

Youth Peacebuilding Gathering 2008

Final Report
April 14, 2009



With many thanks to our funders for their generosity and support; to our staff for their tireless dedication, energy, and creativity; and to the participants for their willingness to trust us in this new venture and to engage in the process we created together.

Youth Peacebuilding Gathering August 24th-31st, 2008

Project Report

(April 14, 2009)

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The Youth Peacebuilding Project is a community-based partnership of the following agencies:

The Institute for Community Peacebuilding (ICP)

Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc. “Those Who Lead”

YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg

Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba, Inc. (IRCOM)

Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council Inc. (Welcome Place)

Manitoba Multiculturalism Resource Centre (MMRC)

Report written and compiled by:

Phoebe Burns, Project Coordinator

Phone: 204-953-3862

Email: p.burns@uwinnipeg.ca

Kendra Williams, CRS Practicum Student

David Pankratz, Director, Institute for Community Peacebuilding

Phone: 204-953-3865

Email: D.pankratz@uwinnipeg.ca

Part 1: Executive Summary

“ONE WEEK OF PEACE”

In the summer of 2008 forty-two youth from different cultural groups in Winnipeg Manitoba (African, Asian, Métis, Aboriginal and European communities) attended an eight-day “peace Gathering” on an Island in Shoal Lake Ontario. Shoal Lake was the ideal location for the Gathering as it is both serene and exciting in its natural beauties of rugged granite outcrops, tall pines, majestic spruce, clear cold waters, haunting loons and magnificent skies. It was here that the forty-two youth plus eighteen dialogue coordinators, fourteen cabin leaders, and other Gathering leadership engaged in a process of cultural and personal discovery; they came to share and learn.

Cultural sharing and learning are not easy or natural activities. To undertake a journey on another’s path requires respect, courage and conviction. And in the case of a seven-day Gathering it also requires focused planning, constant review, lots of music, tonnes of food and fun.

The core activities of the week were the morning ‘dialogue sessions’, where the leadership provided a context in which the youth could and did explore their perceptions of each other that would never get addressed in their day-to-day interactions. By ‘surfacing the conflict’ the youth were able to address and dissipate their negative stereotypes and the fears that rested on these. Out of this they were able to construct positive relationships built on new information and trust – relationships that would withstand the many tests that they will encounter in their day-to-day life. The principles underlying the work included ‘non-coercive’ cabin leadership, ‘adult attachment’ approaches to discipline, adult-led, but peer-driven ‘transformative dialogue’ as the learning tool – all in the service of overcoming ‘identity group conflict’.

The summer peace gathering was a *tour de force* of cultural connectivity. This was a gathering about fear, openings, discovery, trust, friendship and change. This was a week of peace.

“Eight Days of Peace”

In 8 days, you saw the life of your camper change,
 In 8 days, you saw fear shatter,
 In 8 days, you saw stereotypes vanish,
 In 8 days, you saw lasting friendships built,
 And in 8 days, never would you ever have thought
 all of these could be accomplished – and all of them were
 accomplished.

I don’t know how you did it, but you did it, and not
 only that, but you did it successfully.

I am so proud, so incredibly proud of all the hard work
 and I feel so privileged to have been a part of the first peace
 gathering.

Thank you,
 So much.

- 18 year old Youth Leader

We are deeply appreciative to the funders for their contributions to the project. Without their support the project could not have gone ahead. The United Way provided us with the funds that we needed to plan the event as well as core funding for the event itself. The Winnipeg Foundation contributed in that some of their core funding for the Institute for Community Peacebuilding was applied to the Gathering.

Other funders stepped in as well to round out the financial support for Winnipeg's first Youth Peacebuilding Summer Gathering.

Lead funders:

United Way of Winnipeg

The Winnipeg Foundation (through its support of the Institute for Community Peacebuilding)

Supporting funders:

Welcoming Communities – Manitoba Labour and Immigration Multiculturalism Secretariat

Government of Manitoba - Education, Citizenship and Youth

Government of Manitoba – Culture, Tourism, Heritage and Sport

Councillor Harvey Smith

private donations

Quick facts:

Number of participants – 42

Number of staff and volunteers:

 cabin leaders – 20

 dialogue, culture, arts facilitators – 21

 delegation leaders – 4

 videographers – 2

 other leadership – 4

TOTAL 51 staff (Plus Pioneer Camp skills, kitchen and admin staff)

Days at The gathering - 8

Total Cost of the Gathering itself – \$46,260.00

Objective:

The objective of the Gathering was to bring together three groups of youth (Aboriginal, newcomer, and established) to provide a context and process that would give them the opportunity to build bridges of understanding and peace between them as individuals and as identity groups.

