

Conversations for Ethical Decision Making In Secondary Schools:
A Report on Exploratory Sessions

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Conversations for Ethical Decision Making

Everything human takes place in conversations – Humberto Maturana

With thee conversing I forget all time. - John Milton

Changing the conversations is the single most powerful tool we have to take concrete action. - Henning, Showkeir and associates

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The goal of the present investigation is two-fold: to explore the need for a model for ethical decision-making in secondary schools, and to develop such a model for practical application. The model I am exploring is CEDM (Conversations for Ethical Decision Making – Appendix A). Preliminary research suggests urgency in ensuring that professional beliefs (Ware, 2002) and ethical concerns (Forster, 1998) in schools are explicit. CEDM uses dialogue¹ as its theoretical framework in order to make certain that these qualities remain explicit, as well as because it has been regarded as a valuable method to use when exploring conflict (Bohm, 1991; Search for Common Ground, n.d.). Achinstein (2002) writes that conversation around conflict is necessary when making decisions about change.

This report is divided into three sections: intention, action, and review, corresponding to the three stages of action research (Dick, 1993). I will begin the first section, intention, by describing the theoretical evolution of CEDM prior to its first application, during the summer of 2005, followed with a review of the literature surrounding issues that are touched by CEDM. In order to provide a

¹ The words dialogue and conversation will be used interchangeably for the purposes of this review, along the spirit of Bohm's statement, "A dialogue is essentially a conversation between equals," (1991, ¶ 35).

solid theoretical foundation for the necessity of this model I will explore conversations for change, connections between education and other milieus such as Bioethics, professional beliefs and practices, and ethical concerns. I will conclude this section by presenting some possible obstacles to this model.

Section 2, action, will begin with a description of action research, including the rationale behind its use as methodology in this study. That will be followed by a report on the action research itself, essentially the conversations that took place during two trial sessions and how the model changed as a result, including comments on assessment.

The closing section, review, is a space of reflection on the whole process. It will begin with a summary of the study, include significant learning moments and, as in the action research process described by Dick (1993), conclude with possibilities for further intentions.

Intention

You are more likely to learn from an experience if you act with intent. Enter the experience with expectations. Be on the lookout for unmet expectations. Seek to understand them (Dick, 1993, "How do you do action research?" Section, ¶ 24)

Evolution of Model prior to Exploratory Sessions

The need for this model grew from a discussion concerning codes of ethics with a group of masters' students in Human Systems Intervention at Concordia University in Montreal. The crux of this conversation was a growing discomfort with the application of an external code of ethics to solve 'ethical' problems or dilemmas. I discovered that everything I do has an ethical edge to it, and that I turn to values rather than a code of ethics to make decisions. Making

decisions in an ethical manner begins internally, is contextual, and is rooted in values. Begley (2004) writes, "In order to comprehensively address the full range of human motivations and valuation processes encountered by a leader in a school setting, one must think of *values* and *valuation processes* where ethics are one category or component within a broader spectrum of value types "(p. 5). Decision making must be coloured with the values, feelings, and beliefs intrinsic to the people involved in a specific issue, and not solely according to an external code of ethics. With this realization, I set out to explore how the internal could be externalized into solid, informed decisions about an issue. The result is CEDM, a model based on shared decision making through focused conversation about how each participant *really* feels about an issue.

The model is loosely based on a combination of Wheatley's (2002) writings on conversation and Brown's (2003) *Ethical Process*. Brown's ethical process uses argument in order to uncover the underlying values behind the positions people take about issues. What attracted me to Brown was his concern with discovering the values behind our positions, as well as how his process begins with position statements. In that way, participants can respond with an authentic, gut reaction and then work on uncovering the reasons behind their positions. I disagree with using an argumentative structure to do so. I much prefer a conversation where the focus is on remaining curious about others' positions as a strategy for co-creating decisions, for thinking together, as with Wheatley (2004), who writes:

I am hopeful that we can change the world if we can start listening to one another again. Simple, honest, human conversation. Not mediation, negotiation, problem-solving, debate, or public meetings. Simple, truthful conversation where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well. Conversation is the natural way we humans think together. We may have forgotten this, or no longer have time for conversation, but it is how good thinking emerges into actions that create real change. (¶2)

Brown's ethical process is a lengthy one, which turns to traditional ethical approaches for solving problems. Within the diverse settings offered by secondary schools, it has been pointed out that ethics are not enough to inform decisions (Begley, 2004). Brown's process does include other elements, though his reliance on traditional approaches, to the exclusion of non-traditional approaches, remains quite heavy.

CEDM's first iteration (Appendix A), therefore, was influenced by both Brown and Wheatley, yet leans more towards Wheatley in that it is heavily reliant on 'simple, honest, human conversation'. I also introduced an evaluative element in the form of a conversation assessment form (Appendix B) in order to assess the efficacy of the conversations (this element was later incorporated directly into the process during the exploratory sessions). I soon realized its potential in application to school settings, in particular in reflection upon my experience as a secondary teacher in a small, private school in Montreal. To-date, critical

decisions about students' academic and behavioural wellbeing are made, often by one person, in order to solve a 'problem', such as a classroom management issue, quickly. Since decisions are made in reaction to immediate problems they are often inconsistent. These problems, which are shrugged from the classroom to an administrator's office, almost always reoccur since a decision made so quickly by one has little meaning to the others involved (Rooney, 2004). The use of a model like CEDM would shift the purpose of decision-making in secondary schools from a *reactive* towards a *proactive* one, and the locus from one to many through shared decision-making. Shared decision making can increase the responsibility of all stakeholders, teachers and administrators alike, for the care and learning of students and promote commitment to school success (Brown & Anfara, 2002; Else, 2000). Shared decision making can:

- Involve stakeholders in developing shared core values, beliefs, mission and vision for the school district.
- Recognize and value the differences in individual belief systems and develop a core of shared beliefs from individual beliefs.
- Develop joint resolutions of support, define new roles and responsibilities, address authority and control issues, and define decision parameters (Else, 2000, ¶ 13).

The dialogic foundation of CEDM can help to foster a community based on shared decision-making where all stakeholders are responsible for the decisions that are made concerning the students in their care².

² In its preliminary stages, the model includes only school personnel in its decision-making process. I believe that administrators and teachers need to play with the model and test out its efficacy before others can be involved. Future development will incorporate student and parent voices into the conversation as well.

Conversation for Change

Conversation is a powerful tool for uncovering values, beliefs, and the assumptions that frame them in order to create change in organizations. It is the theoretical framework at the core of CEDM. Wheatley (2002), as was discussed earlier, describes conversation as the way people think together. Maturana believes that conversation is what frames all of our activities together as humans. He describes the centrality of conversation to human existence (Fell & Russell, 1994) and his biological theory of cognition is, "...a reflection on how we exist in language as languaging beings, it is a study on human relations," (Maturana, n.d., in Ruiz, 2002, ¶ 10). Maturana himself wrote "...everything human takes place in conversations...we live in conversations," (Maturana et al, 1996, ¶ 19-21). If ethics occurs through care and relationship, then it is only natural that conversation, according to the definitions provided above, be used as a site for ethical decision-making about students. Achinstein (2002) supports the use of conversation for dealing with conflict when she writes, "conversations about conflicts can create new ways of thinking and new ways of doing things," (p. 435). This is a far cry from the lone administrator making arbitrary, reactive decisions, as in the school I described at the beginning of this study.

Conversation, when people are really listening to each other, allows for the emergence of the beliefs and values that underlie an issue for participants. It is through such a conversation that ethical decision making is possible.

Connections to Other Disciplines

The use of conversation as a theoretical framework for making decisions is found in many helping professions. In bioethics, Hester (2004) discusses the importance of exploring methods for creating healthy dialogue from within situations rather than trying to fix them with external tools. An ethics based on contextual dialogue and relationship is becoming widely discussed within the helping professions. It is recognized that more than one perspective is necessary to come to an ethical decision (Childs, 2001; Huotari, 2001; Irvine, 2004; & Prilleltensky et al, 1996), in particular when a variety of professions with competing professional values, are working together with the same client. The importance of values, the backbone of moral ideals through which ethical decisions are made, has also been recognized as an integral aspect of decision-making in sustainability ethics, an ethic that deals with conservation and environmental issues (Tryzyna, 2001).

Professional Beliefs and Practices

CEDM is intended to ensure that caring, ethical decisions are made about a variety of student issues, both academic and social. Key among the social issues that arise in schools is the question of discipline, which, as has been stated earlier, is often meted out in a reactive manner. Harsh, reactive disciplinary methods work against relationship and can actually lower success levels for students (Osher, 2005). McLoud (2005) discusses alternatives to

reactive disciplinary measures in one urban school as they simply were not solving any problems:

Traditional approaches to discipline don't work. In our first meeting, we took a hard look at our approach to discipline. When a teacher ... caught a student misbehaving, he or she would typically react to that misbehavior by assigning a punishment ... This approach was characterized by three traits: It was reactive, punitive, and exclusionary... For a change in school culture to be successful, those driving the change must scrutinize every aspect of the school and involve every member of the school in the process... All school personnel must share responsibility ... (p. 47)

It used to be that decisions concerning student achievement and behaviour were made in the principal's office, however it is becoming increasingly evident that decisions need to be made as close to where they will be implemented as possible. "Of course, to make such a concept work, we must ensure that it connects to the reality of the schoolhouse--which means that having systems in place is essential," (Rooney, 2004, p.84). CEDM is such a system. It can be used as a framework to generate shared knowledge, which can become a force of energy for a school (Lambert, 2002).

Ethical Concerns

The people who work in schools make decisions every day that impact the lives of the students with whom they work. Forster (1998) questions whether or

not all schools are ethical in that, despite the fact that the care and wellbeing of the student is supposed to be at the forefront of all school activity, schools are composed of humans who interact within an organization. As such, other needs may come to the forefront. According to Forster (1998), the ethical concerns of a school need to be “explicit, accepted, and openly acknowledged,” (§ 2) in order to be considered an *ethical* school. These concerns deal with the awareness of the implications of one’s decisions and actions and the acceptance of responsibilities related to those decisions. Forster (1998) maintains that the guiding force behind awareness and acceptance of one’s ethical decisions and subsequent actions is a collection of “ethical principles embodied in a code,” (§5). I disagree with Forster on this point, as I believe decisions should be contextual and arrived at from within the problem situation rather than determined from external sources. Schwartz (2000) also counters Forster’s assumption by making his own, that

...ethical codes are used by management to ensure compliance and are devoid of ethical content. Ethical codes, it is argued, are part of management’s control system in a time of flatter organizational structures with a far wider span of control. (p. 173)

Noddings also rejects the notion of ethical behaviour being guided by principles and rules; however she is less harsh in her dismissal than Schwartz (Smeyers, 1999). She focuses on relationship, on natural caring. Noddings views ethical behaviour as “a human affective response,” (Noddings in Smeyers, 1999, p.235) that is linked with the human condition and, “above all it is situated in a

concrete situation in which what one does or does not do makes a real difference,” (Noddings in Smeyers, 1999, p.237). The lived ethical experience is the basis for decision-making, and not an external code. This ethic, the ethic of care, manifests itself from within the relationships that exist around a moral issue. It is this ethic that is applied in CEDM. Working through relationship to encounter and accept diverse world views when making decisions is recognized as good practice in schools:

...bringing individuals together who have shared concerns and issues, despite very different values, roles, and identities, seems to encourage reflection and critical thought about... conflict as well as proposed strategies for dealing with [it]. (Benhabib et al, 1996, in Zaretsky, 2004, p.74)

Despite Forster’s (1999) claim for the centrality of ethical codes, she also states that, “It will be important for school communities to have structures and processes that acknowledge group identities and promote respectful and caring group interactions,” (¶ 27). CEDM is one such process in that it can guide conversation along ethical, caring lines in order to ensure that decisions are made from within this spirit.

