THESIS

TALKING PEACE:

AN EVALUATION OF PEACE CIRCLE COMMUNITY BUILDING EVENTS IN

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Submitted by

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY MALLORIE ANN BRUNS ENTITLED TALKING PEACE: AN EVALUATION OF PEACE CIRCLE COMMUNITY BUILDING EVENTS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

TALKING PEACE:

AN EVALUATION OF PEACE CIRCLE COMMUNITY BUILDING EVENTS IN

SECONDARY EDUCATION

The dialogue-centered program, Peace Circles, aims to foster connection between school community members by bringing them together to share stories from their lives. Advocates of Peace Circles contend that they help community members develop a greater understanding and appreciation for one another. The purpose of this study is to examine and evaluate two Peace Circles events that took place in April 2009 in northern Colorado high schools. More specificly, this study sought to determine the degree to which participation in Peace Circles affects students' and community members' perceptions of school connectedness. In addition, this study explored the reasons that participants would or would not participate in future Peace Circles.

This study employed a survey-based methodology, asking participants to complete surveys both before and after partaking in Peace Circles. Results indicated that individuals' perception of school connectedness increased following their participation in the Peace Circles. That is, participants reported statistically significantly higher scores on school connectedness items on post-event surveys than on pre-event surveys. Over 95%

of participants also reported that they would be willing to participate in future Peace Circles. Content analysis of participants' written responses produced six categories of reasons for why participants would attend future Peace Circles events: 1) the event was a positive experience, 2) the event fostered connection, 3) the event resulted in a sense of gain, 4) the event was conducive to sharing, 5) the event had a process that participants appreciated, and 6) the event fostered a better school environment.

To conceptualize program effectiveness, the author draws upon literature from adolescent and child development, as well as educational research on school connectedness. Several theoretical perspectives were utilized to define the goals of Peace Circles, including dialogue, restorative practices, and conflict resolution. Applications and suggestions for future research are offered by the author, with the goal of promoting continued, theory-based utilization of Peace Circles in schools.

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With love, peace, and gratitude,

Mallorie

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

For many students, high school can be an enriching and exciting adventure, filled with social events, including dances, after-school clubs, and sports. These activities can benefit the lives of young people, and represent their newfound freedoms and enhanced knowledge and skills. The social aspects of school are important for students. Recent research conducted with secondary student populations indeed reveals that, more than other elements, students are motivated to attend school by the close relationships with their friends and peers (Cavanagh, 2007).

Yet, fostering healthy social environments within schools is often viewed as less important than cultivating traditional academic skills. Thus, some educational studies have called for the implementation of programs in schools that actively promote healthy relationship-building. Greenberg et al. (2003), for example, argue that such interventions can contribute to students' social and academic growth. This combination of both academic and social competence is becoming the new standard for success (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007).

Today, there continue to be high demands placed on students in terms of their ability to do well in their classes and get good grades. Currently, public schools are held accountable to federal education legislation by conducting regularly scheduled state-based, standardized tests to gauge students' academic performance and improvement

over time (Gunzenhauser & Hyde, 2007). However, as research expands on the dynamics between students and their school environments, scholars, practitioners, and educators are realizing that school plays a larger role in students' lives than simply providing them with factual knowledge. How students view themselves in relation to their school community has a variety of implications for students' health and well being, as well as their ability to succeed academically (Anderman, 2002; Dornbusch, Erickson, Laird & Wong, 2001; Sochet, Dadds, Ham & Montague, 2006).

In light of the changing needs of students today, and the growing body of research and literature on school climates, there are programs in existence that focus on building relationships between students and their school communities. This research project evaluates the effectiveness of one such program called "Peace Circles" that aims to cultivate a respectful and connected school community by bringing school members together in dialogue. Though Peace Circles have been considered an effective and useful program, it has gone relatively unstudied. In efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of Peace Circles, it is important to systematically test whether it is achieving its objectives. The evaluation of the Peace Circles program will be based on data collected from participants of two particular Peace Circles events, which took place in April 2009 at Pavilion High School (study 1) and Sage High School (study 2).[1]

To contextualize Peace Circles and their goals, this thesis will provide an overview of the literature on youth development, school climates, and the importance of promoting connectedness in the school environment as these relate to issues many students face in their lives. In addition, a theoretical framework rooted in dialogue, restorative practices, and conflict resolution will be applied. The data from participants at

the two events will then be analyzed to determine if Peace Circles affect students' perceptions of being connected to others and being active participants in their school community.

Youth in School Environments

The time that students spend in their school environments throughout their lives is substantial. The standard eight-hour school day results in students spending nearly forty hours a week at school. School communities are a constantly shifting matrix of social dynamics between students and teachers, influencing the overall culture of the school and individual perceptions. Not all students have positive feelings about their time spent at school. Results from studies suggest that students cannot perform at their highest potential when they are not comfortable at school or perceive themselves as having a negative experience there (Libbey, 2004; Waters, Cross, & Runions, 2009; Whitlock, 2006). Yet, schools are still evaluated on academic performance including student dropout rates, grade point averages, and achievement (Anderman, 2002). The primary method of evaluating schools comes in the form of standardized testing, which forces educators to focus a great deal of class time to developing students' test-taking skills. This can, unfortunately, come at the cost of other school activities and programs (Murray, Low, Hollis, Cross, & Davis, 2007).

In the wake of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, schools are in a precarious situation, because their funding is inextricably linked to student outputs on tests. It makes sense that schools focus their time and energy on preparing students for these methods of evaluation. But research by Anderman (2002) and Battistich, Solomon, Watson, and Schaps (1997) points out that despite these efforts and best intentions, there may be

equally important elements impacting student performance. These other elements can include programs and activities in schools that foster connections among school members. Fostering strong connections is important because it may help individuals to feel more comfortable or safe at school, especially if these proactive connections (those that are reciprocally respectful) work to prevent acts of intimidation and violence between school members. In other words, no matter how much educators prepare students for tests with academic skills, if we are not working to cultivate a positive and respectful school climate, we may never see students achieve to their greatest potential (Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 1998).

This focus on creating positive relations within the school climate is based on the notion that students need to be cultivating pro-social skills in addition to gaining academic knowledge during their time at school. Pro-social skills include behaviors performed by individuals that demonstrate they have the ability to engage with others and can do so productively. These skills and behaviors can be contrasted with asocial behaviors, wherein students isolate themselves from others (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). Studies on youth development have shown that adolescent acquisition of positive social skills can help to prevent and deter future engagement in problematic behaviors, such as criminal and/or violent behavior and truancy from school (Mahoney, Stattin, & Magnusson, 2001; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). The time students spend interacting with one another at school provides an ideal context for teaching pro-social skills. These skills can be covered in the classroom or developed through intervention programs.

An example of a successful program focused on pro-social skill building is the Northeast Foundation's *Responsive Classroom* (RC) approach, which has been used by

60,000 teachers nationwide (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). This program aims to foster positive social skills among students based on their relationships with one another and their teachers. It places an equal value on the academic and social elements of the curriculum and highlights the importance of students learning pro-social skills including cooperation, responsibility, empathy, and self-control (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). This program was evaluated with 62 teachers and 157 students at six schools with results demonstrating that explicit social skill instruction based on daily practices in the classroom contributes to social skill learning (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). Teachers utilizing this method reported that their students exhibited less anxious or fearful behavior in the classroom and more pro-social behaviors (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). The key to the RC approach is that the instruction of the social behaviors has been implemented into the curriculum. This allows many opportunities for students to practice these productive interactions and build relationships, which can help students to deal with social stresses within the school environment.

Many of the pressures students face stem from their need to navigate complex social situations and adapt to social challenges ranging from the need to fit in with their peers, to dealing with more serious problems, such as being the victims of bullying and intimidation (Mouttapa, Valente, Gallaher, Rohrbach, & Unger, 2004). In some educational contexts, where there are no active socializing programs in place, there can be a deterioration of social relations among students, faculty, and the overall school community with some troubling consequences. Mouttapa et al. (2004) claim that bullying is a growing problem that has been documented in the United States and around the world, which comes with serious consequences for the safety of students. Olweus (1993)

defines bullying as occurring when an individual inflicts, or attempts to inflict harm on another.

Research on bullying behaviors in schools tends to focus on three elements. The first focus is on the prevalence of teasing and bullying in a school, as these things can lead to a climate of fear and intimidation (Olweus & Limber, 2000). The second focus is how attitudes of aggression relate to disciplinary actions and violent behaviors among students (Brockenbrough, Cornell, & Loper, 2002; McConville & Cornell, 2003). The third focus is on levels of willingness of those experiencing bullying and intimidation to seek help from adults in the school (Bandyopadhyay, Cornell, & Konold, 2009). Results from The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) offer insight into the prevalence of these issues among youth and young adults in the United States. The YRBSS monitors priority health-risk behaviors among youth and young adults and includes a national school-based survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which was administered to a nationally representative sample of public and private high school students in the given year According to this survey, in 2007, approximately 8% of females and 16% of males were in a physical fight on school property one or more times during the 12 months before the survey (Centers for Disease Control, 2007). In addressing more severe types of violence in schools, the U.S. Secret Service attempted to prevent future school shootings by identifying the root causes for the attacks, identifying bullying as playing a key role in the attackers' decision to act. They also claimed that though it was not a factor in every case, a number of the attackers had experienced long-term and severe bullying and harassment from their peers (National Threat Assessment Center, 2002).

While aggression in the form of physical violence can be one form of bullying, there are other, more subtle forms of bullying and intimidation that also have serious consequences for a students' psychological and emotional health. Mouttapa et al. (2004) identify these risk factors as intrapersonal problems, including anxiety and depression, eating disorders, low self-esteem, and less satisfaction with school. Bullying and intimidation can make students feel unsafe in their school environment, which is problematic not only for them as individuals, but also for schools when it leads to higher rates of student absenteeism and diminished academic achievement (Nansel et al., 2001; Rigby, 2003). According to the YRBSS, approximately 6% of females and 5% of males did not go to school on at least one day during the 30 days before the survey because they felt they would be unsafe at school or on their way to or from school (Centers for Disease Control, 2007). Cases in which students are avoiding school entirely, rather than seeking solutions within that environment, may suggest that Unnever and Cornell's (2003) proposed "culture of bullying" exists (Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2009, p. 356). This culture exists in schools when there is a perception among students that bullying can take place uninterrupted because no adequate system of intervention exists that would make it worth it for them to report their experiences (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009).

The problem of adolescent suicide further highlights the need for schools to improve programming that supports positive school environments. Results from the YRBSS indicate that approximately 36% of females and 21% of males felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities during the 12 months before the survey (Center for Disease Control, 2007). Nearly 19% of females and 10% of males seriously considered attempting suicide

during the 12 months before the survey (Centers for Disease Control, 2007). In addition, approximately 9% of females and 5% of males attempted suicide one or more times in the 12 months before the survey (Centers for Disease Control, 2007). The 2008 CDC *Health* report in the United States compiled by the National Center for Health Statistics and the CDC showed that males 15 to 19 years of age committed suicide at a rate of 12.1 deaths per 100,000 residents, whereas females of the same age range did so at a lower rate of 3.0 deaths per 100,000 residents. This apparent gender paradox in suicidal attempts and completions exists in nations around the globe. Canetto (1991, 1992) believes that socialization, among other things, plays a role in this phenomenon writing that women and men will "tend to adopt the self-destructive behaviors that are congruent for the gender scripts of their cultures" (Canetto & Sakinofsky, 1998, p. 17). Furthermore, Canetto and Sakinofsky (1998) contend that suicide in the United States is predominantly viewed as masculine, whereas suicide attempts are perceived as a "feminine process" (p. 17). This is a serious problem regardless of why it occurs. In Larimer County, located in northern Colorado, between the years of 2003 and 2007, there were 30 suicides among individuals ages 13-19. Moreover, in the year 2005, suicide was the third leading cause of death in the nation for youth from 15 to 19 years of age (Larimer County Compass, 2009).

Researchers are seeking greater understanding of the causes and risk factors of teen suicide specifically. Findings from a study by Walker, Ashby, Hoskins, and Greene (2009), for example, examined some of risk factors believed to precede youth suicide, including low-self esteem, hopelessness, negative life events, disrupted familial environments, feelings of isolation, and the availability of drugs and alcohol. While some

of these elements are not directly connected to the school environment, as evidenced in the Mouttapa et al. (2004) study, bullying and intimidation that take place in school can contribute to students' feelings of low self-esteem, which was a risk factor for teen suicide identified by Walker et al. (2009). Research on suicide prevention programs reveals the need to promote peer support programs, both inside and outside of school, because students indicated that they were more likely to talk about experiencing these risk factors with their friends, rather than with adults (Walker et al., 2009).