Evaluation:

We accomplished our objectives beyond our expectations. Through our own observation, the continued comments of the youth even 6 months later, and the evaluations and surveys returned, we are confident that the outcomes and impact are long-lasting and universally positive.

Part 2 - Activity Report and Analysis

Contents: Dialogue Sessions, Arts Sessions, Afternoon Rotations, Choice Time, Reflection, Evening Programming, Cultural Programming – Mealtimes, Muslim Prayer Times, Halal, Morning Smudge, Aboriginal Sharing Circle, Sweat Lodge, Christian Devotions, Colour Games, Closing Activity

Dialogue Sessions

Five Dialogue session groups consisting of 8-10 youth met each morning for 1.5 hours of dialogue workshop. Facilitators in the workshops were individuals skilled in conflict resolution and youth facilitation, and were trained by the Youth Peacebuilding Project in the Transformative Dialogue Model as adapted from Seeds of Peace. Two to three Dialogue Facilitators worked with the same group of youth each day to explore issues of identity, conflict and peace as identified by the group. The morning dialogue sessions were directed and supervised by the Dialogue Coordinator, who also was responsible for training the facilitators before the Gathering.



Dialogue Facilitators debrief following a session.

At the beginning of the week, the groups focussed on the development of trust and relationship, through a variety of games, activities and discussions. The purpose of this relationship building stage of the group was to create a context of trust for the youth to move into transformative dialogue discussions later in the week. Through the middle of the week, the groups moved into skills development and perspective sharing, considering themes of anger management, communication and conflict styles. They began to discuss deeper issues around identity, prejudice and personal experiences with conflict in these areas. The purpose of the skills development and perspective sharing component of the dialogue workshops was to assist the youth to share their own realities and stories, while identifying the tools necessary to have a transformative dialogue discussion. The final two days of the dialogue sessions tied together the trust building of the start of the week, the sharing and skills development of the mid-week point and created a space for the youth to move into ultimate ownership of the identity group conflict discussions for which the groups had been structured, using the transformative dialogue model.



Small groups working in a morning dialogue session.

Ultimately, the dialogue groups provided the necessary core of the peacebuilding gathering. In dialogue the youth found the opportunity to develop both their own perspectives and find their own voices, as well as hear the stories of others and see the world through the eyes of those previously identified as 'The Other'. The dialogue sessions were a base of support for the youth to process the experience of cohabiting with people with whom they

previously would not have chosen to enter into relationship, as well as a launching point for the kind of learning that comes from experiential understanding – living an issue, a conflict, from the inside out.

The most important experience for me at the gathering was meeting my cabin mates. I made first assumptions which turned out to be wrong and taught me that first impressions aren't always right. – *Youth Participant, age 15.*

The YPP organizers had identified the inherent challenge of the dialogue sessions for the youth before the Gathering and had anticipated youth engaging with this work in a meaningful way, with difficulty and in need of much support. The surprise was the level of attachment and bonding the youth expressed for their dialogue session groups. Rather than use the week of dialogue to move deeper into the rifts which divide, the youth were eager to find common ground, to build friendships among those in their dialogue groups. The youth were highly motivated to identify the issues that were divisive between them, and open to the direction of adult facilitators to find a path within themselves through those issues that could begin to address some of those divisions.

Arts Sessions

Complementary to the Dialogue Sessions, the Artist Facilitators worked with each dialogue group in a rotation throughout the week. The purpose of the Arts sessions was to create a space for each dialogue group to work through the issues and themes identified by the youth in each group using the arts to express themselves. Five artists bringing a depth of professional experience in their field and hands on experience working with youth shared a five day rotation, bringing their Art form to each dialogue group through the five days of dialogue sessions. African drumming and dance, the Brazilian martial art capoeira, song writing, theatre and painting were the arts used to facilitate an alternate level and means of communication within the dialogue groups.

African Drumming Arts Session



Following the 1.5 hour dialogue session each day, the artists would meet with the dialogue coordinators to hear the themes and progress of the group that morning. The artists would then join the dialogue group for the second 1.5 of the morning, and deliver an intensive arts workshop adapted to the specific needs of the dialogue group at that time. The overall themes of identity, communication, expression and conflict remained consistent through the five arts workshops used to further facilitate relationship and communication within the dialogue groups.

The arts sessions also allowed for different members of each group to demonstrate their strengths to the group, an experience which was powerful for the development of self-esteem

within the group. This also assisted in the creation of positive group dynamics as individual youth were able to take turns stepping into the forefront of the group to showcase their different skills as the group moved through the five diverse art forms.



Afternoon Rotations

Each afternoon the youth experienced three activity rotations, each one an hour in duration. The youth participated in these activities with their cabin groups, five groups of 8-10 participants, with three co-leaders responsible for each group. The activities shared by the participants included canoeing, kayaking, wall climbing, teambuilding games, archery and soccer. The purpose of the activity rotations was to create a time and space for the youth to engage in fun, skills building and challenge activities which fostered the development of friendships within each cabin group.

