Addressing Conflict through Imagination in Communities of Philosophical Inquiry

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Abstract: Existing research recognizes the crucial role played by imagination in giving meaning to our experience, thinking critically and paying attention to difference. By using a design based on what we called 'embodied imagination' (analogical reasoning) and 'narrative imagination' (contributions from universal stories), we conduct an exploratory study in a secondary school in a disadvantaged area of France, including multicultural classes. We aimed to observe how 12-15-year-old students think about conflict and how they manage tensions and conflicts that might arise during the dialogue. We have found, first, that universal stories gave students the opportunity to enrich their vision of conflict, inspiring more sophisticated thought. Secondly, we have observed that when conflicts arise during interactions, building a dialogue community is a real challenge, for teachers and students alike. Some students are able to take on the role of mediator, while others try to establish their role as speaker or find their place in the dialogue. Reflecting on the nature of peer relationships in their dialogue, one student suggests the framework of a "friendly discussion".

Keywords: conflict, imagination, community of philosophical inquiry, dialogue

1.   How Does Conflict Relate to the Community of Philosophical Inquiry

Conflict is an integral part of human history. Whether it involves individuals, social relations or relations between nations, conflict is omnipresent. Freund's (1983) definition of conflict seems comprehensive enough: "conflict is an intentional antagonism or confrontation between two or more persons of the same kind, who usually manifest hostility towards each other for some right and who, to assert, preserve or re-establish that right, attempt to break down the resistance of the other, possibly by resorting to violence" (p. 65) [our translation]. The crisis of our time, with wars, climate change, environmental deterioration, and global injustice, makes conflict one of the main challenges human beings have to deal with.

Conflicts are also omnipresent in children's daily lives, and it is often difficult to overcome tensions and conflicts whether between peers, conflicts and violence in the neighborhood, cultural conflicts between ethnic groups, etc. Conflicts also arise unexpectedly and uninvitedly in the classroom, in the playground, or other gathering places at school (Kennedy, 2006). At school, the word 'conflict' can refer to very different situations, "ranging for indiscipline and transgression of rules to more tense and sometimes even violent oppositions between young people or between young people and adults";

conflict is also "a source of development for the child" when it stimulates, empowers, and reinforces the individual during the resolution process (Pouthier, 2016) [our translation].[1]

1.1 Conflict and Peace

The theme of the recent NAACI Conference, "Education for Peace"[2], prompted us to focus on conflict. The Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI), as promoted in the Philosophy for/with Children (P4wC)[3] program, is designed to create a space for thinking together and dialogue (Lipman, Sharp, Oscanyan, 1980), and helps provide the framework of an education for peace. Conflicts can arise in any context of communication, even during the philosophy workshop. We can seize the opportunity in a CPI to make conflict a subject for reflection, to problematize it, to better understand it, as well as to think beyond the possible conflicts that do occur, with a metacognitive perspective. Through our study, we aim to gain a better understanding of how CPI could provide children and adolescents with appropriate tools to address conflict in a creative and integrative way.

As we mentioned at the outset, 'conflict' commonly evokes a struggle or confrontation involving antagonistic elements. There is tension, even opposition, due to disagreement (over values, opinions, habits, etc.), rivalry (over territory, property, places, status, etc.), enmity (negative feelings towards others), ambivalence or internal contradiction (internal conflicts). Tension turns into conflict when a multipolar relationship is reduced to a dual one ("friend-enemy" duality) which excludes any third party (Freund, 1983). Yet, to recognize the multiplicity of other points of view, not necessarily assimilable, means accepting conflict. This applies to social conflict within a democracy.

Reality is on the move. Heraclitus saw in *polémos* (which in Greek means war, conflict, quarrel, discord) the principle of movement and generation of all things, life and harmony being only the result of the confrontation and adjustment of opposites (Heraclitus, fragment 8[4]). Not only is conflict the essence of existence, as Heraclitus pointed out, but "we ourselves are situated in conflict, not outside it" (Benasayag & Del Rey, 2014, p. 91) [our translation]. Conflict cannot be reduced solely to destruction and repressing it can only lead to more violence. It can be constructive, and that goes hand in hand with our commitment and action in our time (*id.*, p. 87).

1.2 Conflict and Dialogue

Dialogue can be seen as having two main characteristics: cooperation and mutual understanding (Grice, 1975; Vernant, 2021). Defining dialogue in this way may seem sufficient to envisage dialogue as a means of avoiding conflict and maintaining peace. On one side, using words can help to calm conflicts

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[1] From the web documentary "Conflicts at school. How to deal with them to improve the school climate", available on *Réseau Canopé,* a teacher training network and public operator of the French Ministry of Education.

[2] North American Association for Communities of Inquiry Conference held in Querétaro, Mexico, July 2023.

[3] We adopt here this terminology which marks the evolution of Philosophy for Children from a method to a "movement" rooted in particular social, cultural and political contexts, encompassing a range of approaches (Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011).

[4] "Opposition unites. From what draws apart results the most beautiful harmony. All things take place by strife", in A. Fairbanks translation (1989, p. 37).

but, on the other side, for dialogue to be possible, conflicts must first be resolved (Enjalbert, 2023). Due to this contradiction, we are therefore faced with an aporia. One way out of the aporia is to distinguish between a strong sense of conflict, that of a long-lasting and persistent crisis, and a weak sense, when conflict is momentary, surmountable, yet still necessary. Yet the question can still be posed, can dialogue lead to conflict resolution and a commitment to peace education? Are such things really feasible?

