

## **The Medium is the Message**

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Last May, I was introduced to Dialogue Education™ through participating in a course offered at Eastern Mennonite University's Summer Peacebuilding Institute (SPI). This course, facilitated by Jeanette Romkema and Marshall Yoder, carried the title, "Designing Learner-Centered Training for Conflict Transformation." As the Director of a Peace and Conflict Transformation (PACT) Program at Anderson University (Indiana), I thought such a course might enhance what I was able to offer the students in our program. I had participated in SPI before, and I had found the experience to be rich and rewarding. What I had not expected was to come out of the seven day course with thoughts about my own teaching style, and that of others, irrevocably changed. Yet this is what occurred.

A few years ago, Colman McCarthy, a noted peace educator in the U.S., visited our campus. In one of his conversations with students, McCarthy noted that he considered tests to be instruments of violence. While I have never considered tests to be the most effective learning instruments, I must confess that until that time, I had never considered them to be instruments of violence. But he started me thinking about the possibility of seeing them in this light.

Fast forward to my summer course, where we noted more than once how consistent are values guiding Dialogue Education™ and those of peacemaking. Both require respect of and listening to the other. They require one to set aside what may be long-held "answers" in favor of the questions brought by others to the conversation. Dialogue Education™ and peacemaking are multi-dimensional enterprises. They recognize differences of perspective, differences in giftedness, and differences in inclination and orientation. And the purpose of both of these is to create something that could not have been created by a single individual addressing a problem or situation. In a real sense, when considering Dialogue Education™ and peacemaking, the medium truly is the message.

Upon returning to my campus this fall, I facilitated a workshop for faculty in our program, designed using the principles of Dialogue Education™. I found the technique to lend itself to peace education in very common sense ways, yet I had real concerns about how my teaching colleagues would

respond. I have included below two responses I received after the workshop, and these reflect the general flavor of the feedback I received.

*I thoroughly enjoyed the event and saw a number of colleagues engaged in ways that they are not typically in other "meetings" where we have been together. [Another colleague] also mentioned to me what a positive experience she had and her appreciation for your effort and leadership. I came away with many more ways in which I think I can organize my course and projects to fit PACT concerns... . I know you had some misgivings about the event, but I want to say again that I found it very helpful.*

*A note to congratulate you on Friday's workshop. It was one of the rare gatherings here that had a defined purpose and structure. I hope you found it to be worthwhile; I know I did.*

So what about tests as instruments of violence, you may ask? Did my summer learnings convince me of the truth of McCarthy's claim? Let's just say that I'm learning ways of leading learners into the academic enterprise that, hopefully, will encourage them to engage with the process to such an extent that tests no longer serve any purpose. With peace education, I believe my classes have already arrived at that place. It's those other required courses in the university curriculum that keep me wondering... .

My workshop design follows.

# FOUNDATIONS OF A CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION APPROACH TO PEACEBUILDING

A workshop for faculty teaching electives in the Peace and Conflict Transformation Program  
at Anderson University

Friday, September 10 2010, 2-4 pm  
Edwards Dining Room, Olt Student Center

## PARTICIPANTS

Seventeen faculty members, representing the following departments:  
*Political Science, Religious Studies, Communications, Economics, Entrepreneurship,  
Campus Ministries, Sociology, Psychology, Art & Design, History, Social Work.*

### IN TODAY'S WORKSHOP YOU WILL:

1. *Engage* with faculty of other disciplines teaching PACT Minor electives;
2. *Analyze* ways in which the peacebuilding wheel might connect to your academic discipline and inform your teaching; and,
3. *Compare* conflict resolution and conflict transformation.

### 1. BEGINNING TO CONNECT (25 minutes)

- 1A. **Pair up** with a participant who does not come from your academic discipline/area.
- 1B. **Describe** to your partner how you believe her/his course reflects the values and priorities of the PACT program.
- 1C. **Evaluate *your*** level of awareness of how your partner's discipline relates to PACT. Using short descriptions (maximum of one sentence), **record** your findings on a Post-it Note and **share** these at your table.
- 1D. In the large group, **discuss** what you notice in your colleagues' comments.
  - What surprises you?
  - What questions come to mind?

### 2. THE PEACEBUILDING WHEEL (30 minutes)

2A. **Read** the description of the Peacebuilding Wheel in the box below. **Circle** or **underline** what you find to be the most interesting or striking elements of the description.

