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ABSTRACT

This paper develops a moral approach to educational controversy, examining a collaborative research project that promotes reconciliation between diverse perspectives and laying out the foundations of a reconciliatory discourse. Section 1 discusses problems in education that contribute to unproductive discourse (conflict of educational purposes, poverty of public debate, lack of public access to the language of education and intellectual struggle, power of special interests, and desire for the quick fix and the dynamic of the swinging pendulum). Section 2 discusses a new vision for educational debate, explaining reconciliatory discourse and educational aims. It also discusses trust and struggle as the core of reconciliatory discourse and examines the distinctive character of reconciliatory discourse. Section 3 discusses: conditions for participation in reconciliatory discourse, noting requirements for reconciliatory discourse; participants' attitudes, beliefs, and competencies; principles of discourse (listening, expressing one's self effectively, personal interaction, and searching and learning through deliberation); and habits of mind and dispositions. Section 4 discusses the procedure for reconciliatory discourse, explaining 5 steps: (1) locating the issues; (2) working out similarities and differences; (3) ranking similarities in order of importance; (4) establishing inter-relationships; and (5) and formulating the problem. Section 5 discusses similar problems in the world of educational purpose. (Contains 11 references.) (SM)

**Creating a Reconciliatory Discourse on the
Diverse Aims of Education**

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Creating a Reconciliatory Discourse on the Diverse Aims of Education

Since teaching is a fundamentally moral occupation, we believe the approach to resolving educational controversies should be set in a moral frame. In this paper, we work to define and develop a moral approach to educational controversy. For the past two years, we have been engaged in a collaborative research project that examines and promotes reconciliation between diverse perspectives. In this paper, we have laid out the foundations of a reconciliatory discourse. The project thus speaks directly to the question: How can we search for ways to engage one another constructively, and how can scholars learn to appreciate and grow from the presence of epistemological controversy?

Problems in Education that Contribute to Unproductive Discourse

Many problems beset public education in the United States at the end of the millennium. We discern five to be of particular importance since each affect debate and educational practice for the worse. These are 1) the conflict of educational purposes, 2) the poverty of public debate, 3) the lack of public access to the language of education and intellectual struggle, 4) the power of special interests and 5) the desire for the quick fix and the dynamic of the swinging pendulum.

The conflict of educational purposes. Our primary concern is that the character of the debate surrounding educational purposes often destroys any attempt to reconcile them. For the past two hundred years, three perspectives on educational purposes have emerged, which can be boiled down to one of three basic assumptions (see Egan, 1997):

- **Education prepares you for your social role, or,**
- **Education develops you as an individual, or**
- **Education gives you knowledge**

This simple three-fold distinction can get complicated, since within each category there are differences and disagreements. For example, the emphasis on preparing you for your social role: some argue for a specific vocational purpose (e.g. training for automotive work), others for a general socializing purpose (e.g. working in learning communities where social experience and getting along with other people becomes paramount). People who think in terms of the priority of the individual range from people who believe that education should make children feel good about themselves to those who argue that the

individual's relationship to God is pre-eminent. Finally, those who advocate knowledge and culture range from the "conservatives" who argue for a canon, or the basics, or core knowledge for every child to those "progressives" who believe that children construct knowledge and can do that only through the articulation of their own experience. From these differing educational purposes and the practice of schools there emerge "oppositions" :

- In elementary education there is a major rhetorical and political battle between those who believe that phonics teaching is essential in teaching children to read and those who see literacy as a matter of whole language acquisition. The State of California in 1998 legislated phonics to be the method for teaching reading.
- The "back to basics" movement, (whether that be a matter of core knowledge in curriculum or advocacy of an instructional mode of teaching) is pitted against those who would argue for relevance and experience as children construct knowledge.
- Influenced by behavioral psychology and vocational education are the advocates of thinking skills and mental processes who are opposed by those with philosophically grounded views of knowledge and knowing.
- There seems, too, to be an irreconcilable difference between those who see the school as a caring community and those who see it as a place to socialize children into the American way of life.

The poverty of public debate. The quality of public debate about education and educational purpose is an important obstacle to its improvement. From the university or college, to the national debate, to regional, state and local forums, discussion is almost entirely antagonistic. That is, people approach the debate from prepared positions out of old conceptions rooted in emotional commitment, or out of special interests.

We don't believe the conflicts need be so hysterical, nor do we believe all oppositions are incompatible. Rather, it is the manner in which debate is conducted that is so damaging. We are not alone in this concern. Thompson and Guttman (1996) have been searching for ways to provide a procedure for solving intractable public controversies in a democracy. From Europe, philosopher Jurgen Habermas has been calling for a "public sphere", a space where the private person can get a word in edgeways (Calhoun, 1992). James Sears and James Carper (1998) have brought together people from diametrically opposed social positions (e.g. on abortion and religion in schools) to seek for common ground. Donald Schon and Martin Rein (1994) have developed a complex process based on the principles of design to find ways out of controversy. Debra Tannen (1998) has explored how our society perpetuates an argument culture.

The lack of public access to educational language and intellectual struggle. We also think there is a strong case for arguing that academics have shut certain people out of the debate. They have filled

education with terminology, drawn from behaviorist psychology, Rogerian therapy, neo-Aristotelian and postmodernism (to name but a few) which clouds public discussion. They take information organize it, analyze it, digest it and spit it back out as a recipe for the masses to follow. Or, worse still, they proclaim a notion of subjectivity in which anything anybody does is as good as the next person's, thereby draining the notion of struggle or effort from the enterprise.