With this question in mind, we decided to look at the relationship between conflict and dialogue in a CPI in which young people think together on the theme of conflict. P4wC studies based on empirical data analysis, especially on the question of how participants understand and manage conflict, are scarce. One of the most enlightening is Kennedy's study (2006) with children aged 7-8 and 10-11 from a public school in the north-eastern US, thinking together on conflict. Based on his observations and the transcriptions of CPI sessions, the author argues that 7-year-old children are capable in a "collaborative and dialogical context" if given "some interactive guidance from an adult" (p. 177) to deal with "the conflict in their own lives and with the conflict they see around them" (p. 133) in a coherent, complex and meaningful way. Kennedy focused on the role and posture of the adult as a CPI facilitator, who is expected to make room for the child's intelligence and consider him/her as "a full-fledged interlocutor" (p. 179)."

Furthermore, in the context of P4wC practice itself, as in any dialogue, neglecting difference and diversity leads to power struggles, instrumentalization of others and even conflict. To overcome the usual limits of dialogue, some authors suggest working in CPI on special dialogue strategies such as openness, empathy and friendship (e.g., Andal, 2020) and develop dialogical pedagogy "to facilitate and cultivate epistemic and moral virtues" (D'Olimpio, 2023).

2. Why and How to Use Imagination to Deal with Conflict?

If we are to address conflict through dialogue, we believe—and this is our main contribution through this study—that imagination is one of the possible ways of doing so.

2.1 Reasons to Use Imagination in CPI.

Many authors recognize the important role played by imagination in human understanding, reasoning and the inquiring process, be it from a psychological, sociological or philosophical perspective. Although imagination has been explored from various philosophical perspectives (Kind, 2016), the recognition of its value owes much to Dewey's rejection of the body-mind, intellect-feeling or reason-imagination dualisms. According to Dewey, imagination is central to contextualizing our own experience and creating meaningful situations in relation to past experiences and ideal possibilities. It also helps to counterbalance dominant mental habits and conduct critical examination of a problematic situation, as is expected in the research process. Insofar as thinking is an imaginative process (Dewey, 1916; Fesmire, 1999), we can admit, as Bleazby (2012) does with reference to P4wC, that an 'intelligent imagination' is at work and completely integrated in a CPI.

Furthermore, the moral and empathic dimension of imagination is particularly important to understand and interact with someone who is different from 'me'. This is addressed in a wealth of

literature (Johnson, 2014; Stueber, 2011, etc.), in relation to personal and social growth, freedom, autonomy or agency, particularly in education (Dewey, 1916; Nussbaum, 2010, etc.) as well as in P4wC (Fletcher, 2016; Gregory, 2007). Imagination can help us to understand others better, to put ourselves in their place, which implies taking an interest in others and their differences (Dewey, 1958; Andal, 2020).

Imagination therefore plays a crucial role in a CPI, enabling participants to create (new) meaning, to think critically and creatively and pay attention to differences. It would seem, then, that imagination is a necessary ingredient for productive dialogue, yet this is not necessarily apparent from the studies carried out on handling conflict through dialogue.

2.2 How to Use Imagination to Think Conflict and Deal with It?

We came up with an empirical study around an "imagination-based thinking" device, inviting students to think together about conflict. We have suggested three different ways of using imagination to work on conflict with students: firstly, by forming analogies, comparisons or metaphors about conflict (embodied imagination); secondly, by discovering universal stories or myths involving conflict (narrative imagination); thirdly, by inventing new possible outcomes to a conflict situation (operative imagination).

a. Conflict in Analogical Reasoning

Analogical reasoning is mobilized "whenever we employ a metaphor or draw a parallel with another register, using the expression *it's like*" (Vernant, 2021, p. 171). Therefore, it could be useful in CPI, especially when aiming at conceptualization (Galichet, 2015; Fournel & Simon, 2021). In one of our previous studies (Fournel & Simon, 2021), we drew on several examples, including these: "thought is like a blurred image", "forgetting is a bit like a file that you close but don't throw away, you keep it"— which illustrate how students metaphorically explore the concept of 'thinking' and 'forgetting', in a CPI. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 454), "our ordinary conceptual system, which we use to think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature." This involves projecting a more familiar, concrete or distinct concept—the *source* (in the above example: the file we are closing)—onto another, less familiar concept that needs to be understood—the *target* (forgetting).

The Chinese portrait exercise is one of the pedagogical tools used by some P4wC practitioners in France (see Galichet, 2015), likely to elicit analogical reasoning. Originally used as a literary game aiming to detect certain aspects of the personality of an individual and identify his tastes or preferences, it clearly has an experiential value. It is made up of questions based on identification with objects, animals, peoples, sensations, actions, etc.

For our study, we initially invited students to conjure up analogies that spontaneously come to their mind in connection with 'conflict' by asking them: If conflict were to embody an object/a smell/an action/a dish/an animal/an object … it might look like … because… Subsequently, we took up their proposals in an attempt to clarify, through a joint discussion, their meanings and how they relate to the conflict.

b. Conflict in Universal Narratives

Another source of imagination that can be fertile ground for thinking about conflict is the collective imagination found in stories. P4wC programs usually incorporate old and new stories as tools for developing memory, logical thinking, discursive skills and motivation to learn (Dascalu, 2022). Myths, for instance, appeal to our sensibility and imagination, while at the same time mobilizing our reasoning in the process of interpretation and understanding (Tozzi, 2006).