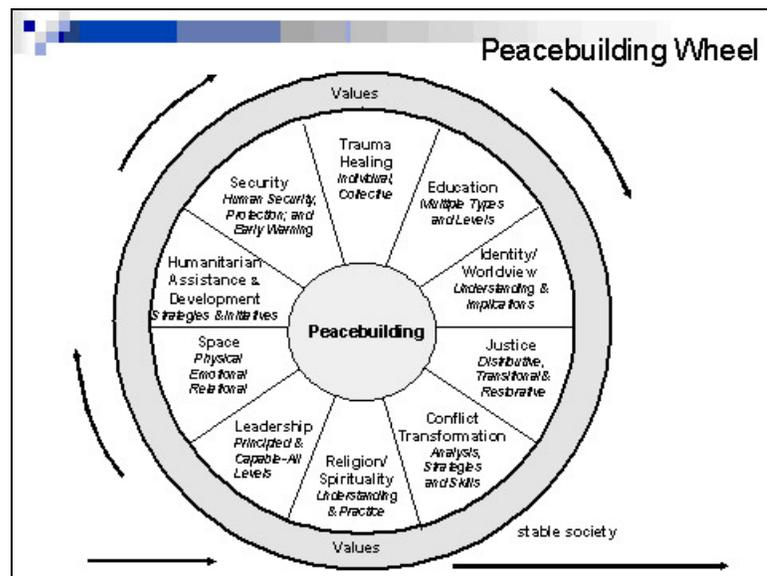
**The Peacebuilding Wheel** is a model that shows the interface of tangible and intangible elements of peacebuilding. As a Wheel, each section has its strength and role to play in complimenting and completing the Wheel, making it possible for it to move forward. The Peacebuilding Wheel can also be used as a template for complex conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction. It helps users see what elements are required to build peace and how they must work together to do so. As a template, the Wheel shows peacebuilders with a particular focus such as trauma healing or transitional justice, who their partners are and who they must build coalitions with to be most effective. Moreover, each section of the Wheel is also a potential “entry point” to begin to deal with violence or its aftermath, but again, peacebuilding toward a more stable society requires the creative and constructive action of each section of the Wheel and the interaction of them all.

Finally, the values that inflate the tire on the rim of the Wheel come from all sectors of it and relate to human needs, rights and dignity as well as beliefs. These values, along with trustbuilding and reconciliation (also a value, process and potential outcome) inform, support and promote both human security and growth and, at the same time, challenge leadership to govern in ways that help build and constructively maintain social, political and economic systems that are just and secure.

Barry Hart, *Peacebuilding in Traumatized Societies*, 2008.

- What did you circle?

2B. **Consider** each of the Peacebuilding Wheel “spokes” as it is added to the poster. What questions come to mind as you are introduced to these various spokes?



- 2C. At your tables, **discuss** which of the spoke areas relates most closely to your own academic discipline. Why do you say this?

Let's hear a few highlights before we go to break.

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**MICRO-BREAK: 5 MINUTES**

Time to stretch and refill your coffee/tea cups.

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**3. TRANSFORMATION AS A MODEL FOR ADDRESSING CONFLICT (30 minutes)**

- 3A. **Read** the “conflict resolution” and “conflict transformation” boxes below, **noting** phrases that particularly stand out in each. **Analyze** the differences between the two.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: “At its most basic, the language of resolution implies finding a solution to a problem. It guides our thinking toward bringing some set of events or issues, usually experienced as very painful, to an end. There is a definitiveness and finality created in the language when we add `re` to `solution`. We seek a conclusion. Resolution’s guiding question is this: How do we end something that is not desired?” Most often, however, conflicts are rarely actually resolved. They are more likely to be contained, managed, or reduced.

J.P. Lederach, *A Little Book of Conflict Transformation*

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION: The approach of “conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships.” The conflict transformation approach is “context-responsive,” taking into account the culture, history, and ethos of conflicted groups or societies. Transformation’s guiding question is “how do we end something not desired and build something we do desire?”

J.P. Lederach, *A Little Book of Conflict Transformation*

- What is different for you about the conflict transformation approach?
- Does this raise any questions for you about the PACT program at AU?

- 3B. In groups of three, **discuss** your thoughts about why Hart’s peacebuilding wheel includes “conflict transformation,” rather than “conflict resolution” as one of its spokes. **Record** two key

ideas on separate post it notes, and **plan** to share and **post** these when the large group reconvenes.

In the large group:

- What do you notice?
- What questions does this raise for you?

#### 4. TAKING IT WITH US (30 minutes)

4A. In the same groups of three, **brainstorm** a list of ideas for how one might use the ideas we have discussed today. **Record** your list on the paper provided and **post**.

4B. Do a **gallery walk** to review the posted lists and **choose** one idea that you would like to try. **Record** your chosen idea in the box below, as a reminder.

Let's hear a few of your plans.

#### Resources

Lederach, John Paul. *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003.

<http://healingtrauma.pdd.mcc.org/resources/hart-traumatic-events-and-identity-threat> .

<http://emu.edu/blog/restorative-justice/2009/04/20/restorative-justice-and-peacebuilding/> .