Conflict, Learning and Sustainable Peacebuilding

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Case Studies for Finding a Better Way Forward

By

William M. Timpson

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And to all life on earth that struggles to stay healthy.

DEDICATION

I need to dedicate this book to so many, to my family members, to my friends, colleagues and former students, to all those who have faced conflicts, from small to crippling, and brought their good spirits, courage, leadership, and resilience to bear, inspiring others to face up to their challenges and move forward.

My mother did that for me in countless ways. Anne Burlak Timpson faced tough times growing up as an immigrant's daughter. In her earliest years in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, she had to drop out of school after the ninth grade to help support her family. Applying for her first job in a local textile plant, she noted how the boys were being offered substantially more than the girls. When she asked why, the brusque response was simply, "Girlie, there is a long line of kids wanting these jobs and if you don't want to work, one of them will." This history always inspired me and so many others to "speak truth to power," to confront the oppressions we faced, to build community and to push for a better world.

Radicalized by the harsh times of the Great Depression, my mom went on to create a remarkable career as a national leader in organizing textile workers, all over the U.S. Believing in the need to challenge the power of the wealthy who got rich by feeding off the labor of the common people who quickly embraced her and her message of solidarity with them, she proudly joined the American Communist Party, believing that Marxist-Leninism offered a better idea, a way forward that was much more fair to those who did the work.

Arrested many times for agitating for unions but never convicted of breaking any law, she remained upbeat and resilient. In 1930 she faced a charge of sedition and the threat of execution in Georgia for daring to speak about unions to an integrated audience of whites and African Americans. Later she was also threatened with deportation as an alien agitator and a danger to the public until the Catholic Church in her hometown of Bethlehem was able to produce a baptismal certificate!

During the Red Scare of the McCarthy era, while I was growing up, she was often in the news when the House Un-American Activities Committee

or HUAC came to town. A police car would occasionally park at the end of our street in a very visible statement that the authorities were watching. I would later learn that our phones were also tapped and neighbors hired to take notes on the license plates of the cars that friends and allies drove when they visited.

Yet, through it all, she was still mom, cooking our meals and enjoying the Ed Sullivan show on Sunday nights with us, camping as a family in summers and learning to ride a bicycle late in life, thoroughly enjoying the joys of peddling through Franklin Park near our house.

My mom's father was her inspiration for working through conflicts. He had emigrated to the U.S. from Ukraine, escaping from a prison in Odessa after he had participated in an abortive insurrection in 1905 against the Tzar by sailors on the Battleship Potemkin. In the U.S., he had gone to work in a Bethlehem Steel plant, sweating long, hard ten-hour shifts at an open-hearth furnace, six days a week.

As my mom would later demonstrate, he grew increasingly upset with the oppressive working conditions with little company attention to the safety or well-being of the workers who were poorly paid, all of which created enormous profits for the owners. When he dared to talk about unionizing, he was quickly fired and black-balled. The consequences were severe.

I imagine the conflict he faced, speaking that truth but in a company town with his family's housing and food at risk. With no recourse, the family soon had to move. However, through it all my grandad kept his values and his dignity. Eventually he took his family back home to Russia when Soviet leaders called for those who had fled the Tsar to return and help build the socialist dream, the workers' paradise. Given her flourishing career building the American version of that dream, my mom stayed in the U.S.

I also dedicate this book to my dad, Arthur Edward Timpson, who was born in Estonia but immigrated with his mother and little brother to the U.S. through Ellis Island and then on to Irma, Wisconsin. There he was greeted by my grandad who had emigrated earlier to take up the challenge of creating a dairy farm on the 40-acres he got for free through the Homestead Act.

Graduating high school and two years of normal school, my dad worked as a teacher in a one room schoolhouse before the Great Depression pushed him to join with dairy farmers in the area to push for a cooperative that

would let them control the financial returns for their labor and provide a better return for their time and investments.

Later in life he would answer the call for volunteers to help defend the elected Republican government in Spain from a rebellion by Generalissimo Franco in 1936, an idealistic effort to protect the world from the spreading scourge of fascism as sparked by Hitler and Mussolini. Yet my dad's ancient Russian built cannon and unpredictable ammunition were a poor match for the advanced weaponry and military personnel coming from Germany and Italy to support Franco and his military coup.

The idealism of the International Brigades made for tough but deadly and overmatched battles. Needing modern weapons, they struggled with the embargo on military equipment that had been imposed by the American government and its European allies in a naïve and failed effort to avoid expanding the war in Spain in such a few short years after the World War One, the supposed "war to end all wars."

The fall of the elected government of Spain during this Civil War and the fear of the spread of fascism throughout Europe was what had inspired my dad to volunteer. To this day, I still wonder whether World War Two could have been avoided if the Allies had had the courage to stand up to the Fascists in 1936 and, at the very least, provide modern weaponry to the volunteers who had come from around the world to defend the elected government of Spain.