As Lipman (2003) previously emphasized, the stories chosen should be conceptually rich, and their use should contribute to developing children's analytical and reflective capacities, educating their creativity and enabling them to access both the particular and universal dimensions of the context evoked by the story. In our view, such access is at the heart of philosophical reflection, therefore, we hope that cultural narratives (myths, creation texts, fables, etc.), that deal with the theme of conflict, will provide new elements for individual imagination and reasoning. That is why we introduced the students to lesser-known universal tales, from different cultures.

c. Imagining the End of a Conflict

To explore the process of conflict resolution, students can use imagination and creativity by putting themselves in characters' shoes, getting involved as an actor and inventing new approaches to address the conflict situations they encounter. This refers to what is more generally known in philosophy as 'thought experiments,' a method of exploring a problem or testing a theory. It consists in imagining situations that are unfeasible in practice, but which can reveal assumptions, explain implications, highlight internal contradiction, open up new avenues of research and close down others. In P4wC, this type of exploration is well suited to the participants. Examples include "The Ship of Theseus", Hobbes's philosophical thought experiment that Worley reformulated in "If machine" (2010, pp. 102-107), and "Gyges's ring" from Plato's myth (*id.*, pp. 91-95).

By involving imagination in these ways, we wanted to conduct an exploratory study to see what conceptions of conflict emerge. We also wanted to observe whether conflict is part of the dialogue, and how it is approached by participants.

2.3 Research questions

We aim to explore in the present study two general issues. The first concerns the students' representations of conflict and the conceptualization of this notion: *What are the students' conceptions of conflict and how do these evolve over the course of the proposed study?* The second looks at the tensions and conflicts that can arise fortuitously during exchanges between students: *How were conflicts managed during the dialogue? What helped and what detracted the dialogue?*

3. Methods

Our study is qualitative. Its objective is to use data collected in context to build an initial understanding of how students perceive conflict, and how they attempt to manage it when imagination is invited into the thought process.

We are inspired by social sciences methodologies which focus on collecting the students' written and oral productions and recording their interactions in order to analyze them. The use of qualitative case studies, based on transcripts of the participants' verbal and non-verbal behavior, which provide a wealth of information that can be analyzed in different ways depending on the research objective, is now a well-established approach in the field of P4wC research (Fournel & Simon, 2023).

Encouraged by previous empirical studies on the theme of conflict, which to our knowledge remain limited, we wish to supplement the existing data and analyze how adolescents (12-15 years old), in a regular and also multicultural context, in France, think and act about conflict. We have also designed a device that combines different ways of mobilizing the imagination in the thought process.

3.1 Study Context

The study was carried out in a secondary school located in a disadvantaged area in south-east France. A philosophy project has been running in this school for the past 9 years. Each student takes part in a philosophy workshop every two weeks, during the first year (11-12 years old), the second year (12-13 years old) and the fourth year (14-15 years old) of their curriculum. This project is supported by teachers who are highly concerned about how to educate children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to think critically. Collaboration with the University Grenoble Alpes has been on-going since 2014 through research-action projects, and training actions.

Our study was carried out between March and June 2023. The socio-political context in France, at that moment, was rather tense (e.g. the pension reform and the protests it has provoked; teacher protests against education policies), also affecting schools and students.

3.2. Participants

The participants were two groups of students aged 12 to 15 years, from the same school. The first group was made up of 22 students from a class (12-13 years old, five were female and 17 male), accompanied in the protocol by their French teacher (Teacher 1). The second was a smaller group of just seven students (12-15 years old, two were female and five male) known as 'allophones',[5] with different academic levels and a level of French assessed according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages[6] between A2 (elementary user level) and B1 (independent user level). These young people attended intensive French courses, enabling them to progress at their own pace, under

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[5] In this group, there are two Albanian girls, two Algerian boys, a Tunisian boy and a boy of Turkish origin.
[6] Council of Europe. (n.d.). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages

the supervision of a second teacher who took part in our study (Teacher 2).

3.3 Protocols and Data Collection

The study was set up in the last term of the school year, spread over 3 months. The protocol has been developed in several steps, each with specific objectives and activities involved, and adapted for the group of allophone students (group 2), particularly in terms of duration and material used. The first three steps are detailed in table 1. In the fourth and final step, teacher asked the students to come up with an individual conflict resolution.[7] As we wanted to deal here mainly with the conception of conflict and observe its evolution through the exchanges in CPI, we will postpone the analysis of this last part of the students' work util a later analysis. What the chart says in text:

	Group 1 (24 students)	Group 2 (7 Allophone students)
Step 1. Collecting initial conceptions of the conflict		
Activities	Imagine the conflict using analogies	
Material	Chinese portrait exercise	Word-label[8], Photolanguage, Chinese portrait exercise [9]
Description	If conflict were an object/a smell/an action/a garment/a dish/an animal/ a sensation/a natural element … it would be a/an … Individual filling in; pooling of the results; discussion	
Data collected	Audio recordings of interactions & Individual Chinese portrait worksheet	
Step 2. Studying universal stories about conflict		
Activities	Reading and analysis universal stories transcribed and adapted in French	
Material	5 stories: The Apple of Discord; The Old Sultan; The Indigest Snake; Ix-Chel and the fireflies; Ra and Apep	Only 2 stories: The Indigest Snake; Ix-Chel and the fireflies
	'Analysis of the conflicts in the stories' worksheet[10]	
Description	Small group work, then pooling;	
Data collected	Small group written productions. Audio recordings only for Group 2.	
Step 3. Conducting a CPI about conflict		
Activities	Philosophical discussion among peers led by the teacher	
Description	Questioning after reviewing the stories. Group discussion based on a question formulated and chosen by the students.	
Data collected	Audio recordings of the philosophical discussion	

Table 1. The study device

In collecting audio data, we took legal and ethical issues into account: informing the children and their parents of the aims of our study and the use that will be made of the data collected, obtaining their consent for the voice recordings, and anonymizing the names of participants in the transcriptions.

