The Alchemy of Change

Cultural Fluency in Conflict Resolution

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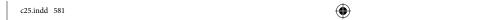I magine a conflict that matters in your bones. It may be a social injustice. It may be a family knot that has proved difficult to untangle. Or perhaps it is an internal struggle that resists rational analysis. The toughest problems are not easily amenable to rational dissection and linear problem solving. If they were, we would need fewer psychotherapists and mediators. Computers could tumble the factors together, producing the most promising way forward. But humans are complex, and human conflict—deep in our very bones—is always about what lies below the surface as well as what can be found above. Intractable conflicts meld history, identity, face, worldviews, sacred meanings, and personal filters in a mélange that always includes culture as an unacknowledged yet very important player.

The complex interrelatedness between conflict and culture is well documented and has been the subject of many conferences, volumes, and special issues. Yet while many have acknowledged its importance, culture and cultural fluency (CF) are arguably still not at the heart of conflict resolution practice, education, and theory. The field tends toward the parochial, as unexamined, unarticulated, and culture-specific assumptions about conflict, engagement, and resolution continue to infuse programs both within and outside the United States.

Multiple conflict resolution projects exist in thousands of sites around the world, fueled by USAID and other funding. North American conflict resolution programs are in the midst of their own life cycles, some flourishing and others withering as technological shifts and the institutionalization of programs in civil and administrative justice yield a range of changes. Professionalization and standardization of practice have sometimes amounted to challenges to the meaningful integration of CF into conflict resolution, squeezing creativity to the sidelines as uniformity is accented.

At the same time, the field is graying as founders retire, seminal thinking branches out, and organizations refocus. In the midst of so much change, what can be said about the relationship between culture and conflict? Is there more

awareness of the importance of culture now than there was ten or twenty years ago? Are there more practitioners and scholars from a wide range of ethno-cultural groups? Do training materials feature embedded understandings of cultural dimensions of conflict, and have simulations moved beyond stereotype-ridden chasms that would trap the unwary novice in carica-tures? Finally, does CF animate and inform policy, process, and system design approaches, or are they being guided in more facile ways by either sequestering culture as an optional extra or forgetting it altogether, yielding approaches based on privileged experiences of agency, mobility, capacity, and maneuverability?

There are some encouraging signs. The waters on neutrality have been trou-bled, with Mayer, Wing, and others emphasizing how a discourse of neutral-ity masks systemic inequities and culturally enacted partiality. The worldviews that have shaped conflict resolution theory and spawned unacknowledged culture-specific approaches to pedagogy have been questioned in a thought-ful four-volume series, Rethinking Negotiation Teaching (Honeyman, Coben, and De Palo, 2009, 2011). The personal qualities—and with them, the cultural lenses—of mediators have been highlighted by Bowling and Hoffman in their seminal work, *Bringing Peace into the Room* (2003). John Paul Lederach (2005) and others have long emphasized the importance of cultural and contextual adaptations born of careful observation and respect for different conceptions of the nature of conflict and context-sensitive ways of engaging it.

At the same time, Peter Adler and other thought leaders have argued that it is essential to move beyond the rigidly analytical orientations so important to the field's establishment to a more protean, dynamic, and complex way of conceptualizing and actualizing change. Such an approach situates culture as central to analyses of conflict and nudges us toward a more complex mental model of change. All conflict resolution work is ultimately about change, and change requires creativity as well as sensitivity to culturally informed ways of achieving it.

In this chapter, I explore relationships between conflict and culture as they relate to theory, practice, and pedagogy. Beginning with a summary of theoretical starting points, I examine recent multidisciplinary work to inform a discussion of culturally fluent ways to enliven theory, infuse practice, and invigorate pedagogy in conflict resolution. I argue that recent findings in neuroscience underline the importance of drawing from work on creativity, expressive arts, and multimodal experience to inform CF. My thesis rests on three simple assertions:

- Cultural fluency—familiarity and facility with cultural dynamics as they shape ways of seeing and behaving—is essential to effectiveness in all aspects of theorizing, practice, and pedagogy in conflict resolution.
- The field is not "there yet." We very much need the infusion of work from multiple arts and science disciplines to inform culturally fluent progress.

- The most promising route to inculcating CF in conflict work draws on art and science as equal progenitors of effective practices and pedagogies that are respectful and relevant across difference while featuring immediacy and protean adaptability.

DEFINING CULTURE

Before describing cultural fluency in more detail, it is important to lay a foundation by defining culture itself, a definition that has been approached in multiple ways. The definitions span the prosaic—culture is the way we do things around here—to the poetic—culture is an underground river, always present yet seldom tasted—to the semiotic—culture is our grammar of being. While culture is omnipresent, it is not explanatory in relation to every facet of conflict. Political, sociological, historical, and other macrodynamics always interweave with culture, as do personal factors that shape patterns of behavior and habits of attention. At the same time, culture is implicated in all conflicts and is always shaping common sense and ideas of fairness, as well as the range of possible avenues and approaches that might constitute resolution.