The existing evidence seems to support the need for cultivating relationships and connections among school community members for a variety of reasons. It suggests that if students have strong relationships, and feel that they have access to individuals that they can talk to and trust, it may deter them from making problematic decisions and engaging in self-destructive behaviors. In addition, some bullying prevention programs are focused on diminishing aggressive attitudes among students and encouraging them to be more accepting of the inherent diversities among their classmates and school community. Bandyopadhyay et al. (2009) suggest that this can be achieved by helping students to get to know one another on a more personal level. Peace Circles in northern Colorado are designed to foster these deeper understandings and personal connections within a school community.

Peace Circles

The First Peace Circles

Peace Circles were originally created in 2001 to respond to a range of issues that arose. The particular school community for which it was designed faced two serious tragedies within the period of two months. The first tragedy was the World Trade Center

attacks on September 11th, followed shortly thereafter by a suicide of a popular student. Following this student's death, violence increased within the student body. The violence seemed to be related to latent racial tensions in the school. In the month following these events, there were many student conflicts and the level of expulsions and suspensions in the school increased dramatically (James, personal communication, September 6, 2009). As a student in that community at that time, my sense was that this created a school environment that seemed unsafe for the rest of the student body. Subsequent use of Peace Circles confirmed these impressions. There were implications for the entire student body because of a global sense of unrest within the school. The conflict was no longer isolated within a specific group of students; many individuals were in serious need of support to help them cope with the sense of loss.

Concerned adults within and around the school community, including counselors and a Restorative Justice coordinator from the school district, worked together to come up with solutions based on their *shared commitment* to work towards a *common good*. The subsequent program developed and implemented by these individuals was Peace Circles. The creative and collaborative efforts taken in the name of helping the entire school community were, as hooks (1994) might argue, key elements in the school's transformation post-crisis.

Peace Circles in High Schools

Peace Circles are intended to promote dialogue amongst students. When the first Peace Circles were organized in 2001, nearly 200 students, teachers, and school community members came together over two days in circles to share stories from their lives and respond to questions that helped people to get to know one another better. This

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two day, 200-person format was one of the largest Peace Circles that has ever occurred in the high schools. Typically, somewhere between 50 and 100 students, teachers, and community members voluntarily attend Peace Circles, lasting an entire school day (approximately 7:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.). The participants are divided into individual circles composed of between 10 and 20 people (depending on the total number of participants). These circles consist mostly of students from all of the grade levels at the school, at least one lead facilitator (sometimes joined by a student co-facilitator), teachers, and, at times, administrators, principals, receptionists, even other school staff (e.g., lunch-room workers). Occasionally, individuals from the local city communities also want to participate and are welcomed to do so.

While the process is open and voluntary in nature, there are certain efforts taken by the lead coordinators (counselors and students) within the school to advertise the event and extend invitations to potential participants. There also exists outside of the school community a broader network of individuals who help to facilitate these events because of their expertise in Peace Circles. There is a considerable amount of work put into organizing these events. For example, the lead counseling coordinator is typically responsible for the retrieval of student permission slips, signed by their parents or legal guardians, in order for them to attend the event. This task, in addition to finding the most ideal date and space for the event must be arranged well ahead of time (Easter, personal communication, March 31, 2009). Advanced notice does not guarantee attendance, however. There are always students who sign up initially, but then do not show up either because they did not get their permission slips returned or due to personal issues that come up unexpectedly.

Coordinators also carefully select students to attend. Typically, students who are extended personal invitations to participate are leaders within the school community. These students, who have influence among the members within their social networks, tend to be effective at bringing additional students with them to the event. Another group of students offered special invitation to participate are those who tend to isolate themselves, or seem to avoid interaction with others and may even be struggling with social or psychological issues. There is no formal method for identifying these students; it may be as simple as inviting a student to participate who is sitting alone in the cafeteria during the lunch period. Counselors may ask students to suggest names of other students in the school who do not appear to have a lot of friends or seem to be alone frequently. In addition to inviting a diverse group of students, when designing the seating charts for each circle, coordinators attempt to place students together who may not be a part of the same social networks. This helps foster the cultivation of new relationships.

Students who isolate themselves at school may have the greatest need for programs that attempt to connect students with new friends and peers, as they often feel a great sense of disconnection and may be at a higher risk for reactions like suicide or depression, as discussed in the previous sections. In addition to extending personal invitations to some key student populations at the school, advertising in various forms is appropriate if the group of participants is to be as diverse and representative of the school community as possible (Easter, personal communication, March 31, 2009). The richness of the conversation and the potential for positive transformation within the school community is believed to depend on the incorporation of diverse viewpoints.

Some additional methods of advertising utilized to achieve diverse participants included posting flyers, running an advertisement during the school-wide announcements, and creating a Facebook notification for the event. At Pavilion High School, every student is enrolled in an "advisory" course that meets weekly. The lead counseling coordinator and her group of five student facilitators (those who have been to Peace Circles previously and chose to take a training in circle facilitation) went into all of the sophomore advisory classes to invite students to participate (Easter, personal communication, March 31, 2009).

A factor that is of equal importance to recruiting participants is location. Peace Circles do not take place on the school grounds for strategic reasons. First, if the event is on school grounds, students are better able to leave their circles before the event has concluded for the day. This poses a variety of problems such as the potential for breaches in confidentiality if, for example, personal information about participants' lives were to be shared with the rest of the school community. It is also problematic for participants to leave a circle early and threaten the trust that is built among group members throughout the day. Building trust helps participants feel comfortable sharing information about their lives, which helps people get to know each other on a deeper level. Event organizers and practitioners also note that, when the event is held at the school, students may not be willing to share any personal information. In sum, given that Peace Circles thrive on inclusiveness, safety, and openness, it was deemed essential to hold the events off campus.

The location of the event also needs to be large enough to accommodate everyone throughout the various phases of the event. There needs to be a space where everyone can

come together in the morning, at lunch, and at the end of the event in the afternoon. In between those times, there must be enough small rooms to accommodate the individual circles and maintain a level of privacy. Due to the space constraints and the limited budget of these events, churches are often ideal locations to have Peace Circles (as was the case in the Peace Circles evaluated in the current study). This may or may not influence participants in their choice to participate because they are informed of the location of the event ahead of time. However, all participants attend a short pre-conference one week in advance, where they receive important information about the event and have the chance to voice any concerns or questions. During this time, participants are informed that the event is not religiously affiliated despite its being held at a church. The event planning and design is carefully calculated in order to maximize the potential for the program to be a success.

The Circle Process

Baldwin (1998) facilitates discussions in circles and offers this insight, "A circle is not just a meeting with the chairs rearranged. . . The circle is a return to our original form of community as well as a leap forward to create a new form of community" (p. 26). The act of coming together in circle to talk with community members is not a new idea or practice; it has been taking place for thousands of years in a variety of cultures. The circle-shape used in Peace Circles is reflected within some African villages and tribes, in the dwellings of the Inuits of the Arctic lands, among the Aborigines of Australia, and the native tribes of the American plains, such as the Lakota Sioux who construct round teepees and set them in circles (Baldwin, 1998). As the facilitators introduce people to the circle and set the stage for the day, an important element is acknowledging the roots of

the practice to many indigenous cultures from around the world.

In practice, there are different types of circle processes to cater to specific goals. Pranis (2005) identifies nine types of circle practices including the following: talking circles, circles of understanding, healing circles, sentencing circles, support circles, community-building circles, conflict circles, reintegration circles, and celebration or honoring circles. While there may be similarities among these different types the intended outcomes of each format are slightly different. It is difficult to categorize Peace Circles as one process because the program serves a variety of these purposes. In the high school context, it serves the functions of the community-building circles or talking circles, both of which are practiced by the First Nations indigenous peoples of Canada (McCue, 2006). Community-building circles, in particular, are intended to create bonds and build relationships among people with shared interests (Pranis, 2005). However, at any given Peace Circles event, there could also be elements of healing, conflict resolution, celebration, and support.

Facilitators develop questions to ask during the process, allowing Peace Circles to be customized to address a community's specific needs or goals. Some of these questions may be planned ahead of time, and some may arise in the moment as the process is happening. This is because the needs of the particular individuals in each circle are going to vary from one dialogue to the next. Also, it is important for those facilitating the process to ask questions that are appropriate for the time and state of the discussion. For example, some of the questions that are typically asked at the beginning of the process are intended to help people get to know one another. An example of this is the question, "who would you bring with you to the circle today to make you feel more comfortable?"

Once there is more trust built among the participants and the facilitator believes that they may be ready for sharing more personal information, a facilitator might ask, "if there were three chapters in the book of your life, what would they be," or "describe a time when you overcame a challenging situation in your life." (See Appendix A for common facilitator questions).

Circles are an organic process of inquiry. This inquiry however, is structured by four important elements, including the keeping or facilitation of the circle, ceremonial rituals, the use of a talking piece, and the establishment of guidelines (Pranis, 2005). The dialogue facilitator is a symbolic figure who helps the process to keep running smoothly. The facilitator takes on an interesting leadership role that requires him or her to create a "space that is respectful and safe," rather than attempting to control the outcomes of the process (Pranis, 2005, p. 36). Composing the space is accomplished by conducting important rituals or ceremonies throughout the day including asking the group questions and modeling responses in the form of stories. These individuals are not neutral or disconnected from the group. In fact, the willingness of the facilitator to be open in the stories they choose to share can impact how open the rest of the participants feel about sharing their narratives.

The main elements of ceremony or ritual in the circles refer to the opening and closing of the process, the establishment of guidelines, and the use of a talking piece. Pranis (2005) describes the opening ceremony as an act that can "help participants shift gears from the pace and tone of ordinary life" (p. 33). Facilitators may ask participants to sit in a moment of silence and take some big deep breaths when they first arrive in order to invite them into the space of the circle. In this space, interactions with others are much

different, even in terms of the slower pace of the conversation, allowing participants the time for reflection.

Another crucial part of the opening of the circle is the establishment of guidelines. Participants all share one thing that they need from the rest of the group in order to feel safe. Confidentiality is always a required guideline, typically described by the facilitator; additional themes that frequently arise are the need for openness, honesty, listening, and suspension of judgment toward others. This ritual allows people "to drop the ordinary masks and protections that create distance from others" (Pranis, 2005, p. 33). Without feeling that they can be honest and open, people may not be able to get to know one another better and build bonds and relationships. This requires breaking down some of the barriers between people and lessening their fears about opening up.

The manner in which people share in these circles is dictated by the incorporation of a talking piece. This can be any kind of an object that is passed from one speaker to the next, making a full clockwise round to each of the participants in the circle. This allows the holder of the object to be the one who "has the opportunity to talk while all other participants have the opportunity to listen without thinking about a response" (Pranis, 2005, p. 35). This is important for both the speaker and listener, as it slows down the pace of conversation. As such, the speaker can formulate his or her thoughts reflectively without being interrupted; the listener can focus wholly on the speaker's message. Among students feeling a sense of isolation from others or lack interpersonal connections for engagement, having the floor to speak with the full, uninterrupted attention of their community members and peers can be a validating and transformative experience.

The talking piece is also helpful in terms of keeping emotions at a manageable

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level, which is important because participants frequently express highly emotional content to the group given the sense of safety cultivated during the process. Nemeroff and Tukey (2001) explain that as group members become more comfortable with one another, there is greater potential for them to dramatically release their feelings that they have been holding in for a long time. In these moments, the groups are brought together in a moment of shared emotion in which, "Individuals have often admitted that it is humbling to realize exactly how little they knew about human experience" (Nemeroff & Tukey, 2001, p. 17). This moment of realization marks a shift where people go beyond merely listening and may enter a state of empathizing with the speaker. Howard (2006) claims that in our moments of feeling an empathic connection with another, we can relinquish assumptions and release our "privilege of non-engagement" (p. 77). A healthy community, as Peace Circles intend to foster, is one in which people engage with one another and actively participate together across boundaries, yet feel safe that their personal information will be valued and protected.

The closing ritual in the circle process is equally important to setting the stage for sharing in the beginning. Closing rituals in circles are designed to "acknowledge the efforts of the Circle, affirm the interconnectedness of those present, convey a sense of hope for the future, and prepare participants to return to the ordinary space of their lives" (Pranis, 2005, p. 33). To achieve these goals, facilitators will thank everyone for being open and taking a risk by choosing to participate in the event. In one of the final rounds of the talking piece, participants typically answer a question such as, "what is your greatest hope for the future?" "What will you take from today?" Or "what will you do to take this experience back to your school tomorrow?" These questions attempt to reaffirm

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that sense of hopefulness about the future and help participants to conceptualize their experiences in the circle in relation to their normal lives at home and at school. It is clear that the facilitation of the event and the process that participants go through together, impacts the effectiveness of the program in connecting people and building relationships based on trust and respect.

<div align="center">**Theoretical Traditions Informing Peace Circles**</div>

Peace Circles have not been considered in light of communication theory. Yet applying a theoretical framework to Peace Circles can be beneficial to practitioners and scholars alike. This section, therefore, examines scholarship on dialogue, restorative practices, and conflict resolution to further inform what constitutes an effective Peace Circles event.