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[7] Using an extract from the Greek myth "Ulysses on Calypso's Island", in which Ulysses is faced with an inner conflict, students had to imagine the decision they thought he should make.

[8] Teacher 2 translated the word 'conflict' into the students' mother tongue. They were asked to choose a word of their choice (in their mother tongue or second language) and write an initial definition.

[9] The Photolanguage was proposed before the Chinese portrait exercise. The students didn't have to deal with all the items of Chinese portrait, and they could use a dictionary or ask peers for translations. For the content, see Appendices 1&2.

[10] See Appendix 3.

For the 10 audio recordings (average length=45 min.) made during the 3 steps of the study, we chose to make a partial manual transcription. A full transcription would be too time-consuming and not essential at this stage of our analyses.

3.4 Methods of Analysis

Our analysis of students' conceptions of conflict is based on the analogies and meanings derived from the justifications they proposed during the Chinese portrait exercise (Step 1). We analyzed the content of their written and oral productions and identified some categories (emerging from the material analyzed) which we believe correspond to the aspects of conflict evoked by participants (features, causes, consequences, etc.). We then tried to identify elements that marked an evolution in their conception of conflict, firstly in the discussion that closely followed the Chinese portrait exercise (Step 1) and secondly in the CPI (Step 3) following the work on the universal stories (Step 2). To observe how students' initial conceptions are developed or evolve in the discussion between peers, we analyzed the verbal exchanges after transcribing them. We followed the discourse and the conceptual process as it unfolded, trying to observe, when students developed definitions of conflict, or came up with new criteria to conceptualize–when new aspects, new examples or new ideas were introduced in the discussion. Our analysis does not focus on specific individuals but attempts to highlight students' representations and tensions in the two groups.

For our second research question, concerning the tensions and conflicts that arose during the discussions, we attempted to describe the relational dynamics observed in the interactions, based on the recordings and transcriptions of the discussions and on the interpretations proposed by the teachers who supported the two groups. Where possible, we compared these interpretations with observations made from the recordings or by one of us who was present as an observer at the workshop.

4.   Preliminary Results

We present here some results in the form of general trends that emerge from our initial analysis; we also highlight, as far as possible, the specific features observed in the two groups. Initially, we analyze the students' conceptions of conflict, their first definitions, then their evolution throughout our study (4.1). Subsequently, we examine the dynamics of tension and conflict in peer interactions, analyzing how students and their teacher manage these moments (4.2).

4.1 Students' Conceptions of Conflict

a. Initial Conceptions

In group 1, students depicted conflict as aggressive and unpredictable, resembling the ferocity of a rabid dog or a hornet's sting. They often likened it to war, characterized by fear, anxiety, and heightened emotions. Conflict emerges unexpectedly (*a panther, a snake which seizes its prey by force, attacking it without warning*) and revolves around disputes over ownership or dominance (*a phone, a video game controller*), resulting in confusion and discord. Moreover, they asserted that human beings are implicated in the genesis of all conflicts, thus bearing responsibility for their occurrence. While most

students acknowledged its destructive potential, one student suggested the possibility of resolution and reconciliation, symbolized by the image of a panda (*sometimes it ends on good terms and with respect)*. In group 2, conflict was also portrayed as a struggle or a fight. Students depicted various instances of conflict, ranging from disputes over money and land to interpersonal disagreements. They highlighted the use of weapons and physical violence, with winners and losers akin to a football game. The aftermath of conflict was depicted through the imagery of sweat. Conflict can also arise from seemingly trivial issues, such as the smell of cigarettes. Students drew parallels between human conflicts and animal behavior, where differences in appearance or scent can lead to aggression. Additionally, conflicts can emerge from differences in opinions or religious beliefs, as well as disputes between nations over cultural traditions (such as Arabic dance, couscous).

We then looked at the meaning the students gave to their analogies to justify the link with conflict. We have identified several aspects that they addressed, as shown in table 2:

Aspects of conflict	Illustrations drawn from students' productions	Occ.[11] in Group 1	Occ. in Group 2
Attitudes	it attacks everything	3	1
Causes	people fight over money, land, rivalries, difference of opinion, physical appearance	2	5
Consequences & Effects	kills, destroys, burns, hurts and causes pains	7	2
Duration	takes a long time to finish	1	
Emotions & Feelings	It gets one angry, furious, raged, annoyed	1	
Examples	For me war equals conflict	2	
Features	ferocious, attacking without reason, dangerous, destructive, aggressive, unexpected	6	
Ingredients	fight, fear, anxiety, adrenaline	1	2
Relation to conflict	some like it, some don't like it	1	1
Relations between protagonists	they are no longer friends	1	
Resolutions	sometimes it ends on good terms and with respect	1	
Sources	for me, human beings are responsible for all conflicts	1	
Status of protagonists	there's no one to beat him	1	1
Strategies	sometimes you just want to scare the other person	1	1

Table 2. Aspects of conflict in students' arguments, by group

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[11] We indicate the number of occurrences recorded in the students' productions, by group to which they belong. We have classified them into categories according to aspects of the conflict mentioned (causes, consequences, etc.), which are categories based on the students' arguments. The figures are only there to show which aspect is mentioned most in one group and which in the other.

