11-1-2008

Putting the Pieces Together: The Puzzle of Conflict Transformation

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Putting the Pieces Together: The Puzzle of Conflict Transformation

by

Janice Marie Johnson

FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES

SKIDMORE COLLEGE
August 2008

Readers: David Karp, Orlanda R. Brugnola
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ABSTRACT

This Final Project seeks to investigate the evolving art of conflict transformation. Conflict transformation is presented via three modalities: a three-hour workshop on conflict resolution, a thirteen-session course, “Managing Conflict,” including syllabus and facilitator’s guide, and a complete worship service. The service will be given before an audience in Fall 2008 at Skidmore College. Using these three modalities, the origins of conflict, the function of conflict transformation strategies, the issue of cultural competency, and the relationship to peacemaking are explored from the standpoint of a skilled practitioner in the field.
“When I am angry will you still embrace me?”—An Introduction

The words that title this section are from a song by Shelley Jackson Denham called “Then I May Learn.” They epitomize the concerns that can keep contending parties from seeking conflict resolution, and they also encompass the hope that brings those parties together. In a sense the use of words from a song to explain the work of this Final Project highlights the reality that conflict transformation, while acknowledging its foundation in the scientific theories of conflict resolution, relies finally more on the arts. The arts—visual, literary, performative—inform the work of the practitioner by supplying perspective and materials. In addition, the practitioner herself/himself must be an artist. The practitioner must be a master listener. That requires both a sensitivity to verbal and non-verbal cues and the ability to discern when there is a mis-match between cue and affect and/or cue and response.

No fixed protocol is adequate for conflict transformation. In addition to the theoretical underpinnings of such a fluid approach, one needs a moment-to-moment readiness for the unexpected, the surprising, the unpleasant, and the amazingly wonderful. Creativity and intuition are serious tools in this practice, for they allow one to ask questions that release feelings and questions that help others to transform their understanding. There must be a powerful on-going self-evaluation in this work, or the practitioner can -- or will -- easily fall into routine and not meet the needs of an emergent situation. Finally, there has to be an authentic experience of celebration or at least emotional connection for the practitioner when parties in conflict find a new way to deal with one another. In other words they
need to know their “success” is being affirmed. Conflict transformation changes the parties’ understanding of their interconnectedness. This is the principle of 
*ubuntu*, the South African concept that “my humanness is inextricably bound up in yours” which will be discussed more fully later in this paper.

**Why We Need More Than Conflict Resolution**

The need for early exposure to conflict resolution is truly a must in today’s elementary, middle school and high school classrooms. While the issue of bullying has made news along with the tragedies of school shootings, there is another reality that confronts this practitioner almost every day. Urban, suburban and rural classroom settings can all be the locus of dangerous tensions and devastating behaviors.

This practitioner has seen a teenage student sequestered *in a cage* within a locked classroom of students who have been expelled from every school because of their belligerent behavior and weapons contraband. This practitioner found that one of the tough, street-wise students was moved to sobs, because, for the first time in her experience, a promise was finally *kept*. The facilitator had promised to bring in a particular college catalogue for her and did so. These young students have precious little hope to live on. In fact, they have no expectation that they will live to see adulthood. No one who has come daily into such circumstances can be content with anything less than a full engagement in the field of conflict *transformation*. 
Some Issues of Terminology

Confusion sometimes arises because terms such as conciliation are used to describe several different processes. For example, a “conciliation court” is simply what is usually referred to as “small claims court.” In a corporate setting, however, conflict conciliation means something else. Conflict conciliation began as a type of negotiation in which the disputing parties did not meet. Instead, a conciliator helped each party to prioritize demands and then conveyed them in a sort of “shuttle-diplomacy.” Typically the conciliator begins with the demands the parties placed at the lowest position on their lists and moves up from there. This is one of the methodologies used by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) established in 1947.¹

In corporate settings, hierarchies are recognized and accepted even if the behaviors of persons at each level are not as pleasant as could be envisioned. In other words, the very fact that in most corporate settings, power trumps and resisting that power has negative consequences serves to persuade all players that they can risk facilitation to lower tension and come to a point of agreement about most issues. That permits a more stylized intervention process to function fairly well.

More recently the term “conciliation” has been used in community board settings such as one in San Francisco.² In those circumstances, trained laypeople or professionals slowly

¹ [www.fmcs.gov](http://www.fmcs.gov)
help the disputing parties to ready themselves psychologically and emotionally for direct negotiation of their differences. This methodology and the ones used by the FMCS are certainly useful in their appropriate corporate or community settings.

Conflict resolution utilizes a number of different methods. In elementary, middle school and high school peer mediation serves as an alternative to traditional third-party intervention by parents, a principal, a dean, etc. In the larger community, a trained mediator hears the parties’ complaints as part of a process designed as an alternative to the courts. The mediator helps the parties to articulate their needs and come to an agreement they can live up to. This is an effective methodology in part because the individuals concerned generally have something of a shared set of expectations of behavior.

In highly charged environments, a scripted intervention is key because the persons in conflict may not have a shared understanding of differences. In addition, there may not be an officially sanctioned hierarchy among them (as there is in a corporate setting). Even a simple mis-hearing, mis-understanding, or mis-appropriation may generate a hostile response.

The latter might be the use of a nickname by someone who is not a close friend, evoking a response ranging from silent despair to violent hostility. In such settings, the players may exhibit what appear to be erratic or otherwise unexpected responses. When this facilitator was working as a teacher in an American high school in Bonn, Germany, there
were very few other people of color on the teaching staff. One of them was a man named Calvin. He was a proud and quiet man who loved living in a foreign country. Time and time again, many of his white colleagues persisted in calling him “Cal,” even though he responded every time, “My name is Calvin.” Those colleagues simply could not understand that their attempts to be informal with Calvin and thereby offering the semblance of bringing him “into their circle,” was received as an unwanted attempt to define Calvin’s reality and identity. These interactions were accentuated by the teachers’ continual rejection of Calvin’s assertion of identity with phrases such as “What’s the big deal?” Calvin eventually committed suicide. Although no one knew why he took this tragic course of action, seemingly insignificant occurrences such as these may well have contributed to this decision.

Had someone skilled in conflict resolution been present, they would have known what to do in this unfortunate situation with Calvin. This facilitator did not have those skills during the time she was working in Bonn. It has remained a painful reminder of why this work is so crucial. A facilitator must be creative and utterly focused in order to function effectively in settings like that. The conflict in such situations needs to be dealt with in order for the parties to learn how to cope with future difficulties. When that does not happen, whether because the conflict is ignored, or not even discerned, then resentments continue at an unconscious level, or at a non-verbalized level, only to erupt again at a later time in a new configuration.
Postmodernism and Conflict Transformation

The tensions between the perspectives of modernity and postmodernity\(^3\) make it difficult to explain how theory and praxis both inform and depart from one another in conflict transformation. The modern perspective saw *fragmentation* in society and in individual lives. Narratives, personal and otherwise were fragmented. Life itself was ambiguous and discontinuous. Literary genres were no longer pristine—poetry could sound like prose and vice versa. All this fragmentation, while it privileged self-consciousness in artistic production, nevertheless was seen as tragic.

The then modern perspective was to “fix” this fragmentation, to rely upon science to make life rational, on philosophy to parse out the rationality in the ethical realm and for art to make the unity and coherence in life. In the social realm, introduction of increasing levels of order was the imagined remedy for the fragmentation of family life and social order. The whole welfare structure with its regulations and associated paperwork might be considered an example of such an attempt.

In a sense modernity expected that knowledge led to a scientific “truth,” that language referred to “realities” that had stability [*i.e.*, words were signifiers that pointed to a genuine signified truth] and that there was some “grand narrative” that would finally explain (and fix) everything to produce an ordered society.

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\(^3\) “Modernity” and “Postmodernity” are terms used for the sociological and historical discussion of these issues. “Modern” and “Postmodern” are usually used to refer to the aesthetics involved in each era, but are also the only adjectives available. There is a fair amount of inconsistency in the use of the two sets of terms in academic writing.
Postmodernity recognizes the fragmentation and discontinuity and ambiguities as does modernity, but approaches them with a very different sensibility. Knowledge is no longer valuable as such, it is only valuable as it can be used. Narrative is reclaimed as “of value,” despite its ambiguities and discontinuities (or because of them), and science is no longer the highest or only standard for reliable understanding. Postmodernity wants to “think globally but act locally,” rather than to “transform society.”

