Navigating the Unchartered Waters of Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution Education

SERGE LOODE

This article suggests that culturally appropriate conflict resolution education in cross-cultural settings can best be achieved through a dialogical approach to education. The article briefly summarizes the discussion about the connection between culture and conflict resolution and presents the two mainstream approaches to conflict resolution training: the prescriptive and the elicitive approach.

Introduction

In their article, "Have Gavel, Will Travel," Honeyman and Cheldelin (2002) highlighted the increasing cross-cultural dimension of conflict resolution training. More and more conflict resolution educators and practitioners travel abroad and share their practice with others in the hope of improving conflict resolution processes in the host countries. In Australia, conflict resolution processes involving Indigenous Australians and members from different ethnic and cultural groups within our diverse society are daily business for many practitioners and trainers. While training and practice are often delivered as separate interventions, training is often conducted as part of a practical conflict resolution intervention. As such, education aims to enable participants to progress their own conflict resolution process through increasing their skills and capacity. On other occasions, conflict resolution practitioners also perform educative functions as part of a mediation,

negotiation, or facilitation processes (Rothman, 1997). This means that training and practice are closely connected and, although this article focuses on education and training, many of the conclusions also apply to cross-cultural facilitation or mediation practice. Working as outsiders in culturally different or diverse communities can be compared to navigating a boat in unknown waters: foreign boats may be unsuitable for local conditions, and currents or winds may behave differently along unknown coastlines.

It is the author's view that conflict resolution educators need to pursue a combined approach that draws from elicitive and prescriptive teaching methodologies and that engages educators with workshop participants and blurs the line between trainer and trainee. This can be accomplished by teaching conflict resolution through a dialogical model and by working with co-trainers from the target communities. The dialogical approach to conflict resolution is framed within the literature on dialogue as a conflict resolution process, and examples for dialogical practice and for co-facilitation from the author's own practice as an academic, trainer, and facilitator are provided. The article uses the terms *conflict resolution education* and *conflict resolution training* interchangeably. It also refers to *trainers*, *educators*, and *facilitators*, meaning the people who plan and present workshops.

Culture and Conflict Resolution

The role of culture in conflict resolution has been widely discussed and this article will merely provide a brief summary. Avruch (1998) traces the history of definitions of culture in anthropology, from culture referring to special intellectual or artistic endeavors or products to the more contemporary distinction between *etic* and *emic* descriptions of cultural expressions. Definitions of culture range from the very narrow—national culture, ethnic group—to the very broad—culture as the lens through which we see the world—indicating that individuals have many cultures that are constantly in flux (LeBaron, 2003). According to Augsburger (1992), social reality is constructed of networks of subjective realities and can be defined as collective shared meaning. Culture then refers to patterns of behavior and worldviews shared by certain groups. These social realities evolve through ongoing cycles of consensus, confusion, conflict, and clarification. Capra (2002) refers to a network of communication that recursively produces and reproduces itself in the social system. Multiple feedback loops of communications produce shared systems of beliefs, explanations, values, and cultural patterns among groups of people and

give them identities and create flexible boundaries delineated by expectation and self-identification. Conflict is an integral part of these cycles of interaction and occurs when different views or beliefs meet each other.

Arai (2006) explains the complex relationship between culture and conflict at the interpersonal and the intergroup level: "[T]he potential for conflict may exist but remain unnoticed when differences between people do not hurt or trigger adverse feelings. Conflict emerges when people realize that their differences matter in the context of interdependence" (pp. 103–104). At the same time, culture shapes and reshapes the way in which conflict is perceived and the behaviors in which it is expressed. Culture helps to define in-groups and out-groups—the *we* and *other*—and tells people and groups how to behave when dealing with conflict. Culture and conflict are inextricably intertwined and have impact on relationships, identity, and possible conflict resolution strategies and processes. Conflict is universal yet distinct in every culture (Augsburger, 1992). Human beings have created cultural pathways for channeling conflict, but these may differ among various cultural groups. Intercultural conflict develops when individuals or groups identify fundamental differences in the way they see the world and when these differences are identified as problems that need to be addressed (Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997).

