THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The goal of the Resist Violence project is to develop an evaluated, theoretically-grounded pedagogy to address the problem of violence in its multiple forms. The approach integrates critical thinking, media literacy and artistic expression in the work of social change. By seeking to engage students intellectually, emotionally and creatively, this project is solidly rooted in active learning, problem-based pedagogy, but is also inspired by social psychology, peace education, nonviolence theory and the practice of successful social movements, which, like education, aspire to create spaces where transformative change becomes possible.

Addressing Cultural Violence

This project builds from the premise that violence is a learned behavior. Such a perspective challenges the common notion that violence is normal and inevitable, drawing attention to the complex and multiple social factors that contribute to violence. The work of James Gilligan (1996, 2003) has proven to be particularly influential in shaping our understanding of violence; after spending over 35 years working in the US prison system, he came to see violence as motivated by intense feelings of shame and the desire for respect, while emphasizing the impact of other environmental factors. The interconnections between different types of violence is emphasized, drawing out not only the links between violence against ourselves and others, but also between the largely unrecognized structural violence of poverty and marginalization to acts of direct violence, including the outbreak of mass atrocities. On this, we have been shaped as well by the theoretical insights of Johan Galtung, whose well-known typology of violence distinguishes between direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence.[1]
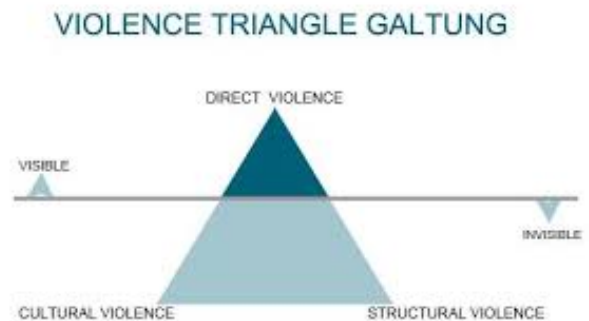
The Resist Violence curriculum expands an understanding of each of these types of violence, along with their interconnections, but our pedagogy puts a focus on cultural forms of violence. We feel that this is particularly relevant for educational violence prevention initiatives. While education can contribute to building our student's resilience to life's difficulties and help them develop the social-emotional awareness and nonviolent conflict resolution skills needed to manage conflicts, our effectiveness will be limited: we cannot directly address the structural or direct violence that may impact on their daily lives. Cultural violence though is about ideas, the ideas that make "direct and structural violence look, even feel, right --- or at least not wrong (Galtung 1990: 291), and as such can be tackled directly in the classroom. Every violent act has multiple causes, but one necessary element is that the perpetrator has to believe that the choice of violence is legitimate, or at least necessary; if not, they would choose another path. The focus of the Resist Violence pedagogy is to critically examine the widely-held ideas that normalize violence in our society, and through the media literacy and artistic expression competencies, provide students with the skills and knowledge to recognize how these ideas are represented in our culture and creatively work to subvert them. The objective is to encourage our students to engage in a serious reflection on

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[1] For Galtung, direct, structural, and cultural forms of violence are mutually-reinforcing: direct violence refers to the physical or verbal assaults inflicted by identifiable perpetrators; structural violence to the suffering caused by the rules and policies of social, political and economic systems; and cultural violence to those aspects of a culture that justify the harm being done.

the effectiveness and ethics of violent solutions, a task which is so essential given the media culture that surrounds them, including an entertainment industry that is replete with violent images and narratives, in which so often "armed conflict is not the last, but the first–and indeed the only–resort" (quoted in Leonard 2004: 6).

Transforming Ideas

The increased public space being given to racist discourse and the continued epidemic of gender-based violence in our community today underscores the difficulties in bringing about positive cultural change. Unfortunately, this is a conclusion reinforced by three decades of research into implicit biases, which has revealed that, despite significantly reduced societal support for explicit racist and sexist beliefs, negative stereotypes, often unintentionally, continue to shape much of our behavior, particularly when we make quick or automatic decisions.

Given their influence in reinforcing social inequality, much effort has been put into designing interventions to reduce implicit biases. A recent study identified 573 such experiments, concluding that, while some revealed changes in implicit bias measures, very few were tested over time to assess their capacity to shift behavior, and that no evidence for such an impact existed. Moreover, the authors argued that any reductions in implicit bias brought about by a short-term intervention would likely be erased when the individual was re-exposed to the cultural environment which supported them in the first place (Forscher, et al. 2018). This has led some to argue that psychological research and practice should not be focused so much on "changing individual hearts and minds [but rather on] changing the sociocultural worlds in which those hearts and minds are immersed" (Adams, et al. 2008: 236), a task which calls precisely for interventions that critique and subvert cultural forms of violence.

