In this paper I explore an instance from my own elementary school science teaching. The goal of this teaching is constructivist in nature. The children explore the science together and through conversation with each other and with the teacher construct meaning. The individuality of the child and the individual's abilities to work within a group are both extremely important to the workings of this type of class. Maintaining both of these facets of the classroom environment — where children can act as individuals but also as part of a group — is often contradictory and always filled with tension for the teacher. The role of the teacher is to maintain this tension and to do so in such a manner that it remains both a progressive force and a creative one in learning. This role presents a number of dilemmas for the teacher — how to construct these experiences so that all children can participate and contribute, how to reward both individual and group actions, and how to maintain control in a classroom where freedom is important. I present an argument in this paper describing why these dilemmas must remain unresolved in the class — it is the tension between the individual and group needs and desires that causes the classroom to act as a community. Individuals need each other and the group for the development and enhancement of ideas. Maintaining individuality is a source of creativity balanced by the considered evaluation of the group. But these two forces also potentially are at odds. Balancing the two falls to the teacher as does maintaining the tension between them.

In this paper I will argue that there is an inherent dilemma in constructivist teaching between serving the needs of the individual child and that of the class. As a teacher I am fundamentally concerned with the learning of each child. But by being committed to social constructivist learning processes in my classroom (Prawat 1989, Driver et al. 1994) I am equally concerned with the actions of the group. These two concerns are mutually dependent upon one another. The things that a group does, their new ideas and directions, are determined by the contributions of individuals. Enabling individuals to contribute to their fullest implies that I must balance controlling children's actions and the outcomes of those actions while enabling free, open-ended exploration and expression.

There is an increasing body of literature in educational studies in which practising teachers examine issues in teaching using stories told from their own experience (Paley 1979, 1981, 1992, Lampert 1985, Lensmire 1994, Ball 1993a, b, c). This approach has the advantage of telling tales of teaching which capture the complexity of teaching. Teaching involves
acting within multiple domains concerning the child, the subject matter and the context simultaneously (Kerr 1981, Shulman 1986). Often acting within one domain causes conflicts with others (Ball 1993b, Lensmire 1993). In the story that follows I explore such a conflict.

I present an argument in this paper for why such dilemmas must remain unresolved in the class. It is the tensions between individual and group needs and desires, and the tensions between domains of the child, the subject matter and the context, that makes the classroom explorations and subsequent conversations about the science progressive and creative. I will present the body of this argument through an examination of a story of the classroom, a story which illustrates the role of the individual in a group in the constructivist classroom and the role of the teacher in balancing this dilemma.

This is a story about how the contributions of a particular child affect the entire class. This story concerns behaviour: how certain disruptive behaviour can be both creative and destructive, how a child's behaviour cannot be divorced from subject matter concerns. In choosing in this story to tolerate or punish a child's behaviour, I, as teacher, affect both the one child, the whole group and what we are doing in the subject matter.

This story is also about my thinking about this child, his behaviour and about my goals for the classroom as a whole. My goal in telling this story is to raise the issue of the connection between children's behaviour and the curriculum. I wish to argue from the perspective of the teacher that issues of classroom 'management' are tied to those of curriculum and that to 'manage' a classroom so that behavioural problems disappear might have unwanted repercussions for curriculum. Such an observation is not new. McNeil (1988) and others (Waller 1932, Cusick, 1973) have noted that teachers can sacrifice controversial content in order to maintain classroom control. What I am arguing is that in choosing to teach in ways that engage the children imaginatively and emotionally, one invites behavioural 'problems'. In doing so I create an unresolvable dilemma – there are some behaviours I cannot tolerate.

Recent writing on the dilemmas of teaching have emphasized that these are inherent, unresolvable and endemic (Lampert 1985, Ball 1993a). They arise from the competing demands and uncertainties within which a teacher works (Dewey 1902, Lortie 1975, Jackson 1986, Shulman 1987). Teachers are responsible to multiple masters arising from the domains – learner, subject matter, context – of which Shulman and Dewey speak. Often these demands are at odds. As Lampert and Ball point out, the teacher 'brings many contradictory aims to each instance of her work, and the resolution of their dissonance cannot be neat or simple' (Lampert 1985:181). Rather, Lampert argues, the teacher ends up 'juggling' these multiple demands, never permanently resolving dilemmas in one direction or another. Thus, instead of advocating a solution to the dilemma I raise between imposing disciplined social behaviour and permitting freedom of behaviour (and hence ideas) in the science we are learning, I wish to use this story to muse on the creative potential in maintaining the tension inherent in such a dilemma.