Culture is a dynamic and changing set of shared patterns reflexively interweaving with knowing, being, perceiving, behaving, and sense making in a given group of people. It relates in multifaceted ways to many aspects of identity, including, among others:

- Territory
- Language
- History
- Religion
- Migration
- Region
- Ability/disability
- Sexual orientation
- Gender
- Generation
- Organization
- Socioeconomic status
- Ethnicity
- Race

Culture always informs starting points—those ways it seems natural to engage with others. We explore these in more depth later in this chapter.

Culture also necessarily invokes the symbolic dimension—that place in which sense is made of our own and others' behaviors and ideas. As we will see, the symbolic dimension is largely below the surface of observable behavior; therefore, accessing it requires symbolic tools including ritual, metaphor, and narrative. The concept of cultural fluency deepens our exploration, offering specific ways to increase individual and collective abilities to bridge differences.

CULTURAL FLUENCY: WHAT IS ITS IMPORTANCE, AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Cultural fluency is a developmental process never fully attained, yet whose pursuit is vitally important. The term was first used in relation to conflict resolution in *Bridging Cultural Conflicts* (LeBaron, 2004) and elaborated by Tatsushi Arai (2006) in *Conflict across Cultures* (LeBaron and Pillay, 2006). It has also been applied in a number of other fields, including business and education (Scott 2010; Mount St. Mary's College, n.d.). It refers to awareness of culturally shaped worldviews—our own and those of others—and the capacity to pay attention to how these cultural lenses affect what we see, interpret, and attribute in conflict. Cultural fluency involves readiness to internalize, express, and enact culturally sensitive meaning-making processes in engaging conflict. The process is a dynamic feature of interdependent social contexts, enhancing our capacities to

- *Anticipate* a range of possible ways to navigate communication and relationship in unfamiliar and diverse cultural contexts
- Become and remain conscious of cultural influences *embedded* in meaning-making processes
- *Express* cultural assumptions transparently to others unfamiliar with particular meaning-making patterns
- *Navigate* sometimes turbulent cross-cultural dynamics to cocreate functional and constructive processes, systems, and ongoing engagements

Meaning-making processes are the constant brain-body activities that connect experiences to our existing mental schemas. We make narratives of our lives, resisting our lives as a series of non sequiturs. Conflicts are no exception: we excavate our own and others' intentions, reasons for behavior, justifications, aspirations, and attributions in the context of social and relational structures, patterns, and past experiences. Thus, we conclude that an interaction is "not fair" or a way we have been treated is "unjustified." Cultural

fluency means accounting for meaning making in two ways: by examining the constructed contexts in which experiences occur and by using a series of tools to prevent or bridge misunderstandings and enhance communication.

Cultural fluency is best illustrated through examples. Consider an experience of traveling to a new place for the first time. Did people seem abrupt or relaxed? Polite or impolite? Did they stand too close or too far away? When gates opened, did they line up or crowd in? Were directions you received easy to follow or impossible? Air travel gives us the opportunity to literally land in another world in a few short hours. But even if we know the language, we may miss cultural cues, violate unspoken cultural norms, and find ourselves in the midst of opaque situations. We may miss the subtleties that could have been identified had we a greater fluency of the culture or cultures of the new destination, and we may even instigate conflict without realizing it.

On a trip to Switzerland to offer conflict resolution training to the worldwide staff of an international organization, a colleague and I staged a conflict to illustrate different strategies of engaging difference. As our conversation became more heated, audience members had a variety of responses. Some disengaged, finding our behavior unseemly and uncomfortable. Others became activated, cheering one or both of us on to more dramatic engagement. Still others were perplexed, unsettled, or amused, watching closely to see what would happen next.

When we took a break, several members of the group approached us. Some congratulated my male colleague's aggression toward me as a show of "putting her in her place." Others remonstrated him for treating me disrespectfully. Only later did those for whom pretending to be in conflict made no sense at all surface their discomfort. They came from cultural contexts that privilege authenticity and transparency above artifice, cultures that precluded even the prospect of taking on synthetic roles for pedagogical purposes. Their concern was how we would be able to repair our relationship now that we had lost face publicly with each other and the group. Thus, a technique we had used many times in North America became a lens that refracted a wide spectrum of ways of making meaning. We had some repair to do as we moved forward with the group!

Clearly, cultural fluency is not only about navigating around a new setting; it also enhances capacities to prevent, engage, and resolve conflict and to be more credible, effective teachers. One of the ways cultural fluency can assist us in pedagogy is in its emphasis on the metalevel. It prompts us to examine teaching strategies according to the cultural assumptions that infuse them and to make these explicit in diverse groups. For example, when using a simulation or other experiential activity, describing some of the culturally influenced ideas of the what, how, and why will give participants a context that facilitates their participation. Effective and thorough debriefing that poses questions

about culturally shaped perceptions and experiences can buttress and model cultural fluency in teaching settings.

