A Pedagogy for Peacebuilding: Practicing an Integrative Model for Conflict Analysis and Response

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Abstract: This article introduces an original teaching model—a «pedagogy for peacebuilding»—designed to help students and practitioners integrate conflict analysis in response interventions. The author discusses the importance of conflict analysis and compares alternative approaches, focused on theory vs. context vs. technocratic priorities. The article then explains the author's «integrated theories of change model» and weaves together seven elements: 1) context analysis and needs assessment, 2) overall goal of intervention, 3) theory of change, 4) specific objectives and activities, 5) beneficiaries, stakeholders and spoilers, 6) scope, resources and risks, and 7) indicators of success. In a fragmented world beset by diverse social, political, and familial conflicts, we need comprehensive tools (and hands-on training) to better understand and respond to conflict.

Resumen: El presente artículo presenta un modelo de enseñanza original—una «pedagogía para la consolidación de la paz»—disenado para ayudar a los estudiantes y profesionales a integrar el análisis de conflictos en sus intervenciones. El autor habla sobre la importancia del análisis de los conflictos y compara enfoques alternativos, centrándose en la teoría vs. el contexto vs. las prioridades tecnocráticas. El artículo explica entonces las «teorías del modelo de cambio integradas» del autor y entrelaza siete elementos: 1) el análisis del contexto y la evaluación de las necesidades, 2) el objetivo general de la intervención, 3) la teoría del cambio, 4) los objetivos y actividades específicas, 5) los beneficiarios, partes interesadas y saboteadores, 6) el alcance, recursos y riesgos, y 7) los indicadores de éxito. En un mundo fragmentado asediado por distintos conflictos sociales, políticos y familiares necesitamos herramientas abarcadoras (y formación práctica) para entender mejor el conflicto y poder responder a él.

Keywords: Conflict Analysis, Peacebuilding, Conflict Resolution, Theory of Change, Teaching.

Palabras clave: Análisis del conflicto, consolidación de la paz, resolución de conflictos, teoría del cambio, enseñanza.

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Introduction: Why Conflict Analysis?

«Mission Accomplished» reads a banner that waves behind US President George W. Bush in May 2003 as he stands atop the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and declares victory in Iraq. The seeds of ongoing conflict are underappreciated, and some dozen years later, Iraq’s citizenry remains plagued with violence and political upheaval.

In South Asia in the early 1970s, ethnic majority politicians celebrate a national name change from Ceylon to the Sinhalese Sri Lanka and curry popular support by shifting the language preference for higher education admission to Sinhalese (vs. the colonial English). The adverse response by ethnic minority Tamils is unforeseen, and eventually spawns three decades of armed resistance by separatist groups like the Tamil Tigers.¹

At a more general level, in families around the world – from Spain to South Africa, and from Singapore to Surinam – couples stressed by financial challenges react by blaming each other. In many cases, conflict escalation leads to divorce, distrust, and a division of assets, thus increasing the economic stressors that precipitated the family conflict.²

All too often in global conflicts – not to mention in local and family skirmishes – we lead with hasty, reactionary responses. We fail to critically analyze a conflict’s sources and guiding dynamics, much less with an eye to its future transformation or transformation.

A traditional definition of conflict highlights «struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources» (Coser, 1956). Popular culture highlights conflict’s negative impacts and the distressing outcomes of accompanying social and political violence. It also, though, offers a chance to catalyze needed change. According to Lederach (2003, p. 15) conflict is «a natural phenomenon that creates potential for constructive growth.»

The concept of Peacebuilding embraces Lederach’s «constructive growth» paradigm and bridges the twin priorities of institution-building and violence «risk reduction» (Barnett, Kim, O’Donnell y Sitea, 2007). Peacebuilders do not pursue absence of conflict, but rather its transformation. They seek to harness the lessons of conflict to establish an alternative, more peaceful future³. Of course, they must first begin by recognizing and analyzing these conflicts.

In the words of practitioners Engel and Korf (2005, p. 95), «Conflict analysis helps stakeholders to reorient their perspectives, which are often heavily influenced by emotions, misunderstandings, assumptions, suspicions and mistrust.»

Alternative Approaches to Conflict Analysis

Even professionals dedicated to understanding conflict dynamics are often limited by «silos» analytic approaches. There is a common tendency to fall into one of three frames in addressing and responding to conflict: a) theory-focused, b) context-focused, or c) technocratic planning-focused approaches. Each approach is characterized by relevant strengths and weaknesses.