Despite massive casualties among these international volunteers, my dad was able to survive this conflict and later volunteered as an artillery sergeant to fight with the U.S. and George Patton's Third Army from D-Day until the German surrender. My dad survived that war as well.

Later in life he would work as a laborer, proud of his "proletariat" status. Like my mom, he had also been radicalized by the Great Depression. He saw clearly that the evil ones were those capitalists who directed and controlled life in the West.

At a time in the 1950's when U.S. hysteria during the "Red Scare" was raging, anything that smacked of far-left politics was scrutinized and often suppressed. When teachers and professional types were being "outed" for their leftist leanings, in his very hard blue collar "Sandhog" job with a jackhammer, he would smile and insist that no one cared about his politics down in the hole. He also had his union there for protection. He would go out every workday to put food on our table and keep a roof over our heads.

He would do this in all kinds of weather, breathing the dust at construction sites or working under pressure as they dug the tunnel under Boston Harbor. I wish I had had the maturity as a kid to thank him for that sacrifice over all those years and to tell him that I understood why he did not want to tolerate my slacking or goofing off and risking future possibilities.

I remember one time when I came home with one "B" on a fourth-grade report card that was otherwise all "A's." The focus for that night's family meeting was about that "B"! "But what about all the A's?" I whined. And of course, he was right; I had goofed off. Dad, this book is also for you, for your inspired service to others, surviving those wars, and for sacrificing your health to support our family.

Living out his values, however, he broke with my mother's loyalty to the Communist Party and left the Party after Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1956 denounced Stalin for his many abuses. For the rest of their lives there was this wall of tension as my mother maintained her loyalties to the USSR while my dad was quick to criticize. Attention to history and values would be my touchstones as I moved through those school years and tried to make sense of the Cold War debates that routinely surfaced at home.

I also dedicate this book to my sister, Kat Wright, who suffered her uppity little brother for so many years. We have since repaired that damage and she has served as a technical editor for several of my books. She can be so attentive to the details that can slip through my impatience. I always wanted to focus on the big concepts—the ideas, the lessons to be learned and, of course, she was alert to the integrity of the entire process, including the accuracy of the sources I cited. Kat, I also dedicate this book to you.

In this family history I must also note the two remarkable young women who grew up in the shadow of my academic career. Bright and engaging, both Kellee and Jayme have done very well in their schools and college careers, finding rich and fulfilling work while inspiring me with their resilience in navigating their own challenges and conflicts.

And to my wife of 25 years, Gailmarie Kimmel, I owe so much, appreciating her steadfast support through good times and hard, successes and setbacks. She was an engaging energy, with a clarity of values, and a deep commitment to progressive goals, to fairness and equity for all people, especially those who have been sidelined and exploited, oppressed

and neglected. And most important is her special, deep and long-standing commitment to the health and well-being of our dear Mother Earth.

PREFACE

Conflict, Learning and Sustainable Peacebuilding (CL&SP)

The Ideas, Skills and Awareness Needed for Greater Understanding and Making Progress

You can CL&SP the moment when conflicts arise through awareness and mindfulness. You can CL&SP the challenges you face; collect the data you need, consider explanations, and use your critical thinking. You can CL&SP opportunities that you face, discover what you need, explore options, and use your creativity to consider new ways forward. You can CL&SP the hands, hearts and minds of family and friends, colleagues, and teammates to better understand the essence of cooperative learning and how best to move a group forward. You can CL&SP the skills you will need and develop mastery through study, experimentation, learning and practice. You can CL&SP the successful case studies on sustainable peacebuilding that can lead the way.

Let me take you on a journey through the tough terrain of conflict but send you forward with ideas, skills and guidance that can lead you to see problems in new ways, to see former "enemies" as possible allies, to connect the dots of sustainability and see the larger picture that shows the interconnected health of people, the work that they do and the environment that surrounds them and us all. Our backpacks will contain the skills we will need to dissect conflicts, big and small. We will then be able to organize and reorganize these data to see new and different ways forward. Our backpacks will also include what we will need to communicate our concerns and frustrations, our hopes and dreams. Our training will push us to listen more deeply and empathize, even when we do not agree with everything being said. We can then have a base for rethinking our positions, finding common ground and moving forward.

Learning will be continuous; it will prepare you for that better outcome you want. Reflection, self-awareness, and mindfulness will grow as you open to new ideas and new ways of looking at the world. Instead of a

straight line of certainty, you will be merging onto more flexible but challenging ways of thinking. You will become better able to articulate what you believe at any one time but open to change when new information surfaces. You will develop new levels of cognitive flexibility that allow you to stretch to better understand others, to hear and accept perspectives different from your own even when you may not fully agree.

You will also become a better teammate, appreciating what others bring, willing to roll up your sleeves and get focused on shared goals. New friends and allies may challenge your preferences. The joy of shared sacrifice and common purpose will help bond your team, group, or organization.