For instance, many conflict resolution teaching materials contain embedded assumptions about the usefulness of direct, explicit communication. A learner from a cultural context where indirect, high-context approaches are expected may find these techniques difficult and uncomfortable. Welcoming a spectrum of communication strategies, an effective teacher can frame this difference as a catalyst for dialogue about how communication approaches can be usefully adapted across a range of settings and parties.

Let's take a look at cultural fluency in practice. As we saw earlier, culture shapes expectations and ways of engaging far below conscious awareness. Lederach (1996) has written about whether an "insider partial" or "outsider neutral" is desirable as an intervenor depending on cultural context. The degree of formality of a setting is also related to culture, varying with the kind of issue as well as with the generation and the relational history of the parties. In child protection mediation, for example, a setting that is too formal may have a distancing effect on youth parties, while a setting that is too informal may be uncomfortable for state officials. Cultural fluency means anticipating and addressing parties' needs, wants, and comfort levels in relation to setting, timing, roles, style of practice (such as facilitative, settlement, or problem solving; also the mix of caucusing and face-to-face meetings), manner of engagement, and myriad other elements.

The following example comes from an estate mediation held between two Chinese brothers. After agreeing to a division of most of their father's property and assets, one building remained. Neither was willing to yield it to the other, and the fate of the entire agreement stood in the balance. The mediator shifted her facilitative approach, asking the brothers if she might make a suggestion. She then floated the idea that they might sell or manage the building as a revenue property, donating the proceeds to an educational scholarship in their father's name. This culturally fluent mediator knew that education had been a strong value of their father, that honoring his name was important in their ethnic and family cultures, and that this would allow both to save face by not giving in to the other. They agreed, and the settlement was complete.

Moving beyond anecdotal evidence, we examine empirical evidence for the usefulness of cultural fluency as a tool in conflict resolution and negotiation. Michele Gelfand and Naomi Dyer (2000) suggest that flaws in research design have made it difficult to draw conclusions in relation to cultural dynamics negotiation. They observe that researchers have limited generalizability and utility of results by conflating culture with geographic location, failing to incorporate complex understandings of psychological processes as they interact with culture, and studying limited numbers of proximal conditions in negotiations. Gelfand et al. (2011) went on from these observations to follow their

own advice, investigating so-called tight and loose cultures across thirty-three nations in relation to social structures, psychological dynamics, and related conflict-handling behaviors. In recent work, Gelfand, Leslie, Keller, and de Dreu (2012) examine conflict cultures in organizations, exploring how group and organizational cultures constellate socially shared and normative approaches to conflict.

And what of cultural fluency? Has this construct been the subject of empirical research other than that done on the theoretical elements on which it rests (Hall, 1990; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 2000)? Michele Gelfand (Imai and Gelfand, 2006) details work done in the past ten years on a related phenomenon, cultural intelligence (CQ), defined as a "person's capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings" (Earley and Ang, 2003, p. 9). CQ has four elements, described below and related to components of CF:

- *Metacognitive:* level of mindfulness and skills applicable in the new culture; closely connected to the embeddedness component of CF
- *Cognitive:* degree of specific knowledge about the new culture; closely connected to the navigational capacity of CF
- *Motivational:* evidence of self-efficacy and persistence in adapting to a new culture; related to the anticipatory capacity of CF
- *Behavioral:* adaptive verbal and nonverbal behaviors; connected to the navigational component of CF

In examining cultural intelligence in relation to organizational negotiations across cultures, Imai and Gelfand (2006) found that CQ measured a week before a negotiation was a valid predictor of value creation in the process. They also found that CQ was a more powerful predictor than other common psychological constructs and that only one high CQ score in a dyad was enough to lift the results for each negotiator. As more work is done replicating and extending these findings, both CQ and CF will become better understood. For now, we consider traps that may inhibit cultural fluency and ways to cultivate it.

BUILDING CULTURAL FLUENCY

As we have observed, cultivating self and other awareness is a good start in developing cultural fluency. But given the submerged influence of many cultural factors, it may be insufficient and even problematic. This is in part because of the ubiquitous traps that await the novice. Such traps may arise from taxonomy, universalism, separation, and automatic ethnocentricity.

The *taxonomy* trap posits that cultural characteristics can be reliably ascribed to a given group in short, generalized lists. These lists are generally

prescriptive and include such behavioral do's and don'ts as bowing, kissing, or shaking hands on greeting. The difficulty is that these lists do not account for in-group variability, rapidly changing dynamics, or generational and other differences.

The *universalism* and *separation* traps are opposites of each other, with the first overascribing similarity across cultures and the second underestimating that similarity. To the universalist, we are all alike under the skin and share the same origin. While it is true that we have basic human needs, the way we experience and pursue these needs—and how we act when they are frustrated—varies a great deal. To the separationist, members of one group are so different from others that no understanding or rapprochement is possible. This is obvious in writing about gender, which would lead the naive reader to imagine that men and women can never have healthy, functional relationships (Grey, 1992). Many narratives from parties in intractable conflict feature separationist rhetoric, ranging from dehumanizing others to diminishing or disregarding them through a variety of discursive devices.