The power of special interests. As part of our history, influential pressure groups have arisen to influence policymakers. The child-focused special interest group is one type within education. Another type is the professional special interest represented by such organizations (e.g., American Federation of Teachers, etc.). A third type is those who have an economic stake in decisions being made, for example those who sell standardized tests. A fourth is comprised of pundits and journalists financially committed to the continuing promotion of argument and debate. Maybe the lobbies that constitute these special interests in a democracy are an inevitable consequence of social complexity, but pragmatic, complex, fair solutions are often drowned out by the pressure from special interests.

The desire for the quick fix and the dynamic of the swinging pendulum. We get easily attracted by quick-fixes and education has seen them come and go. Many address highly complex problems with trivial ideas or simplistic policies. Steady improvement in education seems to be impossible because of the pendulum effect primarily generated, we believe, by the press of antagonistic interests. The pendulum effect is a story about change in education. We are interested in a new vision for controversy.

A New Vision for Educational Debate

The prevailing ideology that the purpose of debate is to win at all costs must be abandoned. Reconciliation requires people to rethink the purpose of educational debate, within the commitment to build on the best in order to improve education for all children.

Changing our orientation away from antagonism to reconciliation is a major undertaking. We will begin to talk differently and to use different language. We will approach problems with a different mindset about people, trusting that they care and have moral motives. We will see those with whom we disagree not as being wrong, but as people with important ideas that need to be carefully considered in order for us to develop an understanding of the problems and then build productive solutions -- together.

We would welcome a new purpose for educational research. Ideally, the purpose of educational research is to find answers to questions. More often the real goal is about finding evidence to support a position. For reconciliation, we still need evidence to support claims, but we also need to acknowledge the limitations of social science research. Evidence from educational research can be found to support many contradictory positions because complex variables impossible to control are constantly ignored. If we use a reconciliatory approach, the goal of research is to find ways to understand what is best in different positions or to build on the best of different positions. Research becomes a type of reflection and synthesis, rather than a testing of hypotheses in a controlled experimental process. Such reconciliation in research would feed public discussion more productively.

We also believe a language and a discourse of reconciliation will develop a better climate for people involved in education including academics, administrators, teachers, parents and kids. We have pointed out how the emotional experience of education contributes to animosities between parents and teachers, often poisoning school-home relationships. Administrators at all levels could redefine their roles as leaders of reconciliatory discourse. Academics too would have to change the tone.

Reconciliatory discourse and educational aims. These are the directions in which we are headed. So we set out to try and build a procedure for a reconciliatory discourse. What do we mean by "reconciliatory discourse"? Reconciliatory Discourse (RD) is a civil discussion in which participants with divergent views seek to build common ground for educational practice through the articulation of a shared problem to which they are all morally and intellectually committed. Participants in reconciliatory discourse use compromise, adopt middle ways, and make practical choices to build on the best. They respect divergence and eschew consensus for consensus' sake. They use its principles in writing as well as in practice-oriented discourse. Their purpose is to make better public and private judgements about education.

RD does not therefore provide answers to controversial questions, although its purpose is to provide for improved public and private judgements about education.

RD is not a procedure for making decisions and solving problems.

Rather, the RD procedure helps people mutually define a problem.

For our profound belief is that we cannot improve public education by swapping solutions to differently conceived problems. We must first agree on what the problem is through “doing the conversation right.” This is not to say that reconciliatory discourse cannot help you find answers. We believe that if you “do it right,” the problem you define (and the eventual solution) will be right. This won't be because you found the true answer or some brilliant insight about the best solution. Rather, you will have tried your best, under the best conditions, working toward the best solution possible. What more can a person do?

It is also important to emphasize, however, that writing this paper was not just driven by a quest for a procedure for conversation. We were practically motivated by the question, how can we reconcile the aims of education? How can we find ways for teachers to both teach content and encourage self-awareness? How can they teach kids to question authority, while also socializing children into the American way of life?

Reconciling aims is not to be found in developing strategies that can be labeled and set up on a shelf for easy access. It emerges from conversation. We believe the way to reconcile the diverse aims of education is embedded in reconciliatory discourse. By seeking to understand what is best in different points of view, especially when the heart of the disagreement is embedded in people's beliefs about the purpose of education, you are working to reconcile aims.

There are many ways people might design a reconciliatory conversation. We have come up with one procedure and worked through it with a number of “oppositions.” Yet for such discourse we need an underpinning, which we believe is a moral basis of trust and an intellectual basis of struggle to construct reconciliation. Through both will come reconciliation of aims, but reconciliation is a meeting of hearts as well as minds. It will include the development of common ground, the use of compromise, the ability to build on the best of arguments and to integrate them. Yet we first need to justify our vision and explain how moral trust and intellectual struggle are at its heart.

Trust and Struggle: the core of reconciliatory discourse

Reconciliatory discourse, we believe, can make the context of public education inviting to parents and grandparents, and everyone who is interested. With Guttman and Thompson (1996), we believe that

the decision will be right if the quality of the debate is right. At its core, RD has both a moral and an intellectual base. The two central concepts are, respectively, trust and struggle.

I: **The moral base.** The language used to discuss the problems will be fundamentally moral. Yet when the word "moral" is used in American culture, it sounds all kinds of alarms because some people associate it exclusively with conservative religious beliefs, which is a misconception. If you think education is mainly a technical business (like fixing a space ship), you are bound by the language of the technicians and engineers and that language is, well, "technical". But if you believe as we do that education is a moral business, what does that mean? At its basic level, that means you should focus on this child, as a unique person, as a unique individual, and not regard the child as a type (gifted and talented) or a statistic (black under-achiever) or indeed as just a role (e.g. a third-grader). It means that teacher's work should be viewed as a profession that presents difficult moral choices that need constant consideration, experimentation and reflection. It means understanding teaching and learning not through the psychological technical concepts, but through terms like fairness, courage, determination, effort, honesty, and so on. If educational discussion were rooted in moral, not technical language, it would be accessible to the ordinary person.

