

Conflict Transformation and Human Rights Education

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Before the resource people presented, each group of participants portrayed visual representations of conflict.

Conflict as a tree

Conflict has roots, leaves and fruits. The roots represent the causes of conflict and the leaves and fruits are the results of conflict. When trying to resolve conflict we need to address the root causes of it.

Roots (causes of conflict)	Leaves and fruits (results of conflict)
Stereotypes Selfishness	War Violence Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons
Anger	Discrimination against Women and Minorities
Economic Interests	Corruption Terrorism
Misunderstanding	Impunity Oppression
Hatred	Win or Lose Situations Insecurity Loss of Human Dignity

Conflict as a sculpture

Often conflict arises in human rights education. The group presented a sculpture to illustrate each of the following ways in which conflict in education can arise:

- ◆ Cultural conflicts
- ◆ Lack of consensus
- ◆ Opposing conflict
- ◆ Religious conflict
- ◆ Differing needs

Conflicts should be resolved in win-win situations.

Catherine Morris

As a topic, conflict transformation is extremely relevant to human rights education. As human rights educators we are working for social change in all our societies, and as most of us know, social change rarely occurs without quite a lot of social conflict.

Characteristics of Human Rights Conflicts

- ◆ Public policy conflicts. Human rights conflicts are not private conflicts, they are public concerns. If human rights conflicts are private, we need to work to make them public. The public nature of human rights conflicts stems from the fact that these conflicts involve human rights or entitlements.
- ◆ Moral conflicts. Human rights conflicts are about how we should treat each other as human beings, what our entitlements should be, and what is right and wrong.
- ◆ Involves power imbalances. It is usually the most vulnerable people in society who are affected by human rights conflicts.
- ◆ Human rights conflicts are embedded in social contexts that involve structural and cultural issues. These conflicts always occur with social and cultural relationships.
- ◆ Human rights conflicts affect the well-being, health and productivity of individuals, children, women and men within their networks of families, communities, institutions and ecosystems.

Latent Conflicts

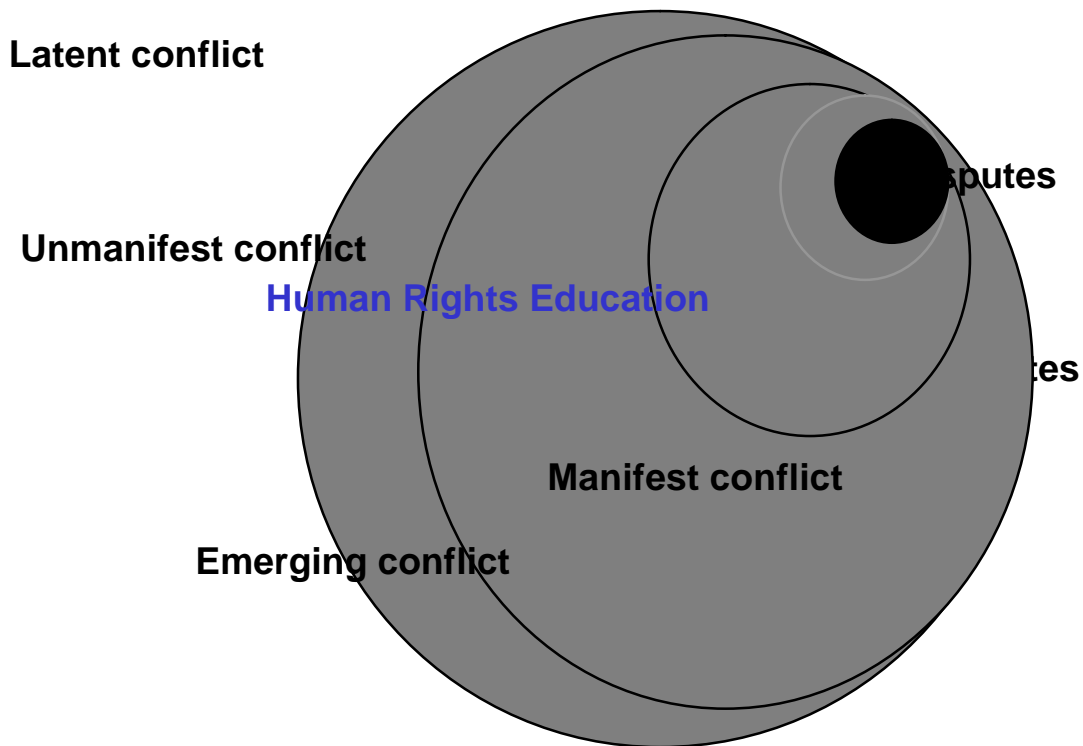
There are sources of conflict that exist in every society, and that under certain circumstances will produce manifest conflict.