We noted that all the different aspects of conflict, which we categorized, were suggested by the productions of the students in group 1. The students in group 2 mentioned less than half of these categories. Our second observation could be more noteworthy because it highlights specific features in the representations of each group. Students in group 1 seem to emphasize the features and above all the consequences of conflict. For Maria, conflict causes, even unintentionally, physical and emotional pain: "a vase because sometimes the vase when uh we drop it falls and it breaks // uh when we have hurtful words it also breaks finally [...] you put your hand on the vase unintentionally then you take your hand away so that makes it fall".[12] Whereas students in group 2 seem to deal more with the causes of conflict. As we can see from Karim's snake example, "the snake when it looks at another snake that doesn't have the same color the same shape // it will kill it or fight to eat it", or Paul's reference to difference of opinion, differences in physical appearance as well as in thinking can lead to conflict.

b. Definitions

After the Chinese portrait session, students in group 1 were encouraged to refine their understanding of conflict by offering definitions. This process introduced new elements into the discussion.

According to them, conflict is dangerous and causes pain and blows. It takes place between protagonists who can disagree with each other about anything and then fight or tangle. One of the new ideas is that of disagreement, co-constructed by two students:

Eliot: [...] there's no real definition but a conflict can be people or things that disagree / people who disagree with each other about anything and that creates a conflict [...] anything can be the source of a conflict it's just.

Joachim: a disagreement

Eliot: yes, in fact it is a disagreement

Another student then explored the interdependent relationship between conflict and disagreement, stating: "conflict leads to disagreement and disagreement leads to conflict". Finally, a fourth student provided further insight into the origins of conflict, stating: "one person wants to be righter than the other // both want to be right and then after that there's irritation."

Let's keep in mind this idea of disagreement and its evolution towards conflict, to see to what extent it was taken up and developed during the second session, held two days later with the aim of continuing to explore the concept. To illustrate how students' thinking became more complex, we have selected two specific moments, which are detailed below:

Joachim: because conflict is that there was a disagreement {Teacher 1: yes}// disagreements may concern a conflict or it can be something else // there are some who are on both sides // you can say

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[12] We don't use punctuation marks (periods or commas) in our transcriptions; / indicates a restart in the flow of speech, and // a pause or silence.

that there are some who don't want conflict because they're on one side and other people they're for the conflict because they want their idea to be put forward

It seems like an effort on the part of the student to qualify the link between disagreement and conflict. According to him, there may be disagreement without conflict. Conflict can arise when someone wants to impose their idea on someone else.

Towards the end of the discussion, one of the students put forward the idea of a collision of two meteorites as an example of conflict. Another student contested the idea that there could be conflict in natural phenomena and argued. A dialogue ensued.

Joachim: that's because in fact a collision isn't / for example the two meteorites they collide // but to disagree you have to have a conscience // it is only people who have conscience

Karim: well no no // imagine there's a meteorite that was supposed to hit the earth // well there's another meteorite that's come into conflict with the other one // you can use the word to say that // it's not like we have a disagreement

Eliot: so if I'm talking about Karim's principle I can say that the table is in conflict with the table next to it or with my chair // so I could say that

Joachim and Eliot each question the possibility of meteorite conflict, raised by Karim. In their view, the conflicting elements must have a conscience, or the will to create a conflict. Finally, the students brought the discussion back to a linguistic level and proposed a distinction. Depending on whether the protagonists are human or not, we can use the term 'disagreement' for the former, but 'conflict' for the latter.

We observed in this episode a further step, initiated by the students themselves, in thinking about conceptual tension between 'conflict' and 'disagreement'.

c. Evolutions in Student's Conceptions

Group 1's studied five narratives; two stand out as particularly distinctive: *Ix-Chel and the Fireflies* from Maya culture, and *Ra and Apep* from Egyptian culture. These stories present conflict in a different light, where it is not solely perceived as destructive: in *Ix-Chel*, the goddess Moon experiences rebirth while in *Ra and Apep*, the perpetual struggle between Ra, the sun god, and Apep, embodying night and chaos, serves as a symbolic origin for the cycle of day and night, ensuring the equilibrium of the world.

After studying these stories, students formulated several questions, such as "Why does conflict exist?", "Why don't we agree?" and "What is conflict for?" Among these, they selected "Can conflict be useful?" for discussion.

During the discussion, they referenced the story of Ra and Apep twice, to emphasize that conflict is essential to the universe's cycle:

Maël: well in Ra and Apep's story the conflict is useful because / otherwise there would never be the night

This narrative, universally relevant, brought forth the idea of a helpful outcome of conflict:

Issam: on the one hand conflict is useful, on the other it's not

Teacher 1: can you explain why you say that?