Understanding others who have been working at sustainable peacebuilding will give you the confidence to do your work toward that end. Your successes will help you push through the conflicts that arise, more confident in what you are doing and much more confident in your ability to master the skills you will need to succeed.

INTRODUCTION

The Skills and Understanding Needed for Conflict Transformation

There is much to know about conflict and how to survive its pressures and threats, both real and imagined, and most importantly, how to find a reasonable, nonviolent way forward. Traditional academic fields will often attempt to take you down deep in their own disciplinary silos, too often neglecting what researchers are reporting in other fields. For example, much has been written within psychology that attempts to identify the human reactions that come into play when conflicts erupt, the "fear, flight or freeze" responses. Sociologists, in turn, have weighed in with analyses of the underlying community, social class or racial dynamics that make conflict more or less likely to erupt. Historians will, of course, put their spin on finding connections with the past that can help us understand the present and what may happen in the future.

In what follows you will read about different case studies that point toward a better way forward out of conflict. As an example, let me share with you here some of my experiences with restorative justice. In my many years of volunteering with this program in Fort Collins, Colorado, we have had great success in switching the focus from punishment to learning and from sentencing to community service that helps to heal the damage that offenders have inflicted.

Yes, there are those trained in mediation, an applied discipline, when a third party will try to bring antagonists together and find an agreeable way forward. There is also the field of negotiation that dominates deal-making in business and lays out the skills, the thinking, and the processes for finding a cooperative resolution to an impasse. Some will write about ways to find the win-win agreements that satisfy all parties. In restorative justice we hold young offenders to a signed contract of what they will do to repair the harm caused, to others (e.g., volunteering for a non-profit organization, apology letters to those impacted by their offense) and themselves (e.g., counseling apology letter, journal).[1]

With the challenges posed by disciplinary reductionism of conflicts generally, the field of education deliberately draws on a range of approaches to equip teachers and school officials with the best theories and practices for addressing the needs of the youth today. For example, the challenge for educators is that some of these students come from very diverse backgrounds and often with widely different talents and motivations.

As another example, in my chapter on Northern Ireland and their peace process, you will read about the integrated schools' movement that brings young people from both Protestant and Catholic communities, many of whom were brought up to demonize and attack the "other." Together they are now challenged by the 1998 Good Friday Peace Accords to forge new communication skills and attitudes that can begin to overcome the legacy of nearly 800 years of hierarchy, colonization, and violence. Educators and parents want these youth to help them forge a new and more inclusive curriculum that bridges these historically destructive divisions and helps everyone communicate, empathize and cooperate for the collective benefit of all.

What educators must learn about dealing with conflict is also what all of us can—and should—learn. For example, there is much to know about the research on cooperation, what is required to build teamwork and foster a "mutual interdependence" that keeps everyone engaged and invested in finding a solution that meets everyone's needs and hopes. There are also values that underlie all this, the moral development that often impacts how people of different ages and backgrounds will respond. In my work on sustainable peacebuilding in Burundi, East Africa, young people see real value in forging teams across tribal lines that had exploded into a long and bloody civil war after the German and Belgian colonists had left and this small nation proclaimed its independence.

There is also much to know about our social-emotional makeup, our emotional intelligence, if you will, that drives our reactions. And of course, there is the critical and creative thinking that defines how we approach conflicts and how we can search for innovative ways forward, how we can see through to new possibilities (because the old beliefs are what produced the conflict in the first place).

As another example, I was fortunate to have won a Fulbright Scholar's award to teach a course in peacemaking in South Korea at the Graduate Institute of Peace Studies at Kyung Hee University. During a time when headlines in the U.S. were ablaze with reports about the threat from North

Korea as it tested its missiles. Yet, many of our students—some of whom were active-duty South Korean army officers—wanted to discuss what had happened in Germany to promote reunification after the Berlin Wall had come down and the USSR had collapsed. They wanted to know what they could do to heal their ancient, 10,000-year-old culture that had been ripped apart by the Korean War of the early 1950's.

Listen to the way in which Heather McGhee, the author of her widely acclaimed 2021 book—*The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*—describes the urgency she uses to challenge readers to think and rethink the nature of systemic racism in the U.S. "My specialty was economic policy, and as indicators of economic inequality became starker year after year, I was convinced that I was fighting the good fight, for my people and everyone who struggled. And that is how I saw it: part of my sense of urgency about the work was that my people, Black people, are disproportionately ill served by bad economic policy decisions … When our government made bad economic decisions for everyone, the results were even worse for people already saddled with discrimination and disadvantage" (xii).