Whereas the concepts of culture and conflict are closely connected, *culture* is also ambiguous and notoriously difficult to define. Brigg (2008) warns that two risks are common in trying to define culture in conflict resolution: "overstating the difference and separateness of cultures and the operation of colonial-style hierarchy in our ways of knowing which lead us to devalue cultural difference" (p. 49). He suggests overcoming these risks by refraining from reifying culture and by encouraging constant inquiry and exchange about values and beliefs.

The practice of delivering conflict resolution education draws on the different cultural pathways and imparts specific cultural assumptions on what conflict is and how it should be dealt with, and the education process itself carries implicit ethical messages. Examples of different cultural pathways are the patterns of third-party involvement: third parties can warn a wrongdoer on consequences or costs if the act is repeated, they can shame an offender with ridicule by public exposure, they can exile an unwanted person from the group, they can act as go-betweens in a process of negotiation, they can provide advice and guidance to reconcile conflicting parties through spiritual practices, or they can act as mediators facilitating direct communication between the parties (Augsburger, 1992). By suggesting

roles and processes that are incongruent with the worldviews of participants, educators can cause intercultural conflict between participants and trainers. In a worst-case scenario, participants feel coerced into learning and implementing conflict resolution processes and behaviors that are not appropriate for their specific context, with potentially conflict-exacerbating consequences. Dealing with this clash of conflict resolution epistemologies requires that workshops and education experiences be structured carefully to emphasize both the importance of local ways of viewing the world and the value of introduced knowledge. Before further elaborating this dialogical approach to conflict resolution education, let us examine the two current approaches: the prescriptive and the elicitive training models.

Prescriptive Training and Its Associated Problems

In the prescriptive model, knowledge transfer is vested in an "expert" trainer, who is responsible for the content and process of the workshop and transfer of this expert knowledge to the participants. Their main responsibility is to receive the knowledge and to improve their own conflict resolution skills through practicing the models and processes presented by the trainer. This educational model usually starts with a description of the particular process (e.g., facilitative mediation or interest-based negotiation) presented through readings, lectures, or visual material. This is followed by a demonstration of how to apply the theory to a particular case scenario through video or role-play demonstration. Participants then enact and practice the model through a variety of scenarios to try it out for themselves and to hone their skills. This is most often done through role-play simulations or case studies. Trainers and coaches provide feedback and assist learners in building their skills according to the model the trainer presented. Finally the trainer answers questions from the participants on how to apply the model in difficult or unusual situations (Lederach, 1995).

Often this type of training acknowledges cultural difference only as an add-on to the process model presented or a red flag that signals caution for the trainers and trainees. Cultural difference between trainers and participants in the prescriptive training model means that trainers need to adapt role-plays so that they make sense within the life-worlds of participants (Abramson, 2009). It also means that they may need to find suitable translations for some of the conflict resolution jargon that is part of their process model, or that they may have to check with the participants as to whether the particular process model works for the target community or group.

Rarely do trainers examine the cultural assumptions of the model they present or question its underlying principles. Lederach (1995) points out that this type of training in its ideal form often fails to distinguish between "underlying broader social functions of conflict resolution and the more specific forms presented to fulfill those functions" (p. 52). While different cultural groups may all recognize the value of third-party mediators, they may have very different views on the concepts of neutrality, assertiveness, or the mediation process as presented by trainers from different cultural backgrounds. When expert trainers present these specific roles, participants may not understand or find them to be appropriate in their life-worlds and cultural frameworks. The following example illustrates this disconnect between the model presented and what made sense to participants within their own cultural frameworks.