These distinctions make it possible to see how conflict resolution, as a scientifically based system for remedying social dysfunction, came into being. In the 1940’s, it was thought that modern psychology could explain enough about human choice-making to allow the development of strategies of intervention when things were going wrong. Theorists worked to create a rational process and were indeed successful in theorizing and developing very successful strategies for negotiation and other conflict resolution.

In the postmodern era, those strategies, may still “work” in some contexts, such as labor negotiations, however, they fall short in being able to satisfy the conflict resolution needs of those for whom discontinuity and ambiguity have been the only experience they have had. They also fall short in the context of religious conflict when that conflict is based on the (conservative, modern) desire for the retention of the “grand narratives” of faith over against the increasing religious pluralism and theological fluidity evident in liberal faith traditions such as Unitarian Universalism.

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4 Much of this presentation about modernity/modernism and postmodernity/postmodernism has been informed by University of Boulder, CO professor, Dr. Mary Klages. For an excellent article, see Klages, M. Postmodernism. <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/klages.htm>
And they are also inadequate in the realm of conflict that is “racially” or “culturally” based, largely because of the nuances involved and because the conflict is rooted not on “real, stable differences” but on signifiers that actually have no “signifieds,” no absolute realities, to point to.

Conflict transformation deals with conflict as a process, ambiguous and fluid. In a sense conflict transformation enacts the postmodern strategy of playing with the ambiguities and the discontinuities, the fluidity. That “play” responds to nuance and opportunity in ways that can be as fluid as the conflict itself. In so doing it creates an environment in which those in conflict can reframe or restructure their understanding of the problems at hand and actually create new relationships based on new understandings. The postmodernist “trick,” in a sense, is to turn the tragic into magic.

The classical theories of conflict resolution can only take the practitioner of conflict transformation so far. When one learns a foreign language, one learns the vocabulary and the grammar but there comes a point at which the learner has mastered those and all of a sudden can dream in that new language. When that happens, one is no longer thinking about those rules of grammar, nor translating from one’s original language to the new. One is living in the new language.
In conflict transformation, there are the basic underlying principles of respect and listening, but each situation can potentially be unexpected in its complexity and certainly in its outcome. Intuition becomes an essential component of a practitioner’s toolkit.

**Theory of and Rationale for Conflict Transformation**

“Individuality vs. Interdependence” could be the title for the *American* story. This country was considered by many earlier immigrants to be a completely new paradigm, the land where one could literally “start from zero.”

5 Those for whom the new paradigm was a religious movement, such as the Shakers, acted in community and with faith in each other’s good will. But for others, individuality came with a shotgun, literally or figuratively.

That sort of individuality tended to presume the *absence* rather than the presence of good faith. Without expectations of good faith, misconceptions easily lead to misunderstandings and anger. Easy access to litigation promises a solution to differences that preserves individuality without the need to compromise or to re-conceive the nature of the differences and the conflict in its entirety.

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5 Jacob Needleman describes this perspective in his narration for Ken Burns’ 1984 film on the Shakers, *Hands to Work, Hearts to God*.

To make it even more complex, in the Protestant dissenting religious framework there are factors that have worked against a sense of inherent goodness in others and even in or within oneself. The recitation of the confessional statement “and there is no health in us” in the old Book of Common Prayer is an example of this perspective. Unitarian Universalism, the faith tradition of this practitioner, is in stark contrast to such sentiments and completely rejects the notion of either innate sinfulness or ultimate damnation. Nevertheless, Unitarian Universalists can fall into the “trap” of allowing individuality to trump interdependence.

In 1998, sociologist Robert Bellah noted that:

...it is no accident...that the United States, with its high evaluation of the individual person, is nonetheless alone among North Atlantic societies in the percentage of our population who live in poverty and that we are dismantling what was already the weakest welfare state of any North Atlantic nation. Just when we are moving to an ever greater validation of the sacredness of the individual person, our capacity to imagine a social fabric that would hold individuals together is vanishing. And this is in no small part due to the fact that our religious individualism is linked to economic individualism which...ultimately knows nothing of the sacredness of the individual.

In addition to these concerns, there is, of course, the more general question of wholeness in a multicultural, pluralistic environment. How do traditional cultures collide with

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7 Barbara Crafton, “And There Is No Health In Us,” “…while sins of commission are down, sins of omission are definitely up: I have not done those things which I ought to have done. The Prayer Book used to add, after that line in the general confession, And there is no health in us, but we dropped it in 1979: it seemed to lack the cheeriness upon which we insisted in those days -- remember that the 70s were the decade that brought us the smiley face.”

8 Unitarian Universalist Association Commission on Appraisal, Interdependence: Renewing Congregational Polity, 1997. This facilitator was one of the authors of this volume.

prevailing American culture, fragment and possibly come to resolution within the 21st Century American milieu?

It is clear to this practitioner that teaching interdependence is the work of conflict transformation in the 21st Century in North America. Archbishop Desmond Tutu defines *Ubuntu* as a word rooted in South African culture meaning, “A person becomes human through other persons.” In other words, my humanness is inextricably bound up in yours. Such a person, Tutu says:

> ...does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole, and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are...What dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me.

Conflict *resolution* presumes a continued relationship in so far as an agreement is fulfilled over time. Conflict *transformation*, however, is a paradigm shift from conflict resolution.

Conflict transformation inevitably begins a shift in the cultural context. An example of such a transformation occurred at an interfaith conference. In 1996, the oldest international interfaith organization, the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) held its Congress in Iksan, South Korea. While the IARF brings together people from faiths around the globe, many members of the IARF were and still are Japanese.

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10 A film such as *Crash*, imperfect as it may be, brought some of these issues to a public otherwise reluctant to consider them. The film, directed by Paul Haggis, won the Oscar for Best Picture in 2005 and made back more than three times its budget. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crash_(2005)]

Tension was very high, as the Korean hosts had lingering memories of the brutalities of the Japanese occupation of Korea during World War II. The Japanese brought with them a lingering disdain for Korean culture.

Over the days of the Congress, both groups interacted in workshops, ate meals and attended cultural performances together. That notwithstanding -- and although cultural politeness orchestrated positive behavior -- tensions still lingered. On the last evening the Japanese Buddhist women’s choir and the Korean Buddhist women’s choir were scheduled to perform together. To everyone else’s surprise and delight, the Japanese choir members chose to perform wearing traditional Korean dress. For the Japanese to wear the traditional clothing of a people they had treated as slaves and for Koreans to receive that gesture in a spirit of reconciliation was remarkable. There were few dry eyes during the beautiful performance, because all were aware of the serious tensions at the Congress.\(^{12}\) Many steps have been taken since 1996 to reconcile Japanese and Koreans. Restrictions on Japanese cultural offerings have been largely lifted in South Korea\(^ {13}\) Today, one of the big stars in the Japanese popular music scene is Korean.\(^ {14}\)

**The Power Behind Conflict Transformation**

On his second visit to America, following his release from 29 years in prison, Nelson Mandela gave this practitioner the gift of a maxim, which has become my signature,

\(^{12}\) The IARF was founded in 1900. Account of the 1996 Congress, received from Prof. Orlanda Brugnola who then served on the Board of the U.S. Chapter of the IARF.

\(^{13}\) [http://www.farsidemusic.com/historyJa.html#rock](http://www.farsidemusic.com/historyJa.html#rock)

Masakhane. After listening carefully he said, “You are a builder, a connector.” The definition of Masakhane:

Masakhane is a people-driven process of working together, encompassing all aspects of our society – social, economic, environmental, cultural and so on. Central to this approach, is the building of partnerships, co-operation between the democratic state and our broad popular forces – mass-based formations, community-based organisations and other progressive formations of civil society — and, of course, the private sector for a better life for all.15

It is in the spirit of Masakhane that three approaches to conflict resolution are being presented here. Each modality can effect conflict transformation. Each uses a distinctive methodology or praxis and therefore requires some unique tools. In choosing to present a thirteen session course, a workshop for professionals, and a worship service with sermon, the reader will be presented with as wide a view of conflict transformation in practice as can be approached within the scope of this Final Project. Theory, praxis, and evaluation are woven together in each presentation rather than treated separately. The conclusion will draw some comparisons for each of these areas with respect to the three modalities presented.