Many people might think of reconciliation as the kind of upshot from a couple visiting a marriage guidance counselor. We specifically use the word reconciliation and the term reconciliatory discourse because we want to emphasize the personal within educational debate. As a parent and a grandparent, we are not merely participants in a theoretical argument, but people actively searching for a framework that will influence decisions that deeply affect those we love. Sure, we seek to build "common ground", but we want reconciliation on that common ground. Compromise too, with its sense of a "middle way", isn't enough to describe what we want either. Common ground and compromise, of course, find a place within our notion of reconciliation. But you can compromise out of fear, not in a spirit of reconciliation. You can find common ground as a practical matter, but not take it seriously. Reconciliation, to repeat, demands a meeting of hearts as well as minds. It suggests commitment. It reconciles people as well as the ideas and the aims they have for education. For us, reconciliation captures the moral character and style of the discourse we envisage. It is about people and their children, not about ideas about people and their children. No one can enter reconciliatory discourse just as an exercise (academic or otherwise).

Though reconciliation is a meeting of hearts and the emphasis is personal, reconciliation should not be confused with conflict resolution. We are **not** looking for conflict resolution, important though that is. Specialists have developed techniques for resolving such conflicts and these techniques presuppose a specific context of anger, hatred, war, or embitterment. We are **not** trying to find some magic solutions that will reconcile all educational oppositions. That would undermine one of our main beliefs, namely, that all professionals, citizens and parents, can become involved in an educational debate which is more productive because it is geared to reconciliation, and at the same time, abandon their reliance on conflict-driven experts.

So the goal is not always to resolve conflicts, because conflict can be the impetus for change. Reconciliatory discourse is about finding ways to use conflict to propel us forward by giving us a way to work through opposed positions productively. It is therefore different from conflict resolution where people or groups are usually working to resolve personal issues as opposed to educational oppositions that are the central topic here. When you work to reconcile oppositions, it is rare that you would spend a lot of time apologizing for being rude or planning your revenge. When feelings are so deeply involved that the conflict is personal, people need conflict resolution, not the reconciliatory discourse we envisage.

II: The intellectual base. If reconciliation is about trust and a meeting of hearts and minds, it will demand intellectual struggle as well. Struggle also means recognizing (intellectually) that you can be wrong. As we work in teacher education, we have both been surprised by how readily teacher-students accept the erroneous idea that knowledge is somehow uncomplicated. Indeed, they seem to resist the idea that working with knowledge is messy, confused, lacking in clarity and contradictory. In other words, they resist the idea that working with knowledge is a struggle.

When we were discussing how teachers can reconcile the aims of education, we considered the idea that teachers often focus on presenting factual content or they focus on reflection or they work to socialize children. What seemed to be missing was the glue that held these different educational purposes (self, society and knowledge) together, a way to integrate them appropriately. We believe the glue is what we call "intellectual struggle." This is what is missing in American education.

Working out the ideas in this paper has been an intellectual struggle. We were trying to reconcile educational aims as we grappled with the idea of the procedure for a new kind of talk. We were trying to

convince people to approach educational controversy differently (the social purpose), we were trying to integrate our personal experiences (the individual purpose), and we struggled with educational content presented by a number of scholars in the field (the knowledge and culture purpose). We realized we were working to reconcile the diverse aims of education. We concluded that reconciliation is at the heart of intellectual struggle. When people (especially students) struggle intellectually, they go through a process of reconciling intellectually or morally diverse points of view.

Explore this idea from a different perspective. If a teacher simply presents information that students must memorize, students are not getting inside the material and seeing its depth. If you have students write a reflective piece and they simply describe their own experiences, more often than not, it has little depth because it is not informed by the experience of other people, alive, dead or fictional. If you ask students to write a theoretical essay about a serious social issue and all they do is spout "their opinions", the essay will be shallow. If however, students take some serious content in depth, connect it profoundly to their lives and experiences and explain in depth how it can influence society, they will have succeeded in the intellectual struggle the topic presents, and they will, in different ways, be fulfilling the three different educational purposes.

The distinctive character of reconciliatory discourse

We suggested earlier that the word reconciliation as being distinct from compromise or the common ground but we suggested both had some place within this discourse. How is reconciliation different from compromise? How is reconciliation different from taking a centrist view? How is reconciliation different than doing a little of everything in an effort to please all parties?

These questions have been asked of us a number of times since the beginning of the project. After we finished working through each of the reconciliation examples, we found that reconciliation is the frame for any and all of these possibilities. Our central argument for the distinctiveness of reconciliatory discourse, therefore, is that while we may choose to compromise, to integrate different views, or to choose a middle way, these choices are not made on pragmatic or expedient grounds. Reconciliation has its roots firmly planted in the idea that no matter what option we choose, we should be building on the morally and intellectually best in the different positions, such that we can each embrace the choices made.

