly positive light. I do not think that this had any impact on how well the interviews addressed the research questions. That being said, the depth of the analysis is limited by the fact that, for confidentiality reasons, I did not have access to the students who participated in the programs. Thus, student impressions were limited to a selection of screen shots of asynchronous dialogue as well as publically available videos used to promote the programs in question.

Regarding the scope of the research, the availability of online communications meant that there were no restrictions placed on geographical location. Interviews were conducted via Skype with participants from Canada, the United States, the Republic of Ireland and Israel. The scope was limited, however, by the fact that only sites that responded to the request for an interview were included in the research. More importantly, the scope was severely limited by the fact that participation in the programs and the research itself was limited by access to technology. It is certainly far from ideal to take a position that dialogue should address power inequalities, only to limit participants to those who have access to technology and the internet. This is a very significant limitation that will be discussed in the discussion (Chapter 6) chapter.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Hegemony**

Both Andreotti (2012) and Helm, Guth and Farrah (2012) refer to hegemony as conceptualized by the philosopher Antonio Gramsci. Andreotti's (2012) work defines hegemony "as the pattern of justifying superiority and supporting domination" (p. 2). Similarly, Helm, Guth and Farrah's (2012) define hegemony as the

subtle process of political domination through ideological domination, whereby the ruling classes succeed in persuading individuals to consent to a subordinate position in a system which operates in the best interest of those in power. The effectiveness of cultural hegemony stems from the imposition of the worldview of those who wield power as a universally valid ideology that benefits all of society, and this is achieved through popular culture, the mass media, education and religion (Helm, Guth & Farrah, 2012, p. 105).



## **Intergroup and Intercultural Dialogue**

Although sometimes used in tandem, intercultural and intergroup dialogue refer to two distinct dynamics. Intergroup contact scholars suggest that while dialogue is considered to be both an interpersonal and an intergroup phenomenon, in cases where open conflict or inequality exist it is often group memberships and not individual characteristics that shape communication (Jones & Watson, 2013). Intergroup interventions thus generally focus on the particular needs of two groups that have some history of tension or conflict. Intercultural dialogue, on the other hand, involves multiple cultures and worldviews and is not necessarily designed to address specific group-based dynamics or differences.

## **Transformative Dialogue**

References to transformative dialogue refer to Mezirow's (1978) conception of transformative learning which encompasses becoming "critically aware of the cultural and psychological assumptions that have influenced the way we see ourselves and our relationships and the way we pattern our lives" (p. 101). This process involves a "structural reorganization in the way a person looks at himself and his relationships" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 108) and perspective-taking with "a conscious recognition of the difference between one's old viewpoint and the new one and a decision to appropriate the newer perspective as being of more value" (p. 108).

## **Dissertation Format**

Having established the problem that will be addressed in this dissertation, the following chapter will outline the empirical and theoretical research on educational technology and intercultural/intergroup dialogue. The research questions will be confirmed in the conclusions of that review. Chapter 3 (Theoretical Framework) will outline different conceptions of dialogue and intergroup contact theory in order to defend adopting a critical and decolonizing lens to the study of dialogue within global online education initiatives. Chapter 4 will defend the choice of a case study methodology as well as outline the analytical framework. This chapter will be followed by the case studies, presented individually with a focus on the research questions (Chapter 5: Results). Finally, Chapter 6 will present the discussion and recommendations followed by the conclusion (Chapter 7).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

The introductory chapter suggested that there is a gap in the literature with regards to the pedagogical models that are used in globally networked learning environments (GNLEs) that facilitate intergroup and intercultural dialogue. This gap was established by conducting a thorough review of the literature that sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the state of the literature on intergroup/intercultural dialogue online? How are these programs conceptualized and in what context?
2. What are the issues surrounding inequality and power that arise? How are they addressed? How do these programs address inequality in design and facilitation?

In the end, two largely separate bodies of literature address these questions. The majority of research on intercultural computer-mediated communication (I-CMC), alternately referred to as “telecollaboration”, was conducted in the context of Business and English courses and meant to develop work-related competencies. The second body of literature is largely theoretical and talks about the hegemonic and colonizing tendencies of technology in global education initiatives. These separate bodies of literature point to a need to bridge the gap between theoretical literature on global citizenship education and online educational efforts to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue.

### Method

#### Literature Search

To explore how technology has been used within educational initiatives to facilitate dialogue in citizenship and peace-oriented curriculum, a systematic literature review using EBSCO was conducted. The first search used the following search terms: SU (“multicultural education” OR “citizenship education” OR “civic\* education” OR “peace education” OR “peace learning” coupled with: “web based instruction” or videoconferenc\* or “handheld devices” or pda\* or “mobile comput\*” courseware or “online education” or “online space\*” or “computer software” or “computer assisted instruction” or net-based or “technology uses in education” or “online courses” or “asynchronous Communication” or “synchronous Communication” or “computer mediated communication” or “distance education” or elearning or e-learning or

“electronic learning” or “social network\*” or “educational technology” OR “social media” OR “online learn\*” OR “web sites” OR Internet or “virtual classroom\*” or “web 2.0” or blog\* or weblog\* or facebook or twitter or instagram. No restrictions were placed on dates and therefore included publications up to and including 2015. 101 articles were retrieved from this search. A detailed review revealed that although quite a few articles (25) addressed power issues in educational technology such as culturally and linguistically biased design and pedagogy, only five articles looked at platforms designed to support intergroup/intercultural dialogue.

A second search was thus conducted in an attempt to identify articles that addressed online intercultural or intergroup dialogue specifically. As suggested by the Education Librarian at Concordia University, the following subject search terms used were: su (interaction) or “intergroup relations\*” or “racial relations\*” OR “intergroup contact\*” OR “intercultural contact\*” or “contact theory” or intercultural or intergroup and, as with the first search, “web based instruction” or videoconf\* or “handheld devices” or pda\* or “mobile comput\*” courseware or “online education” or “online space\*” or “computer software” or “computer assisted instruction” or net-based or “technology uses in education” or “online courses” or “Asynchronous Communication” or “Synchronous Communication” or “computer mediated communication” or “distance education” or elearning or e-learning or “electronic learning” or “social network\*” or “educational technology” OR “social media” OR “online learn\*” OR “web sites” OR Internet or “virtual classroom\*” or “web 2.0” or blog\* or weblog\* or facebook or twitter or instagram. Again, no restrictions were placed on dates and therefore include publications up to and including 2015. 135 articles were retrieved from this search. Only three articles appeared in both the first and second searches.

As recommended by Rocco and Hatcher (2011), in addition to database searching, additional sources were identified through reference lists and a Google Scholar search. 242 articles were retained for analysis. In order to identify the articles that addressed the research questions, a selection of exclusion criteria was established.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

The 242 abstracts were read through for an indication that the article addressed intergroup/intercultural dialogue through an interactive online medium. Articles were excluded from analysis for a variety of reasons. Although many articles discussed the mechanics of setting

up international online courses, such as the need for the professors to develop relationships and coordinate tasks and deadlines, they often failed to acknowledge the dynamics of intercultural communication and made little or no reference to facilitation (ex. Araujo, de Carlo & Melo-Pfeifer, 2010; Azcarate, 2007; Cunnigham, Fagersten & Holmsten, 2010; Little, Titarenko & Bergelson, 2005; Mountcastle, 2011). A number of articles were also excluded because their application of technology did not require any interaction between students, thus not fulfilling the minimal requirements of dialogue. Instead these articles focused on learning about different cultures, simulating intercultural scenarios or playing games (ex. Bachen, Hernandez-Ramos & Raphael, 2012). In the end, 122 articles were retained for analysis.

### **Analysis**

The selected articles were coded according to the following research questions:

1. What is the state of the literature on intergroup/intercultural dialogue online? How are these programs conceptualized and in what context?
2. What are the issues surrounding inequality and power that arise? How are they addressed? How do these programs address inequality in design and facilitation?

The first question was addressed largely by empirical articles that were summarized in a chart that highlighted the following: rationale, conceptualization of dialogue, benefits and challenges. Descriptions of these themes are found in the first part of the findings. Fifty largely theoretical articles were also retained that addressed the second research question. Issues surrounding power in intercultural/intergroup online dialogue are described in the second part of the findings. The considerations for developing inclusive online environments that emerged include: the need for culturally and linguistically inclusive design and pedagogy, the need to embrace and work with conflict and the necessity of redefining the role of the teacher.

### **Findings**

#### **Question 1: State of the Literature on Intergroup/Intercultural Online Dialogue**

**Rationale.** The majority of research on intercultural computer-mediated communication (I-CMC) was completed in the context of Business and English courses with the objective of developing work-related competencies. As explained by Boehm, Kurthen and Aniola-Jedrzejek (2010):

The workplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will increasingly demand employees who bring a global perspective as well as a multiplicity of abilities to their work, including an understanding of world cultures, an ability to work collaboratively, and the capacity to integrate technology into many facets of their work (p. 2).

The incorporation of I-CMC in Business courses is thus largely motivated by the assumption that during one's career intercultural contact and collaboration, on and off-line, is inevitable (Conway-Gomez & Palacios, 2011; Crossman & Bordia, 2011; Freeman, Knight & Butt, 2011). Research on the integration of technology into English language curriculum serves to meet the goal of exposing students to cultural differences while also developing their language skills (Yang & Chen, 2014).

A significantly smaller number of articles, largely referring to online contact as "intergroup", addressed online programs that were developed in the context of peace education. These programs, mostly occurring in Cyprus, Ireland and Israel, were founded on the premise that dialogue between groups in areas of intractable conflict is fundamental to lessening tensions and meeting the goal of reconciliation (Firer, 2008; Laouris, 2004; Vrasidas, Zembylas, Evagorou, Avraamidou & Aravi, 2007; Yablon & Katz, 2001; Yablon, 2007). The Virtual Peace Education (VPE) program in Israel, for example, was developed in the 2000s when the traditional forms of peace education aimed at bringing Israeli and Palestinian youth together had to be cancelled due to an escalation in the conflict and a resurgence of mistrust between both groups (Firer, 2008). Similarly, Laouris (2004) reports that the integration of technology became a necessity in peace-building efforts in education when the European Union postponed accession negotiations with Turkey, leading the Turkish Cypriot authorities to limit the movement of Turkish Cypriots while banning face-to-face meetings with Greek Cypriots.

**Conceptualizations.** In general, studies on English and Business courses were grounded in Michael Byram's (1997) conception of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) which points to the intractability of language and cultural competence. Byram's (1997) model suggests that ICC requires a specific attitude, level of knowledge and skill set. He advocates for an attitude of "curiosity and openness" and a willingness to disengage from one's own beliefs in order to consider issues from other perspectives (p. 34). In addition, intercultural competence requires having knowledge of the various social groups involved, including cultural and political aspects. With this knowledge base, learners can develop interpretative skills that "necessarily

includes handling dysfunctions and contradictions in order to resolve them where possible, but also in order to identify unresolvable issues” (Byram, 1997, p. 37).

Studies that looked at the use of internet communications for the purposes of reconciliation in peace education contexts, on the other hand, were mostly grounded in Allport’s (1954) theory of intergroup contact which suggests that without being supported by certain conditions, dialogue in multicultural settings may only serve to reinforce stereotypes and intensify conflicts. Allport’s (1954) conditions include the need for students to perceive institutional support for having them come together to build relationships. As well, prejudice may be reduced when students from non-dominant groups experience a sense of equal status with dominant groups within the classroom setting. Finally, having students cooperate on some sort of project or goal is also deemed necessary to overcoming prejudices and developing relationships.

The few articles that did speak of using online dialogue in the context of global citizenship education did not address issues surrounding facilitation or power (ex. Meier, 2007; Patterson, Botero, Rigoberto & Salinas, 2012). A more critical perspective that acknowledges and addresses inequality and power dynamics in communication was largely taken up by the more theoretical literature. This body of literature will be presented in the second part of the literature review.

**Benefits.** Across disciplines, there appeared to be general agreement that the benefits of incorporating technology with the goal of facilitating intercultural dialogue and collaboration include: around the clock accessibility for students with internet access (Basharina, 2009), the flexibility of being able to interact at one’s own chosen time and pace without the pressures of a traditional classroom setting (Basharina, 2009; Berg, 2012), having the time to think through ideas before posting or responding (Basharina, 2009) and the opportunity to connect with students from different parts of the world (Basharina, 2009; Berg, 2012). In contrast to face-to-face meetings, virtual learning environments were also seen to reduce the impact of visual or superficial differences between participants.

In addition to allowing contact between groups, most studies on intergroup dialogue suggested that technology mediated discussions had additional benefits. Firer’s (2008) study reported that learners felt that face-to-face encounters with the “enemy” could be extremely anxiety producing, traumatic and end badly. Technology mediated contact, however, allowed

participants to take their time in getting to know each other at a pace that they were comfortable with. Firer (2008) described online dialogue as allowing for reflection and time for “internalizing the new impressions and change of emotions” (p. 196). Similarly, Yablon (2007) stated that using ICTs provided a “base for meaningful interaction while affording a sufficient feeling of safety for personal disclosure and intergroup contact” (p. 102). Finally, Yablon and Katz (2001) contend that online communication allows for deep and meaningful connections by providing access to and facilitating disclosure between a wide range of participants while also allowing participants to pull out of dialogues that made them uncomfortable.

**Challenges.** Firer (2008) warns against underestimating the difference between online and face-to-face dialogue and the potential for frustration when trying to bridge or connect these two worlds through I-CMC. As pointed to by Dillon, Wang and Tearle (2007), as in the case of face-to-face communication, in I-CMC behaviours and expectations are grounded in culturally specific norms that may be negotiated with varying levels of success. In addition, when students from different cultures enter into textual communication the absence of the nuances of tone and expression may increase the risk of misinterpretation (Berg, 2012, Yildiz, 2009). Belz’s (2005) study, for example, explored how the communication style of an American student who generally avoided confrontation was dismissed as being “uncommitted, uninterested” by his German counterparts. On the other hand, the American characterized the German students’ interactions as “rude and aggressive” despite their view that they were merely trying to engage in discussions about the subject matter at hand (p.26). Kramsch and Thorne’s (2002) study of online interaction between French and American language learners also found different discourse styles between the two groups. French participants “used factual, impersonal, dispassionate genres of writing” (p. 94), while American students’ posts were described as being “full of questions and exclamation marks, [which] suggests a high degree of affective involvement and emotional identification” (p. 95).

Another challenge to technology-mediated dialogue is the fact that students from different countries may not have equal access to technology. Needless to say, those who have regular access to technology as well as the internet are advantaged from the beginning (Bali, 2014; Berg, 2012; Helm, Guth & Farrah, 2012). For example, in the Basharina (2009) study engagement was effected by the fact that while most of the Japanese and Mexican students had access to the internet at home, only 61% of the Russian students did.

**Results.** Whether the goal of I-CMC is intercultural competence or intergroup reconciliation, research on I-CMC has yielded mixed results and “often fails to achieve the intended pedagogical goals” (O’Dowd & Ritter, 2006, p. 624; Hoter, Shonfeld & Ganayem, 2009; Veletsianos & Eliadou, 2009). As stated by O’Dowd (2003), “intercultural exchanges which fail to function properly can lead to a reinforcement of stereotypes and a confirmation of negative attitudes” (p. 138). O’Dowd and Ritter (2006) define “failed communication” in online intercultural dialogue as interactions with misunderstandings, conflicts and “low levels of participation, indifference, tension between participants, or negative evaluation of the partner group or their culture” (p. 624). Although Kramsch and Thorne (2002), for example, suggest that intercultural online dialogue raised their learners’ cultural awareness, Crossman and Bordia (2011)’s online intercultural project actually strengthened an adherence to stereotypes. Other examples of intercultural online contact that led to superficial exchanges, misunderstandings, conflict and/or frustration on the part of the students or teachers were reported by Belz (2003), Chun (2011), Hauck (2007), O’Dowd (2003; 2005) and Ware (2005). These outcomes are attributed, based on O’Dowd and Ritter’s (2006) review of the literature, to a complex often confusing, array of factors related to the students and the sociocultural contexts in which they are operating, the organization and structure of the exchange, and the type of interaction which takes place between the groups in the online environment (p. 625).

O’Dowd and Ritter (2006) further outline “potential areas of dysfunction” (p. 628) as including students’ incoming levels of intercultural competence, their motivation and expectations, the relationship between the teachers as well as the alignment of tasks, timelines and assessment criteria. Although these factors may very well explain some of the issues present in this literature, there is no reference to inclusion, inequality or the role of the teacher in facilitating online dialogue.

**Conclusion.** Research in the area cross-cultural dialogue, called “intergroup” in peace related contexts and “intercultural” in English and Business courses, paint a rather scattered image of advancements in this area. Despite compelling arguments for the integration of I-CMC, there are few articles that provide a complete picture, conceptualization and assessment of online dialogue. Although there are some notable exceptions, which will be elaborated on shortly, this preliminary review confirms Basharina’s (2009) contention that research on I-CMC fails to document “the diverse factors influencing learning, such as local contexts, different learner



frames of reference, and instructors' mediation" (p. 390). This is compounded by the absence of a recognition of power issues. Given that the intergroup dialogue studies are centred in areas of conflict, it is particularly surprising that there is little acknowledgement of the need to address inequalities or facilitate discussions on social and political issues. The following section, emerging largely from the theoretical literature, will thus focus on the issues relating to power and inequality that may arise in online dialogues and some of the strategies for working with these issues.

## **Question 2: Issues Surrounding Power in Intercultural/Intergroup Online Dialogue**

Many of the aforementioned articles on ICTs and intercultural dialogue appear grounded in the assumption that the internet can promote equality by providing a "culturally neutral" learning environment where, in the words of Kramsch and Thorne (2002), "native and non-native speakers can have access to one another as linguistic entities on a screen, unfettered by historical, geographical, national or institutional identities" (p. 85). Laouris' (2004) account of the development of the "Technology for Peace" portal, for example, concludes that the use of computer supported dialogue "equalizes power relations among participants because it ensures that all have equal time and equal opportunity to contribute" (p. 71) and "facilitates a common understanding in a way that the consensus is not questioned and all contributors consider all parameters legitimate" (p. 72). These rather sweeping generalizations risk adhering to rather simplistic understandings of how power may be experienced and expressed in these contexts. A small but significant part of the research, however, does focus on the need to develop inclusive and transformative dialogue spaces that openly address linguistic, cultural and technological issues that arise in globally networked online environments that seek to foster intergroup/intercultural dialogue. The following largely theoretical body of literature suggests that there is a need to develop culturally and linguistically inclusive programs in which conflict is openly experienced and addressed. These learning environments also require a reconceptualization of the role of the teacher.

**Developing culturally and linguistically inclusive environments.** Given the prevalence of English in GNLEs and the suggestion that language and culture are inextricable, intercultural online interactions can lead to educational experiences that for many global learners are alienating or exclusionary (Dillon, Wang & Tearle, 2007). Bokor (2011) suggests that the

dominance of the English language sets up an

asymmetrical relationship between native speakers and the “other“ and has been accused of “linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson, 1992), which suggests that those using it as their mother-tongue should be wary of the danger of privileging their “nativeness” as an advantage in cross-boundary discursive events (pp. 114-115).

Few programs acknowledge the implications of the prevalence of the English language, in intercultural online communication. American students in particular are often unaware of the range of differences within the English language and fail to recognize that American English is contextual and may alienate a wider international context (Dillon, Wang & Tearle, 2007). Failing to encourage students to interrogate the consequences of privileging the taken-for-granted status of their variety of English deprives them of the opportunity to “widen their worldviews and self-perceptions as users of English” (Bokor, 2011, p. 116). More than spelling or grammatical competence, this type of reflection is considered essential to successful intercultural exchanges (Bokor, 2011).

Bokor (2011) insists on the need to produce new pedagogical spaces that incorporate a “World Englishes paradigm” that encourages students to examine the factors that influence what they know about themselves in relationship to others through language. Teaching students about the historical and sociolinguistic contexts of Indian English, Ghanaian English and Malaysian English, for example, could help them understand the cultural expectations underlying different rhetorical models (p. 134). One strategy for working across cultural and linguistic barriers online, as presented by Bohemia and Ghassan (2012), is to work with visual ways of communicating such as representing different perspectives through pictures and art.

As explained by Bali (2014), an open dialogue between groups can “be potentially colonizing, empowering one group by inherently being on their terms and serving their interests” (p. 213):

while our classrooms now constitute richly diverse transcultural and multi-epistemological environments, all students are required to conform to essentially mono-cultural, mono-linguistic and mono epistemic linguistic practices (Eijkman, 2009, p. 243).

With the dominance of English comes a privileging of a “western” style of education and discourse that centres on the development of deliberative and critical thinking skills which

emphasize questioning and debate (Araujo, de Carlo & Melo-Pfeifer, 2010; Bali, 2014). However, “the expectation that students will question knowledge or the teacher is not a universally accepted form of interaction” (McLoughlin & Oliver, 2000, p. 59).

Eijkman (2009) makes the case for a more “democratic or egalitarian approach to knowledge construction to render visible the marginalized knowledge systems and discourses of non-Western or non-mainstream social groups that have been erased by the hegemonic suppression inherent in Western higher education” (p. 241). He advocates for an understanding of knowledge that recognizes a multiplicity of viewpoints and speaks to the potential of online learning spaces as “egalitarian transcultural contact zones” that can be both disruptive and productive, neither privileging dominant or subjective knowledge systems, and instead, used to encourage self-reflection and critical interrogation (p. 247).

Bokor (2011) speaks to the need to revamp online curriculum through input from non-western perspectives. An example of designing an online learning environment from a non-western perspective is provided in McLoughlin and Oliver’s (2000) article “Designing Learning Environments for Cultural Inclusivity: A Case Study of Indigenous Online Learning at Tertiary Level”. Their article outlines strategies for developing online learning environments that account for the learning needs and communication styles of Australian Indigenous students. In particular, McLoughlin and Oliver (2000) advocate for the application of a “multiple cultural model” that considers the philosophical underpinnings of goals, objectives, content and instructional activities while incorporating multiple pedagogies. This model is applied by considering the following questions:

1. What kind of learning environment is most familiar to the students?
2. How does the cultural background of these students influence their conceptions of learning?
3. How do students conceive the role of the teacher?
4. What kind of relationship do students want with an online tutor?
5. What kinds of assessment tasks will support learning and cultural inclusivity?
6. What rewards and forms of feedback will be most motivating for these students?
7. Is the locus of control congruent with these students’ own sense of personal control?
8. What cognitive styles characterize the target group? (McLoughlin & Oliver, 2000, p. 64).

McLoughlin and Oliver (2000) further recommend that the design be validated by members of the group or groups in order to ensure its “authenticity” (p. 64).

In reference to their work with Australian Indigenous learners, McLoughlin and Oliver (2000) also present a series of design principles for culturally inclusive environments. The first, is to adopt a constructivist approach to knowledge and an epistemology that incorporates narratives and storytelling as legitimate ways of knowing and moves beyond a focus on rational argumentation, favouring the understanding of multiple perspectives over agreement. For example, Truong-White and McLean’s (2015) article entitled “Digital Storytelling for Transformative Global Citizenship Education” suggests that digital storytelling, which involves the “blending of personal narratives with multimedia content” can “allow students to express lived experiences in poignant and dynamic ways “which was shown to encourage reflection and engagement with non-mainstream perspectives (p. 7).

A second design principle presented by McLoughlin and Oliver (2000) suggests that authentic learning activities should reflect the skills, values and culture of the community with an emphasis on interactivity and dialogue. Integrated opportunities to collaborate, construct and share knowledge are also deemed important to equalize learning environments. They also recommend web-based tools and tutors to support and “scaffold” learners throughout the learning process. Another recommendation is to establish “flexible and responsive” student roles and responsibilities that allow “multi-layered exploration of unit requirements, assessment tasks and learning activities” (p. 67) which should include technical and information literacy skills. As well, multiple channels for communication and interaction should be available. The importance of having a sense of belonging, ownership and control over the learning process is another guideline. The tutors’ roles need to be flexible, responsive and adjusted based on student feedback. In addition, access to multiple perspectives should be integrated. Finally, a high level of flexibility around goals, topics and assessments is considered essential to developing inclusive online environments (McLoughlin & Oliver, 2000).

**Placing intercultural dialogue at center of programs.** Many articles talked about the importance of online international collaboration but treated intercultural competence as one of multiple goals, almost incidental, requiring little more than coming into contact with people from other cultures (ex. Karpova, Correia & Baran, 2009; Lee, 2011; Liaw, 2007). Jaidev (2014) warns against the assumption that bringing groups into contact will necessarily produce

opportunities for intercultural communication that move students beyond stereotypes and superficial understandings of difference. As stated by Dooly (2011):

it is important not to “essentialize” the cultural traits of the participants in the online exchange, since this might lead to assumptions that all incidences or misunderstandings in the exchange were related to the meeting of “cultures’ (p. 323).

Showing an interest in others’ cultures, gathering facts, sharing opinions or values should not be equated with the interpretive abilities deemed to be primordial in intercultural exchanges (Araujo, de Carlo & Melo-Pfeifer, 2010; Belz, 2005).

Jaidev (2014) underlines the importance of teaching about self-awareness of ones’ own socialization, sensitivities and biases. This self-awareness can serve as “a first step towards understanding that every individual’s cultural make-up has been and will continue to evolve based on the influence of the whole range of cultures, people and experiences that the individual has been exposed to” (Jaidev, 2014, p. 134). Muller-Hartmann (2007) indicates that a learners’ capacity for critical reflection and self-assessment is essential to the development of intercultural competence. Furthermore, along with the realization of one’s ethnocentric perspectives, students’ need to learn to be open and flexible when working with different communication styles or expectations of learning (Kitade, 2012).

As pointed to by Bruns and Humphreys (2005), if students are to engage with global issues meaningfully, they must grapple with them in a way that connects to their everyday lives while also considering the impact on others. Thus, one of the significant challenges for faculty is to develop opportunities for students to not only learn first-hand about the process of globalization, but to challenge and re-evaluate their own cultural perspectives. Boehm, Kurthen and Aniola-Jedrzejc (2010) insist that students need not necessarily always agree with the views and opinions of peers in other countries. The more important question is whether they can recognize, understand, and respect differences, and effectively communicate and negotiate in spite of them.

Hilton (2013) advocates using GNLEs to facilitate a critical dialogue that is committed to “disrupting the common-place”, addressing social and political issues while also working towards social action (p. 606). Hilton (2013) recommends a series of design features for such a learning environment: First, a centralized discussion space should give students equal control

over subject-choice and allow them to opt in and out of more private and focused discussion threads. Second, Hilton recommends that platforms have the capacity to create meaningful personal profiles. In addition, tasks should be carefully managed so that students have enough time to reflect on material and engage in a timely manner. In addition, Hilton (2013) suggests developing critical capacities through readings with conflicting viewpoints as well as through the skilled interventions of teachers or moderators. Success is determined once students “begin to self-reflect on their biases, recognize multiple perspectives, question the claims of others and become more comfortable with disagreement as a locus for understanding rather than marginalization” (Hilton, 2013, pp. 610-611).

According to Zembylas and Vrasidas (2005), to avoid the potentially colonizing effects of I-CMC students need to develop “an alternative criticality that involves the ability to move flexibly outside conventional thinking- that is-imagining what it might mean to think without some of the very things that make our current thinking meaningful” (p. 71). A critically literate learner “knows that the process of using the Internet is one of undoing the illusory stability of fixed claims and identities that mark others and one’s self socially and ethnically” (Zembylas & Vrasidas, 2005, p. 71). Further, ICTs should be seen as a way to empower traditionally marginalized individuals and facilitate contact with groups struggling for justice and equity. To this end, they suggest educators use ICTs to develop:

1. the ability to question cherished beliefs and presuppositions, thus emphasizing difference that presents students with the possibility of thinking otherwise;
2. the notion that criticality is not only a way of thinking but also a way of being, i.e. it is a practice, a way of life that does not uncritically accept ideological valorizations; and
3. collective questioning and criticism in social circumstances that affirm resistance against global domination (p. 73).

These aspects of criticality are not meant to promote a monolithic view of a more just or peaceful world but rather to challenge the hegemonic ideologies surrounding ethnocentrism, capitalism, militarism, etc. Zembylas and Vrasidas (2005) describe the need for a “pedagogy of discomfort” that ask students to move outside of their comfort zones and recognize the ideological framing and social construction of what they have been taught (p. 74). As described by Kanata and Martin (2007), any transformative online dialogue will likely require the take down of “fragile

contradictions that are necessary to maintaining their [certain students] unearned privilege” (p. 4).

**Role of the teacher.** Although some articles on I-CMC acknowledge the importance of teacher training and involvement (ex. O’Dowd, 2007; Ware & Kramsch, 2005) few articles explore this issue in much detail particularly as it relates to the facilitation of online dialogue. As acknowledged by Auxiliadora Sales Ciges (2001), I-CMC necessitates a redefinition of an educator’s role and insists that teachers need to focus on facilitating positive interactions with and among students so as to “build a learning community that makes it possible to openly exchange ideas, information and feelings” (Sales Ciges, 2001, p. 137).

Committing to open online dialogue can make it difficult for teachers to feel prepared given the unpredictability of student interactions and the likelihood that tensions will emerge (Schneider & Silke von der Emde, 2006). As a result, Schneider and Silke von der Emde (2006) suggest that “too often efforts to teach communicative competence betray a desire to diminish or even eliminate conflict entirely” (p. 179). One example comes from Hoter, Shonfeld and Ganayem’s (2009) report on their development of a model for intergroup contact in Israel where they intentionally omit subjects that may be “provocative” including certain historical events (p. 10). Schneider and Silke von der Emde (2006), however, suggest that “a dialogic approach to online exchanges offers a conceptual structure for making conflict a central and productive source for learning rather than a debilitating stumbling block to communication” (p. 179). They suggest that it is “more essential to help students to tolerate and feel comfortable with conflict rather than encourage them to deny their own cultural approaches to disagreements or rush to find common ground” (p. 183).

Further, Schneider and von der Emde (2006) insist that intercultural conflicts will always occur and that the solution is not to teach students strategies to avoid conflict, but rather to help students treat conflicts as learning opportunities. As stated by Belz (2003):

It is very important to understand that these contextually shaped tensions are not to be viewed as problems that need to be eradicated in order to facilitate smoothly functioning partnerships... Structural differences frequently constitute precisely these cultural rich-points that we want our students to explore (p. 87).

Given the flexibility that this may require on the part of the teacher, O’Dowd and Ritter (2006) advises educators to take “an on-going action research approach to their classes which involves

collecting and analyzing online interactions and subsequent feedback from their students” (p. 639).

Barraclough and McMahon (2013) further point to the need for teacher involvement in online dialogue so that tensions may be used productively, suggesting that teachers must “pose the tough questions, and challenge students’ assumptions just as they do in the physical classroom, to facilitate students’ critical reflexivity about power, privilege, and their own positionality” (p. 250). Zembylas and Vrasidas (2005) describe the role of the educator as one that

translates experiences through multiple discourses and identities. She knows that all knowledge is partial. These understandings do not lead to anarchy or complete relativity because one can incorporate multiplicity and hybridity without losing a capacity for thoughtful evaluation (p. 71).

The peace education literature readily acknowledges the need for facilitators to receive training in conflict mediation. In the first phase of the “Feeling Closer from a Distance” project, for example, Jewish and Arab university students were trained as program practitioners and attended workshops on ethnic stereotypes (Yablon, 2007). As well, a project regrouping Jewish and Bedouin youth as presented by Yablon and Katz (2001), started with facilitator training on dealing with stereotypes and intolerance. Such training, however, did not mention how to deal with power disparities between participants.

Helm, Guth and Farrah (2012) also support the position that conflict should be turned into opportunities for learning. However, based on their research, they suggest that there are certain “necessary conditions” for these types of dialogues to be productive including “an awareness of the potential hegemonies at play in a telecollaboration project and the addressing of power issues” (p. 118). A dialogic approach, suggest Helm, Guth and Farrah (2012), brings together a diversity of students with the goal of exploring the assumptions and misconceptions that are often at the root of conflicts. Such an approach should not seek common ground but rather engage in an open and respectful dialogue that explores and seeks to understand and have compassion for differences. To adopt such an approach, they recommend a curriculum that overtly tackles sensitive issues effectively taking students outside of their comfort zone. Dialogue groups, they suggest, should be balanced with participants from different backgrounds. Facilitators should be trained and work to develop a trusting environment in which disagreement



is seen as a learning opportunity. Students cannot be seen solely as language learners but also as individuals with multiple identities. Finally, they recommend the use of multimodal/different forms of online communication (Helm Guth & Farrah, 2012).

Akintunde (2006) makes a similar observation stating that “confrontation is an essential element of any class that seeks to deconstruct White racist pedagogy” (p. 36). He also suggests that online spaces may serve to ease tensions associated with conflict by diminishing fears of being attacked or ridiculed. In his experience, students tended to feel more comfortable sharing personal reflections on power, privilege and multiculturalism in an online space. He concludes his observations by suggesting that “as we grapple with the notion that technology is just as much a product of social inequality as a conduit through which we can address such an issue, it becomes incumbent on us to ensure that as the debate rages we are using the technology to its best advantage” (Akintunde, 2006, p. 44).