During a postgraduate course in facilitative mediation in Australia we presented the facilitative model of mediation as practiced in slightly different variations throughout Australia. One of the role-plays involved a neighborhood dispute about a tree hanging over a fence line. In the instructions for the role-play it was stated that the neighbors had sought the assistance of a neighborhood mediation center. An international student who had only recently arrived in Australia was assigned the role of a party in the dispute. He seemed to struggle significantly with this role. After the class the student approached me and voiced his difficulty with the role-play. He stated that in his home country, an outsider from a neighborhood mediation center would never mediate this type of dispute. The parties would approach a family member, or failing that, a neighbor from the same street who would chair discussions on how to deal with the issue. Involving an outsider was an almost-unthinkable way of dealing with the situation and would result in a loss of face for everyone involved. In this example the prepared role-play did not make sense to the student. While it may be easy to amend the role-play and leave out the specifics about the mediation center, what was more concerning was that the role-play inhibited the student from practicing and reflecting on the process and from comparing it with his own experience of conflict resolution because he was so occupied and distressed by the cognitive disconnect.

Another more recent example involved a facilitation workshop with senior members from various Aboriginal organizations. My co-facilitator and I presented a model of computer-assisted group facilitation called *Interactive Management* (Warfield and Cardenas, 1993, 2002). As part of this process, groups use *Nominal Group Technique* (Delbecq, Van de Ven,

and Gustafson, 1975) to brainstorm and clarify answers to a joint problem that the group faces. Then the participants decide which are the five most important answers to the question. During a decision-making stage all participants are asked to write down the five most important answers from the pool of ideas, which are then entered into the computer software to produce a weighted ranking. When I explained this process to the group I introduced it as "voting to determine the most significant ideas." This was met by an icy silence from the group. Then one participant explained to me that the word *voting* signified a white man's process that symbolized centuries of oppression and was in opposition to more culturally appropriate ways of decision making by consensus.

There are a number of ways in which trainers and facilitators can deal with situations like these. We have found that the best way to address the shortcomings of the prescriptive model is to make the underlying beliefs of the model visible and to use techniques from the elicitive model to complement our teaching.

In the first example, we started the next day of mediation training by examining the underlying assumptions of the facilitative mediation model and by critiquing its usefulness in cross-cultural contexts. We encouraged the student to share his discomfort during the role-play with the class and we discovered that other students also had significant discomfort with the facilitative model. One of them, an Australian student, had had a bad experience with mediation that focused too much on reaching an agreement as quickly as possible and had neglected her process needs. The sharing of stories and experiences and the open critique of the facilitative model assisted the students to overcome their discomfort and to view the facilitative role-plays as learning experiences of different conflict resolution processes. We made it clear that participants were not expected to adopt the model of mediation that we presented but that they should develop their own style or adapt the model that made sense to them. We also increased our own knowledge as conflict resolution educators when we explored how the family member or neighbor in the first example would have conducted the conflict resolution process. We discovered similarities to and differences from the facilitative mediation model presented during the course.

In the second example, we asked the participants to share their views on how consensus-based decision making should work and encouraged them to express their discomfort with the terminology and the process. We also reiterated that we did not see ourselves as experts teaching a particular process, but that we were co-learners suggesting that we try out the facilitation process

together. It helped that we were together exploring a real problem that the group was grappling with at the time, and we allowed the participants to make changes to the process as we went through the dialogue and decision-making stages. Using a real problem for the facilitation and encouraging all members of the group to stand up and facilitate the discussion and to oper- ate the computer software for their peers allowed the group to develop a strong sense of ownership. The participants decided not to hold a secret ballot on the five most significant questions but to openly voice their indi- vidual choices and to discuss them. They entered the preferences into the computer software and the computer produced the weighted ranking, which was discussed again. At the end of this process the group agreed that the ranking reflected their consensus on the order of the most important ideas.

Whereas it may have been possible in this example to present the process without using the contentious terminology of "voting," I doubt that con- flict resolution educators and practitioners will always be able to present their models and processes without using language that some participants find offensive. We have found it much more helpful to encourage partici- pants to voice their discomfort or disagreement and we acknowledge it by asking the group for possible ways of amending or redesigning processes that they do not find helpful. By constantly renegotiating the knowledge that is presented and by putting it into context with local knowledge, we can create a respectful and creative learning space.