Dialogue

In the previous discussions of the circle process, functional elements built into the process were identified that clearly root this program within dialogic practices, a technique differing greatly from ordinary conversations. The basic goal of dialogue is for the people participating in the process to achieve greater levels of mutual understanding through reciprocal exchanges. Walsh (2007) describes reciprocity as the "criterion of open-mindedness, mutual respect, and civility" (p. 42). When individuals come together in a dialogue they all have a mutual stake in the process in their role as an open and honest participant, not necessarily in trying to achieve a particular outcome. These tenets that Walsh (2007) describes are very similar to the three main principles of Invitational Rhetoric proposed by Foss and Griffin (1995), which is a theoretical conceptualization of rhetoric based in principles of imminent value, equality, and self-determination.

The goal of Invitational Rhetoric, similar to a dialogue, is to foster an environment where people can gather together to understand the others' perspectives by listening (Foss & Griffin, 1995). The concept of imminent value emphasizes that, "every being is a unique and necessary part of the pattern of the universe and thus has value" (p. 4). Immanent value can be used conceptually to situate Peace Circles in communication theory. Indeed, the program is designed so that every person has an equal stake in the process because of the use of the talking piece and the deep listening that occurs. The presence of each individual in the event reinforces his or her importance within the school community because their participation is given value.

The third principle, self-determination, relates or becomes evident in the program because everyone is open to share honestly, without feeling the need to change some part of themselves to appease others. Circles are most enriching when there is a diverse representation of perspectives and experiences. Strategically, participants are encouraged to share their experiences through stories. This type of sharing fosters deeper understanding between individuals as they hear about the complexities of others' lives.

During Peace Circles, participants are asked to express their values. Often in circles, an activity takes place where the participants are given a paper plate and a marker to write down their core values and share why those specific values are so important to them. The trust and safety of the process, as well as the strategic questions posed to the groups facilitate greater depth in the nature of the interactions. As a result, individuals may experience a shift or change in their perspective of others through this process of sharing and learning, though it is not an explicit goal of the event. Bone, Griffin, and Scholz (2008) state that it is the environment created during an invitational process that

provides an opportunity for growth and change among the involved individuals, though change is not the ultimate goal nor the "criterion for success in the interaction" (p. 436). This distinct conception of a rhetorical process as being separate from the Aristotelian definition of rhetoric as seeking the available means to persuade or change others is quite useful in describing the Peace Circles process and purpose of the events.

Philosopher Martin Buber's (1923) work, *I and Thou,* remains influential in the study of dialogue as it describes how dialogue participants gradually reconstitute the status of their relations with other individuals from 'I-It' to 'I-Thou'. In reference to the phenomenological tradition within Communication Studies, Craig (1999) states that in moving from I-It relations to I-Thou relations we experience "otherness" in a new way (p. 138). According to Craig (1999), "we can and should treat each other as persons (I-Thou) not as things (I-It), and that it is important to acknowledge and respect differences, to learn from others, to seek common ground, and to avoid polarization and strategic dishonesty in human relations" (p. 139). Dialogues are ideal for cultivating I-Thou relationships among people because the overall goal is to increase understanding. It is a potentially respectful environment because the diversity of our stories and differences in our experiences are valued, rather than being sources of opposition and conflict.

The I-Thou relationship is cultivated in dialogues because of the way that the process of sharing is structured and facilitated. Saunders (1999) speaks of dialogue as a "process of genuine *inter*action through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn" (p. 82). The change that happens is illustrated in the way that people may interact and view one another differently after engaging in a dialogue. The participants share personal information and engage with one another on a

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deeper level than in everyday conversation. This element of deep, rather than selective or inattentive listening, is a critical element that is emphasized in Peace Circles dialogues through the incorporation of the talking piece. Even if the person holding the talking piece needs a moment to think in silence about what he or she is going to say before answering, that may be indicative of one truly listening to the previous speaker rather than focusing on what they want to say before their turn. Listening is vital in order for people to "fully 'take in" the viewpoints of others, which is vital for understanding (Yankelovich, 1999, p. 14).

In their daily lives, students spend time talking with their close friends and listening to the issues that they are facing, but it is less common for this to happen in the school environment among individuals who are not acquainted. To build community in a school and increase students' sense of connectedness with others, it is important to get them talking with one another across social divisions. Students can, at times, misjudge their peers based on a lack of information or reliance upon false information. Peace Circles aims to bridge those gaps by offering students a place to connect and interact with many people they may not have under normal circumstances. Particularly by utilizing the technique of storytelling, people can "understand the experience of those who occupy other social locations or positions in the constellation of social groups and status structures" (Walsh, 2007, p. 143). By coming together in dialogue, students from different social locations begin to see one another, in new, potentially more compassionate ways.

Restorative Practices

Since its inception, Peace Circles have been influenced by the principles of restorative practices. This is a broad category of methods that can be employed in situations where a crisis has occurred that can lead to the breakdown of a community. According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP, 2004), the emerging field of restorative practices aims to enable people to restore and build their community in an increasingly disconnected world. These practices have a broad range of application in fields such as education, counseling, criminal justice, social work, and organizational management (IIRP, 2004). Arguably the most prevalent and well-known form of these practices is being utilized in legal systems across the globe in the form of restorative justice.

Restorative justice is fundamental to understanding how restorative practices are meant to foster healing in communities experiencing crisis by restoring relationships. The IIRP (2004) describes restorative justice as "a new way of looking at criminal justice that focuses on repairing the harm done to people and relationships rather than on punishing offenders" (p. 1). Wearmouth, Mckinney, and Glynn (2007) claim that restorative justice is concerned with the move from a retributive system of assigning blame and punishment as means of justice, to finding an "alternative means of preventing, managing, and controlling behaviour by finding a mutually agreeable way forward by negotiation" (p. 39). Cavanagh (2007) identifies the primary stakeholders in a restorative justice process as "the person(s) who caused the harm, the person(s) harmed, and the affected community" (p. 63). The crime or offense takes on a human element as it is related to the person(s) or victim(s) who were directly impacted as well as their families and the

community in which the offense occurred. Borton (2007) claims that within a restorative framework, violations are conceptualized within relationships, rather than being viewed as primarily offenses against the "State" as is the case with punitive, retributive systems of justice (p. 3).

A phenomenon consequentially linked with retributive justice systems is that of recidivism. The United States, for example, has very high rates of repeat offenses, which some argue is due to the fact that individuals are not being thoroughly rehabilitated for the offenses they commit (United States Department of Justice and the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002). Furthermore, the crimes that are committed are rarely addressed from the perspective of the victims (whether the victim is an individual, a family, or an entire community). In the punitive justice system, offenders are placed into a holding cell and may not be asked to reflect on the impact of their actions on the victim(s). According to restorative justice advocates, this does not provide adequate healing and therapeutic rehabilitation for offenders because they are not being asked to or aided in critically reflecting on their impacts on others' lives, which is why many individuals are now looking to integrate restorative justice practices into the legal system. In the same way that individuals working within justice systems are seeking new methods for healing individuals, there are people seeking new approaches for community-wide healing.

Other types of restorative techniques have been utilized in schools for a variety of purposes around the world with some positive results. Previous research shows that restorative programs in schools can have positive impacts on students' behaviors. Research that has been recently conducted has looked at schools in New Zealand that have incorporated restorative practices into the classroom to foster a learning

environment where students can achieve and feel a sense of belonging (Cavanagh, 2007). In the United States and other countries, "Zero Tolerance" policies are being used in schools as a form of "tough discipline" to deter students from behaving poorly (p. 66). While this has boosted the number of suspensions and expulsions, Cavanagh (2007) indicates that some educational researchers question whether this is actually changing behaviors. The concern is that it is furthering the problems students face by increasing feelings of isolation from the school community. One additional study of a 30-month pilot project looked at three local authority schools in Scotland that incorporated restorative practices into school curriculums. Researchers found restorative practices to be effective at promoting harmonious relationships and managing conflicts (Kane et al., 2007).

Cavanagh (2007) makes the argument that new practices need to be implemented into schools to replace the traditional disciplinary policies and approaches. He claims that because of the manner in which students are reprimanded for behavioral issues (and subsequently ostracized from the school community), they have no experience in dealing with their conflicts nonviolently and are stripped of their ability to make good choices. Students are shown that, in the face of conflict, they can simply escape the community rather than having to be a part of a solution. Cavanagh (2007) calls for a new "discourse of peace" in schools in addition to the implementation of restorative practices (specifically, circles) as means to help students nonviolently deal with conflicts and be a part of the restoration of their school community (p. 62).

Conflict Resolution

At the core of restorative practices is the goal of increasing the capacity of individuals to practice constructive conflict resolution that can potentially translate into better-functioning communities. Rehabilitation for individuals, restoration of relationships, and renewal of community systems are all situated within the healing perspective emphasized within the restorative tradition and conflict resolution. The dialogues we engage in as community members, and the stories we share with one another, may not only support peace in local communities, but also shape our notions of broader national or global cultures of peace and nonviolence. Feuerverger (2008) suggests that by sharing stories with students she had a "fresh understanding of their quest for peaceful coexistence amidst the conflict in wider society" (p. 138). Though conflict is ubiquitous and therefore unavoidable, Boulding (2000) claims that a peaceful society or community may be defined in terms of the ability of the people to manage their differences and conflicts respectfully. This begins with our interactions. Opening the lines of communication between individuals who are a part of a community facing conflict is a key task in working towards the resolution of the problem and preventing conflict from spiraling out of control in the future.

Unfortunately, however, the ability to interact with others in a respectful manner and the skills of conflict resolution are not necessarily innate. For this reason, more and more examples of programs in schools that actively seek to equip students with conflict management and resolution skills. One example is the *Creating a New Generation of Peacemakers* program that teaches students as young as pre-kindergarten or preschool age some basic skills like listening, stopping and thinking, and even "walking away"

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(Allen, 2009, p. 177). The program is a full curriculum that teaches students to decrease their acts of physical aggression, and replace them with respect and tolerance for others. This is meant to help them deal with unsafe situations not only at school, but also in their homes and communities (Allen, 2009). Students are even placed into circles to open and close their sessions. Evaluative studies conducted on the program show higher levels of conflict resolution skills among these students, compared to those who were not in the course (Allen, 2009). This study seems to confirm the notion that children at very young ages can benefit from violence prevention programs and learning social skills, which can potentially translate into tangible skills that they can use to their benefit.

Skills like listening and stopping to think before immediately reacting during a conflict moment can equip students with tools to deescalate the situation and prevent serious conflicts in the future. Or in some cases, these skills can also help to resolve current conflicts and contain future ones, as people listen to one another and work through the problems together. Ury (2000) proposes these three methods of dealing with conflicts: prevention, resolution, and containment. Peace Circles were originally used as a process of resolution for those conflicts that had already spiraled out of control in the school. In the two high schools for study 1 and 2, the school communities were not in the midst of a formal crisis. Peace Circles were held as preventative measures to potential conflicts through active community building.

Ury (2000) proposes that prevention is the best way to intervene, *before* the conflict occurs. It appears that helping equip schools with tools to prevent violence before crises happen is an important step towards moving away from a reactionary, crisis paradigm in education, to one of school health and vitality wherein school community

members can thrive in their environment. Research suggests that violence prevention and the cultivation of respectful school communities, through comprehensive planning and instruction on social skills, can be more effective in managing and preventing conflicts than relying primarily on strict disciplinary policies with individual students (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

After conceptualizing Peace Circles within the three theoretical frameworks of dialogue, restorative practices, and conflict resolution, the next section is an overview of the research on the core element of Peace Circles, which is connection. Many scholars conducting research on education are investigating the impact that connectedness has on students' perceptions (Anderman, 2002; Bandyopadhyay, Cornell, & Konold, 2009; Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Finn, 1989; Israelashvili, 1997; Sochet, Dadds, Ham, & Montague, 2005). Whether students feel a sense of connection to their peers, teachers, and school communities has implications for their ability to achieve academically and feel a sense of well being.

Considering Connection in Students' Experiences

Measuring Connectedness

Considering the budgetary crises that schools of all levels are facing in today's economic climate, it is all the more imperative that programs such as Peace Circles are accompanied with empirical evidence for success (Murray et al., 2007). However, measuring the effectiveness of programs that work to bring people together in a respectful way is no simple task. The first place to start is to come up with a clear definition of the end goal, which in this case is connection.

Authors offer different definitions of connection in schools, based on the multiple variables that influence students' perceptions of connection to others. In conducting a literature review on school connectedness studies, Libbey (2004) reveals that some of the most common conceptions of school connection come in studying things like school engagement, school attachment, school bonding, school climate, school involvement, and teacher support. Various studies have posed Likert-type statements to students in attempts to gauge their levels of agreement or disagreement. Moody and Bearman (2002), for example, examined school attachment with phrases such as, "I feel close to people at this school," "I am happy to be at this school," and "I feel like I am a part of this school" (Libbey, 2004, p. 275). Gottfredson, Fink, and Graham (1994) used the phrase, "I have lots of respect for my teachers" to measure levels of school attachment among students (Libbey, 2004, p. 275). Simons-Morton and Crump (2002) attempted to gauge school climate with a similar statement: "Students respect each other" (Libbey, 2004, p. 278).