The Context

This story is constructed from data I gathered during the course of a three-year study (1990–93). During this time, I taught science in a public elementary school which serves primarily the children of married students at Michigan State University. (In this paper, I have given all the children pseudonyms which preserve as much as possible an indication of their culture.) The classes in which I worked were a first grade, a first and second grade combination, and a third grade. These classes each had approximately 20 children. Classes took place three times a week and ran from an hour to an hour and a half in length. Usually half an hour was given to whole class discussion of ideas and findings.

These classroom discussions were usually teacher-centred – I determined who would talk and usually what about. To do this I required the children to raise their hands and be recognized by me before they could speak. Often a child gave a semi-formal presentation of an idea or of some item and then the procedure was that they controlled the conversation, again semi-formally – children who wanted to ask questions or make comments raised their hands and were recognized by the speaker. Classroom discussions in the first and first–second grade combination usually occurred in a 'learning circle' – the children and I would sit in a circle at the front of the room. These discussions almost always, though, became conversations in which the children directly addressed each other rather than waiting for my recognition to talk. These free conversations were punctuated by my taking the control back and choosing who would talk. So discussions would usually start with me posing a question or asking for a description, calling on a number of children until this pattern broke down into a freer discussion. I would allow this discussion to go on for a few minutes and then I would stop conversation and return to my initial pattern of calling on people.

Cory

I had a child in my second grade science class I had also had in first grade so he and I knew each other pretty well. I'm going to call him Cory. Cory was a bit of a problem. He was a very active and energetic eight-year-old boy. He was fun and funny, emotionally sensitive and selfish, creative and destructive. He was fearless physically, and in his interactions with others. He was a leader – others loved to be around him (including me). He was easily bored, but when his attention was caught, he would work at something for hours and his enthusiasm for what he was doing was contagious. He could handle more than one occupation at a time, including, but not limited to, carrying on a science discussion with me and the whole class, different private conversations with children sitting next to him, kicking the person across from him and playing with something (anything) in his desk. Turning your back on him could be quite dangerous: at one moment, he would be carefully and precisely measuring the height of the plants that his science group was growing and conversing about growth
differences with other children; at the next moment, he was demonstrating karate kicks at the back of the room.

Let me give an example. During the year that he and I were in first grade, I taught a unit on scientific theory-making, focusing on dinosaurs. As part of this unit, the class examined various sources of information about dinosaurs and prehistoric life. These included trade books presenting 'factual material' about dinosaurs and fictional material in which scientific ideas were interwoven with fantasy. I wanted the class to think about and discuss what they thought might be real in these books and what was not. Most particularly, I wanted the class to think hard about why they thought these things might be real.

We started by talking about the movie, *The Land Before Time* (Spielberg *et al.* 1988), which the children had just viewed. I asked the children what they thought were real or stretched truths about dinosaurs in that movie. The children said things like, 'Dinosaurs are real', and 'They did lay eggs'. But Claire, a little girl in the class, disagreed with this generalization. 'Only some laid eggs', she claimed. Bulli, another girl, confirmed this and added in turn: 'Well there was a big dinosaur but it also ate dinosaurs'. Claire responded: 'Yeah, Tyrannosaurus Rex [she growls and shows her teeth].' Each time they said these things I challenged their statements: 'How do you know that, though?' Finally, Tatyana responded to one of my questions: 'Um, in *The Land Before Time*, fairy tales were real'. Many in the class vigorously disagree.

*Teacher:* Fairy tales were real in *The Land Before Time* . . . Is that what you just said?

*Maria Theresa:* But magic wasn't real.

*Teacher:* You don't think magic was real?

*Bulli:* Magic was real.