Theory-focused

Social scientists (particularly in disciplines of economics, political science, psychology, and sociology) develop general conceptual frameworks to help explain conflict dynamics across diverse socio-political contexts (Azar 1990, Collier and Hoeffler 1998, Gurr 1993, King, Keohane, & Verba 1994, etc.). Theorists usually focus on selected explanatory variables, guided by common research values including parsimony, clarity, objectivity, and breadth of applicability. The primary weaknesses of a theory-focused approach mirror its greatest strengths: a lack of contextual specificity across cases and too often a lack of operational guidance on how to implement changes «on the ground».

As a case in point, a theory-focused response to youth-involved violence around the world prioritizes the development of conceptual categories to «label» relevant conflict actors. A «Child Soldier» archetype allows theorists to compare diverse conflicts across time and space: including Nicaragua in the 1980s, Sierra Leone in the 1990s, and many nations in the 2000s (Iraq, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Uganda, etc.). Especially in quantitative large-n studies, the priority is usually theoretical clarity and methodological rigor vs. case-based field knowledge.

Context-focused

A competing approach draws support from anthropologists and historians, who argue for case specificity and in-depth field research to describe and interpret conflict scenarios (Nordstrom and Robben 1995, Shepler 2014, etc.). There is an aversion to grand theory and large-n quantitative studies, focusing instead on contextual nuance and localized knowledge. A context-focused approach elicits rich field narratives and targeted program guidance; however, because lessons are difficult to export, the approach fails to resonate with many donors and policymakers focused on broader global conflict phenomena.

¹ See discussion of the Sri Lankan case in Richardson (2005), among other sources. ² Mediation is a useful tool to help manage family stressors (economic and otherwise), catalyzing critical analysis and the development of a «win-win» approach among rival parties, per Baruch Bush and Ganong Pope (2008). Miranzo de Mateo (2010), etc. ³ According to the Brahimi Report on Peacekeeping Reform, peacebuilding considers «the foundations of peace and... the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war (United Nations 2000, p. 3).»
Applying the idea of «Child Soldiers» and youth-involved violence, context-focused analysts highlight the differences across cases, carefully mapping distinct actors and precursors of conflict in Sierra Leone vs. Sri Lanka, for example. They are likely to problematize cross-case comparisons and criticize the emphasis on «best practices» and copycat programming in the field. They often decry how «conventional wisdom» and decontextualized solutions developed by experts in Washington, London, or Geneva are counterproductive to local conflict dynamics.

Technocratic planning-focused
A final approach to conflict analysis draws on applied disciplines of public affairs, operational research, and management, which share a common «process» orientation. This approach focuses on expert guidance to develop operational plans, systematize program implementation, and credibly track program results and impacts (March and Simon 1958, Perrin 2012, etc.). A technocratic planning approach is preferred by many donors and policymakers due to exportability and the focus on accountability. However, critics argue that the underlying theories for technocratic intervention lack nuance and that implementation is often blind to the local political context.

In the case of «Child Soldiers» and youth-involved violence, a technocratic planning approach would focus on operationalizing program interventions. Conflict analysis is not valued as an end in itself (not to confirm a given theory, per approach a, or to better understand conflict context, per approach b). Rather conflict analysis in approach c serves to clarify the technical parameters for response interventions. Planners focus on identifying relevant «best practices» from other contexts, clarifying procedures for operations, and determining metrics to evaluate success. In this technocratic approach, donor requirements often trump the voice and needs of local actors.

In recent years, it has been my privilege to engage and adapt these three approaches in targeted courses and trainings delivered across a range of organizations and participant profiles. I have developed trainings in the NGO sector for local field practitioners, taught specialized classes in elite universities for budding academic elites, and served in inter-governmental and defense sectors, teaching senior state officials to think critically about peacebuilding and «multidimensional» security. As I work with these diverse clients and students, I hear clamoring for holistic, integrated approaches that make sense and can make a difference in our network-driven and politically fragmented global environment.

Working with these sectors, I have attempted to integrate the best aspects of all three conflict analysis approaches. Students and training participants harness the richness of multidisciplinary theory to deepen critical analysis and recognize their own biases and «blind spots». At the same time, we recognize particularities of socio-political context and try to avoid flaws of «cookie-cutter» programming. Finally, students learn to use targeted tools of technocratic planning to structure more logical, integrated responses.

I draw from a wide range of sources and disciplines for my class inputs and, as much as possible, seek to make these resources sharable for comments and collaboration of the wider peacebuilding, development, and security cooperation communities.