A word about these three modalities is in order. While it is unusual for an academic paper to incorporate disparate presentations, in this Final Project it is a necessity because conflict transformation is a multidisciplinary endeavor. Presented here are a course, a workshop, and a worship service. Each of them represents a different and powerful strategy.

The course offers an academic, theoretical analysis of conflict-ridden situations that create dissatisfaction and/or distress. Students in such a course may find the means to act effectively in their personal or professional life. Sometimes this means communicating more clearly or being less volatile, judgmental, and reactive. And sometimes it means that individuals just want to act with more maturity.

The workshop provides a hands-on opportunity to look at conflict and its ramifications. It is an accessible way to look at what might work and gives an experiential overview that can be life-transforming. Some practitioners suggest that a workshop model avoids a heavily cognitive approach in favor of a methodology to effect behavioral change.¹⁶

The worship service touches a different and deeper place in the self. "Worship" literally means "to consider something of worth." That is a very different emphasis from that of a "workshop," which suggests that the participants have work to do.

Worship invites; a workshop demonstrates; a course credentials. Because the word "worship" comes from "worthship," when one worships one opens oneself to new understanding, sets aside assumptions, and wishes for something that will transform one’s way of being in the world. While workshops and courses have experiential components and can be transformational, they operate at a very different level of experience. They tap into the cognitive but can easily leave behind the emotional components that are so critical to understanding conflict and its potential transformation.

All three modalities require awareness of learning styles and differing physical abilities, visible or invisible. A good facilitator needs to be able to adapt materials, even without advance notice, to enable the fullest participation by those present. For example, it may be that one individual’s mobility difficulties require an instantaneous adaptation of an exercise that otherwise would utilize standing or sitting as responses to a question such as “How many of you like chocolate ice cream?” These exercises are “ice-breakers,” and community builders. In a worship service, hymns are usually sung standing up, but this facilitator says, “Please stand, in body or spirit.” The hymns used for a service are also provided in Braille. This not only makes it possible for everyone present to participate, it does so without people having to ask. Successful community-building means that people feel welcomed from the start.
MANAGING CONFLICT
A Thirteen Session Course
Syllabus and Instructor’s Manual
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You will learn about different styles of conflict and conflict resolution. You will also learn diverse strategies for deflecting a conflict-driven situation at home, in the classroom, at the office, or in your larger world. Knowing how to identify pressure points puts you in control as you begin to practice skills to take charge of peacemaking rather than troublemaking or troubleshooting. Conflict can be a creative interchange leading to increased understanding and appreciation of “the other.” (3 credits)

Required Materials: Student Notebook

Required Texts: (These texts are a good blend of theory and accessibility.)


(This facilitator has met Dudley Weeks and has great respect for him because he has a firm grounding in conflict resolution theory and has a way of presenting it that is easy to comprehend.)

(Because this facilitator believes listening is so important to conflict resolution, this book was chosen because it explains roadblocks to listening and tools to improve listening. The author uses humor and story to teach serious messages.)


(In one small volume the author examines the verbal and non-verbal, tone and nuance of communication and brings them to the reader with good activities to try. There is a lot on body language, hidden agendas, etc. This book offers a comprehensive toolkit for verbal and nonverbal communication at home, in the workplace, across generations, and cultures.)

Additional Readings on Reserve:


Course Objectives:

1. To understand the nature and essential elements of conflict. To recognize that conflict can be a creative interchange leading to increased understanding and appreciation of the other.

2. To learn how to recognize conflict and deal with conflict effectively.

3. To identify and address challenges to effective communication.

4. To recognize hidden perspectives of a particular conflict.

5. To discover the shared needs within any relationship.

6. To understand the importance of good listening skills in effective communication.

7. To learn how to handle frequent problems areas such as when one person acts as though there is no conflict, or when dealing with seemingly intractable conflicts.

8. To acquire tools that foster effective and sustainable conflict resolution with a focus on the conflict partnership process.

9. To create a space to focus on the future, agreeing on do-ables—the stepping-stones to agreement.

Course Requirements:

I. Attendance: Managing Conflict is an interactive course where oral participation by all class members is required. Punctuality and regular attendance is expected. Being late two times is equivalent to one absence. Two or more absences will result in a poor or failing grade.
II. Class work: This interpersonal communications class requires active participation. Students are expected to listen to presentations and participate in discussions. Students will participate in several different styles of activities: small-group talks, role plays, short presentations, short written assignments, and so forth. Students are expected to support their fellow classmates by maintaining a respectful class environment. Students are required to work independently and in groups when necessary.

III. Homework: Each student is expected to prepare for class by reading the text assignment and writing down questions/comments for in-class discussion. A weekly written homework assignment is due at the next class meeting. Each written assignment must be double-spaced, Times New Roman font (preferable), and be submitted at the next class meeting. A Final Paper relating the assigned texts to the course work will encompass 20% of your final grade.

IV. Grades are based on Class Participation (25%), Conflict Journals (20%), Weekly Short Written Assignments (35%), and Final Written Assignment (20%). Absences will negatively affect your final grade.

CLASS ONE:

Introduce Syllabus

Introductions

Introductions are particularly significant in this course because all students will be working closely with one another in dyads, small groups, or a large group. It is during
this initial introduction time that much of the tone for class interaction will be established. How formal will students be with each other and with the instructor? How trusting are the students of one another initially? Why did they choose to take the class? These introductions inform the instructor about issues that may arise later in the semester.

Basics: A New Understanding of Conflict

It is important for students to understand that conflict is not necessarily negative in its consequences and that, in fact, it is a natural part of life. Conflict can naturally occur because of group allegiances, such as clan ties, sibling rivalry, and gender dynamics. Any area of human interaction—emotional, financial, physical—can provide opportunities for conflict. Apprehension about one’s personal security or safety is often a source of conflict as well.

Power balances or imbalances can generate conflict. In terms of psychological dynamics, conflict arises when, as children, we enter the stage of what the psychologist Ernest Schachtel called secondary autocentricity\(^\text{17}\)—that stage in which we treat others as objects-of-use. Others become what they can do for us or they become what hinders us from achieving our objectives. All cultures have different ways of responding to this initial approach to interacting with others, seeking to shape it into culturally acceptable modalities. Give examples from personal life, business, college and so forth.

Exercise: Getting to Know You

Conflict Journal

Students are expected to keep a diary of conflicts engaged in or observed, starting from this day. Examples for students to note in their journals: When you woke up this morning, were you annoyed when you heard the alarm? Did you hit the snooze button in anger at least once? (You can have a conflict with yourself!) During the course of this day, have you observed another conflict? Have you observed other conflicts?

Homework:

Read Part I, Chapter 1, Weeks.

Prepare a 2-page written assignment reviewing your respective approach to communication.

CLASS TWO:

Discussion: My Relationship to Conflict

How does each person in the room tend to relate to conflict? There are 5 to 6 generally acknowledged responses to conflict:

Aggressive—Directing or Controlling —“My way or the highway!”

Accommodating—“Whatever you want is fine.”

Collaborative—“Let’s sit down and work this out.”

Compromise—“Let’s both give a little, something is better than nothing.”

Calling a higher authority—“Help!”
Avoidance—“There’s no problem.”

It is important for each person to be aware of his or her style of response to conflict.

The Components of Conflict

Perceiving conflict accurately requires a sensitivity to the layered nature of conflict. First there is the visible situation. There are needs underlying the issue. Conflict is like an iceberg. Much of what causes conflict is beneath the surface. Most students will know about the Titanic and its collision with the iceberg—because of the recent film it provides a good opportunity to explain conflict’s many layers. Examples from daily life might include simple conflicts such as getting coffee with milk when you ordered black coffee from the deli counter person. He/she denies that you asked for black coffee and gets nasty about it. Underlying the disagreeableness may be a host of factors that may or may not have anything to do with you as a customer: personal disappointments or frustrations, experiences of racist behavior by other customers, cultural expectations, etc.

Small-Group Discussion: How I Relate to Conflict and Conflict Resolution.

Exercise: Role Plays

Conflict Journal

Homework:

Part I, Chapter 2, Weeks.

Read Chapter 7, McKay.

Prepare a 2-page written assignment reviewing your respective approach to conflict and conflict resolution.
CLASS THREE:

Point of View; “Wants” versus “Needs”

People frequently mistake “wants” for “needs.” This is not unexpected, especially in a country as affluent as the United States. The social pressures to push past one another in income, status, possessions, etc., often distort “wants.”

