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Critical Issues in Peace and Conflict Studies

Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy

Edited by
Thomas Matyók
Jessica Senehi
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We dedicate this book to our friend and colleague, Dr. Karen Jenkins. Karen was a professor of conflict analysis and resolution at Metro Community College in South Omaha, Nebraska. On October 17, 2010, Dr. Jenkins was abducted and brutally murdered. We remember Karen as a loving, bright and caring person whose smile would always light up a room. We miss you.

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Chapter 15

Peace and Conflict Studies

Reclaiming Our Roots and Designing Our Way Forward

Thomas Matyók

Peace and conflict studies is a transformative leadership field, interdisciplinary in nature and poised to provide a range of nonviolent actions to address complex social issues faced by current and future generations. Whether conflict work is at the micro, meso, macro, or mega levels of analysis, it is about creating positive social change and establishing just peace. Some may not agree with my use of the term peace and conflict studies to incorporate all aspects of the academic study and practice of conflict analysis and resolution. I use the term in the same way that other academic disciplines define their study, incorporating sub-disciplines as their fields mature. It is vitally important that all conflict workers, regardless of the level at which they study and practice, identify with the larger definition of the field. As peace and conflict studies is still emerging, and we work to better draw the lines that define our field of study and practice, I suggest the following model: conflict analysis and resolution as the philosophical foundation of the field,¹ peace and conflict studies as the academic field of study, and conflict resolution as the practice component of the field.

A field of study is not a jumble of skills. Conflict resolution practices are important competencies for peace and conflict workers, but they should not define the field, nor who we are. Confusing conflict resolution skills development with peace and conflict studies is not helpful. Within the academy, however, peace and conflict studies curricula have often lacked focus, and quickly moved from their core purpose of social change. Peace and conflict studies promised much: a reliable guide to conflict amelioration and lasting agreement. But conflict resolution—as the applied component of the field—quickly came to define the field and abandoned this transformational

role. Chaotic and lacking definition, it deserted its humanist heritage for a more salable product, teaching students trade-like skills.

It is time to discuss the discipline's future, its distinction and validity, and, most importantly, how best to prepare tomorrow's scholars and practitioners in the field of peace and conflict studies. My purpose is to initiate a dialogue about the evolving and appropriate role of pedagogy in preparing peace and conflict scholars and practitioners. Although some even ask whether the field will survive in the academy, as a profession, peace and conflict studies is a legitimate leadership field providing significant scholarship and practice in the creation of social change and the establishment of positive peace.

Most current research, unfortunately, focuses on the present state of professional training. The construction of peace is a deliberate activity requiring skilled professionals. As strong as individual programs in peace and conflict studies are, it is time to identify how we will progress as a profession and reclaim direction. This chapter formulates future directions, and provides a conceptual framework for curricular development.

Throughout this chapter, I use the term peace and conflict studies. Peace and conflict studies are transnational, transdisciplinary, and bridge theory and practice.² Conflict analysis and resolution is the philosophical foundation, and peace and conflict studies is the academic discipline and professional field. Using the term *conflict resolution* to define the field misleads. Conflict resolution encompasses the skills required for success by conflict workers, but it is not the academic field of study. Continued use of the term conflict resolution to establish our field's parameters contributes to its marginalization by keeping the field skills-based and narrowly focused. And conflict resolution presumes resolution as the preferred conclusion. The interdisciplinary character of peace and conflict studies is both strength and dilemma. A transdisciplinary, collaborative approach to the study of peace and conflict provides a solid foundation for understanding complex issues, yet it can, if ill planned or uncoordinated, produce a poorly focused and fractured curriculum.³ Peace and conflict studies programs are often located in schools of interdisciplinary studies, employing instructors drafted from various university departments. Petty cross-disciplinary rivalries, however, may inhibit cooperation and block development of coherent programs.⁴ Yet university and college curricula may also approach too narrowly the study of conflict, following parochial interests and ignoring conflict's complexity, depth, and nuance. Unformed in theory or practice, degrees are cobbled together.⁵ Despite some increase in undergraduate programs, most peace and conflict studies—as well as conflict resolution—syllabi are post-graduate. And only a handful of institutions in the United States grant doctorates.⁶

Conflict resolution is relatively new in the roster of university disciplines. In the half-century of systematic, academic study of peace and conflict, two paths emerged: one—legalistic—emphasized a quasi-judicial process to mediate and contain conflict, the other—humanistic—sought transformation of enmity into amity by holistically studying the phenomenon of human conflict. Though still debated, reconciling the two may not be possible. I advocate for a humanistic curricular platform and suggest we are at a *tipping point*. It is time to decide which path governs how we prepare conflict workers.