Anticipated Obstacles

To use CEDM is, in effect, subverting traditional notions of leadership in school. The very purpose of this model is to bring everyone involved in the issue together, with equal footing, to decide upon solutions. With this model, decisions that are

usually made by an administrator are co-created with the teachers and support staff involved with a student. In the school described at the start of this discussion, dilemmas concerning students and teachers are arbitrarily dealt with by the principal in an effort to address them quickly, despite the fact that, according to the mission statement, they “believe that the successful education of our children is a collective effort, based on a constructive partnership involving the child, the school and the home as well as the greater community,” (www.westonschool.org). This is not the fault of any one person but rather a product of the system. Argyris and Schon (in Chrispeels & Yep, 2004) “argue that action paradoxes are endemic to most organizations and exist tacitly in the defensive routines individuals develop,” (¶6). Changing defensive routines is difficult. A leader who is used to solving problems for others quickly in order to move on to the next task at hand could find it difficult to change this decision-making style. Shared decision-making is time-consuming and involves mature leadership skills (Thompson, 2001), essentially requiring a principal to give up some of the power and control behind his/her formally recognized authority (Harris, 2002; & Priggozy, 2001). Askew (in Hopkins, 2000) recognizes that, when it comes to shared decision-making, “Many school leaders talk the talk yet still cling to the stick of autocracy and control,” (¶ 25).

Shared decision-making has obstacles from the teacher’s perspective as well, including time, withdrawal, peer pressure from colleagues, and poor principalship (Miller, 2002). It is scary to lead when traditionally there has always been someone to make the difficult decisions for you. There can be a feeling of,

“Maybe it's better to just let the leader do it all -- then at least we know whom to blame,” (Mohr & Dichter, 2001, p.746). For all parties, shared decision-making is risky and challenges safe, comfortable notions of clearly defined teacher and principal roles (Prighozy, 2001; Brown & Anfara 2002). In particular, when discussing ethics and decision-making, things can get sticky. Ethical conversation requires ‘the dignity of risk’ since “...to talk at deep levels about ethics is to talk about yourself as a person.... ethics threatens people” (Rossiter et al, 1996, 309).

Final Intentions and Next Steps

According to the literature, a model for ethical decision-making in schools can begin to address academic and social concerns that school personnel have about students. The literature I have reviewed here points towards the need for collaboration and shared-decision making as a proactive alternative to reactive measures often taken in schools, (Rooney, 2004; Else, 2000; Brown & Anfara, 2002; Zaretsky, 2004; Osher (2005) McLoud (2005) Lambert, 2002). It would be a mistake, however, not to take note of the difficulties inherent in adopting shared-decision making practices into school settings, such as relinquishing power by administrators or accepting the responsibility that comes with increased power for teachers (Chrispeels and Yep, 2004; Thompson, 2001; Harris, 2002; & Prighozy, 2001; Hopkins, 2000; Miller, 2002; Mohr & Dichter, 2001; Prighozy, 2001; Brown & Anfara 2002). CEDM meets the need for a shared decision making process that recognizes the importance of values. It uses focused

conversation to create an ethic of care based on relationship and shared decision making. The next step is to investigate whether or not CEDM can adequately meet this need in practice.

Action

Action ...is a dialectic between plans and reality (Dick, 1993, Soft systems methodology section, ¶ 6)

The methodology I chose to use in this investigation is action research. According to Dick (1993), "The purpose in action research is to learn from your experience, and apply that learning to bringing about change," (How do you do action research? section, ¶ 23). The action research cycle has, at minimum, the following elements: intention or planning, action, and review or critique (Dick, 1993). This cycle works as a spiral, in that review or critique can then change intention, which would begin the process all over again (Figure 1). I was drawn to the spiral quality of action research: each intention bringing upon an action which is then reviewed, hopefully increasing the clarity of intention for future action. It is experiential learning with intent to bring about change, in this case, towards a more systematic and ethical process for making decisions within the context of secondary schools.

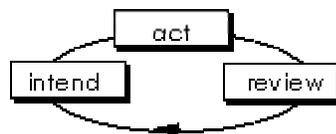


Figure 1. The action research cycle from Dick (1993)

Brief History of Action Research

Action research has its origins in post-war 1940s with Kurt Lewin who focused on participative group processes for dealing with issues of conflict, crisis, and change within organizations, and Eric Trist whose focus was on large-scale problems and multi-organizational issues through a lens of applied social research. Lewin worked initially out of MIT in Boston and Trist through the Tavistock Institute in London. Both were interested in systemic, organizational change, and both believed that decisions were best made closest to their site of implementation. The term *action research* was first used in 1946 by Lewin in “Action research and minority problems” (O’Brien, 1998).

Though initially developed for social issues, action research was quickly adopted by educators for use within schools. The roots of educational action research go even further back than Lewin and Trist to the 1930s and Dewey, who believed in community problem solving amongst educators (in O’Brien, 1998). The first educator to be associated with action research emerged in the 1950s. Stephen Corey of Teachers’ College, Columbia University wrote, “We are convinced that the disposition to study...the consequences of our own teaching is more likely to change and improve our practices than is reading about what someone else has discovered of his teaching” (Corey, 1953, p. 70 in Ferrance, 2000, p. 7).

Action research was initially criticised as being unscientific and it took another 20 years before it began to be accepted in education circles. Today, it is seen as a tool for professional development and school reform and it

encompasses four basic elements to achieve these goals: participant empowerment, collaboration amongst participants, knowledge acquisition, and social change (Ferrance, 2000).

Action Research as Methodology

Action research has traditionally been used in education for curricular purposes: determining effective and appropriate programs of study or instructional strategies for schools and classrooms (Calhoun, 1993). This study differs in that action research is being used not to improve the learning of students, but rather to develop an ethically sound practice of decision-making within schools. Improved ethical decision-making will likely have residual effects on student learning; however the main purpose for the use of action research in the present study is to explore the model's use as a decision-making strategy. As noted earlier, recent experience as well as a review of the literature about decision-making in secondary schools has suggested that traditional decision-making strategies in schools need to move towards strategies that are collaborative and shared (Rooney, 2004).

The exploration of conversations for decision-making incorporated the four basic elements, or themes, of action research as identified by Ferrance (2000). The reason for the explorative sessions was to develop the model according to the needs of the participants. Participants were empowered in that, even though they were provided with an initial model to begin with, they had total control over how the model was used and how and if it was to be altered; the participants worked collaboratively in exploring, discussing, and developing the model; we

acquired new knowledge through collaboration and conversation; and, though social change was not an original intent for this study, participants have expressed a desire and intention to introduce the model we have developed together to their respective schools with the hopes of applying it in their educational settings. It is still to be seen to what extent social change is affected through the use of this model. The action research used to explore and develop this model has essentially taken on a life of its own through the conversations that have supported it. It is quite possible that it will continue beyond the scope of this initial study.

Introduction to sessions

Two sessions were used to explore the conversations for decision-making model. This allowed for a test of the initial model and a subsequent application of a further developed model based on changes made after the first session. Throughout the planning stages of this study, I held the assumption that changes would be made and I was proven correct in that assumption. The changes that occurred as a result of the two sessions will be discussed in later sections.

In order to recruit volunteers for the exploratory sessions, an invitation letter was given to each staff member at one school, explaining the purpose of the study and the anticipated length of participant involvement: two sessions of approximately 90 minutes each to take place on two separate dates over the summer months. Prior to this I had received consent from members of the administrative team, which allowed me to look for volunteers at the school. Response to the letters was quite strong - many people expressed a desire to

participate though they were unable to because of prior commitments. In the end, four teachers, including myself, were present at each session. We had a core team of three teachers with a fourth, different, participant at each of the two sessions.

Each session followed the same basic format. They began with a verbal instruction regarding ethical concerns, the model was then reviewed, along with the assessment criteria, and put into practice. We concluded each session by debriefing what had taken place, both in terms of what we had discussed (content) as well as how we had discussed it (process). Data from the sessions was gathered through collective note-taking, which was collated after each session. Figures 2 and 3 represent the anticipated session agendas.

Verbal instruction re: confidentiality of conversation, freedom to discontinue and psychologist's availability in case of stressful situations (xxx) xxx-xxxx	5 minutes
Review model outline and conversation assessment criteria	15 minutes
Put model in action (including assessment piece)	30-45 minutes
De-brief conversation (what worked, what didn't, thoughts, how should we revise model? Reminder of confidentiality)	20-30 minutes

Figure 2. Schedule for session 1

Verbal instruction re: confidentiality of conversation, freedom to discontinue and psychologist's availability in case of stressful situations (xxx) xxx-xxxx	5 minutes
Review <i>revised</i> model outline and conversation assessment criteria	15 minutes
Put revised model in action (including assessment piece)	30-45 minutes
De-brief conversation (what worked, what didn't, thoughts, further revisions? Reminder of confidentiality)	20-30 minutes

Figure 3. Schedule for session 2

Session 1

The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry,
adapted from Robert Burns

Marlena (school librarian, debating coach, and public speaking teacher), Sam (English, history, and business teacher), Lucille (elementary and secondary music teacher), and Roslyn (English, history, and resource teacher) met for an initial CEDM exploratory session on July 5, 2005³. All four of the teachers have worked at the same school for almost four years together, though two of the teachers will be changing schools in September 2005. What was planned to be a session of approximately 90 minutes expanded into one of close to three hours. What I did not account for was the curiosity of my participants, and it was this curiosity that led to the development of a more meaningful model. The model we explored was CEDM v.2 (Appendix C) and notes from this session are collated in Appendix D, with the assessment notes in Appendix E.

I made the assumption that, once the model was briefly explained, we would then test it out. Instead, we spent more time discussing the model and the theory behind it than we did putting it into practice. As we approached the 90 minute mark and had still not begun applying the model, the participants agreed to continue our conversation rather than stop to reconvene at a later date.