The Elicitive Model of Conflict Resolution Education

The approaches to dealing with disconnect between educators and partic- ipants presented earlier go beyond the prescriptive model of conflict reso- lution education. They draw on participatory and critical teaching methods like Paulo Freire's "problem-posing education." This approach to education emphasizes cognition, not the transfer of information. It helps to resolve the contradiction of the teacher–student relationship. Through dialogue and communication the teachers become students and the stu- dents become teachers. Their experiences and knowledge matter and they co-create and shape the content of the educational process (Freire, 2009). By exploring a problem together or by opening up discussion about the fundamental nature of the concepts presented (and therefore making these concepts the problem to be explored and analyzed), educators can develop more culturally appropriate conflict resolution processes that make sense to

the participants and provide them with practical and useful knowledge and skills. This model of conflict resolution education validates the knowledge of participants and acknowledges that the "implicit indigenous knowledge about ways of being and doing is a valued resource for creating and sustaining appropriate models of conflict resolution in a given setting" (Lederach, 1995, p. 56).

John Paul Lederach is often credited with the further development of problem-solving education into elicitive conflict resolution training. He developed a simple sequence of activities for this elicitive approach to conflict resolution education: the process starts with the discovery of what participants in their setting do when conflict arises. Participants do not use prepared role-plays but get together in small groups and talk about real-life conflict situations. In the next step they develop their own terms, language, and categories for the conflict resolution activities that they have identified. This creates ownership and empowerment. In the third stage the participants then evaluate what works in their given context and what does not, and then adapt and recreate processes to deal more effectively with conflict. Finally, the new or recreated processes are applied in practice through simulations, or later through application to real conflict situations (Lederach, 1995). Elicitive facilitation is a mutual journey of discovery between facilitators and local participants, in which the cultural, communal, and political resources available to local people can be reconstituted, reinvented, recycled, repatterned, and restructured to adapt to new and rapidly changing contexts (Westoby, 2010).

The elicitive approach in its ideal form, while responding to many of the shortcomings of the prescriptive approach, is not without fault. In practice, eliciting information without sharing and presenting knowledge from outside the cultural space of participants misses the opportunity to create innovative conflict resolution processes. It can also inadvertently legitimize the power of certain groups or manifestations of cultural violence (Galtung, 1990). Polly Walker and Chief Selwyn Garu provide an example of the challenges that can arise when using purely elicitive processes: during a "storian" (conflict resolution workshop) in Vanuatu that was facilitated by some of my colleagues the customary chiefs who attended the workshop said at the end of the first day: "Our knowledge is written on the wall. Where will it go? How will it be used? What do we get in return?" Because the Australian facilitators had used flipchart paper to record ideas and concepts and had stuck them on the wall, the participants thought that overnight facilitators could steal their knowledge and take it to Australia.

Because knowledge of local customs in Vanuatu also has a spiritual dimension, the issue was very serious for the participants in the workshop. My colleagues worked with local Ni-Vanuatu[1] co-facilitators, and it was they who reassured the chiefs that when they returned the next day they would see that their knowledge was still where they had left it and that it would be integrated with knowledge brought by the overseas facilitators and by the participants from other islands with different customs (Walker and Garu, 2009).

I have experienced on more than one occasion that participants in conflict resolution workshops expect the facilitators to bring some innovative knowledge or unfamiliar conflict resolution processes to the education experience. Whereas most participants strongly appreciate when their own experience and knowledge is validated and explored, they also come to a workshop or training (often at great expense of personal time and resources) expecting to learn something new or to improve their own mediative capacities. Educators who can respond to this need and who are willing to share their own knowledge and expertise when it is requested can create integrated learning experiences that allow for the discovery of new routes through the uncharted waters of conflict. The integration of local and introduced knowledge allows for the creation of new ideas that acknowledge customary ways of resolving conflict and provide innovative ways to break out of self-perpetuating cycles of destructive interaction. Because this approach draws from both elicitive and prescriptive training, and combines these with critical reflection, it is a *dialogical* approach to conflict resolution education.