### **Conclusion**

There is a significant gap in the literature between the empirical research on developing intercultural competence online (largely in the context of language and business courses) and the largely theoretical body of literature that points to issues relating to power and inequality in international online learning settings. This literature review confirms Freeman, Knight and Butt (2011)’s contention that much of the literature on I-CMC deals with the technical aspects of international virtual teams and that there is a “substantial void in the literature discussing the human factors of global, virtual group formation and function, including the numerous challenges inherent in crossing international and ethnic boundaries and the current importance of developing high functioning global teams” (p. 280). Lamy and Goodfellow (2010) highlight the importance of critiquing telecollaboration by asking “historically-informed questions about whose interests the practice might serve and how its hidden power relations might be deconstructed and understood” (p. 130). To this end, Eijkman (2009) asks, “how can we transform Western higher education to provide epistemically and discursively inclusive transcultural learning zones that place non-mainstream students on trajectories of participation that enhances their opportunity to participate as equals in a more vernacular, a much more egalitarian, cosmopolitanism increasingly committed to socio-economic and politically transformative global practices?” (p. 244). Or as Bali (2014) states rather more succinctly: “how

do we reconceptualize intercultural dialogue/communication programs in order to improve student learning and empowerment while adequately addressing the inevitable imperfection and inequality of the dialogue situation?” (p. 214).

As sites designed to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue continue to emerge, it is imperative that educators and curriculum developers explore the implications and assumptions in their design and pedagogy. Having pointed to the importance of placing intercultural/intergroup dialogue at the centre of a pedagogy that aims to help students work through conflicts and misunderstandings, the following research will take an in-depth look at existing online programs designed to facilitate online dialogue for civic and peace-building ends. This research will adopt a critical stance, which will be outlined in the following chapter (Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework), in order to help educators and designers work towards developing inclusive and transformative online learning environments that support reconciliation, global citizenship and peace.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

### **Introduction**

The literature review suggests that there is a need to explore how GNLEs conceptualize dialogue in order to determine the extent to which they are designed to facilitate discussions that address inequalities and social justice issues. In order to frame the research that will address this gap, the following theoretical framework will begin with a review of prominent theories of dialogue, approaches to intergroup contact and their criticisms. This overview is followed by a description of the facilitative, communicative and psychological processes, outcomes and corresponding pedagogy that make-up Gurin, Zuñiga and Nagda's (2013) critical-dialogical model for intergroup contact. This model, which incorporates both dialogical and critical conceptions of dialogue, will provide a comprehensive structure through which to understand, compare and evaluate online programs that aim to bring students together from around the world for civic and peace-building purposes. By adopting this model, the following research makes an explicit commitment to the epistemological and ideological assumptions of a critical conception of dialogue and global citizenship education. By also incorporating Andreotti's (2012) strategies for identifying the underlying colonizing tendencies of many global education initiatives, this framework also calls attention to "the often unacknowledged connections between knowledge production, discursive enunciations, and denial of complicity in harm" (Andreotti, 2015, p. 223). As such, this framework does not provide a neutral model for comparison but rather serves as a tool for analysis meant to uncover underlying assumptions while advocating for a critical and transformative approach to dialogue.

### **Dialogue Theory**

The following theorists may be considered fundamental to analyzing the many facets of dialogue. Each theorist focuses on different aspects of dialogue, including an examination of the thought processes involved (Bohm), relationship formation with the "other" (Buber), the structures that support deliberation (Habermas), and the process through which reality is revealed (Freire). The facilitative requirements and expected outcomes of the dialogue process differ according to the theorist in question.

## David Bohm

According to Bohm (1996), dialogue should be understood as a “stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us ... out of which may emerge some new understanding” (p. 7). One of the barriers to dialogue, suggests Bohm, is that participants are encouraged to label and draw distinctions between individuals and groups instead of looking for the ways that they are interconnected. Bohm argues that “conflict, hate and irrational behaviour of all kinds have their root causes in incoherence and imbalance in our thought processes” (Sleap & Sener, 2013, p. 37). Dialogue is thus “aimed at going into the whole thought process and changing the way the thought process occurs collectively” (Bohm, 1996, p. 10). The role of dialogue is to overcome a sense of division between humans and explore the thought processes that fragment and impede communication.

In practice, Bohmian dialogue is distinguished by its detachment from a particular structure or content. Instead of being geared towards a specific outcome, the goal is for participants to learn as a group about the extent to which their thought processes can be either “destructive” or “creative” (Sleap & Sener, 2013, p. 37). Participants are thus called upon to suspend their own positions, accept multiple viewpoints and explore the underlying assumptions and beliefs that unconsciously govern their interactions (Bohm, 1996). Inspired by Buddhist philosophy, the expectation is that participants will learn to witness and disengage from destructive thought patterns and instead reach a “common consciousness” through “participatory thinking”:

In participatory thought, the thinker is very aware of the interconnections between things and individuals. He has a sense of being part of a deeply connected social group, of a collective thought process, or of nature. He is aware of partaking of a larger whole, in the sense of receiving from and contributing to it (Sleap & Sener, 2013, p. 41).

Bohm (1996) recommends that dialogue groups be large enough (20-40 people) to ensure a level of diversity and that topics should be allowed to emerge naturally. In this process, facilitators are expected to play a minimal role limited largely to briefing participants on Bohm’s conception of dialogue. After an introduction, the role of the facilitator is only to provide guidance, if needed.

Challenges around the implementation of this type of dialogue include the potentially unrealistic expectation that participants are ready and willing to disengage from their convictions

and have the confidence to engage in this type of open and exploratory dialogue. In addition, a significant source of frustration may come from the fact that it is not a particular topic that is addressed so much as the thought processes that surround it. That being said, it was one of Bohm's fundamental beliefs that learning to engage with others, according to his model, would transform the thought processes that facilitate conflict and instead encourage open spaces in which people would be able to creatively address and solve societal problems (Bohm, 1996).

### **Martin Buber**

Buber attempts to overcome the "us and them" thinking which he says "save men from confusion and hard choices" (Buber, 1970, p. 9). These over-simplifications of complex social issues can only be overcome through an authentic dialogical encounter. For Buber, dialogue is about *how* participants relate to each other. He suggests that there are two modes through which people relate to each other: the "I-It" mode and the "I-You" mode. Within the "I-It" mode, people respond to particular attributes or characteristics of the person they are in conversation with. In this context, you use your mind to experience the other person. In contrast, from the "I-You" mode, you encounter or commune with the other as a whole and unique person. From the "I-You" mode emerges a dialogue in which "the boundaries between separate people are somehow crossed" (Sleap & Sener, 2013, p. 54). Without ceasing to be yourself you open yourself up to "share the other's experience" (Sleap & Sener, 2013, p. 54):

The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one's whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter. The relation to you is unmediated. Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination; and memory itself is changed as it plunges from particularity to wholeness (Buber, 1970, p. 62).

Although described as fragile and unstable, the "I-You" mode is, for Buber (1970), the only context from which dialogue can occur. In a dialogue meant to engage participants in these "I-You" encounters, the role of the facilitator is to model the "authentic presence" that is required for such a genuine connection to occur. This involves being vulnerable and putting one's guard down. In this context, the qualities of a facilitator emerge more in line with who they are and what they do (Sleap & Sener, 2013).

Applied to intergroup dialogue, Buber (1947) insists that common ground is not a necessary precondition, process or goal. Rather, participants are expected to respond to and affirm the other in all their differences. There is no expectation or requirement that participants give up their points of view, rather the humanization of the other is the priority. Buber (1947) suggests that although dialogues may involve speaking from “certainty to certainty” this does not preclude the possibility that open-hearted participants may be able to work towards the vision of “a genuine common life” (p. 9).

### **Jurgen Habermas**

In Habermas’ (1984) words, the aim of his theory of communicative action is “to grasp structural properties of processes of reaching understanding, from which we can derive general pragmatic pre-suppositions” (p.286). In communicative action, participants seek a common understanding of their situation and, on this basis, “harmonize their plans of action” so that individual actions are acceptable to all (Habermas, 1984, p. 10). Habermas’ (1984) contribution to the field of dialogue arises from his articulation of the standards/ideals through which, he suggests, honest and non-coercive dialogue can be facilitated:

This concept of communicative rationality carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their life world (p. 10).

The persuasive force of a person’s speech thus comes from their claims to validity which are brought forth for consideration so that they may be publicly criticized or defended by convincing arguments.

According to Habermas (1984), in order to achieve common understanding, when a validity claim is disputed, participants should step back and explore the claim using the rules of dialectical procedure, which although committed to rationality are also imbued with the moral requirements of solidarity and justice. These rules include the “inclusion rule”, which states that no one who can contribute should be excluded, and the “symmetry rule” which insists that everyone should have equal access to this participation so that every argument may be

considered. Speakers cannot contradict themselves, must be consistent and should not use the same expression to mean different things. Speakers must only put forth what they believe and should be able to provide justification. As well, the “terms of discourse” must not be “ideologically distorted” by power relations or psychological restraints and centred on the open-minded collective pursuit of the best course of action (Ingram, 2010, p. 134). In this context, a validity claim should be accepted when it has been sufficiently justified within its context.

James (2003) suggests that there are several reasons why Habermas is rarely referred to in the literature on intergroup dialogue. For one, he does not have a fully developed theory of intercultural dialogue. Instead, his theory of communicative action seems to “presuppose that actors share a common lifeworld” (p. 161). Sleaf and Sener (2013) further contend that Habermas’ (1984) approach to dialogue is too removed from the complex realities of human life and idealizes a rather western “cool” model of rational interaction. Participants whose modes of expression do not align with such rules of communication may be excluded on the basis that their discussion is deemed irrational or non-democratic: “argumentation itself may function as a form of power since certain actors may be better equipped to engage in argumentative contests than others” (James, 2003, p. 161). Finally, James (2003) suggests that Habermas’ theory of communicative action does not “adequately portray how actors intentionally try to understand alien practices or worldviews” (p.162) and fails to recognize the “deeply cooperative character” of exploring differences (James, 2003, p. 161).

Despite these concerns, James (2003) defends the use of Habermas with intergroup contact theory in particular by suggesting that most dialogue advocates focus on the moral validity of dialogue in and of itself, without acknowledging or addressing “the conditions that either enable or constrain it” (p. 164). A Habermasian view of dialogue insists that participants must be open to criticism and that it is through the ability to withstand criticism that true understandings and partial agreements can be identified. According to James (2003), applying Habermas’ framework to intergroup dialogue can “better initiate an examination of the strategic logics that enable and constrain intergroup dialogue” (p. 158).

### **Paulo Freire**

In his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) brought the idea of critical dialogue as a central component of education to an international audience. Freire’s (1970)

“problem-posing” education project presents “dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality” (p. 83) thus aiming to liberate its participants from ideological constraints. Transformative dialogue is therefore a creative process and requires participants to transcend the “circle of certainty” within which they have been stuck in order to identify and address the causes of their oppression and work towards their liberation (Freire, 1970, p. 38).

Freire (1970) also explained that one of the most significant barriers to dialogue is not just power differentials between groups but also self-imposed barriers. The “oppressed” experience “internalized oppression” when they fail to see themselves as equal to begin with:

They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. ... Only as they discover themselves to be ‘hosts’ of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy (Freire, 1970, p. 30).

Freire’s (1970) proposal of a “problem-posing” education is thus “forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity” (p. 48). Dialogue is, consequently, the central feature of Freire’s pedagogy and the conditions that determine its outcomes, the subject of ongoing debate.

Critical consciousness, Freire’s (1970) goal for dialogue, is facilitated by having students “enter the historical process as responsible subjects” (p. 36):

A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as a historical reality susceptible of transformation. Resignation gives way to the drive for transformation and inquiry, of which men feel themselves to be in control (p. 85).

Being in control requires that dialogue be followed by and directed towards emancipatory action. As stated by Freire (1970):

When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter ... denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action (p. 87).

Such a commitment points to the imperative that teachers facilitate a dialogue that is both hopeful and optimistic. As pointed to by Freire (1970), if participants enter into dialogue with no expectations above and beyond satisfying a course requirement or filling class time, the exchange will inevitably feel “empty and sterile, bureaucratic and tedious” (p. 92). As such, facilitators themselves need to have faith in the power of people to come together, establish trust



and work towards a more just future.

Further clarification of the role of the teacher in dialogue comes in Freire's dialogue with Macedo (1995) in which he cautions teachers against relinquishing their authority when taking on the role of "facilitator". According to Freire (1995), when teachers refer to themselves as facilitators they disingenuously deny their own power. Equally problematic is when facilitation is perceived as non-directive. In an educational setting, claims Freire (1995), there is no task, activity or dialogue that does not have a purpose. Teachers must not shy away from taking responsibility for this, otherwise, the

facilitator denies himself or herself the pedagogical, political, and epistemological task of assuming the role of a subject of that directive practice ... To avoid reproducing the values of the power structure, the educator must always combat laissez-faire pedagogy, no matter how progressive it may appear to be (p. 378).

Accordingly, teachers should take ownership of their power as they facilitate in such a way as to help their students develop the critical capacities necessary to engage in productive and transformative dialogues.

Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy has been critiqued for being too abstract, overly focused on class distinctions and appealing, to a certain extent, to objectivity and rationalism (Ellsworth, 1989; Leach, 1982). Ellsworth (1989)'s primary critique of critical pedagogy, for example, is that it centers around the development of students' capacities for engaging in rational dialogue. This emphasis on rationality minimizes the existence of power imbalances and may instead serve to reinforce them. In a racist society, Ellsworth (1989) suggests, it is inappropriate to subject those fighting for their own rights to be constrained by rationalist discourse regulation.

Although this may be true to an extent, Freire (1995) does state that it is a misreading of his work to suggest that dialogue is merely a "technique" that is objectively applied. Instead, Freire (1995) emphasizes that dialogue should serve as a way to access unconscious beliefs that have been justified through ideology and the social construction of difference. Critical-dialogical facilitators, for example, are directed to use their own subjectivity as a way to demonstrate the connection between perceptions of power and positionality. Critical-dialogical facilitators are expected to mediate and model "productive" dialogue by purposefully using themselves and their experiences as a way to initiate and deepen dialogue (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011, p. 10).

Authentic dialogue, according to Ellsworth (1989), is impossible in a society with such firmly entrenched inequalities and within which power differentials are ever shifting. Referencing her own work in the classroom, Ellsworth (1989) suggests that dialogue is not bound by reason so much as it is by the evolving narratives of its participants:

Our classroom was the site of dispersed, shifting and contradictory contexts of knowing that coalesced differently in different moments of student/professor speech, action and emotion. This situation meant that individuals and affinity groups constantly had to change strategies and priorities of resistance against oppressive ways of knowing and being known (p. 322).

Thus, dialogue is constructed by partial knowledge, self-interest and “multiple and contradictory social positionings” (p. 312) which can lead to confusion and discomfort on the part of the participants. In this, Ellsworth (1989) encapsulates a weakness of Freire’s (1970) pedagogy which suggests a certain objective experience of oppression and demarcation between oppressed and oppressor. These points can be conceded without necessarily abandoning the project of critical dialogue. In fact, contemporary critical theorists acknowledge that the experience of oppression can shift depending on context and is “never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations” (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2011, p. 16).

### **Intergroup Contact Theory**

Intergroup contact theorists elucidate the conditions that support communication between different groups. This field originates in Allport’s (1954) groundbreaking book *The Nature of Prejudice* which demonstrated that, without being supported by certain necessary conditions, dialogue in multicultural classrooms generally failed to explore and openly address issues of inequality and social justice and often only served to reinforce stereotypes and intensify conflicts. As was outlined in the literature review, Allport’s (1954) conditions for overcoming prejudice and relationship-building include institutional support, equal status between groups within a classroom setting and having students cooperate on some sort of project or goal. Since the publication of Allport’s (1954) theory numerous researchers and educators have tested, refined and expanded on Allport’s (1954) conditions. Most notably, Pettigrew (1998) added an additional condition that there needs to be a sufficient amount of time available for cross-group friendships to evolve. These friendships, according to Pettigrew (1998) would be more likely to

lead to a reduction in prejudice that extends from the individuals in the classroom to the broader group in question.

### **Models of Intergroup Dialogue**

Based on twenty years of research on intergroup dialogue in Israel, Maoz (2011) suggests that there are four types of intergroup dialogue models. The most common model, the “Coexistence Model”, “seeks to promote mutual understanding and tolerance between Jews and Arabs, reduce stereotypes, foster positive intergroup attitudes” (Maoz, 2011, p. 211). Designed around Allport’s (1954) conditions it “emphasizes interpersonal similarities (‘we are all human beings’) and cultural and language commonalities, as well as supporting notions of togetherness and co-operation” (p. 118). By doing little more than promoting “folkloristic” and “superficial” aspects of national identity, suggests Maoz (2011), this model fails to address asymmetrical and institutional power inequalities making it fundamentally “immoral” (Maoz, 2011, p. 118).

Also inspired by the work of Allport (1954), the “Joints Project Model” is grounded in the assumption that having participants work towards a common goal will help overcome conflict and emphasize the dispositions and attitudes needed for effective co-operation. Like the “Coexistence Model”, this framework is seen as doing little to address inequalities between groups and can exacerbate stereotypes by not dealing with some of the underlying dynamics within the cooperative structure, essentially perpetuating, in the case of Israel, “Jewish dominance and control while encouraging Arab submissiveness and passivity” (p. 122).

In contrast to the first two models, the “Confrontational Model” seeks to engage groups in discussions around identity, prejudice and asymmetrical power relations with the goal of empowering the subordinate group by providing them with the space and language to challenge the dominant group. Maoz (2011) defends this approach as follows:

many Palestinians and Jewish encounter facilitators and participants do not see the dialogue between them as complete or relevant to their needs unless it explicitly deals with these issues ... Such discussions can help reach deeper awareness and understanding of the general conflict, its affiliated dilemmas, and the implications—for each group and for Israeli society at large- of living in a situation of asymmetrical conflict (p. 120).

Thus, although a lack of recognition of power differences can trigger feelings of frustration and powerlessness, when groups acknowledge and work to understand inequality:

they can become effective agents of change—both in the individuals within the group and in the larger political conflict. With an awareness of power dynamics, each participant can work at a deeper level, understanding the conflict as it works within him- or herself (Agabria & Cohen, 2000, p. 3).

Consistent with the position of the “Confrontational Model”, Agabria and Cohen (2000) insist that in order to develop long-term relationships between groups, political issues no matter how controversial, should be addressed. That being said, the “Confrontational Model” is more prone “to destructive intergroup communication patterns that include verbal violence towards, and degradation and delegitimization of members of the other group” (Maoz, 2011, p. 120).

Finally, what Maoz (2011) describes as the “Narrative Approach” relies on storytelling as a way of sharing and engaging with how other participants experience or are experiencing conflict. This model is grounded in the assumption that sharing “the experience and suffering of the other through story-telling” will help “conflicting groups to create intergroup trust and compassion by re-humanizing, and constructing a more complex image of, each other” (Maoz, 2011, p. 120). The strength of this approach, according to Maoz (2011) stems from the power of personal stories to help people work through their unresolved pain while also eliciting empathy from group members. Without ignoring pressing social issues and asymmetrical power relations, the “discussion of these issues through personal stories enables an increase of intergroup acceptance and understanding while avoiding dead-end arguments about who is more moral and more humane” (Maoz, 2011, p. 121). The challenges in this model arise when, according to Maoz (2011), narratives are contradictory and grounded in fundamentally different understandings of historical events.

Built on Bohm (1996) and Buber’s (1947; 1970) theories of dialogue and Freire’s (1970) conception of “critical consciousness”, the following section outlines the critical-dialogical model for intergroup contact developed by Gurin, Nagda and Zuñiga (2013) and presented in their book *Dialogue across difference: Practice, theory, and research on intergroup dialogue*. This approach to intergroup dialogue also includes aspects of all four models of intergroup contact proposed by Maoz (2011) such as humanizing the “other” through storytelling, discussing social and political issues and working towards a common goal or action.

Gurin et al.’s (2013) model also has a corresponding approach to facilitation, outlined by Nagda and Maxwell (2011), which stresses the inclusion of all viewpoints, facilitates the

development of critical thinking skills and addresses power inequalities. Although Habermas is not directly referred to in this model, the role of the facilitators can be described as enforcing some of the rules outlined in his theory of communicative action. For example, as suggested by Nagda and Maxwell (2011), an important role of the facilitator is to ask “What is facilitating and hindering participation for each of us?” (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011, p. 15) which reflects a commitment to the aforementioned “inclusion rule” as well as the importance of equal access to participation. As facilitators are called upon to ask questions that challenge assumptions, seek to clarify positions and dig deeper, “contradictions” and power dynamics are also brought to the surface. The open recognition of power within the dialogue process as well as having some sort of “action” as an end goal is also reminiscent of Habermas’ (1984) terms of discourse. Unlike Habermas (1984), however, Gurin et al. (2014) and Nagda and Maxwell (2011) put forth a framework for dialogue and facilitation that prioritizes understanding over agreement and complexity over consensus.

### **Critical-Dialogical Intergroup Framework**

Referencing Buber (1970), Gurin et al. (2013) suggest that the dialogical part of the critical-dialogical model emphasizes “how students learn with each other to co-create or constitute themselves and their relationships to communication” (p. 79). Dialogical processes thus focus on how participants engage with each other and “the importance of mutual respect, listening, and building relationships in dialogue” (p. 45). As put forth by Bohm (1996), this model suggests that in order for people to talk across difference, participants need to work to suspend their judgments, listen deeply, identify assumptions and engage in reflective inquiry (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 79). In the critical-dialogical framework, the goal of dialogue is neither agreement nor consensus based decision-making. Instead it aims

to create understanding through exploring meaning, identifying assumptions that inform perspectives, and fostering a willingness to reappraise one’s thinking in light of these exchanges (pp. 44-45).

In the dialogue process, suggest Gurin et al. (2013) students do not take the relationships between themselves and others for granted but instead actively participate in jointly constructing both the meaning and process of building relationships both across and within differences.

Gurin et al. (2013) warn, however, that an exclusive focus on dialogical learning can “blindly embrace the goal of harmonious intergroup relationships” (p. 45). The critical-dialogical framework thus moves beyond Buber (1970), Bohm (1996), Allport (1954) and Pettigrew’s (1998) focus on the formation of interpersonal relationships by integrating Freire’s (1970) conception of “critical consciousness”. As such, interactions are conceptualized in “broader and more complex” ways and viewed as “mechanisms for grasping how societal structures operate to create and maintain inequality” (p. 45). Adopting a critical-dialogical framework thus requires students to consider how their socialization and backgrounds situate them in particular structural hierarchies and how group-based power dynamics may operate in dialogue. Gurin et al.’s (2013) model also moves towards a more critical conception of traditional intergroup contact theory by not only providing the conditions for positive contact but also for the development of commitments and actions that address inequality and injustice. Therefore, this model not only differs from approaches to dialogue that focus on relationship building without an explicit recognition of difference but also from models that aim to raise consciousness and inspire action without addressing power relationships among participants (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011).

According to Gurin et al. (2013) the goal of the critical-dialogical intergroup framework is to impact intergroup relationships, understanding and collaboration while also having participants “go beyond recognizing ways in which their relationships are defined by societal power relations to ways in which they can redefine these relationships to produce more equality” (p. 78). The critical reflective and dialogical processes, outlined in the model, are essential to challenging and deconstructing local and global oppression so as to reconstruct a more powerful and equitable solutions for local and global issues.

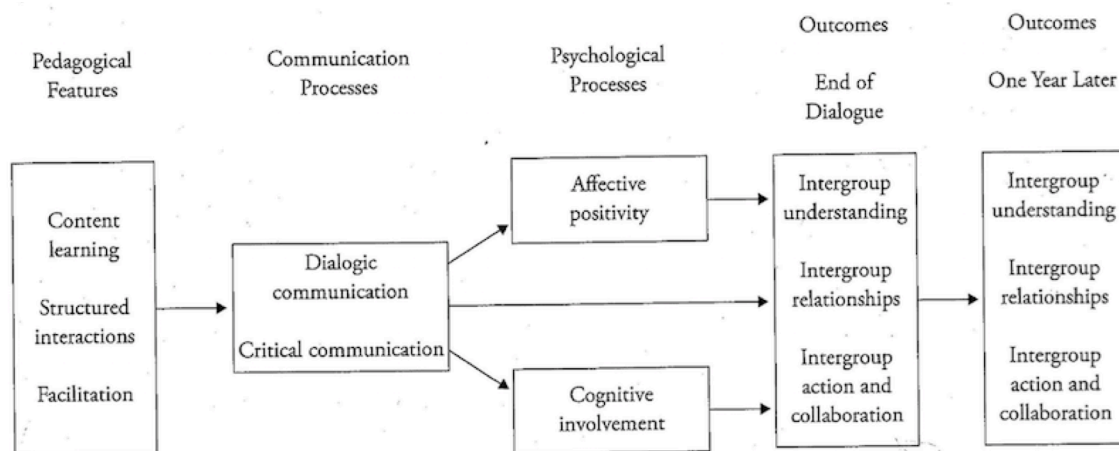


Figure 1. Critical-dialogical framework for intergroup dialogue (Gurin, et al., 2013, p. 76).

The particular role of the facilitator in this model will be integrated in the following using Nagda and Maxwell's (2011) opening chapter to the book *Facilitating intergroup dialogues: Bridging differences, catalyzing change* which outlines the expectations of a facilitator in a critical-dialogical learning environment. Beginning with a conceptualization of facilitation, the following theoretical framework will outline the critical-dialogical model by describing the communicative and psychological processes that this model implies. An outline of the pedagogical features will then serve to illuminate how these processes are supported.

### Critical-Dialogical Facilitation

Classroom debates and discussions often focus on individual differences and personal concerns at the expense of group-based dynamics, effectively separating private deliberations from public discourse (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011). The critical-dialogical model, on the other hand, generally uses a co-facilitation approach in which multiple facilitators are selected to represent some of the social groups present. Facilitators are called upon to support or challenge members of their own identity groups while also modelling effective cross-cultural communication with their co-facilitators. In a critical-dialogical model, facilitators rely on reading materials and cognitive organizers, which have been selected and designed to facilitate the development of critical capacities. Class content is designed to:

generate content for dialogue by engaging participants in structured exercises and experiential activities and then guiding them in connecting their individual in-exercise experiences to their lived experiences and to those of others in the dialogue. They also use group process and group dynamics as *in vivo* content for a dialogue about dialogue whereby students are asked for their own reflections about the dialogue process and the intergroup dynamics (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011, p. 9).

Thus, the essential role of facilitators is to connect the pedagogy to the dialogical and critical communicative processes, psychological processes and learning outcomes that comprise the following critical-dialogical framework (Gurin et al., 2013).

### **Dialogical Communication Processes**

The dialogical communication processes of this framework are grounded in the belief that students should learn from and co-create with each other. The dialogical process “appreciating difference”, refers to the need to listen and learn from others whose experiences and perspectives differ from their own. This process requires students to be open, patient, non-judgmental and curious about others’ ideas and experiences. In this context, dialogue should center on the clarification of what a student has said or to deepen an understanding of why a student thinks a certain way. From here, participants are also led to identify their own biases and assumptions so as to gain an “understanding of how one’s judgment led to the inferences that it did, and thus identifying the ways in which communication may have been impaired” (Gurin, et al., 2013, p.80).

The practice of listening and asking clarifying and probing questions therefore provides opportunities to revise perspectives. Examples of the types of questions that facilitators may use to encourage “appreciating difference” include:

What is something that each of us appreciates about what others have been sharing? Or  
 What is something new or different that each of us has learned from all of the  
 perspectives in our dialogue? Or What are some questions that you would like to ask each  
 other based on what you have heard? (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011, p. 14).

The dialogical communication process also involves, “engaging self”, which refers to the need for reciprocity as all participants are expected to open themselves up to others. Engaging the self involves personal sharing, voicing disagreements, addressing difficult issues and taking risks.



Through an open engagement of differences, participants are expected to find commonalities, points of connection, and build trust over time. Within the critical-dialogical framework, these communicative processes are particularly stressed during the first stages of the model when students interact with each other as individuals as well as members of groups that each have their own measure of advantage and disadvantage (Gurin, et al., 2013). Questions used by facilitators in this context include:

Please say more, Or can you help me with your thinking here? Or, Seems like that really affected you. Can you share something about how you felt and the impact of that experience on you? (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011, p. 14).

Finally, the communicative processes of “appreciating self” and “engaging difference” require facilitators to ongoingly acknowledge and validate participants’ contributions and bridge the processes together. Nagda and Thompson (2011) provide the following examples of the types questions a facilitator might ask to this end:

How is everyone affected by what has been said?

How does that resonate with something of your own experience?

As you all listen and take in what everyone has shared, what are the commonalities and differences you see emerging? (p. 14)

### **Critical Dialogical Processes**

The critical aspects of the model are explicitly inspired by Freire’s (1970) concept of “critical consciousness” and are meant to expose the ways in which power and privilege shape life experiences, impact communication and can inspire taking action to bring about greater social and economic justice. The first critical process, “critical reflection”, involves students actively reflecting on how their own power and privilege operate in society and in their social lives:

Critical reflection deepens both analysis and sharing among students in the dialogue. The emphasis of talking with each other about power and privilege also helps create newer understandings of experience. In addition to examining these socialization experiences and understanding how each of them is located in a system of inequality, students also begin to understand how their privileges are enacted in society and in relations to others (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 89).

Critical reflection thus involves examining past experiences in light of new understandings and a questioning of every day, taken for granted ways of thinking and being. It also entails trying to make sense of communication dynamics and identifying underlying misunderstandings at the heart of conflicts (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 88). In critical dialogical processes, Nagda and Maxwell (2011) suggest that facilitators should personalize and provide context when sharing experiences of power and privilege so that participants can start processing how social inequalities impact groups differently. Facilitators in this context may ask:

What feelings come up as we examine the systematic nature of inequality?

Some people are expressing ideas that seem to be very different from others.

What do you think accounts for the different experiences and perspectives?

What insights and new questions emerge as we listen to all the different perspectives in the group? (Nagda & Maxwell 2011, p. 15).

In recognition of the fact that scrutinizing systems of power and privilege as well as recognizing ones' own unconscious complicity can leave students feeling discouraged, overwhelmed or hopeless, the second critical communication process "alliance building" provides students with a space to channel their individual and collective energies into addressing inequalities. When "bridging dialogue to action" a facilitator may ask:

Based on what we learned about inequalities and the different spheres of influence in our lives, what actions can we take to bring about change?

As members of disadvantaged or privileged groups, what are our responsibilities to connect the dialogue to actions both within our own groups and across groups?

What are the personal risks and rewards of challenging inequalities? (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011, p. 16).

Alliance building thus involves not only working towards social change but also examining the issues that emerge within the collaborative process itself.

### **Psychological Processes**

In this theoretical framework communication processes are expected to foster both cognitive and affective psychological processes, and through these processes, certain outcomes. By fostering open communication, addressing stereotypes and power inequality, and focusing on alliance building, the critical-dialogic communication processes are designed to elicit positive

emotions (“affective positivity”) such as compassion and sympathy (Gurin, et al., 2013, p. 101). Facilitators are thus expected to affirm empathy and intervene when students “exhibit privileged or dominating behaviours” by challenging them to listen more attentively to other group members (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011, p. 15).

A second psychological process, “cognitive involvement”, refers to the requirement of complex and analytical thinking. The ability to consider issues from multiple perspectives, for example, is considered a pivotal pre-cursor to the ability to reflect on one’s own group identity and how personal beliefs are influenced by the experiences and perspectives encountered within one’s group. When interactions in the group reflect larger social processes facilitators may opt to dialogue about the dialogue by asking questions such as:

What is facilitating and hindering participation for each of us?

How are the dynamics of inequalities that are the content of learning being manifested and/or challenged here?

How can our dialogues be deepened in more socially just ways? (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011, p. 15).

Through complex and analytical thinking participants need not only gain an understanding of how their beliefs are constructed but also how the beliefs of others are constructed in much the same way (Gurin, et al., 2013).

### **Pedagogical Features**

Based on the premise that students need to reflect before acting and that contact should be in some way progressive, the critical-dialogical framework takes a staged approach to intergroup contact. As outlined in Figure 1, each stage requires content learning, structured interactions and facilitation and is designed to foster the dialogic and critical communicative processes and outcomes that have been outlined in this model. Readings in between dialogue sessions present a variety of key concepts and perspectives and can be largely theoretical and/or take a more narrative form and include case studies and poems (Gurin, et al., 2013). Structured interactions involve the “intentional creation of group structures and activities to involve students from different backgrounds in active learning” (Gurin, et al., 2013, p. 47) and include exercises related to identity and privilege that occurs within and between groups. Finally, due to the fact that “interactions between students of different backgrounds and life experiences can replicate the

dynamics of inequality” (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 51), a key pedagogical feature of the critical-dialogical framework is active dialogue facilitation which works to “ensure that dialogue promotes open, equal exchanges and deepened learning” (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 51).

The priority of the first stage entitled “Group Beginnings: Forming and Building Relationships” is to set the tone of the course as well as address any concerns that the students come in with. In general terms, intergroup dialogues should be framed as an opportunity to actively and collaboratively learn about difference and inequality. The goal of social justice should be explicit from the outset.

As stated by Gurin, Nagda and Zuñiga (2013), the second stage “Exploring Differences and Commonalities of Experience” moves the students towards beginning to address inequality. More specifically, the goals are:

1. to recognize and analyze through relationships and stories told in the dialogue, how race, ethnicity, gender, and other identities develop;
2. to explore how these identities reflect social group memberships and are located in the larger structural systems of power and privilege;
3. to discover how group-based identities are implicated in relationships that emerge within the dialogue itself (p. 63).

This stage asks students to talk about themselves in terms of their personal and social identities. The emphasis of this phase is on “the sources of intergroup inequalities and one’s and others’ attitudes toward diversity” (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 111). In this phase of the curriculum students begin interacting more to discuss the social and political issues that affect them. It requires openness to sharing one’s own group-based experiences and to learning about the group-based experiences of others. Bridging differences is marked by mutuality and “introspective reappraisal” by members of each group at the same time that they form affective ties with members of another group (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 110).