The focal point of our conversation prior to applying the model revolved around the need for CEDM. Everybody agreed that a framework was necessary in order to facilitate positive and purposeful discussion around student issues, and the main concern was ensuring that any framework we developed be mindful

³ Participants' names and the names of students discussed during the sessions have been changed.

of achieving this goal. Another issue of note had to do with the nature of proactive decisions made within an ethic of care and reactive decisions made as an attempt to address an issue quickly. We all agreed that, with the latter, problems tended to resurface quickly.

Once the model was better understood by all participants, we began. Sam put the presenting issue on the table (see Figure 4), we reflected on the issue individually by beginning to fill out the conversation assessment form, and then worked our way through the phases of the model.

Presenting Issue and Context – Paul

Paul is constantly interrupting everyone in class. He seems to have no self-discipline – he swears A LOT. There isn't much support from mom here; Paul says she's always swearing too! At the beginning of the year he was motivated but ½-way through the year he 'gave up'. He is going into Grade 11 next year and this will be an even bigger problem. He is a leader in class – whether it is in a negative or positive way. Right now his constant interruptions are disrupting my class, and I hear it is the same in other classes as well. I don't know what to do.

Figure 4. Session 1 presenting issue and context

We each provided three to six comments and/or proposals for action based on what we had heard in the presenting issue. Some proposals offered at this point were:

- Paul needs to give input on what he can do to succeed, hear input on what we think he needs to do, and have his progress checked periodically.
- Meet with him to have him identify his problem areas
- Meet with his parents...and him – 1 step or 2?
- Look up books on self-discipline to find strategies

- He should make his goals clear and map out a way of reaching them. That way he sees what he needs to achieve
- Paul needs more self-confidence - he has spoken about how nobody ever tells him he's smart
- He could be a helper during lunch with younger students in fields that he is good at to boost his confidence
- Is he overwhelmed? Do we need to alter his schedule?
- Talk with Paul alone after school to find out about the sudden change and I'd let him know something has to change

We asked each other clarifying questions, and then tried to uncover the underlying values that motivated our recommendations. According to our initial proposals, we uncovered that we believe in acting as facilitators of learning who offer support and guidance for students and, in this role, we value respect and relationship within an ethic of care.

A very interesting conversation about parental involvement grew from this activity. Some of us thought that parents needed to be involved from the beginning, while others preferred to wait until absolutely necessary. This conversation was quite heated in that very different beliefs were present, yet the diversity propelled us towards a unique action that none of us had previously considered. As we worked our way through the model, refocusing and reframing our proposals, we created a plan of action steeped in the beliefs and values we had uncovered during our conversation (Figure 5).

- Initial plan of action for Paul**
- Meet with Paul to talk about our concerns
 - Create a plan with him – mapping out his goals.
 - Arrange a meeting with him, his mother, and his teachers where he presents his needs to his mother.
 - We would need to come up with a way of evaluating it and a reward.

Figure 5. Session 1 plan of action

When we finished applying the model, we took a few moments to reflect on the experience and write down our final thoughts on the conversation assessment forms. The overall feeling was one of success. Sam wrote, “We got some specific ideas on how to improve the situation, but that wasn’t the main benefit. More importantly, we were able to sharpen our ideas of how to go about the process.” The model encouraged Marlina to “think harder and reflect on my role as his teacher...” Lucille noted, “We came up with an original plan that probably wasn’t what we were expecting,” and Roslyn reflected, “I really liked Lucille’ and Marlina’s perspective of HAVING to involve the parents and the shift towards having Paul present the info to them. I learned to let go of my solutions and hand over power to the student.” We then took some time to discuss our final thoughts and came to the consensus that a model is necessary to keep a conversation about students on track and positive. Without one, conversations can go in circles and become very frustrating. Guidelines and a lot of practice for the model will be needed, but time spent on this at the beginning will reduce frustrations and time spent later on in circular conversations.

Changes to the model

As a result of session 1, specific changes were made to the model. These changes grew out of our conversations and were based on the needs of the participants. As mentioned earlier, a large part of our conversation focused on how to ensure that CEDM are concise and positive. In the past, meetings about students at the school have been long and frustrating. They have traditionally been opportunities to vent frustrations about students rather than ones of change. We did not want CEDM to become another forum for griping about students, and so changes were made to the model that would discourage this from taking place. During the conversation, Marlana suggested we find a ‘test question’ that a participant can use on his or herself to see if what they are sharing will be helpful. Sam immediately gave an example of such a question: ‘Why don’t people just ask themselves, is what I will say bringing the conversation closer to a solution? Am I digressing?’ Lucille suggested that we create a list of guidelines to follow that are reinforced throughout the conversations. The third iteration of the model includes guidelines, and Sam’s ‘test question’ is among them.

A second change to the model was the decision to include a time for reflection in Stage 1, after hearing the presenting issue. Lucille suggested doing this in tandem with filling out the conversation assessment forms, “Definitely write out thoughts before the conversation begins. That way it focuses the discussion around solutions and helps to keep us on track. It gives time for teachers to *really* think about the situation.” Marlana added, “Yes, it allows for authentic recording

of our initial thoughts, without them getting lost in the conversation.” We decided to take the time to reflect on three to six points before we began our conversation.

A final change to the model at this point occurred naturally. According to the model, phase 2 of stage 2 is when participants frame their proposals based on feelings, values and beliefs. This activity seemed awkward at the time; no one quite knew what to say. Instead of each participant going through this process, we subverted the activity and collectively excavated the values and beliefs underlying the data we collected during phase 1. In this way, we were thinking together about what our proposals meant to us as educators and it helped to distil the focus of our conversation within a set of values and beliefs that had meaning for us. Session 2 would use the resulting CEDM v.3 (Appendix F) as its framework.

Session 2

Marlena was unable to join us for the second session on July 28. However Marcia, a math teacher from the same school, was able to attend, so we remained a group of four. This session took much less time than the first one. Three of us had already worked through the first model and were able to quickly brief Marcia about the proceedings and turn towards applying the model. The notes from this session are found in Appendix G.

Marcia introduced the presenting issue (see Figure 6) and we again took a few moments for personal reflection and to write down our initial proposals.

Some examples of initial proposals to this issue are:

- Sign an agreement with Max – a contract about his responsibilities in math

- Partner Max with another student – maybe the whole class could have study buddies?
- Pre-teach new concepts – with a good, knowledgeable tutor
- He could have a card to leave on my desk if he needs to leave class without disturbing me
- He needs to find ways to self-monitor and then deal with his anxiety
- Maybe have a ‘safe’ spot in the classroom?
- Break down the work for him, give him deadlines.

Presenting Issue and Context - Max

Max seems to zone out in math class then walks out without saying anything – usually when I am helping someone else so I don't notice right away. He has a history of zoning out when being taught new concepts in math and this has become worse since Christmas. There has been talk of school anxiety (I think even a diagnosis) and he is supposed to go see the school psychologist when he feels anxious. He says he goes to the school psychologist, but often he does not. We have discovered that he spends the period in the bathroom. I have tried the following:
Physical proximity – calming him down by putting a hand on his shoulder
Talking outside of class – told him he needs to let me know when and where he is going.

Figure 6. Session 2 presenting issue and context

We continued by asking clarifying questions, and spent a significant amount of time responding to them. In a sense we switched rounds 2 and 3. Again, it seemed natural to seek to understand each others' proposals before going any further with the process. This went quite quickly and we were led to uncovering our values through a conversation about the nature of Max' abilities. Some of us had initially thought that Max should be able to monitor his own actions. Through the conversation, it was discovered that a more realistic view,

which was in line with our uncovered values, was to provide Max with the support necessary for self-monitoring. The values that sustain this observation are ones related to our roles as teachers: the value of student safety and supporting the development of responsible citizens. Marcia summarised them as, "We need to do our job first, as teachers. All of these proposals have to do with the educational environment. My job is to create an environment where Max can learn."

Once we identified our underlying values, we continued with the model by reframing our proposals and narrowing our focus. Our conversation developed in the same manner as it had during session 1, as Lucille reminded us, "At this point in our last session, I think we started to prioritize and come up with a plan." Before doing that, however, we had a discussion about process when Sam asked, "How do we come to consensus? Who finally decides what to do when? I'm imagining a group of teachers trying to decide on what must be done. It worked last time, but what about when people can't come to consensus?" Sam's question spurred a conversation about the model's purpose. Essentially we were asking ourselves, what are we doing here and why? This conversation about process helped us to further define the purpose of the model as a tool for helping one another to think in an ethical manner, where values and beliefs frame the decisions we make. Lucille summed it up with, "I think we are here to help her think, and to learn things that we can use as well." We then prioritized our thoughts and created an actionable plan for Max (Figure 7).

- Initial plan of action for Max**
- Marcia will contact Max' parents about a tutor for pre-teaching and let them know it is necessary for success
 - There will be a buddy system for the whole class
 - Marcia will talk with Max about a designated safety zone, and they will decide on the teacher he will go to.
 - We'll have to make a plan for this with Max and a schedule.
 - Max will meet with Marcia on a weekly basis to follow up on his math plan

Figure 7. Session 2 plan of action

At this point, we used our second piece of reflective time to record our final thoughts about the session. Both Sam and Roslyn noted that it took under an hour to go through the model, including some time spent discussing process. Lucille noticed that each of the sessions were unique when she wrote, "It's neat that the form of the discussion and the solutions were different than the last meeting." We were all pleased with the amount of work we had accomplished during the session towards creating an action plan. As we were leaving, each of the teachers expressed a desire to use the model in the future. Sam, in particular, stated that he would like to propose the model's use to his principal for use during the 2005/06 school year.

Changes to the model

Once again, our session together helped to further develop CEDM. This session helped to focus the purpose of the model, as a forum for collective thought around a presenter's issue, and allowed for me to describe each stage with more clarity. We confirmed that, for the model to work, especially in its initial stages, it

would be absolutely necessary for the groups to remain small. Smaller groups would be more manageable when working at keeping the conversations focused and positive while experimenting with CEDM. In reworking the model after our second session, I switched phases 2 and 3 of Stage 2. This was a change that developed naturally since, in both sessions, we tried to understand each other's proposals before we began to explore the underlying values. It was natural to ask for clarification when we initially heard others' ideas. Stage 2, round 4 has become a site for not only reframing our proposals, but prioritizing and creating an action plan. The most current version of the model, CEDM v.4 (Appendix H), is a result of the changes made after session 2. In both sessions, we referred to the text version as we explored the framework. I have made slight changes to the visual representation, as seen in Appendix H however I am not very pleased with it and recognize that it needs to be reworked for future use. This is an activity I would like to do with others who have used the model, perhaps their insights can help make a more accurate representation.