Waters et al. (2009) operationalized connection broadly, as the extent to which students feel as though they are a part of their school. These researchers attempted to gauge students' perceptions regarding their academic support, how supportive of a climate there is at school, and the levels of fairness surrounding disciplinary policies. All of these elements are important for students' sense of autonomy (perception of choice and influence on school policy), competence (perception of clear-cut expectations for their behavior), and relatedness (perception of involvement and available emotional support for students). Goodenow (1993) defines connectedness as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the

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school social environment" (p. 80). Acceptance, respect, and support are all, once again, open to various modes of interpretation within the studies themselves.

Whitlock (2006) offers the most specific definition of connectedness as a "psychological state of belonging" where the youth in a school perceive that both they and the other youth around them are trusted, respected, and cared for by the adults in the school in positions of power who influence policy decisions (p. 15). Each of these definitions served specific purposes of the given studies, showing that there is no one set way to determine connectedness, as it manifests itself in multiple forms. However, some scholars argue that the most widely accepted definition of school connection comes from the Wingspread Declaration on School Connections (2004), which defines it as students' belief that the adults in their school care about their learning and about them as individuals. All of these definitions seek to better articulate the nature of educational environments by revealing students' perceptions of how people treat one another at school and whether or not they feel as though they are an important part of the school community based on interactions there.

At the heart of these studies is the concept of environment or context. No two schools are going to be exactly the same because each is occupied by different individuals' histories, values, and beliefs, resulting in unique social dynamics. In looking at the same school community over a five year-period, there are bound to be changes during that time as new students enter into the context each year. Blum and Libbey (2004) claim that there are three specific environmental conditions that influence school connectedness: high expectations for academic success, perceived support by school, and

safe school environments. However, researchers have not come to a consensus on what environmental factors should be the main focus.

Waters et al. (2009) offer a new theoretical framework that looks at the school environment from a broader perspective, venturing beyond purely interpersonal dynamics, to considering the ecology of the school environment. This ecological perspective takes into consideration how connectedness could also be influenced by the school's structure, function, and architectural foundation. These elements incorporate the school size, class sizes, student involvement in decision-making, and how well the school facilities are maintained in relation to students' connection to their school. The researchers propose a theoretical framework that links these ecological elements of the school environment with the interpersonal factors to measure connection (including the relationships among students, between students and staff, and among staff members). The ecological and interpersonal elements are then proposed to feed into the individual students' sense of overall autonomy, competence, and relatedness in that context.

Beyond this discussion of the various frames in which researchers can operationalize and measure connectedness are the following studies that have looked at the correlations between student connectedness and other areas of their lives.

Student Achievement

Anderman (2002) reexamined data collected from 1994 and 1996 by the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which included survey responses from over 90,000 students and interview responses from over 20,000 students, and found that students' perceived sense of belonging or connectedness to their school is related to their positive academic, psychological, and behavioral outcomes during adolescence. Human

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motivation researchers including Maslow (1954) posited that humans are driven to satisfy specific needs in a specific order based on both deficiency and growth needs (Huitt, 2007). In Maslow's *hierarchy of needs*, belonging falls near the base of the pyramid, highlighting the importance of attaining this prior to realizing self-esteem or actualization. Humans seek out belonging as soon as they have satisfied their needs for physiological well being and safety (Huitt, 2007). Research on school connectedness seems to confirm the priority of the need for belonging, especially among the youth in their school environments. In looking at "caring" school communities over the span of about 15 years with a diverse set of elementary schools from the United States, Battistich, Solomon, Watson, and Schaps (1997) found students' needs for belonging, autonomy, and competence are met when schools facilitate student involvement and that they may experience additional positive outcomes including pro-social skills, motivation, and higher achievement.

Finn (1989) looked at achievement in terms of truancy and student dropout rates from the lens of the participation-identification model, which suggested that students might be more likely to drop out if they lack a sense of belongingness to their school. Furthermore, it is students' sense of belonging to the school community that facilitates their academic motivation, commitment, and engagement (Finn, 1989). Based on research conducted with 2,022 students ages 12 to 14 years of age, Sochet, Dadds, Ham and Montague (2006) confirm, "school connectedness has been found to correlate strongly and positively with students' academic motivation and with indexes of school performance and adjustment" (p. 171). These results seem to demonstrate that schools can improve the performance of their students indirectly (rather than directly teaching

them hard skills such as reading, writing, mathematics, etc.), through interpersonal enrichment and connection activities. Considering that schools are dependent on their students' high levels of achievement, this may be yet another important piece of the puzzle that schools can utilize in optimizing performance.

Student Health and Well Being

Though it is clear that student achievement is important for schools, we have not yet considered how important the school environment is for the students from a developmental and general health-standpoint. Studies have shown that the mental and physical health of students is somewhat dependent upon their perceptions of belonging and connection. Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that belongingness is a fundamental human motivation as individuals work to form social relationships and avoid disruption of those ties. Furthermore, when individuals experience a lack of belongingness, they may also suffer from negative outcomes including stress, health problems, and negative effects on the immune system (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This is not dissimilar from research on social support that draws connections between individuals' social interactions and support systems with their length of life, incidence of disease, ability to prevent and deal with stressors (Goldsmith, 2004).

Looking again at school environments, Anderman (2002) found evidence to suggest that if schools can cultivate students' perceived sense of belonging, they may help students avert negative affect and psychological distress. Changing students' perceptions of belonging to their schools may require creating more caring school communities where people respect and support one another (Anderman, 2002). Hagborg (1994) found that students who had lower levels of connectedness to school were more

likely to seek out counseling services for problems ranging from low self-esteem to issues surrounding their families and peer relationships. This may suggest that students who have not established connections or relationships with peers or teachers seek that support in other venues (such as through relationships with counselors).

The potential benefit of increasing students' connectedness at school goes beyond aiding their general health. Studies have shown that these issues are often times much more deeply rooted in students' psyche, including their perceptions of the world and themselves. Various studies based on data from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health also have shown that school connectedness can be a mediating factor in adolescent involvement in behaviors that are deviant and pose risks to their health including the use of alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes, and violence (Dornbusch, Erickson, Laird, & Wong, 2001; Resnick et al., 1997). Walker et al. (2009) conducted a study with 63 high school students participating in the LifeSavers training program in rural Illinois and found that when students engage in substance and alcohol abuse, there is not only potential for their academic achievement to diminish, but also for their risk of suicide to increase. This is supported by findings from the longitudinal study by Sochet et al. (2006) with over 2,000 adolescent boys and girls that confirms a consistent, *predictive* link from school connectedness to certain mental health symptoms and conditions including depression after a time span of one year (taking into account their past depressive symptoms).

Some research suggests that as a result of students' experiences at school and whether or not they feel a sense of connectedness to others in that environment, there may be an impact on individuals' long-term identity formation. Israelashvili (1997)

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studied 307 students in grades five through twelve for their perceptions of school membership, and concluded that students' perceptions of being accepted and respected among peers and staff at their schools ultimately influenced their expectations for their *future*. Clearly, fostering positive school climates is important for both the individuals as they continue to develop a sense of themselves, in addition to the schools' need for students to achieve and grow as learners.

Given some of the new insights shared by educational researchers, it is becoming more apparent that schools can and should actively foster connections within their student body. Though there is some consensus that students need to feel a sense of connection at school, the means by which connection is fostered is not as clearly identified. There is still a need for naming programs and interventions that can successfully achieve this goal.

CHAPTER TWO

The Current Study

The previous sections discussed the history, theories, and research informing Peace Circles, which is a program aimed at building connections between students, schools, and communities. One important step, however, is to determine the effectiveness of this program. An evaluative study is indeed an important task if the program is to receive future support. Grant committees, administrators and school board officials will be more likely to support this program if they can see its effectiveness based on empirical data. Defining what is a 'successful' Peace Circles event is not clear-cut. There are a variety of outcomes that could result from an individual's participation in the program. However, in reviewing the previous material presented, there are a few conclusions as to what defines success in this context.

After participating in a successful Peace Circles event, participants could feel as though they have built connections with other people in their circle and have a greater understanding about others' life experiences. As a result of this, a successful event will help individuals realize new aspects of their own identities in addition to understanding the identities of the other participants in a deeper, more complex way. The participants should feel as though they were being heard throughout the day and that others listened to them. This sense of being listened to should contribute to the next sign of success. The participants should be able to express a sense of respect for those other individuals, and

feel as though they, too, have been respected throughout the dialogue, without being judged. In cultivating these connections, a successful event should foster a sense of belonging among the participants and to the school community overall.

In looking back on the previous research, there exists the potential for concrete, positive outcomes in regards to each of these measures of success for both the individuals participating and the overall school community. All of these proposed goals of the program served as the foundation for the design of measurement instruments to help determine whether the two events at Pavilion and Sage High Schools were in fact successful. This brings us to the goals and research questions of this particular study.

The Research Study and Guiding Questions

There are many different ways to go about evaluating a program's effectiveness. This particular study is limited in scope. It is not designed, for example, to include variables such as academic achievements, truancy rates, or general health and well being of the participants. Moreover, it does not include longitudinal assessment. Though attempting to gauge these aspects would be worthwhile, this study aims to determine if there were changes in participants' perceptions of connection to others and their school, over the course of Peace Circles. Participants filled out surveys soliciting both quantitative and qualitative responses at two points over the course of one day—once when they arrived at Peace Circles before prior to the commencement of dialogue and once after the event is completed.

The first and second research questions in this study pertain to connection and how participants' perceptions of being connected changed over the course of the event.

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RQ 1: To what extent do participants' perceptions of connection to one another and their school community change after participating in Peace Circles?

RQ 2: Are there significant changes in participants' perceptions of connection to one another and their school community from the pre-event to the post-event surveys?

The third and fourth research questions attempt to garner insight into the effectiveness of the program from quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

RQ 3: After participating, do most respondents indicate they would return again in future Peace Circles?

RQ 4: What reasons do participants offer for participating, or not participating, in future Peace Circles?

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Participant Demographics

Sample 1 gathered feedback from the individuals participating in the Peace Circles held for Pavilion High School on April 1, 2009. This was the fifth Peace Circles event at Pavilion. There were 60 participants who filled out pre-event and post-event surveys. Of these 60, 17 (28.3%) were male, 39 (65.0%) were female, and four (6.7%) participants did not indicate their sex. The ages of the participants, include the following: 49 (81.7%) were between the ages of 13-18; one (1.7%) was between the ages of 19-24; one (1.7%) was between the ages of 25-34; four (6.7%) were between the ages of 35-44; one (1.7%) was between the ages of 45-54; one (1.7%) was between the ages of 55-64, and three (5.0%) participants did not indicate their age. The races and ethnicities of the participants included the following: one (1.7%) identified as American Indian or Alaska Native; one (1.7%) identified as Black or African American; 48 (80.0%) identified as Caucasian or White; four (6.7%) identified as Asian; six (10.0%) identified as Hispanic or Latino, and zero participants did not indicate their race or ethnicity.[2]

Of the 60 total participants, 46 (76.7%) were individuals associated with Pavilion High School or closely identified with the school community. Those associated include 40 (66.7%) students, five (8.3%) teachers, and one (1.7%) administrator. The other 13 participants (21.7% of total participants) were not directly associated with Pavilion but

came to represent other populations of the local community. Ten (16.7%) of these individuals were K-12 students; one (1.7%) was a higher education student; two (3.3%) identified themselves as "other," and one (1.7%) participant did not indicate their association with Pavilion High School. Of those who identified themselves as students, eight (13.3%) were in K-8th grade; four (6.7%) were freshman; 20 (33.3%) were sophomores; eight (13.3%) were juniors; 12 (20.0%) were seniors, and eight (13.3%) student participants did not indicate their grade level (see Table 1).