Patricia Devine, the psychologist who thirty years ago first defended the idea that people could be unconscious racists, is also calling for a new direction in this research. Skeptical of the significance of interventions that seek to directly change implicit, or unintentional biases as she refers to them now, she is calling for us to think of them as an unwanted habit "that can be broken through a combination of motivation, awareness and effort" (Forscher, et al. 2017: 133). Unlike previous research experiments, her recent interventions have focused on bringing about long-term changes in individual awareness and behavior, and the results are promising. In one version, participants were more likely than control subjects to publicly object two years later to an essay that argued that stereotypes were useful. The methodology seeks to commit individuals to breaking their habits by teaching about how we can unintentionally discriminate, the resulting societal consequences, and methods to employ that can reduce our biases, such as perspective taking, individuation, and imaging that challenges stereotypes. According to the researchers, the key factors changing behavior seems to be an increase in the participant's noticing of biased behaviors, particularly in others, and in an increased belief that this is wrong (Forscher, et al. 2017).

The focus on individual beliefs is significant, and for Devine and Forscher, connects to social psychologist Milton Rokeach's influential work in the 1970s. Rokeach argued that our sense of self identity was made up of layers, with some layers being more central to our self-concept than others. Changing the higher levels, which included one's values, is most threatening and faces the greatest resistance, as it necessarily requires a reshuffling of all the lower levels. Success in changing beliefs, or knowledge, which is what Devine and Forscher are aiming at, is referred to as the "sweet spot." Efforts at making changes are not perceived as so threatening to one's self-concept and thus easier to do, but they are high enough in the layers that changes will bring about "a torrent of other changes" (Nordell 2017). In contrast, stereotypic associations are more on the bottom and are highly susceptible to environmental influence, something which explains the extent to which single interventions can bring changes to implicit bias measures but seem to have little impact on behaviour. Finally, researchers suggest that changing processes central to the self may be necessary to produce enduring change but may need to be supported by new patterns of behaviour. (Forscher, et al. 2017).

The focus on beliefs also reinforces the Resist Violence pedagogy. The critical thinking competency puts the focus on the widely-held ideas that continue to legitimize violence, namely its inevitability, effectiveness and the perceived lack of a real alternative when deep conflicts escalate. But contradictions abound: violence is profoundly traumatizing, and as such we strongly condemn acts of violence committed against ourselves and those like "us"; but, of course, violence inflicted on the "other" is often quickly accepted as necessary and appropriate. Our acceptance of violence in our virtual and real lives, though, is also contingent on it being represented in ways that shut down our empathy and sense of horror. Thus, greater awareness about the devastating consequences of violence and the implicit visual language by which violence is rendered acceptable or even fun in many cultures (which is explored through the media literacy competency by making and exploring various media techniques) can have a profound impact, perhaps not only shifting our ideas, but also our sense of what is right. This remains to be proven, but our experiences with the pedagogy thus far suggests its transformative potential.

The Unexpected Breakthroughs

The goal of bringing about transformative change is the aim of socially-engaged educational projects, but of course it is also the objective of the activist. The Resist Violence pedagogy aims to bring activism into the classroom, and as such, we have been greatly inspired by the work of nonviolence theorists.

Any exploration of nonviolence theory and practice must begin with Gandhi. The fundamental question for him is how the psychological divides created by enemy images and dehumanizing stereotypes can be eliminated. For Gandhi, both sides have to change, learn to understand the other and see the truth of their common humanity. Appeals to reason have their role, but "arguments become *disqualified* when the people making them are not perceived to be worth listening to (Vinthagen 2015: 209); in this situation, Gandhi argues that efforts are needed to move the opponent emotionally, which becomes possible through the self-suffering of the *satyagrahi* or nonviolent resister. As he expressed it: "real suffering bravely born melts even a heart of stone" (Weber 1992:270).[2]

Gandhi's arguments on the potential of self-suffering to break through the barriers of fear, hate and contempt have been explored by many nonviolent theorists. While examples of rapid conversions exist, Thomas Weber, among others, argues that Gandhi was too optimistic. They point out that the resistance by a devalued enemy can also bring about an increase in the violence being inflicted as the perpetrator becomes enraged as his own power (and world view) is being threatened. The process of social change, they argue, generally happens through a more indirect process, starting with third parties, who are sufficiently close to the victims to see them as human beings, but whose good opinion is of value to the oppressors. "Conversion – or, at the very least, the moving of public opinion leading to feelings of incongruence – does seem to work through self-suffering. However, the route is a little more tortuous and subtle than the early nonviolence theorists believed" (Weber 285).[3]