Final Thoughts about the Sessions

Both of the exploratory sessions were different - session 1 was much more intense (it took place during a massive thunder storm) and our conversations were quite passionate. Session 2 was more concise and to the point - less emotion was involved. Yet both were successful and rewarding in that we finished with plausible plans of action and were left with a feeling of accomplishment. I was reminded about the energy that is created when a few people get together to talk. I was also struck by the contextual nature of the

values that emerged through our proposals in each session. Though three of the four participants in each session were the same, the underlying values that were unearthed were slightly different, dependent on the student and the situation. Begley and Johansson (1997) have found that values are necessary when making decisions about action, “particularly in providing structure for problem solving” (in Coombs, 2003). Both sets of values we uncovered framed unique action plans for each session, further solidifying my belief that decisions made in schools must take context and individual student needs into account.

Assessment

Initially, I had wanted each participant to fill out a conversation assessment form (Appendix B). It became clear after the 1st session, when everyone forgot to fill out the rubric, that the rubric was not necessary. What was necessary, and informative, was the insight gleaned from each participant about how they felt the conversation went. Insight represented by real words, tinged with emotion, and not by a numbered score.

The only parts of the assessment form that have been retained are those concerning initial and final thoughts. They are embedded in the process as personal reflection pieces. They serve two purposes: First, and for the purpose of this study, I asked participants to reflect on the model to help with designing the process of conversation for decision-making in schools. Second, in the future, these pieces can be used as tools to allow for constant refinement of the model based on the needs of the participants. Of particular interest was the way

participants expressed their feelings about how this process has helped them as teachers:

- further defining their role as educators, as support givers
- further expanding their relationship with their students
- further deepening their relationship with themselves

In both sessions, teachers were also excited about possibly having some strategies to work with challenging students and situations.

Review

Systematic reflection is an effective way for practitioners to learn (Dick, 1993, "Why would anyone use action research" section, ¶ 4)

Dick's (1993) expanded version of the action research cycle (Figure 8) indicates that reflection occurs within 'intend' and 'review'. Act is merely action. Contrarily, some of the strongest reflective pieces of this study occurred during the 'act' portions of the cycle, the sessions. In session 1 we discussed, reviewed, and immediately incorporated a reflective piece into the model. In session 2, we unearthed a central purpose of the model, as a site of collective and helpful thought, through our conversation. In turn, these reflective moments have helped to further elucidate CEDM as not only a model for decision-making but a meta-cognitive strategy. We began to think about the underlying motivational factors behind our actions as we were

working through the model. This is represented visually in Figure 9, and in an expanded form in Figure 10.

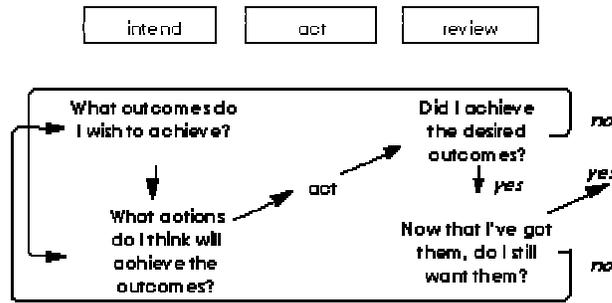


Figure 8. An expanded version of the intend-act-review cycle (Dick, 1993)

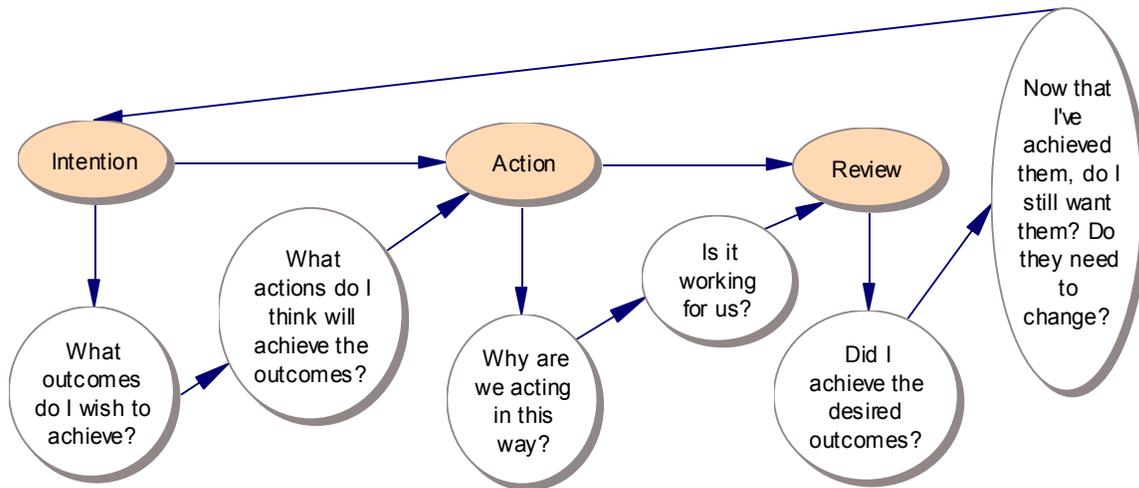


Figure 9. CEDM action research process

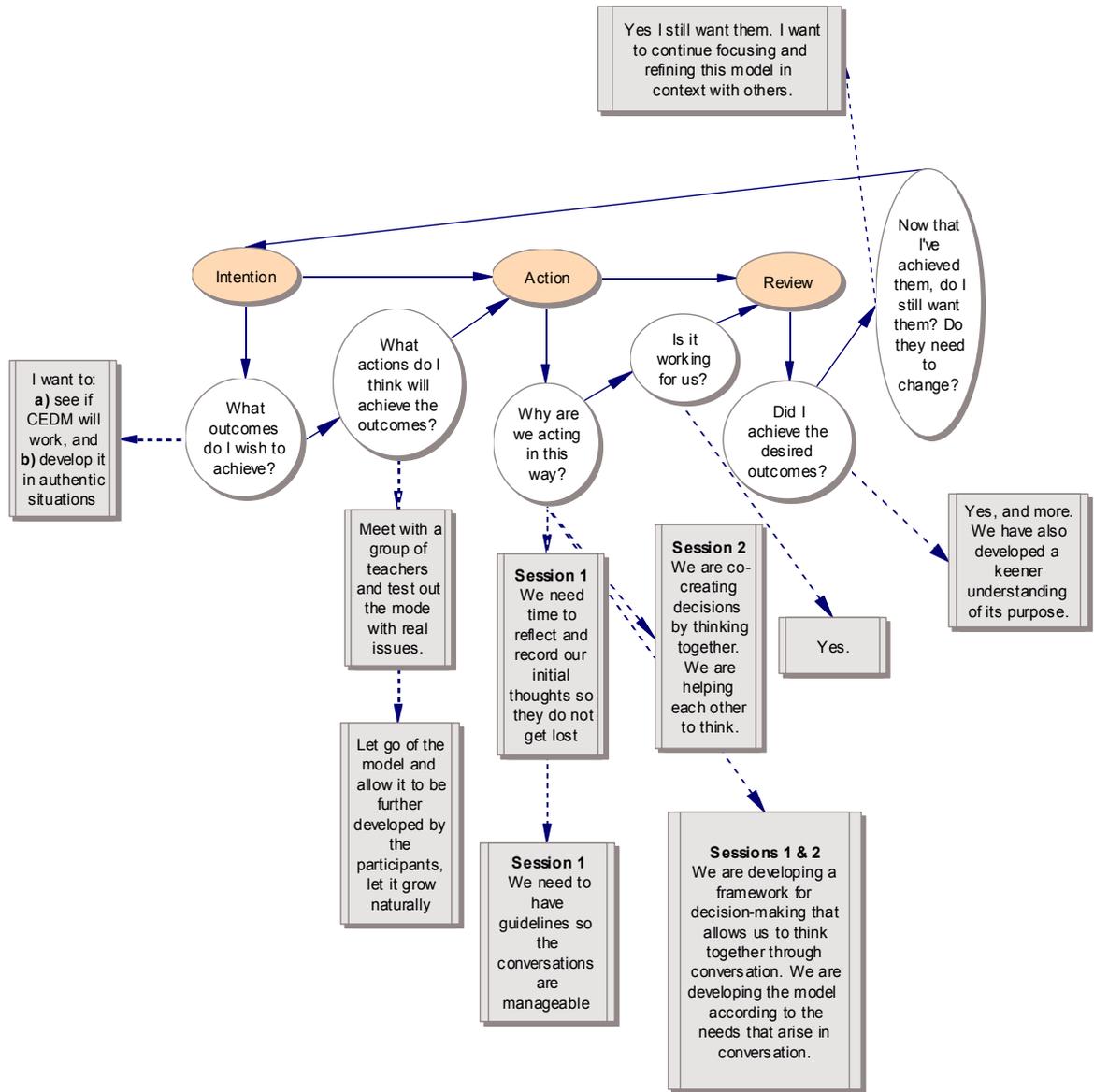


Figure 10. Expanded CEDM action research process

Begley (2004) and Coombs (2003) both indicate that reflective practice in education is necessary for authentic leadership and ethical decision-making strategies. Coombs (2003) argues that reflection gives leaders the time to access their values - values which are essential to properly framing a problem situation, and he continues this thought with, "Not only do practitioners need to organize their work to allow for 'reflective rests' they need consciously to think about their

experiences if they are to learn from them” (p.7). Begley (2004) writes that authentic leadership is a metaphor for “...ethically sound and consciously reflective practices in educational administration” (p.5). He continues to write that reflective practice is only the first step in authentic leadership, the next being to “develop sensitivity to the values orientations of others in order to give meaning to the actions,” (p. 11) that take place in schools.

The incorporation of reflective space into CEDM, during a time of action, allows participants to access their values and beliefs while they are making important decisions about students. In the ensuing conversation, they are then given access to the values and beliefs of others, helping them to make sense of the situation about which they are making a decision, and moving each individual closer to becoming practitioners of authentic leadership.

Possible Further Steps

The main purpose of this study was to explore CEDM as a strategy for making decisions in secondary schools – ethical decisions framed by the values that are important to us as teachers. The study was a success in that, for the small pool of participants in the study, the model answers the need for an ethical practice of shared decision-making in schools. This stage of the CEDM action research process has come to a close with the end of this exploratory study, though it has prepared the way for possible future action.

A next step would be to introduce the model to a larger pool of participants. This would allow for more diversity of thought and action. Marlina, Marcia, Roslyn, Sam, and Lucille are all teachers; testing out the model with participants

from different levels of a school's hierarchy could provide some further insights into the model's process when it is confronted with the power dynamics inherent in a diverse group. It would be interesting to see how different groups of people respond to similar presenting issues. I would also like to see CEDM applied within a school setting. The exploratory sessions occurred during the summer months, when the participants were on an extended break from work. I would like to see how the model works with participants who are involved in busy days with students, peers, and parents. The length of session 1 taught me that a significant amount of time will need to be spent on introducing the model to future participants before attempting its application. As well, more thought would need to be put towards evaluation. For the purposes of this study, anecdotal evaluation embedded into the model's framework was enough, however if it were to be used over an extended period of time I would want to track its progress with ongoing assessments to see if CEDM can affect measurable change in terms of effective decision making strategies. I would also want to track the residual effects, if any, improved decision making strategies have on student learning. As such, it has already begun to affect change with the teachers involved in its exploration and development in that we are thinking more about how to go about addressing the issues that affect us in school. The site of that thought is in conversation, where people naturally think together.