Unlike a narrowly defined disciplinary analysis, what I will present in this book is a journey that draws on a variety of fields and then challenges you, the reader, to connect conflicts with ideas and solutions for creative, successful ways forward. Here are the areas we will address as we work through various case studies:

1. *The Models of Teaching and Learning about Sustainable Peacebuilding.*
2. *The Need for a Positive Climate to Prevent, Resolve and Transform Conflicts.*
3. *Social Emotional Learning: Nurturing awareness of self and other; Mindfulness.*
4. *Effective Communication: Deeper listening; Empathic expressions; Consensus.*
5. *Mastery Learning: Checking for understanding; Building on deductive reasoning.*
6. *Cognitive Development: Learning to handle complexity and ambiguity.*
7. *Cooperative Learning: Utilizing positive interdependence for better teamwork.*
8. *Critical Thinking: Thinking inductively to organize data and test hypotheses.*

9. *Discovery Learning: Exploring and testing possibilities.*
10. *Creativity: Using feelings, metaphors, and contrasts.*
11. *Moral Development: From obedience to "law and order" and ethical principles.*
12. *Experiential Learning: Other ways of exploring and knowing.*
13. *Case Study Analysis: Learning in the real world.*

The models of teaching and learning about sustainable peacebuilding

In our 2008 book, *Concepts and Choices for Teaching,* Sue Doe and I lay out the basics for the various theories and practices that help to define the range of options that instructors use to organize their courses based on their goals, the conditions, the time they have and their students. While some want to insist on a particular approach as THE one that will get the desired results, we took a very different posture in that book and one that I follow in this one as well. It is no surprise that while certain approaches are effective with some students, conflicts will arise with others who struggle or are bored or need attention, with those who come to class with unmet emotional needs or who want attention, power, or revenge.

Importantly, these same lessons are relevant everywhere, not just in schools, colleges, or universities. These ideas and skills are also needed by individuals who face personal struggles, groups who face periodic conflicts and challenges, people in business who want success or non-profit organizations who want impact, churches and service organizations that hope to help communities heal and thrive.

Most of the case studies that comprise the bulk of this book will describe what I have personally seen up close. These were success stories for me that others can tap into when facing their own challenges but only if they are willing to stretch, study, explore and practice other ways for moving forward. Most of these examples come from my own experiences, in schools and universities, in my community as well as internationally. I have promoted sustainable peacebuilding in places in the world that have lived through conflicts, uprisings, and war, with people who now inspire others with what they learned, with their resilience, their abilities to reconcile their differences and move forward.

Having readers of this book develop some working knowledge of these models of teaching and learning, of critical and creative thinking, of values and emotions along with some understanding of these case studies lies at

the heart of my push to offer transformative ways through conflict and promote sustainable peacebuilding. In truth, I know that every one of us is teaching all the time through our actions and what we say, through the guidance and mentoring we offer to others, with how we hold ourselves in times of crisis, how we act and react. In turn, all of this will help to guide you in your own thinking about the conflicts you face and how to move forward in new, different, constructive, perhaps innovative, and better ways.

How a positive, creative climate can prevent, resolve, and transform conflicts

At the very start, we recognize that we can help build a positive climate for ourselves and others, one that supports the development of the creative process. People can take classes and hear presentations that stretch them in new and different ways—intellectually, emotionally, aesthetically, physically, culturally, and spiritually. They can explore areas of art, music, theater, and philosophy. Every one of us has creative potential within ourselves although many have heard the self-judgment, "I'm not creative at all."

For creativity scholars like Roger von Oech (1983), it's mostly a matter of attitude, of breaking out of the "mental locks" that others have placed on us to "get the right answer," for example. Preventing, resolving, or transforming conflicts at times may depend on making that break. When I have taken groups through creativity exercises, we invariably have lots of laughs, "Oohs" and "Aahs" as well as the "What the…" when people face a real puzzle.

First, I'll ask members of the class or the audience to write out their description of "conflict," for example. I'll then ask them to practice "stretching." When I ask for concrete examples of "conflict," I may get "traffic wrecks" or "storms," "flight" or "fights." I then ask what each of those "feels like." I want them to get beyond their intellectual analysis and to tap into their emotions as well. I might get "troubling" and "crazy," "messy" and "dangerous," "unexpected," "complex" or "scary."

I then ask everyone to put together descriptors that are a stretch, different, perhaps opposites. I'll ask, "How is a "traffic wreck" both "troubling" and "crazy" at the same time? How is a storm "messy" and "dangerous" at the same time? How are "tears" "unexpected," "complex" and "scary" at the same time? Now, I'll say, "Let's go back to the original prompt. "How do

you think of ‘conflict’ differently having completed those stretching exercises?”

Creating a positive climate for yourself and others is an important first step in any process, building up the relationships and awareness that then become so important when conflicts do arise. A positive climate allows people to challenge each other, to learn with less fear of emotional meltdowns or stubborn resistance to change. Research into the underpinnings of this emotional climate goes back many years. When I was working closely with teachers and schools in the nineteen seventies, CFK Limited, a Denver-based philanthropic foundation dedicated to improving the learning environment of schools, supported the publication of a series of monographs detailing what "educational climate" meant and how schools can use these ideas to improve.