The goals of the third stage, labeled “Exploring and Dialoging about Hot Topics” is to have students apply “their dialogical skills and their analytic understanding of social identities, inequalities, and collective dynamics” (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 67) to social and political issues. This stage has students attempt to understand different perceptions as well as their underlying

assumptions. Exercises should “help students examine their perspectives on issues and listen to those of others with curiosity and openness to broaden their thinking” (p. 67).

Finally, the fourth stage in critical-dialogical pedagogy, “Action Planning and Collaboration” requires students to apply learning about dialogue, identity, media literacy and inequality to the pursuit of social justice and peace. As stated by Gurin et al., 2013:

This stage is crucial because it allows students to talk about ways in which they can have an impact on inequalities that they have been learning about, to realize that recognizing and understanding their own positions of advantage and disadvantage are not goals but necessary conditions for them to make the world more just (p. 69).

As such, the final outcome involves students committing themselves to social responsibility and action specifically geared to reducing inequalities.

### **Outcomes of the Critical-Dialogical Intergroup Model**

The objectives of the critical-dialogic framework are to increase intergroup relationships, understanding and action. With regards to relational objectives, the framework has been devised to encourage feelings of empathy and to increase students’ motivation to “bridge differences” through an openness to engage in reciprocal exchanges that include sharing one’s group based experiences. Intergroup understanding refers to the recognition that intergroup dialogue requires knowledge about inequalities and an understanding of why they persist. Bridging differences is marked by mutuality and “introspective reappraisal by members of each group at the same time that they form affective ties with members of another group (Gurin et al., p. 110). Bridging differences is meant to build respect and build trust, both of which are important processes towards reconciliation and forgiveness. Thus, this framework is well suited for supporting students from different parts of the world in sustained and relationship-building dialogue that addresses issues surrounding power while also working towards a common project.

### **Decolonizing Global Education Initiatives**

Although the critical-dialogical framework will provide a structure from which to examine different programs, it may do little to fundamentally challenge what Andreotti (2011) describes as a tendency towards rational deliberation and consensus building that is often pervasive in global education initiatives. As stated by Andreotti (2011):

The ethnocentric privileging of Western rationality (as a universal form of reasoning) and of dialectical thought (as a universal form of deliberative engagement) establish specific parameters of validity and recognition of what can be known and how it can be communicated (p. 2).

Thus, those who may not share deliberative ways of reasoning and disagree or feel alienated from its processes may effectively be silenced in an intergroup dialogue setting. Andreotti (2011) thus advocates for a dialogue space that moves learners outside of the “supremacy of the rational” so that they may unlearn their “epistemological arrogance”, “listen beyond their tendency to project and appropriate” and relate to others in ways that legitimize different ways of knowing (p. 6).

Although the critical-dialogical framework views knowledge as socially, culturally, and historically situated, Andreotti (2011) takes it a step further by adding that knowledge is constantly renegotiated in encounters with difference and every knowledge snapshot is at the same time legitimate (in its context of production), provisional and insufficient (Andreotti, 2011, p. 6).

From this epistemological position the dialogue process thus involves upholding the principles of “mutuality, reciprocity, and equality” in search of “ethical solidarities” which should facilitate a kind of contestatory dialogue where knowledge is perceived as situated, partial, and provisional and where dissensus serves as a safeguard against fundamentalisms, forcing participants to engage with the origins and limitations of each others and, specifically of their own systems of production of knowledge and sanctioned ignorance (Andreotti, 2011, p. 3).

Andreotti (2011) suggests that this conception of “ethical solidarities” far from promoting inertia can open people up to a contextual and ongoing co-construction of meaning, (Andreotti, 2011, p. 4).

Andreotti (2015) also calls upon educators and learners to be cognizant of their own complicity and dependency on unequal global relations. She warns that too often “our analyses of problems are already subordinated to our hopes for solutions, our desires for betterment, progress, knowledge, innocence, entitlement and futurity” (Andreotti, 2015, p. 226). People want to see themselves as “good” citizens which can significantly limit their openness to seeing

themselves otherwise. In order to challenge these perceptions Andreotti (2012) outlines a series of questions meant to help identify the reproduction of colonial patterns. As shown in Table 1, the acronym “HEADS UP” points to the need to look for evidence of the concepts of hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticization, salvationism, uncomplication and paternalism, which are often embedded in global education initiatives.

Table 1

*HEADS UP Checklist* (Andreotti, 2012, p. 2)

Concept	Questions
<b>Hegemony:</b> is the pattern of justifying superiority and supporting domination.	Does this initiative promote the idea that one group of people could design and implement the ultimate solution to inequalities? Does this initiative invite people to think about its own limitations?
<b>Ethnocentrism:</b> is the pattern of projecting one view as the only moral option.	Does this initiative imply that anyone who disagrees with what is proposed is immoral? Does this initiative acknowledge that there are other logical ways of looking at the same issue?
<b>Ahistoricism:</b> is the pattern of forgetting historical legacies and complicities.	Does this initiative introduce a problem in the present without reference to why it is like that and how “we” are connected to that? Does this initiative offer a complex historical analysis of the issue?
<b>Depoliticization:</b> is the pattern of disregarding power inequalities and ideological roots of analyses and proposals.	Does this initiative present the problem/solution as disconnected from power and ideology? Does this initiative acknowledge its own ideological location and offer an analysis of power relations?
<b>Salvationism:</b> is the pattern of framing help as the burden of the fittest.	Does this initiative present people “in need” as helpless victims of local violence or misfortunes and helpers or adopters as the chosen “global” people capable of leading

	humanity toward its destiny of order, progress, and harmony? Does this initiative acknowledge that the desire to be better than/superior to others and the imposition of aspirations for singular ideas of progress and development have historically been part of the problem?
<b>Uncomplication:</b> is the pattern of offering solutions that do not require systemic change.	Does this initiative offer simplistic analyses and answers that do not invite people to engage with complexity or think more deeply? Does this initiative offer a complex analysis of the problem acknowledging the possible adverse effects of proposed solutions?
<b>Paternalism:</b> is the pattern of seeking affirmation of superiority through the provision of help.	Does this initiative infantilize people in need and present them as people who lack education, resources, and civilization, and who would and should be very grateful for your help? Does this initiative portray people in need as people who are entitled to disagree with their saviours and to legitimately want to implement different solutions to what their helpers have in mind?

### Conclusion

As stated, the critical-dialogical model has been demonstrated to impact students' capacities for critical self-reflection, perspective taking and commitments to address inequality. Given the comprehensiveness of this model and guidelines for facilitation, it is an ideal model from which to analyze programs that facilitate dialogue, particular in learning environments that explicitly aim to engage students who are in conflict or come from different parts of the world. The analysis and recommendations will be deepened through the use of Andreotti's (2011; 2012; 2015) concepts and questions that have been designed to unpack colonial patterns in global education initiatives.



## Chapter 4: Method

### Introduction

As outlined in the opening chapter and literature review, despite the promise of educational online platforms to connect students from around the world for civic and peace-building purposes, there is little research on how digital technologies can be used to facilitate dialogue and address global inequities. In order to address this gap in the literature, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How are online learning environments that aim to develop peace-building, intercultural and/or civic competence and engagement conceptualized/designed to support intergroup dialogue?
2. How are group-based differences, power differentials and inequalities understood and addressed in portal design, curriculum and facilitation?

Data sources were identified through the literature review, web-searches and by consulting experts in the field. Participants were approached individually through e-mail and invited to participate in the research through an interview. Seven people representing platforms from around the world responded positively and interviews were supplemented by artifacts, information from the sites as well as any available news and journal articles, policy and curriculum documents. As articulated in the theoretical framework, the critical-dialogical model and critical/postcolonial critique of global citizenship education was applied to help identify underlying assumptions and make recommendations for strategies to deepen online dialogue and facilitate transformation. As such, the goal of this research corresponds to Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) position that the role of qualitative research should be to draw out the "hopes, needs, goals and promises of a free democratic society" and to become the source of "critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom and community" (p. 3).

### Methodology

The following section explains the choice of a collective case study methodology by providing connections to the epistemological assumptions of a critical paradigm and the research questions.

## The Critical Lens

The search for an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, grounded in discussions of power and inequality, sets this research squarely in a qualitative and critical paradigm. While the first question is meant to help tease out underlying assumptions about dialogue, the second addresses the foundational questions of a critical perspective, namely “Who/what is helped/privileged/legitimated? Who/what is harmed/oppresed//disqualified?” (Canella & Lincoln, 2012, p. 105). These questions point to the fundamental epistemological assumptions that are embedded in this research and, according to Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg (2011), are shared by critical researchers across disciplines, including:

- All thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted;
- Facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription;
- The relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption;
- Language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness);
- Certain groups in any society and particular societies are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable;
- Oppression has many faces, and focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g., class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them; and finally
- Mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression (p. 15).

Contemporary critical research is thus formed by and works to discover “new theoretical insights, perpetually searching for new and interconnected ways of understanding power and oppression” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 306).

## Multiple Case Studies

Consistent with a critical approach, the explicit focus of this research is on issues of “power, empowerment, inequality, inequity, dominance, oppression, hegemony, and victimization” (Creswell, 2011, p. 467). Case study methodology can support the goal of empowerment, suggest Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) because

Case studies are ‘a step to action’. They begin in a world of action and contribute to it. Their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use (p. 256).

Further, a case study methodology is determined to be appropriate when research questions are descriptive (how is dialogue conceptualized?) and explanatory (how is inequality addressed?). In particular, case study research starts from “the desire to derive a (n) (up-) close or otherwise in-depth understanding of a single or small number of “cases” set in their “real-world contexts” (Yin, 2012, p. 5). Further, in accordance with Yin’s (2003) criteria for the use of case studies in research, this methodology is appropriate when the researcher cannot or does not choose to manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study and believes that the contextual conditions are relevant to the phenomenon under study. These criteria are met by the fact that this research is meant to describe a phenomenon that is very dependent on its context. For example, a program connecting Indigenous students from northern Canadian communities to non-Indigenous students will experience power, presumably, in a different way than a program connecting Jewish and Muslim students in Israel. The importance of context also explains the need to consider multiple case studies in this research.

According to Stake (2005), a “multiple” or “collective” case study approach is appropriate when

Individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest some common characteristic. They may be similar or dissimilar, with redundancy and variety, each important. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding (Stake, 2005, p. 446).

Given the paucity of research in this area, it is impossible to determine whether approaches to online facilitation are particularly different or similar across cases. These case studies are thus descriptive and detailed but have a narrow focus that centers on the research questions.

## **Multiple Data Sources**

An in-depth focus on a particular context should be derived from multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2012). For this research, case studies include interviews with people responsible for or with an understanding of each program design. These interviews are supplemented by program, policy and curriculum information that is publicly available on the platforms, journal and news articles as well as artifacts provided by the participants. As a critical researcher my intention throughout the research process was that the interviewees had a voice, with opportunities to reflect and refine their positions. In a critical research setting, “control can be shared by the researcher and the subject, and ultimately the subject can have a say in how the research is conducted (Bernal, 2002)” (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 113). Open-ended interview questions helped reveal how “participants construct reality and think about situations not just to provide the answers to researchers’ specific questions and own implicit construction of reality” (Yin, 2012, p.12).

## **Data Collection**

In accordance with a case study methodology, data was collected from multiple sources. Although the interview was the primary source of data, journal and news articles, curriculum and program documents available on the platform and program artifacts provided by the interviewees were all integrated into individual case studies. All data collection was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the *Concordia University Department of Education Ethics Committee*.

## **Case Selection**

Multiple case studies were selected for this research. Given the specificity of the research questions and the different contexts available, multiple case studies provide a portrait of what is happening in the field overall. As was determined in the literature review, the “cases” under study are globally networked learning environments (GNLEs) that claim to facilitate intercultural or intergroup dialogue for civic or peace-building purposes. One caveat was that these platforms needed to go beyond merely connecting one classroom to another and provide additional support to teachers whether through training, curriculum, guidelines or one-to-one support. Thus, although there are many Learning Management Systems (LMS) that can connect classrooms on a global level, the role and goal of dialogue depends on the individual teachers involved. These

platforms do not have a particular approach and were therefore excluded from this research. Examples of LMSs that could be used for intercultural dialogue but are not expressly conceived of or supported to meet this goal include: ActivityCircle, Blackboard, Celly, Classroom 2.0, Collaborize, Classroom, Edmodo, Edublogs, E-Tandem, Google Classroom, Kid Blog, Moodle, Open Ed, Pathbrite, Peerceptiv, Schoology, Twiducate, Voice Thread, Wikispaces Education, WizIQ and WriteAbout.

The following GNLEs designed specifically to facilitate and support intercultural and intergroup online dialogue were identified through the literature review: Dissolving Boundaries, the TEC Centre, Soliya and TakingITGlobal. The fortuitous publication of *Online Learning and Community Cohesion: Linking Schools* by Austin and Hunter (2013), brought another nine platforms to my attention. Experts in the field told me about the Peres Center for Peace, Democracy Lab, WorldVuze and Face to Faith. Finally, I was alerted to the Connected North Program through the TakingITGlobal newsletter.

I also conducted multiple internet searches and tried a variety of combinations including: “educational technology”, “platform”, “learning management system”, “globally networked learning environment” and “intercultural dialogue”, “interfaith dialogue”, “global dialogue”, “international dialogue”, “intergroup dialogue” and “virtual exchange” along with “peace education”, “civic education” and “global citizenship”. These searches did not yield any additional data sources and rather confirmed the list of eighteen that was established by the literature review, book and experts in the field (Appendix A: Outreach List).

The sample selected for this study was thus *purposeful*, thereby intentionally meant to help provide an understanding of a central phenomenon, in this case: facilitated online dialogue. Given that there are a limited number of these online programs, the data sources that were approached may be considered “typical” and representative of what is currently available (Creswell, 2011). The eighteen sites that were identified were invited by e-mail to participate in the research (Appendix B: Recruitment Letter).

Seven platform representatives responded positively and agreed to be interviewed. These participants and their platforms cover a range of geographical areas and levels of education. Connected North links high school classrooms in Canada’s northern communities, as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. Dissolving Boundaries connects elementary school students in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Global SchoolNet works to connect

individual teachers worldwide and has a project working with high school classes in the United States and Russia. Soliya's Connect Program facilitates video-based dialogues between Muslim-majority and Western students in higher education. TakingITGlobals's Culture Connect Program provides a framework for eighteen to thirty-year-olds to engage in intercultural dialogue, largely through images. The Technology, Education and Cultural Diversity Centre works with college students and facilitates interfaith dialogue in Israel. Lastly, WorldVuze was built to allow students in elementary and high schools in North America and Africa to ask each other questions.

## **Interviews**

Once the platform representatives had volunteered to participate, a follow-up e-mail was sent to each participant confirming their proposed date and time for the interview and including the consent form (Appendix C: Consent Form) and a copy of the interview questions (Appendix D: Interview Questions). The objective of the semi-structured interviews was to ensure that all research questions had been addressed while also allowing for an open exchange of ideas around the affordances and challenges of these particular learning environments. The interview questions were developed by the researcher in accordance with the questions that emerged from the literature review and theoretical framework. Further, this type of interview allowed me to ensure that information that was unclear or unavailable in the supporting documentation could also be discussed or clarified as needed. Most importantly, by not holding on too tightly to the structure, I attempted to allow for digression and reflection, leaving room for unanticipated information and a spontaneous exchange of ideas. Individual interviews were conducted through Skype. Participants either provided written consent or verbal consent at the beginning of the interview. As outlined on the consent form, the interviews were recorded. The interviews lasted anywhere between thirty-five and eighty minutes.

In accordance with the view expressed by Freire (1970), participants were not viewed as objects so much as partners in the research process who were invited to investigate, examine and reflect on their own practice. The style of the interview thus corresponded to the empathetic and collegial process described by Fontana and Frey (2005). In recognition of the fact that the myth of the "neutral" or objective interviewer has been dispelled, and consistent with a critical approach, the process they outline suggests that interviews are collaborative efforts that should

lead to a “mutually created story” (p. 696) in which the researcher and participant can openly discuss how to potentially extend the possibilities of transformation.

### **Documentation**

In preparation for the interviews, the platforms were scrutinized for any relevant information. In some cases, the sites themselves provided little more than a description of the program. In other cases, the structure of the program, dialogue framework and associated activities were publicly available. In addition, a search for news and journal articles related to the individual sites was conducted.

### **Artifacts**

In many cases, interviewees supplied artifacts after the interviews. Artifacts are defined as “things that societies and cultures make for their own use” and can provide “Insights into how people lived, what they valued and believed, their ideas and assumptions, and their knowledge and opinions” (Norum, 2008, p. 25). In this case, artifacts came in the form of documents such as unpublished PowerPoint presentations, online safety guidelines, guiding principles, dialogue frameworks and curriculum. These documents were incorporated into the case studies in part or in their entirety with permission from the interviewee. A list of the sites and the supporting documentation and artifacts that were available for each site are listed in Appendix E (Data Sources).

### **Data Analysis**

A series of steps were taken to structure, verify and bring together the data in a way that answered the research questions as well as helped identify strategies that align with a critical and decolonizing approach to dialogue. The following section outlines how the results were written up and verified, the conceptual categories determined through open-coding as well as the development of the analytical framework which was devised based on the common themes, the literature review and theoretical framework.

### **Presentation of Results**

Before reviewing the data as a whole, interviews were transcribed in their entirety using a confidential audio to text transcription service called Rev.com. The individual interview transcripts are not available in the appendices for several reasons. The first is that interviewees

were assured that they would be able to review and redact any information that they wanted to develop or restate or was later determined to be confidential. This was meant to facilitate a free-flow exchange between interviewer and interviewee. For instance, upon reviewing her case study, one interviewee felt that that she had provided too much detail about a specific group that she was working with and that what was said could be misinterpreted. There were several cases where certain examples were either removed or made more general. In addition, the interview questions were open-ended and given the “collegial” approach that was taken, often covered topics outside of the purview of the research questions. Given that there were seven case studies transcribed into over one hundred pages, the structuring of the case studies according to the research questions allowed for a focused comparison and analysis that related directly to the research questions.

In the following chapter, the case studies are thus presented individually and present data from the interviews, artifacts provided by interviewees as well as the publicly available documents. In line with the research questions the data is organized under the headings: Context and Description, Dialogue, Role of Teacher/Facilitator, Affordances, Challenges and Power. The subheadings vary according to the data. As much as possible, the participants’ words were used to explain concepts. Before considering the case studies as a whole, the individual case studies were sent to the interviewees to check for accuracy from their perspective. All of the interviewees provided feedback and any and all changes were implemented. The following results chapter presents the member-checked case studies individually in alphabetical order.

### **Coding for Question 1**

For the purposes of analysis, the case studies were merged into one document and organized according to the shared headings. A first reading helped form a general impression of the larger picture. According to Simon (2011), during preliminary readings the goal is to “identify and tentatively name the conceptual categories into which the phenomena observed can be grouped” (p. 254). After a second reading, certain common themes were identified and the data was reorganized into five sections according to the questions and subheadings outlined in Table 2.



Table 2

*Primary Coding Categories*

<p>1) Why use technology to facilitate intercultural/intergroup dialogue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross cultural understanding is considered an essential skills for work, citizenship and peace-building</li> <li>• Allows contact that would not otherwise be possible</li> <li>• Affordable/More accessible than travel</li> <li>• Contact can be maintained in the long term</li> <li>• Develops technological competencies of teachers and students</li> </ul>
<p>2) What are the goals of dialogue and how does it happen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on relationship-building, trust and friendship through project-based learning</li> <li>• Equal status between groups</li> <li>• Student ownership</li> <li>• Teacher/facilitator plays an active role</li> </ul>
<p>3) What are the issues surrounding power and how are they dealt with?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dominance of the English language</li> <li>• Traditional power imbalance between teacher and student</li> <li>• Different perspectives/ways of learning</li> <li>• Acknowledging history/context</li> <li>• Unequal access to technology</li> <li>• Misinterpretation/time lapse/lack of visual cues</li> </ul>
<p>4) Criteria for Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with existing curriculum</li> <li>• Third party support</li> <li>• Acceptable use policies</li> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Privacy controls</li> </ul>
<p>5) What's next? New ways to engage in dialogue through technology</p>

These preliminary themes address the first more descriptive research question (How are online learning environments that aim to develop peace-building, intercultural and/or civic competence

and engagement conceptualized/designed to support intergroup dialogue?) in such a way as to be able to consider the different approaches comparatively.

### **Coding for Question 2**

The second stage of analysis was devoted to addressing the second research question: How are group-based differences, power differentials and inequalities understood and addressed in portal design, curriculum and facilitation? A next reading of the data was thus completed in accordance to the theoretical framework. As discussed, the critical-dialogical model was selected because it has been demonstrated to impact students' capacities for critical self-reflection, perspective taking and commitments to address inequality. Consequently, the framework addresses some of the model's key processes including: values listening, encourages personal sharing, involves critical reflection, requires complex and analytical thinking, explores differences and commonalities, addresses controversial issues, has an action component and engages metacognition. In addition, Andreotti's (2012) aforementioned "HEADS UP Checklist" was incorporated into the analytical framework (see Table 3) because of its goal "to expose the potential complicity in the sets of unexamined assumptions that guide even the best of intentions around [Global Citizenship Education] GCE" (Andreotti & Pashby, 2013, p. 433).

Table 3

#### *Analytical Framework*

<b>Relies on skilled facilitation.</b> Are trained facilitators part of the dialogue process?
<b>Values listening.</b> Does the initiative encourage "appreciating difference" and the need to listen and learn from others whose experiences and perspectives differ from their own.
<b>Encourages personal sharing.</b> Are students encouraged to engage in personal sharing, voicing disagreements, addressing difficult issues and taking risks?
<b>Involves critical reflection and self-reflexivity.</b> Are students actively reflecting on how their own power and privilege operate in society and in their social lives? Does the dialogue process consider "self-imposed barriers" of participants that may not consider themselves to be equal in the first place? Are students called upon to engage with the social, cultural and historical conditioning of knowledge/power production and the unconscious impact of traumas, fears, desires and attachments effect on their decisions/positions?

<p><b>Requires complex and analytical thinking.</b> Does the initiative encourage the consideration of issues from multiple perspectives?</p>
<p><b>Explores differences and commonalities.</b> Are students asked to talk about themselves in terms of their personal and social identities? Does the group explore “the sources of intergroup inequalities and one’s and other’s attitudes toward diversity” (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 111)?</p>
<p><b>Addresses controversial issues.</b> Are students asked to apply “their dialogical skills and their analytic understanding of social identities, inequalities, and collective dynamics” (Gurin et al., p. 67) to social and political issues.</p>
<p><b>Has an action/transformation component.</b> Does the initiative include action planning and collaboration that requires that students apply learning about dialogue, identity, media literacy and inequality to the pursuit of social justice and peace? Does the dialogue process call upon participants to transcend the ideological constraints within which they have been stuck in order to identify and address the causes of their oppression and work towards their liberation?</p>
<p><b>Engages metacognition.</b> Does the initiative require students to consider how their socialization and backgrounds situate them in particular structural hierarchies and how group-based power dynamics may operate in dialogue?</p>
<p><b>Challenges hegemony:</b> Does this initiative promote the idea that one group of people could design and implement the ultimate solution to inequalities? Does this initiative invite people to think about its own limitations?</p>
<p><b>Challenges ethnocentrism:</b> Does this initiative imply that anyone who disagrees with what is proposed is immoral? Does this initiative acknowledge that there are other logical ways of looking at the same issue?</p>
<p><b>Challenges ahistoricism:</b> Does this initiative introduce a problem in the present without reference to why it is like that and how “we” are connected to that? Does this initiative offer a complex historical analysis of the issue?</p>
<p><b>Challenges depoliticization:</b> Does this initiative present the problem/solution as disconnected from power and ideology? Does this initiative acknowledge its own ideological location and offer an analysis of power relations?</p>

**Challenges salvationism:** Does this initiative present people “in need” as helpless victims of local violence or misfortunes and helpers or adopters as the chosen “global” people capable of leading humanity toward its destiny of order, progress, and harmony? Does this initiative acknowledge that the desire to be better than/superior to others and the imposition of aspirations for singular ideas of progress and development have historically been part of the problem?

**Challenges uncomplication:** Does this initiative offer simplistic analyses and answers that do not invite people to engage with complexity or think more deeply? Does this initiative offer a complex analysis of the problem acknowledging the possible adverse effects of proposed solutions?

**Challenges paternalism:** Does this initiative infantilize people in need and present them as people who lack education, resources, and civilization, and who would and should be very grateful for your help? Does this initiative portray people in need as people who are entitled to disagree with their saviours and to legitimately want to implement different solutions to what their helpers have in mind?

## Synthesis

As the data was organized according to the preliminary categories established in the open-coding as well as the analytical framework, it became evident that certain categories could be collapsed. For example, the ways in which the sites conceptualized dialogue directly addressed concerns around ethnocentrism. Given that many of the platforms and curriculum were designed to address the particular needs of specific communities, “acknowledging history/context” was combined with Andreotti’s (2012) concept of “ahistoricism”. Further, based on findings from the literature review, “acknowledging history/context” was expanded to include the ways in which culture is reflected in web design and pedagogy. In addition, “hegemony” was expanded to refer specifically to “epistemological hegemony” (“different perspectives/ways of learning”), “linguistic hegemony” (“dominance of the English language”) and “technological hegemony” (“unequal access to technology”).

In the end, the discussion chapter is presented in accordance with both the major themes that arose in relation to the more descriptive data, including the rationale for facilitating

intercultural/intergroup dialogue online and the criteria for successful integration, as well as in accordance with critical and decolonizing conceptualizations of dialogue. Finally, consistent with a critical approach to research, most of the discussion is framed as a set of recommendations with the aim of providing concrete guidance on how to use these tools and guide future research in this area. By looking at how the data conformed to critical pedagogical standards my intention was to highlight practices that can challenge, deepen and transform students' thinking.

### **Trustworthiness and Reflexivity**

The interview questions were piloted with three college teachers in order to check for clarity. In addition, trustworthiness was sought through triangulation and member-checking. Trustworthiness and reflexivity are also addressed in accordance with a critical approach to the research process.

#### **Trustworthiness**

In case study methodology using multiple sources of data, referred to as “triangulation”, is considered an important part of making findings “robust” (Yin, 2012, p. 13). In the case of this research, interviews, news and journal articles, artifacts as well as documents available from the platforms were all used to develop the individual case studies. According to Carlson (2010) “trustworthiness” is further established by the fact that the case studies represent different groups from different geographical locations, that the interviews occurred at different times and were supported by different artifacts and documentation (Carlson, 2010, p. 1104).

Trustworthiness was also attained through member-checking which involved, as mentioned, providing participants with preliminary representations of the data in the form of a case study. The process involved giving participants copies of the case studies, which relied heavily on their interviews, and asking them to verify the overall case study for accuracy. Participants had the opportunity to change, develop, clarify or remove any part of the document. Member-checking, as is typically the case, was limited to the results section and not to the discussion (Carlson, 2010).

#### **Reflexivity**

According to Smith and Hodkinson (2005), given that researchers cannot step “outside their own social and historical standpoints” there is no possibility of “theory-free observation and

knowledge and judgments about what is legitimate versus illegitimate” (p. 915). Thus the researcher must make their own framework and assumptions clear within their research.

Creswell (2004) further suggests that critical researchers must

position themselves in the text to be reflexive and self-aware of their role, and to be up front in the written report. This means identifying biases and values; acknowledging views; and distinguishing among textual representations by the author, the participants, and the reader (p. 467).

The discussion chapter (6) is thus interspersed with reflections on my own biases and assumptions while also focusing on interpreting and presenting the results in a way that is aligned with the goals of critical research and makes concrete recommendations on creating empowering online dialogue spaces.

### **Conclusion**

In alignment with the exploratory and explanatory research questions the findings of this research will be presented in the form of multiple case studies. The following chapter will present all seven case studies individually in alphabetical order. The content of the case studies are presented in more or less the same order and correspond to the research questions, thus focusing on issues surrounding dialogue, facilitation and power.

## Chapter 5: Results

### Introduction

As outlined in the method chapter, eighteen sites were contacted with the objective of providing an understanding of a central phenomenon; facilitated online intergroup dialogue. Seven representatives of these sites agreed to be interviewed. Interview transcripts were complemented by publicly available materials, journal and news articles as well as artifacts provided by the interviewees (see Appendix E: Data Sources). These data sources were coded according to the research questions. Thus, the following case studies are presented alphabetically and describe how each program conceptualizes dialogue, addresses power issues, and views the advantages and challenges of using technology to facilitate intergroup or intercultural dialogue. The programs cover a range of geographical areas and levels of education and are presented in alphabetical order. The Connected North Program links elementary, middle and high school classrooms in Canada's northern communities, as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous classes. Dissolving Boundaries connects elementary and high school students in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Global SchoolNet connects individual teachers worldwide and has a project working with high school classes in the United States and Russia. Soliya's Connect Program facilitates video-based dialogues between Muslim-majority and western students in higher education. TakingITGlobals's Culture Connect Program provides a framework for eighteen to thirty-year-olds to engage in intercultural dialogue, largely through images. The Technology, Education and Cultural Diversity Centre works with college students and facilitates interfaith dialogue in Israel. Lastly, WorldVuze was built to allow students in elementary and high schools in North America and Africa to ask each other questions. Since the amount of supporting documentation varies significantly depending on the program, so in turn does the length and depth of each case study. Together, these cases provide a rich portrait of the different ways that dialogue and facilitation are being conceptualized in programs that aim to develop cross-cultural understanding.

## 1. Case Study: Connected North Program

### Description and Context

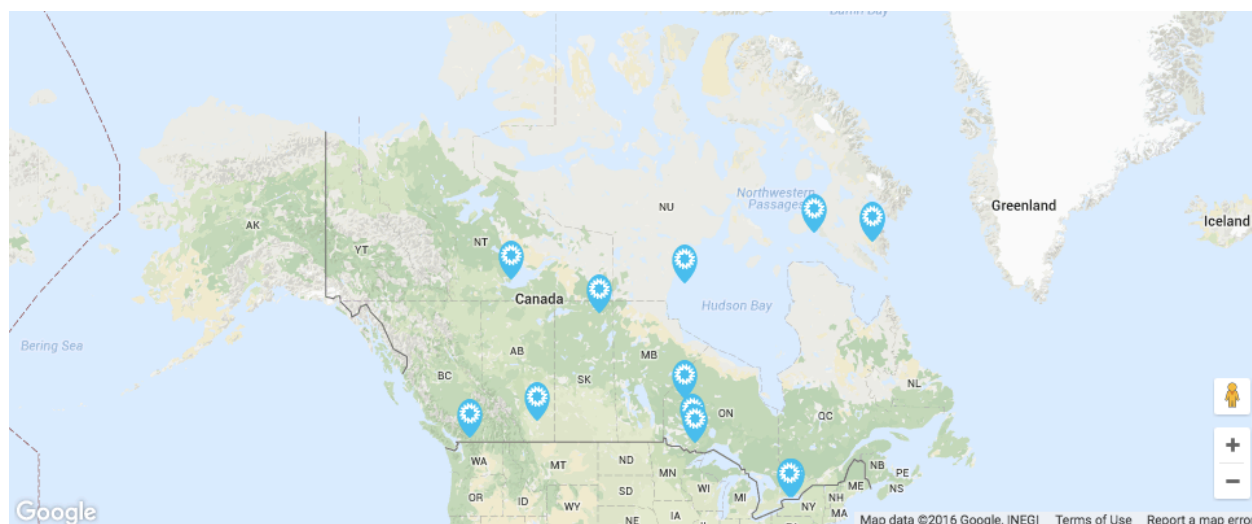
Winner of the Information Technology Association of Canada's 2015 Ingenious Innovation Award for a small to medium-sized public organization, the Connected North Program (CNP) started in Aqsarniit Middle School in 2001. John Fanjoy, the vice-principal of the school, and Cisco Canada, a communications and internet solutions company, piloted the CNP with the goal of using technology to engage learners and address academic underperformance in northern communities (Information Technology Association of Canada, 2016). In the first incarnation of the program, Cisco provided high-definition two-way video to deliver interactive science content that allowed elementary, middle and high school students to witness lab experiments, go on virtual trips to science facilities and engage with experts in the field (Information Technology Association of Canada, 2016). Fanjoy (2016) describes how "students were exposed to lessons and activities previously unimaginable for an isolated northern community" (Information Technology Association of Canada, 2016, para. 5). In addition, by being connected to and collaborating with other schools, students had opportunities to share their cultures and compare life in, for example, Iqaluit and Toronto. Fanjoy (2016) attributes improvements in school attendance, at least in part, to the integration of the CNP (Information Technology Association of Canada, 2016).

Since 2015, TakingITGlobal (TIG), a non-profit organization with over fifteen years of experience connecting young people through technology, has taken the "educational lead" on the program. The program coordinator, Lindsay DuPré, is employed by TIG and has been working with the participating schools from the CNP to "develop customized, engaging virtual content that can bring content to life in ways never before possible" ("Connected North: Transforming lives through technology", 2015). According to the website:

Connected North fosters student engagement and enhanced education outcomes in Canada's remote communities through immersive and interactive virtual learning. The program leverages the latest Cisco collaboration technology to bring unique experiences, experts and opportunities for real-world problem solving into classrooms, while building educator capacity and developing cross-cultural understanding through two-way connections between remote and partner schools (Connected North, n.d.-b).



The Connected North Program uses technology to enhance learning in five ways. The first is through interactive video sessions that may take the shape of a field trip or hosting a talk from an expert in a classroom session. Virtual field trips have included galleries, museums and science labs. The CNP also connects students to mentors and career fairs in order to explore future prospects including post-secondary school options and employment possibilities. Teachers are also connected with each other as well as professional development experts and mentors. Connecting to the “Cisco Networking Academy” also provides support in building technological skills. Finally, the “Cultural Exchange” program connects students from across the CNP network through project-based learning (Connected North, n.d.-a). There are currently nine schools actively involved in the cultural exchanges (see Figure 1).