"The most important thing for me about the Peace Gathering..."

... the dialogue session where I shared my knowledge on gangs. It showed me how I am used to the violence & that it isn't ordinary, because most of the people listening were shocked" – youth participant, age 13

...learning about other religions, because it helped me learn about myself" – youth participant, age 15

The afternoon rotations concluded with a group free swim at the end of each day. During this time the youth could relax on the beach or swim at the waterfront.

The afternoon component of the program also created opportunities for the youth to engage in relationship with the cabin leaders, this kind of mentoring relationship enhanced the ability of the youth to further integrate with the peacebuilding model as they found themselves forming close attachments to leaders of identity groups other than their own.

Often the cabin groups provided a sounding board for the youth to test out the new ideas they were encountering in their morning dialogue and arts sessions. In essence, the dialogue sessions were a safe space for intense conversations and the afternoon rotations were a welcome change of pace which allowed for processing and practical application of new connections.

Choice Time

Youth were given the opportunity to select one activity from the afternoon rotations that they would like to experience in more depth. Following supper each day, youth would sign up for an activity of their choosing (Canoe, Kayak, Capoeira, Fishing, Swimming, Archery, Soccer, Wall Climbing, Mosaic Night Rehearsal) in which they would participate for the hour following

supper. This opportunity allowed the youth to explore their talents and interests and also to exercise personal choice as to how their time at the Gathering would be spent. This was also a time for youth to reconnect and spend time doing a recreational activity with friends from other cabin groups.



Reflection

At the end of each day's program activities, the entire Gathering would come together for a period of quiet time called Reflection. Identified by many of the participants and staff as their favourite time of the day, the 30 minute

Reflection was a space in the daily schedule for spiritual expression and personal sharing. Individuals could sign up during the week to sing, speak, offer a prayer, share a story, read a poem or another activity of their choosing during Reflection. This time together brought a personal face to the diverse faith groups represented at the Gathering and provided a spiritual balance to the physical work of the afternoon activity rotations, and the mental and emotional work of the morning dialogue sessions.

Evening Programming

Following Reflection each evening, an all-gathering evening program was carried out. The purpose of the Evening Program was to develop the participants' sense of being a part of a larger, multi-identity group community.

Sunday: **Baffa Baffa** - this popular game is used to teach cross cultural awareness and understanding, encouraging participants to consider themes of cultural difference, communication, group norms and values and interactions with 'The Other'. The purpose of playing Baffa Baffa on the first evening of the Gathering was to create a context for discussion to explore the ideas central to the Gathering. The game was led by Conflict Resolution specialists and the debrief of the game, later in the evening, assisted facilitators in "surfacing the conflict" within the discussion, as youth were encouraged to make personal and real life connections with the issues brought to face by the game.



Monday: **Variety Show** – An interactive performance by our artist facilitators, participants engaged in African dance and drumming, singing, capoeira and theatre games. The purpose of the evening was to get everyone up and moving as a group and to introduce the artist facilitators to the Gathering. The evening ended with everyone up on their feet laughing and dancing and helped move the Gathering into its early stages of formation as a community of friends.

Tuesday: **Mass Game** – Participants and cabin leaders were divided into two teams competing in a wide running game through forest trails across the whole island. Each of the teams worked together to capture the other team's prize while avoiding being caught by their opponents. This game "Royal Roll", which was introduced at lunch time using an interactive skit, helped the

participants to work together in a multi-identity group team, to learn the physical layout of the Manitoba Pioneer Camp site, and to participate in a fun and exhilarating activity.



Wednesday: Cookout and Campfire – Cabin groups were assigned to one of two outdoor cooking sites and provided with the supplies necessary to prepare the evening meal. The purpose of this activity was to foster teamwork and sharing of skill between youth.

Following the cookout the entire group met at the central outdoor fire location for a campfire and sing-a-long. Participants, Cabin Leaders and Artist Facilitators took turns leading

the group in songs, call and repeats, and dances. The opportunity to stand in front of the entire group and sing or teach a song from a participant's culture was one which gave individuals a chance to shine. The sharing of songs from different cultures and languages served to bring the group together as there were times at the campfire when each person had a turn being the leader or the expert in the type of music the group was enjoying. The campfire was a lot of fun!



Thursday: Festival – At the request of the Gathering participants, our resident African drum and dance instructor, Evans Coffie, taught several dances and led an evening celebration dance party known for the rest of the week as “the African Dance Party”. This evening of group celebration, combined with the inherent cultural sharing, served to solidify the cohesion of the Gathering community.