A Classroom Model for Integrated Conflict Analysis and Response
In my classes and trainings, we usually begin with participative definitions of key terms. Students brainstorm their understanding of selected themes, and we engage scholarly debates about loaded concepts, including: conflict, peace, development, peacebuilding, security, participation, youth, etc. We discuss participants’ backgrounds and address their expectations for the class / training. This sets the tone for ongoing dialogue and allows participants to establish a baseline of shared knowledge, while also drawing insights from their previous professional and personal experiences.

Class activities vary according to participants’ academic and professional demands, but a common element I usually assign is a group project to analyze a conflict situation and develop strategic interventions to achieve greater «peace,» as defined by the group. We consider several strategic elements that are relevant for group analysis and discussion:

Context Analysis and Needs Assessment
• What is the socio-political and cultural context of the targeted conflict environment and who are the relevant stakeholders?
• What stage is this conflict within a broader conflict life cycle or continuum (details to be discussed below)?
• What is the key problem or opportunity your intervention will address?
• What is your role in the contemporary conflict (as a participant, mediator, etc.)?

Overall Goal of Intervention
• What long-term change do you want to achieve?
• How does this goal respond to actors’ context-based needs and interests?

Theory of Change
• What are your underlying assumptions of how change will happen in the conflict scenario? (Frame as a statement of «If...then...»)
Does your intervention rationale correspond to the context and goal?

**Specific Objectives and Activities**

- What specific short-term changes do you hope to achieve through your conflict interventions?
- What specific activities will you carry out to achieve the desired changes? (Consider activities with measurable outcomes)
- How are these activities linked to your Theory of Change?

**Beneficiaries, Stakeholders and Spoilers**

- Who are you targeting with your conflict interventions? Why and how?
- Which other actors are likely to be affected by your intervention and who could emerge as potential «spoilers»?
- How do you expect diverse stakeholders (targeted actors, spoilers, etc.) to respond to your intervention and how do you plan to reach them?
- How do you plan to involve youth in design and implementation?

**Scope, Resources and Risks**

- What is the scope of the proposed intervention and what specific resources (financial, human, etc.) will be required for its success?
- Who are potential partners (government agencies, NGOs, donors, etc.) and what value will they add to intervention success?
- What potential risks could impact intervention success, related staff, or actors involved with the program? (How do you plan to respond?)

**Indicators of Success (Monitoring and Evaluation)**

- How will you know that change has occurred due to your intervention?
- How do you plan to measure and monitor your intervention’s success?
- How well do these indicators align with your Theory of Change, overall goal, specific objectives, and program activities?
- How will you communicate the intervention’s progress to stakeholders?

**Learning and Applying an Integrated Theory of Change Approach**

Participants in my classes and trainings are challenged to address the seven elements listed above as part of what I call an «Integrated Theory of Change Approach» to conflict analysis and peacebuilding. Questions and answers for the seven topics catalyze deeper participant engagement of theory, context, and technocratic/planning frames:

1. Conflict Analysis and Needs Assessment requires students to engage the key components of any conflict, engaging its People, Problem, and Process (Figure 1).

   To address the People component, students are asked to visually map relevant actors in a given conflict, clarifying the nature of relationships among stakeholders: alliances, tensions and conflicts among primary, secondary, and tertiary parties (Figure 2). This helps students (and experienced conflict analysts) to better understand and track those actors likely to influence a conflict scenario.

   To diagnose the Problem (the second «P»), students employ the tree metaphor shown in Figure 3. They are asked to identify the relevant «effects» of the conflict (envisioned as leaves and branches of a tree), «core issues» at stake (understood as the tree’s trunk), and finally, «root causes» (which tend to be hidden, much like a tree’s root system).

   Working with this Tree diagram helps students (as well as experienced conflict analysts) to brainstorm and delineate the effects, core issues, and root causes. They distinguish cause-effect relationships and ultimately clarify the problem(s) they plan to target with response interventions.

   Finally, students learn to describe a conflict’s Process (the third «P») and trace its stages or phases over time. Conflict scenarios are dynamic and evolving, not static. Students practice using diverse analytic tools and metaphors that I introduce in class, including «fire» stages (Figure 4) and the conflict «life cycle» (Figure 5).