Potential sources of conflict are:

- ◆ Facts about past actions and future predictions. For example, conflicts can arise over facts about economic, environmental or social consequences of policies or practices.
- ◆ Interests. Conflicts over interests typically involve conflicts about resource allocation or distribution. For example, conflicts over land management and conflicts between management and unions about wages.
- ◆ Cultural, religious and moral values. Differing values by themselves do not cause conflict, rather the way we interact with others with different values may cause conflict.

- ◆ Political, social or individual relationships. Often historically conflicted relationships are sources of conflict. For example, colonialism still affects many societies and remains a source of conflicts.
- ◆ Social, political and economic structures. For example, legal systems and global economic systems contain many sources of conflict.

How does Conflict Emerge? The Process of Naming, Blaming, Claiming and Taming



Only a small fraction of conflicts emerge as disputes. Research in the United States in the early 1980s showed that only 4% of latent human rights conflicts (discrimination) emerged into disputes. This is mostly because people who experience human rights violations seem reluctant to make claims.

Conflicts often emerge in the following way:

1. People have unperceived injurious experiences. For example there may be pollution in the water which is causing many people to become sick. People accept this situation and do not perceive this as an experience that is causing injury.

2. Human rights education takes place. A human rights educator points out that people are becoming sick because of pollution. This is called naming the problem. People then begin to perceive the situation as injurious.
3. Human rights education identifies the sources of the pollution and blames those who are responsible.
4. Coalitions and NGOs may grow up around the issue. Through these coalitions and NGOs people may start demanding that factories stop polluting the water. We may refer to this as framing requests and claiming remedies.
5. As a result of the requests and claiming remedies, some negotiations may occur.
6. In many cases the claims are denied. It is only when a claim is denied that a dispute occurs. Once disputes occur, stronger actions such as protest take place. Protests can sometimes result in violence.
7. Protest is often important to raise awareness about the injurious situation, and often gives people a greater degree of power. This shift in the balance of power leads to a situation of 'ripeness.' When power is more equally balanced between the polluters and the people, the government realizes that action must be taken to stop the violence and protest.
8. More negotiations may occur. At this stage, negotiations may be more constructive and may produce human rights dialogues, the development of human rights mechanisms, and the use of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. We may refer to these processes as 'taming' the conflicts. Ideally these processes will work towards transformation of conflicts to eliminate sources of human rights conflict.

Human Rights Conflict is Dynamic

- ◆ Human rights conflicts are never static, rather they are always dynamic. Conflict is alive and is always in a state of transformation.
- ◆ People's perceptions and interactions are constantly transforming the conflict situation.
- ◆ Human rights conflicts always affect and are affected by an ever changing internal and external context. This includes economic, social, political and environmental realities.

Human Rights and Dispute Creation

As human rights educators we are often involved in the creation of disputes. This is not because we want more disputes, but rather because the nature of our work calls attention to injuries and raises people's awareness that their injuries are related to social, political and economic injustices and inequities. As human rights educators, therefore, we will always be involved in dispute creation. The question is how we want to approach dispute creation.

Alternatives for Human Rights Interventions

The following responses to human rights conflicts are used by government agencies, companies or NGOs.

Type of Intervention	Risks and Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Suppression and repression – denial that a conflict exists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ May delay the manifestation of conflict ◆ May result in frustration and conflict escalation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Human rights education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Goal is to shift norms ◆ Creates expectations ◆ May manifest conflicts ◆ May not address source of conflicts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Create or reform institutions to address individual complaints. For example, create a Human Rights Commission or a legal system that will hear complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Allows for the creation of disputes ◆ Addresses some conflict sources ◆ Requires resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Institutional and structural transformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Aims to address all major sources of conflict ◆ Creates expectations ◆ Resistance to change ◆ Requires resources

Responsibilities of Human Rights Educators

Human rights educators need to be involved in the whole range of naming, blaming, claiming and taming.

- ◆ At the naming stage, human rights educators need to build capacity for victim support and conflict analysis.
- ◆ At the blaming stage, human rights educators need to build capacity for non-partisan research, investigation, reporting and conflict analysis.
- ◆ At the framing and claiming stages, human rights educators need to build capacity for advocacy, mediation, negotiation and politically astute conflict analysis.
- ◆ At the claiming and taming stages, human rights educators need to build capacity for effective, non-violent engagement in conflict.