*Teacher:* Magic was real? [Lots of talking and debating starts up.] What do people think about what Tatyana just said? I think that was an interesting comment and Maria Theresa doesn't agree with her. Tatyana said that in *The Land Before Time*, fairy tales were real and Maria Theresa says that even in *The Land Before Time* magic wasn't real. What do people think about that? Do you think that a long, long time ago magic was real and fairy tales were real? [Nos and yeses.] Paula doesn't. Do you Kyong Min?

Kyong Min says that she doesn't while others continue to agree with Maria Theresa. Finally Cory says that he thinks that some magic was real. I press him, asking what magic he thought was real.

*Cory:* People coming alive! There are, um, if we weren't there, then who would be? We were magic because . . . there was nobody in the world and there's nobody in the world if no people were there and it's got [to be] . . . it was magic 'cause some people came alive!

*Teacher:* Ahhh, you mean because there became people . . . there weren't people in the old days and then there were people so therefore there had to be magic?

*Cory:* Yeah . . . yeah . . .

Cory is speculating on the origins of man; how can there be people when there weren't people to begin with? His comment is insightful and
imaginative. It indicates the degree to which Cory engages in the spirit of the science we are exploring. It is really interesting and exciting to me when children talk about their awareness, their contemplations, and their attempts at sense-making of mysterious things. This perception and appreciation of the mysterious is part of what causes people to become scientists, writers, poets.

Missing from the narrative, though, is that just before this exchange I had disciplined Cory twice for disrupting the conversation by imitating the fierceness of Tyrannosaurus Rex. When Tatyana made her comment about magic, Cory was one of the loudest in disagreeing with her. This was especially problematic because it had personal overtones and edged on disrespect of a person’s (Tatyana’s) genuinely expressed ideas – something that I won’t tolerate. I had to specifically ask Cory to stop yelling at this point in the class. Fifteen minutes after this excerpt, I sent Cory to the principal’s office, again for disrupting the class.

We had started discussing whether or not dinosaurs take care of their young. The children seemed inclined to think that they did but I challenged this assumption, reminding them that some other animals did not. Quite a lively debate started up concerning crocodiles, turtles and various birds, all of whom lay eggs but not all of whom care for their young. At the mention of crocodiles Cory and Chen began to giggle and imitate scenes from the movie *Crocodile Dundee* (1985). In general, I am willing to tolerate quite a lot of side conversations as long as they are not disruptive because I find that often important ideas come out of them. I asked the two children to stop when Cory stood and shot Chen across the room with his finger. Not only did this seem disruptive to me but I also find this sort of play personally repellent. Cory, though, continued an undercurrent of his conversation with Chen throughout the following discussion.

I introduced a theory to the class:

I’ll tell you a theory that I heard. And this is complicated so you have to listen close. What I heard is that different dinosaurs are different. Some dinosaurs take care of their babies and some dinosaurs don’t. And what I heard, which I think is very interesting, I have heard that the big dinosaurs like brontosaurus or tyrannosaurus . . . [Kojo interrupts to correct me, ‘Tyrannosaurus Rex!] . . . Tyrannosaurus Rex, those guys, the great big dinosaurs, they were the ones that took care of their babies.’

This statement catches everybody’s attention.

I’ll tell you why . . . oh, and the little dinosaurs didn’t take care of their babies . . . and I’ll tell you why. This is the theory that I’ve heard. I’m not saying that it is true or not. I’m just telling you what I’ve heard. I heard that all dinosaurs, *all dinosaurs*, whether they were great big dinosaurs as big as buildings or just little tiny dinosaurs, *all dinosaurs*, had about the same size babies. So even if it was a brontosaurus baby, it was this big. [I hold my hands up about eight inches apart.] And even if it was just a little tiny dinosaur it was still about this big. The babies were about the same size. And so because great big dinosaurs, they were born this size, they had to grow up to be great big dinosaurs, the parents took care of them a lot longer. That’s what I’ve heard. What do you think of that?
I turn and make a face at Cory who is once again talking to Chen. The children start debating my idea. Tatyana says that it should be the other way around. That little dinosaurs should take care of their babies because they’ll be more likely to die and big dinosaurs don't need to worry about it.