Finally, *automatic ethnocentricity*—sometimes called mirror imaging—is a tendency to use our own groups' ideas and values as a reference point, as in the expression "common sense." While not associated with ethnicity per se, discourses of Republicans and Democrats in the United States are replete with examples of automatic *culture-centricity* whose application perpetuates the dialogue of the deaf that too often characterizes communication between them. Debates over gun control, abortion, capital punishment, and other controversial issues are difficult not only because they are complex public policy issues. They are also challenging because they become proxies for symbolic worldview clashes over freedom, power, agency, right relations between women and men and between people and government, and other deeply rooted ideas (Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997). The antidote to this tendency is genuine curiosity and engagement, along with a willingness to suspend confidence about givens. This is the opposite of what actually happens not only in too many parliaments and legislatures around the world, but in communities, organizations, and families.

Avoiding these traps is essential to cultivate comfort with ambiguity. There will always be opacity across cultures; this is part of relating across difference. Not knowing is a necessary part of the process, and reducing anxiety associated with this not knowing can enhance functionality. Another good strategy is to internalize continua that can inform educated guesses as to what might be happening in any given interaction. One such continuum relates to how time is viewed (synchronous or sequential) and whether past, present, or future orientations are accented. Examining it in detail illustrates how tools like this can increase cultural fluency in conflict theorizing, practice, and pedagogy.

Intercultural theorists have identified two orientations to time: mono-chronic and polychronic. Monochronic approaches to time are linear and sequential, and involve focusing on one thing at a time. These approaches are most common in the Western European–influenced cultures including the United States, though there are significant regional and contextual differences. Polychronic orientations to time involve simultaneous occurrences of many things and the involvement of many people. The time it takes to complete an interaction is elastic and more important than any schedule. This orientation is most common in Mediterranean and Latin cultures, as well as some Eastern and African cultures. Negotiators from polychronic cultures tend to

- Start and end meetings at flexible times
- Take breaks when it seems appropriate
- Be comfortable with a high flow of information
- Expect to read each other's thoughts and minds
- Sometimes overlap talk
- View start times as flexible and not take lateness personally

Negotiators from monochronic cultures tend to

- Prefer prompt beginnings and endings
- Schedule breaks
- Deal with one agenda item at a time
- Rely on specific, detailed, and explicit communication
- Prefer to talk in sequence
- View lateness as devaluing or evidence of lack of respect

Another dimension of time relevant to negotiations is the focus on past, present, or future. National cultures, including those of Iran, India, and East Asia, lean to accenting the past, while the United States tends to be oriented to the present and the near future. Latin American peoples have both present and past orientations, while indigenous peoples in the Americas often use a past and future-oriented approach to time, stretching seven generations forward and back. Parties or third parties focused on the present should be mindful that others may see the past or the distant future as part of the present. Those for whom time stretches into the past or the future may need to remember that a present orientation can bring about needed change.

Of course, no one group fits neatly on a continuum; we all have some capacity to move around. A traumatic event may catapult an entire group into a focus on the past once the immediate crisis is over; a society experiencing rapid economic growth may spend a lot of time contemplating the future that

is fast approaching. Differences abound within groups not only in relation to generation, but also in relation to many other aspects of identity. At the same time, conflict is likely to escalate when those involved do not realize, or discount, the extent to which different relationships to time are confounding their communication.

The importance of these differences in relation to time came home to me when I offered negotiation training in relation to land claims to representatives of two levels of government and First Nations people in British Columbia. During introductions, the First Nations people welcomed everyone to their traditional territory with a prayer in their language, then began a narrative account of their history with the preface: "Seven generations ago . . ." When the government representatives were asked to make introductory remarks, they projected PowerPoint slides of the steps for ratification and adoption of an eventual agreement. The vastly different starting points in relation to time also played out in the way the three groups wanted to structure meetings, their attitudes to punctuality, ideas of what constituted effectiveness, and their attributions about each other. Though the time-related differences were not a surprise to anyone, they still functioned to make communication and progress more difficult.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore other cultural continua identified by interculturalists. Interested readers are directed to the online web resource Beyond Intractability (http://www.beyondintractability.org/), especially the essay on cross-cultural communication (LeBaron, 2003). Other continua address a wide range of starting points, including these:

- Spatial orientation—how close it is comfortable to stand, how furniture should be arranged, who should be seated where
- Affiliation and agency—individual autonomy versus group decision making
- Communication content and approach—directness and indirectness and the related ideas of high and low context, the degree to which things are named explicitly (low context) or to which the context is used to communicate what is not said (high context)
- Axiology and epistemology—including whether the universal or the particular is emphasized, as in the difference between mass production and one-of-a-kind creation; also, whether there is a reliance on specificity and diffuseness as in the difference between decision making based on empirical data or intuition
- Permissibility and kind of touch—greeting and parting rituals and the range of acceptable behavior across genders and generations and within and between groups

- Meanings associated with nonverbal communication—including eye contact, specific gestures, and particular facial expressions, as well as comfort or discomfort with silence

- Attitudes toward fate and personal responsibility—whether personal accountability is expected or people anticipate that many things are outside their control

- Face and face-saving—important in virtually every culture but manifested differently across and within world regions

- Power distance—the degree to which people are comfortable with vertical hierarchies

- Uncertainty avoidance—the degree to which people avoid risk and associated uncertainty

For more about these concepts, readers are directed to Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000) and Edward T. Hall (1990) and the scholars cited in these books, which are gold mines for culturally fluent practitioners. They deepen self-understanding, increase awareness of the cultural assumptions embedded in theory and practice approaches, and scaffold mental maps that can significantly improve practitioner guesses about what might be going on when cultural misunderstanding occurs.