*Figure 2.* Schools participating in the Connected North Program (Connected North, n.d.-c).

## Dialogue

A member of the Métis Nation of Ontario with a background in social work and years of experience working with First Nation, Métis and Inuit youth across Canada, L. DuPré sees the role of dialogue within the CNP program as a pathway to reconciliation. More specifically, dialogue is meant to

foster cultural exchange in a meaningful way, that engages people and builds empathy ... if meaningful relationships and change are going to happen, engagement has to be on that deeper level (L. Dupré, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

First and foremost, suggests L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), dialogue needs to be

all about trust building, and especially within our [Indigenous] communities, you have to build that trust. We say in the community all the time, “We're process oriented people. Everything is about relationship”.

Consistent with the overall approach of TakingITGlobal, the CNP works to facilitate trust-building and cross-cultural dialogue between schools through project-based learning. The importance of taking this approach with northern students in particular, suggests L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), is that it helps overcome issues around self-confidence and shyness by focusing participants’ attention on a task. As explained by L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), project-based learning

creates reasons for talking to each other. If you put two groups of kids together and just say “Okay. Go.” they might just talk about the weather and stay very surface level. Especially for these northern students, who can be particularly shy, project-based learning can help orient discussions and develop their confidence.

Another important part of TakingITGlobal’s approach, suggests L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), is an emphasis on bringing youth together and creating networks so that dialogue is sustainable above and beyond their class work.

One of the big challenges in northern communities, explains L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), is that many youth and community members experience ongoing intergenerational trauma that is intensified by not always knowing where the issues and trauma have stemmed from. Although we hear about the need to teach non-Indigenous students about the history of colonization,

people in our own communities need, through their healing process, to also experience the truth part of truth and reconciliation. It can be challenging, but I think there can be no one answer, in terms of how to create the spaces, because it really depends on who it is in that space (L. Dupré, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

Thus, conceptualizations and goals of dialogue will be different based on whether the group is entirely Indigenous or a mixed classroom of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The latter can be particularly challenging given a tendency to tokenize Indigenous youth and treat them as

“cultural experts”. L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that instead of taking one approach or applying one conceptualization of dialogue the CNP develops its programs on a case-by-case basis. Although the sessions might be similar in theme, strategies for facilitating reciprocal and empowering dialogues necessarily depend on the context.

An important strategy for developing these exchanges, suggests L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), is for youth to have a voice in the programming, thus providing a sense of “agency and ownership” over the project. A teacher from Mine Centre, Ontario told L. DuPré “I want my students to be the ones driving how this program is used” and this has become an important part of the approach (L. Dupré, personal communication, February 12, 2016). Rather than focusing exclusively on what the teachers want to do, L. DuPré has started conducting brainstorming sessions with participating students. Getting these students engaged, suggests L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), can be challenging and the key is to start with their interests and build from there. What emerged in Mine Centre, for example, was a shared interest in computers and video games. From there they decided to participate in a project on reconciliation through the game “Minecraft.” The project is described by Wab Kinew (2015, November 13) on his Facebook page as follows:

Reconciliation is in your hands. You will build the future of this country... So go ahead and 'craft' it!

How it works: A First Nations school partners with a mainstream school.

Have students dialog with one another, learn about one another, research local Indigenous culture and history.

Together come up with an answer to the question "what does reconciliation look like to us?" ... And then build the answer in Minecraft

Possible things to build:

1. What would a national monument to Indian residential school survivors look like?
2. Build a round house, long house or traditional building together in 3D
3. Build a future Canadian city where Indigenous culture and peoples are celebrated
4. Your own vision

Post a picture using the hashtag #craftreconciliation

On Instagram or Twitter and submit by June 1, 2016

Please have a parent or teacher submit on your behalf

L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) states that she would not have predicted that Minecraft could be used as a form of reconciliation, but to the youth it feels like a very appropriate and normal way for them to engage in dialogue.

In another project, students from Fort Providence in the Northwest Territories and a school in Calgary, Alberta have been using the online platform to collaborate on math exercises. They decided to turn this project into an opportunity to not only learn math but also to learn about culture by sharing recipes. This collaboration will culminate in a potluck in which the students will make and taste each other's recipes and eat together via the telepresence technology. Although these types of collaborations may not directly address the great divides in resources between north and south or the legacy of injustice suffered by many Indigenous communities, L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that sometimes it is important for youth to find some common ground or interest and just have fun together. As stated by L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016):

Of course, those deeper conversations are going to come out, but if you try too hard to force them, it's not going to happen ... you need to let the youth take the lead on it.

Again, if you try to force them like, "Okay. Talk about reconciliation right now," it'll be like, "What?!"

When students learn together and collaborate on projects they start sharing and reflecting on their own life experiences at a pace that they are comfortable with. Once they have started building trust and forming connections with each other, the expectation is that students will be more open and responsive to addressing issues such as reconciliation (L. DuPré, personal communication, March 28, 2016).

### **Facilitation**

L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that having an online space where people can exchange ideas is "just the tip of the iceberg" and that an important question for her is: "How do you do group facilitation in an online space, and create an environment where dialogue can occur?" Although she wants youth to take the lead in these discussions, she feels that there is an important role for her and other facilitators to play in the

moderation of discussion boards. She describes her role as working to bring separate conversations together, drawing connections between different ideas, and ensuring that the northern students have a voice:

what we're trying to do is to not just engage youth in dialogue, but to create spaces where Indigenous youth have a meaningful role, again, not a tokenistic role. There's so much power in that. It's just so incredibly important for them to have these spaces where their voices can be heard ... they're starting to realize that their voices matter. That's what Connected North is all about (L. Dupré, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

An inclusive online environment also relies on a facilitator's ability to address power dynamics which involves, suggests L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), an understanding of the fact that it is impossible to guarantee a "safe space" that is free of racism, sexism or homophobia:

Depending on people's social location and areas of power and privilege what constitutes a "safe" space may look very different and just enforcing this "safe space" label may actually reinforce oppressive power dynamics.

The facilitator's role is to engage students in a productive and respectful dialogue, creating opportunities to deepen thinking. Although issues around safe spaces and power and privilege may not be outwardly discussed throughout most Connected North sessions, suggests L. DuPré (personal communication, March 28, 2016) an understanding of these concepts has been crucial to structuring and facilitating the program in a way that respects and empowers Indigenous youth.

### **Affordances and Challenges**

Although L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) acknowledges that the time lapse of discussion boards as well as missing verbal cues can limit some aspects of dialogue she also suggests that having the have time to process information, reflect, and formulate ideas can have a positive effect. For the CNP in particular, the primary benefit of a virtual space is that it connects students to people and spaces that they would likely never have access to otherwise. For example, a north-to-north cultural exchange connected a school in Iqaluit to a school in Arviat. Together the schools took a virtual tour of a museum of Inuit Art in Toronto. The goal of this exchange was to counter many of the negative portrayals of northern communities and to

help students deepen their pride for their culture. Students from each school recognized artwork and artists from their communities. Given that both communities have limited access to spaces where they can view their own art, L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that this exchange provided a powerful example of using technology to create connections and build pride. L. DuPré was gratified to hear that, after the “field trip”, one youth excitedly proclaimed, “Did you know they have our artwork? They care about us down there!” L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) recalls that “it was just kind of a beautiful moment, just even showing them that there are spaces that people want to learn and hear about them can be powerful”.

Another advantage of online dialogue is that it can allow for multiple channels of communication. Having opportunities for dialogue through telepresence and online discussion forums can engage students who may have an easier time finding their voice in one or the other format:

A beautiful example was, with our school in Arviat trying to collaborate with students in Vancouver. They used the discussion forum to share information about their communities. One of youth from Arviat used the space to talk about how much he loves his language. He wanted to teach the other students how to speak a little bit of Inuktitut, so he wrote a bunch of common phrases and wrote out how to say it in Inuktitut ... I bet you if he was just put in front of the telepresence, he wouldn't just all of a sudden pipe up and speak Inuktitut. It gave him a way to still have a voice (L. Dupré, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

Thus, concludes L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), having multiple ways of interacting can bring in students who may not feel comfortable speaking as freely through videoconferencing.

### **Controversial Issues and Power Dynamics**

L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) admits that she had been a bit hesitant about the idea of a primarily non-Indigenous group of people wanting to come in, through education, to support Indigenous youth. She felt that there was “much potential for greatness” but also “potential for not just failure, but harm” in the building of north-south connections in particular (L. Dupré, personal communication, February 12, 2016). L. DuPré

(personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that sometimes people, even with the best of intentions, just want to be exposed to Indigenous culture. This type of interaction she notes, can feel very one-sided as often people in the south take information from northern communities, offering little in return. In order to redress this imbalance and to ensure that north-south exchanges are done in a respectful and balanced way, L. Dupré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) begins by “centering on the needs” of the northern classrooms as she facilitates connections with southern schools.

To maintain an ongoing vigilance with regards to ensuring balanced and empowering cross-cultural dialogues, L. Dupré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) developed six guiding principles that provide a framework for curriculum design and communications within and between schools. The key areas are as follows:

1. *Relationship building*: We acknowledge the importance of relationship building, including building trust not just with the students and teachers that we are working with, but with the communities.
2. *Thinking beyond the classroom*: Understanding that students' experiences within the classroom cannot be disconnected from their realities outside of the classroom. This means their current family situations, health and mental health issues, etc., but also the historical context that greatly impacts their everyday realities.
3. *Culturally appropriate content*: We acknowledge the importance of thinking critically about the content we are providing through our sessions. We want the students' cultures to be respected and valued through all sessions and choosing content that reflects this is critical.
4. *Empowerment through role models*: In our approach we acknowledge the importance of mentoring and providing role models to students.
5. *Expectations*: We acknowledge that each school, each classroom, each teacher and each student are unique and face different challenges, but also demonstrate different strengths.
6. *Incorporating a diversity of voices*: Beyond just session content, we believe that the success of Connected North will come from seeking out input and feedback from other organizations, academics, leaders and community members who can help us improve

the program in ways that best support the schools that we are working with (L. Dupré, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

Thus, instead of taking a direct approach surrounding reconciliation issues L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that an important part of her job is to ensure that reconciliation and decolonization is embodied in every aspect of the program.

The level to which students may engage in dialogues on controversial or emotional topics, as was discussed previously, depends on the context. For southern students in particular, suggests L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), initial discussions about social justice may need to occur within their physical classrooms first. This will involve providing them the critical thinking skills necessary to recognize the negative and stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples that exist in history textbooks and in mainstream media. This type of pre-work, suggests L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), should help make any subsequent dialogues with northern schools more respectful and meaningful. In general, L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests

rather than addressing these [controversial] issues head on, the program is more focused on embodying the opposite [of racism, colonization and tokenism] and works to build respect and understanding, rather than talking about the need for it.

“Embodying the opposite” requires a critical questioning of history in such a way that youth are challenged to recognize that there is no one absolute truth and that there is a need to ask, “Whose perspectives are being privileged and seen as law, basically, and whose are being silenced or ignored?” (L. DuPré, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

Although in north-south cultural exchanges it is rare that controversial issues are confronted directly, L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that

The whole program is reflective of a key social justice issue, which is that there is such a divide between the north and south. The digital divide is a big part of that but there are so many bigger ones, like access to clean water, food insecurity, just cost of travel and people leaving their communities.

The divide is so great that issues surrounding power imbalances are often inevitable. For example, questions around climate justice emerged when a Connected North classroom participated in a TakingItGlobal project called “Climate Change in my Backyard.” This project



asked participants to share photos that demonstrated how they were affected by climate change. In accordance with L. DuPré's commitment to the normalization of Indigenous knowledge, these sessions also included showing videos of elders talking about climate change. This particular project brought up some challenging questions as students from a private school in Calgary, who are close to the oil industry every day, were confronted with photos of the environmental devastation experienced by the northern students.

In order to address power imbalances between the north and south, it is also essential, suggests L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), to move beyond stereotypical representations of the "exotic north" in order to "actually give opportunities for young Indigenous role models to teach about their culture and to be seen as experts". For example, L. DuPré invited Tristan Martell, a traditional men's grass dancer and contemporary hip-hop artist and break-dancer to one of the sessions. For the southern schools, suggests L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), this session in particular helped address the common perception that Indigenous communities are "just stuck in the past". Instead of directly confronting stereotypical representations, L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that role models like Martell provide different representations of what it means to value and incorporate traditional Indigenous culture.

When connecting Indigenous students, in contrast, engaging directly in deeper and difficult discussions can be an important part of dialogue. In a separate project run by TakingITGlobal, L. DuPré facilitated a leadership group of Indigenous students. In this group, L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) remarked that:

there were discussions, that we were able to have, that if it as a mixed group, I don't think we would have been able to have. We were able to get into some deep issues and talking about the pain facing our communities, and the violence, and things like that.

Following the group meetings, L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) contacted participants and asked them to reflect on the experience. She recalls having a Skype call with one of the young girls who said:

You know, it's really hard sometimes when you feel like you're the only one who cares about these things, but to have spaces where you can connect with other people who also

care, and have that passion, and know some of the challenges, is so comforting and supportive (L. DuPré, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

This particular participant had bonded with another youth from Labrador. These girls, from opposite sides of Canada, talked about language revitalization in their communities and one of them was developing an app to help teach youth about their language. As described by L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016):

The other one was just so inspired by that, and because of that started doing a word of the day to help herself and other people in her community start learning. They were also sharing it through the discussion space and just through social media as well. These connections, again, are happening, and it's surpassing the space, the boundaries of the space.

Building connections and bringing attention to positive young role models in Indigenous communities, suggests L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), is very empowering while also being a form of decolonization of the mainstream media that tends to focus on the negative things happening in these communities.

Although teachers and students from the south are often used to having access to different forms of communication technology, there can be a steep learning curve for northern participants who may be less accustomed to having technology in the classroom. Given that a significant barrier to participation in the program for northern communities centres around comfort with and access to technology, L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that there is a need to address this divide by taking the time needed to get students used to the platforms while investing in professional development for the teachers. Even though the involvement of Cisco Canada has helped address the issue of access by providing two-way telepresence technology to participating schools, both Cisco and TakingITGlobal have insisted that beyond the hardware there is an essential need to increase bandwidth in these schools. Given the role that technology and internet access can play in improving access to educational resources, connecting and empowering northern communities and “fostering connections and bridging the cultural divide between north and south” (L. Dupré, personal communication, February 12, 2016), access to technology in northern communities, suggests L. DuPré, is a fundamental social justice issue.

## 2. Case Study: Dissolving Boundaries

### Description and Context

Running from 1999 to 2014, the Dissolving Boundaries (DB) program used Internet-based communication technologies (ICTs) to facilitate contact between young people in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Funded by the Departments of Education in Belfast and Dublin, DB was managed in the Republic of Ireland by the Education Department of the National University of Ireland and in Northern Ireland by the School of Education from the University of Ulster. Designed to address a “post-conflict mistrust” between youth (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015), DB’s aims were:

cultural—the development of cross-border links that promote cultural awareness;  
educational- promoting valuable collaborative learning experiences between pupils;  
technological- integrating ICT into the curriculum in a meaningful way

(Austin, Smyth, Rickard, Quirk-Bolt, & Metcalfe, 2010, p. 327).

Over the fifteen-year duration of the program, DB facilitated well over 100 partnerships from primary, secondary and special needs schools, reaching 2,600 teachers and their 50,000 students aged nine to seventeen.

Participating schools from the Republic of Ireland were largely referred by Education Centers while schools in Northern Ireland were recommended by ICT advisors within the education system. Interested schools could also contact the DB team through the homepage of the website (Dissolving Boundaries, n.d.). Every year, participating teachers were invited to a planning meeting which included a day-long training with the program team. The location of the training was generally in a hotel located north of Dublin in the Republic of Ireland, approximately halfway between participating schools from both groups.

These meetings gave teachers the opportunity to learn about the technology, meet the DB team, plan their joint project work and socialize (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015). As described by Austin and Hunter (2013):

At the epicenter is teacher professional development both in terms of the acquisition of technical skills and, crucially, the pedagogic knowledge, based on classroom experience, of knowing when and how to deploy technology in ways that promote collaborative learning (p. 36–37).

Teachers also received handbooks with contact information, guidelines around netiquette, form letters for parents and a list of suggested venues for face-to-face meetings. By the end of the conference teachers were expected to have completed learning agreements with their partner classes essentially outlining what they were intending to do for the whole year in blocks of time (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015). Agreements were shared with the schools and small grants were contingent on teachers adhering to these agreements.

Upon returning to their classes, DB teachers would present their projects, collaborative partners and the DB site to their students. Although there is a virtual learning environment available to every school in Northern Ireland, in an effort to “level the playing field”, the DB team chose to use Moodle to connect the classes.

we wanted as much as possible for the kids to feel that they were on a level of playing field, mutual territory where even the platform was not overly associated with one jurisdiction rather than the other (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

In addition, they felt that the Moodle discussions and the wiki interface had been created in a way that would appeal to even the youngest students. For the DB team, Moodle was determined to provide a good balance between informal chit-chat and collaborative work.

DB had its own Moodle-based learning space and computer conferencing area. Students used Moodle’s forum to get to know each other and comment on each other’s work as well as a wiki which allowed students to collaborate on a shared website. Through the site, students could also blog and upload podcasts about their work. To protect the students’ privacy, the on-going work and communication between schools was password protected thus inaccessible through the public domain. A protected environment for video conferencing was also provided. Finally, a key feature of DB was the face-to-face meeting, usually an outing or excursion, which could occur at any point during the year. As described on the website, the purpose of the face-to-face meeting was to “consolidate and sustain the relationships initiated in the online and video-conferencing communication” (Dissolving Boundaries, n.d.).

At the end of the academic year, teachers published a short description of the activities and outcomes of their work on the DB site’s publicly accessible “Projects Page”. The project team would also conduct annual evaluations of the program and disseminate the results in project reports and academic journals.

## Dialogue

Dr. Roger Austin, founder of Dissolving Boundaries and professor at the University of Ulster, suggests that there were two broad goals of dialogue: “respect for difference and appreciation for similarity” (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015). For the Dissolving Boundaries program, dialogue was explicitly grounded in Allport's (1954) conditions for relationship-building which highlights the importance of providing opportunities for extended contact. The development of the DB program was founded on the belief that ICT could be a “cost-effective and viable way for long-term social and education links to be made” (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015). As stated by Austin and Hunter (2013), “Crucially, what ICT brought to the Contact Hypothesis was the potential for long-term contact to be sustained beyond short face-to-face encounters” (p. 21).

According to R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015), Allport's “equal status” requirement was met by first, putting students into small balanced work groups with members from both groups:

one of the things that we pretty much insisted on was that the schools set their classes up into small groups that were roughly similar in age and ability. For example, the Northern Irish School would have had maybe five groups of children with perhaps five in each group. Their partner school in the Republic would also have had five groups. Group A in the North and group A in the South would have worked together. Now this was quite deliberate, partly reflecting the contact hypothesis: If you want children to become familiar with an outgroup, it's better if it's not a whole mass of people. Also, better if it's not one to one. The group provides enough diversity for the kids to not be able to make easy generalizations about them down there. In other words, in any one group there would easily have been a kid with bright red hair, very Irish looking but possibly a recent arrival from the Congo.

The use of a selection of ICTs also helped maintain the “equal status” requirement for the contact hypothesis by providing a range of interactivity options which could appeal to a wide variety of ages and abilities. According to R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015), the asynchronous forum was best suited for younger students whose communication skills were advanced by having the space for reflection and the “opportunity to hold and think about what it

is they wanted to write” before engaging with others. On the other hand, special needs students benefitted particularly by using videoconferencing for making connections (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

According to Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015), online discussion forum content was generally student-driven and unstructured. Students asked each other, for example:

what did you do at this weekend kind of stuff. However, it’s important to bear in mind that some of these kids were only eight years old. It was actually very important that they felt comfortable just talking about whatever, football, food, stuff that's seen on TV. That was running in the background, all the social chitchat (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015).


From an outsider’s perspective, these exchanges may have seemed “trivial,” however, they were actually a deliberated part of the program design. As outlined by the “contact hypothesis” these types of opportunities for informal interaction are essential for trust and friendship building.

Further meeting the requirements of the “contact hypothesis” the DB project focused on having the groups collaborate on a common goal. These joint projects were generally developed through the wiki page of Moodle. One of the benefits of having a wiki is that the user can see how it was developed and who participated and commented on what part by looking through the pages’ “history”. One example of a collaborative learning project that demonstrated interaction between groups was the creation of a wiki page on the Plantation of Ulster. Instead of having individual contributions to the page “lost in some anonymous, amorphous lump” (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015), the two secondary school groups were assigned a particular colour for their comments. By having the perspective of the students from the Republic appear in one colour, and the comments from the school from Northern Ireland appear in the other, a visual representation emerged of differing perspectives or lenses on the same historical event (see Figure 2).

**Life of a displaced Irish person during Ulster Plantation** [Edit page](#)

Latest edits: Thursday, 3 March 2011, 12:03 PM (andrew m); Tuesday, 1 March 2011, 01:59 PM (LAUREN H); Tuesday, 15 February 2011, 02:04 PM (LAUREN H); full history

Since the rebellion has ended, our county of Donegal has been over run with English and Scottish. All of us have been forced off our land. The language of our country has changed from Irish Gaelic to English. We are poor and cold and not happy with this situation. We will not give up until it is resolved!



Many of my friends, who had survived the war were rounded up and sent to Sweden. We will never see them again, and knowing the English, they probably have them locked up. Many of these have left their families in ruins. Many of us have been forced to live in bogs, hills and forests. Some lucky ones became tenants on the planters land and can at least try to make a living. However, the poor have no support since the monasteries have closed down. Some traitors have

Figure 3. A visual representation of the co-construction of a historical event (Austin, 2015).

For the DB team, interactions between students were deemed to be productive and successful when they moved beyond the exchange of information. The wiki function was crucial to encourage interactions that would lead to the creation of new knowledge or a new project such as writing poetry or holding a joint art exhibition:

By using wikis both sides could really feel that they were collaborating on bringing something richer to the knowledge than if they were just studying it on their own (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

In order to reflect the type of interaction that was occurring in DB, Austin et al. (2010) developed their own framework that describe interactivity levels as follows:

*Level 1:* Teachers use a variety of means (e.g. Moodle, video-conferencing and face-to-face meetings) to establish a working partnership with the other school where pupils exchange personal and curricular material and where teachers use appropriate technology to plan and monitor their pupils' work. This stage is marked by extensive use of communication but with limited evidence of collaboration. Many schools reach

an intermediate level –

*Level 2:* Here there is evidence of *regular* social and/or curricular interaction, including the sharing of ideas and perceptions by pupils. There is evidence of collaborative learning. This is a valuable building block towards more advanced collaborative learning which we see as having some or all of the features of what we call Level 3 interaction.

*Level 3:* Evidence of challenging knowledge construction and/or attitudinal change, pupil ownership of the learning process and/or pupil reflection on the learning process which includes elements of metacognition ('learning about learning') (p. 336).

One "particularly challenging aspect of this work", according to Austin et al. (2010), was for students who were collaborating together to move from friendship-building to a place where they could provide each other with "constructive criticism" (p. 332).

In order to reassure parents, the DB online program had a system that would alert the team to any inappropriate language. When comments were signalled to team members they could then go in and edit comments. This was not generally an issue, however, and R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015) could only recall three occasions when such an intervention was warranted.

### **Controversial Issues**

Whereas some educational interventions seek to address deeply contested issues head-on, DB adopted "a more oblique approach, seeking to build trust and confidence between participants and creating a neutral place in which "hot" issues can emerge when participants are ready to air them" (Austin & Hunter, 2013, p. 27). One reason for this is described in an article by Austin, Hunter, and Hollywood (2015) which suggests that "a strong focus on collaborative work in non-contentious areas of the curriculum has a strong chance of securing support from key stakeholders, including teachers, the main churches and other stakeholders in the education system" (p. 508). This type of interaction, suggest the authors, may be more "modest" but it is also more realistic as ICTs are used to "normalize" relations between young people who would otherwise not have the opportunity to come into contact.

In the interest of building trust, the curriculum focus would usually start with work on topics that did not challenge a students' identity. In general, subject-matter was determined by



the teachers and was directly aligned with the particular requirements of a course or curriculum:

We left this [topic selection] primarily in the hands of the teachers. What we did say to them was it's really important that you imbed what you're going to do in the curriculum that you have to follow anyway. We don't want this being an out of school activity or something done at lunchtime. Now partly because we took that position and it was all about trying to get the teachers ownership of the process, they themselves I think felt more comfortable choosing relatively non-contentious topics (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

Social and political issues were expected to emerge “naturally” once students got to know each other and if and when a teacher felt equipped to handle them (Austin & Hunter, 2013, p. 32).

However, it did occur that events would take place in the news that teachers would feel needed to be addressed with their students:

I think that when questions arose naturally as part of the link, teachers addressed them. In other words, they didn't start off by saying, okay, we're going to talk about abortion today or the police in Northern Ireland but they were, if you like, responding to questions or comments from pupils as and when they arose. I've got to say, there were some schools that chose what could be regarded as quite challenging topics (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

Tackling controversial issues was thus not an explicit goal of the DB program. Although trust-building was determined to be the priority, it was the individual teachers and pairings that determined the subject-matter that they felt comfortable tackling with their students.

### **Criteria for Success**

According to R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015), the success of the program was grounded in its alignment with existing curriculum, the ongoing opportunities for professional development as well as the ongoing monitoring, support and evaluations that were conducted by the DB team. A critical feature of the project, according to R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015), was that it identified aspects of the curriculum across jurisdictions that were sufficiently “common” so as to complement the students' ongoing course load. Working mainly around issues to do with the children's own lives and with their familiar geographical and historical context, the teachers designed tasks and resources that were both

investigative and collaborative while meeting their own curriculum requirements. Thus, from the outset, teachers of history and geography were expected to use ICTs as a natural part of the way they worked. In addition to developing subject knowledge, other school requirements that aligned with the DB program included the enhancement of intercultural competence and ICT skills. This type of alignment was critical for getting “institutional support” also deemed primordial by Allport (1954) for establishing the necessary conditions for positive intergroup contact.

R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015) also stresses the importance of “third party engagement”, which he suggests is critical to the success of the coordination of this type of initiative:

We felt very strongly that one of the jobs that we should be doing as the project team was to monitor the flow of information between the schools. Because of the nature of schools being busy places, a possibility of teachers going sick, etc., one of the things that my two colleagues were doing with their partners from Maynooth was they each took a quarter of the schools and monitored them every week. If we noticed that one school, for example, wasn't getting any response from the other school we felt it was part of our job to ring the school and say, we noticed this and we're here to help.

By R. Austin's (personal communication, October 9, 2015) estimation, however, these types of issues came up in only about 10% of partnerships. Finally, as mentioned, the annual conferences that allowed teachers to meet, plan lessons and learn about collaborative teaching and ICT integration was considered crucial to the success of the program.

### **Challenges**

Given that all participants were living on the island of Ireland, English was the language used for communication. That being said, R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015) points to the fact that differences in accent were sometimes so pronounced that the children would have to speak very slowly and think carefully about audience when they were talking:

Irish as it's spoken in Northern Ireland is not quite the same as Irish spoken in the Republic of Ireland. What I'm saying is one might assume that it's all the same but actually it isn't. That's not just a question of accent by the way. It's actually different vocabulary.

In addition, from a technological standpoint, the project was more challenging to manage in secondary schools. In elementary schools teachers can, at some point in the day or week, gain access to the computer lab or laptops that generally circulate throughout the school. In high schools on the other hand, students move from class to class every forty minutes making it harder to coordinate computer access.

Finally, suggests R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015), reflecting on the fact that the DB project lost its funding in August of 2014, another important challenge to this type of work is the need for ongoing support to teachers:

this type of work seems to need a third party to support it ... when the funding stopped and the team withdrew, I think it's probably fair to say that pretty much the interaction stopped between the schools. That's sad. I don't know whether that means that we failed. I don't know whether it means that you do need some residual level of outside help. I would say this is not easy stuff to do.

Thus, R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015) argues, these types of programs likely require ongoing third-party funding so that a team is available to train teachers, facilitate pairings, monitor interactions and support teachers as they move “outside of their comfort zone”.

### **3. Case Study: Global SchoolNet**

#### **Description and Context**

Global SchoolNet (GSN) is a non-profit education organization founded in 1984 in California with a mission to

support 21st century, brain-friendly learning, and improve academic performance through content-driven collaboration. We engage educators and students in brain-friendly e-learning projects worldwide to develop science, math, literacy and communication skills, foster teamwork, civic responsibility and collaboration, encourage workforce preparedness and create multi-cultural understanding. We prepare youth for full participation as productive and compassionate citizens in an increasing global economy (Global SchoolNet, n.d.).

Cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration is fostered by providing an online space for teachers and youth organizations to look for opportunities that are relevant to their objectives. The publicly accessible “Projects Registry” page is, according to the site, the “the Internet’s oldest and largest clearinghouse for teacher-conducted global learning projects” (Global SchoolNet, 2012). These project-based learning opportunities are varied, “ranging from understanding terrorism, the mathematics of music, exploring innovative waste management solutions, to creative story telling, online safety and studying global warming” (Global SchoolNet, 2012). To find a partner through the projects database, teachers first fill out a form that identifies the purpose of the collaboration they are seeking, the curriculum area they are working in as well as the technology they have available for the project. Curriculum areas include: international relations, science, physical education, technology and social studies. Technology type refers to e-mail, graphics, audio, blogs, etc. (Global SchoolNet, 2012). Teachers also have at their disposal “a state-of-the-art, worldwide e-learning platform, for multilingual, project-driven collaboration” developed by Global SchoolNet and eLanguages, called “International Projects or Partners Place” (iPoPP). IPoPP provides educators with a “supportive community and easy-to-use tools that embrace the constructivist learning methodology, project-management principles, and future thinking strategies” iPoPP has served to connect 120,000 educators from 194 countries (Global SchoolNet, 2015).

Since 2009, GSN has been facilitating cross-cultural understanding among American and Russian youth with the goal of preparing them to “work together to prevent or solve common problems” (Rogatkin & Andres, Eds., 2014). In 2013, the Education and Youth Working Group developed a project called “CyberFair: Connecting Youth Through Volunteerism” that encouraged community involvement by providing students with the space to present their own experiences with volunteer work through a variety of medium including text, video or slide show. According to the founder of GSN, Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), this project was conceived of when Russian students became interested in the fact that many students across the United States are required to participate in service learning. This was “off-putting” to many Russian youth who, according to Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), associated service learning with the old Soviet regime’s requirements that citizens work for their communities. She suggests that this particular type of cross-cultural exchange was important given the positive impact that opening up to volunteerism would have

on Russian youth:

today most societies realize that unless you engage your young people in a caring way with the community, the quality of life is not going to be good. Bad things are going to happen, there's going to be graffiti, there's going to be crime, there's going to be drug use, etc. (Y. Andrés, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

In 2014, the group expanded its activities by initiating a project called “Open Doors” which promotes models of collaboration among schools and NGOs that “support new education standards in the US and Russia” (Rogatkin & Andres, Eds., 2014). Outcomes of the project included a 70-page booklet titled "School and the Community: Collaboration in the Context of New Educational Standards” which showcases models of partnership as well as two videos called “Opening Doors to Collaboration” and “When We Open Our Doors” (Rogatkin & Andres, Eds., 2014).

### **Dialogue**

In the context of GSN, dialogue is the means through which collaboration occurs. As the founder of Global SchoolNet, Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) describes her “particular passion and focus as centred around effective collaboration”, which requires that the following questions be answered:

How do you do it? What are the tools you use? What works and what does not work?  
 Why do you do it? What value is added from collaboration? Why should teachers go beyond their traditional classrooms to collaborate? What are the students getting out of it?  
 What are schools getting out of it? What is the community getting out of it?

For Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), regardless of the specific project, it is important to encourage students to think beyond their own work goals and personal gain in order to reflect on how they could be of service to their communities. Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) further speaks to the need to connect local issues, whether environmental, economic, health or security-related, to a global context:

We try to give them those different layers of understanding, how they can do things that are going to personally benefit them, benefit their community, school or organization, and at the same time fits in with this idea of being a good global citizen.

Thus dialogues are expected to move outside of the classroom and into the community while also

forming connections between the local and the global.

When describing her explicitly constructivist approach to project-based cross-cultural collaboration, Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) suggests that online interactions and dialogue are not very different from those that occur face-to face. In both contexts, the first priority needs to be a clear identification of the purpose of the dialogue and collaboration. According to the GSN model, types of collaboration fall into the following categories: database creation, electronic appearance or Q & A, electronic publishing, expert mentoring, global classroom, information collection, information search, intercultural exchange, interpersonal exchange, keypals, live expedition, parallel problem solving, peer feedback, pooled data analysis, problem solving, sequential creation, simulation, social action, travel buddy and virtual meeting or gathering (Global SchoolNet, 2012).

The most common purpose of cross-cultural collaboration, suggests Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), is “information sharing” on a selected topic. An example of a project that had “information sharing” as its purpose had students from London, San Diego, Sydney and Tokyo collect and share information on the endangered species in their local zoos. Another example involved students looking at water conservation strategies in the United States and Australia (Y. Andrés, personal communication, October 10, 2015). As mentioned, a purpose of collaboration could also be “problem-solving” which might involve looking at an environmental or diplomatic issue and trying to come up with new ideas or solutions to it. Collaborations with “cultural exchange” as their purpose involve comparisons between countries regarding subjects such as, according to Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), “how we celebrate holidays, the foods we eat, the side of the road we drive on, etc.”.