Future academic preparation of peace and conflict scholars and conflict workers grounded in the humanities requires novel thinking. Traditional education models are inadequate to prepare scholars and practitioners for conflict work's complexity. I suggest an *engaged scholarship* model of undergraduate and graduate curricula. The model assumes humanistic definitions of the field and convergence on knowledge supporting the positive and peaceful transformation of conflict. Transformative, positive peace seeking and humanistic conflict resolution practices will restore the field's progressive qualities. It will distinguish graduates as something more than *lawyers writ small*.

THE FIELD'S DEVELOPMENT

It seems that conflict resolution is as old as humankind.⁷ For ninety-nine percent of human history, cooperation among humans has been the norm,⁸ suggesting the importance of conflict resolution as an important part of humankind's social evolution. However, the documented history of formal peace and conflict practices begins with the Kingdom of Mari (Modern Day Syria) in 1800 B.C.E. where its kings used arbitration and mediation to resolve disputes among themselves and between vassals. The history and practice of conflict resolution is well documented;⁹ yet formal study of conflict is recent. Anchored to centuries of thought,¹⁰ the conflict resolution movement only began to define itself as a distinct field of study following World War II.¹¹ It emerged as an academic discipline in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹²

Four waves frame the study and practice of conflict analysis and resolution and introduce the field's developmental narrative.¹³ The first wave was the social change begun in the 1960s with the *power to the people* movement. People's trust in social institutions began to erode throughout the 1960s. The Viet Nam War and Watergate changed the direction of American society. Through political engagement, people began to take back power from elites. Forms of alternative dispute resolution showed up on the social scene first. The second wave pursued professionalization in the 1970s, the third focused on the structural nature of conflict and human needs, and wave four moved

the field toward a transformation focus under the umbrella of peace studies. We now find ourselves riding a fifth wave that provides an opportunity for the field to design its way forward and emerge as a theory-based discipline with a defensible place in the academy. In reclaiming our transformative roots, a humanistic frame informs curriculum development. Within this framework, conflict resolution skills development is one component of professional training.

The evolution of the field as a form of study has been a messy one. The field incorporates every form of conflict resolution from interpersonal negotiation to the extra-legal (war), and currently there is an ongoing competition regarding the practices that should define the discipline. The field lacks focus and is more a collection of conflict resolution skills and techniques than a disciplined field of study.¹⁴

Currently, graduates and practitioners of conflict resolution programs, lacking defined knowledge and skill competencies, are adrift in the professional marketplace and hard pressed to articulate their unique qualifications.¹⁵ Fuzzy definition of knowledge and skill competencies is exacerbated by conflict resolution's response-driven nature.¹⁶ It addresses extant conflict rather than *provention* or transformation. Many students of conflict resolution enter practice too early, poorly prepared, and potentially doing as much harm as good.¹⁷ Too often, graduates of conflict resolution programs find themselves unable to market their skills; unable to demonstrate convincingly useful skills, they request letters of recommendation to apply to second, alternate graduate degree programs. The professional employment market is all too often limited in its demand for conflict workers. And graduates of conflict resolution programs may not carry appropriate skills into the marketplace. It is time to strengthen the profession through a curriculum grounded in core competencies.