Sample 2 included individuals participating in the Peace Circles held for Sage High School on April 29, 2009. There were 76 participants who filled out pre-event and post-event surveys. Of these 76, 25 (32.5%) were male, 48 (62.3%) were female, and four (5.2%) participants did not indicate their sex. The ages of the participants, include the following: 63 (81.8%) were between the ages of 13-18; two (2.6%) were between the ages of 25-34; four (5.2%) were between the ages of 35-44; three (3.9%) were between the ages of 45-54; three (3.9%) were between the ages of 55-64, one (1.3%) was over the age of 65; and one (1.3%) participant did not indicate their age. The races and ethnicities of the participants included the following: three (3.9%) identified as Black or African American; 55 (71.4%) identified as Caucasian or White; one (1.3%) identified as Asian; two (2.6%) identified as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; eleven (14.3%) identified as Hispanic or Latino; two (2.6%) identified as "other"; and three (3.9%) participants did not indicate his or her race or ethnicity.[2]

Of the 76 total participants, 55 (72.4%) were individuals associated with Sage High School or closely identified with the school community. Those associated include 49 (63.6%) students, four (5.2%) teachers, and three (3.9%) were associated in some

Table 1

Pavilion High School Peace Circles Participant Demographics (N=60)

	Total	Percentage
All Participants		(Out of 100%)
Sex		
Male	17	28.3
Female	39	65.0
No Response	4	6.7
Age		
13-18	49	81.7
19-24	1	1.7
25-34	1	1.7
35-44	4	6.7
45-54	1	1.7
55-64	1	1.7
65+	0	0
No Response	3	5.0
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	1.7
Black or African American	1	1.7
Caucasian or White	48	80.0
Asian	4	6.7
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0	0
Hispanic or Latino	6	10.0
Other	0	0
No Response	0	0
Associated with Pavilion Community		
Student	40	66.7
Teacher	5	8.3
Administrator	1	1.7
Not associated with Pavilion community	13	21.7
No Response	1	1.7
Associated outside Pavilion Community		
K-12 Student	10	16.7
Higher Education Student	1	1.7
Other	2	3.3
Participants who associated with Pavilion, or no response	47	78.3

Pavilion High School Peace Circles Participant
Demographics (N=60) Continued

Students		
K-8th grade	8	13.3
Freshman (9th grade)	4	6.7
Sophomore (10th grade)	20	33.3
Junior (11th grade)	8	13.3
Senior (12th grade)	12	20.0
No Response	8	13.3

"other" capacity. There were 20 (26.0%) participants who were not directly associated with Sage but came to represent other populations of the local community and 1 (1.3%) did not respond. Of the participants who were not associated with Sage directly, two (2.6%) of these participants were community members; 15 (19.5%) were K-12 students; one (1.3%) was a school district employee; three (3.9%) identified themselves as "other," and 56 (72.7%) were either associated with Sage or did not indicate their outside affiliation. Of those who identified themselves as students, 12 (15.6%) were in K-8th grade; seven (9.1%) were freshman; 17 (22.1%) were sophomores; 12 (15.6%) were juniors; 14 (18.2%) were seniors; and 15 (19.5%) did not indicate their grade level (see Table 2).

Procedures and Measurement

Administration of the surveys in both studies began shortly after students arrived at the churches between 7:30 and 7:50 a.m. Upon arrival participants were greeted, offered breakfast, given a brief introduction as a whole group, and then given name tags that have symbols to direct them to their assigned smaller rooms. When students arrived in the small rooms, they found a few things on the chairs arranged in a circle. The chairs had nametags on them for the assigned seating. Once students found their seats, they also

Table 2

Sage High School Peace Circles Participant Demographics (N=76)

	Total	Percentage
All Participants		(Out of 100%)
Sex		
Male	25	32.5
Female	48	62.3
No Response	4	5.2
Age		
13-18	63	81.8
19-24	0	0
25-34	2	2.6
35-44	4	5.2
45-54	3	3.9
55-64	3	3.9
65+	1	1.3
No Response	1	1.3
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0
Black or African American	3	3.9
Caucasian or White	55	71.4
Asian	1	1.3
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	2	2.6
Hispanic or Latino	11	14.3
Other	2	2.6
No Response	3	3.9
Associated with Sage Community		
Students	49	63.6
Teacher	4	5.2
Administrator	0	0
Other	3	3.9
Not associated with Sage community	20	26
No Response	1	1.3
Associated outside Sage Community		
K-12 Students	15	19.5
Community Member	2	2.6
School District Employee	1	1.3
Other	3	3.9

Sage High School Peace Circles Participant Demographics
(N=76) Continued

Participants who associated with Sage, or no response	56	72.7
Students		
K-8th grade	12	15.6
Freshman (9th grade)	7	9.1
Sophomore (10th grade)	17	22.1
Junior (11th grade)	12	15.6
Senior (12th grade)	14	18.2
No Response	15	19.5

found a pen and a pre-event survey on a paper plate (for them to write on). The lead facilitators had an instruction sheet for administering and collecting the pre-event and post-event surveys (prior to beginning dialogue for pre-event and just after the conclusion of the dialogue for post-event). It had verbatim verbal instructions for them to read to students, contextualizing the surveys as to why and how they had to fill them out (see Appendices B and C).

The students had approximately five to ten minutes to fill out the pre-event surveys. The goal of these was primarily to capture their motivation for coming, collect some basic demographic information, identify whether they had been in circle before, as well as gather responses to nine Likert-scale statements (see Appendices D and E). These same statements were also included in the post-event surveys (see Appendices F and G). These statements were listed in a different order on the post-event surveys and also included some "negative responses" to control for response set phenomenon (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p 179). Also on the post-event survey, participants were asked to circle their answer on a numerical scale to show changes in response to statements regarding connection, participation, and respect after their experience at Peace Circles. Another

method for gauging change in the participants was to pose open-ended questions for them to respond to including "What was your most meaningful experience here today," "What will you take from your experience today," and "Explain why," they answered yes or no to participating in Peace Circles in the future? At the end of the day after filling out the post-event surveys, participants gathered together as a whole group in a large circle to voluntarily share with the whole group some of their individual reactions to the day overall.[3]

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

RQ1

To address RQ1, which asked to what extent participants' perception of connection to their school community changed after participating in Peace Circles, three one-sample t-tests were conducted on three items from the post-event survey. The three items included in the analyses asked about participants' degree of change (ranging from -3 *less likely* to +3 *more likely*) regarding their sense of connection to their school, level of participation, and degree of respect. Prior to analyses, the seven-point -3 through +3 scale was converted to a 1-7 scale for ease of interpretation of the means. Each one-sample t-test used mid-point of the converted seven-point scale (i.e., 4.0) as the test value. The mid-point of the scale approximates "no change" in a participant's response.

Sample 1. Results for each of the tests indicated that the mean response was statistically significantly higher than the scale mid-point. Specifically, for the item, "After this experience today I will have a greater sense of connection to my school," the mean response ($M = 5.79$, $SD = .96$) was higher than the mid-point, $t(56) = 14.09$, $p < .001$). For the item, "After this experience today I will more actively participate in my school," the mean response ($M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.04$) was higher than the mid-point, $t(56) = 11.93$,

p < .001. Finally, for the item, "After this experience today I will be more respectful to people at school," the mean response (M = 6.35, SD = .89) was higher than the mid-point, $t(56)$ = 19.80, p < .001) .

Sample 2. Results for each of the tests indicated that the mean response was statistically significantly higher than the scale mid-point. Specifically, for the item, "After this experience today I will have a greater sense of connection to people at my school," the mean response (M = 6.04, SD = .85) was higher than the mid-point, $t(71)$ = 20.47, p < .001). For the item, "After this experience today I will more actively participate in my school," the mean response (M = 6.01, SD =1.04) was higher than the mid-point, $t(71)$ =16.41, p < .001). Finally, for the item, "After this experience today I will be more respectful to people at school," the mean response (M = 6.44, SD = .79) was higher than the mid-point, $t(71)$ = 26.42, p < .001) .

RQ2

To address RQ2, which asked if there would be significant changes in participants' perception of connection to their school community from the pre-event survey to the post-event survey, a paired-sample t-test was conducted on the composite school connection variable. Prior to conducting this analysis, however, a factor structure for the school connection items needed to be determined. Thus, principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation was conducted on the nine Likert-type items from the pre-event survey. Results indicated the potential existence of two factors, based on the eigenvalues (i.e., < 1.0), which were 3.79 and 1.17. Based on the scree plot and the factor loadings in the pattern matrix, however, only the first factor was interpretable. This factor was comprised of six of the nine items (see Table 3). Two of the remaining items loaded

rather weakly on the first item, while one item loaded on the second factor. Rather than

retain a one-item second factor, though, the six items comprising the first factor were

used to create the school connection composite variable. For consistency, the

corresponding six items from the post-event survey were also computed into a separate

school connection composite variable. The Crobach's reliability coefficient for these

measures was acceptable, at .83 for pre-event and .81 post-event surveys.

Table 3

Factor Analysis of the School Community Connection Items from Pre-event Survey (Pavilion High School)

	Factor	
Item	1	2
I feel like I belong at my school.	**.774**	.225
I feel like people at my school know who I really am.	**.769**	-.145
I feel like I have little in common with others at my school.	**.716**	-.111
I feel like people from my school listen when I talk.	**.646**	.145
I feel disconnected from others at my school.	**.619**	-.163
There are opportunities for me to be a leader at my school.	**.523**	.266
Many people at my school feel the same way I do.	.435	-.016
I participate in few to no activities in my school.	.412	.110
I would like to be more a part of my school.	.016	.749

Sample 1. After the pre-event and post-event composite variables were created

and found to be reliable, a paired samples t-test was conducted to determine if the means

were statistically significantly different. Results of the paired samples t-test indicated that

the post-event mean ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .58$) was statistically significantly greater than the

pre-event mean ($M = 3.73$, $SD = .75$), $t(57) = -.3.31$, $p < .05$.

Sample 2. As done in sample 1, principal axis factor analysis with oblique

rotation was conducted on the nine Likert-type items from the pre-event survey. Results

indicated the potential existence of three factors, based on the eigenvalues (i.e., < 1.0),

which were 3.52, 1.20, and 1.01. The results for sample 2 were less clear than for sample 1. Inspection of the items reveals that the first factor is the most consistent with the conceptualization of school connection forwarded in this study. Therefore, only the first factor was used in the analysis. This factor was comprised of four of the nine items (see Table 4). The fourth item, it should be noted, loaded rather weakly on the factor; nonetheless, it seemed sufficiently similar to the previous items to warrant inclusion in the factor. The strength of this item's loading is also less of a concern given the exploratory aim of this investigation. The third factor could also be utilized; those two items (i.e., items 8 and 9), however, do not seem to reflect school connection (as conceptualized in this study) as well as the items from factor 1. The Crobach's reliability coefficients for the four-item connection index were .76 for pre-event and .69 post-event surveys.

After the pre-event and post-event composite were created, a paired samples t-test was conducted to determine if the means were statistically significantly different. Results of the paired samples t-test indicated that the post-event mean ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .53$) was statistically significantly greater than the pre-event mean ($M = 3.86$, $SD = .66$), $t(71) = -4.04$, $p < .001$.

RQ3

RQ3 asked participants if they would participate in Peace Circles in the future. Results from sample 1 were the following: 58 (97%) said yes, 1 (2%) said no, and 1 (2%) had no response. A slightly different approach was taken when asking this question in sample 2. A scaled measure was created ranging from: NO!, no, maybe, yes, YES! This

Table 4

Factor Analysis of the School Community Connection Items from Pre-event Survey (Sage High School)

Item	Factor		
	1	2	3
I feel like I belong at my school.	**.814**	-.123	-.108
I feel like people at my school know who I really am.	**.662**	.259	.164
I feel disconnected from others at my school.	**.489**	-.176	.099
People at my school accept me for who I am.	**.477**	-.030	.303
I feel like people from my school listen when I talk.	.343	-.500	-.027
My peers and I can talk about our differences respectfully.	.299	-.465	.162
My personal experiences are much different than those of my peers.	-.025	-.229	.002
I feel disrespected by others at my school.	.011	-.238	.703
Many people at my school feel the same way I do.	.020	.111	.518

was done to increase variability of responses. Results from sample 2 show: 66 (87%) said YES!, 6 (8%) said yes, 4 (5%) said maybe, 0 said no, and 0 said NO! Overall, 72 participants (95%) from sample 2 said they would attend again.

RQ4

To address RQ4, which asked participants to explain why they would or would not participate in Peace Circles in the future, a thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative responses. In total, there were over 30 different reasons offered by the participants from both samples as to why they would participate again in Peace Circles. These reasons were condensed into six themes that broadly captured each of these reasons.

Only one individual out of the total respondents indicated she would not participate in Peace Circles in the future. The reason she offered was simply the word, "senior," which seems to indicate that her grade level was the reason why she would not return rather than some dislike for the program. Similarly, five participants from both samples said that they would participate again in the program if they were not graduating from their high school community, or if it were offered at the college level. It would be beneficial for these individuals to know that they could continue participating in these events as community members or even facilitators if they so desired. The event is not strictly for students, or even just people who are directly associated with the school community. There were participants at both events that were not students at these schools, but rather community members and higher education students.

Four participants from sample two indicated that they would "maybe" participate again. One simply wrote, "not sure," to explain why. The second individual wrote, "Allow others to participate," which may mean he wanted more individuals from the school community to be involved or able to participate. However, the event was open to the entire school community and participants attended on a voluntary basis. The third "maybe" response came from a student who said he was "already a peer." There are peer-support programs in high schools that connect students in one-on-one relationships, which may have similar elements to Peace Circles. These similarities may or may not deter this student from participating in both in the future.