   If we envision conflict like a fire (Caritas 2002), it helps us understand process dynamics of conflict escalation (and de-escalation). Fires and conflicts first require the necessary materials: the kindling for «potential conflict» includes social inequalities and identity-based tensions, among other grievances. Fires then need a spark to begin to burn: conflict «confrontation» includes symbolic events to break the status quo, like a large protest, a controversial legal decision, or death of...
a key actor. The next stage – the bonfire – fans the flames of the initial spark and represents the apex of «crisis», in which the fire burns out of control. We usually see «crisis» escalation on multiple fronts: rivals’ tactics tend to escalate from persuasion to threats, the scope shifts from small to large, the issues from specific to general, the actors from few to many, and the overall goal from «doing well» to winning (adapted from Pruitt and Rubin 1986). Eventually, bonfires burn down or are contained and thus return to a state of coals. The coals of «potential conflict» can easily relight a spark («confrontation») and fan a larger bonfire («crisis»). Or there is hope for an alternative future, one which requires cooling the coals, removing flammable materials, and planting new trees for «re-generation»... in the case of conflict, focusing on prevention and a transformation of relevant structures and relationships.

A related process diagram in Figure 5 considers the «life cycles» of state-level conflicts (Lund, 1996, 2009). Students are challenged to trace the shifts over time across stages of durable, stable, and unstable peace as well as escalated situations of crisis and war.

As with the «Fire» model (in Figure 4), the Conflict Life-Cycle model (Figure 5) offers the opportunity to assess the conflict stage for a given moment as well as trace evolution over time. The timing is critical because selecting an in-

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**Figure 2. Relationships in Conflict (People): Parties & Stakeholders**

**Figure 3. Conflict is Like a Tree (Problem)**

**Figure 4. Conflict is Like a Fire (Process): 5 Stages of Conflict**
intervention such as «peacetime diplomacy» – appropriate for the «Stable Peace» stage – is unlikely to work at the height of war. Appropriate interventions require a clear understanding of the conflict process.

Significant attention is dedicated in my class and trainings to analyzing all three P’s of conflict (People, Problem, and Process). Students learn to apply diverse conceptual models (Figures 2-5) to particular conflict cases. They come to see the importance of Conflict Analysis and Needs Assessment to develop effective interventions: in sum, we cannot respond effectively to a conflict scenario that we do not take time to understand.

2. For the Overall Goal of Intervention, my students are asked to carefully consider and articulate the final outcome desired for a selected conflict scenario, with attention to potential sub-objectives and progress indicators. We compare different potential goals, particularly conflict settlement, resolution, and transformation frameworks, as discussed by Reimann (2004):

- Intervening from a «settlement» paradigm focuses on managing the conflict dynamics through official state measures (Track I), most often via peacekeeping coercion or elite-level negotiation. Ultimately the goal is to return to the status quo before crisis.
- If an intervention goal is framed from a «conflict resolu-
tion» frame, focus is usually on changing the relationships of the conflict actors. Non-state mediators and trainers often are incorporated (Track II), with emphasis on building trust among all actors.
- Finally, an intervention focused on conflict transformation is more radical in its goal: challenging status quo sociopolitical relationships and addressing the underlying structures of conflict. Examples of transformative interventions include «Multitrack» or citizen diplomacy (Diamond and McDonald 1996) and non-violent social movements that incorporate active resistance (Stephan and Chenoweth 2008).

Overall goals of conflict interventions vary widely and are largely dependent on the 3 P’s of conflict assessment (Figure 1): for example, the role of a mediating party («People»), diagnosis of core issues («Problems»), and current stage or phase of conflict («Process»). The goal developed by my students is expected to incorporate a realistic assessment of the conflict scenario and also provide a compelling vision for a desired future state.

3. Developing a comprehensive Theory of Change serves as a critical hinge between conflict analysis and effective response (accomplishing the overall goal of intervention). Students are challenged to consider the underlying assumptions and worldviews of their intervention strategy, with particular
If we create strong and fair economic opportunities, then there will be peace. (see Figure 6). According to Lederach (1997), the sector often interrup the sources of weapons & personnel needed for the war effort, then there will be peace. (Church and Rogers, 2006, p. 16). They are encouraged to incorporate multiple elements from the RPP list as they critically develop their own Theories of Change.

4. Articulating Specific Objectives and Activities helps to draw program planning «out of the clouds» and link strategic goals to operational implementation. In many real-world responses, there is a great disconnect between intervention goals and more specific program objectives and implemented activities. This is especially true when importing «best practices» from elsewhere, without sufficient consideration of the local context.

For example, if my Theory of Change to counter «Child Soldier» recruitment centers on grassroots mobilization and shifting public attitudes, then it would be a mistake to develop high level dialogues as one of my core activities (which actually reflects POLITICAL ELITES THEORY).