Required is a competency-based platform for teaching conflict resolution within the defined field of peace and conflict studies, one that is action-oriented and combines theory with mentored practice. If a profession, it is essential we have unified educational strategies for teaching peace and conflict transformation.¹⁸

ENTRENCHED IN THE ACADEMY

Peace and conflict studies, as an academic newcomer, struggles for acceptance and legitimacy. Roughly 450 academic programs exist in the United States, covering conflict resolution subjects at various levels.¹⁹ The number and variety of programs seems irrelevant if one has no qualitative criteria to judge; any port serves when all ports are equally unmapped. This instability

describes the current conflict resolution field. It is a jumble of curricular approaches trying to teach skills uncoupled from a comprehensive grasp of social complexity. The field is and remains a poorly defined set of practices that may or may not be specific to a distinct discipline.²⁰ A review of conflict resolution programs shows classes are found in the curricula of many institutions that are taught by unspecialized faculty with little direct training in the field or those whose chief interests are not peace and conflict studies. Thus, conflict resolution has an unscholarly reputation. Lacking core knowledge and skill competencies for conflict workers,²¹ graduates may or may not be competent to do what they say they are able to do, transform or resolve conflict.

Professionalization results from deliberate study built upon a common body of knowledge and honed by supervised practice. As in medicine or law or any genuine professional field, the preparation of the graduate cannot be random. Conflict resolution's increasing randomization and the virtual absence of mentored application of theory makes a professional identity iffy, at best, impossible at worst.²² Absent clearly established core knowledge and skill competencies, grounded in theory and research, it is doubtful that conflict resolution practitioners can claim true professional status. Certainly, those consulting conflict resolution professionals rightfully expect practitioners to possess minimum qualifications. And, characterization as a professional requires vastly more than a rambling hodgepodge of skills.

The current field of conflict resolution pays small attention to the academic preparation of conflict workers. A review of the literature reveals precious little research on pedagogic or curricular issues. Training conflict workers follows two alternatives: the technical or the transformative.²³ A technical educational framework, of course, aims at the cessation of conflict and implies a post-conflict state that may only achieve a *negative peace*, the absence of direct violence. Technical proficiency may result in the resolution of conflict, but it does not necessarily lead to just and equitable outcomes. Technical conflict resolution may lead to maintaining unjust social conditions rather than changing them.²⁴

In the relatively new discipline of peace and conflict studies, how do its students differ from those who study conflict from the vantage of political science, sociology, psychology or a host of other perspectives? As in medicine, so in the social sciences, increasing knowledge reveals greater complexity and tends toward specialization. The multiplication of academic disciplines in the modern university reflects this phenomenon. Conflict resolution, lacking clarity and rigor, is at the academic margins. It is an ill-defined and loosely structured field in which peace research and conflict resolution are trivialized. The field is marginalized because we have not defined our center.

Current emphasis on preparing professionals in the field is freighted by technique and accumulating knowledge of ill-defined value. Analysis of conflict and its transformation receives a perfunctory nod in *academe's* groves. A narrow, practice-centered approach leads to solutions chasing problems rather than developing context-specific intervention methods.²⁵ The answer, I believe, rests on the use of varied analytical systems synthesized—brought to bear—on the dynamic structure of conflict itself and driven by the goal of purposeful and effective change.

AN ALTERNATIVE CURRICULAR APPROACH

In contrast, transformation works to end conflict while simultaneously addressing the structure that produced conflict, replacing it with something healthier, and, as a result, moving toward a *positive peace*, the absence of direct and structural violence and the presence of justice. Social justice and issues of fairness are important aspects of conflict resolution practices.²⁶ A social justice centered curricula becomes the defining characteristic of the academic preparation of conflict workers. We require a discipline recognizing our humanity with all its complexity, a discipline that acknowledges the existential quality of conflict. This thinking reflects three beliefs: cooperation is a *normal* condition of humankind,²⁷ when conflict occurs it can be creatively and peacefully transformed²⁸ and, finally, analysis alters conditions.²⁹ Conflict analysis and resolution requires simultaneous, parallel activities designed to modify personal and social behaviors and even cultural perspectives. It looks forward, asking antagonists to create a future in which both discover satisfaction. We cannot be lured into the comfortable trap of mechanistic procedures. Our purpose in educating professionals is for more than mere perfection of technique. Technique must be informed by analysis and explore peaceful transformation and reconciliation. This result is accomplished by multidisciplinary practices. Multidisciplinary practices ensure all dimensions of conflict are analyzed and addressed. But, few conflict professionals have been trained that way.³⁰

WE MAKE THE PATH BY WALKING

Peace and conflict studies is informed by a range of other, essentially humanistic, disciplines and borrows methods and skills suited to particular situations and circumstances. It recognizes that the range of human experience is a tapestry whose warp and woof is the sum of all culture and experience. Its goal

is community and positive peace. This goal sets it apart as a stand-alone profession. One practicing humanistic conflict transformation assumes a broad, *renaissance* approach to the study and reshaping of contention. Renaissance-style practitioners join wide-ranging academic interests with specific conflict transformation skills. He or she seeks to understand the peculiar structure and dimension of a situation. Indeed, practitioners internalize the concept that the process of resolution is, itself, loaded with assorted baggage. Virtually all disciplines offer some useful tools for understanding the character and components of conflict.