Dialogue and Dialogical Conflict Resolution Education

The practice of dialogue has its roots in Western culture and can be traced back to Socratic dialogues by Plato (Dessel and Rogge, 2008) and the root of the word *dialogue* itself, which stems from the Greek word *dialogos*: *dia*, meaning "through," and *logos,* meaning "the meaning of the word." This refers to the stream of meaning that flows between and through dialogue participants (Dessel, Rogge, and Garlington, 2006). It is collective communication that allows for the sharing of thought and can transform existing beliefs and create innovations and cultural artifacts (Banathy and Jenlink, 2005). All individuals and groups present are invited to add their voice to the collective communication, not by insisting on or defending their own views against others but by adding their views to the collective interaction. These views are clarified, discussed, and examined by the

group. Ideas or parts of ideas and views are taken up by others, added to, changed, and adapted. Sometimes participants change their original views and stories in light of this collection of views and ideas, sometimes they feel confirmed in their beliefs, and sometimes completely new ideas are developed that are more than the sum of the parts.

Dialogue also allows participants to examine and share preconceptions, prejudices, and the characteristic patterns that lie behind their thoughts, opinions, beliefs, feelings, and roles (Bohm, Factor, and Garrett, 1991). The basic idea is to suspend opinions as well as judgment of what others share and to try to gain understanding of their respective starting points. Dialogue is a "culturally and historically specific way of social discourse accomplished through the use of language and verbal transactions" (Banathy and Jenlink, 2005, p. 4). It includes notions of community, mutuality, and authenticity and aims to establish an egalitarian relationship. According to LeBaron (2003) dialogue processes give participants from different cultural backgrounds an opportunity to understand the influence of existing cultures and the differences that distinguish them without letting a particular culture or cultures dominate the discourse. Because dialogue allows participants to experience each other in context and provides insight into the values, logic, and stories of the people involved, it can bridge intercultural conflicts and help conflicting parties improve their knowledge and understanding to transform the relationship.

Whereas dialogue certainly holds the potential for better cross-cultural understanding, it needs to be acknowledged that—just like any other conflict resolution intervention—it promotes certain underlying principles, namely participation, egalitarian relationships, and the belief that better relationships can be built if people interact with each other by listening and suspending judgment. Given that the practice and literature on dialogue are rooted in Western academia and practice, this produces the paradox of a culturally biased communication process that aims to expose and transcend cultural bias. Practitioners aim to address this paradox by being transparent about the underlying assumptions of dialogue processes and by checking with participants as to whether they consider the process appropriate. However, anyone who has delivered cross-cultural facilitation or training will know the nagging uncertainty at the back of a facilitator's mind as to whether participants agree to a proposed process merely out of politeness or whether they truly agree with its principles.

Dale Bagshaw (2009) advises that "Western trainers need to deconstruct and decentralize Western models of mediation when training in

other cultures and focus on building on the strengths of local practices" (p. 23). Practitioners' beliefs about change, which are rarely articulated, underpin key decision-making processes in the development of conflict resolution interventions (Shouldice and Church, 2003). These underlying beliefs, which are socially constructed, shape how practitioners and educators see their role in the conflict, as well as the roles of conflict parties and stakeholders, and how they construct their theories of change (Hendrick, 2009). Often these underlying beliefs are not articulated or are taken to be the same for the recipients of conflict resolution and training interventions. Instead of assuming that their education interventions will teach participants effective models to resolve conflict within their own societies, dialogical educators act as catalysts for knowledge generation and emphasize the creation of safe spaces in which all participants in a workshop setting, including the trainers, can discover, explore, and practice conflict resolution models and skills to create appropriate responses to local conflict situations.

The education process should neither be prescriptive nor totally elicitive, but should allow everyone involved to practice and critique conflict resolution processes and their underlying assumptions. For many trainers this means strengthening their self-awareness and reflexivity (Bagshaw, 2009), and holding models and concepts lightly to allow participants to evaluate them based on their own cultural context. Trainers and participants enter into a dialogue with each other.