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Appendix A

A conversation model for ethical decision-making v.1

Setting the context

- Conversation host gathers the involved parties – if necessary regroup in smaller groups of maximum of 5 people.
- Host emphasizes principles behind the conversation:

“We acknowledge one another as equals

We try to stay curious about each other

We recognize that we need each other’s help to become better listeners

We slow down so we have time to think and reflect

We remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together

We expect it to be messy at times” (Wheatley, 2002, p.29)

- Ethical problem is put on the table by individual(s) hosting the conversation.

Aiming for understanding

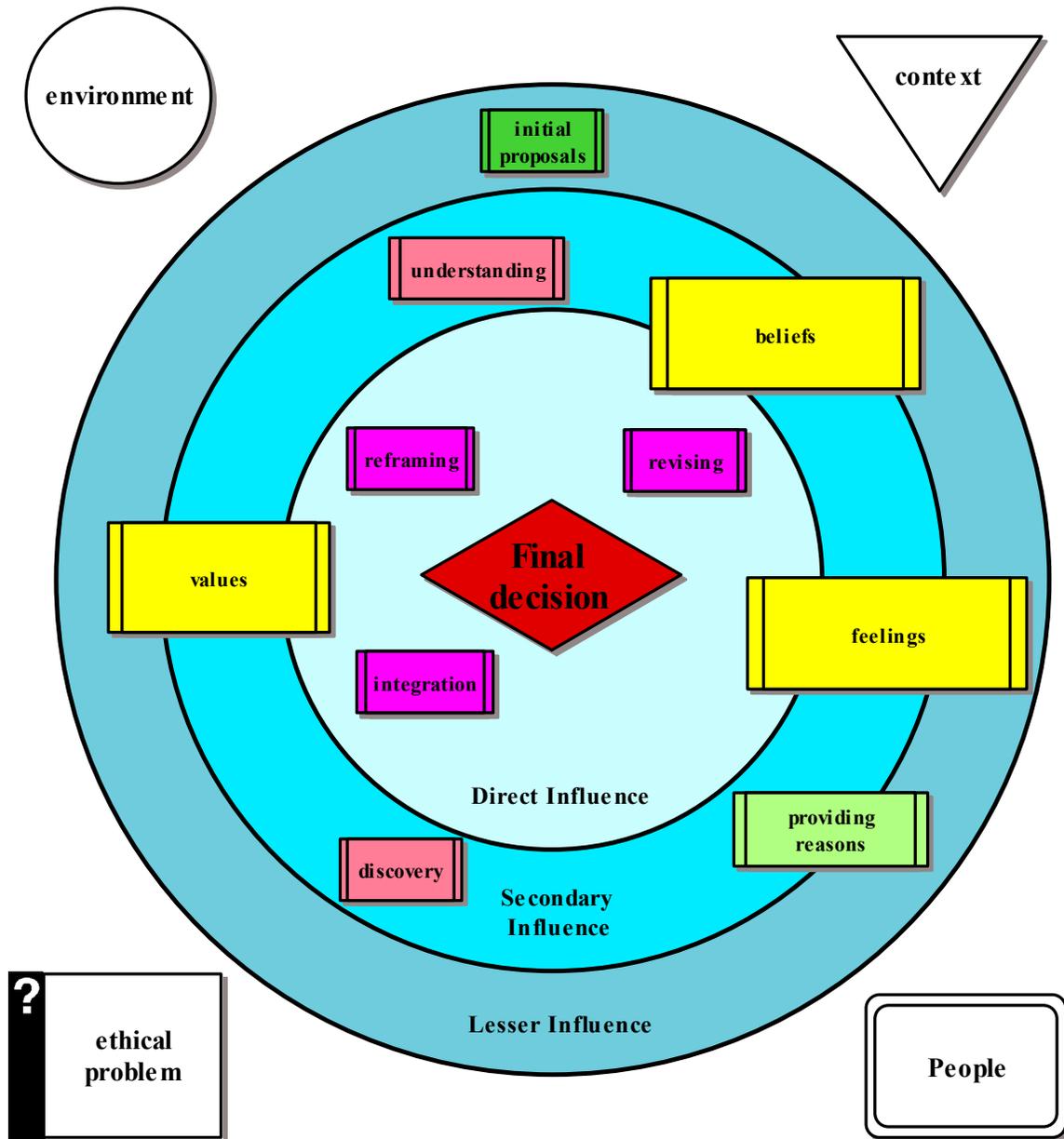
Conversation begins –

- Round 1 – initial proposals
- Round 2 – frame the proposals by providing reasons based on feelings, values, and beliefs
- Round 3 – discussion continues, based on discovery of others’ points of views, with the purpose of understanding reasons given by others
- Round 4 – discussion continues with a focus to reframe and or revise proposals with the ultimate goal of coming to a final decision

Feeding back to the system

- A decision to act on the problem is made (that will affect all parts of the system)
- Possible revision of code of ethics dependent on discoveries made in conversation

On the following page is a visual representation of this process.



Appendix B

Conversation Assessment Form

Conversation starter: Ex: Jimmy, who is diagnosed with ADHD yet his parents really do not want him to take any medications, is sabotaging my classroom and the learning that goes on in it with his disruptive behaviour.

Participant _____: My thoughts prior to beginning the conversation (use the back of this page if necessary):

Participant _____: My thoughts at the end of the conversation, including something I learned (use the back of this page if necessary):

“How was our conversation?”

Circle or highlight the number that you feel corresponds to the quality of the conversation we just had. Be honest – this is being used as an assessment to help guide the quality of the conversations we have.

4 Outstanding!	3 Pretty good!	2 So-so...	1 Oops...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <i>One voice talked at a time</i> · We heard from everyone involved · <i>We stayed on topic</i> · We supported our positions by stating our values and beliefs · <i>We listened to the values and beliefs of others</i> · We challenged some assumptions · <i>We learned something with this conversation.</i> · An ethical decision was made 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <i>One voice was heard more than others</i> · A couple of times there were interruptions. · <i>We stayed on topic most of the time.</i> · We supported our positions by stating our values and beliefs some of the time. · <i>We listened to the values and beliefs of others some of the time</i> · We learned something with this conversation · <i>An ethical decision was made</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <i>It got kind of loud because lots of voices were going.</i> · We only heard from a few people. · <i>People couldn't focus on what others were saying because of outside distractions.</i> · We talked about several ideas. · <i>We hardly ever made or listened to statements about our values and beliefs</i> · Not much learning happened. · <i>A decision is not agreed upon yet</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <i>Nobody listened to anybody else's ideas.</i> · We had to stop the conversation.

Adapted from: *Using a Rubric to Improve Literary Conversations*

<http://www.middleweb.com/ReadWrkshp/JK17.html>

Appendix C

A conversation model for ethical decision-making v.2 *A work in progress by Patricia Rosen, April 2005*

Stage 1: Setting the context

- Conversation host gathers the involved parties – if necessary regroup in smaller groups of maximum of 5 people.
- Host emphasizes principles behind the conversation:

“We acknowledge one another as equals

We try to stay curious about each other

We recognize that we need each other’s help to become better listeners

We slow down so we have time to think and reflect

We remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together

We expect it to be messy at times” (Wheatley, 2002, p.29)

- Issue is put on the table by individual(s) hosting the conversation.

Stage 2: Aiming for understanding

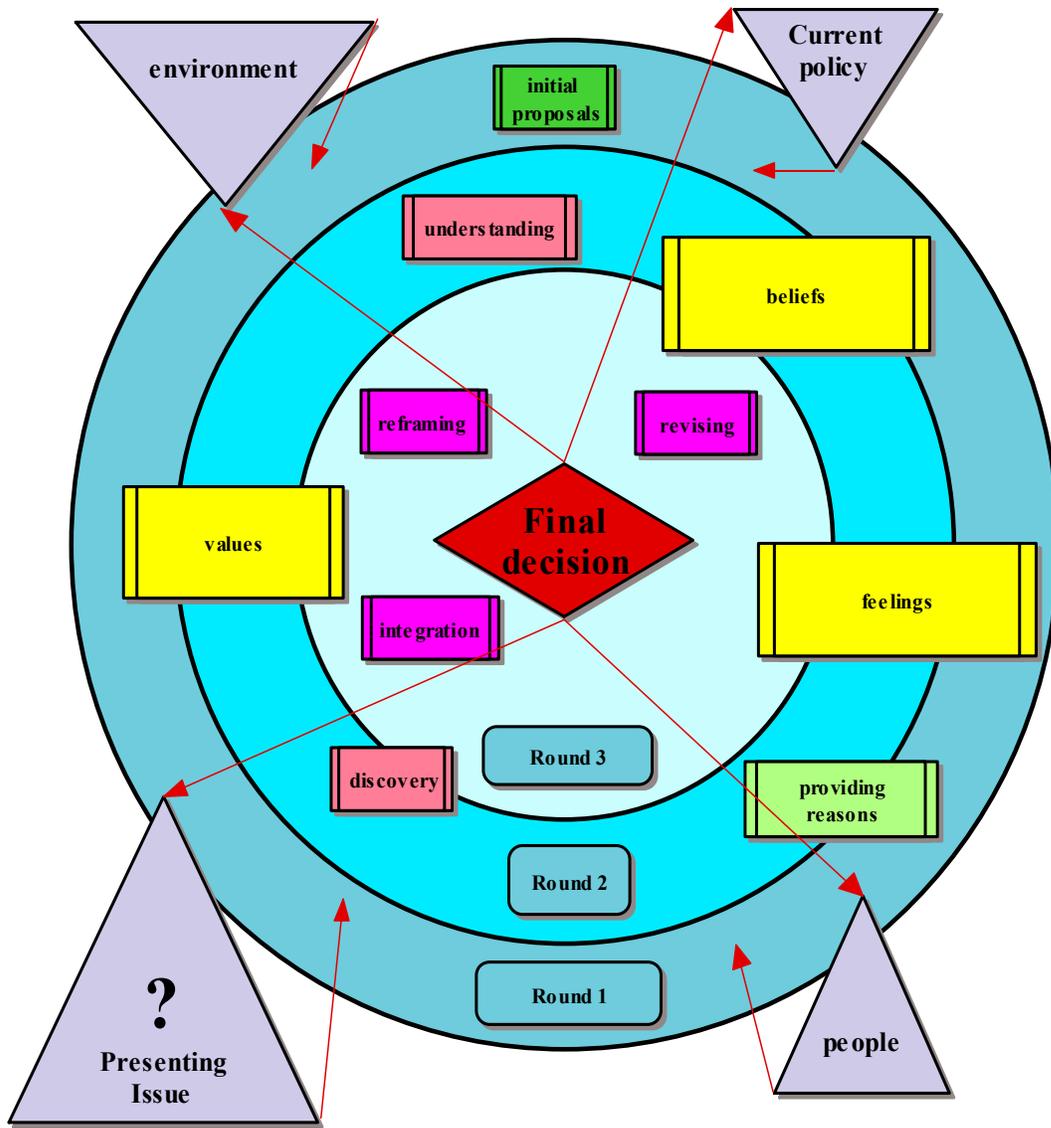
Conversation begins –

- Round 1 – initial proposals
- Round 2 – frame the proposals by providing reasons based on feelings, values, and beliefs
- Round 3 – discussion continues, based on discovery of others’ points of views, with the purpose of understanding reasons given by others
- Round 4 – discussion continues with a focus to reframe and or revise proposals with the ultimate goal of coming to a final decision