Peace and conflict studies provides the purpose for humanistic conflict resolution practice. Peace and conflict studies generates a context empowering people to act. It is progressive and forward looking. Positive peace is a deliberate, not unintended, outcome. The humanistic approach to conflict creates new, future-centered narratives. While the politicalization of conflict resolution fragments a common humanity with the introduction of power, peace-centered transformation seeks to restore a *tribal*, or community, context to conflict resolution.

Since conflict is seldom simple, imposed rationalization creates a facade of order where none exists in reality. It removes individual conflict from the broad interests of the community. Without a communal context, conflict resolution is likely to be unstable and does little to transform the origin of the conflict. A peace-centered transformative type of conflict resolution requires practitioners who are *generalists* in the best sense of the word, individuals who are comfortable with complexity

A CURRICULUM LOOKING FORWARD

The strength of the peace and conflict studies field rests upon a *renaissance* approach to learning, one not tethered to disciplinary thinking, and an emphasis on altering behaviors. An interdisciplinary methodology, however, must not become a license for shallow or shoddy learning. Validity demands academic rigor. And, such rigor is best formed within a curricular framework flexible enough to accommodate cross-disciplinary collaboration but rigid enough to be defined as unique within the academy.

Professional Identity

Professional identity derives from programs in higher education. In many ways, development of identity in the field of peace and conflict studies mirrors some of the frustrations experienced by teachers in creating a coherent

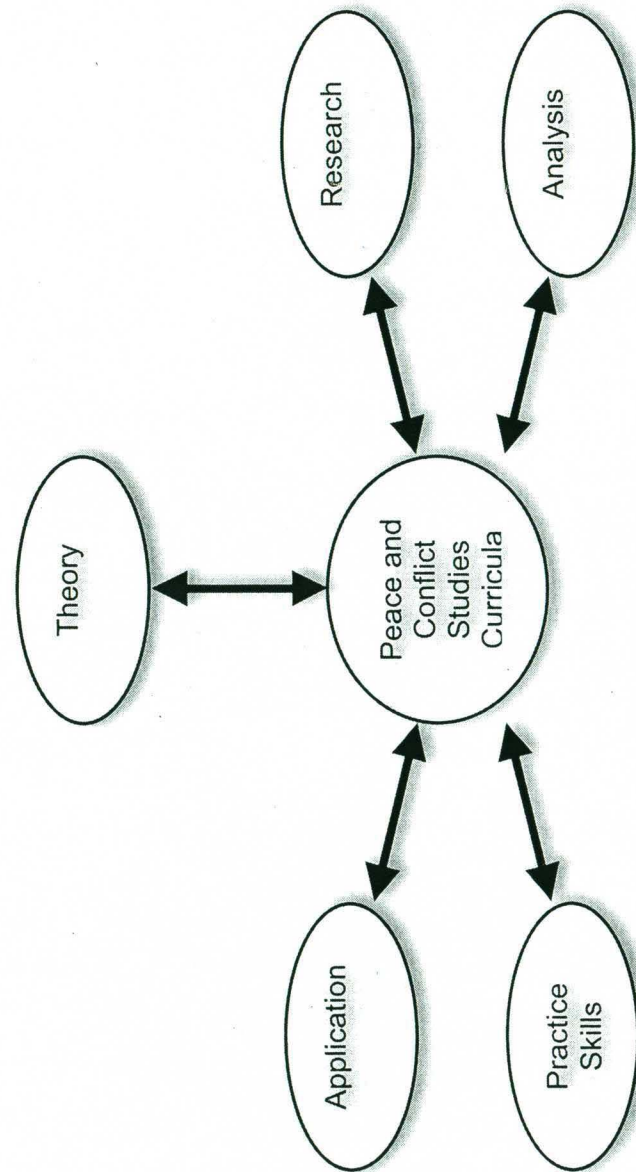


Figure 15.1. A Curricular Model

and unified sense of self.³¹ Mastery of rigorous curricula contributes to a feeling of professional identity and enhances graduates' ability to present themselves as experts in conflict.