A search for opportunities to collaborate on the “Projects Registry” page with “cultural exchange” or “social action” as its purpose reveals eleven active projects. One of projects, geared for five to ten-year-olds, is looking for partners to “exchange general cultural information, a local story, and gather data on some scientific topics”. Another project, aimed at a broader population of five to nineteen-year-olds, is proposing a question and answer format project in which students can ask and answer questions directed towards a global community. The “Global Writing Workshop Project” intends the ongoing development of a co-construction of non-fiction texts by students from around the world. An “Elementary Service Learning Project” has students conduct local “litter surveys” and learn about how plastic debris in the ocean affects the food

chain. This connection between local and global issues is followed by a collaborative and cross-cultural brainstorming of possible solutions (Global SchoolNet, 2012).

Once the purpose of the cross-cultural collaboration is clearly articulated, the next step is to determine the methodology and tools. As stated by Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), although online tools change quickly, Google docs is particularly well suited for collaboration. In addition, collaborating classes generally need to select a photo-sharing app and a video conferencing app for live interactions. A big part of what GSN tries to do, suggests Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), is to help people learn how to use communication technologies effectively for collaboration.

In general, overtly controversial issues are avoided. Instead, suggests Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), the priority is for people to share information, learn about each other and be open to beliefs that are different from their own. As stated by Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015),

If you really want to be creative, and innovative, and create an entrepreneurial environment you have to work with participants to get them to understand that they need to be open to different perspectives, different points of view, and that's one of the purposes of going into that dialogue.

There is a list of “acceptable use guidelines” meant to provide a framework for respectful dialogue. Teachers usually have their own institutional policies that they can refer their students too as well. When working with K–12 students, parents must also give permission to have their children participate (Y. Andrés, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

### **Role of the Teacher**

As described on the GSN website, in a project-based learning environment the role of the teacher shifts:

Rather than being simple dispensers of knowledge, they discover their primary tasks are to guide and coach and mentor their students. They teach their students how to question, and how to develop hypotheses and strategies for locating information. They become co-learners as their students embark on a variety of learning projects that chart unfamiliar territory (“PBL Pedagogy,” 2006).

Although every project is somewhat different, suggests Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), the primary role of the facilitator thus becomes more centered on managing time and keeping students focused:

they need to be a time manager because often when you're involved in a collaboration it can be all over the place, a free for all, and then people get side-tracked.

Managing the project requires keeping students on task by going back to the purpose, goals and scope of the project.

Most often the facilitator is the teacher although it could also be someone else that has been identified in the group. Whatever the case, a new facilitator or “project leader” needs some level of training “otherwise it is often disastrous” (Y. Andrés, personal communication, October 10, 2015). At the beginning stages, reports Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), teachers are often overwhelmed by the idea of teaching combined classrooms of up to 100 students online. Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) works with teachers to overcome these fears by teaching them techniques to help defuse the reliance of student on teacher that often shapes the power dynamics in a traditional classroom setting. Instead, Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) tells teachers to encourage students to rely on each other:

If a student has a question, an effective strategy is to have the facilitator throw it out to the group and tell them that you are not going to answer the question for some specific amount of time, for example three days. The dynamic of that is very powerful because what happens is suddenly the group takes responsibility and they want to find out the answer ... they want to be the one that is the problem solver.

After the pre-determined amount of time, the facilitator may step-in and provide or correct an answer if needed.

Another role of the facilitator is the “conflict resolver”. On occasion, some sort of tension may arise and it is the role of the facilitator to remind students what the purpose of the collaboration is and the importance of allowing people to speak and respect differences of opinion, “it should never be personal, you're discussing ideas, you're not discussing people personally” (Y. Andrés, personal communication, October 27, 2015).



An important role of the facilitator is to periodically summarize what has been happening in the group. The facilitator should follow-up on whether tasks have been completed and comment on the level of participation:

you set the expectations, summarize once a week what's happened ... saying things like: "this is what we learnt ...", "here is some more research that might help...", "it looks like only 2% of you are actively participating..." etc. (Y. Andrés, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

The facilitator is also expected to stimulate students and populate the learning space with new ideas and resources.

Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) provides ongoing support to teachers. She usually starts by meeting with them face-to-face and then provides online support and mentoring throughout the semester. She has a checklist of questions that help narrow down the scope of the collaboration. Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) specifies that the goal at this stage is to be specific and realistic:

You can't equally do it all. You have to prioritize. You can't equally gain cultural understanding, increase information about a topic, develop teamwork skills, improve technology skills, become good storytellers, etc.

Once particular objectives have been identified the next step is to select the appropriate evaluation method to determine whether the students have attained the learning goals. In Y. Andrés' (personal communication, October 10, 2015) experience, teachers often get overly fixated on the mechanics of the technology. Instead, she suggests, they need to focus on the purpose of their collaboration and how to design a project that will meet their goals.

### **Challenges**

One challenge in global learning projects involves the fact that English is expected to be the default language of instruction. Given that not all participants are native English speakers, they may not feel equally comfortable participating. Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) suggests that although this is certainly an issue, teachers are generally quite experienced in dealing with different language skills in their own classrooms. In any case, in general, the students involved have learned English at school and welcome the opportunity to

practice. Russian students, for example, have been learning English since grade two (Y. Andrés, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

That being said, Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) does acknowledge that misinterpretation and frustration can occur in cross-cultural exchanges. The best strategy to avoid some basic misunderstandings is to have students learn about the history, culture and communication style of their partner groups. For example, Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) suggests that some cultures will be very open and direct, which may be interpreted as rude by the other group. One way to address linguistic differences, suggests Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), is through the sharing of photographs and videos. For example, the Student Television Network, which is an organization that involves students in broadcasting, has asked participating students to tell a story without using words (Y. Andrés, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

Although Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) prefers face-to-face contact, she points to the fact that this can be extremely challenging to organize when dealing with cross-cultural collaboration across time zones. For example, in another project that Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) advises on called the “Global Forest Link” the 17-hour time difference between the United States and Russia has made synchronous sessions exceptionally difficult to organize. In one case, Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) brought in an expert in Environmental Science, through Skype, who had written many articles about forest change to speak with the classes. The students prepared for the talk by reading his articles and then working in groups to come up with questions to ask him. Since the only time that could work was the middle of the night for the Russian students, they submitted their taped questions ahead of time and were then able to view a video of the talk. Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) points to the fact that when you only have fifty minutes for an activity such as this one, the interaction needs to be quite scripted in order to ensure that all questions are answered and to avoid long silences or, on the other hand, too much rambling or going off topic (Y. Andrés, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

#### 4. Case Study: Soliya's Connect Program

##### Description and Context

Soliya is a non-governmental organization that was founded in 2004 in response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York City. The organization's primary goal was to open the lines of communication between youth in Western and Muslim-majority countries (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015). With offices in New York and Cairo, Soliya is

Driven by the belief that in our increasingly inter-dependent world, it is necessary to shift the way our communities engage with differences - moving from confrontation to co-operation and compassion - Soliya aims to enable vastly more young people to have an in-depth and meaningful cross-cultural experience as part of their education. Harnessing the tools of new media, we have established a scalable and high-impact virtual exchange program model for cross-cultural education that is very relevant to 21st century challenges and needs (Soliya Inc., 2014).

In the last ten years, Soliya's work has centred on the development of "high-impact, low-cost cross-cultural experiences" that draw on "best practices from the fields of educational exchange and conflict resolution with innovative uses of new media technologies" (Roberts, Welch, & Al-Khanji, 2013, p. 88).

**The Soliya Connect Program (SCP)** is a virtual cross-cultural education program that brings together university students from Western countries with those in Muslim-majority countries through "curriculum-based and facilitated" online dialogue. The Connect Program is used by professors from accredited university courses from different departments such as political science, religious studies and communications. To date, the program has been used in over one hundred universities in twenty-seven countries across the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Europe, and North America (Roberts et al., 2013).

The Soliya team assigns students from participating courses to a dialogue group. There are up to thirty-eight groups per semester with seven to ten students in each group. SCP students participate in eight weekly two-hour synchronous discussions through Soliya's custom-built web-based videoconferencing application. Students are deliberately grouped with the goal of establishing a "balanced cohort" of students from the West and from Muslim-majority countries

as well as male and female. In addition, most often no more than two people from any given university class will be assigned to the same dialogue group (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

Although all of the dialogue groups follow the same general curriculum facilitators are given some latitude regarding the selection of activities and the students themselves are asked to select the topics to be discussed. Therefore, even though dialogue groups are part of the same program and abide by the same calendar, content and process can differ significantly. In addition to participating in the live weekly dialogue sessions, students have a space on the SCP website where they can share information about themselves and connect with the members of their groups as well as the greater Soliya community (Helm, Guth, & Farrah, 2012).

## **Dialogue**

**Role of teachers/facilitators.** In the SCP there is a clear distinction between the role of the organization and its facilitators and that of the professors:

Soliya designs the SCP curriculum, sets up dialogue groups, assigns each group two trained facilitators, provides university professors with guidelines on how to integrate SCP into curricula, and requires facilitators to provide local teachers with student reviews (i.e., reports on students' participation and performance) (Helm et al., 2012, p. 110).

The role of the professor is thus to integrate the SCP's assigned readings and discussion topics into their own courses. They must also prepare students for the SCP by explaining how it aligns with and enhances the goals the course. In addition, professors are expected to play a role in debriefing participants, encouraging reflection and grading related assignments (Helm et al., 2012).

Acknowledging the essential role of facilitation in transformative dialogue, Soliya provides extensive training to its facilitators. According to Soliya's website, the facilitators come from over twenty-five countries and include Connect Program alumni, graduate students and professionals engaged in international work. Their trainings consist of a combination of live online sessions, readings, and multimedia resources. Online sessions include interactive discussions, simulated facilitation practices, and personalized feedback. After a minimum of twenty hours of training and one semester of facilitation, facilitators receive an Advanced Training Certificate endorsed by the United Nations Habitat (Soliya Inc., n.d.).

The central role of facilitation in the dialogue process is demonstrated by the ongoing support that is provided to facilitators. For newer facilitators, coaches will listen to a recorded dialogue session at least once during the semester and provide the facilitator with feedback. As well, at the end of each weekly session, all facilitators fill out a questionnaire with questions such as: What stage is your group at? What particularly difficult moments happened during this session or what were the highlights? Do you need coaching support for something that has happened that you do not know how to navigate? In addition to identifying needs for support, H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) suggests that these types of reports help identify shared concerns between facilitators that may be associated with particular current events occurring in a specific semester.

**Approach to dialogue.** Soliya's model takes a staged and process view of dialogue. The first stage is "Orientation" and involves having group members learn about each other, address anxieties and work on building trust. In the second "Group Definition" stage, similarities are emphasized and bonds begin to form as students explore their own biases and assumptions. In "Learning through Difference" (stage 3), participants are led to open up about themselves and develop strategies for addressing emotional and controversial issues. As the group begins to explore differences, participants are challenged to listen and empathize with each other. According to the curriculum guide, it is at this stage that power dynamics usually begin to emerge.

The fourth stage, "Sincere transformation" refers to the establishment of an environment where students are no longer preoccupied with trying to convince others of their positions, and instead, listen to different perspectives in an attempt to learn from and understand one another. As described in the curriculum documentation:

They also begin to explain their own point of view in a way that individuals from the "other side" can hear. That is when the "transformation" of the relationships, based on mutual understanding and empathy, can happen. The group realizes that real learning arises from expressing themselves openly, examining their own thinking process as well as that of others, and engaging with the different views in the group (Soliya Inc., 2015, p. 24).

In this stage, the expectation is that group members have a level of self-awareness and “internalized the idea of good discussion” so that the group members are able to manage and work through conflicts that may emerge (Soliya Inc., 2015, p. 24).

In the fifth stage, “Forward-looking Brainstorming” the focus on having discussions is shifted to brainstorming how this experience, and things learnt as a group, could be utilized and transferred outside the group context. At this point, according to the curriculum document, groups often start to feel that they want to share what they have learned with the larger community. This is when they can start to think jointly about how they can contribute outside of the group and change things for the better. Group discussions become future and solutions oriented as the emphasis moves from dialogue to action. Finally, in the sixth and final “Winding Down” stage, the group acknowledges and expresses gratitude for the work they have done together and determine whether and how they would like to maintain a relationship outside of the SCP (Soliya Inc., 2015, pp. 24–25).

Trained to engage participants in a productive and respectful dialogue, facilitators work with their groups to move through these stages but are warned that

not all groups go through the semester following this model exactly, but there are great variations in the process. Groups also go through this process with varying speeds some finding it easier to progress than other groups. Finally, groups don’t always progress in a linear manner through these stages: you’ll find some groups reaching stage 3 with confidence in exploring controversial issues and then go back to stage 2 when addressing a different topic for instance (Soliya Inc., 2015, p. 24).

Therefore, although the stages are useful guides for the dialogue process, this model relies on the co-facilitators’ abilities to assess where their group is at and to adjust their approach accordingly.

**Goals of dialogue.** H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) suggests that the goals of dialogue are both skill-based and attitudinal, which she summarizes as follows:

An important skill is to communicate more effectively across cultural differences and to collaborate with people in diverse groups, and this is interesting in the employment space as well as for generally preparing young people for what it means to thrive in a really complicated world. Then, additionally, there's an emphasis on self-awareness and awareness of different perspectives, generally. This includes being able to understand

what people think in different areas and why they think the way they do and to appreciate that.

Professors may choose to have their students participate in one of two versions of the curriculum that vary slightly in emphasis. The first “cluster” focuses on intergroup dialogue between students from the West and those from Muslim-majority countries while the second “cluster” explores a broader range of global social and political issues.

According to the curriculum, there are five goals of dialogue. The first is the development of “Cross-Cultural Communication and Collaboration Skills” which refers to the ability to engage constructively across differences with a commitment to reach “sustainable solutions to shared problems” (Soliya Inc., 2015, p. 22). The second goal of dialogue is the development of “Empathy” which involves the capacity to build relationships and connect to the essential humanity of other participants, with respect and appreciation. The third goal, “Critical Thinking” is defined as the ability to engage with complexity and re-examine pre-existing beliefs and opinions. The fourth, “Awareness”, refers to the ability to seek out and understand the underlying emotions, assumptions, values and biases that shape positions (Soliya Inc., 2015).

The fifth goal, “Activation”, involves the development of a long-term interest in cross-cultural communication and engagement with different perspectives, values and cultures (Soliya, 2015, p. 22). As described by H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015):

We really care about activation and the extent to which people, as a result of having an intense dialogue experience with people that they would never otherwise meet, then feel inspired to go out and do something and engage with others on a deeper level.

H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) points to the fact that dialogue needs to be about more than just providing opportunities to share and be exposed to different perspectives. Students also need to engage in a reflective process that helps them understand why they and others think the way that they do. To engage students in this type of reflection, most sessions end with a “meta-conversation” about the evolving dialogue process and their role within it (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

**The role of curriculum.** The curriculum describes the dialogue stages and recommends corresponding readings, assignments and exercises for each stage. According to H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015), “We try to find that balance between providing

tools and a road map in terms of what tends to work really well in fostering a really intense productive group process and making sure there's conflict and it's not just superficial". As such, facilitators are given a fair amount of latitude when it comes to implementing the curriculum, although select exercises are mandatory as is the need to take a staged approach to interactions. Generally, the co-facilitators meet on Skype in between sessions and discuss their groups' needs as they look through the recommended activities in the curriculum. Facilitators may decide, for example, to assign their groups some homework. Soliya's platform also has a polling feature that allows students to vote anonymously on the topics they want to discuss. Facilitators may also opt to nominate student facilitators and have them come to the session with questions or having researched a particular topic (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

In the initial stages of dialogue, suggests H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015), the curriculum focuses on having students set up the ground rules for the dialogue and equipping students with the tools, language, and confidence to start naming and identifying group dynamics and sources of conflict. As stated by H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015), in the preliminary stages is it essential "to give students a sense of ownership over the group dialogue process".

There are discussion resources available in the curriculum including a list of the different types of topics that could come up. Discussion resources include questions that tend to provoke deeper conversations as well as suggestions on how to handle different responses, effective conversation starters and activities or readings designed to help center the group (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015). H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) describes one example of an exercise that usually occurs around week five called the "life stories activity" which involves sharing the events that individual participants believe have helped shape their worldview. This activity may be used once participants have built a certain level of trust and may be more open to sharing personal experiences and stories. At this point, suggests H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015), participants are encouraged to listen and ask each other questions.

Although there is much flexibility in the curriculum, there are certain topics that are determined to be essential. In the group that is more geared towards addressing issues between the west and predominantly Muslim countries, for example, there is a session that must be devoted to the role of religion and politics. As stated by Helm et al. (2012):



Underlying the SCP curriculum is the belief that if managed well, conflict and anger can provide real learning opportunities and can lead to genuine transformation in the group and the group dynamic. Thus, facilitators are not encouraged to avoid conflict, but rather are trained to work with it so that it helps the group grow. SCP facilitators learn techniques which can be used turn the ‘heat’ in the conversation up or down (p. 166).

Given Soliya’s commitment to working through conflict, as long as a dialogue is constructive and the students are engaged, it is rare that topics are completely off limits. That being said, facilitators are expected to check-in through the private chat function with individual participants when conversations get heated. Students are allowed to “pass” on certain discussions, and H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) suggests that interesting discussions may revolve around why not everyone is equally comfortable addressing a particular topic.

### **Power**

Soliya’s curriculum is designed explicitly to address power imbalances within the group and, as stated by H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015), “harness these dynamics for deeper learning”. Notions of power and privilege are addressed early on in the curriculum as facilitators are trained to observe dynamics like who is participating and who is having technological issues. As stated by H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015), “We’ve been making changes, semester by semester, to actually explore to complicate our dialogue further and explore all different types of differences, power dynamics, and the notion of privilege”. Additional power issues that were acknowledged and addressed revolve around language, technology and the inclusivity of the dialogue environment.

**Language.** Although efforts are being made to look at and integrate translation technology, these features are as of yet inadequate. Dialogues currently occur in English thus making the participation in dialogue of native speakers arguably more accessible than to non-native speakers. Facilitators are sensitized to this issue and play an important role in translating certain words/terms and providing textual summaries of arguments in real-time in order to help ensure that points are clearly communicated. In addition, the curriculum includes exercises that use images which may help address language differences as well as help students communicate beyond words (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015). For example, suggested exercises include sharing images or pictures related to identity, interests and aspirations.

Although the Soliya platform and curriculum was devised to complement curriculum in courses such as international relations and media studies the fact that dialogues take place in English has expanded its appeal to English as a second language teachers who are looking to provide their students with opportunities to engage in “authentic” discussions with native speakers. H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) points to the fact that this expands Soliya’s reach as it engages young people who may not be actively pursuing opportunities for intergroup or intercultural dialogue.

**Technology.** All meetings take place online, using Soliya’s web conferencing application. To participate in the dialogue, users need a web-cam, USB headset, and a high-speed internet connection. The platform is designed to maximize functioning in low-bandwidth environments. To further increase accessibility, Soliya is currently working on a new platform that will eventually be mobile-compatible (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

**Inclusivity.** Certain mechanisms are built into the platform in an attempt to create an inclusive environment. One strategy is to have the small dialogue groups “seated” in a circle. A chat box in the middle of the circle is used by facilitators to summarize the points being made and for students who may be having technical issues (see Figure 3).



Figure 4. A typical view of a Connect Program session (Helm et al., 2012).

A private chat function also allows facilitators to check-in with and encourage individual group members that may not be participating. For some of the more difficult personal sharing conversations H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) explains there are different strategies for encouraging participation. For one, the private chat function allows students to share things with their facilitator who may then, in turn, share it with the group without naming the student. The polling tool can also help facilitators get a sense of how the group is feeling around certain issues. Then the students can talk about the range of viewpoints without attributing them to particular members of the group (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

### **Affordances and Challenges**

In contrast to exchanges in which students are displaced to another country for a couple of weeks, Soliya's virtual exchanges occur within a students' regular day-to-day context. In addition to being affordable and thus accessible to a larger population, this type of extended exchange allows students time to reflect on their learning and anchor their conversations in their daily lives, thus minimizing, in H. Belsky's (personal communication, October 10, 2015) words, the "transferability challenge".

Some of the most transformative moments in virtual exchanges, suggests H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015), occur when students log on to a session that happens during a holiday or family event when they are at home and can share their experiences with the other students. H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) describes one such session as follows:

I had a young woman show up to a session right after there was a bombing that morning near her home and she was emailing me in the morning stating that the internet was patchy and that she didn't think she would be able to sign on. But, she managed to convince her parents to let her go out because she wanted to attend her session and talk to her group. They drove her to her university computer lab and she logged on and she shared her story ... as she was living it.

This experience, according to H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) points to the power of "literally logging on from your dorm room, from your parents' house, or from your

computer lab, and having the ability to turn your computer around and then show people where you are”.

On the other hand, suggests H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015), one issue that is particular to online programs, is concerns about students’ safety and privacy online. The most important thing, according to H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015), is that unlike in the case of some other social media and video conferencing apps, Soliya controls who has access to the platform. New users come in through established partnerships. Students gain access through their teachers while facilitators go through an interview process and extensive training. Soliya staff are also extremely vigilant about keeping student information protected and safe (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

## **5. Case Study: TakingITGlobal’s Culture Connect**

### **Description and Context**

TakingITGlobal (TIG) is a non-profit organization that has been using technology to connect young people worldwide since its launch in 1999. Currently available in thirteen languages, TIG’s goal is to “inspire, inform and involve” their 617,439 members from around the world and “to support young people in exploring unique pathways to civic engagement” (Corriero & O’Doherty, 2013, p. 493). The many programs that are available through the site are grounded in the TIG “Theory of Change” which aims to develop “well-rounded global citizens” by focusing on the following:

- *Youth development:* We help develop a sense of social responsibility and awareness of global issues, as well as build capacity among youth, regardless of their placement across the spectrum of engagement.
- *Youth action and participation:* We provide engaged youth with the access to global opportunities, building their skills and creating a sense of belonging to a community of other actively engaged youth.
- *Social movements:* We strengthen global social movements by collaborating with other organizations to ensure that youth participate and become key stakeholders in these efforts.
- *Societal values:* We impact shared values through our involvement in global social movements, ultimately influencing attitudes and behaviours towards creating a more

sustainable world (Corriero & O’Doherty, 2013, p. 494; TakingITGlobal, 2015).

TakingITGlobal for Education (TIGed) is part of the TIG platform and currently hosts 15,648 educators, 5,295 schools and 266 projects from 153 countries (TakingITGlobal for Educators, 2015). TIGed is designed for “globally minded educators” who are looking for opportunities for their students to engage in international collaborations (Desai, 2007, p. 9). According to the site, the virtual classroom helps teachers “utilize technology to create transformative learning experiences”, by facilitating “deep learning competencies through real-world problem solving” so that “classrooms everywhere become actively engaged and connected in shaping a more inclusive, peaceful, and sustainable world” (TakingITGlobal for Educators, 2015).

TIGed provides a private, customizable and advertising-free virtual classroom equipped with social networking tools including blogs, discussion boards, photo sharing, podcasting, collaborative mapping, photo sharing and video chat. These classrooms and tools are designed to connect students with each other in a “safe space” where teachers can control, view and contribute to student work. In addition to providing collaborative tools, the platform connects teachers across disciplines and from around the world looking for opportunities to collaborate (Desai, 2007).

In order to support active partnerships and collaborations between classrooms, virtual classroom educators also gain access to an “activity database” with curriculum-based lesson plans and activity ideas organized according to subject area and grade level. In addition, the “thematic classrooms” provide complete units of instruction including content, assignments, and teaching strategies. The first “key area” addressed by TIGed is global citizenship which involves “helping students to understand their rights and responsibilities in the face of international challenges that know no borders” (TakingITGlobal for Educators, 2015). The second, “environmental stewardship” refers to cultivating “a sense of respect and responsibility” with regards to environmental issues. The third key area seeks to develop leadership by “Valuing and incorporating student voice in classrooms and schools” (TakingITGlobal for Educators, 2015). Finally, the TIGed platform also provides a variety of professional development resources.

The Culture Connect Program is part of TIGed and was piloted in 2013 with help from the “Intercultural Innovation Award” conferred to TakingITGlobal by the BMW Group and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. According to the coordinator of the program, Liam O’Doherty, the goal was to “create a digital exchange program so that people who would never

get to meet each other could share and learn and exchange with each other” (L. O’Doherty, personal communication, February 12, 2016). By the end of the Culture Connect program, participants are meant to have bridged “cultural divides through individual and collective sharing - helping to advance diversity and multiculturalism in our civil society” (“Culture Connect,” 2016). As of the writing of this case study the Culture Connect was not actively being run by TIG staff members, however the units, platform and structure were available and being incorporated by individual teachers through the TIGed virtual classroom.

## **Dialogue**

Culture Connect is a four-week “digital exchange” program that has included participants from over thirty countries. The feel of the program, as described by L. O’Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016), is upbeat and student-centred:

we use language like “Dear Adventurer” to bring a sense of fun to the program as the participants have missions and we don’t necessarily know what is going to happen, but we’ll find out together in setting the context of this safe space, where we’re going to explore and connect around things that matter to us.

The program is founded on the assumption that, as stated by TakingITGlobal co-founder Jennifer Corriero, “When young people have an opportunity to learn from the experiences of their peers around the world, the concept of ‘other’ shifts to an outlook of intercultural connection” (“Culture Connect,” 2016).

The program is structured such that each week the participants are tasked with accomplishing a “mini-mission” which was designed to encourage intercultural dialogue inspired by the following themes: “Daily Life” “My Roots” “Our Vision” and “Our Quest”. Each session has a discussion forum and allows for the exchange of images and/or photos based on the theme of the week. Participants are expected to comment on each other’s contributions. In the first week of the Culture Connect Program, for example, participants were directed to upload three images that represent parts of their daily lives such as:

- The view outside of your window in the morning;
- A preferred park, restaurant or coffee shop;
- An important person or activity in your life (“Culture Connect,” n.d.)

Another example, from the third week, asks participants to upload an image that represents their vision for the future. The following reflective questions are also provided:

- How would you express the aspirations you have for your community, your country, and the world?
- What gives you hope?
- What issues do you consider to be most pressing to address and how do you believe it can be resolved? (“Culture Connect,” n.d.-b)

Participants are also directed to provide two comments on the images submitted.

During the pilot of the program, L. O’Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) recalls the highlights as follows:

I remember there was a particularly strong interaction around monsoon season and the weather differences between different places. Other topics related to food, the environment, styles of dress or what day-to-day life looks like.

In the pilot of the Culture Connect, L. O’Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) did not notice anything particularly controversial being presented and describes the contact between participants as leaning “much more towards positive interaction and sharing”.

L. O’Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) describes the dialogue space that is fostered through the TIGed platform as follows:

We want people to feel free to express themselves, to the extent that they feel comfortable doing so, and to have recourse if they feel people are not treating them fairly. And that would often happen by just reporting it to the facilitator.

Students are able to enter, edit and comment as well as delete or change any of their previous comments. It is essential that participants understand the

group norms of positive, social interaction and that we're looking to learn and that differences are going to arise, but that, if we treat people with respect and treat those differences and differences of opinions as an opportunity to learn, and that we just don't go off on people because they have differences of opinion or different lifestyles or different ways of entering into the space (L. O’Doherty, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

L. O'Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that a successful dialogue online space relies on developing and respecting group norms, “the technical elements” that allow students to change their entries as well as the presence of a facilitator who moderates interactions with the goal of supporting positive exchanges between students.

### **Facilitation**

Linked to the Culture Connect site is a resource for teachers called “Facilitating Intercultural Digital Exchanges”. This “mini-course” involves four activities that discuss how intercultural competence is conceptualized and how peer-to-peer interactions can be guided in online discussion (“Facilitating Intercultural Digital Exchanges”, n.d.). In the first activity, for example, participants are asked to assess their “cultural intelligence” based on “Richard Bucher’s Cultural Intelligence 9 megaskills” which is defined as follows:

1. *Understanding my cultural identity* - looking inward and understanding our own thoughts, biases, behaviours and cultural identity.
2. *Checking cultural lenses* - recognizing the ways in which cultural backgrounds differ and how they influence thinking, behaviour and assumptions.
3. *Global consciousness* - moving across boundaries and seeing the world from multiple perspectives.
4. *Shifting perspectives* - putting ourselves in someone else's shoes and someone else's culture.
5. *Intercultural communication* - exchanging ideas and feelings and creating meanings with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.
6. *Managing cross-cultural conflict*—the ability to deal with conflict among people from differing cultural backgrounds in an effective and constructive manner.
7. *Multicultural teaming*—working with others from diverse cultural backgrounds to accomplish certain tasks
8. *Dealing with bias*—recognizing bias in ourselves and others and dealing with it effectively
9. *Understanding the dynamics of power*—grasping how power and culture interrelate and the effect of power on how we see the world and relate to others (“Facilitating Intercultural Digital Exchanges,” n.d.).



Activity three involves having teachers share pictures, images or symbols that represent their worldviews and to apply the “RISE Model for Meaningful Feedback” which stands for the need to:

- Reflect (Recall, ponder and communicate)
  - Inquire (Seek information and/or provide ideas through questioning)
  - Suggest (Introduce ideas for improvement of current situation) and
  - Elevate (Raise to a higher degree or purpose in future iterations)
- (“Facilitating Intercultural Digital Exchanges,” n.d.).

when commenting on others’ work. The final activity called “Weaving the collective narrative” asks teachers to design a lesson.

Since the program was piloted, the structure has been available for teachers to implement and facilitate. Teachers can upload the four activities as a template to connect classes and collaboratively explore the questions. With regards to effective online facilitation strategies, the best way to foster interactivity, suggests L. O’Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016), is by modeling the behaviours you would like the participants to emulate. In addition, sometimes the facilitation process involves:

gently reminding people that they might not be living up to the group norms. This may involve a tiered approach, where first there might be a verbal warning, then there might be a reminder of the consequences, then there might be the implementation of those consequences, and then people might get kicked out (L. O’Doherty, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

Facilitators may have to intervene and say things like: “Based on the stuff that you’re posting, I’m going to have to edit out a bunch of the stuff that you’re putting in here. If you continue in this way, I’m going to have to restrict your interaction” (L. O’Doherty, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

In reference to a discussion thread on the TIG site, L. O’Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) recalls a conversation that he initiated on Palestine and Israel. Two people with opposing viewpoints debated for the equivalent of about thirty pages. L. O’Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) describes the exchange as getting:

very, very heated, but as I was reminding people about the norms and what was expected of them in that space and they were very much fine with the fact that this was being heated and even though they were disagreeing, I don't want to say violently, but energetically against each other, that they both had a mutual respect for each other's perspectives ... it is sometimes what is necessary for people to feel heard and to air their grievances and to have an interaction on some of these topics that are not easy.

Part of the facilitation process thus entails feeling comfortable with a level of discomfort and trying to recognize the “difference between just random, un-targeted hate and passionate disagreement” (L. O’Doherty, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

### **Challenges and Benefits**

L. O’Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that one of the challenges of online dialogue in general is that, in some cases, people may be less invested due to a lack of emotional visual-cues. In real-time conversations

if I say something that is hurtful or challenging or that is disagreed with someone in person, I can see right away how that affects them emotionally and I have to deal, potentially, with the repercussions, if now the person is crying. Whereas, if I’m in an online context, I don’t see the effects of the things I might write on the people who might experience them (L. O’Doherty, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

In addition, suggests L. O’Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016), the level of anonymity enabled by open and public online discussion environments mean that “you don't need to behave because no one knows who you are, and you could be anyone”. The TIG platform however provides a bit of “disambiguation” in terms of who people are because they are members of the community and presenting as themselves (L. O’Doherty, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

For groups in conflict, online discussion spaces allow for “personas” which provide an “interesting proxy to disambiguate and just create a personal connection” without getting caught up in the conflict:

Let's say you're in a society that's experiencing a conflict, you and another person might connect over something that's entirely different to that and just realize that you have these things in common, but not even necessarily realize until quite a bit later that this person is

on the other side of the conflict. The ability for groups to organically form and start to share and then realize different things that potentially would have not made them interact in the first place, I think, is a really interesting and powerful thing. There's also something liberating about having access to very raw opinions that people wouldn't necessarily feel super-comfortable sharing that can be shared behind the veil of anonymity (L. O'Doherty, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

Thus allowing for a level of anonymity may help facilitate connections with people who may not, under other circumstances, be able to meet and look beyond certain political and social issues.

The easy sharing of photos, artwork and graphics in an online space can open up a dimension of dialogue that may not be as easily experienced in the traditional classroom setting.

L. O'Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that

by using photographic evidence, you can convey a lot of information very quickly and even tell a story ... it's also a bit more of a solid communication because it provides a direct record, digital and visual representation of a context as opposed to [written] information which is mediated by the individual's personal, potential biases, influences, and feelings about the specific topic.

Adding both visual and creative elements to the dialogue process in an online environment thus introduces ways of understanding other participants through a different lens.

### **Power**

In terms of power imbalances within the interactions themselves, L. O'Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that

those are definitely going to be at play, even subconsciously, but I feel like difference and people's perspective being different was the whole point ... everyone was brought into the space with the idea that this was going to be about sharing, and so in that very constructive, open environment, we didn't see nearly as much the floating of privilege or these types of things in a way that we would be sensitive to in some of the other programs.

Although L. O'Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) did not see power imbalances as a significant issue within the dialogues themselves he did underline the power

issues surrounding access to technology. Participation in any aspect of TIG is inevitably limited to people and communities with internet access. The digital divide, suggests L. O'Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016), is not only determined by geographical location but also within communities often in accordance to race and class. Increasing the accessibility of Culture Connect in particular and TIGed in general has meant experimenting with different levels of internet bandwidth and providing a mobile option.