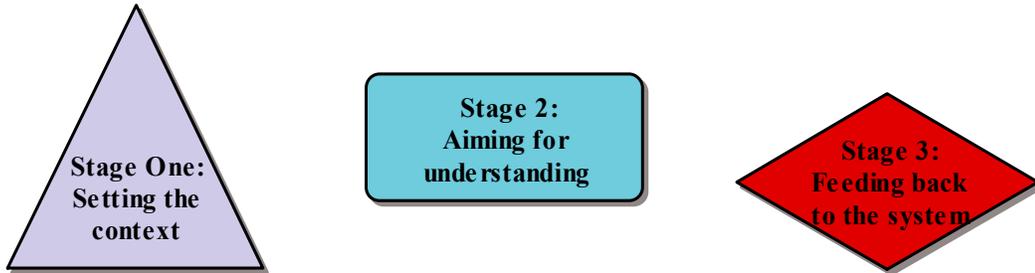
Stage 3: Feeding back to the system

- A decision to act on the issue is made (that will affect all parts of the system)
- Possible revision of “policy” (code of ethics, discipline policy...) dependent on discoveries made in conversation

On the following page is the beginning of a visual representation of this process.



A conversation model for ethical decision-making
Patricia Rosen (2005)



Appendix D

Session 1 notes– July 5, 2005.

Pre model-use

Administrative tasks

- Signed consent forms
- Discussed confidentiality of participants and students who came up in discussion
- Discussed psychologist's availability to participants and provided her phone number

Discussion around model

- Roslyn introduced model and went through each stage
- **Marlena** - this model seems so logical. It solves the problem of communication and reason for discipline (reducing the gap between presenting issue and discipline (or resulting action))
- **Lucille, Marlena, Roslyn** – 3rd party decision-making doesn't work
- **Sam** – third party could be useful, though, for objectivity
- **Marlena** – yes – but only in conjunction with the people involved
- **Marlena** – “this model allows us to dig for information and get to the heart of the matter”
- **Consensus** – using this model will be a lot of work and use a lot of time – At first. Once it is introduced and discussed in a school setting, it can eventually save work and time.
- **Marlena** – What do you mean about the term ‘ethical’? It must be important if you included it in the title. What is ethical decision-making?
- **Roslyn** – for me it is about not making decisions at the drop of a hat. It refers to the need for deliberation and conversation when making decisions about students – vulnerable people....ensuring that decisions are made based on our values...
- **Sam** – so decisions should be made based on our individual values? That doesn't seem right...
- **Roslyn** – well, no. But this model is a forum to discuss our values and beliefs as educators. But since we do not have a teacher's code of ethics in Quebec, perhaps this could be a way to co-create a values system that is fair for students at our school? So that decisions aren't made based on how someone feels at a specific moment in time...

Conversation around how conversations are necessary

- **Lucille** - To see others' perspectives
- **Roslyn** – and seeing others' perspectives can allow me to 'helicopter', to see an issue from above instead of from within one perspective

Conversation around time

- **Consensus** – we need to develop measures to ensure that the conversations do not go on and on and on
- **Sam** – playing the devil's advocate. What would some teacher's say?
 - I don't have time to talk about student issues!
 - By Grade 10 they should know what they need to do.
 - If a student messes up, detention is just fine. I am not wasting my time talking about every student issue that arises.

Ideas that came up around the issue of time

- **Roslyn** – well, since many student issues are similar, we won't need to discuss every student who has an issue at meetings. We can transfer some of the ideas generated when discussing one case to others.
- **Marlena** - We must focus on the topic. The presenter must remain the only presenter.
- **Lucille** – focus on the issue. Don't bring up other issues, or other examples of the same issues
- **Marlena** – that is one of the most frustrating things when we meet about students! Many teachers just keep telling the same stories over and over instead of looking to a solution. It's like they are one-upping each other (who has the worst 'name of student' story.)
- **Roslyn** – yes, we are not sharing war stories! I didn't mean to say that we could talk about a bunch of different students at once; I meant that we should discuss extreme cases and then teachers can glean strategies on their own for use with other students.
- **Lucille** – ok, as long as we focus on the issue!
- **Marlena** – find a 'test question' that a participant can use on his or herself to see if what they are sharing will be helpful
- **Sam** – example – is what I will say bringing the conversation closer to a solution? Am I digressing?
- **Lucille** – perhaps if you can come up with a list of guidelines to follow that are reinforced throughout the conversations, such as what we just discussed
- **Marlena** – and probably they would be enforced a lot at the beginning, but eventually teachers would be used to the structure of these conversations.
- **Roslyn** – We would definitely need them at the beginning, since conversations about students have traditionally followed the sharing war stories pattern. Good idea.

Using the model

Sam – presenting issue: Paul is constantly interrupting everyone in class. He seems to have no self-discipline – he swears A LOT. There isn't much support from mom here; Paul says she's always swearing too! At the beginning of the year he was motivated but ½-way through the year he 'gave up'. He is going into Grade 11 next year and this will be an even bigger problem. He is a leader in class – whether it is in a negative or positive way. Right now his constant interruptions are disrupting my class, and I hear it is the same in other classes as well. I don't know what to do.

Decision made by all to begin filling out conversation assessment forms

- Allows for reflection on topic
 - Allows for authentic recording of initial thoughts, without them getting lost in the conversation
- **Lucille** – Definitely write out thoughts before the conversation begins. That way it focuses the discussion around solutions and helps to keep us on track. It gives time for teachers to really think about the situation.
 - **Consensus** – we should each offer 3-6 points.

Round 1 - We each presented our initial thoughts (they are collated on the assessment form)

Roslyn – hmm...this may be difficult to do (going through the model) because we are all on the same page. [Or, perhaps I mean that the use of the model in this instance will not have the effect I had planned...as when people with differing beliefs would have to come to a decision.]

Round 2 – We pulled out the following beliefs and values based on our initial thoughts ******this could mark a change to the model. Instead of framing the proposals based on feelings, values, and beliefs we could excavate the round 1 data in order to define the values and beliefs that are important for those involved. In that way, looking at our initial thoughts from a different perspective, as a way of confirming whether or not we still believe in them.*

- The student is vitally involved
- Not a top down situation – we can not tell him what to do
- Student needs to take ownership of their situation
- Find out what the student is thinking – student's thoughts, beliefs are important
- Respect for the student – “you are having difficulty in this area, how can I help you keep on track?”
- Creating support for student
- An ethic of care – relationship used to help make decisions - How can I be a support to you?

- We spoke a lot about relationship – not only teacher/'student, but also student/student – Paul tutoring younger students.
- Facilitation of learning rather than teaching.

Round 3 – reflecting on ideas from round 1

- **Sam** - Paul does not often say that he does not understand or that he is overwhelmed
- **Roslyn** – though when he does he is able to, quite clearly, describe when he has stopped 'getting' something
- **Roslyn** – there could be some bravado at work here. He doesn't want to say he doesn't get something because everyone always says how smart he is, it'll make him look weak. Maybe he needs to take fewer classes, like some other students have, so that he can succeed in all of the classes he does take.
- **Marlena** – he is a leader. Not afraid of saying his thoughts, a good thinker.
- **Consensus** – maybe he needs some more time to process info?
- **Roslyn** - Remember his testing – he is diagnosed adhd, which often really means just that (needs more time to process)
- **Roslyn** – essentially, what coping strategies can we offer him?
- **Lucille** – let's prioritize – there seem to be a few issues here
- **Consensus**
 - Self-discipline
 - Confidence
 - Coping strategies if he is overwhelmed
- **Marlena** – “Maybe his behaviours are his red flag of ‘I can't cope’”

Round 4 – reframing, revising proposals

- **Sam** – can Paul write down the things he doesn't understand?
- **Roslyn** – I think definitely!
- **Marlena** – Encourage him to ask questions
- **Sam** – but he disrupts so much already!
- **Marlena** – I see, writing it down will help control his impulsiveness – instead of interrupting he is writing.
- **Roslyn** – and that is him taking ownership of his situation
- **Roslyn** – Let's use Lucille's idea - make out a map of his goals
- **Marlena** – and we should definitely meet with him
- **Sam** – if he is motivated he will work
- **Lucille** – teacher could keep a diary of when he is misbehaving
- **Roslyn** – A lot of people may complain about the extra work
- **Marlena** – Teachers have to show what they are willing to do!

Very interesting conversation about parent involvement!

- **Lucille** – we should meet with the parents
- **Sam** – but often parents' notions about school are 'wrong' – based on bad experiences.

- **Roslyn** – maybe in this situation, because there is no support, maybe we should leave her (mom) out of it until it is necessary to meet with her, ex: if we decide to change his schedule, reduce the workload
- **Lucille and Marlana** are both very hesitant to leave mom out of this...parents must be involved in order for any type of plan to work. We must have the support of parents.
- **Roslyn** – and so far, we don't have a history of support here. If we can't get the support, do we just give up on Paul? Only the students with parents who are 'on board' get our help? That seems wrong to me, and we're left with the fallout in class.
- **Sam** – maybe we can come up with a specific plan of how to help Paul before we meet with his mom?
- **Roslyn** – you mean, meet with Paul?
- **Marlana** – yes, have Paul come up with his plan and have him present it to his mother!
- **Lucille** – She would probably be more welcome to strategies that come from her son than ones that come from his teachers
- **Consensus** – Meet with Paul, talk about our concerns and create a plan with him – mapping out his goals. Then arrange a meeting with him, his mother, and his teachers where he presents his needs to his mother. We would need to come up with a way of evaluating it and a reward.

Post model thoughts...

These are collated on the assessment form...

Consensus – a model is necessary to keep on track and positive. Otherwise conversations can go in circles and become very frustrating. Guidelines and a lot of practice will be needed, but time spent at the beginning will reduce frustrations and time spent later on.