Issam: well because for example for Ra and Apep // well uh // Apep did something that was good

The chosen question has sparked new perspectives, suggesting that conflict extends beyond fruitless wars, violence, and destruction—it can also potentially have utility and serve as a driving force. This seems to mark a significant progression in students' conceptualization of conflict.

d. New Examples

Let's now examine the new examples that have emerged: the discussion expanded to include the example of football. The rivalry between the two teams was presented as an element that enhanced the excitement of the game, although it was acknowledged that rules are necessary to prevent conflicts from escalating among supporters.

Malone: well // really I would say I prefer there is rivalry between the two teams rather than none // because if there is no rivalry in football for me this is not football anymore // if you have a classico Marseille *vs* Paris or Real vs Barça if there is no vibe or something like that // for me I think / I prefer there are conflicts in football rather than no conflict

Students subsequently changed their frame of reference to contemporary social events, introducing two new examples. Firstly, they referred to the teachers' strike against their administration for increased remuneration:

Malone: for instance / the college Vercors / the Rectorate they have suppressed twenty-five hours of lessons, I think

Teacher 1: ok // is it a conflict which is useful?

Malone: yes

Secondly, they introduced the example of the social situation in France in 2023 (the strong demonstrations and strikes against the pension reform postponing legal retirement age). This led them to propose a new definition: conflict is considered useful when it results in changes aligned with the demands of the parties involved.

Teacher 1: so what you said if I can rephrase is that // a conflict is useful when it leads to a change in line with the requirement of those who are in conflict // when a requirement of those in conflict is satisfied // is it any requirement or do we need criteria for this?

Maël: you still need that the two parts are satisfied // because // if not // it can create conflict in the other direction // and if one is winning and then the other isn't happy and she or he starts a conflict again // then it can lead to a conflict for a long time like that // both parties still need find a common ground

These examples seem to have facilitated a deeper exploration of conflict as a dynamic process.

 e. New ideas

At the onset of the discussion, a student had introduced the concept of 'common ground' (*terrain d'entente*, in French) as a necessity to prevent conflict. Conflict was deemed non-constructive while common ground was seen as essential.

However, as the dialogue progressed, students seemed to reach a consensus that a human experience devoid of conflict (including disagreements, tensions, rivalry, adrenaline, and confrontation) would be dull.

As the discussion unfolded and examples were provided, it became apparent that common ground often arises in the aftermath of conflict, highlighting a dynamic process where conflict can serve as a catalyst for its emergence.

Throughout the discussion, students also critically examined the concept of 'disagreement' and its relationship with conflict. They underscored the importance of a diversity of opinions, acknowledging that while this diversity may lead to conflict, disagreement itself holds importance. Their exploration of disagreement surpassed the initial approach taken in the earlier discussion.

Nolan: yes it's true / it is true because if everybody agrees with everything // there is / yeah there is no critical thought // yeah there won't be any originality

Thus, the recognition of conflict as a catalyst for change throughout human history, particularly in social and political contexts, was viewed positively, facilitating a deeper exploration of conflict as a dynamic process.

Considering these examples and the development of complex thinking that ensued, we can say that Group 1 students' conceptions of conflict evolved. These changes were prompted by their interpretation of Ra and Apep's mythical battle. Through its metaphorical interpretation of the world, this myth prompted a question that brought forth a problematization: tension between order and chaos, never-ending conflicts seem to be a condition of life, of change. This idea then found an echo in the students' context: different frames of reference such as football, social actuality. Thanks to the echoes

of this narrative, students delved into more intricate considerations regarding 'disagreement' and conflict, ultimately arriving at a new definition that focuses on the process of conflict, driving force of change and disruption, giving birth to temporary new orders and relations.

This appears to resonate with the Heraclitan concept of '*polémos*' mentioned earlier, which posits that reality is in a perpetual state of flux, with equilibrium continually re-establishing itself through conflicts between divergent forces, repeatedly.

4.2 Conflicts During the Dialogue

During the implementation of our device, we observed several instances of tension, characterized by robust disagreements regarding ideas as well as interpersonal conflicts. We tried to understand how conflicts were managed during the dialogue and to identify, if possible, what helped and what hindered the dialogue.

We observed that facilitators and participants addressed and reflected on these tensions in diverse ways, which we sought to elucidate by analyzing the following situations:

- **Case 1**

In the multicultural group (Group 2), the discussion was initiated by the question: "Can conflicts arise over nothing?" Students gave examples of conflicts, such as disagreements within couples and verbal altercations erupting in a stadium following a referee's error.

When the facilitator (teacher 2) invited the participants to consider the consequences of conflict, expanding on the football example, one student highlighted the rapid escalation of insults exchanged between players and fans. Alicia interjected, asserting that "escalating insults is not the right thing to do" and "insults are not a pathway to resolution." However, when Amine attempted to summarize Alicia's point, he suggested that boys engage in physical confrontation ("fight for real") while girls tend to reconcile more swiftly.

Alicia disagreed with this gender-based assumption, arguing, "I don't agree because he doesn't understand girls."

Amine and another boy, Abed, formed a kind of male alliance against Maria pointing at girls' weakness when they make up after an argument. At some point Maria, after introducing the idea that an argument between two girls could also last for a long time, just as for boys, was mocked by Abed once again ("yeah girls"). She reacted, saying "Algerians too." At that point, tensions culminated. Laughter, whispers, mockery, sighs, interruptions, expressions of frustration, discriminatory remarks disrupted the discussion.

The facilitator took on the role of mediator to calm the situation and keep everybody focused on the subject, trying to summarize what the discussion had led to. Usually, one of the students in the group was used to taking on the role of mediator through his interventions, but he was absent this day.