In New York City, for instance, the smallest gourmet coffee, a “tall,” can cost over $2.00. In 2008 it is possible to buy a fried egg sandwich in many locations for only $1.00. It is also possible to pay for a year’s primary education in some countries for $5.00 per annum. These sorts of amazing inequities affect people of different economic situations quite differently and contribute constantly to an undercurrent of irritability than vents through any slight miscommunication.

Discerning the Nuances of Conflict

The essence of good work in conflict resolution requires authentic listening and a willingness to “go” where the conflict has taken the participants, even if it is surprising. It is important to remember that what you think you “see” may not be what is really going on. Tone of voice, eye motion and raised eyebrows, and gesture are some of the many components in helping to decipher a conflict situation.

Class Discussion

Conflict Journal
Homework:

Read Part I, Chapter 3, Weeks.

Read Chapter 3, Nichols.

Prepare a 2-page written assignment reviewing your understanding of the difference between wants and needs.

CLASS FOUR:

Discussion: Listening

What is listening? Most of us think we know? And at the same time, most of us know that we can easily get it wrong. And most of us have had the experience of feeling that we are not being listened to. Hidden assumptions and emotional responses work powerfully to hinder our ability to listen. Anger and fear are particularly debilitating and often distort what we think we hear—so much that we are more likely to react irrationally.

Exercise: Good and Poor Listening

Two people come to the front of the room. One tells about something exciting like a ball game. The second person “doesn’t listen.” Participants are asked what cues they picked up about the second person’s not listening. The scenario is repeated with good listening, i.e., with paraphrases, animated eye contact, etc. Participants learn that they know more about listening than they thought.

Exercise: “A Time I Really Listened….” and “A Time I Felt Listened To…”

Conflict Journal
Homework:

Read Part I, Chapter 4, Weeks.

Read Chapter 1, McKay.

Prepare a 2-page written assignment exploring you’re the way in which you listen.

CLASS FIVE:

Discussion: The Role of Listening in Preventing Conflicts from Escalating

No one is happy to think that a concern they have expressed has gone unheard by others. Common responses to feeling unheard are repetition, raising the voice, getting impatient and then angry, accusing the “listener” of not paying attention or not caring, and withdrawal. While each of these responses is understandable and might be appropriate in a particular situation, they are, more often, not very effective and can even become a style of dysfunctional interaction.

Exercise: The Zen of Listening—Listening Without a Chattering Mind of Assumptions

In this exercise, students begin to learn how to listen without allowing their assumptions to intrude in their mental process and how to curtail those mental interruptions when they occur. This exercise utilizes what has been learned in earlier classes as a foundation, but gives the students intense practice in focused listening, without a sense of the self-centered."18

Conflict Journal

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18 While the title of this exercise is one also used by author Rebecca Z. Shafir, (2000) The Zen of Listening, Wheaton, IL: Quest, the style of this practitioner and that of Ms. Shafir, is a former speech therapist/pathologist. http://www.innerself.com/Behavior_Modification/listening.htm.
Homework:

Read Chapter 5, McKay.

Read Chapter 5, Nichols.

Prepare a 2-page written assignment on your listening style and openness to listening.

CLASS SIX:

Discussion: My Relationship to Conflict

What keeps us from listening? For one thing, familiarity can play tricks on our ability to retain an unconditional regard for others. We have heard the other’s concerns the proverbial “1,000 times.” The other is always complaining/whining/unhappy/wanting something. While indeed these may be fairly accurate assessments of the other’s behavior, they are not much help in getting the non-listening listener back on track. What questions might we ask ourselves when we find ourselves silently reciting the litany of why we don’t need to listen? What techniques might we employ on ourselves to help us re-focus? How might we better assist the one verbalizing to express their concerns in more effective and satisfying ways?

Small-Group Discussion: How I Relate to Conflict and Conflict Resolution.

Exercise: Role Plays

These role plays require a discussion of nuance, tone, verbal language and body language as keys to understanding how mis-communication can occur.

Conflict Journal

Homework:
Part II, Step 1, Weeks.

Read Chapter 14, McKay.

Prepare a 2-page written assignment reflecting on the art of conversation as a tool to reduce conflict.

CLASS SEVEN:

Point of View;

Discerning the Nuances of Conflict

Exercise: The Pyramid

Perceiving conflict accurately requires a sensitivity to the layered nature of conflict.

To help the participants more clearly understand the issue of point of view, an activity using a tangible object is introduced. This activity asks the participants to pass an object around, studying it carefully. In this instance, the object is a brass pyramid paperweight. The group is divided into three sections. The facilitator then goes to each group and gives them written instructions to be followed. A reporter is designated by and for each group. After following the instructions, the participants regroup and each designated reporter delivers a report. The activity demonstrates the issue of point-of-view faster and better than most books could!

The assignment is the same for each group: List a dozen words to accurately describe the object. However, each group received a different key as to what the object was.
Group A understood that it was a museum-quality Egyptian relic retrieved from the Metropolitan Museum.

Group B understood that it was a paperweight that sits on this facilitator’s desk, holding down a stack of papers.

Group C understood that it was something that had long been sitting in a corner.

The teachable moments from this activity offer rich treasures for the role of point-of-view in communication, in conflict, and in conflict resolution. In addition to descriptions of size, weight, finish, shape, and so forth:

Group A offers words such as exquisite, beautiful, and inspiring.
Group B offers words such as practical, heavy, and “okay.”
Group C offers words such as useless, ugly, and cheap.

As the designated reporters read out the descriptions, the group begins to understand the message that they themselves have conveyed. The facilitator can readily join them in their inevitable laughter. Then there is a free discussion of the experience. The goal is for participants to understand that the object is a constant. It is the descriptions that change based on point of view.

This facilitator shares a personal reflection: “The pyramid sits on my desk as a reminder of my daughter. At times I see her in a positive light, at other times I am hardly aware of her except when I need something from her, and, truth be told, I
sometimes see her in a negative light. In each instance, I act out of my authority, out of my point of view…. This activity reminds me that teachers do this with students, doctors with patients, partners with partners…. I invite each participant to find his or her own object and use it as a reminder of the power of point of view.”

Conflict Journal

Homework:

Read Part II, Step 2, Weeks.

Read Chapter 6, Nichols.

Prepare a 2-page written assignment on defusing emotionality in conflict resolution.

CLASS EIGHT:

Exercise: Positioning

What is the role of the individual conflicted partners in the conflict. What is the evident need of each player? What are the additional needs of the respective players? What is s/he unwilling to give up?

Exercise: Our Hidden Agendas in Conflict

We may as a couple, for example, argue about where to go for a get-away weekend. But we may well be having issues with each other about our differing parent styles with our children. We need to ask ourselves what we are really arguing over. Might it be our different parenting styles?

Conflict Journal

Homework:

Read Part II, Steps 3 and 4, Weeks.

Read Chapter 8, Nichols.
Prepare a 2-page written assignment exploring an aspect of the conflict partnership process that particularly resonates.

CLASS NINE:

Discussion: Prejudgment

Exercise: The Power of Perception

This exercise includes the use of classic optical illusions such as the old woman/young woman\(^{19}\) and the rabbit-duck.\(^{20}\)

Conflict Journal

Homework:

*Read Part II, Step 5, Weeks.*

*Read Chapter 13, Nichols.*

*Prepare a 2-page written assignment on misperceptions in conflict.*

CLASS TEN:

Discussion: Cultural Aspects of Conflict and Conflict Resolution

As Tatsushi puts it, “Cultural fluency is our readiness to anticipate, internalize, express, and help shape the process of meaning-making.”\(^{21}\)

Small-Group Discussion: Cultural Impact and Implications

Exercise: Role Plays

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\(^{19}\) [http://mathworld.wolfram.com/YoungGirl-OldWomanIllusion.html](http://mathworld.wolfram.com/YoungGirl-OldWomanIllusion.html)


Conflict Journal

Homework:

Part II, Step 6, Weeks.

Read Chapter 7, Nichols.

Prepare a 2-page written assignment reflecting on your response to a cultural challenge in conflict resolution.

CLASS ELEVEN:

Discussion: Challenges within Conflict Resolution

Cultural, personal and professional challenges in resolving conflict.

Exercise: Planning for My Final Paper

Exercise: What I Have Yet to Learn

Conflict Journal

Homework:

Read Part II, Step 7, Weeks.

Prepare a comprehensive outline of your final paper.