The final response came from one of the eighth grade students who commented, "I have a hard time speaking my thoughts. But I liked being able to listen to others." Perhaps within her smaller circle, she was not aware that she could "pass" and not speak

if she was uncomfortable doing so. It seems important for future facilitators to be advised to reiterate to participants that they can pass their turn if they so choose. There may still be value in the experience of just listening to others share. However, there has been deliberation in past discussions among facilitators on the advantages and disadvantages of telling participants at the beginning of the process that they can pass. This can in some cases result in so many people passing their turn that the group members become unwilling to share and open up with the other group members.

Themes

Despite the wide variety of reasons offered by participants as to why they would come again to future Peace Circles, many of these shared common elements. These commonalities were compiled into six themes to explain why the participants would return (see Table 5). Frequently, the participants' responses were indicative of multiple categorizations. For example, many participants indicated multiple reasons why they would participate again, such as it was a great experience (theme 1) and that they made new connections (theme 2). Therefore, each participant response could include multiple categorizations (see Table 5).

The first theme, "Positive experience," simply means that the participants described the event using any variety of positive terms or phrases such as, "Because it was awesome," or "It was a good experience." Many participants also described the event as being "fun."

The second theme, "Connection," encompasses a variety of reasons that all relate to the notion of people being brought together or bonding. Nine respondents from both samples said they would return to get to know people on a "deeper" level again. Three of

these respondents acknowledge how great it was to hear others' stories. Four said that

they would return again to replicate the experience of connecting with others among a

Table 5

Table of Themes for Future Peace Circles Participation

Categories	Examples	Total # of Respondents (Pavilion)	Total # of Respondents (Sage)	Total # of Respondents (Combined)
1. Positive experience	It was, "neat," "awesome," "cool," "fun," "lovely," etc.	29	38	67
2. Connection	"I love the connections and fire that I have to be friends with these people."	27	33	60
3. Sense of gain	Gained "new perspectives," "new found respect," etc.	24	33	57
4. Sharing	"It was a good way to share things you struggle with in life."	3	4	7
5. Appreciate the process	"I believe in and promote the use of peace circles in schools," "They are the highlight of my year."	2	4	6
6. Better school environment	"It promotes an amazing environment, especially in a school."	3	3	6

new group of people. Four commented that the event helped them to feel a sense of

community or connection specifically. The majority of these responses in this theme

revolved around the notion that people got to know one another and met new people that

they would not normally talk to at school.

The third theme, "Sense of gain," seeks to describe a group of responses that

indicate the participants walked away with something new as a result of participating.

Twelve respondents described the program as being therapeutic or helpful in some way; one even commented, "It's almost like a free counciling [*sic*] session." Seven participants indicated they gained "new perspectives," or "new insights," throughout the day. Three individuals said they gained a sense of respect for their community members. Three commented that they gained a sense of "understanding," "comfort" and/or "safety" by getting to know people better.

Theme four, "Sharing," represents a group of seven participants who indicated that it was good to be able to share information about their lives with others. Some of these individuals expressed the sentiment of needing to share burdensome information to "get off my chest." Sharing specific feelings or emotions, in addition to difficult issues or situations in life with others, were also a part of this theme.

The fifth theme, "Appreciate the process," reflects the messages from six individuals who showed appreciation specifically for Peace Circles or the process that happens there. One of these individuals said that they would support the use of Peace Circles in schools. A student said she wanted to participate again in the form of a co-facilitator, assuming a leadership position within the program. Another student admitted, "They [Peace Circles] are the highlight of my year." Another person said that Peace Circles are, "what an education should be."

Theme six, "Better school environment," refers to the six individuals who suggested that Peace Circles helped their school to be a better place or that by participating, they were contributing to their school community in a positive way. Two participants said that the event gave them the chance to "be heard," and have a voice within their school community. Two individuals said that this event was a good way to

get involved in their school. One student said the event provided an opportunity to "make an impact," referring to the school community. Another student identified the event as a tool that "promotes an amazing environment, especially in school."

Lastly, four individuals said they would participate again but offered no explanation.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The social environment that students experience at school can have serious implications for their lives. Schools can benefit from providing programs and opportunities for students to connect to one another in positive ways because it helps motivate students to achieve and succeed academically (Sochet, Dadds, Ham & Montague, 2006). Not only can connectedness help students do well with their studies, but it can also help them avoid negative outcomes like stress, health problems, diminished immune systems, and engagement in self-destructive behaviors (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Dornbusch, Erickson, Laird, & Wong, 2001; Resnick et al., 1997). If students feel that they know others in the school community better and are given opportunities to create connections based in respectful interactions, they can help prevent acts of intimidation and violence and help others (including teachers and staff members) to feel more comfortable at school. Fostering connection can help students to feel their best, so they can also reach their greatest potential (Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 1998).

Peace Circles were originally created to help a high school community in crisis redevelop vital connections that had been lost to serious conflict. This study examined the effectiveness of the Peace Circles program at promoting connection between school community members. Peace Circles were conceptualized within a range of theoretical

and practical perspectives including dialogue, restorative practices, conflict resolution, adolescent development, and school connectedness research. School connectedness has been conceptualized through a variety of approaches. Researchers have measured connectedness in terms of students' involvement, perceived levels of teacher support, perceived belonging, and perceptions of being cared for by others in their school (Goodenow, 1993; Libbey, 2004; Whitlock, 2006). There is much consensus that fostering connection at school is important, yet how to make this happen has been less clear. The positive findings from this study suggest that Peace Circles are an intervention program that can potentially cultivate connection among school community members.

In addition to casting light on the operation and effects of Peace Circles on school connectedness, this study offers a framework for conceptualizing school connection. This conceptualization is based on three elements: increased understanding, improved listening, and enhanced trust. Each of the research questions driving this study was aimed at gathering input regarding these elements of connection.

The first research question asked to what extent did the perceptions of connection changed among participants. Participants were posed the three statements, "After this experience today I will have a greater sense of connection to my school," "After this experience today I will more actively participate in my school," and "After this experience today I will be more respectful to people at school," and were then asked to respond to a numerical scale to evaluate the extent of change. Results for each of the statements from both samples showed statistically significant increases in participants' responses. The second research question also showed statistically significant increases in participants' perceptions of connection to one another in both samples. The final

quantitative measurement pertaining to the third research question asked whether or not participants would return to Peace Circles in the future. Ninety-seven percent of the participants from sample 1, and 95% from sample 2, said yes, they would return.

Though most of these participants indicated that they wanted to come back to participate in future Peace Circles, it was important to identify the reasons behind wanting to return to participate again. Furthermore, it would not be deemed sufficient if participants wanted to return again only to get a day off school. The fourth research question investigated the reasons participants offered as to why they would return. The participants' open-ended responses offered fascinating insights into the program and its impact on the participants. Based on content analysis, six themes emerged, all of which spoke to the benefits this program can offer school communities. Many participants said the experience helped them connect with others, meet new people, and make new friends. In addition, their participation brought them new insights about others, fostering a new sense of respect. Some students also thought that it promoted a positive environment in their school and was therapeutic in allowing them to share information in a safe environment. Students were able to disclose things that they had been keeping to themselves and causing them unnecessary burden.

Theoretical Implications

The findings from this study also shed new light on important communication and conflict management theoretical perspectives, including dialogue, restorative practices, and conflict resolution. First, dialogue was introduced as a form of genuine interaction (Saunders, 1999), in which people could experience others in a new way (Craig, 1999). Dialogic interactions are conducive to creating conditions in which individuals may relate

to one another through the I-thou paradigm of communicating that places value on mutual respect and honesty (Buber, 1923). This paradigm, which can be cultivated in dialogues, is opposed to Buber's (1923) conception of the I-it paradigm of communication via strategic dishonesty. Linked to these notions of increased understanding through dialogue is Invitational Rhetoric (Foss & Griffin, 1995), a perspective identifying three key principles of imminent value, equality, and self-determination. Results from this study are relevant to each of the three guiding principles of Invitational Rhetoric. First looking at immanent value, it is important for students to feel that they are valued and seen as important parts of their school communities. After participating in Peace Circles, responses showed that participants felt that they belonged more at their school, people listened to them more, they had more in common with others, and felt less disconnected.

Regarding the principle of self-determination, responses showed that participants at Peace Circles felt able to share their authentic identities with others throughout the event. In doing so, participants felt accepted by others. This links back to the importance of the process of dialogue in its capacity to produce civil and reciprocal interactions, especially when there are ground rules in place. By introducing a set of guidelines for the interactions at the beginning of the process (i.e., suspending judgments, openness, listening to understand, confidentiality, etc.), an invitational environment is created where participants can feel a sense of safety. Safety, in this framework, is primarily cognitive. The safety lies in the sense of security that an individual can possess in expressing his or her thoughts and experiences without the fear of being attacked or judged. A sense of

security is then reinforced because people in the circle are listening to understand how those shared experiences have meaning.

Theoretical work from the field of Communication Studies on privacy management theory (CPM) (Petronio, 1991, 2000, 2002) and boundary turbulence (Petronio, 2002) can also be applied in examining the communication in Peace Circles. Petronio (1991, 2000, 2002) created the CPM theory to explain the processes by which groups or dyads disclose and develop ownership rules for private information.. Individuals have to manage their dialectical needs of openness and closedness when disclosing private information (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Petronio, 2002), which is magnified in Peace Circles when the process depends upon openness between group members. By revealing private matters in a public way, however, the individuals take a risk and become vulnerable because they must trust the others with their information.

As one group member discloses highly private information, they are potentially creating boundary turbulence (Petronio, 2002), because they are violating the social norms of what is typically shared between groups of people without intimate bonds or close relationships. In Peace Circles, students are selected to sit together in certain groups because they do not have close relationships, or may even be experiencing interpersonal conflict. Despite the nature of their relationships coming into the event, as each individual offers private information, the group members become shareholders of one another's personal information, changing the nature of their bonds. Reciprocity of sharing then becomes very important in reaffirming the safety of the space and the subsequent willingness of individuals to open up to others.

Examining the philosophies of restorative practices is also helpful in identifying the objectives of Peace Circles. Both restorative practices and Peace Circles place the focus on creating positive and harmonious relationships between community members. The underlying premise behind restorative work is that to diminish harm and develop relationships in the midst of a community crisis, we must avoid isolating and/or excluding offender(s) from the community (IIRP, 2004). All persons impacted by the crisis or conflict, regardless of their role in the event, need to identify and negotiate solutions collaboratively. Open communication is vital for restoration to take place. This is a very useful way in which to think about schools (i.e., as both communities and interdependent systems of individuals). Looking at school communities from a systems perspective is indeed helpful because changing one component of a system impacts the other components as well. As Galvin, Dickson, and Marrow (2006) articulate, the social systems that stem from individuals forming relationships are, "larger and more complex," than the individual components (p. 312). This is a fundamental insight because it shows that our communication with others and the structure of our interactions can have an impact on individuals and the overall system itself. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) believe that systems like families, neighborhoods, and schools impact youth's ability to achieve optimum development. If conflicts break out between groups of students, or frequent acts of intimidation take place, they are bound to have a ripple effect, with repercussions for other members of the student body.

Utilizing more restorative approaches could be effective in transforming cultures of bullying and intimidation in schools. If Unnever and Cornell's (2003) conceptualization of a "culture of bullying" becomes a reality at a school, it will require

the collaboration of all school community members, including the offenders, to address the problem (Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2009, p. 356). The individuals being directly subjected to intimidation, as well as those indirectly affected by witnessing the behaviors from the periphery, need to have a voice and be able to safely express how they are being impacted. Those perpetuating the intimidation need to be given the chance to participate in an intentionally structured process of communication, like Peace Circles, in which they can and must listen. In creating this opportunity, the students become active in co-creating solutions to restore the situation rather than assuming a more passive role in the events. This experiential learning equips students to listen and critically reflect on how their behavior influences others. School communities can experience greater social capital when they create conditions for individuals to cooperate in the pursuit of goals that benefit all school community members (Putnam, 1993).

Traditional types of exclusionary-based disciplinary policies, such as the use of suspension and expulsion, are argued to result in young people's inability to handle problems non-violently and without full capacity to make good choices (Cavanagh, 2007). Cavanagh (2007) researched "cultures of care" in some New Zealand schools and found evidence to support the implementation of "discourses of peace," in which students work with teachers, parents, and administrators to co-create policies for responding to misbehavior and conflict (pp. 70-71). In this discourse, a wrongdoing or conflict can be viewed as an opportunity for growth and learning for the entire community. This mode helps empower students with the capacity for solving problems, making positive choices, and confronting problems non-violently (Cavanagh, 2007). Peace Circles offer an ideal process and environment for school community members to have serious conversations

about their schools and how each individual can share responsibility in finding solutions to conflicts.

Similar to the way in which restorative practices emphasize the importance of maintaining harmony within a community, some conflict resolution scholars and practitioners are identifying the need to equip students with nonviolent, conflict resolution skills. Ury (2000), for example, speaks to the importance of preventing conflicts before they occur. Many conflicts in high school or middle school environments are a result of students making assumptions and jumping to uninformed conclusions about one another without seeking genuine understanding. If students could come together and learn about one another on a deeper level, as they do in Peace Circles, it could prevent conflict. The Peace Circles process could be utilized in dealing with interpersonal conflicts between students. Allowing the individuals to hear one another's perspectives and potentially foster understanding and respect in place of anger or violence. Moreover, by having students participate in a process that teaches them the value of listening and acceptance they could, over a period of time, change the culture of a school. In sum, equipping individuals with non-violent, conflict resolution skills can provide them with long-lasting benefits.