Other helpful tools in cultivating cultural fluency are poetry, metaphors, rituals, and narratives. These tools are windows into cultural influences on the conscious and even unconscious motivations and actions of individuals and groups. They have shaped and thus reflect ingrained and emerging behavioral patterns and collective identities across generations. We come back to these toward the end of the chapter in the discussion of pedagogical approaches. For now, we consider how new work in neuroscience may contribute to culturally fluent conflict work.

NEUROSCIENCE AS CONFLICT RESOLUTION RESOURCE

Neuroscience is a new frontier, daily generating insights that relate to conflict resolution. Although many conflict resolution scholars are investigating this nexus, few have considered how neuroscience relates to cultural fluency. In this section, I summarize recent advances and pose questions about their implications for culturally fluent processes and pedagogy. Neuroscientists' conflict-relevant work spans a wide range, including the physiology of emotion, communication, receptivity, attunement, empathy, and creative thinking. This fast-changing corpus has already yielded important insights into the intertwined and complex relationship between cognitive and embodied states,

as well as how change happens in attitudes and behavior. Cultural patterns and habits, too, interact with nervous system physiology in ways not yet fully understood.

One important finding related to culture is that the brain is more malleable than originally thought; it is more like plastic than like iron, hence the term *neuroplasticity*. The ubiquitous machine-brain metaphor is thus being replaced with the understanding that the brain is actually more like muscle tissue, as it literally rewires itself in relation to external stimuli. Because brains can rewire quickly, the theories of change that animate conflict work come into question. Given that individual or collective shifts need not be painstaking and drawn out, conflict resolution processes of relatively short duration, designed with brain functioning in mind, may be powerful catalysts for change (Pascual-Leone et al., 1995; Doidge, 2007).
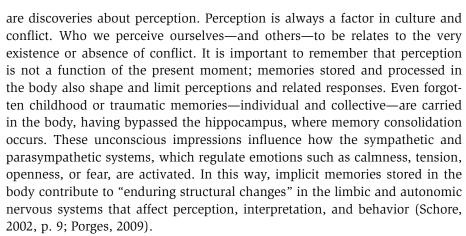
Also of interest from a cultural perspective, neuroplasticity reveals that neurons that fire together are wired together and those that fire apart remain wired apart. Repeated instances of associated neurons firing in particular patterns create pathways in the brain that become neural superhighways, relegating the untraveled back roads of unfamiliar pairings to increasingly less accessibility and use. In the pressure and anxiety of conflict, we may fall back on familiar thought patterns, chains of reason, and group-approved behaviors and have greater difficulty perceiving alternatives—what Tidwell calls "trained incapacity." He cautions that "through [our] own training [and experience, we may] become blind to alternatives . . . [and] become so habituated to one set of behaviors that no others seem possible" (1994, p. 4). We literally get locked in to habitual perceptions, communication patterns, and behaviors despite their limitations and their associations with impasse. Add cultural patterning and group pressure to conform to the mix, and the challenge of accessing neuroplasticity is even greater.

While much neuroscientific work pertains to individual brains, provocative questions arise about the effects of rapid brain rewiring on collective thinking and consciousness. Research in this area has the potential to reshape conflict intervention as it reveals ways that cultural patterns and collective attitudes can shift in the midst of intense conflict, catalyzing relational change among former enemies, even in the face of cultural pressure to distance from "the other." Are there ways to influence the malleable brain toward cooperation and peaceful coexistence? And can this be done on a collective scale? The very plasticity that enabled the formation of entrenched patterns offers the possibility for future change—and relatively rapid change at that (Wexler, 2008).

Other recent work in neuroscience on subjects as diverse as embodiment, empathy, and bicameral brain functioning is also potentially fertile for work on cultural dynamics (Siegel, 2010; Beausoleil and LeBaron, 2013), as

are discoveries about perception. Perception is always a factor in culture and conflict. Who we perceive ourselves—and others—to be relates to the very existence or absence of conflict. It is important to remember that perception is not a function of the present moment; memories stored and processed in the body also shape and limit perceptions and related responses. Even forgotten childhood or traumatic memories—individual and collective—are carried in the body, having bypassed the hippocampus, where memory consolidation occurs. These unconscious impressions influence how the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems, which regulate emotions such as calmness, tension, openness, or fear, are activated. In this way, implicit memories stored in the body contribute to "enduring structural changes" in the limbic and autonomic nervous systems that affect perception, interpretation, and behavior (Schore, 2002, p. 9; Porges, 2009).