I propose a curricular model (Figure 15.1) that integrates academics and practice. Introduced is an overarching macro framework for peace and conflict studies curriculum development. This conceptual model of curriculum development is a tool by which scholars and practitioners can stretch their thinking to new levels. The model can be easily modified for use at undergraduate and graduate levels of study. Core and elective classes can be divided among the theory, research, and analysis dimensions of study, ensuring a solid foundation for practice is established.

Future peace and conflict workers are mentored and receive immediate feedback on their performance. Students will have an opportunity to observe conflicts and intervention methodologies *in situ*. Mentoring and coaching by practicing professionals will be an important aspect of fieldwork. Extensive fieldwork will set the foundation for a career defined by reflective practice. The model is flexible enough to allow for contextual differences while ensuring a degree of unity among programs with core competencies anchoring individual program development. The model is informed by other professional fields such as social work and education. The practice skills and application dimensions ensure graduates of conflict resolution programs have had the benefit of extensive fieldwork under the supervision or practicing professionals.

Core Competencies and Learning Goals

I propose that peace and conflict studies be anchored in core competencies and threaded across curricula. To move the ball forward, programs can be built that ensure the following competencies are achieved. Learning goals can be used in developing courses and course learning objectives.

Theoretical background of the field. Conflict analysis and resolution is the philosophical background of the field of peace and conflict studies.³² Graduates will be grounded in a common body of conflict analysis and resolution theory.

Global competence. Graduates will be able to operate in a global environment. Curricula are internationalized.

Collaboration. Graduates are competent in working with state and non-state actors as well as governmental and nongovernmental organizations in the field.

Cultural competency. Graduates are able to live and work in multiple cultures, simultaneously. Graduates are able to employ de-colonized research and analysis methodologies.