The individual benefits of Peace Circles can also be examined from the perspective of identity formation and how the genesis and evolution of selfhood occurs. Mead (1964) contends that we cannot even know ourselves, or what our own 'self' is, without seeing it in relation to other 'selves.' He also claims that the self is not inherent nor is it present from the time of our birth, but rather, the self arises through our social experiences and activities. Furthermore, in light of these social processes, the individual

sees him or herself differently because of his or her participation in social interaction. Feedback from students on the surveys suggests that in addition to learning more about others and making stronger connections, they are learning a great deal about themselves in terms of who they are, who they have been, and who they want to become. This happens through their reflection on their stories and having the opportunity to think about what goals and dreams they have for the future.

Mead (1964) argues that individuals must experience moments of looking at their lives from the outside-in; people have to "get outside" themselves in order to see their own self as an object to observe and become aware of, experientially (p. 202). Mead (1964) feels that we can simultaneously be both subjects and objects and that the 'self' is a reflexive entity. A question often asked by the dialogue facilitators to guide the conversation is, "If your life were a book, what would the main chapters be?" This offers students a new conceptual framework in which to view their lives, from the observer standpoint. Christensen and Johnston (2003) believe that this gives students authority over their own lives as more than just the expert, but also as the author and the main character in their own life story. Even the way that students choose to tell a story is meaningful in how they emphasize important turning points and reveal the new understandings that came from those experiences.

The narrative approach allows individuals to reflect on themselves and the environments in which they live. In particular, they are able to consider what cultural messages have been instilled upon them, how those messages have influenced their choices, and how familial interactions contribute to the formation and evolution of their identity (Thomas & Gibbons, 2009). In light of these new understandings and insights,

participants who engage in a narrative form of sharing can understand the past, present, and future in new ways (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Limitations

In light of the theoretical and practical contributions of this study, there are several limitations to this study as well as directions for future research. The first limitation of this study is its small sample size in both the number of participants at each event and the fact that this was a sample of only two schools. There are more than two schools holding these events. In the future, more complete data could be gathered from participants at all Peace Circles events. The second limitation of this study is the phenomenon of demand characteristics within the data. It is possible that the participants in these events answered in a way consistent with how they thought they needed to because of the fact that research was being conducted. Though the researcher was not in the rooms with the participants as they were filling out the surveys, perhaps it would be better to have them fill the surveys out when they were not in the actual environment of the event.

The third limitation is that these responses provide only a snapshot of these participants at one set point in time. This study does not reveal whether or not these participants continued to feel greater connection over time. Nor does this study examine how students' academic achievement or health changed after participating. It would be very interesting to conduct future longitudinal research that tracks the achievement and holistic well being of Peace Circles participants. This research could also investigate any cultural changes within school communities that hold Peace Circles each year. The measures used in this study are potentially a fourth limitation. They were developed by

the author to address the concept of school connection. The measures, though useful, have not been used in other studies. Moreover, the factor analysis, though yielding useable factor structures, indicated that the items could likely be improved in subsequent studies.

In addition to identifying limitations within the current study, there are also some limits concerning what Peace Circles can accomplish for students and schools. Mainly, Peace Circles are one-day events that often take place twice in a school year. Given results from this study, individual participants appear to be positively impacted. However, other programs teach pro-social skills and conflict resolution techniques in schools and are institutionalized into the curriculum. It is perhaps the habitual or daily practice that makes programs like the *Responsive Classroom* (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007) and *Creating a New Generation of Peacemakers* (Allen, 2009) so successful. Peace Circles are currently offered as a voluntary, supplementary activity. That is not to say that Peace Circles should be a required process as they are used right now. Rather, there is a need for future research to be conducted on how to implement processes like dialogues into the classroom on a more regular basis.

There is an additional concern with Peace Circles that the information being shared about peoples' personal lives could get back to the school community at large. A breach in confidentiality is always a concern and could have serious implications for students, as well as the adults who are participating. Participants do take a risk in what they chose to share with the group. Other than talking about the importance of confidentiality with the groups at the beginning of the process, there is not much to be done to ensure that a breach does not occur. Perhaps facilitators could tell people not to

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share things that they would be devastated for others to hear. However, that creates boundaries by limiting honesty and openness. Lastly, the quality of the facilitation is always a variable that is difficult to control for. These individuals have a very difficult job on their hands, with great responsibility to the participants in the groups. Ideally, the facilitator will have gone through training in peacemaking circles, restorative justice, and/or other community-facilitation techniques. However, it is often difficult to find the appropriate training venues, as well as qualified facilitators (who are often expected to work for minimal, if any, compensation). Institutionalizing the program and allocating sufficient funding for facilitation is an important step in guaranteeing a certain level of quality and consistency among facilitators.

Holding Peace Circles in educational settings is a powerful tool that can achieve positive results. Nevertheless, there are many variables that influence how successful these events can be, especially in school environments. Peace Circles, and dialogue more broadly, are techniques being utilized in more and more areas. Businesses are using circles as a way to increase communication, transparency, and efficiency. Companies like the *Nowhere Group* utilize facilitated circle processes in some meetings with the goal of, "releasing the creative potential of leaders, teams and cultures within and across some of the world's largest companies, government agencies and local communities" (Nowhere Group, 2010).

For yet another purpose, it seems that using circles or dialogues would be an effective tool for peace and reconciliation processes among groups of individuals in the midst of conflict. The Contact Hypothesis proposed by Allport (1954) posits that by bringing individuals from opposing or rival groups together, under certain conditions,

intergroup conflict can be reduced and relations improved between individuals by promoting tolerance and understanding (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Hewtone & Brown, 1986).

Future Directions in Research

In light of the previous discussion and proposed ideas, there are multiple directions to take in future research on Peace Circles. First, would be to conduct a secondary research project on Peace Circles from a longitudinal perspective. Considering that this study does not offer insight into the lasting effects of Peace Circles on students' perceptions of connection to others, it would be productive to conduct a longitudinal analysis in this area. Specifically, conducting follow-up interviews with the participants approximately one month, and again at six months after the event, could help researchers to better gauge the long-term impacts of the program. Some of the potential questions to ask the participants could be, "Thinking back on the last Peace Circles, do you still interact with the individuals who were in your circle or feel a sense of connection to them?" "Have you seen any positive changes in your school community that you could associate with Peace Circles taking place?" "If you could help Peace Circles to have a longer-lasting effect on your school community, what would that look like?" The information gathered from these interview questions could help to improve the program and potentially demonstrate another level of effectiveness of Peace Circles for school communities.

A second study that could be conducted on Peace Circles would involve working with school administrators to create a new class that has the potential to institutionalize the practices of Peace Circles into the curriculum. At Colorado State University, the CSU

Center for Public Deliberation enrolls students who take classes on the skills of community-facilitation techniques. The student facilitators then help to run local democratic forums with local community members. Along these lines, there could be a new high school class offered to students that focuses on building a skill set for community engagement, revolving around specific facilitation techniques like paraphrasing, deep listening, note taking, and the art of asking good questions to achieve specific outcomes among others.

In this voluntary elective class, students could participate in a dialogue during class time to help build a trusting classroom community. Simultaneously, students could learn the process of facilitating Peace Circles. In addition, students could engage with material on conflict management techniques, the principles of restorative practices, and deliberative democratic forums, such as the *National Issues Forum* model for policy-based discussions (see http://www.nifi.org/ for more information). A class on facilitation could offer students the chance to practice with Peace Circles and attain a practical skill set that they could utilize in future professional contexts. This class may also be offered in a service-learning format in which students must participate in a community-building event outside of the classroom. Further, students could be evaluated at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester, in terms of their acquisitions of these skills and perspectives on the importance of community engagement, active citizenship, and nonviolent communication processes.

A third research study to be considered takes the process of Peace Circles and implements it in an international context. Recently, a group of exchange students from various locations in Iraq came to participate in a leadership program. The program,

sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Iraq and the U.S. State Department, took place on three different campuses around the United States (Ingalis, 2009). In the program, the students engaged in a variety of activities in the local community from building houses with Habitat for Humanity, to meeting locally elected government officials, and even participating in a short version of Peace Circles. After the dialogue took place, many of these students commented on how unique the program was and how useful it could potentially be to practice in their local communities in Iraq. One young woman in particular, who works with a nongovernmental organization of young leaders in Iraq, said that she would be interested in holding a Peace Circles dialogue with the members of this organization.

It would be fascinating to conduct research on the applicability of Peace Circles within international contexts in the midst of conflict. For example, in the nation of Iraq, it would be interesting to see how young Iraqi leaders could learn about members from other ethnic identities and build bridges to work collaboratively to help rebuild their nation. Studying the utility of Peace Circles for fostering new understandings across racial, ethnic, religious, or political divides could be conducted in places such as Northern Ireland, South Africa, Rwanda, Burundi, or anywhere that conflicts perpetuate violence and hatred. Though it would not be a simple task to implement Peace Circles in these places, there is real potential for Peace Circles to foster reconciliation and help communities take positives steps towards peaceful coexistence.

Potential Applications and Implementations of Peace Circles

As seen in this study, Peace Circles have a home within the realm of education. Identifying resources for program implementation is a challenge, however. This

evaluation study was intended to demonstrate to school administration that they should be supporting this program in their schools by designating resources to Peace Circles because of the benefits it offers students and the school community. In the past, this program has received grant funding through the federal government. Despite the great deal of work associated with applying for funding through granting agencies and governmental avenues, this is an option for those seeking to hold Peace Circles.

In addition to these avenues, potential exists for businesses and non-profit foundations to partner with local school districts to hold Peace Circles. The previously mentioned for-profit company, *Nowhere Group*, works to enhance the creative potential of organizations. This company also has a non-profit arm the *Nowhere Foundation* that seeks to foster creativity within the realms of education, health, business, and governance (Nowhere Foundation, 2010). Of particular interest to this study are the educational programs. For example, in 2002 the *Nowhere Foundation* created a program called Enhanced Children's Learning (ECL), which aims to offer students "holistic, affective and creative aspects of growth" during their education (The ECL Story, 2010, ¶ 2). The program received eight years of funding to operate in primary and secondary schools in the United Kingdom and has now been shown to be a "powerful new approach for parents and educationists who wish to enhance the emotional well-being, creativity and learning of our children and young people" (The ECL Story, 2010, ¶ 2). The ECL approach acknowledges that classrooms, schools, and families are all interconnected and, thus, Peace Circles would seem to be a nice addition to this program.

In considering how to expand the scope of the Peace Circles program to addressing broader cultural conflicts, there are legally-constituted non-governmental

organizations (NGOs) operating totally or partially through government funding that are run by individuals unaffiliated with the government. NGOs could possibly utilize Peace Circles in achieving their specific goals. For example, the Non-Governmental Organization Committee on Disarmament, Peace and Security has provided services and facilities to citizen groups working towards peace, arms control, and disarmament for over thirty years here in the United States (NGO Committee on Peace, Disarmament & Security, n.d.). It has a network clearing house, a newspaper publisher, a year-round liaison to the United Nations, and a conference organizer because of its distinguished efforts. This NGO, and others with similar visions, could offer the Peace Circles model to citizen groups and host the appropriate trainings on running these events as well as peacemaking circles facilitation techniques. This information could be dispersed as potential tools for fostering respect, acceptance, and understanding, which fall within the aims of achieving peace and supporting disarmament and nonviolence in the midst of conflict.

Conclusion

When students walk through the doors of their school, they are preparing to embark on an educational journey where they will learn skills to help them be successful in the future. Along the way, they will not only be learning about others, but also about themselves. This study has revolved around a program that aims to bring these young people together, with their peers and others, to get to know about one another on a deeper level. This is important because these individuals are interdependent. It is not always easy for students to make connections, especially in the midst of the frequent intimidation that occurs in these environments. Conflict seems ubiquitous. Yet the skills for respectfully

managing conflict and differences is the key to creating peaceful communities and societies (Boulding, 2000). Helping students see one another in a new, more compassionate, accepting, and respectful light could make positive differences in the future. Everyone has a story, and if we take the time to listen, it is amazing how much we can learn.

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APPENDIX A
Common Peace Circles Facilitator Questions

Low Level Questions (low level of risk):
- If you could bring anyone into this circle with you, who would it be and why?
- What does family mean to you?
- Who is someone you admire and why?
- Tell us something about yourself that makes you proud.
- What does community mean to you?
- Tell us a famous quote that inspires you and why?
- Tell us about a person close to you, and what you like best about him or her.
- What does courage mean to you? Who do you think is courageous and why?
- If you were writing your life story in three chapters, what would those chapters be about?
- Tell us about something that happened that embarrassed you.
- Tell us about something that happened that made you laugh.
- Tell us about your happiest day so far.