In one of these publications, Shaheen and Pedrick (1974) defined *climate* in terms of productivity (learning, thinking) and satisfaction (morale). For them, *productivity* went beyond just getting and giving information to building on what we already know, using inquiry and problem-solving processes to improve our abilities to think critically and creatively. We want to clarify values and purposes. For these researchers, the *satisfaction* that arose from a more positive climate was linked to increased productivity, how we can gain a sense of personal worth through our efforts, how our work and interactions benefit from having an enriching space around us and how we feel when we can participate in worthwhile activities.

Think of the challenges you routinely hear with respect to our schools and the education we want for young people. What we want at the core—good communication and thinking skills, knowledge of the basics and how to solve problems—has not changed. This climate research in conjunction with what we have learned about effective schools holds some of the keys for getting there. These factors are also important for improving climate in homes, in community organizations and in businesses.

At about the same time, Fox and his group (1974) outlined several general factors that characterize a positive climate for learning and teaching, including respect, trust, high morale, opportunities for input, continuous professional growth, cohesiveness, renewal, caring, commitment to goals, and ease of communication. In 1980, Lezotte and his colleagues focused on productivity as it relates to measurable outcomes, i.e., the norms, beliefs, and attitudes that enhance or impede achievement.

Based on these ideas and this research, I participated in climate assessments in schools where we interviewed staff about their attitudes, what obstacles or conflicts they saw as well as the strengths that they also could identify. The picture that emerged provided a roadmap for future training. I could later see this map working in poor countries of the Caribbean, Central and South America—Cuba, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Brazil—that attempted to push for development by focusing on literacy for the entire population, not just the children of the wealthy and powerful.

For Joseph Lowman (1995), however, the factors that drive learning in college come down to two fundamental elements: *Intellectual excitement* and *rapport*. In his view, the best instructors in college combine enthusiasm for their course material with a genuine care for students and their learning. These kinds of respectful processes are especially important when addressing differences and resolving conflicts at any level—local, national or international. These attitudes—excitement and care—can make a difference in every context. And these are at the core of effective case study analysis where we look at what others have accomplished and consider what could apply to any of our conflicts and challenges.

In 2002 Patterson, Grenny, McMillan and Switzler published their book *Crucial Conversations* and identified areas where certain "tools" and "conditions" produced better resolutions of conflicts. They write: "The difference between the *best* communities and the *good* or the *worst* is not the number of problems they have. All communities deal with problems. In the best communities, key individuals and groups find a way to engage in healthy dialogue. They talk through important issues. In contrast, communities that fail to improve play costly games. During community meetings people insult one another, become indignant, and act as if individuals with different views are sick or deranged. Battles ensue" (13-14).

In Northern Ireland, it was so dramatic for me to see victims of the violence willing to sit down with ex-convicts who had been combatants and use what they were taught about reflective listening and empathy to learn about the other side and search for inclusive ways forward. In her book, *Cultures of Peace,* Elise Bouldng (2000) makes the argument that everyone needs to be wary of the steady diet of conflict and violence that dominates the media.

Sadly, the standard news truism is that "if it bleeds, it leads" because that is where the profits are in getting the attention of readers. The focus for

empathic listening in order to find inclusive ways forward as described above, however, forced participants to dwell more on the possibilities, and less on the problems, on areas where victims and paramilitaries could come to agreement about moving forward, what Boulding refers to as "best case thinking."

Social Emotional Learning: Nurturing mindfulness and awareness of self and others

At the top of the list of the skills and knowledge all of us need for dealing with conflicts and doing our part to find constructive ways forward are the foundations for social-emotional learning, what Dan Goleman (1994), the author of *Emotional Intelligence,* insists are most of what determines our successes in life, at home, at work, with friends and at play. Even the brightest people may struggle when they cannot control their emotions, and in particular, their anger. Just think of the ways that mask wearing in the U.S. became so contentious when the Covid pandemic erupted.

Specifically, Goleman critiques traditional views of intelligence as much too narrow.

> "There are widespread exceptions to the rule that IQ predicts success—many (or more) exceptions than cases that fit the rule. At best, IQ contributes about 20 percent to the factors that determine life success, which leaves 80 percent to other forces … My concern is with a key set of these 'other characteristics,' emotional intelligence: abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathize and to hope" (34). Conflicts and polarized politics invariably raise emotions that can be difficult to control or manage, especially in the "heat of a particular moment."

At the end of his book, Goleman has a section he titled, "The ABC's of Emotional Intelligence." Think about your own experiences with conflicts, personal and professional, as well as your feelings about peaceful alternatives. What would it take for you to get control of your feelings when threatened or angry, fearful, or confused? It's hard to argue with Goleman's contention that understanding and managing our emotional responses are foundational for success in life let alone when conflicts arise. And when guns were readily accessible, in the U.S. or Northern

Ireland before the Peace Accords were signed, violence and tragedy too often followed.