Friday: Mosaic – A celebration of the cultural communities represented at the Gathering, youth were encouraged to create displays of song, dance, skit or any other relevant cultural performance of their own choosing. Youth worked throughout the week during their free time to refine their performances and the evening was a great success. The purpose of Mosaic was to allow a forum for the youth and cabin leaders to display their talents and abilities as these relate to culture or individual interest. The solid bonds within the group created a safe and supportive environment as youth cheered one another's performances and celebrated the accomplishments of their fellow Gathering participants.

Saturday: Dance – On the last evening of the Gathering, participants were able to take part in a dance where the music was provided by a professional DJ. A campfire supervised by Gathering staff was also available to youth not wishing to stay at the dance. This was an evening



of fun, youth were able to dance together and integrate the friendships they had formed at the Gathering into a space more typical to their socializing in the city. In this way, the dance on Saturday evening was able to facilitate building of bridges between the experience of being friends with a person from a different identity group at the Gathering, to what that might look or feel like back in the city.

Cultural and Religious Components of the Gathering:

Mealtimes: The host site of the Peace Gathering, Manitoba Pioneer Camp, has a practice of giving thanks before each meal in the Christian tradition. The Youth Peacebuilding Project adapted this practice to give thanks in several rotating practices: Christian, Muslim, Traditional Aboriginal, Jewish and Secular. Individuals could sign up throughout the week to offer thanks before a meal. This rotating consistent mealtime prayer set a tone of consistency throughout the week and also helped youth accustomed to giving thanks before a meal feel comfortable with the meal routine at the Gathering. The use of different faiths to offer thanks was extremely helpful in allowing youth to make connections between the commonalities of the different faith groups represented at the Gathering.

“Nothing could ever compare to how this gathering changed my opinion on different cultures and people. This was the most amazing experience ever and nothing can ever take this away from me. I love this gathering and I want to spend time with everyone all day, everyday” – Youth Participant, age 16.

Muslim Prayer and Halal

A number of the youth and staff attending the Gathering were practicing Muslims, and so it was important to the Gathering to be able to support the needs of these individuals as necessary throughout the week. Staff leaders at the Gathering who were Muslim themselves worked with the Coordinator to identify times and physical space for prayer times. These prayer times were announced as a part of the general announcements and created an opportunity for demystification of Muslim practices for the non-Muslim youth at the Gathering. Another opportunity for this was around meal times, where frequently announcements were made regarding the Halal options for the meal. This also gave non-Muslim youth a chance to learn about the cultural and religious practices around meal times for Muslims.

Aboriginal Sharing Circle

Aboriginal staff leadership at the Gathering created the initiative on an Aboriginal staff and participants sharing circle on one afternoon during the week. The purpose of this time was to



create a space for the Aboriginal members of the Gathering community to come together as a group and reflect on their experiences at the Gathering and anything else they might wish to share with the group. This initiative had a very positive impact on the Aboriginal participants and cabin leaders, many of whom returned from the Sharing Circle reporting feeling calm and grounded and happy to have had that opportunity.

Morning Smudge

Each morning at the Gathering, the Aboriginal staff leadership at the Gathering led a morning smudge, the burning of sacred medicines and a time for reflective prayer and thanks, for anyone who wished to attend. Many Gathering participants and staff attended this smudge each morning. Youth who previously had little or no exposure to traditional Aboriginal spiritual practice were able to experience this activity, and witness their Aboriginal fellow group members practicing their own spirituality. This kind of intense cross cultural sharing supported the work of the Gathering in a way that was both safe and meaningful for the Gathering participants and staff.

"I had no idea Aboriginal people felt that way about White people." – *youth participant, age 14.*

"Going to the Sweat Lodge with my cabin mates taught me to share love, confidence, culture and friendship" – *youth participant, age 16.*

"It was an eye opening experience for me to be able to hear and experience the sweat lodge and see their culture" – *youth participant, age 14.*

"I like Native people, I learn about their culture and I like it. I change my mind about them" – *youth participant, age 15.*

Sweatlodge

The Youth Peacebuilding Project contracted with two elders from the nearby Shoal Lake First Nation, Cecil and Grace Redskye, to perform five sweat lodges for the staff and participants at the Gathering. The Sweat Lodge is an important ritual in First Nations' Traditional spiritual practice, its purpose is for cleansing and giving thanks, and can also be a physically intensive experience.

Boys' Sweat Lodge: The boys were taken by boat over to Shoal Lake First Nation following lunch. At the site of the lodge, they assisted the Elder Cecil Redskye, in collecting wood for the fire and preparing the site of the lodge. They then received teachings about the lodge from Cecil Redskye before going into the lodge. Those going into the lodge also were instructed by Youth Peacebuilding Project staff member Winston Thompson to prepare offerings of tobacco for the elders and offerings of food for the feast. The boys reported very positively of their experience of the sweat lodge.