## **6. Case Study: Technology, Education and Cultural Diversity Center**

### **Description and Context**

Founded in 2004, the Technology, Education and Cultural Diversity Center (TEC Center) began as a joint initiative between three teaching colleges in Israel: Hakibbutzim College, serving a secular Jewish population, Al-Qasemi Academic, an Arab Muslim college, and the Talpiot College of Education, a Jewish religious college. Serving academic staff and students in teaching colleges as well as teachers and students in primary and secondary schools, the main objectives of the TEC Center are as follows:

- To develop innovative educational models that bridge among cultures, using and applying advanced technologies;
- To train teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds to use the internet and other advanced communication technologies as teaching tools while becoming acquainted through collaborative small group learning;
- To develop online teaching units that encourage acceptance of those who are "different" and make them part of the curriculum in teacher education colleges and schools;
- To create an inter-cultural online community, comprised of the teaching staff of education colleges and schools;
- To generate ties among teachers, pre-service teachers and students from different cultures;
- To stimulate cooperative multicultural ventures among educational institutions and non-profit organizations, as well as with the Ministry of Education in Israel and in other countries facing multi-cultural challenges (Shonfeld, Hoter, & Ganayem, 2012, pp. 17–18).

The first initiative of the TEC Center was an inter-college conference that was held through the use of technologies such video conferencing and webinars. The following year, a course called “Advanced Learning Environments”, was the first inter-college course ever offered in Israel. Students from the various colleges were brought together in groups of six and worked collaboratively on assignments. The groups met every two weeks to participate in synchronous and asynchronous activities over a year-long period. Since running its first inter-college course, at least a dozen other colleges from Israel have joined the TEC Center (“TEC Center,” n.d.).

The TEC Center’s mission is “to ensure that the online multicultural collaborative learning course is available and accessible to every pre-service teacher education colleges in Israel” (Shonfeld, Hoter & Ganayem, 2013, p. 50). For the TEC Centre, teachers are viewed as “major agents of social change and dialogue among cultures” (Shonfeld et al., 2012, p. 20) and should therefore have access to courses on multiculturalism and exchanges with cultural groups outside of their own. Thus, when these students become teachers,

they will reflect their “new” and moderated point of view of the “other” among the children they teach, and thus can help diffuse the long going stereotyping of the “other” (Shonfeld et al., 2012, p. 20).

As teachers work with team members from other cultures and develop a sense of mutual understanding and respect, they become important models for future generations (Shonfeld et al., 2012).

Since 2008, the TEC Center has also been active in the school system. This started with the “TEC-Amirim Project” which uses ICTs to engage religious and secular Jewish and Arab children, aged eleven and twelve, in dialogue. Participants are selected by the regional advisor of the Ministry of Education largely based on accessibility of the technological requirements of the TEC Model. For the last two years the project has grown to cover 100 schools throughout the country with 120 teachers and 3000 pupils a year. The teachers meet for a three-day seminar and do an online course preparing them to teach with two other teachers and their classes from different cultures and religions in Israel. The project activities are designed to last a school year and are based on a series of specific instructional technology related tasks that serve as a toolbox for the teachers. The teacher groups, however, decide on the sub topic areas they will deal with as well as the corresponding activities as it is felt that the more teachers “own” the material the more committed they will be. The course offerings of the TEC Center necessarily align with the

requirements of the formal education system and include subjects such as science, environmental studies, mathematics, current events, drama and music (Shonfeld et al., 2012).

The courses are based on online units that include synchronous lessons that are facilitated a few times throughout the year in accordance with the TEC model. The webinars are conducted through the “Blackboard” program. In between classes students can communicate and work, at their convenience, through a special multicultural social network built for that purpose. On the social network the students have access to learning materials, tasks, and asynchronous discussion forums. The students work in the social network in groups of six to twelve from each school. Students can also go to the “virtual café” where they can get help, feedback and support on group assignments from their peers. Clear rubrics are given for each assignment including both an individual grade as well as a group grade, in which both co-operation and collaboration are taken into consideration. In order to achieve the maximum grade participants need to collaborate with their partners (Shonfeld et al., 2012).

At the end of each school year, the children and their teachers meet at a park, museum or in one of their schools. The main objective of this encounter is to have face-to-face social interactions so students can “celebrate the collective achievements of the teachers and children” (Shonfeld et al., 2013, p. 54). Children who have had little previous contact with children from the other cultures note a gained appreciation of “festivals, traditions, language, and food of the other” (Shonfeld et al., 2012, p. 54). Outcomes for Arab students in particular has been a better understanding of their Jewish classmates (MOFET Institute, 2015). According to E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), co-founder of the TEC Center, qualitative and quantitative third party research consistently shows that participating students change their attitudes towards the “other” while teachers report improved collaborative and technological skills.

### **The TEC Model**

All of the programs offered by the TEC Center necessarily adhere to the TEC Model. Developed by the TEC Center, this model is designed to use collaborative learning and advanced technologies to engage teachers and students in “constructive dialogue and co-operation between diversified groups and eventually - tolerance and mutual respect” (Shonfeld et al., 2012, p. 15). As described on the TEC Center website:

The technological reality of the 21st century allows for in-depth acquaintance with other cultures based on common universal values in addition to unique values of each culture, thus developing a more open understanding and respectful dialogue... Inter-cultural dialogue is essential for knowledge and mutual respect as well as for a better enlightened human future (MOFET Institute, 2015).

The conceptualization of dialogue that is put forth by the Center is one that progressively works towards building trust and mutual respect between groups that have been marked by a legacy of prejudices (MOFET Institute, 2015).

The TEC Model's framework is largely derived from Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis and Salmons' (2008) model for online collaborative learning. Like Allport's "contact hypothesis" the TEC Model first lays out the necessary conditions for its successful implementation. These conditions are outlined as follows:

- Small group co-operation and collaboration
- Institutional support
- Interaction over a year
- Team teaching
- Content a-political
- Equality of status
- Teachers belong to different cultural groups

Once these conditions have been met, the TEC Model can be implemented (see Figure 5).

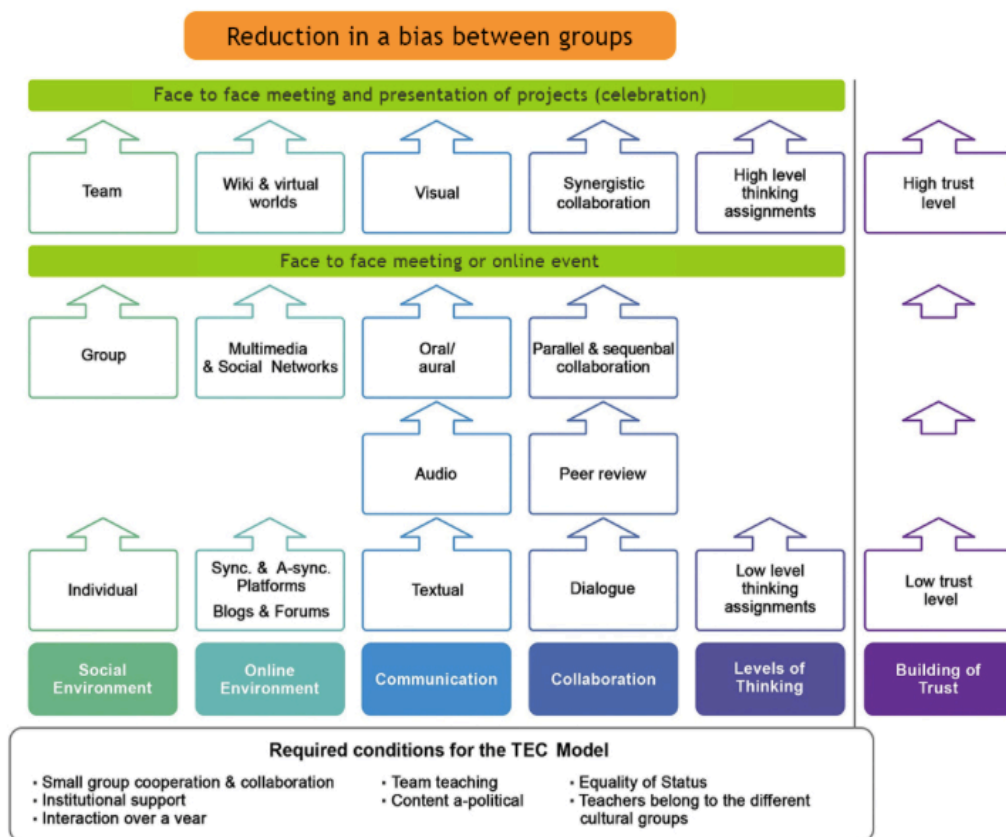


Figure 5. The TEC Model (MOFET Institute, 2014).

As outlined in the chart, the model is grounded in the assumption that, in order to build trust, contact should be progressive and move through stages. In addition, certain internet-based technologies are more conducive to facilitating contact at certain stages.

As depicted in the TEC Model, in the beginning stages, individual students have access to synchronous and asynchronous means of communication such as forums and blogs. The first task is for students to come up with communication guidelines or rules. At this point, communication is textual and collaboration is at the “Dialogue” stage. In the last couple of years, E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015) notes, college students have also gone outside of the platform and used “WhatsApp” to interact textually. This has allowed them to continue chatting in a way that is immediate and ongoing without having to log onto the site. Students can then post a summary of these outside chats on the course Moodle site so that they can become a source of further discussion. Text-based exchanges outside the course site, suggests E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), expands the opportunities for interaction and



integrates the development of these relationships into the day-to-day lives of students, thus developing a sense of community (E. Hoter, personal communication, October 31, 2015). According to Salmons (2008) at this first stage participants move from exchanging ideas to finding shared purpose and coherence in the plans and/or tactics needed to coordinate their efforts.

Many teachers, according to E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), choose to start with an exercise in which everyone writes their name and where it comes from:

In Hebrew and Arab cultures a lot of thought is given when you name someone. It's never because it sounds right ... it has meaning. It could be a memory of someone or because it represents some kind of quality or power.

This type of exercise is important for working through the assumption that the different groups have nothing in common. Other examples of comparisons have included looking at the music of different cultures.

In this preliminary stage, many teachers may also ask students to communicate through pictures. Students are asked not to take pictures of themselves but rather to present parts of their lives and culture through images, past and present. This medium, suggests E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), is an excellent way for sharing and comparing different viewpoints. Students could be asked, for example, to take and share a picture of what they see outside of their bedroom window and then reflect on or compare the images (E. Hoter, personal communication, October 31, 2015).

E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015) suggests that you can begin to see a change in the relationships between students based on how they sign off from their textual communication. Once students start adding things like “have a good weekend” or sharing personal information about what they will be doing over the weekend, for example, we can see that a transition is being made and friendships are being formed (E. Hoter, personal communication, October 31, 2015).

According to Salmons' model (2008), the next level of collaboration is “peer review” in which participants exchange work, provide feedback and incorporate others' comments. As trust develops, student groups move into “parallel and sequential collaboration” (level 3) which requires that each participant complete a component of their project and then build on each

other's contributions.

For “parallel and sequential collaboration” to occur participants begin to use technologies that allow for live audio exchanges. The lack of visual representation, suggests E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015) remains important because, for example:

some women dress completely covered in black. Based on this, other participants may assume that they couldn't possibly have anything in common. If, however, they have spent time working on assignments, giggling and laughing together, then they will see each other as individuals not stereotypes.

This type of progression thus allows participants to deepen their relationships through online collaborative activities and not pre-judge one another on the basis of outward appearance (Shonfeld et al., 2013). A significant shift occurs in the relationships, suggests E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), once the group has accomplished their first group assignment. Through this process everyone has had to do their part and the grade reflects the fact that they have worked together and can rely on each other (E. Hoter, personal communication, October 31, 2015).

It is not until the final stage of collaboration, called “synergistic collaboration”, that participants make visual contact as they work “together to collaborate fully in the creation of a product that meshes each one's contributions into a whole” (Salmons, 2008). Examples of collaborative projects include:

(a) development of an educational game; (b) creation of a video clip; (c) involvement in Internet research, including use of various databanks; (d) using collaborative online tools such as “voicethread” “mindomo” and “google docs” (e) participation in activities incorporating understanding and the implications of safe and secure Internet use; (f) reflection via personal blogs; (g) building of treasure hunts and Web quests; (h) working and collaborating on a wiki, second life and social network (Shonfeld et al., 2012, p. 20).

One new development that the TEC Center is working on is the creation of a virtual world for its participants. Due out in 2016, “TEC Island” is a version of “Second Life” that is specifically designed to facilitate intergroup dialogue and collaboration in Israel. This virtual world has a learning space where students can meet, collaborate and showcase their projects as well as a synagogue, church and mosque. There is also a restaurant where students from all sectors of

society can sit down and have a meal together. In this space they must order their meal in three languages in order to have it appear. There is also a space for students to socialize while playing games (E. Hoter, personal communication, October 31, 2015; see Figure 6).



*Figure 6.* TEC Island (Hoter, 2015).

As outlined in the model, the “synergistic collaboration” stage is usually followed by face-to-face meetings.

### **Controversial Issues**

As noted in the “Conditions for the TEC Model” there is a general avoidance of controversial issues. With elementary school children, suggests E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), these types of issues are avoided and the emphasis is placed on similarities. For younger participants the priority is to move them away from black and white, good versus bad thinking. Teachers orient discussions around how they think old people should be treated in society and what kind of world they want to live in. At the college level, however, E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015) is looking at Jewish and Palestinian literature. One of the challenges, she suggests, is that “the narratives are so different that it is very difficult for students to hear each other” (E. Hoter, personal communication, October 31, 2015). Instead of attempting to address conflicting viewpoints explicitly, learning is thus centred around a subject area with the emphasis being placed on learning how to work together. As described by E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015):

We are trying to widen the students' minds about the identities of others. We hope to get funding next year to continue the children's course for another year so the same children can continue working together and we will be able to go deeper in understanding one another. This year one of the topics in the college literature course was identities. Based on the literature students presented their identities in a symbolic form and then recorded themselves narrating a story about one of their identities. The students were asked to choose another student's identity to make it into a written story- telling the story from another's perspective and ultimately the whole group chooses one story to perform together.

### **Role of Teacher**

The TEC Model is implemented by the educators of the participating groups, within small teams from the different cultures. Teachers make up a community of people who teach together and are dedicated to the mission of the TEC Center. They often build strong bonds and socialize together outside of the workspace. In fact, suggests E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), an important role that the teacher plays is to model the attitudes and behaviours that they are working to cultivate in their students. As well, having teachers that represent each culture is meant to facilitate the "equal status" requirement of the "contact hypothesis" by helping students from every group feel supported, like they have an equal voice in the group.

For the schools program, the supervising teachers from each school participate in an accredited in-service training course tailored to the project. After meeting for about two months in small groups in an online environment, they meet face-to-face for a three-day training at the beginning of the school year. Together, they decide on their subject matter, assignments, and write about their units and how they correspond to the TEC model (Shonfeld et al., 2013). Teachers are expected to demonstrate how their semester will move through "blocks" or stages as interactions shift through the various mediums. Each teacher's cluster has an adviser who meets with the teachers online every week, visits the schools, and keeps in touch with the principal. In addition, all the teachers meet online twice a month throughout the school year to learn about new technologies such as TEC Island and to discuss ongoing issues such as ideas for face-to-face sessions. The TEC Center also provides teachers with counselors who provide

ongoing weekly support throughout the year (E. Hoter, personal communication, October 31, 2015). As stated by E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), the goal is not to tell teachers what to teach, so much as to provide them with a model for teaching and exercises that they can try out and adapt. For E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), this flexibility is essential for maintaining the flexibility and “sustainability” of the approach.

### **Challenges**

Ongoing challenges, according to E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), revolve around cultural differences, differences in study habits, intercultural competitiveness, and topics marked by deep and historical disagreements. The most significant challenge to implementing the TEC model, however, is the ongoing political tensions that can keep institutions, parents, teachers and students from agreeing to participate in the first place. Ideological and psychological barriers include a resistance by many religious Jewish schools and colleges which are opposed to mixed-gender online collaborations. These types of challenges make the face-to-face meetings particularly challenging as some male Orthodox Jewish students may decline to attend events that include women. Secular Jews may also have reservations about collaborating with religious Jewish students as well as Arab students many of whom look and dress differently. The fact that students may feel superior or inferior based on visual cues, suggests E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), is one of the reasons that visual and face-to-face contact is delayed until the end of the program.

Another challenge to fostering a sense of equality between groups is that the common language of instruction is Hebrew. Arab students have reported that the predominance of Hebrew has led to the “fear of facing inequality in the group” (Shonfeld et al., 2013, pp. 57–58). One strategy for addressing language disparity, as was previously described, involves assignments that look to non-verbal ways of communicating, such as the sharing of pictures. As multilingual social networks emerge and translation technology improves, however, this concern is being increasingly addressed (E. Hoter, personal communication, October 31, 2015).

## 7. Case Study: WorldVuze

### Context and Description

In 2008, WorldVuze co-founder Julia Coburn decided to coordinate pen-pal exchanges between classrooms in Tanzania and Canada. These interactions evolved quickly as access to technology allowed for the sharing of text, videos and links. As communication increased so did educators' concerns that these individual exchanges sometimes served to reinforce generalizations as students assumed that their penpals' views were representative of their country. The WorldVuze platform was therefore created to facilitate a more "global learning experience" by providing students with access to a multiplicity of perspectives from within one country and around the world thus exposing students to the "complexity of what it means to be human" (J. Coburn, personal communication, November 4, 2015).

WorldVuze has since become a wide-reaching non-profit organization that provides an online educational platform where students from across Canada and around the world can share and explore perspectives with each other by asking and answering questions. The map-based question and answer format is designed to be easy to integrate into a variety of curricula at the elementary and high school levels. As described by J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015), "What we've created is the ground work: a flexible technology and system that is globally-connected and has safety mechanisms".

According to the site, through WorldVuze, teachers can ask questions on behalf of their class to a global community of students. Using the site teachers can also track students' activity "allowing them to assess difficult to measure skills and competencies over time, such as critical thinking, communication and information literacy" (WorldVuze, 2015). Answering questions can help students "deepen their understanding of themselves, each other, and the world around them by sharing, comparing, analyzing, and reflecting on their own and other students' views on questions asked locally and around the globe" thereby adding "real-world relevance to a wide variety of subjects by investigating the first-hand views of other students independently or directed by their teacher" as they "creatively apply the first-hand, primary perspectives of their peers locally and around the world to research projects, class discussions and statistical analysis" (WorldVuze, 2015).

The WorldVuze platform is thus designed to facilitate an inquiry-based global dialogue

that, it is hoped, leads to an openness to differing perspectives and a deepening of critical thinking skills. The platform allows students to sort and find patterns in how students have responded to questions and, according to the website, “dig deeper to understand why they are thinking the way they do—*giving them a deeper understanding of themselves, each other and their world*” (WorldVuze, 2015).

### **Dialogue**

According to J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015), the WorldVuze approach to dialogue emphasizes the need to “take a step back while taking the time to be open to listening, communicating, and understanding”. In contrast to many intercultural or intergroup dialogue models, J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) suggests that the WorldVuze approach does not emphasize the need for some sort of agreement, cross-cultural collaboration or action. Based on her experiences in international development, J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) suggests that having students prematurely attempt to address or take action on a social issue can be problematic and laden with assumptions that in the end may “accomplish the opposite of a well-meaning social justice project”.

By having classrooms post a question that is then answered by students from around the world, the platform is explicitly designed to expose students to wide-ranging perspectives that differ from their own. WorldVuze participants are expected to answer questions and be open, curious and respectful of different positions. As students are encouraged to consider multiple perspectives, J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) suggests that the hope is that this will lead to an increase in students’ capacities to think critically as they analyze issues and explore the complexities of many of today’s social issues. When students’ are able to challenge their own thinking, this is recorded on the site as a “mindshift”. J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) defines a “mindshift” as follows:

When students come in with assumptions about the topic or some of the responders and then, after reading through all the other perspectives, experience a change in their thinking which they can then share with other students.

The fundamental challenge, according to J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015), is thus how to trigger or deepen critical thinking skills, moving beyond acknowledging different perspectives to having a “mindshift”.

**Role of teacher/facilitator.** When teachers join the site, they gain access to materials including tips on how to formulate “powerful questions” that will invite a variety of perspectives and opportunities for deeper learning and “mindshifts” by being relevant, engaging, thought-provoking and challenging. That being said, while some classes may ask questions about climate change or views on the death penalty others may also ask questions related to favourite superheroes or pets. Allowing for a variety of questions is important, suggests J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) because:

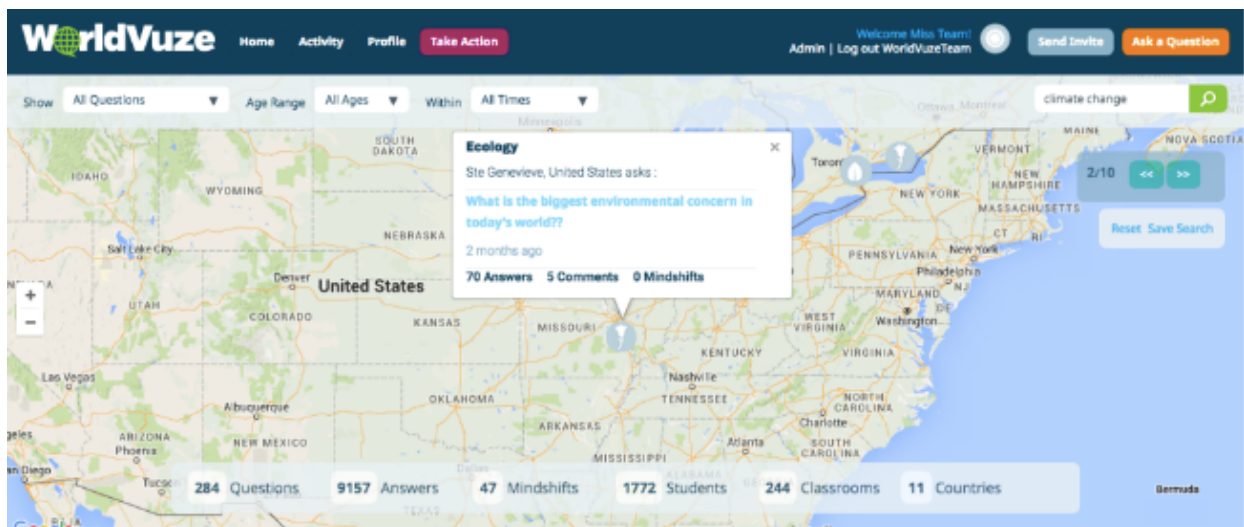
I think that’s all the shades of being a person. Sometimes, you’re talking about your favourite superhero character, and another time you’re talking about a climate change. I like that they can do that and they have the flexibility for all these conversations you can find and seek dialogue that interest them and engage them. That’s really what it’s about.

Although the teacher is responsible for posting the question, WorldVuze does encourage their teachers to consult with their students first. Having teachers post questions is meant to limit the number of questions that are posted while ensuring that the quality of the question is likely to engage other students.

Instead of initiating a question, teachers may opt to have their students explore and participate in existing exchanges. A search filter on the site allows students to look up any questions related to, for example, the environment. Although most teachers use WorldVuze to ask or explore questions related to their curriculum they can also direct their students to explore the site and identify a topic that interests them. For J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015), providing students with open access to the site, beyond their class questions, is an important feature as it allows students to learn about issues they care for or have questions about.

Integrating WorldVuze into curriculum can help teachers address some of the challenges of having discussions on controversial issues in a traditional classroom setting. According to J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015), asking questions to a global audience takes the pressure off teachers to represent multiple perspectives on an issue. As well, it minimizes the pressure that students may feel to conform to the perspective of their teacher on a particular issue. Instead, students are directed to a variety of global perspectives as they are encouraged to do their own research and decide their own positions (J. Coburn, personal communication, November 4, 2015; see Figure 7).





*Figure 7. View of the question: What is the biggest environmental concern in today's world? (Coburn, 2016)*

As of yet, J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) suggests that it is rare for teachers to get directly involved in the exchanges themselves. The role of the teacher currently revolves around framing the question and effectively tying WorldVuze into an existing curriculum. Ideally, suggests J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015), teachers would give students feedback throughout their participation with WorldVuze. However, this is often not yet the case. One of her current goals is to provide professional development opportunities for teachers to learn how to intervene effectively to advance students' thinking. In addition, these types of learning opportunities would help develop a network and community of teachers engaged in this type of online facilitation so that they may discuss strategies and exchange resources.

J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) suggests that both the WorldVuze technology and teacher engagement could be improved so as to recognize and highlight critical engagement thereby raising the level of dialogue. For example, some sort of badging or flagging system could draw attention to certain posts while teachers could learn about different prompts to direct towards students who may not be fully engaged or unwilling to consider alternate perspectives.

**Dialogue guidelines.** WorldVuze applies some general guidelines that revolve largely around restricting offensive language. The site also has a profanity filter and flagging system which allows any user to identify a post which they may deem as inappropriate. Flagged

comments get sent to the site curators as well as the teacher of the student in question. J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) states that it is critical to the site's approach that student's not be censored and it is rare that a comment is removed. According to the WorldVuze online safety document, the site maintains the privacy of their teachers and students by doing the following:

- We validate every teacher before they are allowed access to the WorldVuze site
- Every student on WorldVuze is connected to their teacher via a unique 'class code.'
- WorldVuze does not require or collect student email addresses.
- Students' identities are protected on the site.
- Students are all accountable to their teacher on the site.
- WorldVuze uses a profanity filter on the platform.
- Teachers and students can 'flag' any post.
- WorldVuze provides teachers with a student online conduct video (J. Coburn, personal communication, November 4, 2015).

Students' safety is maintained by asking them not to use their real names on the site. Instead, they choose usernames, with only their teachers knowing their actual identities. The only information students know about each other is their country of origin, age and gender (J. Coburn, personal communication, November 4, 2015).

## **Power**

The WorldVuze platform is designed to be accessible to as many populations as possible by being free and accessible over low bandwidth. The WorldVuze platform was originally designed, tested and implemented to connect students in a small community in Tanzania with students in Ontario, thereby ensuring its accessibility from a technological standpoint. The design of the site is also meant to provide a "level playing field" by allowing every participant the space to express himself or herself with every voice on equal footing (J. Coburn, personal communication, November 4, 2015). As stated on the site: "It is a place where every voice matters and every voice is equal, bringing together students from different backgrounds all over the world" (WorldVuze, 2015). As mentioned, J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) also suggests that WorldVuze can help diffuse the traditional power dynamics between teacher and student by having students engage with the perspectives of other students thus

lessened a possible tendency to agree with or conform to a teacher's position.

J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) suggests that although English is clearly the dominant language on the site, the WorldVuze team encourages participation in multiple languages and have some translation and multilingual features. With additional funding, they hope to integrate simultaneous translation software. As well, one of the challenges of a platform that is explicitly global is the seeming impossibility of tailoring it to specific cultures or regions. Efforts to ensure inclusivity are currently being made as the WorldVuze team looks to establish regional coordinators (J. Coburn, personal communication, November 4, 2015).

### **Conclusion**

These seven case studies provide a diverse overview of the field of technology-mediated dialogue for civic and peace-building purposes, whether for the goals of understanding, friendship, trust-building or reconciliation. Although the contexts are very different and educational levels range from elementary to higher education there are nonetheless themes that emerge across these case studies that will be explored in the following discussion chapter. By applying concepts from the theoretical framework and literature review, the practices that are aligned with a critical and decolonizing conception of global citizenship education will also be highlighted.

## Chapter 6: Discussion and Recommendations

### Introduction

The results chapter presented seven case studies on programs that facilitate intergroup or intercultural online dialogue for civic, peace-building and reconciliation purposes. The following discussion weaves together the major themes that arose when considering the results as a whole and anchors them in the theoretical framework. The first part of the discussion outlines the rationale for using technology to facilitate intergroup and intercultural dialogue as well as several of the features identified by the programs as being integral for obtaining teacher and institutional support. Consistent with the objectives of critical research, the rest of the chapter is shaped in the form of a series of recommendations designed to address the following questions that were identified in the literature review (Chapter 2):

What can we learn from these programs that could be used to advance a decolonizing ICT education agenda/critical global citizenship? (Zembylas & Vrasidas, 2005, p. 81).

and

how can we transform Western higher education to provide epistemically and discursively inclusive transcultural learning zones that place non-mainstream students on trajectories of participation that enhances their opportunity to participate as equals in a more vernacular, a much more egalitarian, cosmopolitanism increasingly committed to socio-economic and politically transformative global practices? (Eijkman, 2009, p. 244).

By applying Andreotti and Pashby's (2013) proposed guidelines the following discussion aims to "expose the potential complicity in the sets of unexamined assumptions that guide even the best of intentions" ( p. 433). In addition, the framework will be used to highlight the practices that I believe align with a critical and decolonizing framework and should serve to guide future developments in this area (see Appendix F).

### Rationale for Using Technology to Facilitate Dialogue

Both the interviews and the literature review make the case that the most compelling argument for using technology to facilitate intercultural or intergroup dialogue is that it can connect people who would not otherwise have the chance to meet. As well, technology-mediated

communication has the added benefit of being sustainable in the long-term, thus helping to fulfill the requirements of Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis.

### **Allows Contact That Would Not Otherwise Be Possible**

All of the programs addressed in this research connect student populations that would not otherwise have the opportunity to meet. For the Connected North program this is due to the remoteness of many northern communities and a lack of affordable transportation. As described in the case study, the integration of technology has allowed for educational opportunities “previously unimaginable for an isolated northern community” (Information Technology Association of Canada, 2016, para. 5). In the case of Israel, the barriers to face-to-face meetings are related to regional political conflict. In Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland the primary challenge to contact is a largely segregated school system. Thus, even though these programs are technically within the same region or country, face-to-face contact has many obstacles. For Soliya's Connect Program, TakingITGlobal's Culture Connect, Global SchoolNet, and WorldVuze, digital communications have allowed students from around the world to come into contact for the purposes of dialogue.

### **Facilitates Transferability and Long-Term Relationship Building**

In addition to being affordable and thus accessible to a larger population, a virtual exchange provides students with time to reflect on their learning and to anchor their conversations in their daily lives, thus minimizing, in H. Belsky's (personal communication, October 10, 2015) words, the “transferability challenge”. In contrast to traditional and expensive student exchanges in which students are displaced to another country for a short period of time, longer-term virtual exchanges can facilitate the integration of new ideas into students' real-world contexts. As concluded by Pettigrew (1998), the ideal conditions for intergroup interventions include ways to sustain relationships over time so that new perspectives can be integrated into one's worldview in the long term.

Austin and Hunter (2014) suggest that “Crucially, what ICT brought to the Contact Hypothesis was the potential for long-term contact to be sustained” (p. 21). For the TEC Center, text-based exchanges outside the course site have expanded the opportunities for interaction and ultimately facilitated the integration of new relationships into the day-to-day lives of students, thus developing a sense of community that is sustainable outside and beyond the virtual

classroom context (E. Hoter, personal communication, October 31, 2015). This feature of online communication is an important component of TakingITGlobal's (TIG) mission which centers around sustaining youth led networks that extend beyond class work. Thus, students who are connected either through Culture Connect or Connected North are also encouraged to link into the wider TIG community with its youth-led working groups, discussion forums and social action projects

### **Securing Institutional Support**

All of the programs addressed in this research suggest that in order to appeal to teachers and educational institutions there are a selection of requirements that need to be met. The first criterion for successful integration is to ensure that the platform can align with and is informed by existing curriculum goals. "Third Party Support" with regards to professional and technical support is also determined to be essential. Whether through the provision of professional development opportunities, meetings, a support person or actual facilitators, the sites had a shared commitment to ensuring that they were effectively integrated into curriculum. Finally, these platforms were all private and governed by acceptable use policies and ground rules for participation.

### **Curriculum Alignment**

Anchoring interventions related to online collaboration and dialogue into a wider curriculum was determined to be crucial for ensuring the sustainability and success of the programs in this research. Programs must be designed around cross-cultural dialogue in a way that is complementary to specific curricular goals and addresses the need to develop technological skills (Austin & Hunter, 2014: Austin, Smyth, Rickard, Quirk-Bolt, & Metcalfe). A critical feature of Dissolving Boundaries, for example, was that it identified aspects of the curriculum across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland that were "common" and provided ways to enhance these elements. Working mainly around issues to do with the children's own lives, geographical and historical contexts, teachers designed tasks that were both investigative and collaborative while meeting their own curriculum requirements (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015). Similarly, the TEC Center designs a curriculum meant to compliment the requirements of the formal education systems including subjects such as science, literature, environmental studies, mathematics, current events, drama and music.

On the TakingITGlobal Education site, teachers can seek curriculum alignment through the “activity database” which includes teacher developed lesson plans and activity ideas labeled according to education level, subject-area and competency. As well, “thematic classrooms” provide complete units of instruction including content, assignments, and teaching strategies. The simple question and answer format of the WorldVuze platform is designed to be flexible enough to be used in conjunction with a variety of subject-matter and curriculum goals. For Connected North and GlobalSchoolNet, the coordinators offer personalized support for designing collaborative projects that can meet particular course objectives. Connected North, Dissolving Boundaries, TakingITGlobal and the TEC Center also provide opportunities for teachers and students to develop technical competencies. This type of alignment was critical for getting “institutional support”, determined to be primordial by Allport (1954), for establishing the necessary conditions for positive intergroup contact.

### **Third Party Support**

The programs analyzed in this research were selected because they provide more than then merely the technology needed to connect classrooms. Each program works with and supports educators on some level. Soliya’s Connect Program (SCP) provides a clear distinction between the role of the organization and its facilitators and that of the professors. University professors receive guidelines on how to integrate the Connect Program into their curriculum. Meanwhile the Soliya team sets up the dialogue groups, trains and assigns co-facilitators, and has the facilitators fill out reports for the professors on student attendance and participation (Helm et al., 2012). The role of the professor is thus to assign Soliya’s readings and discussion topics into their own courses. They must also prepare students for the SCP by explaining how it aligns with and enhances the goals the course (Helm et al., 2012).