Medium Level Questions (medium to high level of risk):
- Tell us about a time you felt discriminated against, judged, or put down. What happened and how did you feel?
- Tel us about a time you were afraid or felt threatened. What happened and how did you handle it?
- Describe a time when you felt really included, valued, or appreciated.
- What has your high school experience been like? Do you feel that you fit in or belong at your school?
- How do you think people perceive you? Is it different from who you are on the inside?
- Tell us about a crisis in your life. What happened and how did you handle it?
- If there was one thing about yourself you could change, what would it be and why?
- If you could say one thing to anyone, what would it be, who would you say it to, and why?
- What is the greatest lesson in life you have ever learned?
- What is one piece of advice that you wish you could pass along to everyone else?
- What brings you a sense of passion?
- What would be the most difficult thing in your life to have to give up?
- If your life flashed before your eyes, what three moments or scenes from your past would you expect to stand out?
- Describe a time when you felt inspired.

Common Peace Circles Facilitator Questions Continued

Medium Level Questions (medium to high level of risk):
- What is on your mind today?
- Describe an "aha" moment that has defined you.
- What is an obstacle that you have had to overcome? How did you do this?

Issue-Specific Questions for School (medium to high level of risk):
- We're here to talk about community at your school and if students feel like they belong. Could you tell us what is your experience of being part of your schools' community?
- What do you think makes a school a community?
- What makes people feel like they belong?
- How do people treat each other at your school? Is there anything that could be improved?
- Where do you stand in the hallway at passing periods? How does it feel to walk down the halls of this school? Where do you eat lunch? Why do these things matter?
- What junior high did you come from, and why does that matter?
- What does school spirit mean to you?
- What does it mean to be a leader at the school?
- What would make you feel more a part of your school community? What about your friends?
- Why did you choose to come to this school?
- What do you think needs to happen to make things better at your school?
- What could you personally contribute to a solution?
- How do teachers show they care about the students and the school?

Facilitator Instructions—Questionnaire distribution
Pavilion High School Peace Circles—April 1st, 2009

I will make sure that students have a copy of the pre-questionnaire on their chairs, with pens/something to write on, when they arrive. I will leave a stack of post-questionnaires with you to administer at the end of the day. It should only take students about 5 minutes to fill out each of the surveys.

"Pre surveys":
1. Begin reading them these directions once they are all in the room seated, **before** you begin the circle process.
    - **Say**: "Good morning everyone. You should all have found a paper on your chairs. (***Hold your pre-survey up to show them).*** Today, you are all going to be given the chance to share your opinions on this experience here today. We will be collecting your responses ***both before and after*** you participate."
    - "Your insights will help guide a research project being done on Peace Circles by a CSU graduate student."
    - "Please answer honestly: there are no right or wrong answers; your answers will **not** be connected to you personally in any way."
    - "Right now, if you could all please think of a key word or phrase, not your name, that you will be able to remember all day. Write that key word on your pre-survey on the line next to "ID Code" at the top right now."
2. Give them 15 seconds or so to do this.
    - **Say:** "Go ahead and fill out the rest of the survey."
3. Give them 5 minutes or so to do this; once everyone is done, collect the pre-surveys and then:
    - **Say:** "Thank you. Make sure to remember that key word, so that you can write it again on your post-survey when we are done."

"Post surveys":
4. After you finish your last round of the day, before returning to the larger group, hand out the post-surveys & hold up your copy:
    - **Say:** "Before we go meet up as a larger group, we are going to fill out the post-surveys to capture your input about this experience in circle."
    - "Before you start, write your key word at the top of the page next to "ID Code," this is the same key word that you put on your pre-survey this morning."
    - **"**Once you've done that, you can fill those out now. When you are done, you can hand me your survey and you can head over to the _____location_____ to meet up with everyone."

APPENDIX B
Facilitator Instructions (Pavilion High School) Continued

"Thank you for filling this out, *your responses are very much appreciated*."

*If students forget their key words, still have them fill out the post-survey anyway.
**I will be around to get the questionnaires from you at the end of the day!

Thank You!!!

Facilitator Instructions—Questionnaire distribution
Sage High School Peace Circles—April 29th, 2009

I will make sure that students have a copy of the pre-questionnaire on their chairs, with pens/something to write on, when they arrive. I will leave a stack of post-questionnaires with you to administer at the end of the day (you can delegate this to the student co-facilitators to help with).

It should only take students about 5 minutes to fill out each of the surveys.
Student facilitators: Please get a <u>head-count</u> of the total # of participants in your circle.

"Pre surveys":
5. Begin reading them these directions once they are all in the room seated, **<u>before</u>** you begin the circle process.
    - **Say**: "Good morning everyone. You should all have found a paper on your chairs. (***Hold your pre-survey up to show them).*** Today, you are all going to be given the chance to share your opinions on this experience here today. We will be collecting your responses ***both before and after*** you participate."
    - "Your insights will help guide a research project being done on Peace Circles by a CSU graduate student."
    - "Please answer honestly: there are no right or wrong answers; your answers will **<u>not</u>** be connected to you personally in any way."
    - "Right now, if you could all please think of a key word or phrase, not your name, that you will be able to remember all day. Write that key word on your pre-survey on the line next to "ID Code" at the top right now."
6. Give them 15 seconds or so to do this.
    - **Say:** "Go ahead and fill out the rest of the survey."
7. Give them 5 minutes or so to do this; once everyone is done, collect the pre-surveys and then:
    - **Say:** "Thank you. Make sure to remember that key word, so that you can write it again on your post-survey when we are done."

"Post surveys":
8. After you finish your last round of the day, before returning to the larger group, hand out the post-surveys & hold up your copy:
    - **Say:** "Before we go meet up as a larger group, we are going to fill out the post-surveys to capture your input about this experience in circle."
    - "Before you start, write your key word at the top of the page next to "ID Code," this is the same key word that you put on your pre-survey this morning."

APPENDIX C
Facilitator Instructions (Sage High School) Continued

- **"**Once you've done that, you can fill those out now. When you are done, you can hand me your survey and you can head over to the _____location_____ to meet up with everyone."

"Thank you for filling this out, *your responses are very much appreciated*."

*If students forget their key words, still have them fill out the post-survey anyway.
**I will be around to get the questionnaires from you at the end of the day!

Thank You for your help!!!

Pre-Survey (Pavilion)

ID Code: _____ .

Pavilion High School Peace Circles—April 1st, 2009

Participant Information and Pre-Survey
The information collected in this survey will be used to further study Peace Circles.
Thank you for your time and honesty in your responses.

What brought you to Peace Circles today?

_____

_____

For the following items: _carefully read_ and _circle_ your level of agreement or disagreement.

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel like people at my school know who I really am.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel disconnected from others at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I would like to be more a part of my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like people from my school listen when I talk.	1	2	3	4	5
I participate in few to no activities in my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like I belong at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
There are opportunities for me to be a leader at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like I have little in common with others at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
Many people at my school feel the same way I do.	1	2	3	4	5

Sex: □ Male □ Female

Age: □ 1-12; □ 13-18; □19-24; □ 25-34; □ 35-44; □ 45-54; □ 55-64; □ 65+

Are you associated with **Pavilion High School**?
□ Yes □ No

If **yes**, are you a(n): □ Student; □ Teacher; □ Administrator; □ Other: _____ .

If you are **<u>not</u>** associated with Pavilion High School, are you a(n):
□ Community Member   □ K-12 Student   □ Higher Education Student
□ Parent   □ School District Employee
□ Other: _____ .

If you are a **<u>student</u>**, your grade level is:
□ K-8; □ Fr.; □ Soph.; □ Jr.; □ Sr.; □ College-level

Race/Ethnicity
□ American Indian or Alaska Native   □ Black or African American
□ Caucasian or White   □ Hispanic or Latino
□ Asian   □ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
□ Other _____

Feel free to send any additional comments by email to Mallorie Bruns at
Mallorie.Bruns@rams.colostate.edu
<u>THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!</u>

Pre-Survey (Sage)

ID Code: _____.

Sage High School Peace Circles—April 29th, 2009

Participant Information and <u>Pre-Survey</u>
The information collected in this survey will be used to further study Peace Circles.
Thank you for your time and honesty in your responses.

What <u>brought</u> you to Peace Circles today?

_____

_____

For the following items: *<u>carefully read</u>* and *<u>circle</u>* your level of agreement or disagreement.

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel like people at my school know who I really am.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel disconnected from others at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel disrespected by others at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like people from my school listen when I talk.	1	2	3	4	5
My peers and I can talk about our differences respectfully.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like I belong at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
People at my school accept me for who I am.	1	2	3	4	5
My personal experiences are much different than those of my peers.	1	2	3	4	5
Many people at my school feel the same way I do.	1	2	3	4	5

Sex: □ Male □ Female

Age: □ 1-12; □ 13-18; □19-24; □ 25-34; □ 35-44; □ 45-54; □ 55-64; □ 65+

APPENDIX E
Pre-Survey (Sage) Continued

Are you associated with **Sage High School**?
□ Yes □ No

If **yes**, are you a(n): □ Student; □ Teacher; □ Administrator; □ Other: _____.

If you are **not** associated with Sage High School, are you a(n):
□ Community Member   □ K-12 Student   □ Higher Education Student
□ Parent   □ School District Employee
□ Other: _____.

If you are a **student**, your grade level is:
□ K-8; □ Fr.; □ Soph.; □ Jr.; □ Sr.; □ College-level

Race/Ethnicity
□ American Indian or Alaska Native   □ Black or African American
□ Caucasian or White   □ Hispanic or Latino
□ Asian   □ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
□ Other _____

Feel free to send any additional comments by email to Mallorie Bruns at
Mallorie.Bruns@rams.colostate.edu
THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

ID Code: _____.

Pavilion High School Peace Circles—April 1st, 2009

Participant Information and Post-Survey
The information collected in this survey will be used to further study Peace Circles.
Thank you for your time and honesty in your responses.

What was the most meaningful part of your experience in circle today?

_____

_____

For the following items: _carefully read_ and _circle_ your level of agreement or disagreement.

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel like people from my school listen when I talk.	1	2	3	4	5
I participate in few to no activities in my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like people at my school know who I really am.	1	2	3	4	5
There are opportunities for me to be a leader at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel disconnected from others at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
Many people at my school feel the same way I do.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like I have little in common with others at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like I belong at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I would like to be more a part of my school.	1	2	3	4	5

Have you ever participated in Peace Circles **before**?
  ☐ Yes ☐ No   If yes, how many times? _____.

Post-Survey (Pavilion) Continued

Would you participate in Peace Circles in the **future**?
☐ Yes ☐ No   Please explain **why**:

_____

_____

What could be **improved** upon in the future?

_____

_____

What will you **take from** this experience in circle today?

_____

_____

Circle your answer:
     Less likely   **No change**   **More likely**
     -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3
After this experience today I…
1. Will have a greater sense of connection to my school.
     -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3
2. Will more actively participate in my school.
     -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3
3. Will be more respectful to people at school.
     -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3

Feel free to send any additional comments by email to Mallorie Bruns at
Mallorie.Bruns@rams.colostate.edu
THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

Post-Survey (Sage)

ID Code: _____.

Pavilion High School Peace Circles—April 29ᵗʰ, 2009

Participant Information and <u>Post-Survey</u>
The information collected in this survey will be used to further study Peace Circles.
Thank you for your time and honesty in your responses.

What was the most <u>meaningful</u> part of your experience in circle today?

_____

_____

For the following items: _carefully read_ and _circle_ your level of agreement or disagreement.

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel like people from my school listen when I talk.	1	2	3	4	5
My peers and I can talk about our differences respectfully.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like people at my school know who I really am.	1	2	3	4	5
People at my school accept me for who I am.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel disconnected from others at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
Many people at my school feel the same way I do.	1	2	3	4	5
My personal experiences are much different than those of my peers.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like I belong at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel disrespected by others at my school.	1	2	3	4	5

Have you ever participated in Peace Circles **before**?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, how many times? _____.

Post-Survey (Sage) Continued

Circle your answer to the statement: "I would attend Peace Circles in the **future**."
        NO!   no   maybe   yes   YES! Please explain **why** you answered this way:

_____

_____

What could be **improved** upon in the future?

_____

_____

What will you **take from** this experience in circle today?

_____

_____

Circle your answer:
      Less likely   **No change**   **More likely**
      -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3
After this experience today I…
1. Will have a greater sense of connection to people at my school.
      -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3
2. Will more actively participate in my school.
      -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3
3. Will be more respectful to people at school.
      -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3

Feel free to send any additional comments by email to Mallorie Bruns at
Mallorie.Bruns@rams.colostate.edu
THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

Footnotes

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[1] Pseudonyms have been assigned to the schools and individuals involved in these events to protect their identities.

[2] Categories were taken from the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/.

[3] The Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval to use the data collected on surveys at the two Peace Circles events featured in this research.