Those boys who had been in Sweat Lodges before were happy to share the experience with their cabin mates and those who had never heard of Sweat Lodges before were interested to learn more about the First Nations culture. This was a very positive cultural sharing interaction for the youth.



Girls' Sweat Lodge: The girls received teachings about the sweat lodge from Aboriginal staff people Winston Thompson and Jaquolynne Fitzner and prepared their tobacco pouches and feast plates at the Gathering site before being transported by

boat to the site of the Sweat Lodge. The girls were also instructed to wear traditional length skirts and to be sure that they were not menstruating if they were going to enter the sweat lodge. This teaching prompted many useful and interesting discussions for the youth and staff at the Gathering, regarding different cultures' treatment and perception of women while they are menstruating. The girls also reported very positively on their experiences in the Sweat

Lodge. There was some friendly competition between the boys and girls as to whose Lodge had been the hottest!

Christian Devotions

In future years the Youth Peacebuilding Project hopes to add a Christian prayer meeting to the program of cultural/religious activities.

Colour Games

The last full day of the Gathering was devoted to a special event called “Colour Games”. The participants and cabin leaders were divided into two teams, each with its own team captains. The teams competed throughout the day in a variety of challenge activities. Points were awarded to teams for spirit, fairness, cooperation, as well as for the ability to learn a song in another language, complete arts and sports based rotations and a water regatta.

The day was a high energy competition with a focus on fair play and team spirit. The purpose of this competition was to create an intense experience for the youth to compete alongside peers of different identity groups, and to feel the strength of their bonds to one another in a competitive setting.

The teams were each told that they were competing for a championship trophy. The day ended with an awards ceremony and each team was presented with a trophy. The teams were told that the competition had ended in a tie and that the answer to who had really one the day was in the trophy. Inside each trophy was the name of one of the Newcomer staff members, Muuxi Adam. Muuxi stood in front of the group and delivered a moving speech about the spirit friendship and peace he saw in the youth at the Gathering.

The day ended with the youth holding hands and saying a silent prayer of thanks for the peace and friendship among them. The purpose of this conclusion to the day was to convert the energy of the day’s competition and redirect it back into the values of peace and breaking down barriers of the Gathering.

“Looking back on camp the most important experience was...
 ... Meeting new people and knowing the culture and religions” – youth participant, age 13
 ... Learning people’s characters, having fun with other kids” – youth participant, age 13
 ... Working together with people from different places” – youth participant, age 14
 ... Making new friends” – youth participant, age 13
 ... When I was going to camp I didn’t trust anyone at all but when I began to learn more about them I trusted them” – youth

Closing activity

The closing activity of the Gathering took place in the morning of the final day. Gathering participants and staff stood in a circle, each holding a candle. The first candle was lit, and the flame of the candle was passed around the circle from person to person as the group sang a song that had been taught at the campfire earlier in the week.

“I can make all things well, I will make all things well, I shall make all things well, All shall be well”.

Everyone sang as the flame of peace and friendship was passed around the room, and youth were encouraged to take their candle home with them, as a memory of the time spent together at the Peace Gathering.

The purpose of this closing activity was to provide symbolism for the unity of the group, and to recognize that a group of individuals who had met one week ago as strangers were now parting as friends. Following this activity there was a great deal of hugging and saying goodbye, after which the Gathering adjourned for lunch and then on to catch the boat and bus back to the city.

Part 3 – Theoretical Underpinnings of the Gathering

Our work rested on almost a dozen concepts and best practices. These include:

- The foundation of the work at the Gathering was Transformative Dialogue/Learning. The premise of this work is that the objective of this learning is the transformation of the person, and this occurs in the context of the engagement of the whole person, not just the mind;
- Identity group conflict theory, which states that when meaning, security of the group, and dignity of cultural practices are threatened, the intervention needs to be different than with 'ordinary' conflict;
- Attachment-based leadership, which is based on the premise that youth want to form appropriate attachments to adults, and thrive and learn best in an environment in which they have confidence in their adult relationships;
- An understanding that it is youth aged of 15 to 17 who are most appropriate to this work because they understand it both experientially and conceptually, yet are not fully entrenched in the conflict – they still believe there is a better way;
- Challenge by Choice best practices which never force a participant into any activity – they may be cajoled and encouraged - but never threatened, punished or rewarded in any way but intrinsically;
- Learning through Relationship best practices were a core of the dialogue model. We created a context for learning – the youth did the work;
- A 'positive' approach to the situation was our starting point. This was 'Youth Peacebuilding', with a focus on our objective and how to get there, rather than a focus on the problem and how to minimize it;
- We also provided the participant with two relational groups – the 'dialogue group' in which the hard work was done, and the 'play and cabin group' where they could further explore relationships from other cultures;
- 'Surfacing the Conflict' was key to our success. Instead of ignoring the pre-existing conflicts, prejudices and stereotypes, we invited the youth to explore that which divided them;
- We highlighted, respected, and explored the cultural differences that the youth brought with them, and as trust built, they increasingly shared previously downplayed but significant cultural practices with their new friends;