CLASS TWELVE:

Discussion: Meeting Challenges Successfully

Exercise: Brainstorming for Success

Exercise: Drama and Dynamics

An opportunity to collectively arrive at solutions developed during the course.
Conflict Journal

*Homework:*

*Read Part II, Step 8, Weeks.*

*Write 2-page paper on “Do-ables” and Mutually Beneficial Agreements.*

*Submit final paper outline.*

**CLASS THIRTEEN:**

Discussion: Achieving Positive and Lasting Conflict Resolution

Exercise: Case Studies Synthesizing Part II, Step VIII, Weeks

Exercise: Discussion and Feedback

Evaluations and Closure

*Submit Final Paper.*
3-HOUR CONFLICT RESOLUTION WORKSHOP

SAMPLE AGENDA

[Combined Un-timed and Timed Agenda—the Timed Agenda is for the Facilitator]

Janice Marie Johnson, Facilitator

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Welcome and Introductions 10 mins
   Establishes a basis of trust for the process and for the facilitator. Invites participants to meet each other.

Gathering 10 mins
   Invites participants to learn something about each other.

Community Practices 10 mins
   Establishes guidelines for behavior including confidentiality during the workshop.

Agenda Review 10 mins
   Allows participants to know what to expect in sequence.

Conflict Web 10 mins
   Allows participants to share ideas about conflict as a preliminary to learning how they themselves respond to conflict.

Back-to-Back 30 mins
   Participants learn to recognize how they themselves respond to conflict.

Break 15 mins
Breaks offer participants a moment to unwind, chat with others, and take a moment for renewal.

**Microlab 30 mins**

Participants begin to learn conflict resolution skills in a timed process that requires good listening.

**Pyramid 30 mins**

Participants learn about point-of-view.

**Taking It Further 10 mins**

Announcements are made about other resources available to participants.

**Evaluations 10 mins**

This quick and key process allows participants to offer a critique to improve the program and to help the facilitator judge the effectiveness of the workshop.

**Closing 5 mins**

Closure provides a positive conclusion after the opportunity for critique and provides the facilitator an opportunity to thank participants.
Welcome and Introductions

The welcome is very important. These are the moments when participants make an initial judgment about the facilitator and the process itself. They often come to the workshop with some anxieties about what will be expected of them. If the welcome is inclusive and clear the workshop participants can feel a sense of trust in the process. If the welcome is not inclusive or is unclear or the facilitator is anxious, participants do not have confidence in the process. This lack of confidence interferes with learning itself. The technical elements presented in the workshop may indeed be noted by participants. However, the deeper learning from the experiential aspect will be lost because the participants never open themselves to really engage with each other during the workshop.

Someone already trusted by the workshop participants should warmly introduce the facilitator. For example, if the facilitator is at a school to work with the cafeteria staff, their union representative might be the best person to give the introduction. The school principal would generally not be the right person because that role is one often resented by those staff persons. The person introducing the facilitator may indicate that s/he will not stay for the workshop in an effort to allow participants to be comfortable.
Introductions of each member of the group are also important. They should foster a sense of camaraderie and commonality. It matters that the playing field be fairly level. Questions should not, at this stage, require answers that highlight sensitive differences in the circle, such as high-school drop-outs and Ph.D.s or unwed mothers and married mothers.

**Gathering**

This is a quick go-around. It is done in such a way that all can participate. The assignment might be “Name someone whom you consider to be a peacemaker.” In addition to the usual heroes such as Gandhi and King or Tubman and Parks, participants should be encouraged to consider someone whom they know or knew personally, perhaps a grandmother or beloved teacher. The facilitator could elicit reflection from some of the participants, time permitting.

**Community Practices**

Community Practices is a term used for an agreed-upon understanding of behavioral rules during a workshop process. The facilitator offers an opportunity for participants to consider and briefly articulate their individual needs. This is essential if the participants are to formulate a useable guideline for their behavior with each other during the workshop process. Confidentiality, for example, is an important guideline. A person who is anxious about some personal information getting beyond the group, knows that the group, as a group, has made an agreement about confidentiality.
In beginning to help participants devise their own set of Community Practices, I use the visual metaphor of a *Gift Basket*. My question to all is, “What are the gifts that we choose to give each other?” As the facilitator, I may model an answer by offering, “the gift of listening.” My goal is to elicit responses such as “being on time for breaks,” “one person speaking at a time,” “trying to practice speaking from one’s own authority,” and so forth. I actually draw an empty basket on the chart paper and as responses come in, I draw and note them on the newsprint as *gifts* for our community.

**Agenda Review**

Participants, adults and children alike, want to, and deserve to, know what is happening. This is another way in which trust can be engendered. The facilitator should clearly and concisely go over the various elements of the presentation. The order of elements of the Agenda is determined by the need to build trust initially and to educate throughout. This occurs incrementally through proper introduction of the facilitator and introduction of participants to each other, and an understanding of what they are responsible for, and how they should behave. This might mean knowing whether they are free to “interrupt” the facilitator with clarifying questions or whether they can expand on another participant’s response. (A participant does *not* interpret or translate for a peer or the facilitator.) The facilitator needs to make sure that the sequence of activities is clear to everyone.

The workshop exercises establish a deepening understanding of conflict. In the first exercise (Conflict Web), the almost universal perception of conflict as *negative* is challenged. In the second exercise (Back-to-Back), the different styles of typical response
to conflict are demonstrated. The third exercise (Microlab), “unpacks” the understanding of conflict by figuratively taking participants back to their early experiences of conflict and moving them up to the present. The fourth exercise (Pyramid), demonstrates the role of perception of the various parties in a conflict. Some participants will want to go deeper, so resources are offered (Taking It Further). Evaluations and Closing provide both critique and positive ending to the whole workshop.

The Agenda Review reflects respect for each participant’s time. Below is a detailed look at a few of the activities this practitioner often uses in conducting conflict resolution workshops:

**Conflict Web**

This is done as a quick brainstorm. It offers a quick overview of uncensored ideas of what Conflict is. Participants are encouraged to call out words or thoughts. The responses offer few surprises. Nouns are usually offered first: *arguing, anger, war, fight, weapons, violence*. Feelings are offered second: *angry, upset, sad, frustrated, confused, hurt*. Usually with some hinting, a word such as *opportunity* or *resolution* is called out.

At that point, this facilitator offers a premise. Conflict is a natural part of life. Life would be boring without it. Nature works in conflict – the changing of the seasons, the life cycle, beautiful music, wonderful literature, powerful art all require elements of conflict in order to be rich. Conflict is not a bad thing. It is not a good thing. Conflict simply *is*. 
The challenge is for us to recognize it, to understand what to do with it, and to turn it into something positive.

**Back-to-Back**

This is a technique first encountered at *Morningside Center Teaching for Social Responsibility* (formerly, *Educators for Social Responsibility Metropolitan New York*).

It requires participants to pair up back to back. This facilitator presents a scenario, and without rehearsal, each pair offers a role play of the scenario. A sample scenario is that a customer in a long line at the supermarket turns to get a magazine in the next line. The customer comes back and the customer behind, cuts in front of him or her.

The facilitator describes the scenario then calls out “One, Two, Three, Action!” Each pair goes into action until they are called to stop. (This is when the fun begins!)

In most instances, each pair’s scenario gets debriefed. Participant are asked to consider how they decided who would be Person A and who would be Person B. Even that process reflects much about communication style. With a group of 24 people, the pairs tend to cover the main conflict resolution styles. A pair will have no trouble being polite and shrugging shoulders. A second pair will call for the store manager. A third pair will debate and negotiate. A fourth will fight…. And so forth…. This role play serves as a far better teacher than much book theory and formal teaching. Each person shares surprises and “aha!’s” Most people role play an exaggerated version of what they would actually
do in real life. Time permitting, at the end of the activity, each pair goes “back to the video tape” and recreates a positive scenario. (In this practitioner’s experience, children, youth, and adults respond profoundly to this activity.)

**Break**

After the intensity of the back-to-back exercise, participants need a “breather” during which they can not only deal with biological needs, connect with family via cellphones and such, but to also visit with participants and allow learnings from the previous exercise to “sink in.”

**Microlab**

“Microlab” is a term used to describe particular process in which the participants go through a structured process that allows them to learn aspects of conflict resolution. It is so termed because it provides a smaller version of real-life situations in which participants can experiment with articulating ideas and emotions in a controlled setting that allows them to perceive they each relate to conflict. The basic structure of a Microlab has been developed through the work of *Educators for Social Responsibility.* Practitioners use the basic structure, adapting the questions and the style to meet the needs of the particular situation.