On the other hand, other programs take a more personalized approach and work directly with teachers to develop different forms of collaboration. Global SchoolNet teachers, for example, facilitate student interactions and get direct and ongoing support from the organization throughout the semester (Y. Andrés, personal communication, October 10, 2015). The coordinator of Connected North also takes a very hands-on approach to facilitating partnerships, and works directly with teachers to develop programs that meet students’ needs. L. DuPré

(personal communication, February 12, 2016) has also facilitated conversations with students in order to determine the types of projects that would be relevant to them.

For the TEC Center, the supervising teachers from each school participate in an accredited in-service training course tailored to the project. After meeting for about two months in small groups in an online environment, they meet face-to-face for a three-day training at the beginning of the school year. Together, they decide on their subject matter, assignments, and write about their units and how they correspond to the TEC model (Shonfeld, Hoter & Ganeyem, 2014). As stated by E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), the goal is not to tell teachers what to teach, so much as to provide them with a model for teaching and exercises that they can try out and adapt.

Dissolving Boundaries teachers were invited to a planning meeting that gave teachers the opportunity to learn about the technology, meet the DB team, plan their joint project work and socialize (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015). As described by Austin and Hunter (2014):

At the epicenter is teacher professional development both in terms of the acquisition of technical skills and, crucially, the pedagogic knowledge, based on classroom experience, of knowing when and how to deploy technology in ways that promote collaborative learning (p. 36- 37).

Teachers also received handbooks with contact information, guidelines around netiquette, form letters for parents and a list of suggested venues for the face-to-face meetings. By the end of the conference teachers were expected to have completed learning agreements with their partner classes essentially outlining what they were intending to do for the whole year in blocks of time (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015). When Dissolving Boundaries lost its funding, however, partnerships that had been formed in this way were largely disbanded. According to R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015), this is a testament to the need for ongoing third-party support and funding so that a team is available to train teachers, facilitate pairings, monitor interactions and support teachers as they move “outside of their comfort zone”.



### **Privacy Controls, Safety Measures and Acceptable Use Policies**

Securing institutional support is dependent on ensuring that student spaces are private and protected. Every platform in this research is password protected so that student interactions cannot be viewed in the public domain. In the case of WorldVuze, students' identities are further protected through the use of usernames. Other than the username, the only information that is visible to the WorlVuze community is a students' country of origin, age and gender. Only individual teachers know the actual identities of individual students (J. Coburn, personal communication, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015).

In order to reassure parents, Dissolving Boundaries and WorldVuze both report that they have a type of "profanity filter" that alerts administrators to the use of inappropriate and/or offensive language. When comments are signaled to team members they can then go in and edit or remove these comments if needed. Dissolving Boundaries, WorldVuze and TakingITGlobal also share a flagging system that allows teachers and students to alert site administrators to comments that may not be considered appropriate or conflict with "acceptable use guidelines".

Many sites recommend that individual classes and groups come up with their own ground rules for communication. Although these mechanisms are in place, both H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) and J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) point out that it is critical to their approach that students not be censored unless deemed absolutely necessary. In the case of Soliya's Connect Program, facilitators are trained to deal with rare instances of hateful speech by turning them into opportunities to deepen learning (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

### **Guidelines for Developing Online Programs that Facilitate Transformative Dialogue**

Having provided practical guidelines regarding the integration of online dialogue into education programs, the following section is framed as a series of recommendations on how to foster transformative dialogue while maximizing the capabilities of an online environment. Although many of the programs addressed here reflect more of a "soft" approach to global citizenship education and an apolitical version of intergroup dialogue, there are some features of these programs that can nonetheless provide guidance on how to address epistemological, linguistic and technological hegemonies in online learning environments. Specifically, the following advocates for a critical approach that recognizes the importance of historical context,

prioritizes transformation (instead of normalization) in dialogue and explicitly addresses power dynamics. A transformative dialogue model should move through stages with trained co-facilitators. In order to facilitate inclusion the affordances of online dialogue should be leveraged by providing opportunities for engagement through videoconferencing as well as asynchronous discussion forums. The integration of wikis, images and videos should be used to share personal experiences, challenge dominant ideologies and explore different ways of knowing and understanding social issues. Facilitators should be trained to balance feelings of discomfort and safety within the group so that participants are both receptive and challenged. Finally, in line with a critical framework, the dialogue process should conclude with emancipatory action aligned global peace building and social justice efforts (see Appendix F: Guidelines).

### **1. Include Historical Analysis**

The critical-dialogical framework points to the need to attend to the different needs of groups based on history and context (Gurin et al., 2013). As suggested by Andreotti (2012), decolonizing global initiatives requires the inclusion of complex historical analysis as well as an awareness of power imbalances, inequalities and certain groups' experiences and complicity with harm. Although the TEC Center, Dissolving Boundaries, Soliya and Connected North all provide examples of how a particular context may shape how programs are designed none of them appear to explicitly address the historical power imbalances between the groups involved.

In the case of Israel's TEC Center, as noted in the case study, the most significant challenge to facilitating intergroup dialogue is that the populations involved are already entangled in political tensions that are marked by deep historical disagreement, conflicting narratives as well as ideological and psychological barriers. In addition, the implementation of the TEC Model for dialogue faces cultural barriers including a resistance by many orthodox Jewish schools and colleges to mixed-gender online collaborations and face-to-face meetings. Secular Jews also reported having had reservations about collaborating with religious Jewish students as well as Arab students, many of whom look and dress differently. Due to the fact that students may feel superior or inferior based on visual cues, suggests E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015), the TEC Model in particular delays face-to-face contact until the end of the program. Although the TEC Model is designed to address visual cultural differences, it does not speak to how to address historical disagreements which may be considered fundamental to transforming intergroup relationships.

For Soliya, the significance of historical context is reflected by the provision of two different curriculums, referred to as “cluster one” and “cluster two”. Cluster one focuses on intergroup dialogue between students from the west and from Muslim-majority countries while the second “cluster” explores a broader range of global social and political issues with a mix of students from all over the world. Unlike the TEC Center, all required contact between groups occurs through telepresence technology. This is probably due to the fact that the dialogue model used by Soliya relies heavily on the presence of co-facilitators to move participants through the stages of dialogue. In this model, the emphasis is on understanding difference through dialogue. Issues surrounding power, however, appear to be centered on their manifestation within the dialogue process without necessarily being grounded within a historical context. For example, within the dialogue setting there might be evidence of a regional imbalance with regards to access to technology or comfort participating in dialogues. Facilitators may make observations about these imbalances within the dialogue setting without necessarily addressing broader or historical social justice issues.

For the Connected North Program, an explicit attempt to address the historical context has meant designing programs around the needs of Canada’s northern Indigenous communities. The coordinator also points to the development of a responsive curriculum that recognizes “that many youth and community members experience ongoing intergenerational trauma that is intensified by not always knowing their histories or where the issues and trauma have stemmed from” (L. DuPré personal communication, February 12, 2016). Partnerships with non-Indigenous educational institutions have thus been conditional on meeting the needs of northern communities. This approach is meant to address a historical tendency to exploit and tokenize Indigenous youth in north-south contact initiatives.

An example from a north-to-north cultural exchange, however, reveals what can happen when the historical legacy is not addressed directly. In one instance reported in the previous chapter, a school in Iqaluit was connected to a school in Arviat and together the schools took a virtual tour of a museum of art in Toronto. The goal of this tour was to counter many of the negative portrayals of northern communities and to develop a sense of pride in the participants. Students from each school recognized artwork and artists from their communities. L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) reported feeling gratified to hear that, after the “field trip”, one youth excitedly proclaimed, "Did you know they have our artwork? They care

about us down there!". She further recalled that "it was just kind of a beautiful moment, just even showing them that there are spaces that people want to learn and hear about them can be powerful". Although this might foster positive emotions in the short-term, without a deeper questioning around *why* Indigenous youth in Canada suffer disproportionately from issues surrounding self-confidence, it seems unlikely to lead to systemic change. In fact, without a deeper questioning, such an intervention may do little more than reinforce what Freire (1970) described as "internalized oppression" as the youth involved appear gratified that the dominant group even acknowledges them. Without asking historically informed questions around social issues that are particular to youth in Indigenous communities it is not only unlikely that transformation or justice will be the result, but the dominant group gets humanized for "caring" without having done anything to warrant this sentiment.

## **2. Prioritize Transformation**

A preliminary comparison of how the programs view the goals of dialogue reveal a similar emphasis on understanding, respect and appreciation of multiple perspectives. For Global SchoolNet, for example, dialogue is defined as a process whereby students come "to understand that they need to be open to different perspectives, different points of view" (Y. Andrés, personal communication, October 10, 2015). At the end of the exchanges fostered by the Culture Connect model, participants are meant to "bridge cultural divides through individual and collective sharing - helping to advance diversity and multiculturalism in our civil society" ("Culture Connect," n.d.). For Soliya's Connect Program, the purpose of dialogue is to have students "engage with differences - moving from confrontation to co-operation and compassion" ("Soliya," n.d.). For Dissolving Boundaries, the goals of dialogue were "respect for difference and appreciation for similarity" (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015). The conceptualization of dialogue put forth by Israel's TEC Center is that of a process that works towards building trust and mutual respect between groups that have been marked by a legacy of prejudice ("TEC Center," n.d.). As well, the WorldVuze approach to dialogue emphasizes the need to "take a step back while taking the time to be open to listening, communicating, and understanding" (J. Coburn, personal communication, November 4, 2015). Finally, for the Connected North Program, although the role of dialogue may change based on the context, it is ultimately, according to L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), conceptualized

as a process that builds trust, empathy and “cross-cultural understanding” (“What is Connected North” n.d.).

Despite these shared commitments to the pursuit of understanding, several programs provided examples of initiatives that seemingly fail to move students beyond superficial considerations of difference. For example, some of the “strongest interactions” from the Culture Connect pilot were around weather differences, food, styles of dress and day-to-day life. For Global SchoolNet, the most common purpose of cross-cultural collaboration is “information sharing” such as a project that had students from London, San Diego, Sydney and Tokyo collect and share information on the endangered species in their local zoos. Additional examples of “cross-cultural collaborations” included, according to Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), “how we celebrate holidays, the foods we eat, the side of the road we drive on, etc.”

More in line with a critical conception of dialogue, several of the programs did suggest that an important part of the dialogue process involves some sort of shift or transformation on the part of the student. Reminiscent of Mezirow’s (1978) conception of transformative learning, the WorldVuze platform suggests that dialogue is meant to facilitate a “mindshift” which involves experiencing a change in one’s thinking due to exposure to multiple perspectives. Students are encouraged to consider these different perspectives as they ask and receive answers to questions from a global audience. J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) suggests that the hope is that this will lead to an increase in students’ capacities to think critically as they analyze issues and become open to an exploration of the complexities of many of today’s social issues. For the Dissolving Boundaries program, Austin et al. (2010) developed a framework that described the optimal level of interaction as follows:

Level 3: Evidence of challenging knowledge construction and/or attitudinal change, pupil ownership of the learning process and/or pupil reflection on the learning process which includes elements of metacognition (‘learning about learning’) (p. 336).

For R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015), this was the ongoing challenge of the program, moving students from relationship-building to a place where they felt like they could challenge each other. Soliya’s H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) points to the fact that dialogue needs to be about more than just providing opportunities to share and be exposed to different perspectives. Students also need to engage in a reflective process that helps

them understand why they and others think the way that they do.

As described by Freire (1970), moving beyond “understanding” involves the ability to identify and transcend ideological constraints in order to recognize the causes of oppression so as to work towards liberation. Andreotti (2013) further suggests that this process necessarily involves recognizing one’s own complicity in global inequality. For the programs addressed in this research, however, although there was some convergence regarding “understanding” and “respect” being priorities in dialogue the programs that sought “transformation” were generally limited to the ability to consider multiple perspectives, reflect on assumptions and engage in metacognitive processes. Although these are important aspects of the dialogue process they do not go far enough in grappling with oppression, complicity, liberation and social justice. Programs must be conceptualized around the goal of transformation and the conditions needed to support these shifts in understanding and responsibility.

### **3. Have an Emancipatory Action As a Goal**

Although many of the programs share a commitment to having a common project as an end goal, these projects do not appear to be directed towards an emancipatory action and may succumb to the salavationist, uncomplicated and paternalistic penchants of “soft” conceptions of global education. As suggested by Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015), one of the reasons WorldVuze purposely avoids having any sort of cross-cultural collaboration or action is because they believe that having students prematurely attempt to address or take action on a social issue can be problematic and laden with assumptions that in the end may “accomplish the opposite of a well-meaning social justice project”. Andreotti (2012) further warns that these projects must challenge a tendency towards “uncomplication” and ask: “Does this initiative offer a complex analysis of the problem acknowledging the possible adverse effects of proposed solutions?” (p. 2). Despite these concerns, Freire (1970) insists that dialogue must be followed by and directed towards emancipatory action because

When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter ... denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action (p. 87).

Gurin et al. (2013) recommend that a final project should be worked on collaboratively and include developing an action plan that requires students to apply what they have learned about inequality to the pursuit of social justice.

Although many of the programs described do involve cross-cultural collaboration on a final project, they are largely apolitical without reference to issues surrounding inequality or injustice. For example, the TEC Center, Dissolving Boundaries and Soliya's Connect Program all have final projects that are designed to foster intercultural collaboration and align with curricular goals related to the ability to represent multiple viewpoints. For the Connected North Program, a project-based approach to interaction is taken because, according to the coordinator, it helps northern students overcome issues around self-confidence and shyness by creating reasons for students to talk to one another, focusing participants' attention on a task with an objective (L. DuPré personal communication, February 12, 2016). Although this rationale may be logical, there is little indication as to how the project can work to ultimately address why Indigenous youth appear to experience significantly lower levels of self-confidence than their southern counterparts. In this setting, an emancipatory action might look to expose, understand and address the particular challenges faced by northern youth and move towards addressing the root causes of these issues.

Global SchoolNet also takes a largely project-based approach to collaborations between classes as well. Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) suggests that students need figure out

how they can do things that are going to personally benefit them, benefit their community, school or organization, and at the same time fits in with this idea of being a good global citizen.

This particular vision of action, however, fails to acknowledge that what might benefit one personally may not technically benefit people from other parts of the world, assuming this would be a concern for the "good global citizen". Thus, this approach may be seen as disengaged from the complexities of many current social and political issues.

This somewhat simplistic approach to action is also reflected in Global SchoolNet's US-Russia Education and Youth Working Group's project called "CyberFair: Connecting Youth Through Volunteerism" which was conceived of when Russian students became interested in the

fact that many students across the United States are required to participate in service learning. This was described as “off-putting” to many Russian youth who, according to Y. Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015), associated service learning with the old Soviet regime’s requirements that citizens work for their communities. She suggested that this particular type of cross-cultural exchange was important given the positive impact that opening up to volunteerism would have on Russian youth:

today most societies realize that unless you engage your young people in a caring way with the community, the quality of life is not going to be good. Bad things are going to happen, there's going to be graffiti, there's going to be crime, there's going to be drug use, etc.

This particular project seems consistent with a “soft” conception of global citizenship which views the “nature of the problem” as related to poverty and helplessness as opposed to inequality and injustice (Andreotti, 2006, p. 46). Further, it seems to elucidate Andreotti’s (2012) concern around global education initiatives that may be seen as “paternalistic” as the American students are portrayed as having something to teach their Russian counterparts thus potentially reinforcing feelings of American superiority. Whatever the case, the ideological roots of the project are not acknowledged. Therefore, despite being structured in such a way as to have a collaborative project as an end goal these projects seem to be largely apolitical and are therefore unlikely to be emancipatory from a critical or decolonizing perspective. An emancipatory action would look at the root causes of inequality and poverty before determining the value of volunteerism and its relationship to social justice.

#### **4. Put Students in Small Diverse Groups**

At its most basic level, intergroup dialogue theory is grounded in the expectation that small groups of diverse students will meet regularly and in-person. The TEC Centre, Dissolving Boundaries and Soliya all reflect the “equal status” requirement of Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis and Gurin et al.’s (2013) critical-dialogical framework by insisting that dialogue groups are small and have representatives from a diversity of groups. The rationale, as described by R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015) was as follows:

one of the things that we pretty much insisted on was that the schools set their classes up into small groups that were roughly similar in age and ability. For example, the Northern Irish School would have had maybe five groups of children with perhaps five in each



group. Their partner school in the Republic would also have had five groups. Group A in the North and group A in the South would have worked together. Now this was quite deliberate, partly reflecting the contact hypothesis: If you want children to become familiar with an outgroup, it's better if it's not a whole mass of people. Also, better if it's not one to one. The group provides enough diversity for the kids to not be able to make easy generalizations about them down there. In other words, in any one group there would easily have been a kid with bright red hair, very Irish looking but possibly a recent arrival from the Congo.

In addition, Global SchoolNet and Connected North both meet this requirement to the extent that they pair up classrooms from different communities or parts of the world. Maximal diversity was also sought by Culture Connect when selecting the participants of their pilot program. Most of the programs also encourage co-facilitation with representatives from different groups thus having diversity within the teaching team as well.

### **5. Take a Staged Approach to Dialogue**

A fundamental premise of the critical-dialogical framework for intergroup dialogue is that building relationships across differences should occur in stages and that every stage is designed to move the dialogue forward in some way and has its own readings, goals and expectations of the facilitator (Gurin et al., 2013). The priority of the first stage “Group Beginnings: Forming and Building Relationships” is to set the tone of the interactions while making the goal of social justice explicit. The second stage “Exploring Differences and Commonalities of Experience” moves the students towards beginning to address inequality as students talk about themselves in terms of their personal and social identities. In the third stage “Exploring and Dialoging about Hot Topics” students apply “their dialogical skills and their analytic understanding of social identities, inequalities, and collective dynamics” (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 67) to social and political issues. Finally, “Action Planning and Collaboration” requires students to apply learning about dialogue, identity, media literacy and inequality to the pursuit of social justice and peace. Despite some significant differences, both the TEC Center and Soliya models for dialogue share this assumption that, in order to build relationships, contact should be progressive and move through stages. Although both these models provide examples of ways to

structure dialogue processes online they are also both missing some key considerations and fail to align with a critical or decolonizing conception of dialogue.

The TEC Model's framework is largely derived from Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis and Salmons' (2008) model for online collaborative learning. In the beginning stages, communication is textual and collaboration is at the "Dialogue" stage. The next level of collaboration is "peer review" in which participants exchange work, provide feedback and incorporate each other's comments. As trust develops, student groups move into "parallel and sequential collaboration" (level 3) which requires that each participant complete a component of their project and then build on each other's contributions. In the final stage of collaboration, called "synergistic collaboration", participants make visual contact as they work "together to collaborate fully in the creation of a product that meshes each one's contributions into a whole" (Salmons, 2008). The "synergistic collaboration" stage is followed by face-to-face meetings. Although the act of collaboration may be seen as transformative in and of itself when bringing together groups in conflict, as Maoz (2011) suggested, failing to address power differentials and conflicts can actually exacerbate tensions within a group.

In the Soliya Model, stages are distinguished by their goals and facilitation strategies, while the technology remains the same. The first stage is "Orientation" and involves having group members learn about each other, address anxieties and work on building trust. In the second "Group Definition" stage, similarities are emphasized and bonds begin to form as students explore their own biases and assumptions. In "Learning through Difference" participants are led to open up about themselves and develop strategies for addressing emotional and controversial issues. As the group begins to explore differences, participants are challenged to listen and empathize with each other. According to the curriculum guide, it is at this stage that power dynamics usually begin to emerge. The fourth stage, "Sincere Transformation", refers to the establishment of an environment where students listen to different perspectives in an attempt to learn from and understand one another. In this phase, the expectation is that group members have a level of self-awareness and "internalized the idea of good discussion" so that the group members are able to manage and work through conflicts that may emerge. In the fifth stage, "Forward-looking Brainstorming", the focus on having good discussions as a group is shifted to brainstorming about how this experience, and things learnt as a group, could be utilized and transferred outside the group context. Finally, in the sixth and final "Winding Down" where the

group determines whether and how they would like to maintain a relationship outside of the dialogue group (Property of Soliya Inc., 2015, p.24-25).

Based on the description of the “Sincere Transformation” stage, the expectations do not appear to require a recognition of power dynamics outside of the dialogue process and/or an elaboration and commitment to address and transform injustice. In order to align with a critical and decolonizing approach to dialogue processes, programs should include stages that require students to question their level of privilege and/or disadvantage as well as the responsibilities they may have because of this. They should be brought to question the “risks and rewards of challenging inequalities” (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011, p. 16) in a way that is positive and empowering.

## **6. Train Teachers and Facilitators**

As was determined in the literature review, although some articles on intercultural online dialogue acknowledge the importance of teacher training and involvement (O’Dowd, 2007; Ware & Kramsch, 2005) few actually explored the issue in much detail. Critical pedagogy insists that teachers/facilitators must take responsibility for their role in the dialogue process so as

To avoid reproducing the values of the power structure, the educator must always combat laissez-faire pedagogy, no matter how progressive it may appear to be (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 378).

Accordingly, facilitators should take ownership of their power as they facilitate in such a way as to help their students develop the critical capacities necessary to engage in productive and transformative dialogues. The critical-dialogical facilitator, for example, is directed to use their own subjectivity as a way to demonstrate the connection between perceptions of power and positionality. Critical-dialogical facilitators are expected to mediate and model “productive” dialogue by purposefully using themselves and their experiences as a way to initiate and deepen dialogue (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011, p. 10). The following suggests that the primordial role of the teacher/facilitator is to move students through the dialogue process by questioning, modeling, balancing discomfort and safety and facilitating student ownership over the dialogue process. Although many of these guidelines are applicable to a traditional classroom setting, the physical absence of the teacher in most of these online settings can change dynamics significantly.

**6.1 Question and model.** According to Gurin et al. (2013), the primary purpose of a facilitator is to move a group through the stages of dialogue as their thinking becomes increasingly complex. Soliya's Connect Program is a testament to the essential role of facilitation in the dialogue process. Extensive training and coaching is provided to facilitators who learn to observe dynamics and ask questions that deepen dialogue and critical thinking skills. Co-facilitators are also called upon to model cross-cultural communication and support each other through the unpredictable turns of open dialogue.

The TEC Center also speaks to the impact of modeling of cross-cultural friendships that may have never been imaginable to participating groups. The TEC Model is implemented by the educators of the participating groups, within small teams from the different cultures. These teachers make up a community of people who teach together and are dedicated to the mission of the TEC Centre and often develop deep friendships. Exposing these friendships and cross-cultural camaraderie allows students to imagine what is possible outside of the classroom.

For WorldVuze, when teachers join the site, they gain access to materials including tips on how to formulate "powerful questions" that will invite a variety of perspectives and opportunities for deeper learning and "mindshifts" by being relevant, engaging, thought-provoking and challenging. As of yet, however, reports J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015), it is rare for teachers to get directly involved in the exchanges themselves. Ideally, suggests J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) teachers would give students feedback throughout their participation with WorldVuze. However, this is often not the case. One of her current goals is to provide professional development opportunities for teachers to learn how to intervene effectively to advance students' thinking. J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) suggests that both the WorldVuze technology and teacher engagement could be improved so as to recognize and highlight critical engagement thereby raising the level of dialogue. For example, some sort of badging or flagging system could draw attention to certain posts while teachers could learn about different prompts to direct towards students who may not be fully engaged or unwilling to consider alternate perspectives.

**6.2. Balance discomfort and safety.** Barraclough and McMahon (2013) point to the need for teacher involvement in online dialogue so that tensions may be used productively, suggesting that teachers must "pose the tough questions, and challenge students' assumptions just as they do in the physical classroom, to facilitate students' critical reflexivity about power,

privilege, and their own positionality” (p. 250). Zembylas and Vrasidas (2005) describe the need for a “pedagogy of discomfort” that asks students to move outside of their comfort zones and recognize the ideological framing and social construction of what they have been taught (p. 74). As described by Kanata and Martin (2007), any transformative online dialogue will likely require the take down of “fragile contradictions that are necessary to maintaining their [privileged students] unearned privilege,” (p. 4). Further, Belz (2003) insists that:

It is very important to understand that these contextually shaped tensions are not to be viewed as problems that need to be eradicated in order to facilitate smoothly functioning partnerships. ... Structural differences frequently constitute precisely these cultural rich-points that we want our students to explore (2003, p. 87).

Schneider and Silke von der Emde (2006) further warn that it is “more essential to help students to tolerate and feel comfortable with conflict rather than encourage them to deny their own cultural approaches to disagreements or rush to find common ground” (p. 183).

Despite this significant amount of agreement from the more theoretical literature, most of the programs addressed in this research avoid conflict entirely. Committing to open online dialogue, explain Schneider and Silke von der Emde (2006), can make it difficult for teachers to feel prepared given the unpredictability of student interactions and the likelihood that tensions will emerge, thus “too often efforts to teach communicative competence betray a desire to diminish or even eliminate conflict entirely” (Schneider & Silke von der Emde, 2006, p. 179). These concerns are reflected in the ways that these programs address tension and controversy, which range from explicit avoidance, to allowing issues to emerge “naturally” and finally devoting some time to these issues without necessarily addressing issues of power and privilege.

The TEC Center avoids controversial issues. For younger participants the priority is to move them away from black and white, good versus bad thinking. Teachers orient discussions around how what kind of world they want to live in. At the college level, learning is centered around a subject area, such as literature, with the emphasis being placed on learning how to work together. One of the challenges, suggests E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015) is that even when discussing literature in this context “the narratives are so different that it is very difficult for students to hear each other” (E. Hoter, personal communication, October 31, 2015).

Dissolving Boundaries is described as adopting “a more oblique approach, seeking to build trust and confidence between participants and creating a neutral place in which “hot” issues can emerge when participants are ready to air them,” (Austin & Hunter, 2014, p.27). One reason for this is described in an article by Austin, Hunter and Hollywood (2015) which suggests that “a strong focus on collaborative work in non-contentious areas of the curriculum has a strong chance of securing support from key stakeholders, including teachers, the main churches and other stakeholders in the education system” (p.508). This type of interaction, suggest the authors, may be more “modest” but it is also more realistic as ICTs are used to “normalize” relations between young people who would otherwise not have the opportunity to come into contact.

In the interest of building trust, the curriculum focus would usually start with work on topics that did not challenge a students’ identity. In general, subject-matter was determined by the teachers and was directly aligned with the particular requirements of a course or curriculum:

Now partly because we took that position and it was all about trying to get the teachers ownership of the process, they themselves I think felt more comfortable choosing relatively non-contentious topics (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

Social and political issues were expected to emerge “naturally” once students got to know each other and if and when a teacher felt equipped to handle them (Austin & Hunter, 2014, p. 32). However, it did occur that events would take place in the news that teachers would feel needed to be addressed with their students:

I think that when questions arose naturally as part of the link, teachers addressed them. In other words, they didn’t start off by saying, okay, we’re going to talk about abortion today or the police in Northern Ireland but they were, if you like, responding to questions or comments from pupils as and when they arose. I’ve got to say, there were some schools that chose what could be regarded as quite challenging topics (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

Tackling controversial issues was thus not an explicit goal of the Dissolving Boundaries program. Although trust-building was determined to be the priority, it was the individual teachers and pairings that determined the subject-matter that they felt comfortable tackling with their students.

For Connected North, although some controversial issues may be addressed in the north to north exchanges, north-south dialogues are designed to focus on friendship-building and understanding. L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that it would be ineffective to jump into discussions on controversial issues and reconciliation. Instead, the primary focus is on facilitating collaborations through which students learn about each other's cultures, such as the potluck and math example. L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that sometimes it is important for youth to find some common ground or interest and just have fun together. As stated by L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016)

Of course, those deeper conversations are going to come out, but if you try too hard to force them, it's not going to happen ... you need to let the youth take the lead on it. Again, if you try to force them like, "Okay. Talk about reconciliation right now", it'll be like, "What?!"

On the other hand, if students talk about food, host an event together or work on a music project, they start sharing and reflecting on their own life experiences when they are ready. Once they have started building up trust, they will be more open and responsive to addressing the harder issues.

As was revealed in the overview of the program structure as well as the significant investment in the training of facilitators, Soliya's Connect Program is more cognizant of the need for tension as a catalyst for deepening dialogue. Although there is much flexibility in the Soliya curriculum, there are certain topics that are determined to be essential. In the group that is more geared towards addressing issues between the west and predominantly Muslim countries, for example, there is a session that must be devoted to the role of religion and politics. As stated by Helm, Guth & Farrah (2012):

Underlying the SCP curriculum is the belief that if managed well, conflict and anger can provide real learning opportunities and can lead to genuine transformation in the group and the group dynamic. Thus, facilitators are not encouraged to avoid conflict, but rather are trained to work with it so that it helps the group grow. SCP facilitators learn techniques which can be used turn the 'heat' in the conversation up or down (p. 166).

Given Soliya's commitment to working through conflict, as long as a dialogue is constructive and the students are engaged, it is rare that topics are completely off limits. That being said, facilitators are expected to check-in through the private chat function with individual participants when conversations get heated. Students are allowed to "pass" on certain discussions, and Belsky (2015) suggests that interesting discussions may revolve around why not everyone is equally comfortable addressing a particular topic (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

According to the curriculum document, in stage three of the dialogue process "Learning through Difference", participants are led to open up about themselves and develop strategies for addressing emotional and controversial issues. As the group begins to explore differences, power dynamics usually begin to emerge. However, engagement with power issues and controversial topics appears to be quashed in the next stage, "Sincere transformation", as students are expected to move out of trying to convince others of their positions, and instead, listen to different perspectives in an attempt to learn from and understand one another in the name of "mutual understanding" (Property of Soliya Inc., 2015, p. 24). As mentioned, this is also potentially problematic and fails to fundamentally address power dynamics. It is difficult to imagine, for example, how a discussion on American foreign policy is determined to be "productive" if it results in "mutual understanding", which by definition does not actually necessitate reflection on power structures or a shift in perspective so much as an awareness of alternative positions. This is a valid goal, but, on its own fails to align with a commitment to equality and social justice.

**6.3 Facilitate student ownership.** Given that opportunities for engagement in dialogue are both text-based and through videoconferencing, there are different strategies that can be applied to challenge some of the traditional power imbalances between teacher and student. For Soliya, this involves providing a space for students to select topics and encouraging them to drive and direct the dialogue. In this case, the role of the facilitator involves ensuring that there is a balance in the perspectives that are represented and attempting to draw out students who may not be actively engaged. Although L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), for example, also aims to have Connected North youth to take the lead in discussions, she also feels that there is an important role for her to play in the moderation of discussion boards. Thus, although youth are encouraged to speak on and explore issues that matter to them, she then sees



her role as bringing separate conversations together, drawing connections between different ideas, and ensuring that the northern students have a voice. Another strategy for fostering youth ownership in the Connected North Programs has been to conduct brainstorming sessions with participating students and, whenever possible, letting them determine how the projects will unfold.

WorldVuze and Global SchoolNet capitalize on the physical absence of the teacher to facilitate student ownership of dialogues. In the case of WorldVuze, although the teacher is responsible for posting the actual question, J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) does encourage teachers to consult with their students first. In addition, assessing and evaluating the multiple perspectives available through WorldVuze can take the pressure off teachers who feel the need to provide multiple and balanced positions on issues themselves. Coburn (personal communication, November 4, 2015) suggests that WorldVuze helps diffuse traditional power dynamics between teacher and student because, in the face of multiple perspectives on an issue, students may feel less pressured to agree or conform to their teacher's position (J. Coburn, personal communication, November 4, 2015). Andrés (2015) also works with the Global SchoolNet teachers to help them foster student ownership of the online spaces by sharing strategies that encourage students to rely on each other. For example, she suggests that teachers wait several days before responding to students thus encouraging them to take responsibility for each other. In this case, the physical absence of the teacher can help students turn to each other.

## **7. Capitalize on Interactivity Options to Foster an Inclusive Learning Environment**

As recommended by McLoughlin and Oliver (2000), culturally inclusive online learning environments should provide a multiplicity of channels for communication and interaction. To create an inclusive online environment, Hilton (2013) recommends providing a centralized discussion space where students share equal control over choosing discussion topics. As well, students should be able to opt in and out of more private and focused discussion threads. The capacity to create meaningful personal profiles is determined to be important for relationship building. In addition, asynchronous discussion spaces allow enough time for students to reflect and engage with material at their own pace.

Atkintunde (2009) suggests that students tend to feel more comfortable sharing personal

reflections on power and privilege in an online space. Both R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015) and L. DuPré (personal communication, November 4, 2015) confirm that by allowing time to process information, reflect, and formulate ideas, the integration of online discussion forums can have a positive effect on dialogue. In addition, most programs acknowledged the benefit of offering different ways of interacting as well as spaces reserved for socializing and friendship building.

For R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015), Dissolving Boundaries' online communications helped attain the "equal status" requirement of the contact hypothesis by providing ways of participating that could appeal to a variety of ages and abilities. The asynchronous dialogue forum, for example, was best suited for younger students whose communication skills were advanced and benefitted from having the space for reflection and the "opportunity to hold and think about what it is they wanted to write" before engaging with others. On the other hand, special needs students benefitted particularly by using videoconferencing for making connections (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015). Students used Moodle's forum to get to know each other and comment on each other's work as well as a wiki which allowed students to collaborate on a shared website. Through the site, students could also blog and upload podcasts about their work. A protected environment for video conferencing was also provided.