Part 4 – Learnings

This was the first year of this project, and we were very gratified that it worked as well as it did – that the many decisions we had to make for the first time proved to be the right ones – or at least not significantly the wrong ones. The evaluation material in parts 7 and 8 provide us with significant guidance to improving logistics, training, leader selection, etc. I’d like to highlight only a few of the learnings here, some of which showed up on the evaluations, and others from our own observation and reflection:

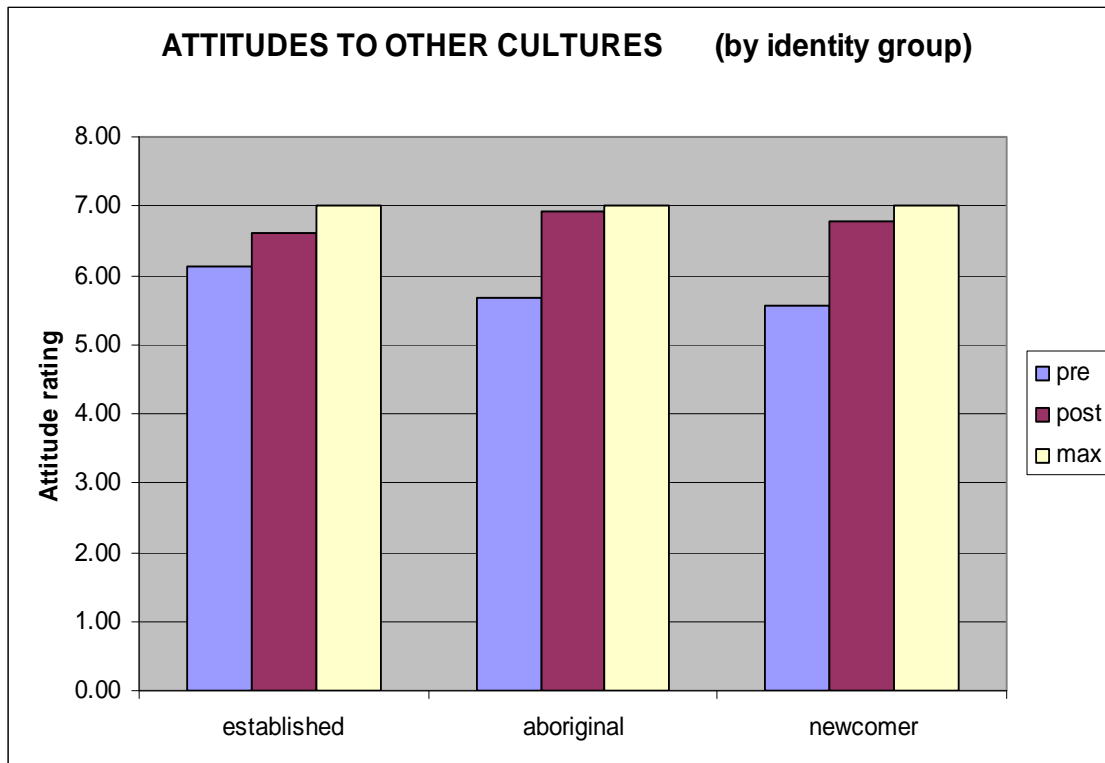
I. Youth Participant Survey Analysis

This data compilation was collected from the intake/outtake participant surveys completed by the youth participants before and after the Gathering. The participants coded the surveys in a way that allowed us to match the pre-and post-camp survey of each participant, while still retaining anonymity.

Attitudes to other cultures

Questions 8, 9, and 14 were questions about the possibilities of trust and friendship with youth of other cultural groups. The pre- and post- answers to these questions all showed significant increases in positive attitudes towards other cultures, as evidenced by the chart below, in which we see significant changes for all the groups at the gathering, in terms of their attitudes to other cultures. Briefly, the purple bar shows the ranking of attitudes at the start, the burgundy bar shows attitudes at the end, and the yellow bar shows the maximum level that attitudes could have been ranked at.