When stress, threat, or shame is experienced, the autonomic nervous system unconsciously increases adrenaline and cortisol, which limits blood flow to the frontal lobes of the brain. This is why access to thinking functions or previous knowledge is limited in the midst of intense emotions and why it is more difficult to remain receptive to unfamiliar people or ideas or to enact novel responses to conflicts. The brain is, quite literally, short-circuited (Porges, 2004). When the body senses safety, the autonomic nervous system supports a state of "open receptiveness." This state is essential to both learning and integrating new information, as well as preventing retraumatization when recalling past experiences (Siegel, 2010). It remains to be seen whether these phenomena also operate in groups. That is, does the short-circuiting of an individual's brain make it more likely that others in the vicinity will follow suit? Do the physiological processes associated with stress and resistance to change operate collectively in ways that are shaped by, or even transmitted through, culture? Work on mirror neurons and transgenerational brain patterns suggests that individual states are indeed mirrored in others nearby and reproduced over time (Wexler, 2008). The neurobiology of culture is a frontier of much significance for culturally fluent conflict resolution scholars.

Because receptivity is integral to transforming conflict, neuroscientific work is important and potentially game changing. It directs our attention not only to culture and its influences, but the way that cultural dynamics affect individual and collective attitudes, values, thoughts, and behaviors. As well, it draws essential attention to the phenomenology of physical experience as we realize that rigid patterning can be carried and transmitted intergenerationally. It also brings us to a focus on the neurobiological state we hold as third parties and individual parties. What if our analytic and communication techniques are less potent unless we find ways to shift into more receptive states before using them? Too often, we work with conflict parties when they are in states

that block or severely truncate the possibility of change. If individual parties' neural habits, reinforced and held in place by the forces of tradition and collective patterns, involve perceiving and responding to each another as a threat, further entrenchment and distance can be expected from engagement. To shift to openness to learning and change, it is vital to find ways to shift out of unhelpful neural feedback loops and into those associated with increased plasticity and change. An example comes from a problem-solving workshop held twenty years ago in Ireland.

In 1993, a group of diplomats from many parts of the world gathered near Dublin to problem-solve about one of the most intractable conflicts of our time: Israel-Palestine. The challenge for the facilitators was to move them out of the well-worn superhighways of reflexive statements, repetitive framings, and limiting assumptions. For two days, the process followed a conventional problem-solving format, and little new was revealed.

On the third day, a bus trip to Belfast gave participants opportunities to look down Falls Road, searching in a "pre-Good-Friday-agreement Northern Ireland" for ways to address intractable differences. Jostled in the bus, the previously restrained participants began to see each other as more multidimensional and complex. As they uncovered commonalities and shared passions, they began to relate more playfully. Dialogue with Northern Irish peacemakers and visits to bicommunal projects deepened camaraderie within the group. As the bus headed back to Dublin following a group meal, participants sang together under the comforting cover of darkness. Only after this excursion did conversations enliven, originality emerge, and imaginative possibilities for shifting intractable conflict in Israel-Palestine begin to reveal themselves.

Reflecting on this experience, facilitators wondered how conflict transformation processes could be intentionally structured (or unstructured) to invite physiological and psychological states and mutual openness conducive to creativity and innovation. Without the neuroscientific understandings described above, we speculated that people step out of habitual perceptions and limiting understandings to welcome nuance and texture when they step out of business as usual. Creative imaginations are more easily engaged in the midst of an open and relaxed state than in the midst of a focus on thought and analysis alone. Yet shifting workshop designs and getting buy-in from participants is difficult: in the already-tense terrain of conflict, people are understandably reluctant to step outside their comfort zones in ways that might seem risky or embarrassing.

An obvious hidden-in-plain-sight truism occurred to us: everyone attending had real-life bodies with creative capabilities and a love of play and beauty. Why state these obvious facts? Because this workshop, like dozens of others, was designed as if everyone existed from the neck up; as if brilliant analysis

would flow directly from careful selection among a range of cognitively gener-ated alternatives; as if facilitators had only to nudge people to "think creatively, outside the box," and new spirals of fecund possibility would unfurl themselves, unfettered by previous inhibitions, perceptual and cognitive habits, or norms of interaction. Neuroscientific work has confirmed the hunch that physical move-ment is a huge catalyst to attitude change in ways we are only beginning to real-ize (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall, 2011).

It turns out that physical and verbal expressions are intricately interrelated: both activities are located in Broca's area of the brain, activated during both speech and expressive movement. In fact, the brain's pathways for speech are overlaid on the areas associated with sensorimotor work, suggesting that neural processes for verbal language are relatively recent specializations, with movement being a form of prelinguistic communica-tion (Massey, 2009). Movement offers an alternative and instinctual mode of expression, and indeed it may be more effective than verbal language for some forms of expression and cognition: when the language center of the brain is temporarily deactivated, individuals often exhibit savant-like mental capacities, including improved artistic, mathematic, and proofreading abilities (Snyder et al., 2003). Perhaps we can access savant-like facility with con-flict through movement. A new book examines these possibilities (LeBaron, MacLeod, and Floyer Acland, 2013).