Cory: Uh, I disagree! The little dinosaurs can just take care of their selves. But the big dinosaurs, they take care of their babies. But I know why the little dinosaurs don’t . . . because the big dinosaurs, if they find them, they’ll eat them. So that’s why they go and hide and leave their babies there.

Teacher: Oh, because it's more dangerous for them because they might be eaten? Huh, that's pretty interesting.

Cory has just made another very interesting new extension to the logic of our argument. Tatyana, though, argues back,

The big dinosaur doesn't, the big dinosaur really cares about their babies 'cause the big dinosaur hides them in the cave not to be dead and the medium ones don't care about the babies because they are really kind of big but they think that they are small, that’s why they don't care about their babies until they grow.

Kojo also disagrees with Cory. Um, I wanted to say that one of you guys are wrong, one of you are wrong. I think Cory's all wrong. Quite a few dinosaurs don't take very good care of their babies.' I asked him why he thought that. Kojo replied, 'Because they leave their babies to look for food, then something might happen. They might be in danger, tyrannosaurus might kill everything!' Then Chen speaks, agreeing that dinosaurs might have to leave their babies to fend for themselves in order to avoid predators. This might be temporary though – they might still return at times to care for their young.

Chen: They take care of the babies. They have to run away from the other dinosaurs that will kill them.

Tatyana: I disagree!

Cory: I disagree!

Well, now Chen and Cory were arguing in the class discussion as well as carrying on their other discussion about Crocodile Dundee. I asked the two boys to quiet down, to sit down, and when I saw Cory shooting Chen with his finger again, I finally sent him to the office to call his parents (an arrangement that the school had made at the last parent-teacher conference). 'Cory, go to the office and call your dad, that's one too many times that you've done that, go.' I started to summarize the various arguments because I wanted other children in the class to be able to respond.

Okay, I told a story about something that some scientists think. Some scientists think that some kinds of mother and father dinosaurs took care of their babies and in particular it was the big dinosaurs that took care of their babies rather than the small ones and Tatyana said that she thought that it would make more sense if the small ones took care of their babies because the babies need to be taken care of more because they were little. And Cory said that he thought it was much more likely that the small ones didn’t take care of
their babies because the small ones needed to hide and they couldn't stay around the nest, watching after the babies because they might get eaten.

But without Cory to respond and participate, adding his innovative ideas which so often stimulated others' thoughts, the discussion felt empty and petered out.

A Teacher Comments

Cory is very insightful, observant and knowledgeable about the way things work. He is curious and enthusiastic. He is happy to talk and I love and need for him to talk in my class – he says really helpful and stimulating things that the others hear and we use to challenge ideas and move our discussions along to new things. But in order for that to happen he has to speak when it's appropriate: when other children are ready to hear. He is speaking not just for himself but also for the sake of others. To get him to do this I have to walk a fine line allowing him to misbehave so that I don't squash him and disciplining him into talking and acting only when I want him to. This is very hard and very obvious to me with Cory because he is so ebullient but I think that the same tension between being an individual and being a member of a group is true for every person in the class. For example, the quiet children – are they really participating in their heads or are they someplace else? In this sort of environment in teaching, where I am dependent upon children taking a chance and thinking out loud, I can't force participation for when a child does speak, they are speaking as an individual and they have gone public with their individuality. This requires a lot of trust. I have to wait for that trust to develop because it's a trust in self as well as a trust in others.

In thinking, writing, teaching in this manner, I am developing my own critical consciousness; becoming aware of some of my own moral and ethical choices because they are confronted by instances of this paradox of the individual and the group in my teaching. What I tolerate from Cory and what I don't allow become conscious choices because reacting to his bad behaviour can have such negative effects on the curriculum, the teaching and the learning of that class. But, conversely, I need to suppress some of Cory's behaviour so that he can participate in a group, hear and understand the things that others contribute. This is not an argument to resolve that paradox of the individual in the group. Asking Cory to leave the classroom did momentarily resolve the paradox but that meant the end of a very good discussion. We all lost when I did this.