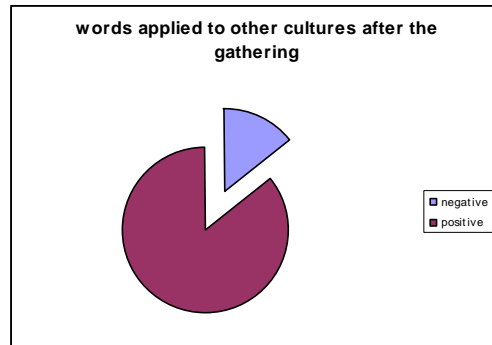
It is worth noting that the youth’s responses, particularly for the Aboriginal youth, almost reached maximum values.



Increase in positive words used for other cultural groups

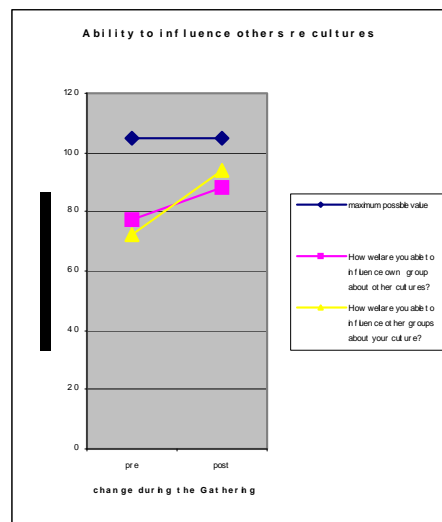
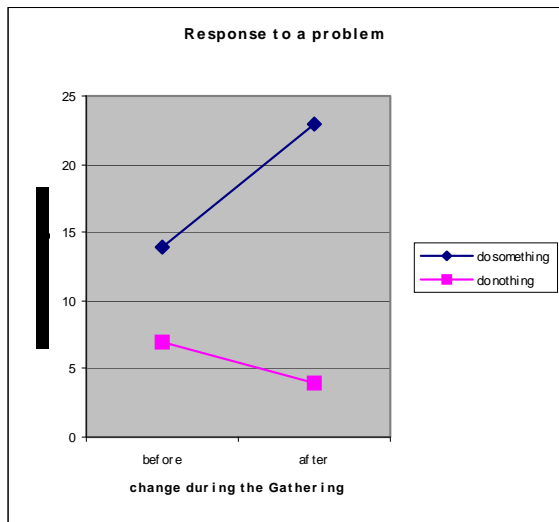
Question 19 addressed a similar theme in that it was interested in what words (some positive, some negative) the participants would apply to people of other cultures.

The pie charts below demonstrate clearly that attitudes shifted significantly while at camp. The chart on the left shows that prior to camp, 40% of the attitude responses were negative, whereas, after camp only 15% were negative. Given that living and playing together for a week could have led to drastically different results, we were very pleased to see this positive change in attitudes.



Questions 10, 11, and 15 revolved around the change in self-confidence of the participants in a variety of areas. This is an important element of the evaluation, because the literature states that a strong sense of conflict with another identity group reduces the person’s confidence to take action, either for oneself or for another.

The participants showed a marked improvement in their self-confidence in the areas tested as noted by the rise in the blue line on the left (representing willingness to take action if a problem arises in the schoolground), and the drop in the pink line, which represents an unwillingness to take action. Similarly the graph on the right shows an increased confidence in affecting change in one’s own and another’s culture.



II. The importance of an existing relationship with an adult at the gathering:

We knew going in that we wanted 'delegation leaders' at the gathering – adults with whom the youth could identify. What we didn't know is how extremely important having a pre-existing relationship with that person would be.

When everything was going smoothly, it wasn't an issue – however, when the participant was experiencing difficulty of any kind, the arrival of an adult with whom they had a pre-existing relationship was almost the only intervention that was needed, and/or effective. In many situations, it was not the professional skills nor the manner in which the two related to each other – it was enough that the adult arrived, expressed care for the participant (often only implicitly), and made an effort to understand and/or resolve the problem that the participant was facing.

We renewed our determination to ensure that every youth will have an adult there whom they had known previously.

III. The importance of experience in youth work for the facilitators:

We had five dialogue groups. Two groups exceeded our expectations, one group met our expectations, and two did not move their youth as far as we'd hoped they would. While there are a variety of factors at play in these results, the one consistent factor was that those experienced in youth work out-performed those without that experience – even if their experience with facilitation in other contexts was exceptional.

We will choose facilitators in the future based on their demonstrated ability to work with youth. We can train/mentor them in the specific facilitation skills required.

IV. The size of the dialogue sessions:

We worked with dialogue groups of eight people each. This was too small for a number of reasons. It only took a few marginally-participating participants to significantly change the dynamics of group interaction, only two of an identity group in a dialogue session placed significant burden on them to represent their group – where if there were four, the pressure was reduced. And group dynamics didn't develop as vibrantly as they would with a slightly larger group.

We will work with groups of 12 participants in the future.