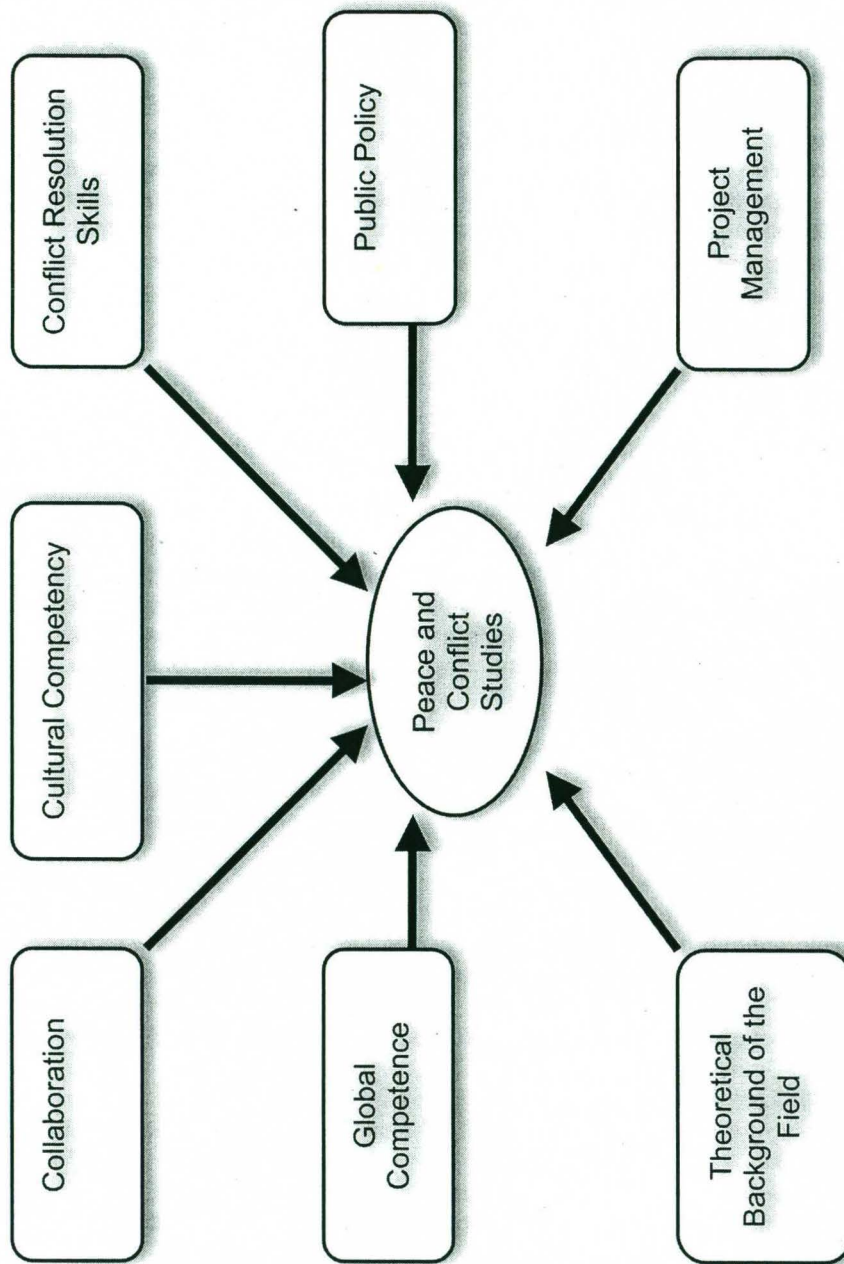


Figure 15.2. Core Competencies

Conflict resolution skills. Graduates have mastered basic conflict resolution skills; interpersonal negotiation, mediation, facilitation, group problem solving, etc.

Public Policy. Graduates are able to understand how public policy development influences conflict and conflict transformation. And, how to use field experiences to frame policy development.

Project management. Graduates are able to design and implement conflict intervention programs.

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

Core courses focus on providing peace and conflict studies students with a strong theoretical background in peace and conflict. The goal is to provide common and basic elements in the field of peace and conflict studies. A common language is created.

Undergraduate programs should provide common and basic elements in conflict resolution. And, as skills develop, there should be ample opportunity for practice in which academic study informs practice and practice reinforces academic skills. Core courses in the peace and conflict studies major should emphasize three crucial bodies of knowledge:

1. an understanding of the historical evolution of peace and conflict studies and the literature reflecting such development;
2. knowledge of the specialized terms employed in the discipline; and
3. mastery of common methodologies in the field.

There must be a strong liberal arts electives component to peace and conflict studies programs. Micro program tracks should be avoided in favor of classes categorized by discipline and content increasing students' understanding of complexity, nuance, and narrative in conflict.

Among elective courses in a conflict resolution major, there is need for classes developing students' cultural literacy. Graduates in the discipline are strengthened through a strong interdisciplinary grounding with courses such as cultural anthropology and global social work. Globalization—political, economic and social—broadens the range of disputes and anyone concerned with their peaceful transformation must recognize diversity and be prepared to act in a realm of many cultures and world views.

Required literature courses are a must. A literature component should be a part of any conflict resolution program adding richness and depth of understanding. Literature is narrative, and introducing students to its analysis

contributes to an understanding of people and conflict—people in conflict. A study of literature, especially the literature of other cultures, often reveals people and their social context in ways and in depths unavailable in other disciplines.

Incorporating anthropology and global social work into conflict resolution programs not only develops insight into other cultures but, even more importantly, exposes students to an essential decolonized methodology. A participant-observer approach is essential to understand the culture of conflict and resolution processes. It is invaluable when students engage in fieldwork.

The scope and depth of undergraduate conflict resolution programs can be enhanced with the introduction of fifteen credit-hour capstone semesters including a senior thesis (the senior thesis is, in a sense, an interdisciplinary examination and might take the form of a case study centering on the culture of conflict analysis and resolution drawing on the student's field experience as a participant-observer). The final semester of off-campus fieldwork can be augmented with weekly seminars analyzing the week's experience and linking it to theory (the model of mentored student-teaching and social work field instruction programs is worth considering).