Just as a jostling bus ride, singing in the darkness, and the stark reality of somatically experiencing "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland interrupted the diplomats' patterns of cognition and behavior to yield imaginative open-ings, so is the alchemy of arts essential for transforming conflict and cata-lyzing social change. Arts, completely intertwined with culture, are essential in a world that cries out for creativity, even—or especially—in the midst of ashes. Invoking the arts is not to look through a rose-tinted window. It is to be clear and unrelentingly rigorous in finding ways to transform conflict, acknowledging its complexity while trusting its mysteries. These approaches invite creativity and imagination into practice and training in ways that make both more compelling and potentially far more productive. They are explored here as complements to the neuroscience work described above. Together, they offer the potential to deepen cultural fluency and thus the effectiveness of conflict resolution pedagogy and practice.

ARTS-BASED APPROACHES TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION

As artist and conflict scholar Dena Hawes (2007) writes, arts-based approaches take conflict parties outside business as usual, disrupting fac-ile narratives and facilitating communication across psychological, physical,

cultural, and emotional boundaries. Conflict resolution professor Craig Zelizer (2003) situates them as part of a larger framework of civil society–based initiatives for peace building. This family of approaches has long been used in traditional cultures through rituals to foster and mark progress toward peace, yet has not always been seen as a resource in our reach for scientific legitimacy in conflict studies. Contemporary conflict practitioners sometimes find it difficult to use arts-based approaches even though they span cultural divides and offer connectivity across differences. Yet the age-old division of heart and mind that privileges analytic, reason-based approaches discounts the more diffuse resources of arts at its peril. To counter cognitive habits of enmity, state change and creativity are essential. The plastic, culturally fluent brain can more easily develop new neural associations when creativity is scaffolded through the arts.

Conflict scholar Tatsushi Arai defines creativity as "unconventional viability" (2009). His definition evokes the oft-quoted statement of Einstein that "we can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." Johan Galtung (2009) poses this question in his Foreword to Arai's book: "What, then, stands in the way [of creativity]?" He answers, "In one sentence: actors deeply engaged not in solving but in winning, victory, the V-word. To conflict parties committed to the goal of winning, Other is the problem, *not the relation to Other*. Bring Other to heel, and the world is right. Other is Evil, up against our good Self, there can be no compromise, no creative 'transcendence,' only victory for the Good over Evil. Moreover, Other should not only be deterred from exercising his evil craft, but be crushed never to rise again."

Arts-based approaches are a fruitful counterpoint to this habit, ingrained in many conflict parties' minds, of seeking to vanquish the other. In the nuanced world of the arts, it is difficult to maintain stark black-and-white dichotomies and a crisp sense of separation from others. People emerge from creating images or moving together in improvised dance with new appreciation for each other's dilemmas and complexities. With actual experiences of each other's cultural common sense, they are better able to appreciate commonalities and find ways to bridge differences.

Arts-based approaches encompass a whole constellation of enacted, somatic tools that foster creative expression, from visual and theater arts to music, dance, and poetry, from the humanities, fine and performing arts to expressive arts, providing fruitful vehicles for imagination and intuition in the midst of conflict. Resonating on the symbolic level where meaning is made, they welcome sensing and feeling—dimensions too often "managed" or sidelined in conventional approaches—as embodied experiences essential for truly transforming conflict. This is important because emotions can be powerful motivators toward transformation just as they are central drivers in conflict

escalation. As well, sensing and feeling trigger mirror neurons, thus evoking empathy as experiences are shared (Gallese, Eagle, and Migone, 2007).

Arts approaches need not be formal. It is useful to tap a wide range of expressive and imaginative tools in conflict resolution processes, whether arising spontaneously or planned. These modes are not used primarily as performances or to generate artistic products (though sometimes participants choose to continue joint efforts that yield such things), but as conduits for accompaniment and change. They can also be vastly beneficial in pedagogy because of their versatility and capacity to help learners deepen creative, somatic capacities (Alexander and LeBaron, 2013).

Arts approaches need not always adhere to specific forms. They can be as simple as imagery-based metaphors, as in the example of dialogue between pro-life and pro-choice activists in Canada. Invited to identify their heroes or heroines, people from both sides chose Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. This commonality surprised them, interrupting the negative labels each had long assigned to the other. An exploration of what these figures represented to each side—compassionate leadership, justice, and emancipation—fostered emergent mutual respect. From this base of respect, dialogue participants collaborated on a range of social actions to ameliorate the feminization of poverty.

As is evident from this example, cultural fluency is intricately bound up with arts-based work. Seeing a play in France gave me more contextual understanding than ten lectures about patterns of conflict-handling behavior in France. Humor, tone, textures of engagement, ways of naming or skirting differences, nuances of communication—all these were present in an engaging narrative that literally took me inside the frames of reference of the characters. Participating in creating a play or a piece of visual art—necessitating sharing assumptions about what works and why—is potentially even more fruitful.