The point here is not to find some test or metric that helps us choose between the two (or five, or whatever) choices we have, but to examine these supposedly fixed, opposed positions and develop something different and hopefully better. We are not proposing another procedure for problem analysis. Through reconciliation, we are attempting to provide guidelines for,

- 1) engaging in productive, moral conversations,
- 2) defining a problem more accurately
- 3) opening up new ways of looking at old problems in an attempt to uncover new possibilities

The point is to develop conversational strategies that move educational progress forward faster and stop the pendulum. Once again, the point here is not to find some test or metric that helps us choose between the choices presented. There are no reliable tests or metrics that can remove all human judgement. We can, and certainly should, seek out statistics and qualitative research, anecdotal examples and polls to try to understand the nature of the problems we face. And, we need to set high standards for evaluating empirical evidence, as we have always tried to do. But, we need to accept the frailty of social science evidence and embrace (rather than resist) the reality that educational decisions are mostly based on human judgement. The process is incredibly ambiguous whether we like it or not. In the 20th century, social scientists had hoped that subjecting social problems to "rigorous scientific research" would give us THE answers to our questions. That didn't happen, at least to the degree that we would have liked. So, it is time to try something new. We believe the answer lies in productive conversation. Knowledge is messy. There are no "right answers," for teachers in the classrooms, for administrators making decisions, or for professors writing books. We need to surrender to the struggle. Additionally, public education in a democracy has an inherent political component, whether we like it or not. In our political culture what we REALLY do is a lot closer to reconciliation than we usually admit. We have a culture that says that we should respect minority rights even in a majority decision, so rarely are our decisions purely one way or the other, they involve the views of competing groups. If we admit this going in, instead of arguing vigorously for one "pure" solution or another, we'll probably make much better decisions and have a lot less pointless conflict.

The Conditions for Participation

It makes sense to us to say that the core of reconciliatory discourse is moral and intellectual, and that it is rooted in a new vision of civil discussion. If that makes sense to you too, then the specific

conditions and requirements for participation will have to be hugely different from those for participants in antagonistic debate. These are not just formal conditions: they imply habits of mind, moral and intellectual dispositions, perhaps even changed character and temperament. We need to explore these possibilities.

As we talked to people about our idea of reconciliation, various kinds of entrenched ideas were mentioned. Some teachers think minority children are inferior. Some psychologists think that genetics is the only determinant of ability. Some people believe that wealthy children should have better access to education, others that women should not be educated much, if at all. Citing these kinds of views, people consistently asked two questions:

- "aren't there some oppositions that cannot be reconciled?", and,
- "aren't there some oppositions that should not be reconciled?"

The answer to the first question is a pragmatic one. First, there may be people who refuse to reconcile their position, those who simply state what it is and turn their backs. Second, there may well be positions where people have the will to reconcile, but cannot find common ground.

The answer to the second question is more important because it centers on people's moral beliefs. We came up against this problem specifically in our writing about testing. Some critics of testing go so far as to say that testing is damaging to kids, therefore testing is immoral. For these critics, no argument could appropriately defend testing, because they would claim it is an inherently immoral practice. We thought carefully about this example and have explained our position because we wondered how a believer in the immorality of testing could contribute to a reconciliatory discussion easily. These ruminations moved us to a general question: what would rule out a person from a reconciliatory discussion? Reflecting on that still further, we developed three initial questions about the position a person might hold which could rule him/her out. Is the position held by this person, we asked,

1. Rooted in an unshakeable moral belief,
2. A challenge to constitutionally enshrined practice,
3. A breach of existing law?

As an example of (1), it would be difficult to hold authentic RD on the biology curriculum if one participant were a doctrinaire believer in creationism. As an example of (2), it would be difficult to hold RD about a school curriculum if one participant believes that there should be universal education for whites only. Lastly, as an example for (3), it would difficult to hold RD if, in discussing sex education, a participant believes that the laws against incest can be ignored or should be repealed.

But then we sought to put the three questions in positive form as conditions for taking part. Two considerations were in our mind as we did this. First, we don't want RD always to drift back to a discussion of first principles of law and morality. Some base has to be articulated on which people can start, recognizing of course that no single law, even the tenets of the Constitution is forever fixed and unchanging. But secondly there are educational and teaching conventions resting on a moral base (such as teachers avoidance of sarcasm or teasing). Again while there is room for discussion about such matters, RD is not intended as theoretical, but as practical. There must be some givens for such a discussion. Thus, we concluded, participants in reconciliatory discourse must be:

1. open to moral and ideological reconciliation,
2. committed to the constitution which can set parameters for discussion, and
3. believe that people ought, in general, to obey the law.

If these conditions are not met, we believe that the discussion is going to be difficult to start and, if it does, it will probably founder, even if the participants come to the table believing they are intellectually and morally committed to the process. There can come a time, in other words when advocates should give up the reconciliatory process and move on. Otherwise it is a waste of time. For RD is not some kind of panacea or magic wand out of which consensus will emerge among diametrically opposed views, or, among participants whose convictions are beyond certainty. RD is a gritty, unending moral and intellectual struggle.

Of course, it is important not to give up too quickly or stereotype people according to faulty assumptions. Don't assume that people can't meet these conditions before you have talked to them. Just because you do not share the same religious beliefs with someone does not mean that you do not share some similar moral values. Beyond the labels "atheist" and "Christian" there may be deeply held and common views of the child upon which an agreed practice can evolve out of reconciliatory discourse.

The Requirements for Reconciliatory Discourse

Let us suppose then that all participants meet the conditions. What then are the basic requirements for effective participation? They fall into two categories:

- Attitudes, Beliefs and Competencies, and
- Disciplines of the discourse.

These requirements are not prior conditions. Indeed we regard RD as a potentially most effective vehicle for learning, and we would expect people will want to develop or refine these personal qualities through experience of RD. Each category of requirements can be continuously redefined and improved.

Participants' Attitudes, Beliefs and Competencies

In our development of these arguments, we found early on that it is always necessary to understand the background to the diverse views people hold. First, there are personal involvements. Is a person an advocate of standardized tests because s/he performs well at them or an opponent because they upset her children? Is a person opposed to school choice because s/he lives in a "good" neighborhood? or is a person a proponent of school choice because s/he no longer has children in school and wouldn't have to deal with the consequences? This can be expanded into personal background and autobiography, good and bad experiences. Then there are contextual choices people make, for example, decisions to pay more attention to one's career than to one's children's education. Finally, there are choices rooted in basic beliefs or ideology and, of course, those not rooted in any particular ideology at all. A person with a free-market view of the economy may take the same view of public education, perhaps without examining the differences.