Restraining Cory, containing him, giving him free rein – these are all continuous tensions in my class. Cory is an extremely important part of my science instruction. The insights that he gives me and his peers in science are invaluable as is his contagious participation in various tasks. Teaching him to 'act correctly' in class is a paradox. Do I mean for him to be 'on task', doing things I tell him to, do his work as a part of a group, or be his ebullient, individualistic self? Both components are important both for him, individually, and for the whole of the class.
Discussion

My goal in teaching is constructivist in nature – that the children explore the science together and construct meaning through conversation with each other and with the teacher (Hawkins 1974a, Osborne and Wittrock 1985, Duckworth 1987). In my ideal we, as a class, construct a community focused by our study of science. At the core of such a community are people talking together about shared questions, profiting from differences and similarities (Schwab 1976). This is the essence of a community – people interacting with each other for a purpose, out of a need for the unique contributions that only other members can make (Sartre 1963, Bellah et al. 1985). Such a community is vital: it can grow, change, shift focus and direction. It is bound together by member’s similarities and differences. The individuals' uniqueness and their capacity to work within a group are both necessary to the workings of this type of class.

In teaching science in a socially constructed manner I am dependent upon the ideas and the creativity of each child. New thoughts and directions come from the children, as well as from me. Each child must feel comfortable and free to pursue their ideas and to express them to the group. Maintaining both facets of the classroom environment – where children can act as individuals but also as part of a group is at times contradictory and always filled with tension for the teacher. It is the differences in perspective which constitute individuality shared that drive the development of a community – the children share their ideas about the science, both learning from each other and from the process of sharing. This depends upon the children acting as individuals in formulating their concepts and in speaking them. It is also dependent upon the individual's ability to act as a member of a group. The individual needs the group for the development of their ideas.

In such a classroom the roles children take on – how they act and interact – must be self-generated. Likewise the science that we do, the questions and the form those questions take, are also emergent. The application of pre-defined roles and the careful structuring of tasks for effective group practice (Cohen 1986, Noddings 1989) do not fit. The comfort (for the teacher) of the discipline imposed by such arrangements are unavailable. Rather the teacher is left with the nebulous desire to impose certain ways of behaving and trying to guide the content of interactions in more powerful directions.

I argue that the classroom community is shaped both by the ways that I encourage the children to interact with each other (respect for each other and each other's ideas) and by the children's engagement with the science. Both are intertwined and interdependent. There is an idealistic way of thinking that tends to emphasize the latter – that it is the sense of shared purpose in the subject matter that enables the construction of ways of interacting. This is not entirely true; the community of the classroom is dynamic, its purposes and focuses shift and reshape themselves as our explorations evolve. The constant is the way I wish the children would interact with each other. Because I ask the children to act in a certain way (and they usually comply), the focus of the community can change without
the community dissolving. The children value each other and so they value expressions of new ideas. These ideas become new purposes for both individuals and the group as more and more children explore them. But this goes in the other direction also – because the community reflects differences as well as similarities it is beset by centripetal as well as centrifugal forces. The teacher must act to balance the two.

Joseph Schwab has commented upon the centripetal and centrifugal forces which shape the classroom. In his paper `Education and the state: learning community' (1976) he talks about the role of the home and of the school in moral education. The role of the home is to represent differences in ideas, beliefs and moral choices. The role of the school is to represent the choices of the larger community. The latter is what allows the individuals within a community to live together. The former enables the collective to grow and change, and not stagnate within one world-view. As he (1976: 243) writes:

The two together, however – centripetal school, centrifugal homes – should give us neither a dangerous homogeneity nor the divisiveness and faction threatened by exclusive hegemony of differing homes. Home balanced by school would yield diversity of perspectives and propensities toward action. School balanced by home would yield appreciation of the uses and advantages of diversity and would confer communication and collaboration among the diverse. A communicating, collaborative diversity of perspectives and propensities would yield satisfactions in the very acts of communication and collaboration, as well as material advantages perceptible to those involved. Such satisfactions and advantages are the essential nutrients of community.