As more neuroscientists study arts, conflict, and change, our field will be revolutionized (Berrol, 2006; Ramachandran, 2000). Collaborations among conflict resolution scholars, neuroscientists, and artists are thus among the most promising for the development of the field going forward. In addition to informing process innovations, these collaborations hold strong promise for pedagogy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY

In spite of the efforts of many scholars and practitioners, cultural fluency in conflict is elusive. It is a nonlinear developmental process that relies on neuroplasticity and creativity, both of which are augmented through the arts. Cultural fluency is also enhanced when people are motivated to cultivate it.

Motivation can come from conflict when parties realize they really do not understand each other yet are interdependent. Equally, conflict can function to short-circuit the curiosity so vital to developing cultural fluency. In learning contexts, cultural fluency is most easily surfaced when a group is diverse and an atmosphere invites safe exploration of shared and differing patterns of paying attention and constructing meaning.

Over the twenty-five years I have taught about culture and conflict, I have noticed repeatedly that those with privilege attached to their identities have had a harder time than others in identifying their cultural lenses. To someone who has not felt exceptionalized, culture is harder to discern and its workings may seem exotic. Cultural institutions may reveal and even reify this problem: a visit to the National Museum of the American Indian, for example, reveals countless ways that native peoples in North America have been romanticized while also persecuted. Culture is always in some way refracted through the lenses of power, and power unexamined can have disastrous effects for those perceived as other.

I have developed a suite of pedagogical approaches designed to invite learners to investigate their own lenses and associated cultural assumptions in safe yet boundary-extending ways. These approaches draw on creative and expressive arts as ways of accessing symbolic understandings of conflict and resolution strategies, and on recent neuroscientific findings. They cluster into three categories:

- *Individual exploration*. Activities include drawing a "culture flower" or other multidimensional figure and filling in different cultural identifications and influences and associated messages about conflict and resolution; identifying cultural metaphors for conflict and ways these have shaped experience and perception; and writing a cultural autobiography that identifies key messages about inclusion and exclusion, acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in conflict, turning points in cultural identification and other aspects of personality formation.

- *Group experience*. Activities include debriefing and comparing notes on individual explorations; lines of privilege (in which learners line up and step forward or back in relation to privilege or disadvantage they have experienced, physically demonstrating and experiencing their relative positioning); dialogically exploring cultural accounts of familiar cultural patterns and looking for surprises (e.g., an account of American negotiators written by a Japanese negotiator for his colleagues); and simulations like BaFa' BaFa' or Barnga (Centre for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, n.d.).[1]

- *Synthesis*. Sculpting and expressive arts activities that invite participants to work across modes of expression to embody experiences of conflict

related to affiliation; spatial dynamics and positioning; perception and vantage point; and ineffable aspects including power, privilege and disadvantage, and exclusion and inclusion. (For more on the use of expressive arts in conflict pedagogy and practice, see Levine and Levine, 2011, and MacLeod, 2013.)

Using these and other experiential tools in combination with the cultural continua described earlier, learners move beyond scripted role plays into deeper capacities to understand and work across difference. These approaches stand in sharp contrast with much of the training in the conflict resolution field with its overreliance on planned simulations. We are far better served by stepping outside business as usual to see where and how we need to stretch in the midst of a rapidly changing world (Alexander and LeBaron, 2010).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

As the multidimensional and dynamic effects of culture are understood as central to conflict resolution theory and practice, both must change. Cultural fluency involves suppleness and flexibility, the capacity to attend to nuance and what is under the surface, and an ever-refining ability to sense and respond to diverse starting points. As culture is acknowledged, it becomes clear that all theory arises from a particular standpoint, as do diverse approaches to practice. Culturally fluent conflict theory is transparent about which cultural assumptions inform its course. As we have seen, the appropriateness of direct or indirect communication; face-to-face engagement; intervention by outsiders or insiders; particular timing or setting; degrees of formality; neutrality or partiality; a problem-solving, facilitative, or transformative orientation—all of these are culturally shaped. Thus, it becomes clear that there is no universal theory of conflict or uniform best practices in conflict resolution. Everything is exquisitely particular. It is from this acknowledgment that the best practices emerge, as well as the theories and research that explain them. Just as a powerful personal story—think the diary of Anne Frank (2010)—can have universal resonance, so too can a well-crafted, culturally fluent conflict process live beyond any resolution it attains, not only for the parties involved but in its role as a field builder.

As we stand at the threshold of new worlds shaped by technological advance, transformative scientific discoveries, and possible radiant futures, cultural fluency becomes vitally important. As it is admitted to the canon, new ways of integrating it will be developed. In this is the alchemy, that is more than the sum of its parts, and the way to constructive social and individual change.

Note

1. These and other simulations were developed by intercultural communication scholars to provide authentic experiences of cultural and worldview differences. See Sandra Mumford Fowler, "Intercultural Simulation Games: Removing Cultural Blinders," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2006, *30*, 71–81. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ace.36719863009/abstract.

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