Dialogical conflict resolution education elicits stories and practices from participants and adds the knowledge and models provided by the educators. No process or practice is given priority over the others and participants are constantly encouraged to critically examine the ideas and practices under discussion. Often the group develops a conflict scenario that is representative of the struggles that participants are dealing with. Then the group brainstorms appropriate ways to deal with the situation. Facilitators often retreat to the background during this process and do not actively suggest ways to deal with the situation. They use respectful questions to challenge assumptions and to test the strategies developed by the group for contingencies and unforeseen consequences, similar to the reality-testing that facilitative mediators employ during the option generation and negotiation phases of mediation.

Dialogical educators also introduce processes or techniques and may even encourage participants to practice them. This is done within a frame of trial and error to encourage participants to search for answers outside

their usual frame of reference and to try out different ways of resolving conflict. It is important to emphasize that educators do not expect participants to adopt their models, but that this practicing is part of the dialogue to better understand each other's ideas.

When the group is ready they then decide on the way forward and the facilitators assist them in developing a detailed and workable action plan. One particular micro-skill that I find helpful in facilitating dialogical conversation is what Bush and Folger (2005) call a *check-in*. By frequently checking with the participants on how the conversation is going and whether they want to discuss a particular issue in more detail, the participants are encouraged to actively shape the dialogue and not just follow topics set by the educators. Because stories, ideas, and views are shared and examined in the dialogical space, they permeate each other and can spark new ideas and combinations that are more than just the sum of the parts.

At the same time, the process is empowering to the participants because their knowledge is respected and they are encouraged to add their voices to the dialogue. During a recent dialogue and training workshop a participant mentioned that the process encouraged her to speak up and to add her ideas. She also said that in many other training or facilitation situations in the past she had stayed silent because she had been afraid that she could not add anything valuable to the discussion.

Working Dialogically with Local Co-trainers

Dialogical conflict resolution education is not only dependent on the educator's approach and the design of the workshop. Collaboration with local co-trainers or co-facilitators adds significantly to the engagement process. Working as a team results in more resources and creativity to deal with problems arising during the workshop and better engagement if facilitators exhibit different facilitation styles (e.g., one facilitator is more energetic; the other is more reflective). Working with local facilitators helps to create an atmosphere in which participants feel that the workshop is directly relevant to them (Pretty, 1995). Just as boat captains rely on local pilots to help them maneuver in unknown waters, conflict resolution educators can work together with local co-facilitators to provide effective and well-received training.

Local co-facilitators do not necessarily have to be highly trained and experienced conflict resolution experts. Often co-facilitators come from other backgrounds and have different strengths. Sometimes they are members

of the host organization that sponsors or organizes the training workshop; sometimes they are what Mary Anderson (2002) would call the *connectors* in a community. They are the peacemakers, interested in increasing mediative capacities and in working through difficult conflict situations. They are also the local guides who know the conflict situation better than any outside intervener and they often have legitimacy in local communities.

The collaboration should start with jointly designing the conflict resolution workshop and with co-creating the program and the discussion of possible activities. Some commentators would call this a "train-the-trainer" workshop, but this terminology is closely related to the prescriptive training model and does not fully recognize the importance of the knowledge of local co-facilitators. In traditional train-the-trainer workshops, participants normally learn a particular prescriptive model and then assist the lead trainer in teaching this model to the target audience, or they are expected to teach the model themselves as envisioned by the program.

Train-the-trainer workshops are often utilized to scale up the impact of a training intervention and to roll out the training program to a wider audience. This can cause significant problems with program fidelity, as Tricia Jones (2004) has pointed out with regard to conflict resolution education in schools. It is only natural that local facilitators adapt the program presented, leaving out parts that do not make sense in their cultural contexts, and that the program may look different from what was envisioned by the original designers. Therefore, it is a more constructive approach to design the program with local co-facilitators in the first place.

In our own training and facilitation practice and in line with our dialogical principles, my colleagues and I present some of our ideas to our co-facilitators and ask them to critique them and to present their own. We use elicitive processes to develop role-plays and simulations together and we constantly try to compare our understanding and that of our co-facilitators. We also ask them for advice on how to present certain topics and invite them to co-present the workshop. Through this pre-workshop dialogue we build a program that is a combination of local and introduced processes and we build relationships within the training team that help model constructive conflict engagement across cultures to the workshop participants.