Appendix E

Conversation Assessment

Initial Thoughts:

Sam

This is a tough one. Paul has a long history of problems in school, patterns of behaviour have set in, and his work habits are his work habits. We shouldn't expect a miracle, but we can definitely expect changes. Paul needs to give input on what he can do to succeed, hear input on what we think he needs to do, and have his progress checked periodically.

Marlena

Paul and self-discipline: uniform always messy, language, giving up. He's a star in class.

- Look up books on self-discipline to find strategies
- Meet with him to have him identify his problem areas
- Meet with his parents...and him – 1 step or 2?
- Suggestions – he makes 2
- Parents make 2
- Teachers make 2
- Strategy kit...rewards?
- Anticipated concern – mother's attitude

Lucille

- Paul needs more self-confidence - he has spoken about how nobody ever tells him he's smart
- He needs help getting organized and staying on track
- He should make his goals clear and map out a way of reaching them. That way he sees what he needs to achieve
- I think we need to be strict and consistent but without alienating him
- He could be a helper during lunch with younger students in fields that he is good at to boost his confidence

Roslyn

- Talk with Paul alone after school to find out about the sudden change
- I'd let him know something has to change
- Try to get him back to the beginning of the year (in his head)
- Is he overwhelmed? Do we need to alter his schedule?

Concluding thoughts:

Sam

We got some specific ideas on how to improve the situation, but that wasn't the main benefit. More importantly, we were able to sharpen our ideas of how to go

about the process, how to get Paul and his parents involved, everyone's role, and what we could and shouldn't expect.

Marlena

I learned that there are a variety of ways to help Paul and the suggestions made me optimistic. It also made me think harder and reflect on my role as his teacher, about watching for cues, documenting his behaviour and ways to tackle the situation. New ideas "evolve" as we talked.

Lucille

- It's neat how we used many of the suggestions and built on each other
- We came up with an original plan that probably wasn't what we were expecting
- Most of the discussion was positive and stayed on track

Roslyn

Idea about parents – I was against involving his parents because of a history of a lack of support. I really liked Lucille' and Marlena's perspective of HAVING to involve the parents and the shift towards having Paul present the info to them. I learned to let go of my solutions and hand over power to the student. I also learned that, even though I thought we were all in agreement in terms of beliefs and values, there were some subtle differences that caused a bit of conflict that was worked through in our conversation.

******No one filled out the rubric! (1-4 if it was a good conversation or not) So I would say that it isn't needed, though I would like to include some type of assessment in terms of improvements for the future...perhaps an open ended statement about one thing that could be done differently, or that was missing?*

Appendix F

A conversation model for ethical decision-making v3 *A work in progress by Patricia Rosen, Summer 2005*

Stage 1: Setting the context

- Conversation host gathers the involved parties
- Host emphasizes principles and guidelines for the conversation:
 - “We acknowledge one another as equals
We try to stay curious about each other
We recognize that we need each other’s help to become better listeners
We slow down so we have time to think and reflect
We remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together
We expect it to be messy at times” (Wheatley, 2002, p.29)
 - Remain focused on the issue at hand
 - *Remember* – we are here to help the original presenter find a solution
 - Do not bring up other, similar issues or stories
 - *Ask yourself* - is what I will say bringing the conversation closer to a solution? Am I digressing?
- The presenting issue and context is put on the table by individual(s) hosting the conversation
- Individual reflection
 - Write out initial proposals on presenting issue
 - Offer 3-6 ideas, comments, solutions, recommendations...

Stage 2: Aiming for understanding

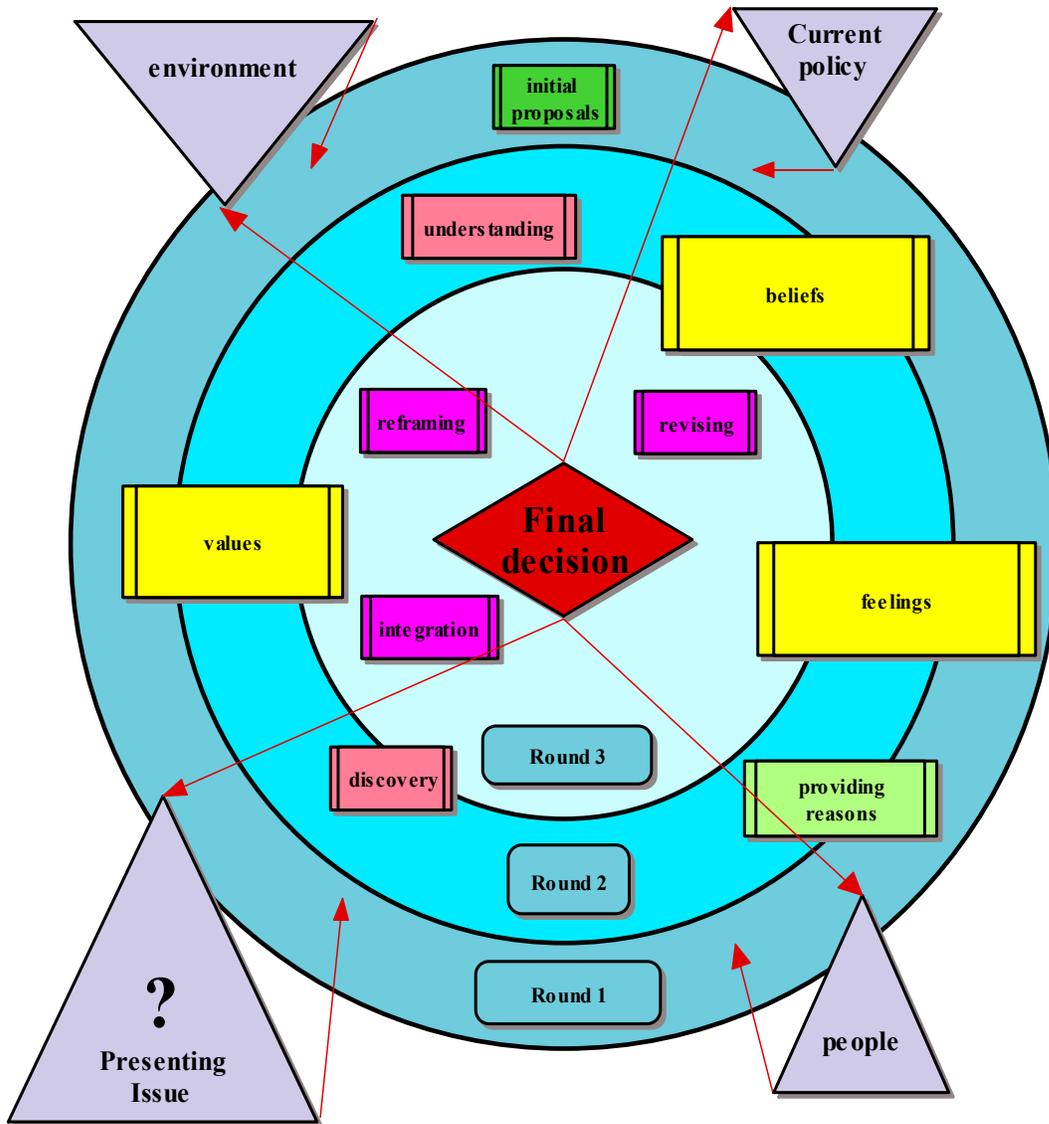
Conversation begins –

- Round 1 – initial proposals
- Round 2 – analyse proposals given to uncover values and beliefs behind them
- Round 3 – discussion continues, based on discovery of others’ points of views, with the purpose of understanding reasons given by others
- Round 4 – discussion continues with a focus to reframe and or revise proposals with the ultimate goal of coming to a final decision

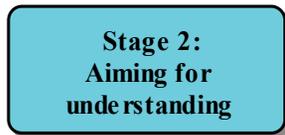
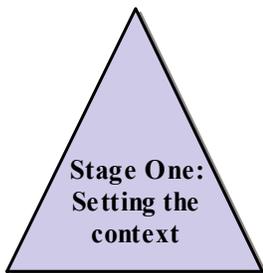
Individual reflection – write down thoughts at the end of the conversation, include something learned. Is there anything that can be done differently?

Stage 3: Feeding back to the system

- A decision to act on the problem is made (that will affect all parts of the system)
- Possible revision of school policy dependent on discoveries made in conversation



A conversation model for ethical decision-making
Patricia Rosen (2005)



Appendix G

Action Research for CMEDM - Session 2

Stage 1: Setting the context

Presenting Issue and context

Marcia

Max seems to zone out in math class then walks out without saying anything – usually when I am helping someone else so I don't notice right away.

He has a history of zoning out when being taught new concepts in math and this has become worse since Christmas.

There has been talk of school anxiety (I think even a diagnosis) and he is supposed to go see the school psychologist when he feels anxious.

He says he goes to the school psychologist, but often he does not. We have discovered that he spends the period in the bathroom.

I have tried the following:

Physical proximity – calming him down by putting a hand on his shoulder

Talking outside of class – told him he needs to let me know when and where he is going.

Personal reflection (Initial thoughts)

We took 5-10 minutes to reflect and record our initial thoughts re: the presenting issue. These are presented in *round 1* of Stage 2.

Stage 2: Aiming for understanding

Conversation begins –

- Round 1 – initial proposals

Roslyn

Create a designated space for Max to go to with a form to fill in, or a letter he needs to write explaining his absence.

Sign an agreement with Max – a contract about his responsibilities in math

Partner Max with another student – they are responsible for each other.

THOUGH – Max is kind of a loner and he is very concerned with appearing different so maybe the whole class could be divided up into 'study buddies'...

Pre-teach new concepts – with a good, knowledgeable tutor

Marcia

He could have a card to leave on my desk if he needs to leave class without disturbing me

He needs to find ways to self-monitor and then deal with his anxiety

Question – does he have this problem in other classes?

Max needs a firmer hand guiding him

I'm wondering if he takes advantage of his situation

Lucille

He needs more self confidence and independence - There are stress issues

He needs to give a warning to the teacher before he gets panicked

He could work on coping strategies

Maybe have a 'safe' spot in the classroom?

Does he ask questions when he doesn't understand? (no)

He works well in music, although he also seems tired. Could there be issues at home in terms of lifestyle?

Sam

Is this just on bad days?

Is Max succeeding anyways? If so, maybe this is less of a problem than it seems.

Could he write a note with time of departure? Tell someone?

Does he work well with someone else? Could he sit with them?

Break down the work for him, give him deadlines.

- Round 2 – discussion continues, based on discovery of others' points of views, with the purpose of understanding reasons given by others

Roslyn

Marcia, you mentioned that Max needs to find a way to self-monitor. I am wondering if Max can do this. Can he self-monitor? I always thought some of his issues come from the fact that he can not.

Lucille

But he needs to be responsible in class. He can't just wander out – Marcia needs to know where he is.