According to Goleman, you can help yourself and others in many ways. You can develop your own self-awareness, recognize the feelings you have, label them, and see the links with your thinking. You can determine what mix of thoughts and feelings are underlying a particular decision. Think through the consequences of the alternative choices you have and the decisions that you make. Apply these insights to other decisions you have had to make. Recognize the strengths and weaknesses of your insights in a realistic light. In the Peace English Clubs that have emerged through the leadership of Fulgence Twizerimana at the University of Ngozi in Burundi as part of our efforts to promote sustainable peacebuilding, young people work through the conflicts they face, sharing their experiences and thinking through alternatives.

Goleman also wants us to explore new ways to handle our anxieties, anger, and sadness. He insists that we can do more to take responsibility for our decisions and actions, and then follow through on the commitments we make. We can learn to listen better, offering others our reflections on what we have heard from them and clarify any misperceptions. We can extend this listening into empathy, how we can better understand what others are feeling and thinking. In this way, we can learn to respect the differences that emerge in how different people react. We can learn to distinguish between what others say or do and how they behave. We can learn how to become assertive rather than angry or passive in our communication and actions. We can study the arts of cooperation, conflict resolution, and negotiation. In Northern Ireland I was so encouraged to see the victims of the violence come together to cooperate on a shared art project as they talked through the traumas they have suffered, ultimately agreeing to take their insights out into the general public.

Assertiveness

As Goleman knows, we can also commit to understanding the place of assertiveness as we advocate for change when facing conflict, neither falling into submissive apathy or exploding into aggressiveness, anger, and violence. Assertiveness training has proven enormously useful for many adults as well as the young. The Canters' book, *Assertive Discipline,* was useful for me and other educators after its publication in 1976. People of all ages can benefit from understanding more about the continuum of

choices they have, what distinguishes an assertive response from aggressive or submissive responses. For example, the ending of the U.S. military role in Afghanistan in 2021 raised many questions about that twenty-year war, its costs and the lives lost, and whether, for example, the U.S. responded two aggressively with a full military force after the attacks of September 11th when the Navy Seals later proved that it was possible to hunt down a criminal with a "surgical strike" for far less.

At one end of this continuum, we can get hostile. We can get angry, adopt a negative attitude, or become aggressive and even violent. We can blame others—a colleague, a friend or family member, a neighbor, a politician, or rogue member of a violent fringe group. In schools, a student may act out in class in a variety of ways, being rude to instructors and classmates alike, coming in late or leaving early, chatting with friends, acting like a bully. For any of us, even doodling and sleeping, eating, or reading the newspaper, can be passive-aggressive expressions of disrespect or rebellion.

When I first taught in a Cleveland inner city junior high school, the community was still reeling from the riots that had followed the killing of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The principal at Patrick Henry Junior High School, at that time the largest in the state and 100% African American, was Bill Smith. He became legendary in using the early PA announcements, at times for as much as thirty minutes before the first class would start, to talk to the entire school about their anger and what they could do with that energy instead of torching their own community.

On the other end of this assertiveness continuum, people can become submissive and allow others to dominate or some injustice to continue. At times it may just be inertia that wins. At other times we let our fears and confusions paralyze us. We may suffer in silence or look for excuses. We may define ourselves as introverts and be uncomfortable out front with other activists. We may feel overwhelmed by events that seem too big, too dangerous or too far away.

Young people will often succumb to peer pressure and limit their participation in class, pulling those ball caps lower over their eyes or around backwards, slumping down and checking out, reengaging with their phones or laptops. In their minds, looking "cool" may be their primary concern and this can obviously undermine their learning. In a study group, a submissive role may mean backing off from taking the necessary initiative. It can be hard for students to confront each other

about lousy attitudes, lack of responsibility, off-task behavior and the like. Some students routinely slack off when they should be engaging in the challenges of their studies. If we are to find new ways forward past conflict and violence, for students or anyone else, we will need a deep and "assertive" commitment to what is required for sustainable peacebuilding.

Taking some time to discuss and practice assertive responses can also help individuals take more responsibility for their own roles, especially when they're involved in group projects. We can help ourselves and others be more direct in our communication, expressing clearly and concisely what we want, how we feel and what we need. We can focus on honesty in our communication. We can help everyone, ourselves included, be more empathetic toward others, to work toward understanding those with different opinions. We can also help everyone be more persistent in offering reasonable requests, for example, by making eye contact when appropriate. All of this becomes so much more important when conflicts erupt.

While this may sound straightforward enough, it does take time, study, and practice to learn. It requires awareness or mindfulness to master. Guidance can also make a big difference when we are trying to make changes. For educators in Northern Ireland who were promoting integrated schools, this kind of guidance was essential as individuals faced their violent past, worked to manage their own emotions, to rethink their prejudices toward the "other", and to open up to new insights and possibilities for the school's curriculum—their version of "critical race theory."