Our co-facilitators have mentioned that this modeling of collaborative practice has had a tremendous effect on some of the groups. During a facilitation process with a culturally diverse community one participant arrived late. This person was not aware of the procedure and anxious to make her

opinions and ideas heard as soon as possible. She interrupted other group members and spoke over the top of them. With this group, and as agreed with our local co-facilitators, we used a circle process and talking stick that was passed by the facilitators to the respective speaker. After only a few minutes and a quick explanation of the talking stick process the newcomer quickly adapted. After about two hours of circle process (Kraybill, 2005) we perceived a dramatic shift in this person's communication style. She did not interrupt other speakers anymore; on the contrary, the latecomer acknowledged that she had learned something and that the information she received from others was new to her. She also began to refrain from stating her opinion as a matter of fact, as she had done in the beginning, and began to ask for input or clarification from other participants.

Working with local co-facilitators is also a suitable strategy to build rapport quickly and to enhance the legitimacy of new and sometimes counterintuitive conflict resolution processes. While it takes more time to prepare the actual workshop with co-facilitators, this extra time can often be made up by the time saved in building rapport. During the community facilitation process described earlier, my colleague and I observed how our local co-facilitators became more and more confident in their role as facilitators and took over more and more of the facilitation of the community workshop.

When we left the community after the workshop, our local colleagues remained to continue the work. They were able to build sustainable capacity within the community and used and adapted the processes and techniques we had developed together. Over the next months the local facilitators utilized the facilitation method with another group and also adapted the process to suit their needs. They often contacted me to discuss ideas and to explain why they had changed certain parts of the process. This process was well received by their community and provided a unique learning experience for all of us.

In 2009, together with a training team made up of young bicultural workers, I delivered a number of conflict resolution workshops for high school students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Every time we delivered a workshop I was amazed at the speed with which my co-facilitators could build rapport with the students and how easily they could get them to open up and share some very personal experiences of conflict. During the breaks my co-facilitators (many of whom were arts workers) often played guitar, sang, or danced with the students. This greatly enhanced the students' attention and engagement during the other parts of the workshop

and kept them interested in the program. After the workshop, my co-facilitators provided valuable reflections on the effects of the training and together we fine-tuned the program to match different school situations and different student groups.

Co-facilitation is also an excellent way to make the underlying cultural assumptions of conflict resolution processes and techniques more visible and to increase the reflexivity and knowledge of the educators. In particular, when co-facilitators use different techniques or disagree with each other respectfully about the appropriateness of certain interventions, this tension can provide important learning experiences for everyone involved. It clearly emphasizes that there is no one way to resolve conflict and that every conflict involves a multitude of different views and voices all of which need to be respected and heard for dialogue to ensue. Being challenged in a respectful way by co-facilitators allows educators to reflect on their own deeply held worldviews and how they shape their approaches to education; this provides for a diverse learning environment that appeals to a more diverse audience than one educator could do on his or her own.

Limitations of the Dialogical Approach and of Co-facilitation

Dialogical interventions and training are based on postmodern epistemologies and share some of the criticism directed at postmodernism. Because it does not promote one particular model, dialogical training may lack direction and specific advice for some participants. The central ideas of postmodernism and the emphasis on meaning making, deconstruction, and reconstruction through communication have been criticized as vague and hard to operationalize. Dialogue as a meeting of minds requires achieving a high level of transformational consciousness and suspension of judgment. This is hard to sustain during protracted conflict situations (Coleman, 2004). Some of these criticisms can be addressed by thorough planning and by clearly articulating the expectations of participants and facilitators at the beginning of the workshop. Scheduling enough time to allow all participants to share their own views and asking everyone to listen respectfully can assist the group in achieving a dialogical state of being together.