Because a Microlab is a timed activity that requires careful listening as well as talking, it is very effective with youth (4th grade and up) in getting them to communicate very briefly with an “I” statement. The facilitator asks some questions to prompt the participants to speak for one to three minutes each—the length of time has to do with the age of the participants in this small group exercise. Usually there are no more than four

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persons in a Microlab and everyone is expected to listen without interrupting. This is a very important learning experience because most youth do not find it easy.

Microlabs in a classroom setting require that the class be divided up into groups of three or four. Several methods for this work well—counting off of course, but also perhaps the use of puzzle pieces or numbered cards draw from a container of some sort. The groups are kept small so that everyone will be able to see and hear each of the members of their group. The guidelines for a Microlab are explained at the beginning so that it is clear from the outset that the process will be fair. The wording of the instructions usually includes statements such as the following:

1. This is a timed activity—you will each have one (or more) minutes to speak and I will be telling you when it is time to go on to the next speaker.

2. If you need more time to think or don’t want to speak, it’s okay to pass.

3. Speak from your own point of view.

4. What we say in the small groups is confidential, so we need to agree that what gets said in the small groups doesn’t come back to the large group.

5. You only have to share what you feel comfortable with.

After giving the instructions the facilitator asks the first question—saying the question, modeling answers, and then repeating the question again. Participants thus get time to think, have a good idea of what is expected of them and can formulate their answers. Between questions, a reminder about not interrupting may be needed.
While Microlab questions are usually tailored to the particular situation, they fall into a few general categories such as the following:

1. What do you want to say about [what happened, the issue, etc.] What are you thinking about it? What’s on your mind?

2. How are you feeling right now?

3. What do you want to do so our community (or the world) will do something (about the issue)?

Obviously the first two kinds of questions make it possible for participants to share their thoughts and feelings if they are ready to do so. The third sort of question is framed to elicit a positive response to the issues.

After the questions, the facilitator reconvenes the large group and checks in with the participants to find out how the experience was for them. The facilitator then asks for volunteers to share something they said in the small groups and a reminder that because of confidentiality, they have to talk about only their own experiences.

A larger classroom discussion may follow this sharing, and it is quite possible that the discussion can get pretty heated. For that reason, the facilitator suggests some guidelines for the discussion and gets buy-in from the participants beforehand. Brainstorming can be a very positive way to wind up the large group discussion because it leaves participants feeling that they have been heard and that they can do something together that is positive about the issues.
A Microlab on Conflict Resolution itself might incorporate questions such as the following:

1. What were the early messages you received about confrontational behaviors when you were growing up?

2. What do you appreciate about how you deal with conflict today?

3. What would you like to change about how you deal with conflict today?

This Microlab would also be followed by a group discussion, debriefing the experience.

One of this practitioner’s goals is that participants begin to understand that how they deal with conflict *today* is intricately connected with how they learned to deal with conflict from their youngest days. While lifting up the cultural and familial dimensions of the issues, personal experiences can be useful examples. For example, this facilitator was raised by both Jamaican and Cuban relatives. The Jamaican family expected children and youth to have a voice at the dining table whereas Cuban relatives believed that “children should be seen and not heard.” Such mixed signals are often carried throughout adult life, creating ambivalence about when participation will be positively received.

**Pyramid**

*See description in the Thirteen Session Course (pages 29 to 31).*

**Taking It Further**

This is the time for this practitioner to share conflict resolution resources such as upcoming workshops, courses, programs, books, and articles pertaining to the subject.
Evaluations

This practitioner always take time for evaluations. They are a useful tool for the facilitator to use to gain fresh insights for affirming and improving the work. Evaluations offer an indication that the facilitator values the experiences of each participant.

Closing

This is a quick go-around. Each participant is asked to share a thought, a word reflecting anything positive. It could be as general as “Something that I am looking forward to doing within the next month” to a response as specific to the workshop them as “Something that I learned about myself today.” The emotional “temperature” of the room is a gauge for designing a closing activity to suit the group. In closing, the participants are warmly thanked for attending the workshop.
WORSHIP SERVICE

Introduction

A Worship Service in the Unitarian Universalist tradition weaves together music (which may be instrumental and/or sung by soloist, choir, or some combination thereof), poetry, prose readings, sermon or homily, prayer or meditation, a blessing of some kind, and often some simple rituals. The rituals might include a candle lighting, a moment to greet fellow congregants, or a spoken affirmation shared by everyone at some point during the service. This richly textured experience may be fairly simple in presentation, or highly professional and elaborate depending on the congregation, the time of day and the particular constituency from the congregation that most often is present at that time. Ideally the service feels seamless, but much planning goes into it. Planning notwithstanding, the worship leader must always be alert to handle unexpected occurrences and model a graciousness and even humor in doing so.

Before the service takes place, a sermon blurb is written by the worship presenter for the congregational newsletter and website. This is the one that I wrote for my sermon:

“Rabindranath Tagore said ‘...when old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart, and where old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders.’ Conflict transformation offers us new melodies and new country.”

A sermon blurb entices and promises something to the reader — suggests the possibility of some new perspective in the context of a familiar concern.

Order Of Service: “New Melodies From The Heart”
Janice Marie Johnson, Worship Presenter

PRELUDE

CHALICE LIGHTING*

HYMN

UNISON AFFIRMATION AND DOXOLOGY

GREET NEIGHBOR, WELCOME, ANNOUNCEMENTS, OFFERTORY

READING*

SOLO

SERMON*

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

MEDITATION*

HYMN*

BENEDICTION*

POSTLUDE

*Janice Marie Johnson leads this element.
Worship Elements: “New Melodies From The Heart”
Janice Marie Johnson, Worship Presenter

Prelude

This musical selection is often made by a music director sensitive to the general content of the service on a particular day. An soft instrumental rendition of “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off”\(^{24}\) was selected for this service. The song lyrics speak to the sermon topic. The prelude invites the congregation into a sense of reflection.

Chalice Lighting

Unitarian Universalists usually light some sort of candle or other flame at the beginning of worship. Such lighting is usually accompanied by words specially selected for the occasion or standard ones set by a particular community. One or more persons may participate in a chalice lighting. The words that follow were chosen to reflect themes that will emerge in the sermon that follows later in the service.

“We meet on Holy Ground.
For that place is holy where we meet each other.
Where lives touch, where love moves
Where hope stirs.
How strong is our need for one another
Our silent beckoning to our neighbors,
Our invitations to share life and death together,
Our welcome into the lives of those we meet,

\(^{24}\)“Let’ Call the Whole Thing Off.” This popular song was written in 1937. Music by George Gershwin and lyrics by Ira Gershwin. Made for movie “Shall We Dance” with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.
And their welcome into our own.”

[Janice Marie Johnson lights the chalice at this point.]

“We kindle our chalice,
a bowl of light,
Reflecting the Eternal Light
Which shines always
around and before us.”

--Anonymous

Hymn(s)

Unitarian Universalist services usually feature two or three hymns for congregational singing. The congregation is invited to “stand in body or spirit” and join in singing the Hymn # in the hymnal. With this wording, this invitation to song is sensitive to those with certain physical disabilities. (This invitation has grown out of a previous one, “Stand as you are willing and able.”) The congregation may be led or accompanied by a soloist or a volunteer or professional choir. The hymns are usually selected by the worship leader, the person giving the sermon. The selection is based most heavily on the words, but the melody or history of the hymn may also be the basis for the choice of hymn.

Janice Marie Johnson consulted with Jerry Brown, Director of Music in selecting the hymns for this service. Hymns # 381, 380, 374 as a medley (sung in that particular order,
for building emphasis of the theme of the sermon), are one-stanza hymns all of which can be sung to the hymn tune known in many denominations as Old Hundredth. For this service, these were combined as one hymn with the following words which are suggestive of the process of conflict transformation. The first stanza comprises words by Isaac Watts (1674-1748), the second by Charles Lytle (1884-1980), and the third by William de Witt Hyde (1858-1917) — all three are found in the Unitarian Universalist Association’s current hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*. (1993) Boston: Beacon Press.

#381
From all that dwell below the skies
Let songs of hope and faith arise;
Let peace, good will on earth be sung
Through every land by every tongue.

#380
Rejoice in love we know and share,
In love and beauty everywhere;
rejoice in truth that makes us free,
And in the good that yet shall be.