The process of reconciliation, because it is couched in moral terms, demands that the position of individuals in the discourse and the choices they make, be understood. We do not need just the history of the (theoretical) oppositions, but the story of how individual participants came to hold the views they do.

We must also accept responsibility for the fairness of a discussion. Too often, public debate is conducted about "them," those people who have neither the skills nor the confidence to enter a public forum even as a listener. Some discussions simply don't accommodate those who don't speak English well. Some people can be excluded because they are thought not to be educated, even though the discussion might concern their children. Fairness demands opportunity. Most parents care desperately about their children, but may be very ill equipped to enter public discussion that affects them as citizens and parents. Central to the idea of public debate, but critical to RD, must be that we anticipate and value additional information and opportunities to contribute from anyone.

We must also understand and recognize the subtleties in the use of language. Language obviously can be used in all kinds of ways, and persuasion and rhetoric are part of any discourse. Yet we also have to constantly watch the way language is used especially in terms of its persuasive power.

Finally, we must search consistently for the similarities in the positions under discussion. Accustomed as we are to confrontation, we can be led to think that differences are more likely than similarities. We should be much more circumspect about profound divisions for perhaps there is much greater agreement about education than one might suspect.

The Disciplines of the Discourse

It is a common experience, we are sure, to be in a conversation with a person who thinks s/he is participating, but is in fact doing things that undermine the discussion. For example, there are those who rehearse platitudes (we all care about each other here, don't we?) which takes a serious conversation nowhere. We have heard others completely ignore a theme going on in a discussion and make remarks which are completely irrelevant (I forgot to mention that we should consider x.) Others still can interject by demanding the right to be heard as a representative of some group or other. (As a member of Y, I can tell you.....). But perhaps the most common weakness to which we are all subject is that of stereotyping individuals. In education you can hear phrases like "You testing people, you all believe human beings are just like machines!" "You progressives, you believe we should never discipline children!" "You advocates of school choice, you believe in a free for all in which the rich will win!" Or, of course, more polite versions.

We tried to think of types of discipline specific to a participant in RD, because we believe that many people don't have a conception or experience of a disciplined conversation. Each of these disciplines we mention is built into the RD procedure:

- listening,
- expressing one's self effectively,
- personal interaction
- searching and learning through deliberation.

The discipline of listening. Failure to listen can of course have many causes, one of which is the false assumption we make about the person talking. A teacher might think parents who don't come to school to talk about their child are uncaring and disinterested. From the parents' viewpoint, they may feel they are never listened to, merely talked at.

Listening is also very difficult for officials, because it's not their policy. Schools are unlikely to seek your input on major policy decisions, though they will be unwise if they fail to go through the motions on matters of political controversy, like redistricting. Indeed officials (elected and appointed) have all kinds of devices for "involving the public". They set up a committee that invites comments. They establish a policy and ask for questions. Often the private citizen ignores these invitations because he or she senses that the decisions have already been made and this is an exercise in window-dressing democracy. But is this really listening? Or merely listening to the vocal, or the special interest?

But look at it from the official's viewpoint for a moment. They believe that they are going to get arguments from fixed special interest positions (which they already know). They believe they will get versions of familiar oppositions. They know the arguments about school choice versus neighborhood schools, about testing and assessment, and all the special interest protagonists will do is to trot out well-worn cliches from these positions. They know too that most people who contribute will want to declare their position forthrightly and will be more interested in winning than in seeking a common solution. Officials know all this --- because that is the way things continue to operate.

The discipline of listening is not a skill of one's ear. Listening, we believe, is a moral commitment. To listen with sufficient care, a person must be interested in what the other person has to say! It demands at least the following:

- not assuming that we know what a person is going to say
- finding a way (e.g. by writing down) to get at exactly what a person means
- never making assumptions about where the person is coming from
- rarely interrupting, and
- asking more questions than making statements.

RD puts a huge premium on the discipline of listening.

The discipline of self-expression. This discipline is also not a skill of the mouth and brain. It is a moral commitment to explain what you think to others who value your right to say it and the content of what you have to say. People often become so emotionally invested in a particular position that they cannot think straight. Others are inhibited by conversation, especially in any sort of public forum (remember those silent in class?). Some are over-talkative, as if on automatic pilot, unable to halt the flow of words pouring out of their mouths. Some don't think before they talk. Many good public speakers are appalling conversationalists, though that may be because they are not interested in listening. None of this is

easy. It all demands practice. If RD is to work, there must be a conscious attention to the discipline of self-expression that is connected to, but different from, listening.

The discipline of self-expression therefore seems to us to demand

- careful practice, based on notes or a written script
- constant support from all participants
- a focus on thinking of questions to ask, not statements to make
- monitoring the styles of other participants
- a sense of moral obligation to make one's self clear.

The discipline of personal interaction. The most central requirement of RD is that participants must want mutual success. Making the comparison with a team in any game can easily convey this. Anyone who has been a member of a team knows that team success is more important than individual success, though all the time there will be tensions between players on the same side who are in competition with each other for cash, public esteem or whatever. RD is like a team activity, except that members have different positions to start with, and are thus openly in some kind of competitive stance.

These may be called skills of personal interaction, provided they are recognized as being moral not technical. They include such propensities as

- resisting any temptation to stereotype or deliberately misinterpret another person
- paying particular attention to those who find difficulty in taking part in the discussion (see, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986).
- deliberately engaging personally with every participant
- accepting mutual responsibility for the conduct of the discussion.

