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completely is not to say it was not important. CPE is attempting to present a crucial step forward for the whole emerging field of conflict resolution. Conference organizers learned a tremendous amount from the entire process and a next conference can move ahead further. The whole process has also served to push the CPE conference planners to look at issues of racism among themselves more thoroughly. ■

*A more detailed report on the conference is being prepared and will be available later this year for \$5.00. To order copies, write the Center for Peace Education, 103 William Howard Taft Road, Cincinnati, OH 45219 or call 513-221-4863.*

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## The Social Transformative Potential of Conflict Resolution Training

by Les Brunswick

When schools adopt conflict resolution programs, it is often with quite limited aims such as solving discipline problems. But many people who are active in the school conflict resolution movement have a sense that it could have a far larger impact, and not just on education, but on society as a whole.

In fact, there is a very good chance that conflict resolution will help produce enormous changes for the better. Conflict is an inevitable part of life, and we find it at all levels, from the individual to the international, and with all types of issues. Unfortunately, today conflicts are very often dealt with through adversarial, win-lose approaches, and the result is an enormous amount of unnecessary suffering.

What we need is for people to convert to resolving problems through the win-win, collaborative approach. This might well happen. Conflict resolution is increasingly attractive to people, and the school movement is expanding very rapidly. It is conceivable that within two or three decades, virtually every student in the United States will receive training in conflict resolution skills as part of his or her education.

As these students graduate and join the adult world, we can expect they would apply what they have learned in school. This could well lead to conflict resolution methods being applied in all areas of society, at all levels, and with every type of issue and ultimately to major restructuring of our institutions — institutions which are at present structured so that they lead to chronic conflicts between individuals or groups. The school movement is thus part of a larger movement that could radically improve our country and perhaps the entire world.

Such a universal adoption of the win-win approach is absolutely essential for social justice. Among those who promote social justice, there often seems to be a vague idea that we will at some point reach a perfect society and all conflict will then cease. However, new conflicts, often between various social groups, will continue to arise, no matter how justly structured a society is.

If such conflicts between social groups are not resolved in a win-win fashion, then they will be handled through coercive power, with stronger groups dominating weaker ones, and so we still have injustice. For that reason, it is impossible to have and maintain a truly just society unless everyone knows and practices conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution is also essential because many of our social institutions are structured in ways that are counter to human needs. What is needed is radical restructuring, which would require taking into account the concerns of many involved groups, and such a complex process of planning and negotiating could not be accomplished unless the involved parties used a win-win approach and did so in a skillful manner.

In addition, teaching conflict resolution is essential for getting people to work for social justice. Most people would like a cooperative, human society, despite their doubts that such a society is possible to achieve. However, when people learn conflict resolution, they come to see that conflict can be solved voluntarily, and so they realize that a cooperative society is possible. As a consequence, they become much more supportive of fundamental social change.

In her article "Conflict Resolution: Bane or Boost to Peace and Justice?" (*The Fourth R*, Vol.

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What we need is for people to convert to resolving problems through the win-win, collaborative approach. This might well happen. Conflict resolution is increasingly attractive to people, and the school movement is expanding very rapidly. It is conceivable that within two or three decades, virtually every student in the United States will receive training in conflict resolution skills as part of his or her education.

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40) Abigail Fuller also advocates fundamental structural change, but by a different strategy. Fuller speaks of "oppressive structures" that are supported by "the state" and must be "overthrown" through "mass action" for "large-scale social change." She thus apparently advocates the traditional left-wing strategy in which oppressed groups and their supporters unite in a giant political force that gains the power of the state and then uses its position to tear down present structures and put radically different ones in their place.

It is virtually certain that such a strategy would not work. Over the last two centuries, many radicals have tried it in this country and failed, and there is little particular reason to believe it would work today. For one thing, the vast majority of the population is simply opposed to it. Beyond that, in the unlikely event that a movement along these lines made major progress, it would almost certainly provoke a forceful response that could well defeat it.

Furthermore, in those cases in other countries where a group advocating revolutionary change has, through election or armed revolt, come to power, there has almost invariably remained a large minority (or even majority) of the population that was opposed to fundamen-

tal structural change. In order to produce such change, the revolutionaries have therefore generally resorted to coercion, as through the force of the law. However, when people are so forced, it is the opposite of the freely cooperative society that the revolutionaries want (and may even be repressively authoritarian), so the policy fails to achieve its deeper goal.

In contrast, the strategy of promoting fundamental change through the training of conflict resolution skills is far more attractive to people in this country, much less likely to provoke forceful opposition, and it involves far less coercion than the traditional left-wing strategy. It is therefore much more likely (perhaps in occasional combination with confrontational tactics) to achieve success in producing radical positive change.

In selling conflict resolution to school officials, it may be best to speak of more limited aims. However, there is no doubt that conflict resolution has an enormous potential to produce radical changes in society in the long run, and we need to keep this clearly in mind. ■

*Les Brunswick is a member of the training team of the Pittsburgh Mediation Center. He may be reached at 420 Hastings Street, Pittsburgh PA 15206.*

## Social Justice: Some Reflections

As I read the latest issue of *The Fourth R* (Vol 40, August/Sept 92), I was pleased to find the thorough reflections on and challenges to such salient issues as social justice and education. Particularly in a field such as ours which promotes a healthier or more just approach to resolving problems, it is of utmost importance that we individually and as a group pay critical attention to the nature of our practice and development. Some of the questions raised in the lead article, "Racism in Conflict Resolution and Mediation" may be addressed when we harken back to what education is and what it involves.

First of all, "education" literally means the process of drawing out. This can be interpreted to mean drawing out our innate wisdom, drawing one out from oppressive mental constructs (like inferiority, self-hate, etc.) or drawing out the skills to further our education. By simply teaching people, children or otherwise, the skills to recognize new possibilities and the potential to create them for themselves and others, one has facilitated the first steps in the breakdown of social injustice. Denial of education is a common form of oppression.

Teaching conflict resolution includes (but is not limited to) analysis skills and empowerment. By being able to analyze, students can

address the social issues of their day, use their best judgement, and be liberated toward action. To equip a child with analysis skills rather than quantities of information (which can often function as blinders) is a move toward empowerment. It is important here to note that children of all ages are quite capable of analyzing on their own without instruction. I think, however, that children's abilities to view the world honestly and assess it bravely are oftentimes shut down unintentionally by adults who either think they have the clearer perspective on things, or are themselves uncomfortable with the idea of analyzing the world around them. Suppressing children's need to know and understand may bring up issues of trust, abandonment and respect. As we head into the next one hundred years, I believe people will finally realize how deeply imbedded our society has been in its efforts to control *everything* in the world, including the thoughts of our children.

The lead article mostly discusses racism and other oppressive social structures as though they reside in the forefront of our cultural minds, when in fact these orientations occupy many levels of the psyche. The fear and disconnectedness members of society experi-

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