#374
Since what we choose is what we are,
And what we love we yet shall be,

The goal must ever shine afar —

The will to win it makes us free.

**Unison Affirmation and Musical Doxology**

The entire congregation recites the unison affirmation and sings the doxology:

(UNISON AFFIRMATION)

Unto the Church Universal, which is the depository of all ancient wisdom and the school of all modern thought; which recognises in all prophets a harmony, in all scriptures a unity, and through all dispensations a continuity; which abjures all that separates and divides and always magnifies humanity and peace; which seeks truth in freedom, justice in love, and individual discipline in social duty; and which shall make of all persons, sects, classes, nations and races, one Beloved Community — unto this Church and unto all its members, know and unknown throughout the world we pledge the allegiance of our hands and hearts.

(DOXOLOGY)

From all that dwell below the skies,
Let words of love and peace arise;
Let joyful songs of praise be sung
Through every land by every tongue.

-- Amen

**Greetings, Welcome, Announcements, and the Offering**

These elements are standard in creating a worshipful, welcoming, and caring community.

**Reading(s)**

Unitarian Universalist services usually have one or two readings, offered by either the person who will give the sermon or by another worship participant. The readings may be prose, poetry, scriptural, from spiritual sources around the world, from literature, or non-fiction. They have an element to offer that enriches or explains an aspect of the content of the sermon.
(that precedes or follows). They may include a responsive or unison reading from the hymnbook or other source, so that the congregation reads with the worship leader.

The first reading is adapted from an untitled essay by the late systems analyst and organic farmer Donella Meadows, in a collection of materials compiled by the artist Frederick Franck and Janis Roze and Richard Connolly entitled, “What Does It Mean to Be Human? Reverence for Life, Reaffirmed by Responses from around the World.”

[Janice Marie Johnson’s comments added in italics at the end of the reading.]

Meadows says: “To be human is to be born with an enormous package of potentials, for hatred and suspicion, for love and trust, for greed, generosity, passion, apathy — and a long list of other positive and negative traits. I guess all those traits can be found in many mixtures inside each of us. I sure can find them all in me.

To be human is to be born into a world that pull out and pushes back the potential inside us. I push and pull back, trying to find or shape a part of the world (including other people) that supports my inborn potential. Sometimes the world supports part of me. Sometimes it crushes part of me.

Being human, I am blessed with remarkable organs of perception that brings millions of messages from the world — and I can be so dazzled by my own barrage of experience that I take it for the whole world. But I’ve learned the hard way, that my experience isn’t the

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world. It's only a tiny sample.

So I need other people, who have sampled other parts of the world. Together we can make a more complete picture. I need to report my piece of reality honestly, listen to others, and remember that bit of truth I know is not anywhere near all the truth there is.

There's a part of me—it feels as if it's buried deep—it shines. It literally shines. It's connected to the whole universe. I think it's what other people mean when they use words like conscience or soul or god.

Most of the time I keep it well buried under the sludge of busyness, complaints, schemes, worries fantasies and fears. The culture I live in powerfully encourages sludge. It does not lead people to experience the shining place inside of themselves.

What kind of dance can I do with a culture that loads me with sludge and does not recognize my inner shine? I can respect myself and others for the moments of nobility we do managed to produce out of the mix of potential and experience, shine and sludge that we carry around with us. We do it with astonishing frequency.

I weep for the culture, but when I think about who I am, who we are as humans, I have to laugh—laugh as I would laugh at a child or a puppy, bumbling and self centered, a still unrealized being, but wonderfully endearing, infinitely loveable, full of potential.”
Each of us has several different identities. Today mine include: woman of color, mother, daughter, sister, friend... But there is so much more to me. Depending on the context I might describe myself as educator, speaker, student, singer, activist. And in yet another context, theist, pacifist, liberal, listener and more. Think for a moment of those identities that make you YOU! No doubt you will each have your own distinctly particular list at any one moment or another.

I return to Meadows’ line, “I have to laugh – laugh as I would laugh at a child or a puppy, bumbling and self centered, a still unrealized being, but wonderfully endearing, infinitely loveable, full of potential.”

Musical Solo: “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off”

Lyrics are listed herewith to set the stage for the sermon:

Verse

Things have come to a pretty pass

Our romance is growing flat,

For you like this and the other

While I go for this and that,

Goodness knows what the end will be

Oh I don't know where I'm at

It looks as if we two will never be one

Something must be done:
Chorus - 1
You say either and I say either, You say neither and I say neither
Either, either Neither, neither, Let's call the whole thing off.

You like potato and I like potahto, You like tomato and I like tomahto
Potato, potahto, Tomato, tomahto, Let's call the whole thing off

But oh, if we call the whole thing off Then we must part
And oh, if we ever part, then that might break my heart

So if you like pyjamas and I like pyjahmas, I'll wear pyjamas and give up pyjahmas
For we know we need each other so we, Better call the whole off off
Let's call the whole thing off.

Chorus - 2
You say laughter and I say larfter, You say after and I say arfter
Laughter, larfter after arfter, Let's call the whole thing off,

You like vanilla and I like vanella, You saspiralla, and I saspirella
Vanilla vanella chocolate strawberry, Let's call the whole thing off

But oh if we call the whole thing of then we must part
And oh, if we ever part, then that might break my heart

So if you go for oysters and I go for ersters, I'll order oysters and cancel the ersters
For we know we need each other so we, Better call the calling off off,
Let's call the whole thing off.

Chorus - 3
I say father, and you say pater, I saw mother and you say mater
Pater, mater Uncle, auntie, let's call the whole thing off.

I like bananas and you like banahnahs, I say Havana and I get Havahnah
Bananas, banahnahs Havana, Havahnah, Go your way, I'll go mine

So if I go for scallops and you go for lobsters, So all right no contest we'll order lobster
For we know we need each other so we, Better call the calling off off,
Let's call the whole thing off.

(This particular solo sets the stage for the sermon, and is immediately followed by it. The sermon is delivered by Janice Marie Johnson.)
I had a near “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off” moment a few weeks ago. My friend Gene Glickman and I were heading to our pre-conference “ULTI” Unitarian Universalist Leadership Team Institute meeting in “faraway” Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. There was a particular train that we had to catch, the 10:50. Since the train runs only once daily, missing it was not an option.

We had agreed to meet at Penn Station at 10:30. But we missed communication as to where. I understood that we had agreed to meet at the Big Information Board. Gene understood that we had agreed to meet at the Information Booth. Those of you who know Penn Station know both where the Information Board is and also where the Information Booth is. They’re on opposite sides of the huge Amtrak waiting area! So we each waited impatiently for the other.

The situation was further complicated by our differing approaches to that recently-developed mode of communication – the cellphone; I cannot imagine life without a cellphone. Gene, on the other hand, in this day and age does not own a cellphone. Finally, Gene mustered himself to think outside his particular box: he went to a pay phone and dialed my cell phone number.

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26 Unitarian Universalist sermons are from 15-25 minutes in length. Homilies are shorter, lasting usually no more than 10-12 minutes. Sermons may be read or given extemporaneously. Homilies may even be impromptu at unforeseen occasions.
“Where are you Janice?”

“I'm right here, Gene, where we agreed that we would meet. Where on earth are you?”

“I'm right here, Janice, right where we agreed to meet. Where on earth are you?”

Then we each said simultaneously "If you're here, why don't I see you?"

To cut a long story short, we were soon able to cut through the missed communication, meet each other, and make the train (just barely!). Eventually, we were even able to laugh about it. The reality was that the missed communication between Gene and me was not at all comforting! It was fraught with tension. The further reality is that we were good friends with an already-established relationship founded on trust. Without that trust, the missed communication was fraught with the possibility of a conflict ensuing.

Rabindranath Tagore said “…when old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart, and where old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders.” My belief is that Gene and I were able to hear new melodies from the heart.

Years ago, when I became interested in the field of conflict resolution I thought that I would be learning a set of skills which I could employ with fairly predictable, and positive, results. Old melodies…. I have come to realize that the use of the term Conflict Resolution is an unwitting reification—an attempt to make something very abstract far too concrete! Conflict itself is a part of our human experience. Conflict does not exist as some thing that can be modified or addressed by any particular methodology.
What occurs in mediation, for example, is not the removal of conflict but the transformation of the disputants’ experience of their differences. The evaluation of mediation in terms of compliance to a mediated agreement is misleading because it continues to reinforce the idea that conflict is an object to be moved or manipulated, or even blasted away like a granite boulder.