Did the students realize that they were in a conflict? Could the issue have been thematized? If the facilitator's endeavors in this part of dialogue failed to move things forward, it may be because the underlying relationship issue prevented any progress being made on the content under discussion.

- **Case 2**

In the regular class (Group 1) session following the Chinese portrait exercise, students discussed conflict and death. The initial remark from Joachim —"conflict brings disagreements and it can lead to death"—sparked tensions and the expression of strong opposing views. Maria got angry, expressing exasperation about the constant association with death ("death always") prompting laughter from peers. The facilitator intervened, seeking clarification from the two students: "What do you mean Maria? What are you trying to convey?" "Is this what you meant, Joachim? Can you elaborate on your statement?" Eventually tensions eased when a third student, Josias, cited the war between Ukraine and Russia as an example of conflict leading to violence and death. Subsequently, students explored various levels of conflict, with the most severe being deemed the most harmful. We can say that the facilitator's request for clarification and the well-known example given by another student, associating death with conflict, contributed significantly to avoiding polarization.

Later on, the theme of death re-emerged in the discussion:

Eliot: concerning the sensation I don't really agree with Joachim because death is not a sensation // when you die you don't say oh yes I am dying

Joachim: yes though // during a few seconds you have the sensation / this is a sensation not the death

Eliot: it can be discussed but / we won't enter into a debate

Teacher 1: ok // does someone want to add something

According to Eliot, death is not a sensation. However, Joachim argued that we can experience the sensation of death, which is distinct from death itself. Eliot acknowledged Joachim's objection, but ultimately chose to avoid further debate, with the teacher's agreement. Can we say that Eliot didn't want to pursue the disagreement, and possibly revise his position, preferring to change the subject? Or rather, that he wanted to avoid conflict? It's hard to say, but we might ask if the intervention of the teacher or a peer would have deepened the proposed distinction.

Tensions resurfaced later when student Maria suggested that interpersonal conflict could also be significant, even if it does not result in death. She took an example of an argument which she considered very serious:

Maria: if for example someone close in your family has just died // and two people are arguing because one says // yeah, she deserved that // and the other // no that's a serious argument too

Laughter ensued, hindering Maria from clarifying her statement. Despite the facilitator's attempts to reinforce discussion rules, tensions persisted between Maria and Eliot, as Maria stated that "death was a passage" and "argument can be serious too." However, when other students intervened and engaged in a calmer discussion about death (drawing distinctions and nuances between natural death and death provoked by various conflicts), the conflict between Eliot and Maria shifted from personal to conceptual. The discussion continued with different speakers, with the mediation of peers helping to de-escalate the conflict and enabling further dialogue.

However, the underlying conflict between Eliot and Maria remained unresolved as Maria withdrew from further participation in the discussion. Notably, she was the only female voice in the group. It is likely that the predominance of male voices, coupled with the mockery and lack of attention she received, prevented her from developing her ideas and expressing herself fully.

- **Case 3**

At the end of the discussion "Can conflict be useful?" (Group 1), a student analyzed the disagreement in which he was involved with a fellow student, and raised a point for reflexion:

Josias: yes sometimes there are tensions but not many

Teacher 1: so when are there tensions?

Josias: me and Maël/1 disagreed // I said conflict wasn't useful at all and Maël said yes it is useful // for example in a football game it is useful he said

Teacher 1: so it's a disagreement but what explains the absence of tension then?

Josias: there's no tension because / because we're having a friendly discussion

Josias remarked that tensions arose sporadically during the discussion, though they were not frequent. These tensions stemmed from his disagreement with another student regarding the utility of conflict. Despite the initial disagreement, he ultimately concluded that tensions were not present. The framework of the discussion, 'friendly discussion' was proposed as a means to foster thinking together.

In this excerpt the students engage in meta-reflection on the dynamics of the discussion, offering an insightful analysis that introduces the notion of friendship. Scholars have identified friendship, along with openness and empathy, as "successful dialogue strategies". It can be hypothesized that this reflection was facilitated by the CPI approach, which directs students' attention to the process.

5. Discussion

The first contribution of this article is bringing to light the nature of the students' spontaneous conceptions of conflict, and how these evolve through interactions.

On the basis of their individual proposals, we reached an overall picture of 'conflict' as a fight or struggle, largely related to physical and moral injuries. This is not surprising because we invited them to think about conflict not in an abstract way but with their bodily and everyday experiences. It is likely that they conjured up, in their suggestions, images from current geopolitical events or films, from their everyday social life as adolescents, the violence of words. Even though they used the same comparison markers to draw analogies and represent conflict, adolescents in our study did not focus on the same aspects, depending on whether they were in the regular class (group 1) or in a multicultural group (group 2). Students from group 1 were born or are living in an urban working-class area, facing delinquency, poverty, daily violence, parallel economy and thus fear and insecurity. They mentioned that conflict burns, kills, degenerate, wastes time, etc., which primarily refers to the effects and consequences. Allophone students also associated conflict with fighting but they focused on physical appearance, cultural or religious differences, which probably points to the status of foreigner or migrant and portrays conflict in terms of causes that provoke it.

The fact that each group emphasizes different aspects of conflict could be related not only to the students' personal experience or cultural background (most of the pupils in group 1 come from families with a migrant background), but probably to their social and even scholar status (regular *vs*. specific language needs). However, with a small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be so relevant in other allophone groups. In addition, other elements could be addressed, such as the group's experience and regularity in the practice of philosophical dialogue (which, in our study, group 2 did not have, and group 1 had).