The discipline of searching and learning through deliberation. People are often blinded by their prejudices like those who, in discussions of corporal punishment pronounce that "it never did me any harm". To take part in RD is to be prepared to search for understanding, critical to mutual success. The discipline requires that everyone comes to the table as a learner, not a knower. This searching and learning is not a book study. It occurs within the process of deliberation, which demands valuing democratic procedures set within the purpose of the deliberation, in this case, the reconciliation of educational aims. So participants must also learn these disciplines of discourse.

Habits of Mind and Dispositions

So far we have isolated basic moral notions, like respect and responsibility for fairness, individual talents which are also moral in different ways such as listening, expressing oneself

clearly, learning how to interact with others, and we have discussed briefly the ability to search out similarities in opposed positions.

Yet there are habits of mind and dispositions that are integrative of these various qualities but also extend into both intellectual quality and emotional dispositions. In the next chapter, we provide a "procedure" for reconciliatory discourse. But, the procedure can be viewed as a set of habits of mind that provide a structure for defining problems. For example, in the RD procedure, a person has to first locate what the issues are under discussion. In this first step, they seek to understand the context of the debate. That requires patience and perseverance, as well as a critical habit of mind that is controlled by the concern to understand positions one does not hold. We are not saying, by using such "virtue" terms that RD is reserved only for those of saintly disposition. Rather, we know that our aggressive skills and dispositions can be sharpened constantly if we engage in antagonistic debate. Equally, our reconciliatory dispositions have been neglected and left fallow. Habits of mind and dispositions are learned: they are not given to us at birth.

In the second step, we search for similarities. Searching for similarities will also require patience and perseverance, but it will also demand the ability to suspend rather than rush to judgement, to hold back one's emotional charges or prejudices, and to ponder, to ruminate, to consider almost in a judicial way the possibilities of linkages between what appear to be dramatically different positions. Nowhere is this matter more clearly expressed than in Deborah Tannen's (ref) book *You Just Don't Understand*. There is a sense of naive naturalism there, i.e. that there is simply something different in the make-up of men and women. The challenge set out by Tannen, we both believe, is for men and women to understand those dissimilarities and to work to understand and maybe to adopt the dispositional frameworks of the other gender.

Yet we are also going to have to deliberate between important and unimportant similarities and differences. In the third step in our procedure, we ask people to rank the similarities, focus on those that are important and disregard those that are not. The habits of mind appropriate to deliberation are not necessarily those of the person of action. This goes beyond mere rumination and pondering. It demands a disposition to accept changes in beliefs, habits of mind such as consistency in examining all positions, of a certain kind of rigor to which

one is passionately committed. For it has often been argued that reason is cold and calculating, whereas passion is free warm and uninhibited. Our belief is that we need to be passionate about reason, and to move away from those antagonistic habits of mind which undermine our reason and reasoned dialogue. In this case, judgement is extremely important. Nowhere will these habits be of more value than in trying to rank similarities and differences between positions.

In the fourth step of the procedure, we consider the inter-relations. We will also need the clarity of mind to be explicit about our values. This is both very easy and very difficult. For example, a person who believes in a position derived, say, from a theological argument, has simply to deploy the theological position and defend it from a fixed premise. That, we think, is relatively easy. Much more difficult is it for a person whose disposition is inquisitive, who is reluctant to accept authority, for he or she can see all manner of difficulty in his or her own position which makes its articulation very problematic. At this stage, it is important to be honest about the realities of the situation and to avoid the trap of polarizing oppositions in an attempt to defend one's position.

In the final step of the procedure, we seek to define the problem and work toward a solution. Notice that we have set out a complex set of habits and dispositions. That does not mean, we repeat, that we cannot enter RD unless we have them. Rather that, we need to adopt these varied attitudes, disciplines and dispositions if RD is to be fruitful for us. For many of us, we are old (and young) dogs needing to learn new tricks.

The Procedure for Reconciliatory Discourse

We suggest earlier that Reconciliatory Discourse is a civil discussion in which participants with divergent views seek to build common ground for educational practice through the articulation of a shared problem to which they are all morally and intellectually committed. What does reconciliatory discourse look like in practice? In this section, we outline a set of procedures that people can follow step by step to work through educational controversies. But, we have also emphasized that reconciliation can be viewed as an approach that need not be followed precisely. We believe that the structure could be used in at least three types of context with more or less rigidity depending on the situation. For example, people could use this for:

- the after-dinner conversation (or anything similar) where people who have internalized the basic structure use it automatically in any **general overview** of a contested topic.
- the journalist writing a story or a group of researchers writing a paper, that is where people are seeking to **understand the details of a particular controversy**
- any context where antagonistic participants use a **formal discussion requiring a procedure** and a protocol to reconcile their conflicting aims.

So, you can use this structure very broadly, as a way to remind yourself to remain within the boundaries of a moral approach, use the five main steps, but follow them loosely, or use it in a formal process where you follow the procedure step by step.

Towards the definition of a problem

The product of successful reconciliatory discourse (RD) is the understanding of, and authentic acceptance of, the definition of a problem stated with as much clarity as possible. In their book, *The New Rational Manager*, Charles Kepner and Ben Tregoe (1981) set out six techniques of problem analysis with a focus on business contexts. Problems arise there because there is a deviation from formerly acceptable performance and a performance that has never quite met expectations. Educators might learn enormously from the Kepner-Tregoe techniques, but business contexts assume agreed ideologies and goals. Educational controversy, as we have described it, can assume no such thing. Nevertheless, as Kepner and Tregoe put it, “it is important to name the problem precisely because all the work to follow – all the description, analysis, and explanation we will undertake – will be directed at correcting the problem as it has been named” (p. 29).

In the context of this opposition, to build on the best, and make an appropriate choice, you need to understand the real problem given the context. The focus of RD is getting the problem right first, for which there is a basis of collaboration and trust among participants.