A field experience such as that described is unique in conflict studies programs. Combining academic rigor, scholarship, and practice, it is an innovative approach to an undergraduate major in peace and conflict resolution and a sound foundation for graduate studies.

GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Graduate programs should be heavily grounded in theory and critical analysis with a strong practice component supported through integrated fieldwork. Classes focusing on conflict theory will inform students' later analysis in the field. This approach is twofold: first, it provides graduates of peace and conflict studies undergraduate programs with a higher level of knowledge vis-a-vis theory, and second, it provides non-conflict studies undergraduates with a strong theoretical foundation that may be missing. My experience is that many students who enter graduate programs in conflict resolution lack the theoretical underpinning in conflict that is necessary for success in the field as a humanistic practitioner. A juridical approach to conflict resolution is technique oriented and does not necessarily require the understanding and application of conflict theory.

The second element of a graduate education should be extensive fieldwork.³³ As an applied social science, there should be ample opportunity for students to engage as practitioners in conflicts of all types; community becomes laboratory and text. Future conflict workers need to gain practical

experience under the guidance of conflict workers and the mentorship of peace and conflict studies faculty. I am thinking here of the practice teaching model used in schools of education, and the fieldwork evaluation model employed in social work programs. Only through the application of theory in the field are students able to fully understand how theory and practice inform each other, and how new knowledge in the field is developed. Sixty-six percent of conflict resolution programs offer field experiences and thirty-nine percent require a practicum.³⁴ I suggest a much more aggressive approach, possibly incorporating fieldwork throughout the program, as a centerpiece of the curriculum, not an afterthought, but public scholarship.

Peace and conflict studies programs can benefit from the use of portfolios. Portfolios provide students with an opportunity to focus their graduate education across the curriculum. Rather than a jumble of disjointed classes, students weave classes together to create a whole that acts as the centerpiece of their capstone thesis and integrated seminar. The program is treated holistically.

Graduate peace and conflict studies programs should rely heavily on case studies. The case study format will help prepare graduate students in developing skills they will use in their fieldwork; a foundation is set. The case study approach incorporates the three major components of any curriculum: theory, research, and practice. An important aspect of case study work is that it moves learning away from the acquisition of knowledge and engages students as creators of new knowledge. Students become active learners modeling the skills they will take into the field.

Research methodology classes should be an important part of any curriculum. Research classes will help breach the divide that can develop between theory and practice.³⁵ Partnerships are an essential aspect of any curriculum. Supervised field experiences with partners will contribute to the development of professionalization in the field. Partners can become advocates for graduates in our field. Partners, too, can provide essential feedback regarding the knowledge, skills, and abilities they are looking for in program graduates. Individual work in peace and conflict studies classes should be kept to a minimum. Conflict work is collaborative work. Students should engage in group work throughout the curriculum. The development of collaborative skills is vital to future success in the field.

CONCLUSION

In an attempt to define conflict resolution as a genuine academic discipline, a critical analysis of programs in the United States argues for a rich body of core classes and electives, made richer still by focusing on a common body of knowledge and skills.³⁶ This is not reflective of the current state of conflict

resolution programs. They are all over the map. Academic programs are insular with little significant collaboration across the field, there is no agreement on core competencies.³⁷ Curriculum development is *ab ignitio* at individual institutions dictated by institutional requirements, not student needs.³⁸ A field reacting to institutional stresses is not designing itself into the future. After fifty years of wandering the academic landscape, let us finally agree on who we are and what we should teach to acquire that identity.

Designing our way forward as a field will involve reflection and expanded vision. Resources and commitment are required. The field of peace and conflict studies should be defined by its humanistic characteristics and approach to the peaceful transformation of conflict.

Once defined as a field in the humanities, undergraduate and graduate programs in peace and conflict studies should develop a core of subjects providing scholars and practitioners a shared body of knowledge. Next, programs at undergraduate and graduate levels should develop curricula integrating scholarship and practice akin to teacher education and social work models. Supervised fieldwork is the centerpiece of such programs. In the fieldwork phase, peace and conflict studies faculty act as coaches, mentors, and facilitators linking students, fieldwork supervisors, and the university. Scholarship and practice inform each other in creating knowledge.

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