The results also suggest that students' spontaneous conceptions evolved during the process. The discussion "Can conflict be useful?" revealed, in our analysis, a greater complexity in their thinking about conflict, including the ability to distinguish, give criteria, raise objections. We think that this discussion also drew on the collective imagination presented in some of the universal stories studied with the groups. It is possible, therefore, that collective imagination embedded in universal stories gave students the opportunity to enrich their vision of conflict, inspiring more sophisticated thought; students focused on the process of conflict rather than on 'frozen' characteristics, which enabled them to express nuanced thoughts. In our study, the encounter between narrative imagination, on the one hand, and the sensitivity and imagination of the students, on the other, ultimately led to a reconceptualization of the conflict.

Our observations are consistent with those of Kennedy (2006) who emphasized for younger children (7-year-olds) the ability to reason, in relation with their experience, in a coherent and complex way about the topic of conflict, when they are in a "collaborative and dialogical context." Adolescents seem to have this ability too. Kennedy emphasized the importance of the adult's posture in facilitating interaction and making room for the child's intelligence. Following with these observations, our study suggests that imagination can be a stimulating pedagogical design supporting students' thinking.

Furthermore, we suggest that inviting students to use their imagination in variety of ways (embodied, narrative, operative) could lead adults to leave more room for child's individuality.

The second contribution of this article is a better understanding of how students manage tensions and conflicts arising during interactions in a collaborative and dialogical context.

We could observe tensions and sometimes conflicts in the CPI we analyzed so far. We note that students' roles in the dialogue are not always frozen: they sometimes are speakers defending their ideas, but they sometimes can endorse different roles such as mediators, diplomats who enable the dialogue not to get stuck in a disagreement between two sides and/or two people, but to go forward.

Self-regulation of the group enabled participants to overcome tensions and to continue the dialogue. This very much depends on the history of the group, its dynamic, everyone's place, and power relationships. Group 1 had a regular practice of CPI. On the contrary, in group 2, some students found it hard to express themselves. They were subjected to mocking by the others. The group was not used to discussions, individuals were still trying to find their place and/or assert themselves. In the process of building a community of inquiry, the construction of the group constitutes a real challenge: at the beginning, and maybe sometimes throughout the CPI's history, students are looking to establish their role as speakers, to find their voice and place in the dialogue. In this context of interaction, the process that deals with the relationships between discussants seems intimately linked to the process that deals with the philosophical content under discussion; sometimes the former can prevent certain advances (Fournel & Perrer-Clermont, 2022).

6. Conclusion

We observed that metacognition could help students to analyze their own involvement in the dialogue and even consider what peer relationships should be. As one of the students suggested, a "friendly discussion" can reduce or eliminate the tensions that would otherwise hamper dialogue.

It might be argued that there is a link between this idea of friendship in discussion and the concepts of caring thinking, attentiveness, listening to the other, used in P4wC literature. This calls to mind the words of Arendt (1974): "... for the Greeks, the essence of friendship lay in discourse. They maintained that only a constant 'speaking together' united citizens in a polis. Dialogue reveals the political importance of friendship, and it's very humanity" (p. 34). Arendt broadens and elevates *philia politike*, the concept inherited from Aristotle to a more genuinely political form "so that it may cope with differences, diversities and heterogeneities among friends" (Chiba, p. 521). We think this concept could be useful for analyzing the relationships between students within the space and framework they share and build within CPI.

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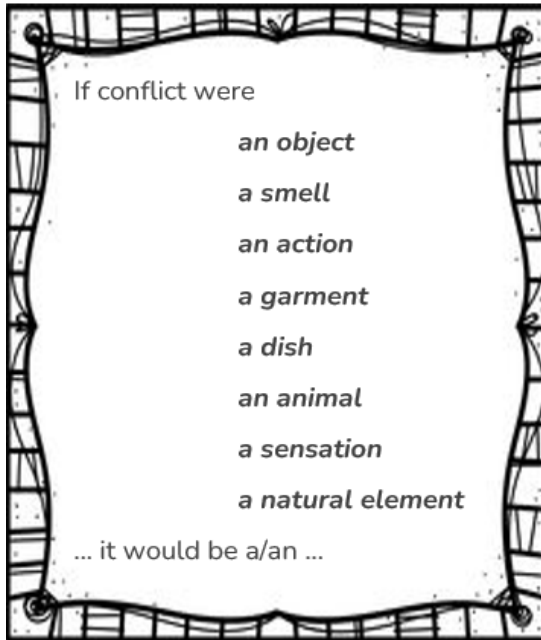   84.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Photolanguage

Appendix 2. Chinese portrait exercise

If conflict were

an object

a smell

an action

a garment

a dish

an animal

a sensation

a natural element

... it would be a/an ...

Appendix 3. Analysis of the conflicts evoked in the stories.

Analysis of the conflicts in the stories

Story title : ....

Group members : ....

The conflict	What are the reactions and emotions provoked by the conflict in the protagonists?
Protagonists: Problem / object of the conflict: Origin (cause) of the conflict:	1. 2. 3. 4.

End of the conflict? Consequences?	What kind of conflict is it?
Is the conflict over? If so, how did it end? Consequences :	

What do you think of this conflict? What questions does this conflict raise?

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