Collaboration builds trust. In antagonistic discourse, the conversation is only collaborative in that we are talking to each other. I state my case, you come back with a different point of view, and the technique of argument is then to either substantiate your claims when you are challenged or to search out weaknesses in my position, often accompanied with such phrases “Who on earth believes that?”, “How ridiculous!” and so on. Properly structured, working together to set a problem builds trust. But there is something more to it than merely trust: “Mutual trust is a virtuous circle of anticipation and action whose

initiation always requires a leap of faith beyond the available evidence." (Schon and Rein, p. 179) You have to take risks if you want to learn to trust in a professional community (Sockett, 1993).

The skeleton of the procedure

In this section, we provide a short synopsis of each step in the procedure. This is not simply a checklist meant to provide you with an explanation of "how to" talk to people. We also explain why each step is important. In fact, while the description of a theoretical approach usually provides the foundation to frame pragmatic procedures, we have used a set of pragmatic procedure to further explain our moral approach. We provide a rationale for each of the steps. We concluded that problem definition had to include at least:

- a) examining the history of the opposing positions
- b) laying out the opposing positions
- c) uncovering any hidden problems
- d) uncovering any surrogate problems
- e) narrowing our focus and naming the issues precisely
- f) looking for mutual relationships
- g) defining terms
- h) agreeing on one question to be answered (prioritizing the problems), and
- i) identifying similarities and differences between positions.

We broke these down to five basic steps for reconciliatory discourse:

- I** Locate the issues
- II** Work out similarities and differences
- III** Rank the similarities in order of importance
- IV** Establish inter-relationships
- V** Formulate the problem

1 Locate the issues

People with opposed positions each have a view of their history. They will describe the problem in distinct ways. What, for example, is character education? What is at stake? Why is it being discussed? Group A might focus on misbehavior, claiming that young people are too promiscuous, using drugs, having sex, and so on. Group B describes the problem in terms of political alienation, the young being turned off politics, not voting, not caring about the wider world. Group C place the responsibility with the family, advocating character education to offset the breakdown of the family and to provide parenthood education. Faced with these three possibilities, if you're interested in RD, you won't ask "who is right?" You will want to describe the location and origins of these different views and why they come from

different places. Engaging in RD, you must have a strong sense of where any controversy is located -- historically, socially and politically.

2 Work out similarities and differences

You can then search for similarities and differences. Every position a person takes on a practical problem has behind it, not just a history, but specific political, social, cultural, religious or moral values. So, once you've got the history and the location described, you then need to sort out its central values, its ideology, together with the practices and the outcomes it inspires. Once these are as clear as possible, you need to examine contradictory statements of values and articulate the similarities and differences in value and practice. Get the similarities down somewhere for they represent the first major building block in a mutually agreed sense of the problem.

3 Rank the similarities in order of importance

In principle, out of such an inquiry or conversation could come huge lists of similarities and differences. For the sake of the product -- defining the problem, everyone must help to clear the decks. This means looking at differences first and putting to one side those which are either unlikely to be solved, or which no one has any particular investment or interest in. From this everyone will know a) where the oppositions are, b) what is central, c) what is beyond agreement, and d) what is not viewed as important.

But the key to good problem definition lies in ranking the similarities. The list may run right the way from grand statements of value through to a specific practice. For example, imagine a context where a group of teachers and academics are engaged in RD mutually defining a problem on the shape of character education for the 3rd grade. Even though there is widespread agreement on a list of similarities, ranking them may be much more difficult. The practices -- what the teacher says, how the class is organized, what is put on the walls, what the books are -- will be the more important for teachers. For the academics the emphasis may be on reconciling philosophical similarities and descriptions of origins, in say Aristotle, John Stuart Mill, or John Dewey. How do they reach authentic acceptance on how these similarities are to be ranked?

We must remember, therefore, that every participant and every discussion is context-bound. So, first, you can't describe the similar values over here and similar practices over there. Practices cannot be fully described without explicit description of the values that support them. Second, similarities are

important only to a context, in this case a 3rd grade curriculum. The context needs to be described. Ranking similarities therefore also functions as a check on whether the similarities are what they appear to be. Ranking provides for evaluation of an agenda. It may well result in retracing one's steps to understand the similarities once again.

4 Establish inter-relationships

This is the step in the procedure where you seek common ground. We've got the historical and contemporary oppositions in our heads, and we have not only worked through similarities and differences, but we have them ranked, suggesting what is critically important as we approach problem definition.

The category of inter-relations has two dimensions. First, in this category, we explore what people do in practice. Ignoring practical realities is one of the main reasons that good ideas in education fail. The second dimension of inter-relations is about exploring how oppositions are inter-related, (for example how they are dependent on each other or embedded within one another). In this category, we seek to understand how oppositions relate to each other, especially given the realities of what actually happens in classrooms, as opposed to what is suppose to happen in classrooms.

This is the point at which a reality check is needed. You can't properly figure out the inter-relationships of what people do, the practice of teaching and learning in its widest sense, without evidence of some kind. What do people do in character education lessons? How do teachers on the job teach children to be honest? How can the conversation be widened to describe inter-relationships without, for example, some exploration of the nature of deceit, and the connection of truth to language.

In order to understand what happens it practice, it is important to support claims with evidence, such as teacher research studies. Remember that the purpose of looking at the evidence is not to "find the best approach", but to explore whether the similarities you have uncovered provide instances of practical inter-relationships and mutual dependencies.

5 Formulate the problem

It is on that basis that solutions to problems can be found. Solutions must be linked to actual contexts. Finding solutions is, for us, a distinct form of practical discourse requiring a new book. Kepner and Tregoe (1981) have a tried and tested procedure in business. Schon and Rein (1994) use their experience in design to

describe a strategy for coming to solutions. Our belief is that educational controversy is difficult because there is no mutually agreed problem. Below, we have summarized the entire procedure in an outline.