Throughout the process of naming, blaming, claiming and taming we need to employ strategies that move us towards the goal of negotiation. If we do this, we will create a climate where we will be able to engage in effective human rights dialogue and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

Eugénie Aw

What do We Mean when We Talk about Conflict?

In Africa, for the past 50 years conflicts have been struggles for independence, provoked by misery, poverty and a lack of alternative perspectives. Armed conflict is essentially the consequence of a political climate that accepts structural adjustment programs and marginalization caused by globalization. It is also caused by African leaders who, in order to maintain their power and resist the force of democracy, use economic resources to finance armament instead of political and social development.

Global conflicts are due, in part, to real, material issues. For instance, the privatization of military activities insures the continued existence of armed conflict. Many conflicts are related to access to and exploitation of natural resources. Water is at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Often ethnic identities are manipulated and twisted to justify the existence of a conflict.

War is not only the prerogative of militaries. More and more civilians are becoming involved in armed conflict, and militias are often made up of very young civilians.

Women and Conflict

We tend to view women as passive and more prone to reconciliation. This is partly due to the roles occupied by men and women in society. In Africa, women are traditionally seen as the stabilizing element in society because they are responsible for physical and social reproduction through the institutions of marriage and education. In most traditional societies, women are married into their husbands' families. Women must therefore be stabilizing forces capable of reconciliation if they want to successfully create links with their new families. In times of conflict women are expected to support the group to which they belong. Women cannot remain outside conflict – they take part in conflict. When conflict is caused by discrimination and hatred of a different group, this group becomes dehumanized and animalized. This was the case in Rwanda and Côte d'Ivoire, where people were called cockroaches and snakes.

Women occupy particular roles during conflicts. When families and communities are exiled, women cannot give into their fear because they must prepare food for the journey, and reassure and care for the children. Women endure a specific kind of violence, which is exacerbated by the portrayal of women in society. Even in states that have signed international conventions relating to women's rights, women are subordinated through their clothing and the way they are treated. Violent conflict is an exacerbation of this manner of treating women. Victory in the enemy camp occurs by violating women's bodies because it is through women's bodies that social and ethnic reproduction occurs. This is why we talk about rape as a tool of war.

Post-Conflict Reconstruction

The Fight Against Impunity

Women have denounced the fact that newly reconstructed systems of justice are male-dominated. One example is the way in which the Arusha Tribunal dealt with the cases of female victims of rape during the Rwandan genocide. The women were considered to have played a part in, and therefore to bear some responsibility for, the rapes they were subjected to.

Reconstruction of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Today women are more conscious of human rights abuses. Women have denounced rape, and women understand that in order to gain respect for their rights, their position in society must evolve. Traditionally women have not been able to speak out, but thanks to advocacy efforts some progress has been made. Women are gaining rights to access their lands and rape has been classified as a war crime.

The raising of women's consciousness around the world is fundamental. Women are fighting for economic justice and for the recognition of the economic contributions they make in their homes and communities. Women are also becoming more vocal in the public sphere. Women are claiming their role not only as protectors of the lives of their communities, but also as protectors of whole nations.

One of the challenges that always comes up in the aftermath of a conflict is the fact that in order for things to change, power relations must be modified, and power must be shared more equitably. Unfortunately this only occurs sometimes. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, ministerial positions were distributed among the leaders of the war. If there are no changes within national institutions, governments will not be respected and will not represent and respect the interests of all citizens.

Women and Human Rights Education

How can human rights educators bridge the gap between human rights education and the reconstruction efforts of women at local levels? How can human rights educators work with women, learn about their experiences, and help them claim and assert their rights?

A West African religious chief said, "a law is good but it does not come to your home and talk to you". We must bring laws to communities in language that clearly states what the physical, psychological and economic needs are for adequate reconstruction. Women must use these laws to transform societies.

As human rights educators, we must reflect on our place in conflict, on how to share our knowledge, and above all on how to accept that we must learn from others without whom we would know nothing.

Question and Answer Period

The following themes were raised during the question and answer period:

How can human rights educators respond to conflict situations in which the victims are blamed for the conflict?

Prevention is the key to addressing violence that occurs during the claiming stage, when a conflict becomes manifest. Human rights educators need to train people in negotiation and mediation skills. Employing these skills can be a tool to prevent this kind of victim-blaming. Peace education and non-violence education in schools are other ways in which human rights educators can work towards conflict prevention and conflict transformation.

As human beings we tend not to believe that non-violence can be effective. We need to study and learn from non-violent movements and strategies that have successfully overcome huge, global injustices. We need to build cultures that understand the power of non-violence strategies and that understand how to employ non-violent strategies effectively.