V. The role of religion at the Gathering:

We knew that we'd be working with participants who identified to various degrees with at least three understandings of spirituality (four if we include 'non-religious spirituality'). What we didn't anticipate was the prominence that this rapidly achieved. We're quite certain it was not the influence of the leadership, since most of the strong leadership did not self-identify with any religion. Religious activities are outlined in Part 1, so I don't need to repeat them here.

As an example, meal-times were preceded by some kind of acknowledgement of 'thanks' or 'blessing', and we distributed this task to as many identity groups as we could identify. While the first few such 'rituals' were strained, they rapidly became a welcomed part of the meal, and were generally applauded and received with positive energy.

This change in response may have been due to our efforts to 'normalize' all the spiritualities at the gathering, and the participants (and many of the leaders) grew comfortable with this as they realized that 'their' spirituality got its fair turn, and no-one was trying to suggest superiority or a need to 'convert'.

We will be more deliberate about appropriately incorporating spiritual expression in future Gatherings.

VI. The Selection Process for Participants:

We had anticipated working with a significant number of youth prior to the gathering, and then selecting the most appropriate for the Gathering, based on demonstrated leadership, level of exposure to identity group conflict, and relative distance from gang involvement.

As the gathering approached it became clear that the youth-serving agencies that we were working with, were essentially selecting youth based on which of them had not yet been to a natural setting that summer, or other criteria such as availability.

This meant that our youth were more diverse in their leadership skills than we'd anticipated, and also not nearly as familiar with, or committed to the 'peacebuilding' aspect of the gathering as we would have hoped.

We found that the lack of commitment to peacebuilding was almost irrelevant – and in fact served to highlight the power of our process, because they became involved in spite of initial lukewarm interest, or in some cases, mild antagonism to the process.

We will be both more deliberate about youth selection than we were, but also less deliberate than we had initially planned.

VII. The Absence of 'Fighting' at the Gathering:

We didn't 'expect' there to be fights at the Gathering – but others did – especially when they saw who we had there, in terms of variety and demographics. In fact, there were absolutely no violent incidents and almost total absence even of significant tension. The one or two incidents that did arise were not severe, and were largely resolved by the youth themselves as their cabin leadership set a context for them to work through the cause of the problem and arrive at an amicable solution.

We haven't entirely concluded why there wasn't much fighting, but certainly some factors would have been: the high adult/youth ratio, the non-coercive approach to adult/youth relationships, the constant activity from morning till night, and the fact that they were significantly involved in the content and experience of the dialogue sessions.

We will continue to feature the elements that we think contributed to the lack of open conflict.

VIII. The Presence of some families of staff:

In order to make it possible for parents of infants to attend, we invited them to bring their families with them to the Gathering. In all, there were six families present, which added seven adults and eight children to the numbers at the Gathering. The reviews of this policy were mixed.

As a benefit, the staff we wanted and needed were there – and in each case, their contribution was crucial to the success of the Gathering. The children also became part of the community, and as so often happens when parents are prepared to let others care for their children, the children enriched the experience of those who played with and cared for them.

On the other hand, child-care could not just be handed off to a stranger on schedule, and the children were more of a distraction than had been expected.

We expect to continue to invite families, both because it brings the staff we want and need, and it makes for a richer community. We will ensure appropriate childcare so that the children are as little distraction as possible.

IX. 'Self-respect' preceded 'other-respect':

We found that, as we did the cultural learning pieces, the participants of whom we were speaking were as attentive as those who were learning. As the gathering progressed, the participants became more comfortable with their own cultural distinctives, with the attendant confidence and assurance that was so necessary in order for them to be open to understanding and respecting the cultural distinctives of others.

There doesn't seem to be anything different that we need to do next time.

Part 5 – Conclusion

The 2008 Youth Peacebuilding Gathering was, by all accounts, a tremendous success. The 42 youth participants came away with a radically altered view of each other that has remained with them until now. This will lead, and has led, to more harmonious relationships, a renewed confidence, a stronger bond between groups, and an optimism about the future that had previously been darkened by the ‘implicit conflict’ with groups of which they knew little.

By creating a safe place for the youth to surface the conflict in a transformative dialogue co-existence model, they were able to deepen their relationships while exploring the differences that had formerly divided them. In the process they gained more respect for their own traditions, and out of that strengthened base came to respect, honour and enjoy the traditions that other groups brought.

This is a model, we believe, that can transform the face of inner-city Winnipeg, starting with small groups in schools and neighbourhood groups, and eventually having an impact on the behaviour of youth in difficult situations, such as invitations to join gangs, or other risk behaviours.

We are planning activities to renew and reinforce that learning, as well as develop their leadership skills to bring these new attitudes to their peers at school and at home.