The Transylvanian Unitarian theologian Dávid Ferencz (d. 1579) reminds us that “We need not think alike to love alike.” What then, can we say about conflict -- the phenomena human beings experience -- as being so disruptive in personal, community, political, national, and multinational contexts?

The misunderstanding of conflict begins in the missed awareness of communication errors. The same kind of miscommunication that Gene and I experienced ever so briefly. These errors are miscues, usually unintentional, in the service of attempts to gain advantage over the other. Our diverse familial and community cultures come into play. The compounding of our intellectual and emotional responses in these situations (for example, from puzzlement, to frustration, to hurt, to anger, or to rage) contribute to the sense that the difficulty is something concrete, i.e., a “stumbling block.”

Conflict has much to do with miscommunication. The “isms” that we fight against whether here at Community [the Community Church of New York, Unitarian

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27 “Stumbling block” comes from the Greek “skandalon” which does refer to an actual object, the part of a trap or snare with the bait, upon which one keeps stumbling. In its metaphorical sense, “Skandalon” provides the origin for the word “scandal.”
Universalist], or in our larger world, have much to do with miscommunication. Racism, for example, an “ism” that we fight mightily against, can be analyzed as a very complex web of miscommunication. It serves to establish and reinforce prejudice. It serves to misdirect attention away from privilege and its sources. Miscommunication around race can obscure its systemic nature. It can sanction an individual’s power over another or a group’s power over others.

The web of miscommunication around race is of such density and intricacy as to render the development of effective anti-racism methodologies difficult, confusing, and at times, seemingly ineffective. Those of us involved in anti-racism work within Unitarian Universalist world can certainly attest to this!

The 20th Century has brought us some new methodologies and a broader understanding of the complexities of conflict. Now I have come to understand that conflict transformation, rather than conflict resolution, is the challenge of the 21st Century.

Conflict transformation offers us new melodies and new country. Despite the fact that armed conflict and outright war continue, there is something new happening, something that was virtually unknown even fifteen years ago. There is a new consciousness arising, most visibly expressed in two emerging phenomena.

The first is the realm of micro-economics. Not only did Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammed Yunus realize that $27 could free 42 poor people from the clutches of
money-lenders, there are now websites such as www.kiva.org which make it possible for people of modest income all over the world to participate in micro-credit projects that benefit poor people on every continent.

The second phenomenon is the will for reconciliation and forgiveness in, what would have been previously, almost unimaginable circumstances. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa was one of the first of its kind, but its influence continues. Linda Biehl was the mother of Amy Biehl, a young American social activist killed in a South African township, befriended her daughter’s killers and helped them to make a positive future for themselves. Linda visited with us last March [at an anti-racism conference at Community Church]. More recently, the Amish community whose children were held hostage and killed, reached out to the killer’s family in forgiveness of him and support to them. These are but two examples of a somewhat startling and amazing pattern of forgiveness that seems to be emerging.

In view of this new consciousness, it is clear to me that while conflict transformation requires skills and sensitivity and both breadth and depth of cultural understanding, it is most definitely an art. This is the challenge: to use the understanding of conflict transformation as the unraveling of the knots/errors in lines of communication to develop an entirely fresh approach to true communication, to new melodies from the heart. This approach would encompass respect, dignity, acknowledgment of difference,

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29 http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/
30 http://www.amybiehl.org/
perseverance, kindness, firmness, support, generosity and gratitude. It requires living the seven principles that Unitarian Universalists covenant to affirm and promote:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person
2. Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part

I always knew that the slightest breath could create a conflictual situation. But I never knew how to handle it…. Now I know that we can help to teach our children to be peaceable beings by teaching them good communication skills. We can help them learn how to express their feelings—recognize the feelings in their bodies—then strategize how to modulate those feelings.

We can teach them to be culturally competent, to value collaboration over compromise.

We can help them assemble a custom-made tool-kit for communicating effectively around conflict. There are different styles of response to conflict: avoidance, aggression, compromise, collaboration, calling in a third party authority. Even though each of us has
our own style, we need to be familiar with all of them and learn the nuances of the personalities and cultures we interface with. This is the basic demand of cultural competency, a key competency if we plan to be welcoming of and embraceing of others.

Christina Feldman asserts,

“I” and “you,” “us” and “them,” “winning” and “losing,” “victor” and vanquished” – these are no more than the tricks of the mind exiled from the heart. The face we see before us is no other than our own, the person we see before us is ourselves in another guise. What else can we do but open our hearts, what else do we need to do?  

We can choose to recognize conflict transformation as a pathway to peace.

We can expand our cultural competencies. We can listen to each other, listen deeper, and listen deeper still. May our “new melodies break forth from the heart.”

Masakhane.

Musical Interlude

This music is selected and played on the grand piano by the Director of Music. It is music capturing the message of the sermon.

Meditation

Unitarian Universalists are not always be entirely comfortable with the word “prayer” as it may remind them of a form of petitionary prayer they do not find appealing. Others see

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33 This maxim, meaning, “Let us build together” is my traditional closing for a sermon. Other Unitarian Universalists would most often use either “Amen” which means, “So be it” or “Blessed Be.”]
prayer as aspirational in nature and therefore have no difficulty with the word. In many congregations, people are invited to join in a spirit of “meditation or prayer.” As with chalice lightings and readings, these words often reflect themes that emerge in the sermon, thus helping listeners to be more open to the message of that sermon. The following meditation was selected for this worship service:

“It is good to know our songs by heart for those lonely times when the world is not singing them back to us. That’s usually a good time to start humming to yourself, that song is most your own.

They can be heard as songs of love or of longing, songs of encouragement or of comfort, songs of struggle or of security. But most of all, they are the songs of life, giving testimony to what has been, giving praise for all we’ve been given, giving hope for all who strive for, giving voice to the great mystery that carries each one of us in and out of this world.  

Hymn #34, Though I May Speak With Bravest Fire:

Though I may speak with bravest fire, and have the gift to all inspire, and have not love, my words are vain as sounding brass, and hopeless gain.

Though I may give all I possess, and striving so my love profess, but not be given by love within the profit soon turns strangely thin.

Come, Spirit, come, our hearts control, our spirits long to be made whole.

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Let inward love guide every deed; by this we worship, and are freed.

Benediction

Unitarian Universalists close their services with a benediction (“good word”) or “closing words” that either wrap up a point in the sermon, the service as a whole, or simply send congregants forth, presumably renewed in spirit for the coming week. Janice Marie Johnson offers the benediction immediately following the hymn. The congregants have been standing and singing the hymn and remain standing for the benediction. The following benediction was selected for this service:

“Change is very musical, but sometimes you must listen for a long time before you hear the pattern in is music.”

The benediction is followed by the postlude.

Postlude

Congregants sit and quietly enjoy the music, bringing closure to the worship service.

“Peacherine Rag” was selected for the prelude of this worship service.

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Concluding Remarks About This Final Project

This Final Project has presented three very different modalities for educating about conflict, conflict resolution and conflict transformation, a thirteen-session course, a three-hour workshop and an entire Unitarian Universalist worship service. Each modality has its own unique usefulness; each touches a very different aspect of the participant’s experience. Some of the same materials have surfaced in all three modalities, for the art of conflict transformation has certain elements based on the practitioner’s grasp of conflict resolution theory and the intuitive and creative response to conflict-in-the-moment. It cannot be stressed enough that while much can be written about theory and method, the success of the actual praxis depends heavily on the preparation of the practitioner.

The preparation and the presentation are different for each of the modalities presented here. The energy levels and style of participation by students or congregants is completely different. The body language, tone, and even voice quality is usually different. Preparation is not only cognitive but emotional as well. In addition, the practitioner must have a highly developed cultural competency and be sensitive to a depth of nuanced communication that takes literally years to develop. Such nuance is not easy to convey in words, for the reason behind a conflict and its persistent occurrence may be perceived and understood in a tiny moment of observed gesture or other body language or seemingly accidental choice of phrasing.
It is hoped that this Project will convey to the reader a sense of the possibility and excitement that conflict transformation offers, while suggesting possible further inquiries. It has been a privilege for this practitioner to study and work in the field — to struggle with the pieces of the puzzle of conflict and to put at least a few of the pieces together. And it has been most gratifying to find in that work a deep sense of hopefulness about our interactions with one another.
Bibliography