Here are some general guidelines for you or anyone you are helping address a conflict:

(1) *Before acting, reflect on the conflict you are facing and develop a clear definition of what you think is wrong.* Everyone will need to understand "who owns the problem." For instance, within restorative justice circles, some shoplifters become confused about what they need for completing their community service responsibilities—i.e., where they will do their volunteer hours, what if any preconditions exist or skills are needed, and what additional training requirements may be in place at that site before they are allowed to serve—yet they may not have asked these or other related questions. Can they really expect others to read their minds and provide answers for them? And the stakes are high. If they fail to complete their

contracts, their cases will be turned back to the District Attorney for adjudication through the courts.

(2) *Plan for a preferred response to a conflict.* Individuals can improve their thinking by clarifying what they want. For example, when a group member forgets a key meeting and others were counting on that person's contribution, the group members can think through their responses. Too often too many of us just bury our feelings under a pile of resentment or fear of confrontation while the problem festers and may repeat. We can help others take some initiative here by offering something constructive. The group and every member will be better off for it. Ultimately, success may be at stake. Fundamentally, we can help everyone be more loyal to themselves, their needs, their hopes, and dreams as well as those of their group members. In Northern Ireland I got to interact with a victim of a bombing that killed his wife and father-in-law. He could have turned his rage into membership in a paramilitary group that would seek to exact some form of revenge. Instead, he got involved with various efforts aimed at rebuilding his community.

(3) *Use a visualization.* Have people use their imaginations, how they think a situation would play out with different responses. If you sense their anxieties rising, back up and try again. This is exactly what desensitization programs use. For instance, if students have test anxiety, help them learn how to visualize taking the exam while they practice being calm. In a highly polarized political environments, you can help people visualize crossing that divide, listening carefully with empathy and then practicing how that plays out in reality.

(4) *Now it's time to practice conflict resolution on others.* People can use it with friends, co-workers or family members, community members or a neighbor with an obnoxious barking dog! In an organization, we can have people talk about a problem in their groups, for example. There they can get support for confronting a slacker but in a constructive way—that is a core skill in sustainable peacebuilding! Who knows; maybe this person will turn out to be a terrific group member if given honest feedback and the chance to respond and to change. Alternatively, this "slacker" may not be ready to contribute at a level that the others want. That may be okay too. Everyone has choices. Everyone has responsibilities but everyone should also be accountable. Over many years of teaching,

I often heard from student groups that a particular member was procrastinating and putting the group at risk but when I talked to the supposed "slackers," I also heard that some performed better under the pressure of an upcoming deadline as opposed to those who wanted to get going on a project long in advance.

As an example, within restorative justice, there is an important other side to this issue. Young people often like to hang together with friends and, at times, cross legal lines—for some excitement and fun, to relieve their boredom. However, peer pressure can be a big problem. Some gangs will demand dangerous and violent tasks of a new member. Within our work in restorative justice, we often must confront teenagers who showed their bravado by shoplifting with their friends but then got caught. In our circles we have pushed into the thinking and emotions that led to this kind of decision. As one way to take responsibility and think more deeply about their actions, some offenders choose to write apology letters. These could be sent to the merchant, for example, and/or the arresting police officer, to a parent or guardian. An apology letter to "self" can also prove powerful in addressing what otherwise can get dismissed as just "dumb."

(5) *Finally, have people put their new plan into action and later evaluate the results.* Just, what did happen? Were they pleased? Did they get their questions answered? Did they get their concerns addressed? Is the problem resolved? Is their group better off now? Do members feel that they have a way forward should a conflict arise? Some people may have to experiment with various options before getting to the right "chemistry" of personalities, motivations, size, conditions, etc. Note that their skills, individually and collectively, should increase as they work together and take the time to address the effectiveness of their group.

With our work in restorative justice, we also put our attention to what we call a Completion Conference where we evaluate what the offender has done to "repair the harm" and move forward, e.g., personal reflections about responsibility, what may have been written in a journal about the incident, what apology letters may indicate about motivations and insights, contributions to a community non-profit organization, experiences in counseling—all part of this healing exercise.

These guidelines are not just for addressing conflicts, however. People can use the same principles and practices to express appreciation to someone for an expression of kindness, to a group member who comes on time and is ready to work, or to a leader who puts a stimulating challenge out there for others to meet. Each of these guidelines can be considered part of the skill set for sustainable peacebuilding, including the mindfulness needed to address conflicts and problems in honest, direct, and constructive ways.

Do you remember the Robin Williams' character in the 1989 movie *Dead Poets Society*? He shows his students the "wall of honor" at the fictional Welton Academy, all those school heroes from the past. His comments went something like this: *All these faces before you, full of hopes and dreams just like you. Full of hormones just like you. What's happened to their lives? You see, they're all pushing up daisies. Food for worms. Did they wait too long to make something of their lives? The Latin phrase for this is Carpe Diem, seize the day. Listen in. You can almost hear them speaking to you. Seize the days. Make your lives extraordinary.*

While this film is fiction, we routinely see the value in embracing this kind of challenge even with the threat of conflict possibly lurking nearby. For example, in Burundi, East Africa, our Peace English Club continues to offer ideas for the University of Ngozi, the surrounding community and its schools to contribute actively to sustainable peacebuilding. In 2021 a series of events was organized for the International Day of Peace as designated by the United Nations. Those attending contributed songs, poems and speeches about ending war and violence while building a better and peaceful way forward.

