

Virtual School of “Dialogue, Democracy and Peaceful Conflict Resolution”

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION AND INTERCULTURAL LEARNING by Michael Raphael

Lesson VII

MICHAEL RAPHAEL peaceact@aol.com

NATIONALITY Portuguese and American

EDUCATION
-Nova Southeastern University
PhD Conflict Analysis (currently attending program)
Brooklyn College, New York, N.Y. - 1998
-M.A. Social Psychology/Human Relations
Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel - 1987
- B.A. Political Science, Psychology

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

2001-present	Peaceful Communication	Cascais, Portugal
	Consulting Firm: conflict and peace building	
1995-present	Council Of Europe	Strasbourg, France
	Democratic Leadership Program (Independent Consultant)	
1999 - 2003	NANSEN DIALOGUE CENTER	Bosnia, Macedonia
	PeaceBuilding, Conflict Management Consultant (Independent Consultant)	
1999 - 2002	REUT-SADAKA (FRIENDSHIP)	Tel Aviv, Israel
	Director Palestinian Jewish Peace Organization	
1992 - 1996	GREENACTION	Tel Aviv, Israel
	Director, Board Member	
1990 - 1992	VERA INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE	New York, N.Y.
	Training Specialist, Group Dynamics	
1988 - 1990	INNOVATIVE COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES	New York, N.Y.
	Program Director, Development Coordinator	
1987 - 1989	GREENPEACE	Amsterdam, Holland
	Campaigner, Field Manager	

SKILLS

Leadership

- Led and initiated international peace seminars and exchanges for ethnically diverse people.
- Founded and established funding for fledgling environmental and peace organizations.
- Achieved national recognition for organizations through media and public relations.
- Supervised within a variety of non-governmental organization (NGO) settings.

Creativity

- Created and developed anti-prejudice and human relations curriculum for New York schools.
- Developed and conducted creative courses in conflict management in many emerging countries.
- Produced and initiated art and music events to support human rights, environment and peace issues.

Training

- Trained non-governmental agencies in Europe and the Middle East in conflict resolution and intercultural learning.
- Trained and supervised many facilitators and trainers from many diverse backgrounds and nationalities.
- Practiced individual family and group therapy with diverse populations.

Mediation Conflict Management Expert

- Mediated hundreds of family, community and political cases in many different settings.
- Successfully implemented conflict management programs in approximately 100 New York schools.
- Conducted conflict management programs in Israel, Palestine, Northern Ireland and the Balkans.
- Designed conflict management workshops for the European Community.

Organization

- Consulted with international organizations in Europe and the Middle East in conflict management, Confidence building and peace work.
- Organized successful public campaigns in the U.S., Europe and the Middle East.
- Consulted with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on organizational skills and campaign management.

Lecture on conflict transformation and intercultural learning

As a member of a university peace group in the mid 1980's, I can remember my first experience in European inter cultural and conflict education. I can remember how intense the experience was and how for the first time I came to realize that belonging to a distinct culture not only provides me with a viable interpretation of the world around me, but also places me in relation to other cultural groups.

The facilitator pressed the group to explore their differences. The emphasis was to explore how we were not like each other. I felt uncomfortable with how I was defined by the others; not by my individual qualities, but by the qualities they assumed based upon my origin and cultural orientation. Following a series of powerful exercises, the members of the groups realized that although there were differences between the cultural groups in perspective and customs, as individuals, we found strong similarities with other group members. As a matter of fact I found some of the individuals in the “other” groups to be even closer to me than my own group, be it in political orientation or social values. The training left me with more questions about myself, my culture and what it all really meant to me.

Almost twenty years later, I am a researcher and professional involved in many programs that deal with conflict as well as intercultural learning. The changes that have occurred in this new field, both in theory and practice, show a growing maturity and deeper understanding of the complexity of these concepts. In my presentation today I would like first to highlight some of these theoretical changes and then present some of the international projects and programs that reflect these changes.

Conflict is a feature of all human societies and an aspect of all social relationships. How we conceptualize the root causes of conflict will determine to a large degree the sorts of conflict resolution theories and practices we favor, or even think possible. Likewise, how we conceive of conflict's causes will determine the importance of culture in our theories and practices of conflict resolution. Here are two widely cited definitions that highlight different root causes of conflict:

- 1) Conflict...A struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources, a struggle in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals. (L. Closer, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, 1956)
- 2) Conflict means perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously. (J. Rubin, D. Pruitt and S. Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation Stalemate and Settlement*, 1994)

Closer's definition is more specific regarding causes and responses to conflict (by allowing both “values” and qualifying “claims to” to modify the main clause). It focuses on the idea of scarcity as the cause. It also highlights the consequences of conflict: a “struggle” that results in some direct or indirect violence to “neutralize, injure or eliminate”. The second definition emphasizes less categorical reasons: “perception” and “belief”, nothing immutable and therefore capable of change.

These two definitions suggest two major approaches to conflict and, thus to conflict resolution. The first definition underlines scarcity of material resources and power. The second highlights perception and belief, and, by extension, different interpretations of these. The first seems to move parties rather directly to contention, to struggle. The second seems to invite the possibilities of talk, of negotiation.

These two conceptions of conflict resolution will underline not only the definitions of conflict but also the methods and perspectives of solving conflict.

The first reflects a clear strategy that brings a socially visible or public episode of conflict (a dispute) to a definitive end. This appears to offer only a zero sum game, a win or lose resolution. Under this concept a disputant negotiates or brings in a third party to stipulate a solution or struggle to eliminate the other ‘contestant’.