In class exercises, participants are asked to consider the alignment, specification, and measurability of proposed peacebuilding interventions. They must be clear about their expected outcomes and then carefully trace the links between their Overall Goal, their Theory of Change, and their Specific Objectives and Activities. Activities are expected to be measurable (qualitatively or quantitatively) to help evaluate program progress and to diagnose relevant challenges in implementation.

5. Steps of identifying Beneficiaries, Stakeholders and Spoilers are essential in the design of effective conflict responses, whether drawn up in my class or in the field.

First, we need to specify the sector(s) to target as beneficiaries of the intervention, weighing costs and benefits of working with elites vs. middle range vs. grassroots actors (see Figure 6). According to Lederach (1997), the sector often most critical to program success is the middle range leaders, due to their strategic links up and down in society.

Next, we need to analyze and try to predict how other sectors will be affected (directly and indirectly) by our interventions, assessing potential responses. The stakeholder map from earlier conflict assessments (Figure 2) is often very helpful in this process.

Finally, to prevent «blowback» on programmatic interventions, strategic peacebuilders should always plan for
likely spoilers – often among marginalized youth sectors. It is usually wise to develop preventative interventions with these sectors in mind. A host of security and peace scholars (Felbab-Brown 2009, McEvoy Levy 2001, Hamilton 2015, and Richardson 2005, etc.) warn of the unintended consequences when we ignore key «spoilers» and under-appreciate implicit roles they play in negotiations and programming.

6. It is important to plan for a conflict intervention’s Scope, Resources, and Risks. My class participants are asked to estimate the number of beneficiaries, size of the target area, breakdown of program budget, and timeline for implementation. They also draft a plan for program staffing and partnering, clarifying the expectations for staff expertise and considering potential strategic alliances to mitigate program costs. Outreach is an element often overlooked in peace programming: it is important to consider how to best reach and attract potential program staff, partners, and donors in a given conflict context.

Risk mitigation is another critical element: participants in my classes are tasked with writing down all that could go awry in the program, forecasting «worst case» scenarios, and then developing potential responses. When conducting this process in a diverse group, it is fascinating to see the number of blind spots that can be overcome through a simple brainstorming session.

7. Finally, developing quality Indicators of Success (Monitoring and Evaluation) is critical for the sustainability and accountability of peacebuilding interventions. Measures may be qualitative or quantitative, but tracking results is a priority for prospective donors as well as those participating in the program. This requires baseline context data and a clear assessment plan to delineate a program’s effects versus external influences.4

In class we discuss the importance of indicator alignment, that is: how well the selected indicators reflect the program’s objectives and activities. In the realm of monitoring and evaluation, we articulate a plan to gather relevant information, assess program impact, limit bias, and share results. Thinking clearly about indicators and assessment is very important in design and implementation phases of a program, not just during the post-evaluation.

My classes and trainings apply a nested, integrated approach to Theories of Change, linking each of the seven program planning elements discussed above: IF we apply and implement our integrated Theory of Change, THEN we should expect to achieve the Overall Program Goal.

Figure 6. Pyramid of Strategic Actors: Peacebuilding Interventions

More specifically:
- IF we are faced with a given Context Analysis and Needs Assessment THEN we should target particular Beneficiaries, Stakeholders, and Spoilers.
- IF we target particular Beneficiaries, Stakeholders and Spoilers, THEN we should carry out a given set of Activities (tied to Specific Objectives).
- IF we carry out a given set of Activities (tied to Specific Objectives), THEN we should meet specified Indicators of Success (reviewable through a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan... linked to Context Analysis and Needs Assessment).
- IF we effectively track and achieve the Indicators of Success, THEN we can ensure fulfillment of the Specific Objectives.
- IF we fulfill the Specific Objectives (tied to targeted intervention Activities), THEN we can make progress towards completing the Overall Program Goal.

Conclusion
What sets this analytic and teaching framework apart from most other program planning exercises is its participatory nature (often with actual stakeholders), its relative simplicity (for non-specialists), its contextual openness, and its attention to political spoiler risks. This «integrated theories of change» pedagogy and model can be applied flexibly across diverse profiles – both academic and organizational – and it provides the space for participants’ critical dialogue, contextual nuance, and operational problem solving.5

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In a fragmented world beset by a wide range of social, political, and familial conflicts, we need comprehensive tools (and hands-on training) to help us understand and respond to conflicts. We need more practice in building collaborative and participatory solutions. An integrative pedagogy for peacebuilding may help us on our way.

References