Feminist nonviolence theory is critical of an overemphasis on suffering, and the promotion of a heroic martyrdom, which they view as yet another expression of masculine power and the male warrior, albeit a nonviolent one.[4]

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[2] It should be noted that there is another central dynamic within nonviolent struggles, which Vinthagen refers to as its "power-breaking potential." Here the focus is on challenging the opponent's sources of power through a combination of noncooperation, defiance and disobedience. As Gandhi wrote to the British, "We are convinced that if we can but withdraw our voluntary help and stop payment of taxes without doing violence, even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured" (Sharp: 1973: 84). Indeed, in the work of many nonviolent theorists, including Gene Sharp and more recently Erica Chenoweth (2011), nonviolence struggle is represented as essentially similar to its violent counterpart, with the difference being only one of technique. Its transformative potential, which is being emphasized here, is largely, if not entirely, ignored.

[3] Gandhi's writings, though, do allow for a variety of interpretations, and both Weber and Vinthagen argue that he does at times present a more sophisticated explanation of how self-suffering can break down the psychological barriers that enable violence to be inflicted.

[4] See, for example, McAllister (1982).

Sociologist Stellen Vinthagen builds on this critique, shining further light on the dynamics of nonviolent action. The transformative power of nonviolence does not, he argues, come for the suffering per se, but from one's willingness to put themselves at risk. The victim's truth – their equal humanity and the potential of a new relationship of equality with the oppressor – is revealed through the activists being prepared to lose it all – "their property, their friends, their body – everything except their 'honour'" (211). This is not the helpless suffering of a victim, but an intentional choice, an expression of commitment that has "truth-bearing power" (213).

> Suffering has a meaning in that it constitutes an indicator of the activist's sincerity and dedication. By taking action because of a vision, despite the risk of suffering, nonviolent activists are considered to be serious parties in a conflict. They cease to be 'non-people', 'God's enemies', 'treacherous', 'rats', 'cockroaches', 'dirty', 'barbarians', 'idiots' or 'animals'. (216)

> …what appears to be decisive is *why* the activists suffer, in what situations and what they do when punished. (220)

Central to bringing change is the recognition that the nonviolent activists are proposing a better future, encompassing greater equality, freedom and mutual respect (218), a vision appealing to most of us, but one that cannot be attained "as long as there are threatening people" (219). The challenge for nonviolent movements is to make this aspiration recognizable to society; the more this happens, the more illegitimate violent responses and the status quo becomes. Through stories and music, powerful symbolism and images that unexpectedly capture our attention or activate our empathy, or the performances of Civil Rights sit-ins and Occupy Wall Street's encampments, nonviolent movements have long turned to art as a means to promote cultural change and alter power relationships.

> The ability of artistic activism to surprise us – to show up in unlikely places (e.g. not a gallery) or take on unfamiliar forms (e.g. not a protest march) provides an opportunity to disrupt people's preconceived notions of art and protest, and their predetermined ideas about the messages we are trying to communicate. Artistic activism creates an opportunity to bypass seemingly fixed political ideas and moral ideals and remap cognitive patterns. Surprise is a moment when hearts can be touched and minds reached, and both changed. ("Why Artistic Activism?")

What implications does this have for the classroom? For those of us involved in peace and social justice education, the classroom is a space to encourage cultural change, a place for nonviolence practice. Thankfully, we rarely have to confront the fear and dehumanization that exists in deeply-embedded systems of injustice, but we do face discriminatory attitudes and harmful ideologies. As we have explored, changing someone's ideas is no easy task; indeed, none of us likely are as open to new ideas as we would like to think. Being confronted by knowledge that challenges our world view is threatening, and we often respond with defensiveness and denial to protect our self-identity. As Cohen and Sherman emphasize, the need to ensure the integrity of our sense of self is so strong that even mundane everyday events can trigger defensive mechanisms (2014: 335).

But the transformative capacity of nonviolence is subtle; although this has created a problematic tendency to link nonviolence to passivity, it is a strength. We are unexpectedly affected before our resistance is activated – the element of surprise is essential. As educators interested in bringing about a change in deeply-rooted cultural ideas, we certainly need to think more about how we can bring the unexpected into the classroom. Rather than start with explicit discussions about social privilege, for example, we need to think more about how we can move students into recognizing their group's advantages themselves. Gandhi stressed that nonviolence action must

persuade, not coerce, someone into changing, and thus inherently must be done in a respectful manner; even amidst the intensity of India's struggle to free itself from British control, Gandhi sought to never humiliate his opponents. We may view the actions that someone does as "bad", but we need to keep these distinct from the person.