For Dissolving Boundaries, the space given for discussion was generally unstructured, student-driven and used primarily for socializing. Although R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015) acknowledges that from an outsider's perspective, these exchanges may have seemed "trivial", this open and unstructured approach to interactions was a deliberate part of the program design. As outlined by the "contact hypothesis" these types of opportunities for informal interaction are essential for trust and friendship building.

Although dialogue through Soliya's platform is primarily through videoconferencing, certain mechanisms have been built in order to create a more inclusive learning environment. Having participants appear on the platform in the shape of a circle is meant to facilitate student ownership over the dialogue. In the center of the "dialogue circle" is a public chat box. Facilitators use this box to clarify questions and summarize points, thus helping second language students verify their own comprehension. The chat box can also be used if a participant is having technical issues or may feel more comfortable putting their thoughts into writing. In addition,

there is a “polling feature” that allows students to respond to questions anonymously. Then the students can talk about the range of viewpoints without attributing them to particular members of the group. The private chat function allows students to share things with one of their facilitators who may then, in turn, share it with the group without naming the student (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015). As well as participating in dialogue groups, all students have an individual blog on the SCP website, which they can use to communicate with the broader SCP community outside of their own groups (Helm, Guth, & Farrah, 2012).

The importance of being able to socialize while also being able to experiment with different levels of anonymity was brought up by L. O’Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) from Culture Connect. He suggested that while bringing people from different sides of a conflict could potentially put both of those people at risk, both from each other but also from their communities back home, online discussion spaces can allow them to take on “personas” which can provide an “interesting proxy to disambiguate and just create a personal connection” without getting caught up in the conflict:

Let's say you're in a society that's experiencing a conflict, you and another person might connect over something that's entirely different to that and just realize that you have these things in common, but not even necessarily realize until quite a bit later that this person is on the other side of the conflict. The ability for groups to organically form and start to share and then realize different things that potentially would have not made them interact in the first place, I think, is a really interesting and powerful thing. There's also something liberating about having access to very raw opinions that people wouldn't necessarily feel super-comfortable sharing that can be shared behind the veil of anonymity (L. O’Doherty, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

Thus allowing for a level of anonymity may help facilitate connections with people who may not, under other circumstances, be able to meet and look beyond certain political and social issues.

For the Connected North program, having opportunities for dialogue through telepresence and online discussion forums can engage students who may have an easier time finding their voice in one or the other format:

A beautiful example was, with our school in Arviat trying to collaborate with students in

Vancouver. They used the discussion forum to share information about their communities. One of youth from Arviat used the space to talk about how much he loves his language. He wanted to teach the other students how to speak a little bit of Inuktitut, so he wrote a bunch of common phrases and wrote out how to say it in Inuktitut ... I bet you if he was just put in front of the telepresence, he wouldn't just all of a sudden pipe up and speak Inuktitut. It gave him a way to still have a voice,” (L. Dupré, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

Thus, concludes L. DuPré (personal communication, February 12, 2016), having multiple ways of interacting can bring in students who may not feel comfortable speaking as freely through videoconferencing.

As discussed, different interactivity options allow for progressive contact between orthodox and secular Jews as well as Arab Israelis in the TEC Model. In the last couple of years, E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015) notes, college students have also gone outside of the platform and used “WhatsApp” to interact textually. This has allowed them to continue chatting in a way that is immediate and ongoing without having to log onto the site. Students can then post a summary of these outside chats on the course Moodle site so that they can become a source of further discussion. Text-based exchanges outside the course site, suggests E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015) expands the opportunities for interaction and integrates the development of these relationships into the day-to-day lives of students, thus developing a sense of community (E. Hoter, personal communication, October 31, 2015).

The importance of being able to explore serious questions as well as socialize more generally is explained WorldVuze co-founder J. Coburn (personal communication, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015) as follows:

I think that’s all the shades of being a person. Sometimes, you’re talking about your favourite superhero character, and another time you’re talking about a climate change. I like that they can do that and they have the flexibility for all these conversations you can find and seek dialogue that interest them and engage them. That’s really what it’s about.

Thus while some classes may ask questions about climate change or views on the death penalty others may also ask questions related to favourite superheroes or pets.

## 8. Challenge Epistemological Hegemony

Andreotti (2011) suggests that global education initiatives need to overcome the:

The ethnocentric privileging of Western rationality (as a universal form of reasoning) and of dialectical thought (as a universal form of deliberative engagement) that establish the specific parameters of validity and recognition of what can be known and how it can be communicated. These parameters are intimately associated with aspirations for unanimity and consensus and make it impossible for other forms of thinking, knowing, being and communicating to “disagree” or even make intelligible contributions in Western-led and structured sites of conversation (p. 2).

The literature review revealed similar concerns that online learning environments often privilege a “Western” style of education and discourse that centers on the development of deliberative and critical thinking skills which emphasize questioning and debate (Araujo, de Carlo & Melo-Pfeifer, 2010; Bali, 2014). Eijkman (2009) writes, however, of the potential of using online learning spaces as “egalitarian transcultural contact zones” through which students gain access to a multiplicity of viewpoints, and dialogue spaces that can be both disruptive and productive, without privileging one way of communicating over another (Eijkman, 2009, p. 247).

Thus it can be argued that an online learning environment is well-positioned to challenge epistemological hegemony and allow for a more

democratic or egalitarian approach to knowledge construction to render visible the marginalized knowledge systems and discourses of non-Western or non-mainstream social groups that have been erased by the hegemonic suppression inherent in Western higher education, (Eijkman, 2009, p. 241).

McLoughlin and Oliver (2000) suggest that, for example, a culturally inclusive and emancipatory online learning environment for Indigenous learners must recognize students’ capacities to construct their own knowledge, bring prior experience and culturally preferred ways of knowing to learning tasks so that they may develop a sense of ownership and pride in their own knowledge and forms of expression. The platforms used in this research provide examples of how digital imagery, storytelling and narratives can be used to challenge and move outside of dominant ideologies, while validating and encouraging different ways of knowing and seeing the world.

For the Dissolving Boundaries team, co-constructing wikis was particularly crucial to encourage interactions that would lead to the creation of new knowledge:

By using wikis both sides could really feel that they were collaborating on bringing something richer to the knowledge than if they were just studying it on their own (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

These joint projects were generally developed through the wiki page of Moodle. One of the benefits of having a wiki is that the user can see how it was built, who participated and commented on what part, through the pages' "history". One example of a collaborative learning project that demonstrated how there could be multiple ways of understanding historical events was through the creation of a wiki page on the Plantation of Ulster by students from Dissolving Boundaries. The two secondary school groups were assigned a particular colour for their comments so that the perspective of the students from the Republic appeared in one colour, and the comments from the school from Northern Ireland appear in the other thus providing a visual representation of differing perspectives or lenses on the same historical event (R. Austin, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

One strategy for working across cultural and linguistic barriers online, as presented by Bohemia and Ghassan (2012), is to work with more visual ways of communication such as representing emotions and viewpoints through images. L. O'Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that for the Culture Connect Program a benefit of having an online space for communication was that it allowed for the easy sharing of photos, artwork and graphics. These visual representations of emotions, worldviews and perspectives open up a dimension of dialogue that may not be as easily experienced in the traditional classroom setting. L. O'Doherty (personal communication, February 12, 2016) suggests that

by using photographic evidence, you can convey a lot of information very quickly and even tell a story ... it's also a bit more of a solid communication because it provides a direct record, digital and visual representation of a context as opposed to [written] information which is mediated by the individual's personal, potential biases, influences, and feelings about the specific topic.

Adding both visual and creative elements to the dialogue process in an online environment thus introduces ways of understanding other participants through a different lens. For example, in the

first week of the Culture Connect Program, participants were directed to upload three images that represent parts of your daily lives. They were also directed to comment on each other's images.

In an example from the literature review, Truong-White and McLean's (2015) research suggests that digital storytelling, which involves the "blending of personal narratives with multimedia content" can "allow students to express lived experiences in poignant and dynamic ways" (p. 7) which was shown to encourage reflection and engagement with non-mainstream perspectives. The TEC Center starts often starts by having participants engage in a level of personal sharing by having everyone write down their names and where they come from. For the TEC Center, this type of exercise is important for working through the assumption that the different groups have nothing in common. As further explained by E. Hoter (personal communication, October 31, 2015):

We are trying to widen the students' minds about the identities of others... Based on literature students presented their identities in a symbolic form and then recorded themselves narrating a story about one of their identities. The students were asked to choose another student's identity to make it into a written story- telling the story from another's perspective and ultimately the whole group chooses one story to perform together.

This approach is reflective of what Maoz (2011) described as the "Narrative Approach" which relies on storytelling as a way of sharing and engaging with how other participants experience or are experiencing conflict. The strength of this approach, according to (Maoz, 2011), stems from the power of personal stories to help people work through their unresolved pain while also eliciting empathy from group members:

discussion of these issues through personal stories enables an increase of intergroup acceptance and understanding while avoiding dead-end arguments about who is more moral and more humane (Maoz, 2011, p. 121).

In reference to their work with Australian Indigenous learners, McLoughlin and Oliver (2000) recommend adopting an epistemology in online learning environments that incorporates personal sharing in a way that validates narratives and storytelling as legitimate ways of knowing.

An example of using online spaces to explore epistemological plurality comes from Connected North's participation in a TakingITGlobal project called "Climate Change in my

Backyard”. This project asked participants to share photos that demonstrated how they were affected by climate change. In accordance with L. DuPré’s (personal communication, February 12, 2016) commitment to the normalization of Indigenous knowledge, these sessions also included showing videos of elders talking about climate change. This particular project brought up some challenging questions as students from a private school in Calgary, whose parents were largely employed by the oil industry, were confronted with stories and photos of the environmental devastation that challenged how they knew and understood issues related to climate change and an industry on which they were dependent. Being cognizant of epistemological hegemony does not suggest a rejection of rationality nor does it suggest that all positions are equally valid. Instead it speaks to the possibility of online environments being made conducive for the expression of marginalized viewpoints and forms of expression.

### **9. Acknowledge Linguistic Hegemony**

One challenge in global learning projects involves the fact that English is often the default language of instruction. Given that not all participants are native English speakers, they may not feel equally comfortable participating. Although few of the articles in the literature review acknowledged the implications of English being the dominant language of communication Bokor (2011) suggests that this reality sets up an

asymmetrical relationship between native speakers and the “other” and has been accused of “linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson, 1992), which suggests that those using it as their mother-tongue should be wary of the danger of privileging their “nativeness” as an advantage in cross-boundary discursive events (p. 114-115).

As suggested by Helm, Guth and Farrah (2012) online dialogue interventions inevitably impose a “linguistic hegemony” due to the fact that they, at least for the time being, necessarily occur in a shared language. Although, other than the TEC Center, all the programs do largely take place in English, most of them were cognizant of this issue with regards to inclusion and attempt, in different ways, to redress this imbalance. Although translation software may evolve in such a way as to address some of these issues, ultimately, it is important that this dynamic be acknowledged and that participants have the space to explore its impacts on the dialogue process.

For WorldVuze, although English is clearly the dominant language on the site, the team encourages participation in multiple languages and has some translation and multilingual



features. With additional funding, they hope to integrate simultaneous translation software ((J. Coburn, personal communication, November 4, 2015). In the case of Soliya, dialogues currently occur in English thus making the participation in dialogue of native speakers arguably more accessible than to non-native speakers. Although efforts are being made to look at and integrate translation technology, suggests H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) these features are as of yet inadequate. For the time being, one of the strategies employed by Soliya is to have co-facilitators that are able to speak different languages. In addition, many dialogue groups have two participants from the same University and may share a language and help each other with translation. As well, the use of the central chat box to summarize points being made throughout the dialogue sessions can help make the conversation accessible to different language levels. In addition, the curriculum includes exercises that use images which may help address language differences as well as help students communicate beyond words (H. Belsky, personal communication, October 10, 2015).

The TEC Center also acknowledges the challenge of fostering a sense of equality between groups when the common language of instruction is Hebrew. Arab students have in fact reported that the predominance of Hebrew has led to the “fear of facing inequality in the group” (Shonfeld, Hoter & Ganayem, 2014, 57-58). One strategy for addressing language disparity, as was previously described, involves assignments that look to non-verbal ways of communicating, such as the sharing of pictures. As multilingual social networks emerge and translation technology improves, however, this concern is being increasingly addressed (E. Hoter, personal communication, October 31, 2015).

In any case, even though the Dissolving Boundaries program brought together students whose first language was English, R. Austin (personal communication, October 9, 2015) suggests that often regional differences in accent and vocabulary can be so pronounced that young people had a very hard time understanding each other and had to slow down. As suggested by Bokor (2011), one way to address “linguistic imperialism” is to acknowledge it and encourage students to examine the factors that influence what they know about themselves in relationship to others through language.

Finally, in some cases the dominance of the English language serves as an incentive to participate. Although the Soliya platform and curriculum was devised to complement curriculum in courses such as international relations and media studies the fact that dialogues take place in

English has expanded its appeal to English as a second language teachers who are looking to provide their students with opportunities to engage in “authentic” discussions with native speakers. H. Belsky (personal communication, October 10, 2015) points to the fact that this expands their reach to engage a new group of young people who may not necessarily be actively pursuing opportunities for intergroup or intercultural dialogue. Similarly, although Andrés (personal communication, October 10, 2015) readily admits that the dominance of the English language may impact the level of participation, in general, the students involved have learned English at school and welcome the opportunity to practice.

### **10. Address Technological Hegemony**

Another challenge of technology-mediated dialogue is the fact that students from different countries do not have equal access to technology. Needless to say, those who have regular access to technology as well as the internet are advantaged from the beginning (Bali, 2014; Berg, 2012; Helm, Guth & Farrah, 2012). When asked about power and inequality, every interviewee spoke to the “digital divide” and the fact that these types of learning opportunities were only accessible to those with technology. In addition, ease of participation is severely affected by economic and regional differences. Although some students, for example, can easily participate from the comfort of their own homes, other students are left competing for limited lab time within their own institutions or are faced with intermittent connectivity. In the case of the Connected North program, some students had never had access to technology or the internet at school until the program. In the meantime, Culture Connect and Soliya are trying to become more accessible by working on becoming mobile-friendly and devising ways to function using a lower bandwidth. Access to technology should be acknowledged and addressed as a social justice issue in and of itself as students are encouraged to consider who is included and excluded from online spaces and what the implications are in terms of power and social justice.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, it is fair to assume that the possibilities for new ways to facilitate intergroup dialogue online will continue to emerge. It remains to be seen whether projects that aim to facilitate reconciliation through “Minecraft” or interfaith dialogue through “Second Life” can transform relationships in real life. By providing recommendations grounded in a critical and decolonizing framework and informed by the particularities of an online learning environment

this chapter means to provide guidance for the development of GNLEs designed for civic and peace-building purposes. The discussion of the recommendations provided examples from the results that served to clarify the distinction between interventions that may be viewed as potentially colonizing or those that could be seen as transformative, thus contributing to the debate as to the emancipatory potential of these spaces. The following and concluding chapter will briefly reiterate the general findings of this research, the theoretical implications and make recommendations for future developments in the emerging area of educational technology and reconciliation, global citizenship and peace-building.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

### Introduction

This dissertation sought to address the need for research into how educational technology can be used at the service of peace-building, reconciliation and global citizenship education that has been identified by international organizations, academics and educators from around the world (Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna 2006; Austin & Anderson, 2008; Austin & Hunter, 2013; Bachen, Raphael, Lynn, McKee & Philippi, 2008; Dutt-Doner & Powers, 2000; Firer, 2008; Ghodarti & Gruba, 2011; Johnson, Zhang, Bichard, & Seltzer, 2011; Laouris, 2004; Middaugh & Kahne, 2009; Rheingold, 2008; Tawil, 2011; United Nations, 2010). Grounded in the assumption that internet-based communications can be used to either reinforce pre-existing social arrangements or challenge them (Atkintude, 2006; Dooly, 2011; Gregerson & Youdina, 2009; Helm & Guth, 2010; Herring, 2001; Zembylas & Vrasidas, 2005), seven globally networked online learning environments (GNLEs) were analyzed in accordance to the following research questions:

1. How are online learning environments that aim to develop peace-building, intercultural and/or civic competence and engagement conceptualized/designed to support intergroup/intercultural dialogue?
2. How are group-based differences/power differentials/inequalities understood and addressed in portal design, curriculum and facilitation?

Presented as case studies, information on these programs was collected from interviews, journal and news articles as well as policy and curriculum documents. In order to address the potentially colonizing impact of these programs, they were analyzed using Gurin et al.,'s (2013) critical-dialogical framework and corresponding facilitation principles (Agabria & Cohen, 2000; Nagda & Maxwell, 2011) which have been demonstrated to develop critical capacities and commitments to social change. Andreotti's (2012) framework for decolonizing global education initiatives was also applied in order to help frame the discussion and guide recommendations. The following will briefly present the empirical findings of this research, theoretical and policy implications as well as outline recommendations for future research in this area.

## Empirical Findings

This research confirms that in order to integrate an online program that facilitates intergroup or intercultural dialogue, it is important to secure both institutional and third-party support. This support usually hinges upon the inclusion of privacy controls, safety measures and acceptable use policies. Under ideal circumstances, the technological component is accompanied by a resource person or team who can support teachers. In order to avoid adding to current teaching workloads, these programs should be designed such that they can be used to meet the goals of and enhance current curriculum standards. In addition to goals related to citizenship and peace education, these programs are seen as developing work-related technological and intercultural competencies.

This dissertation echoes current research in the area of educational technology and intercultural dialogue by confirming that one of the benefits of internet communications is that they allow people who would otherwise not have the chance to meet, to make contact. In addition, interactivity options allow for progressive contact between groups that may be experiencing some level of tension or conflict. This medium also facilitates relationship-building and transferability by occurring in a space that is already used by young people and can be accessed, in many cases, regularly and in the long-term.

After analyzing seven different programs that facilitate online dialogue through a critical and decolonizing framework it has become clear that many programs reflect a “soft” conception of global citizenship education. Few of the programs explicitly address the dialogue process, facilitate cross-cultural interactions or address controversial social and political issues. In addition, although “understanding” was a common goal, objectives are largely apolitical and devoid of analysis regarding systemic oppression or global inequality. As a result, some of the projects were assessed as supporting ideas of northern supremacy and thus possibly reinforcing internalized oppression.

On the other hand, many of the programs addressed in this research also revealed the potential that online educational initiatives have to create inclusive spaces that can, at least to a certain degree, be decolonizing and used for the pursuit of understanding and social justice. Some of the programs, for example, could be seen as working to transform epistemological hegemony by incorporating media that provided a visual representation of the co-construction of

knowledge. In addition, what is considered “knowledge” was diversified through the sharing of images, narratives and storytelling. By providing different interactivity options, such as text and video, asynchronous and real-time possibilities for contact, students with different language and learning abilities also felt more comfortable participating in dialogue.

Although there was an asymmetrical relationship between those who were communicating in their native language versus those that were not, here too technology was used to help address the imbalance. Whether by supplementing videoconferencing with a chat box, including translation features or incorporating a selection of interactivity options, an online setting can address some of these inevitable challenges of cross-cultural and global communication. Finally, the digital divide meant that individual students had different access to and ease with technology. All programs acknowledged this issue in some way and were working on versions of their platforms that use low-bandwidth or could be accessed through mobile technology. In some cases, differential access to technology was used as an opening for discussions on inequality.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Concerns that GNLEs are at risk of reinforcing oppression/inequality was at the heart of this project. As discussed, research demonstrates that when intercultural/intergroup dialogue does not address issues of power, inequality and social justice it can exacerbate tensions and intensify conflicts. In order to be transformative, these learning environments must necessarily be explicitly committed to social justice and decolonization. Although Gurin et al.’s (2013) critical-dialogical framework was developed in a traditional classroom setting, by incorporating Andreotti’s (2012) framework for decolonizing global education initiatives this research presents an analytical framework that may be used for evaluating or developing dialogue centered global education initiatives. Further, by applying the analytical framework to case studies of GNLEs, potential uses of technology at the service of peace-building and global citizenship education become apparent. In fact, this research suggests that there are features of online learning environments that can facilitate the conditions for inclusive dialogue and challenge epistemological, linguistic and technological hegemonies. In addition, when conceptualized from a critical standpoint, dialogue, curriculum and facilitation may be enacted in such a way as to allow for potentially transformative learning experiences.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research attempts to bridge the gap between the empirical research on intercultural dialogue in online education and the theoretical body of literature on educational technology and issues surrounding colonization and power. Further, this dissertation aims to provide direction as to how internet-based communications can be used to challenge (as opposed to reinforce) inequality thus addressing the need for pedagogical models that take a critical and decolonizing approach to dialogue for reconciliation, peace-building and global citizenship purposes.

As was addressed in the literature review, intercultural online exchanges are often superficial, and thus at risk of reinforcing stereotypes, confirming negative attitudes and actually exacerbating misunderstandings, tensions and conflicts thereby leading to significant frustration on the part of the students or teachers (Belz, 2003; Chun, 2011; Hauck, 2007; O'Dowd, 2003; 2005, O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006, Ware, 2005). These outcomes are attributed to multiple factors including students' sociocultural contexts, incoming levels of intercultural competence and the way online interactions are structured and facilitated (O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006). One of the difficulties in assessing these environments is a lack of explicit pedagogical models that outline the dialogue process in particular.

Future research should therefore develop and/or adapt existing GNLEs in accordance with a critical and decolonizing framework adapted to the socio-historical context and educational level of the targeted populations. As recommended in the discussion chapter, incorporating such an approach involves grounding discussions within their historical context, addressing issues surrounding power, prioritizing transformation, having an emancipatory goal, taking a staged approach to dialogue, involving trained facilitators and acknowledging and working with linguistic and technological hegemony. These recommendations require designing learning environments that capitalize on the variety of interactivity options that are enabled in an online setting.

Developing, documenting and applying social justice oriented pedagogical models would allow these platforms to be evaluated so that researchers may determine the extent to which these programs actually can and do work towards social justice. Once there is a more deliberately critical and decolonizing approach to the conceptualization and facilitation of these types of interventions, future research will be able to develop ways to test and evaluate these programs.

Determining the extent to which a transformation in thinking actually occurs in these settings as well as the extent to which it informs and is sustained in future relationships will further the evolution of this field with regards to its transferability and value as a peace-building tool.

Given the complex dynamics of intercultural dialogue in any setting, future research should use a mixed methods approach to the assessment of individual programs that capitalizes on the ways in which online dialogue may open up possibilities for documenting and analyzing the degree to which a transformation in thinking has occurred. Content analysis of online discussions and reflection papers, for example, could attempt to document shifts in thinking by looking for evidence that students have challenged and re-evaluated their own perspectives as well as signs of empathy, perspective taking, understanding and commitments to social change. Students could use the same criteria to reflect and document their own perceptions of the dialogue process and outcomes. Measuring incoming and outgoing levels of intercultural competence/attitudes towards diversity could also be measured through a survey. Further, in line with the social justice oriented framework proposed in this project, future research in this area should evaluate programs based on the extent to which students have reflected on how they are implicated and/or complicit in global social issues and how they may be both part of the problem and the solution. Success may then be determined by the extent to which students feel equipped to face complex social issues with openness, curiosity and courage as they acknowledge current inequalities and explore a range of possibilities for addressing them in a context “where justice starts with the forms of relationships we are able to create” (Andreotti & Pashby, 2013, p. 433).

### **Conclusion**

This research project speaks to the powerful potential of GNLEs to bring students together from around the world and engage them in transformative dialogues on social and political issues. Not only can these spaces connect students who may never otherwise have the chance to meet, but online spaces may also have other facets that are conducive to facilitating difficult discussions inclusively. The findings both confirm the existing rationale for continuing to develop the area of educational technology and intercultural dialogue, and provide pedagogical guidelines on which to continue work in this emerging field. As such, it is hoped that this project has in some way contributed to addressing what Zembylas and Vrasidas’ (2005) have described as a fundamental challenge in education today:



[to] use the new technologies in creating a culture and society based on respect for cultural difference, and aim at greater participation of individuals and groups largely excluded from wealth and power in society ... [to accomplish this] Educators need constantly to devise new decolonizing strategies in which ICT can be used for the advancement of what is ultimately an important educational vision: to create a more just and peaceful world (p. 81)

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### Appendix A: Outreach List

Name	Scope	Link
Asia-Europe Classroom Network	Asia-Europe	<a href="http://aec.asef.org">http://aec.asef.org</a>
Schools Online	UK/International	<a href="https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org">https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org</a>
Connected North	Canada	<a href="http://www.connectednorth.org">http://www.connectednorth.org</a>
Culture Connect-TakingITGlobal	Canada/ International	<a href="http://www.tigweb.org/community/cultureconnect/">http://www.tigweb.org/community/cultureconnect/</a>
Democracy Lab	United States/ International	<a href="http://democracylab.org">http://democracylab.org</a>
Dissolving Boundaries	Ireland	<a href="http://www.dissolvingboundaries.org">http://www.dissolvingboundaries.org</a>
E-PALS	International	<a href="http://www.epals.com/#!/main">http://www.epals.com/#!/main</a>
E-Twinning	European Union	<a href="http://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm">http://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm</a>
Face to Faith	International	<a href="http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/projects/supporting-next-generation/supporting-next-generation-strategy">http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/projects/supporting-next-generation/supporting-next-generation-strategy</a>
Flat Connections	Australia/ International	<a href="http://www.flatconnections.com">http://www.flatconnections.com</a>
Global SchoolNet	California/International	<a href="http://www.globalschoolnet.org">http://www.globalschoolnet.org</a>
International Education and Resource Network	International	<a href="http://www.iearn.org">http://www.iearn.org</a>
Peres Centre for Peace	Middle East	<a href="http://www.peres-center.org/Hanging_out_for_Peace_project">http://www.peres-center.org/Hanging_out_for_Peace_project</a>
Schools Linking Network	England	<a href="http://www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk/#sthash.BR3HIhO8.dpbs">http://www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk/#sthash.BR3HIhO8.dpbs</a>
Connect Program - Soliya	International	<a href="http://soliya.net/?q=what_we_do_connect_program">http://soliya.net/?q=what_we_do_connect_program</a>
TakingITGlobal Education	International	<a href="http://www.tigweb.org/tiged/">http://www.tigweb.org/tiged/</a>
The Center for Technology, Education and Cultural Diversity	Israel	<a href="http://www.mofet.macam.ac.il/tec/eng/programs/Pages/default.aspx">http://www.mofet.macam.ac.il/tec/eng/programs/Pages/default.aspx</a>
WorldVuze	International	<a href="https://www.worldvuze.com/">https://www.worldvuze.com/</a>

## Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear [*insert name*],

My name is Nicole Fournier-Sylvester and I am a PhD candidate from the Education Department of Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec. I am also a college teacher who, like you, is interested in how to develop intercultural competencies online. I am writing to you in the hopes that you will agree to participate in my research study on the use of learning platforms to develop civic and peace-building skills through online dialogue.

I have selected [*insert platform name*] as an important example of a platform that brings a diversity of students together in online dialogue. If you agree to participate in this study, we will set up a time for an interview that should last no more than thirty minutes. The interview will be semi-structured and address the ways in which your platform serves to support and facilitate intergroup/intercultural dialogue as well as any of the challenges that may arise. This interview can occur through the medium (skype, google etc.) and at the time of your choosing. Your participation may be discontinued at any time.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please e-mail me at [nicolesylvester@videotron.ca](mailto:nicolesylvester@videotron.ca).

Sincerely,

Nicole Fournier-Sylvester

## **Appendix C: Consent Form**

### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH ON INTERCULTURAL ONLINE DIALOGUE**

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a research project that is being conducted by PhD candidate, Nicole Fournier-Sylvester, under the supervision of Dr. David Waddington from the Education Department of Concordia University.

Contact information: 514-999-2079, nicolesylvester@videotron.ca

#### **A. PURPOSE**

I understand that the purpose of this research is to explore the role of dialogue in online learning environments that bring groups together for civic and peace-building ends.

#### **B. PROCEDURES**

- I understand that participation in this interview is strictly voluntary.
- I understand that my interview will be recorded and transcribed.

#### **C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

I understand that my participation in this interview will provide insight on the use of online educational platforms for intercultural dialogue.

#### **D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

- I understand that I must be eighteen years old or over to participate in this research.
- I understand that my identity and that of my organization will be identified in the research.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences. Should I decide to discontinue my participation after having participated in the interview, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor (Dr. Waddington, dwadding@education.concordia.ca, 514-848-2424, ext. 2039) on or before April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 and request to be excluded from the project.

**I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.  
I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.**

NAME (please print)

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SIGNATURE

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If at any time you have questions about the proposed research, please contact Nicole Fournier-Sylvester, 514-999-2079, [nicolesylvester@videotron.ca](mailto:nicolesylvester@videotron.ca) or her supervisor Dr. David Waddington, [dwadding@education.concordia.ca](mailto:dwadding@education.concordia.ca).

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 [ethics@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:ethics@alcor.concordia.ca).

### Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your program. How and why was it developed? What was the context? What was the rationale/inspiration for the portal?
2. What is the role of dialogue within your program? How is dialogue conceptualized? What are the goals of dialogue?
3. How are students prepared to engage in online dialogue? What are the preconditions for dialogue/how is it setup?
4. How is the dialogue structured (progressive, based on readings and exercises, etc.)?
5. How are relationships fostered between students?
6. How is dialogue facilitated? What are the expectations of the teacher in this environment? Are there online communication guidelines? If so, how are they defined and by whom?
7. Are social and political issues discussed? Who decides what types of issues are addressed? Are any issues avoided? Why? How are conflicts managed? What are the expectations of the students?
8. What determines whether and online dialogue is effective or productive? What shifts/transformations/outcomes/goals are being sought? How are they measured/witnessed/evaluated?
9. Are issues of inequality/injustice/power imbalances addressed either within or outside the group? If so, how? If not, why not?
10. How are teachers trained/prepared to use the portal?

\* Would you be interested in reviewing and providing feedback on the recommendations that will come from this study? If so, please contact the researcher directly after submitting this form.

## Appendix E: Data Sources

Program	Location	Website	Education Level	Interviewee	Artifacts
1. Connected North Program (CNP)	Canada	<a href="http://connectenorth.org/index.html">http://connectenorth.org/index.html</a>	Elementary, middle and high school	Lindsay DuPré, Program Coordinator from TakingITGlobal	-Website -Policy document (internal document)
2. Dissolving Boundaries (DB)	Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland	<a href="http://www.dissolvingboundaries.org">http://www.dissolvingboundaries.org</a>	Elementary school and high school	Roger Austin, Founder	- Website -Powerpoint presentation (internal document) -Journal articles
3. Global SchoolNet (GSN)	California/ International	<a href="http://www.globalschoolnet.org">http://www.globalschoolnet.org</a>	Elementary school and high school	Yvonne Marie Andrés, Co-Founder	-Website
4. Soliya's Connect Program (SCP)	International (West & Muslim-Majority)	<a href="http://soliya.net/?q=what_we_do_connect_program">http://soliya.net/?q=what_we_do_connect_program</a>	Higher education	Hannah Belsky, Senior Partnerships and Development Coordinator	-Website -Journal articles -Curriculum (internal document)
5. TakingIT Global's Culture Connect Program (CCP)	Canada/ International	<a href="http://www.tigweb.org/community/cultureconnect/">http://www.tigweb.org/community/cultureconnect/</a>	High school and higher education	Liam O'Doherty, Director of Digital Youth Engagement Programs	-Website -Journal article -Facilitation training site
6. The Center for Technology, Education and Cultural Diversity (TEC Center)	Israel	<a href="http://tec.macam.ac.il">http://tec.macam.ac.il</a>	Elementary school, high school and college	Elaine Hoter, Co- Founder	-Website -Journal articles
7. WorldVuze	Canada/ Tanzania/ International	<a href="https://www.worldvuze.com/">https://www.worldvuze.com/</a>	Elementary school and high school	Julia Coburn, Co-Founder	-Website -Safety guidelines (internal document)

### Appendix F: Guidelines

1. Include historical analysis	Acknowledge and address the historical power imbalances between the groups involved and develop online spaces designed around the possible cultural and psychological barriers to dialogue.
2. Prioritize transformation	Conceptualize dialogue such that transformation and an alignment with social justice is explicit, thus working to identify and transcend ideological constraints in order to recognize the causes of oppression and work towards liberation.
3. Have an emancipatory goal	Offer a complex analysis of a problem and attempt to address the issue through a social justice action while also acknowledging the limitations of proposed solutions.
4. Put students in small and diverse groups	Setup dialogue groups that are small and as diverse as possible.
5. Take a staged approach to dialogue	Recognize that dialogue is a process and should involve stages including relationship and trust building, exploring identity formation, seeking understanding and consideration of one's own implication and complicity in social justice issues.
6. Train facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognize that, whether through text-based or video-based interventions, transformative dialogue requires active facilitation centering on the ability to ask questions that deepen thinking and reflexivity around power and privilege.</li> <li>- Treat conflict and tension as opportunities to deepen dialogue and help students to tolerate, work through and feel comfortable with conflict, balancing feelings of comfort and safety.</li> </ul>
7. Capitalize on interactivity options to facilitation inclusion	Provide multiple of channels for communication and interaction, including spaces for socializing and personal sharing, synchronous videoconferencing and asynchronous discussion forums.
8. Challenge epistemological hegemony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assign readings that present different perspectives in different ways (ie. theoretical, conceptual, narrative, visual art, case studies and poems)</li> <li>- Include opportunities for engagement through digital imagery and storytelling as well as wikis for comparing narratives, understandings of history or the roots of conflicts.</li> </ul>
9. Acknowledge linguistic hegemony	Explore the implication of having a dominant language for communication and incorporate non-verbal communication opportunities and translation technologies.
10. Address technological hegemony	Observe differential access to technology between groups, including those excluded from online intercultural dialogue opportunities, and connect conversations on the "digital divide" to broader social justice issues.