Transactional Analysis

Another way to think about addressing conflicts and promoting the mindfulness needed for sustainable peacebuilding is to reference the ideas of Eric Berne (1964) and others (e.g., Bry, 1973; Ernst, 1973; Freed, 1971, 1973; Harris, 1969) who described communication within *Child, Adult* and *Parent ego-states.* In this model of Transactional Analysis, it would be the *Child* within you who can get scared or anxious and respond submissively. It can also be the *Child* within who tries to rebel, who acts out against authority or sulks, who lashes out in anger, who reaches too quickly for a weapon but who also can be a loving, creative force.

At the other end of the continuum, it may be the *Parent* within you who becomes demanding, telling others what they should or shouldn't do, controlling or scolding them but who can also hold the moral high ground for ethical judgment. Like those who flaunt their power or authority, this kind of "parental" response can also move into aggressiveness. In between is the *Adult* response where you can rationally address even complex and emotionally charged issues, express yourself clearly and invite others to join you in thinking through possible solutions.

People of all ages can find Transactional Analysis meaningful, practical, and accessible. With the use of role plays for practice, for example, individuals get to examine their "ego states" in various situations, whether they have been functioning in the "Parent" mode (authoritative, caring), the "Adult" mode (rational, problem solving) or "Child" mode (spontaneous, rebellious).

Having this framework in mind, then, can be useful for analyzing conflicts from the past, exploring and practicing alternative strategies, and then planning for a better future. Understanding fighting, for example, as an expression of the "angry child" can offer a way to work toward an "adult" nonviolent alternative. After the attacks on the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, I went into my large lecture class and attempted to use that day's topic of Transactional Analysis to offer one way of understanding the motivation of the hijackers as well as the predictable anger toward them by those wanting revenge and punishment for all who helped plan this attack.

Here is another example: Have you ever felt patronized by someone who talked down to you? In TA terms, you might think that this person was responding from the "Parent" role—i.e., superior. In turn, did you become angry? Were you, then, in the "Child" role—emotional, unthinking, and rebellious? That would make sense; it's a natural response to perceived condescension. However, staying in the "Adult" role could help you break these dynamics and get to a more rational, direct, and honest basis for communication, i.e., understanding your own reactions as well as how you could think about the other person's responses.

The ongoing debates about gun control in the U.S. offers yet another way to use our CL&SP model with Transactional Analysis. The "Adult" in us can see the data on gun violence including homicides, accidents, and suicides, compare the cases in the U.S. with what other nations experience, and consider needed reforms. The "Child" in us can recognize the fear that

can motivate people to arm themselves. There is also a natural emotional response to gun violence and a need to show compassion for victims. The "Parent" in us can then show commitment to take responsible actions that could reduce these tragedies.

Along with assertiveness training, practicing with the ego-states within Transactional Analysis can help people find alternatives to angry responses that too often prove harmful and, at times, even violent. Most important, however, is how relevant these models can be on a personal level. While many discussions about peace and nonviolence revolve around national or international issues, it may be just as important to get clear about constructive alternatives to violence for each of us as individuals, grounding peacebuilding efforts in a real, meaningful, practical, and personal context.

For example, during Friday prayers in March of 2019 a gunman opened fire on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, killing 50 people and injuring many more. The nation responded quickly with a huge overhaul of the nation's gun laws including a ban on military style assault weapons. In contrast with the U.S., gun ownership in New Zealand is considered a privilege and not a right. To buy a firearm a New Zealander must have a permit that is granted on a case-by-case basis after a background check by authorities. These permits are good for up to ten years after which they must be re-vetted before they can be renewed.[2]

In a review of the impact of gun control measures world-wide, Max Fisher's 2022 analysis for the New York Times showed how volumes of research studies have clearly substantiated the benefits of gun control measures. In several developed nations outside the U.S., restrictions on gun use have been tightened and gun violence has been lowered. Moreover, mass shootings have declined as have suicides and murders. Just in Australia in 1996, for example, a mandatory gun buyback led to a million firearms melted into slag with a dramatic drop in mass shootings.[3]

With his roots in the Quaker tradition, Parker Palmer (1998) offers ideas for managing both emotions and the intellect, the feelings and ideas that can also support peacebuilding. In his book, *The Courage to Teach,* he addresses the complexities of teaching and the importance of more holistic approaches that integrate head and heart, the "both-and" mixture of what he terms "paradoxical teaching." His insights about teaching and learning can apply as well outside any formal educational setting.