These two forces and their analogous sources are present within a classroom. The beliefs of each individual are different from another's and act centrifugally. The consensual behaviour and beliefs of the classroom as a group, whether imposed by me or achieved organically, bind the individuals together. The two forces enable the children to live together – there is some set of agreed upon foundations for action and communication – and enable both the individual and the group to change ideas, directions and even norms of behaviour. The classroom becomes a community because the centripetal qualities of the individual and the centrifugal qualities of a group are respected and allowed to bear fruit.

There is a central role in this for conflict between class members. New ideas and explanations are not automatically accepted and celebrated. Rather the group must be convinced of their superiority. Children make statements of their beliefs and ideas. These can be accepted as they are, accepted for consideration, or immediately argued against by others who hold different views with equal certainty. The community in this class is, I think, characterized by children entering imaginatively, intellectually, empathetically into one another's conceptions of the world. This is done in order to understand each other. This thinking becomes critical and then creative (Belenky et al. 1986). The progression of such thinking becomes increasingly revisionary.
For children to consider ideas other than their own, for them to change their ideas – modify them with the ideas of others – their own sense of certainty must be affected by our conversations. Because each child has to try to recognize and maybe understand the other's argument in order to argue against it, certainty is recast as uncertainty (Dewey 1939, Wittgenstein 1969, Vygotsky 1978, Billig 1987). This is an important quality of my community. It is an illustration of how I try to use conflict to strengthen the community, strengthen the need that people with different ideas and opinions feel for each other. When certainty can be recast as uncertainty, the children can value their differences. This is a community based upon differences between people as much as on likeness. But this conflict is difficult to control. It must be expressed in ways which still communicate respect. It must be done in ways that don't violate our valuing for each other. Although my desire is that conflict shall result in a strengthened community it can still potentially divide the community and possibly destroy it.

The teacher as well as the children are members of a community. A community contains people who share some goals, purposes, values, ways of acting and communicating, but not others. I participate in the development of the science both as a member of the class and as a person standing apart, looking from the outside. I share in some of the children's pursuits but I also have other goals which they do not share, that they are the subject of, not participants in developing. The basis of a community is similarity on one or more dimensions – without similarity a community would not exist, could not function. The children and I must share some interests for my claim to be a member of the community to be valid. On some level the science we are doing is new to me. The connections we make are different from ones I have made before. The driving force, however, the life force behind a community is difference – we need each other because we are different from each other. I wouldn't have these new connections without the stimulus of the children. They wouldn't have them without my active shaping of our tasks and approaches to those tasks.

When we act in a community, we act on an assumption of similarity but often our actions expose our differences. For example when the children talk they bring to the surface each other's different ideas and goals in the science. When they talk I often become aware of my more fundamental values which I haven't explicitly shared with the children around their discourse and behaviour. This exposure motivates change, in ourselves as we learn from this and in the community as its members evolve. I personally come to question many of my values around the children's interactions. The children question their scientific ideas. This process is fundamental to my classroom. All of this depends on expressions of conflict – our recognitions that many of our ideas and values are in conflict, are not shared.

Communities are defined by the relationships between people and these are constructed through a medium. Through this medium these relationships develop a reason for being (Sartre 1963, Hawkins 1974b). In my classroom, this medium is the pursuit of the science. A community is composed of people who are different and the same simultaneously.
Similarities are recognized and/or constructed by developing a common language and ways of doing things framed by the medium, the science. This process is driven by a shared purpose. The essence of community is people interacting with each other because each can contribute something different and unique towards a common purpose, towards fulfilling a mutual need.

I have up to now been talking about a conflict in my classroom between children over their ideas about the science. A second and equally fundamental conflict is between myself and the children. My value choices around how the children should act and interact as well as about the science arise from my own history and background both conscious and unconscious. The children are not blank slates either, lacking values or scientific knowledge and understanding.

There is a conflict between how I think people should act and how the children assume they should act. This is conditioned by the fact that we are both in the setting of the school. We inherit roles and relationship expectations that we didn't create, a conflict not of our making. This is heightened, I would argue, because during our classes it is hard for me to interrupt conversations or the children's activities to make explicit the qualities of their behaviour that I think are acceptable or not. To make such interruptions would be in a sense a violation of the community, a statement about myself as a non-member. I am often unwilling to do this because I do view myself as a member of the community and I believe that my authority to shape both science and behaviour comes from this membership as well as my memberships in other outside communities.