Whereas the work with local co-facilitators greatly enhances the sustainability, legitimacy, rapport-building, and reflexivity, preparing workshops in this dialogical fashion requires more resources, takes more time (Taylor, 2003), and requires serious effort to build relationships between

local and outside facilitators. Workshops cannot be delivered with minimum preparation and trainers cannot just parachute in and out of the community. Pretty (1995) suggests at least two days of joint preparation for a ten-to-fourteen-day workshop. From my experience, even two days is hardly enough time to build true rapport with the local co-facilitators unless a good relationship already exists. In our work in Vanuatu we normally conduct a five-day *facilitator storian* with the local facilitators the week before a community storian. Dialogical co-facilitation also requires that educators acknowledge that they are not the ultimate experts in their subject matter and it requires that they be willing to hold concepts lightly enough for local co-facilitators to challenge them and to change the concepts and processes to integrate introduced and local knowledge (Brigg, 2003). But these are not necessarily disadvantages; they can actually be considered strengths of dialogical co-facilitation.

Dialogical conflict resolution education still focuses on building conflict resolution capacity among participants (and educators). In cases where worldviews and values within the training group are incommensurate, this aim may need to be suspended (at least for the moment) to make way for a dialogue process without any educational ambitions. Where some participants favor an approach to dealing with the conflict that is totally unacceptable to other participants (or trainers), such as when participants suggest that the use of violence or oppression is culturally appropriate in a certain situation or where human rights are compromised in such a strong way that trainers feel that further discussion and action planning may lead to harm for participants or others, all conflict resolution education will reach its limits. In such situations it may be advisable to invite the group to reevaluate the goals of the workshop and to engage in a process of facilitated storytelling in which all participants are allowed to voice their experiences without criticism from others and in which clarifying questions are asked to further elicit the values and worldviews behind the incommensurate views.

In other situations (such as when tensions within the group suggest the immediate outbreak of violence or severe damage to fragile relationships) it may be advisable to terminate the workshop and either invite participants separately for further workshops, or invite them to come together to explicitly dialogue about their views of the situation. This change of frame for the gathering can sometimes help in defusing situations and in assisting participants (and trainers) to open their minds to the others' views. Since dialogical conflict resolution education is built on the principles of dialogue,

engaging in such processes will be considerably easier compared with other educational approaches since participants have already started to engage in dialogue as part of the education process.

Conclusion

In summary, dialogical conflict resolution education provides more sustainability and approaches participants and co-facilitators as valuable members of a co-creation process of constructive conflict engagement. This article has argued that culture and conflict are intertwined and that in complex intercultural conflict situations no single intervention or training will improve the situation. To deliver effective and culturally appropriate conflict resolution education, trainers need to hold their expert knowledge lightly and design learning experiences that acknowledge and validate local approaches to conflict resolution and local expertise. In a dialogical manner, conflict resolution educators work with the knowledge and experience of participants and share their knowledge and experience only where needed or requested. Local and introduced knowledge of conflict resolution permeate each other in dialogue and allow for the development of new and creative ways to deal with conflict.

This type of educational experience is best delivered with local co-facilitators who participate in the organization, planning, and design of the workshop. They should be given equal space to share their experiences and should be encouraged to critique their outsider colleagues. This establishes trust within the training team and trust in the local capacities for peace. All parties involved, whether they are local or foreign, gain the possibility to learn from each other and to further develop their conflict resolution practice.

Challenges to dialogical education and co-facilitation can be addressed through thorough planning and relationship building and by being humble and respectful in relation to local knowledge. If the education process is compromised because of incommensurate worldviews, then dialogical educators need to suspend the educational parts of the process and concentrate their efforts on the dialogue process itself. In extreme circumstances workshops can be terminated or postponed.

By following these guidelines, and together with co-facilitators and workshop participants, conflict resolution educators can jointly navigate the uncharted waters of conflict and work out the best bearings for safe landfall.

Note

1. The term *Ni-Vanuatu* refers to all Melanesian ethnicities originating in Vanuatu.

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Serge Loode is the program director of the Mediation and Conflict Resolution Program at the University of Queensland, Australia. He practices, teaches, and researches mediation, dialogue, and multiparty facilitation, focusing on building relationships across difference, managing uncertainty, and understanding complexity.