Roslyn

I agree – but I don't think we can put the onus on Max. This can increase his school anxiety.

Roslyn

Is he on meds?

Marcia

Yes, and he is drowsy because of it.

Marcia

We need to support him in becoming more responsible and he needs to learn the concepts in Math. Is he the same in other classes?

Lucille

He likes music and works hard – though like I said earlier he is tired quite often.

Sam

He is the same in English. When I introduced new assignments –like the layered curriculum assignment – he just stared at it. I had to chunk the assignments down for him, give him deadlines. But he does well, so it is not as much of a problem.

- Round 3 – analyse proposals given to uncover values and beliefs behind them

Roslyn

So, if we look at our proposals...what are the underlying values? Why do we think our suggestions are 'right'?

Sam

Well, we want to support his weaknesses

Marcia

At the same time as increasing his responsibilities

Lucille

Like giving him crutches to help him walk

Marcia

I think there is also the value of student safety. I need to know where he is.

Roslyn

During our last session, we had a strong discussion about parental involvement. It's interesting that it wasn't brought up at all in our proposals. What is the underlying reason for that do you think?

Lucille

You're right. For some reason it didn't seem to apply here.

Marcia

Yeah. We need to do our job first, as teachers. All of these proposals have to do with the educational environment. My job is to create an environment where Max can learn. Once we go through some of these and use them with Max, at that point, if there is still an issue, we would need to go to this parents and I can say, this is what I have done so far.

Roslyn

Though, if we decide to go with pre-teaching or something like that..

Sam

Then we'd have to contact the parents.

- Round 4 – discussion continues with a focus to reframe and or revise proposals with the ultimate goal of coming to a final decision

Roslyn

Let's go back to our initial proposals, what can be done?

Marcia

The buddy idea can be done. I used to do that with other classes. I liked that a lot. Creating a designated space in the classroom is not really viable for the coming year – there will be 18 kids and there won't be enough space.

Roslyn

What about using a baffle? Max is quite unique – he hates to look different, but I have come to understand that his idea of different is very different from ours! He would totally work behind a baffle if he were freaking out and didn't want others to see him.

Lucille

Like a little kid – I can't see you so you can't see me

Roslyn

Exactly! Or, what if his safe space was another teacher's classroom? Like Sam's? I used to do that all the time with Bob O., a lot of us did. It worked great.

Lucille

They do it all the time in the elementary school. This way the student isn't wasting time sitting at the office, or waiting to talk to The school psychologist. They are getting work done.

Sam

We do that sometimes – that would be fine with me.

Marcia

And we're having a new house system, where students will have advisors within their houses.

Roslyn

We could even get Max to choose, of the teachers who will be in his house, who is the best choice. We'd have to then make a schedule.

Marcia

Yes, so he knows where to go during Math class.

Lucille

And then he should still fill out a card before going, and maybe a check-in of some sorts at the other class.

Roslyn

And work waiting for him – review work, whatever, at the other class.

Marcia

I agree.

Roslyn

I think pre-teaching will be necessary. He'll miss the concepts with this plan.

Lucille

When would you do it, Marcia. In the mornings?

Sam

Max is usually in pretty early.

Marcia

Oh, I don't know if I would do it. I have to cut back a bit. I'm doing so much. We'd have to get him a tutor.

Roslyn

A tutor who really know what they are doing – not just a student.

Marcia

definitely

Lucille

At this point in our last session, I think we started to prioritize and come up with a plan.

Sam

How do we come to consensus? Who finally decides what to do when? I'm imagining a group of teachers trying to decide on what must be done. It worked last time, but what about when people can't come to consensus.

Roslyn

Good question...I think, ultimately, it's the teacher who presented the issue who will decide on what to take or not. None of us can force a teacher to do something in her classroom!

Lucille

And Marcia has already done that – with the proposal of creating a safe space in the classroom. She said it couldn't work in her classroom, so she makes the final decision.

Roslyn

Yeah, I'm reminded of Margaret Wheatley and how she writes that conversation is how people naturally think together. This model is becoming a way to help the original teacher think through a problem.

Sam

Ok – so it is up to the teacher, finally, to decide on things.

Lucille

Yeah, I think we are here to help her think, and to learn things that we can use as well. So, let's prioritize.

Sam

Marcia will contact the parents about a tutor and pre-teaching

Roslyn

And let them know it is necessary for success – not an option.

Marcia

Oh definitely. He will not be able to succeed without this.

Marcia

I will have a buddy system for the whole class. And talk with Max about a designated safety zone, and the teacher he will go to.

Roslyn

We'll have to make a plan for this with Max. And a schedule.

Lucille

How will we follow up on this?

Sam

Well, he'll continue his weekly meetings with the school psychologist.

Lucille

Could he meet with you, Marcia? That way it seems less disjointed.

Roslyn

I think that's a fabulous idea. He can still have his meetings with the school psychologist, but I think meeting with his math teacher about his math plan makes more sense.

Marcia

Oh sure, we meet quite often already. That's fine.

Individual reflection – write down thoughts at the end of the conversation, include something learned. Is there anything that can be done differently?

Roslyn

- It only took an hour!
- And we still spoke quite a bit about process
- We came up with a doable solution
- Question about determining consensus - Realization that host is ultimately responsible for taking or neglecting recommendations, and we are helping her to think. We are there to help her think.

Sam

- We're getting better
- It's hard to think of everything, others' insights helped

Lucille

It's neat that the form of the discussion and the solutions were different than the last meeting.

- It's also great leaving and knowing we have come up with a plan

Marcia – had to leave before writing this down. [liked the fact we came up with an action plan, enjoyed the process]

For the purposes of this study, Stage 3 is not being explored

Appendix H

A conversation model for ethical decision-making v4 *A work in progress by Patricia Rosen, Summer 2005*

Stage 1: Setting the context

- Conversation host gathers the involved parties into small groups (4-6)
- Host emphasizes principles and guidelines for the conversation:
 - “We acknowledge one another as equals
We try to stay curious about each other
We recognize that we need each other’s help to become better listeners
We slow down so we have time to think and reflect
We remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together
We expect it to be messy at times” (Wheatley, 2002, p.29)
 - Remain focused on the issue at hand
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 - Do not bring up other, similar issues or stories
 - *Ask yourself* - is what I will say bringing the conversation closer to a solution? Am I digressing?
- The presenting issue and context is put on the table by individual(s) hosting the conversation
- Individual reflection
 - Write out initial proposals on presenting issue
 - Offer 3-6 ideas, comments, solutions, recommendations...

Stage 2: Aiming for understanding

Conversation begins –

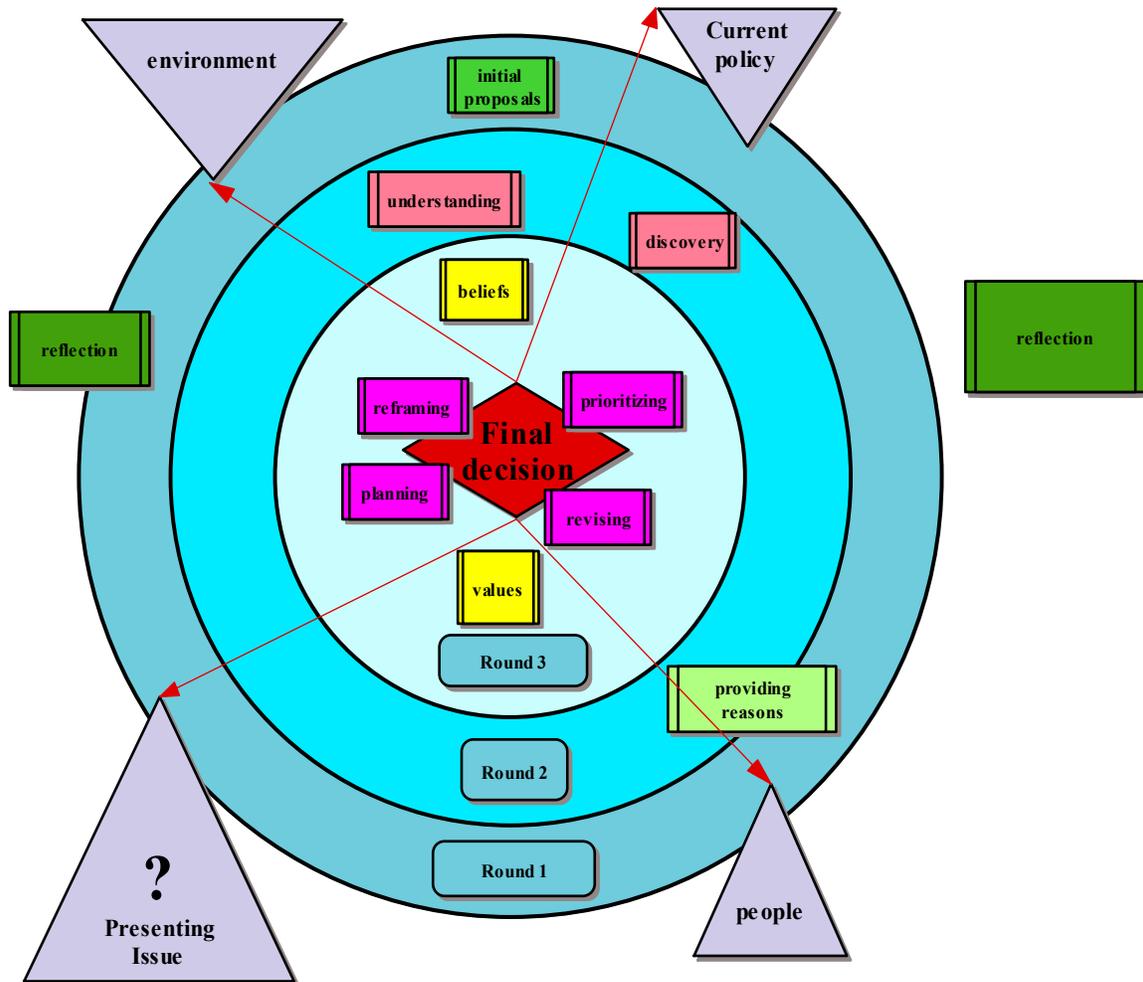
- Round 1 – initial proposals
- Round 2 – discussion continues, based on discovery of others’ points of views, with the purpose of understanding reasons given by others
- Round 3 – analyse proposals given to uncover values and beliefs behind them
- Round 4 – discussion continues with a focus to prioritize proposals with the ultimate goal of coming to a final decision and creating an action plan

Individual reflection – write down thoughts at the end of the conversation, include something learned. Is there anything that can be done differently?

Stage 3: Feeding back to the system

- A decision to act on the problem is made (that will affect all parts of the system)
- Possible revision of school policy dependent on discoveries made in conversation

For the purposes of this project, Stage 3 will NOT be investigated.



Conversations for ethical decision-making v.4
Patricia Rosen (2005)