The Procedure

I Locate the Issues

- a) Describe the oppositions and their origins
- b) Identify any hidden issues
- c) Identify any surrogate problems

Product: Description of real oppositions

II Work out similarities and differences

- a) Revisit the conditions and requirements for participants
- b) Suspend judgement
- c) Describe self-interests and participant power-relations
- d) Set out central values and outcomes
- e) Identify perceived similarities and differences.

Product: The initial agenda of similarities and differences

III Rank the similarities in order of importance

- a) Examine the progress of the discourse
- b) Work out those differences on which agreement is unlikely
- c) Isolate the differences in which few have an investment and set aside
- d) Rank the similarities in order of importance

Product: The developed agenda of differences and similarities

IV Establish inter-relationships

- a) Establish common educational practices from the list of similarities
- b) Define mutual interdependencies of similar practices

V Formulate the problem

- a) Define the problem
- b) Review each product and develop a plan of action.

Product: Full statement of the problem with an agreed agenda for action

Similar Problems in the World of Educational Purpose

Three main thoughts occurred to us as we explored curriculum and policy issues from a perspective of reconciliation:

- Educational practice frequently reflects all three aims
- The division in educational purposes is now of historical interest only since attention to all three is necessary in a complex democratic society
- Matters of how children get a sense of value, and thereby how they are motivated, indicate that each purpose embodies an important general educational experience.

The Potential for Integration. Our first thought is that it is possible for the three educational purposes to be **integrated and complementary**. Kieran Egan's (1997) book, *The Educated Mind*, is built around the claim that these purposes are incompatible and he develops a new conception of educational purpose. The problem here is, we believe, that the fundamental purposes are so engrained in people's expectations of education that, for public debate and private judgement to be coherent, the three purposes have to be the starting point. Much depends too on how individuals interpret them. Incompatibility seems to imply for practice that, if a system is a full blooded embodiment of one purpose, then elements of another cannot be included. We disagree. We believe an educational system can contain important elements of all three at once.

For us, it would be very unsatisfactory if our children and grandchildren's educational experience in school did not contain major elements of each educational purpose. We are attracted as individuals by a public education encompassing all three. Those aspirations don't seem to us to be in conflict in an educational system that is not divided by antagonistic debate. Look at the claims Lisa Delpit (1995) makes and you will find the same kind of claim: what she rightly objects to is the notion that black children somehow can't be expected to have academic expectations. A coherent public education, should, we think, draw on all three purposes.

The redundancy of the division of purposes. Our second thought is that the emergence of these three educational purposes was a feature of a historical context now passed, so now we really are just fighting old battles. How did this dramatic threefold division of purpose arise? The significant context for the development of the divisions was the exponential growth of the US--from a rural vastness into an industrial commercial and military giant and from a country dominated by an ethnic (white) majority into a more cosmopolitan society, especially when it began to put to rest in the twentieth century the evils of slavery and racism

How did that affect views of educational purpose? In the late 19th and early 20th century, as the country started to burst into its industrial complexity, there developed an intense struggle for the curriculum, for what/how children should learn (Kleibard, 1995). There were huge demands from industry and commerce for trained labor. Different views of scholarship emerged. "Free Americans" wanted, as Emerson's essay on *The American Scholar* suggests, a break with European traditions of knowledge and the

creation of new understandings. The country was heavy with immigrants speaking many different languages. The United States needed its immigrants to be taught to be Americans. The tensions that resulted led to emphases on one segment of educational purpose against another.

Yet times have drastically changed. No longer do industrial purposes call for a labor force sweating at the doors of blast furnaces, or for that matter, children doing their own thing oblivious of social needs. A complex post-industrial technological society, like what we now have, needs creative, enlightened, educated people confident as individuals but cognizant of the needs of our complex society and, of course, able to use computers and related machines for human purposes. The division of the three purposes was relevant to an age and a context. Each has general validity and importance for our present context. The challenge is to get on with finding ways to integrate and reconcile them.

Teaching children to value. So far in this section we argue that it is possible for the three educational purposes to be **integrated and complementary**. Our second thought was that the emergence of these three educational purposes was a **feature of a historical context now passed**. Our third thought reveals similarities and differences between the three positions. At the heart of the conflict between the three educational purposes is a conflict of value. It runs like this. Should children, in general, learn things like literature, art, music and history that are deemed to be worthwhile in themselves? Or, should their (present) values be developed so that they are accustomed to choice as they grow up? Or, should they learn skills, trades or accomplishments that have a cash-value as they enter the marketplace?

How children come to value things is another way to examine the conflict between the three educational purposes. Those who value knowledge as the educational purpose and those who emphasize the individual usually deploy some intrinsic statements about value. Those advocating a social purpose are more likely to speak of extrinsic value. The brute fact is that the messages are confused throughout schooling and university education. If education were driven by a coherent unified purpose, people would pay better attention to developing in children an understanding of both types of value. Both would be emphasized because both are important if our account of a complex technological society is accurate.

So, our third thought runs like this. Offering children educational activities driven by all of the three educational purposes will enable them to test out different kinds of motivation and to deepen their understanding of what it is to value things. This sense of value, connected as it is to what people choose, is

at the heart of the personal freedoms treasured in a democratic society. Our sense of value is on a continuum from the purely intrinsic to the simply extrinsic or instrumental.

Maybe we are confusing children about value because we can't reconcile educational purposes. One possible outcome of reconciliatory discourse would be for educational practice to develop a more coherent sense of teaching children ways in which to place value on their activities, aspirations, and ambitions.

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