Psychology provides much support for the positive effect of even a small generous gesture in a conflictual relationship. A remark or question that causes an opponent to think of themselves positively can reduce the intensity of a difficult situation, leading to a greater willingness to make compromises in negotiations or an increased openness to a stigmatized "other" (Cohen and Sherman: 352-353). In one wonderful experiment in 2015 five hundred people were canvassed door to door about their attitudes toward trans issues. After a short 10-minute conversation, the experiment had a significant effect on reducing negative attitudes for at least three months. What was significant is that the canvassers used an approach that involved analogic perspective taking, where the people who were canvassed were given as much time as they wanted to explain their perspective and asked to discuss an experience where they had been perceived as different and treated unfairly (Broockman and Kalla 2016). In and out of the classroom, small gestures that value the other person make a difference.[5]

With the Resist Violence pedagogy, however, we are going beyond using the insights of nonviolence theory and practice to shape the classroom environment by bringing social activism directly into the course. Through artistic activism, students are able to think of themselves as not mere consumers of culture, but agents of change. This is an empowering identity, but also one that brings responsibility as it reveals a more sophisticated understanding of social power -- power is not simply top down, but continuously being reproduced in our everyday habits,

Figure 1: "Would you call Venus a slut?" by Aislinn Beattie, 2017

through our beliefs, feelings and actions. Resistance becomes possible, although more difficult as it involves us making the unconscious conscious, but as students become more aware of this, it also makes their choices in life more meaningful. Activism seems too daunting to many of us, and perhaps too political for the classroom, but connecting it to art makes it accessible. It is a perfect vehicle for students to reveal how violence has impacted on their lives, show the humanity of the "other," and create a vision for a better future. As students engage on what is meaningful to them, they frequently respond unexpectedly to what is meaningful to others. And, as much as the committed activist's willingness to put themselves at risk can move us, this powerful element of vulnerability is inherent to the creative process. Hopefully beliefs shift, but even more significantly, a new self-identity may be developing as students engage with the sociocultural world that shapes them

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[5] Any exploration of what makes transformative change possible in both personal and political relationships should also examine the power of a genuine apology. To apologize is to voluntarily declare that one has no excuse or justification for an action or inaction, thereby transferring power to the wronged party who now has the capacity to accept or reject the act of contrition from the wrongdoer. As legal scholar Martha Minow writes: "At heart, the apology depends upon a paradox. No matter how sincere, an apology cannot undo what was done, and yet 'in a mysterious way and according to its own logic, this is precisely what it manages to do'" (1998: 114). For a psychological exploration of an apology, see Aaron Lazare's *On Apology* (2004).

Conclusion

The Resist Violence project offers an inherently integrative educational approach to responding to the violence in our communities. Its origin lies in a learning communities collaboration between a Humanities teacher, who for many years has explored the issues of violence, war and peace with her students, and a Cinema-Communications teacher, filmmaker, and activist. The choice of addressing critical thinking, media literacy and artistic expression was thus an obvious one. Our growing understanding of the extent to which the Resist Violence pedagogy connects to the theory and practice of so many other fields, however, is truly exciting. In terms of educational theory, the pedagogy's ability to reach the whole student cognitively, emotionally, and creatively supports the new insights being offered by neuroscience, in particular the work of Mary Helen Immordino-Yang on embodied brains and

Figure 2 "Love the Skin You're In" by Mya Alexis-John, 2017

social minds (2011, 2014). As students develop their own ways to subvert the cultural messages that surround them, they are working on the authentic projects promoted by proponents of active, problem-based learning (Bass 2017). The focus on cultural violence, or the ideas and values that legitimize and normalize violence, is a relatively novel approach in violence prevention pedagogy, but, as explored here, is reinforced by peace study's understanding of violence, psychological research on reducing prejudice, and nonviolence theory and practice on social change. Lastly, there is the focus on resistance. Initially, we viewed this primarily as a means to reduce the extent to which our students might be overwhelmed by the material and to deepen their critique of violence. But, as we explored the connections between art and activism and engaged our students meaningfully with the violence in their real and virtual lives, the potential impact of the pedagogy became evident.

Figure 3 Group photo at the "I Object" exhibit presented by the Winter 2018 class

"(The Resist Violence course) challenged my knowledge, experience, and opinion! Made me know more things, realize more and made me a better person."
- Student, Winter 2018

"…Thank you for helping me heal. Now I understand how violence works and it helped me be less ashamed as a result of my experience with it. I think the course also taught me how to bring change to the world, and I am happy to know that some teachers are committed to helping students deconstruct harmful ideas."
- Student, Winter 2018

Pat Romano & Kim Simard
Dawson College, Montreal
November 2018

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