The second conception of conflict resolution is the one that has arisen most recently with the dramatic emergence of a field of study of conflict resolution. It offers as a preferred means of resolution a more subtle and nuanced approach of interest-based negotiation. It seems to exclude retreat (even if voluntarily), coercion and war as modes of conflict resolution. Some theorists of the “new” conflict resolution even want to exclude negotiation that aims to create a simple division of resources or ‘compromise’ as a mode of genuine conflict resolution. Genuine resolution is differentiated from conflict “management” or conflict “regulation” from dispute “settlement” or conflict mitigation. Each of these may well have a role to play-by, for example, dampening or halting violence-but they should not be mistaken for resolution. Resolution aims to get to the root causes of the conflict and not merely to treat its episodic or symptomatic manifestations, that is, a particular dispute. In this way its affinity is to peace studies rather than to strategic studies, where we can find the first sense of resolution predominant.

John Galtung made a distinction in his seminal article “Violence, Peace and Peace Research” between “negative” peace or absence of war and “positive” peace which he defines as a societal condition in which structures of domination and exploitation, which underline war, have been eliminated. In conflict resolution theory, this Galtung’s approach has been advocated most forcefully by two theorists. One is John Burton, who invented the expression “conflict prevention” to refer to a kind of resolution that seeks to eliminate the root cause of the conflict or, as he put it, to seek the “solution of the problems which led to the conflictual behavior in the first place.” (J. Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention*, 1990). The other is John Paul Lederach, who, believing that conflict resolution as a term is misunderstood as “management” and “settlement” feels the term should be changed to “conflict transformation.”

Their conclusions are that we must face the negative perceptions of those in our community who view conflict as something to be suppressed and avoided or who handle conflict in destructive ways. If we want to change conflict dynamics we must educate and encourage people to solve problems in their community and enhance decision-making and communication skills. It is not enough to have the political content negotiated, but the process of the conflict and the dynamics between the parties must be examined, reflected and improved. Settling the current status quo only prevents war but does not necessarily promote “positive” peace.

The conflict narrative receives its importance from both parties understanding the dynamics of their relationship. Comparing the validity of relative truths does not assist in resolving conflict (the past is driven by unalterable perceptions); changing the dynamics of the relationship will. This has been particularly obvious during my work in the Balkans, where many of the community leaders are facing a great deal of suspicion due to a very recent and severe experience of conflict. Even in those areas in the region where hostilities ceased there is still a strong feeling of resentment and segregation. Without a holistic approach to conflict education, objectively examining the roots of conflict, perception, communication and problem solving skills, our efforts will only be temporary at best.

Ironically these two leaders of the field disagreed with respect to the role of culture in conflict resolution. John Burton saw conflict resolution processes as capable of objective and universal approaches that belie such things as culture. Jean Paul Lederach saw culture as inextricably linked to the perceptions that drive conflict and therefore conflict resolution. This leads us into the realm of intercultural education and its relationship to conflict resolution.

Following what we have established so far, conflict behavior is influenced by our perceptions of both relationship of the disputants and of the conflict itself. We have found in all our work that culture is a dominant influence of our perceptions and beliefs. Therefore, the intercultural experience will have to be a part of any conflict resolution workshop. When we engage in this activity we should be concerned with the assumptions that one makes about culture. The most effective learning is interactive and collaborative with an emphasis on problem solving skills. Conflict can not be broken down dispassionately into its component parts with costs and benefits arrayed on a balance sheet for all the participants to compute. A successful learning experience about conflict, as Kelman and Rouhana write in their book Promoting Joint Thinking in International Conflicts, “enable(s) the parties to penetrate each others perspective, gaining insight into each others concerns, priorities, and constraints”.

It is hard to imagine a better description of an exercise of ethnographic imagination or of cultural analysis. I would go further and argue that in intercultural conflict resolution a cultural analysis is an irreducible part of problem solving. In a problem-solving workshop, a cultural analysis is accomplished when, with the help of a facilitator, the members in the group gain some insight into the schemas, encodements, indigenous models and theories of others. Each individual is also given the chance to express their own complexity and preferences.

One of the dangers in the intercultural workshop is that the individual will be tagged into national stereotypes without being able to explore their own individual perspectives. Ironically, in the current European context very few individuals are influenced only by one culture; globalization, mobility and technology have a great influence on individuals and their communities. Homogenous cultural regions are becoming almost obsolete. Culture is no longer seen as static and timeless but rather dynamic and adaptable. Swift social, political and economic changes have affected many regions in Europe. This has created instability as well as an opportunity for individuals to be given the maximum freedom to define themselves.

The intercultural learning experience is not viewed any more as a clash of cultures, but rather a laboratory of ideas and perspectives, where young individuals can test their own and other's solutions to our increasingly complex societies. Cultural orientations obviously influence our interpretations of the world, but figuring out our different orientations, their relative influence, and the way they all vary in every individual makes for a respectful and transformative experience for all the participants in the workshop.

In summary, there is a great deal of evidence as to the benefits of intervening in conflicts with interactive training models that expose the participants to both conflict resolution as well as cultural literacy. It is clear that this response can be effective for the participants and seed the communities with individuals who can promote change.

In the long term it is necessary to recommend the inclusion of these approaches in the curricula of schools across Europe so that these discussions and insights can be experienced by all youth.