We often have conversations, divorced and temporally disconnected from our actual engagement in science, about 'proper' behaviour. These conversations are different from those about behaviour when we actually have become immersed in the science or our conversations. I think that in the heat of our activities and interchanges it is all too easy for the children and myself to act on our unstated assumptions and desires about how we might like to behave and because these assumptions are unstated the conflict doesn't become articulated, talked about. It remains a struggle beneath the surface. This is how learning and change occur on both sides (myself and the children's).

As I have said, it is because of this discordance between what different individuals want or between what an individual wants and a group demands that I, and others, come to re-examine our values as we become aware of them. Part of this process of evaluation is to measure the worth of our values within a new context generated by this subterranean conflict between people who are, as yet, not abstracted from that context (Heidegger 1962, Habermas 1991). If the struggle was explicit, on the surface and divorced from context, sooner or later an apparent resolution would be reached and the problem would appear to disappear, but the point is that if the community is to remain alive and vital, it can't and shouldn't be allowed to reach a resolution.

The role of the teacher is in fact to maintain the tension of this struggle in such a way that it doesn't become resolved. One force cannot be permitted to dominate over another. The teacher should do this in such a
manner that the struggle between forces, the conflicts within a class, remain both a progressive force and a creative one in learning. This role presents a number of ethical dilemmas for the teacher -- how to construct experiences so that all children can participate and contribute, how to reward both individual and group actions, how to maintain control in a classroom where freedom is also of great importance.

The argument I present in this paper recasts the goal of classroom management. *Rather than thinking of the goal of management as avoiding conflicts between children and between children and teacher, it becomes one of managing those conflicts, even fostering them at times.* I am asking that the tensions inherent in such conflict be embraced for their creative potential. The source of new and interesting ideas and ways of behaving in the subject matter are within the conflicts between individual beliefs and desires and behavioural norms of the class as a whole. This suggests developing a different attitude towards both conflict and classroom management with pre-service teachers.

It is well known that one of the greatest stumbling blocks for beginning teachers is classroom control. Even experienced teachers are known to sacrifice subject matter for enhanced behavioural control (McNeil 1988). Much effort is often put into pre-service programmes to help students avoid conflict and impose management techniques on students. Rather, I would argue, pre-service teachers should be taught the creative potential of conflict and how to work with such conflict to help students develop critical thinking skills as well as imagination and originality. All three of these classroom goals -- critical thinking, imagination and originality -- arise as an interplay between individuals thinking on their own and individuals participating in a group with consensual ideas about the way things ought to be.

All of this places teachers at the centre of an unresolvable dilemma -- balancing both the needs of the individual and of the group. Serving one side or the other causes both sides to lose. In my story of Cory, both Cory and the group are dependent upon one another. Cory’s individualism could not be allowed to run rampant, however, but neither could the norms of the group with their rules for ‘proper behaviour’ be allowed to suppress him. Rather, ideally his individualism should be allowed to enhance the thinking of the group and the group should help him to discipline his thinking in such a way that he becomes more thoughtful both about the science and about himself. Trying to balance these two competing demands when working with children is not easy. In a social constructivist classroom it proves an inherent dilemma.

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Notes

1. During the times that I taught the first and the first and second grade combination classes of this story, I worked with Kathy Valentine, the classroom teacher for all other academic subjects.

2. The data I used to write this story are from transcripts of audio-tapes – I audio-taped each class and transcribed the tapes myself. I also kept copies of most of the children’s written work. The children were always aware of the audio-taping going on and quite interested in what I was doing. The children periodically requested that they listen to the tapes and would comment upon them. The children also knew that I was writing about my teaching in the classes and using the classroom discussions in these writings. I asked the children to help me pick their pseudonyms.

3. I use this word recognizing it as problematically judgemental. I am writing here of how this teaching feels to me and those feelings are inherently judgemental and evaluative (Habermas 1991). In part, I wish to expose in this paper the repercussions of such judgements.

References


