

# *education in and for conflict*




*Paco Cascón Soriano*

*Member of the Seminario de Educación para la Paz  
[Seminar on Education for Peace] of the Asociación  
Pro-Derechos Humanos [Human Rights Association]*

Over the last few years, education for peace (EP) has increasingly been focusing on the theme of education in and for non-violent conflict resolution. There are various reasons for this. On the one hand, other sectors and NGOs have been doing important work on some of the corollaries to this theme (co-education, education for development, ecology, etc.). On the other hand, the theme itself is one of the more specific ones that give concrete value to EP, and one from which ground-breaking contributions may be expected because of its focus on non-violence. Furthermore, it is a departure from the more inner-directed lines of thought in EP, which consider peace a condition of contentment with oneself, an absence of war or conflict.

Even though, latterly, outright violence is being rejected as a model, alternative ways of dealing with conflict are unavailable. As a result, in spite of this rejection, violence is still the way conflicts are being dealt with, except where - still a much more common occurrence - other, equally negative attitudes are adopted, such as submission or evasion.

EP is now going to throw out a challenge: to provide education in and for conflict. Concretely, this challenge will be taken up in such important areas as:



-  taking a positive view of conflict. Seeing it as a way of transforming society and human relations and making them fairer. Discovering that conflict is an educational opportunity, an opportunity to learn to forge another type of relationship, a way of preparing ourselves for life, learning to assert and enforce our rights in a non-violent manner.
-  learning to analyse conflicts and discovering their complexity. Giving guidelines to teaching staff, parents and students alike so that they have the tools to help them confront and resolve the conflicts that arise in our daily lives.
-  finding solutions that will enable us to confront conflict without violence, without destroying one of the parties, and give us the strength we need to ensure that all of us win and can satisfy our needs. Developing non-violent aggressiveness, assertiveness, and discovering the basis of our own power and others': these are just a few of the avenues to be explored.


Educating for conflict means learning to analyse and resolve conflicts both at the micro level (interpersonal conflicts in our personal surroundings: classroom, home, neighbourhood, etc.) and at the macro level (social and international conflicts, among others).


In the new century, learning to resolve conflicts in a just and non-violent way is a big challenge, and one that educators for peace cannot shirk, nor would we wish to.

## A positive view of conflict

There is a very widespread idea that conflict is something negative, and therefore something to be avoided. This idea is probably based on a number of considerations:


-  we think of the way in which we have usually seen conflict being confronted or "resolved": violence, annihilation or destruction of one of the parties to the conflict rather than a fair and mutually satisfactory outcome. From the very earliest age, the models that we have seen - children's television programmes, games, films and stories - all point in that same direction.
-  everyone knows that confronting a conflict means investing a lot of energy and time and undergoing an experience that is not particularly pleasant.


 most of us (including educators) feel that we have not been educated to confront conflicts in a positive way and that we therefore lack the tools and resources to do so. In the curricula of education science faculties, such topics as conflict resolution are nowhere to be seen.


 we have a great resistance to change. Even when things are not going well and we can see it clearly, very often we prefer to let things ride rather than accepting the risk that would be involved in a process of transformation.

Nonetheless, conflict is **inseparable** from human relations. We interact with other persons, with whom we are bound to have differences of opinion and whose interests and needs will often be opposed to our own. Also, conflict is **inescapable**, and however tightly we close our eyes to it or avoid it, its own dynamic will continue. It is a living thing that will run its course even though we flee from it, becoming ever bigger and more unmanageable.

However, we see conflict as **positive**. Many reasons could be given for this, but we shall emphasize only the following:

 diversity and difference are valuable in themselves. We live in one single world but one in which plurality and diversity, in the context of cooperation or solidarity, are a source of growth and mutual enrichment. Living this diversity implies differences of opinion, disputes and conflicts.

 without coming into conflict with unjust structures and/or the people that uphold them, society cannot advance and adopt new paradigms. In other words, conflict is the main lever of social change, something that we, as educators for peace, should consider to be one of our basic objectives.

 conflict is an opportunity to learn. If conflict is something inherent in human relations, learning to act upon conflict has to be equally fundamental. If, instead of avoiding conflict or struggling against it, we talked about it openly with the children, we could turn conflict into an opportunity for them to learn how to analyse and confront it. Resolving conflict on their own will not only cause them to take pleasure in agreement, it will give them a greater capacity to resolve other conflicts in the future.

The challenge facing us will be how to learn to confront and resolve conflicts in a constructive, non-violent way. This means understanding what conflict is and knowing all its aspects, as well as how to develop

attitudes and strategies to resolve it. By “resolving” conflicts, rather than simply managing them, we mean the process by which we deal with them and even arrive at an understanding and resolution of their underlying causes. However, the resolution of one conflict does not mean that no more will arise. As long as we are alive, interacting and growing, conflicts will keep on cropping up and will give us opportunities to advance or fall back, depending on how we confront and resolve them.

For that reason, we as educators for peace see conflict as something positive and inescapable that must be the centre of our work. Therefore, we shall work with the conflicts that daily arise closest to us (interpersonal, intergroup, etc.) in what we call microanalysis, and conflicts of greater scope (social, sectarian, international) in what we shall call macroanalysis. With smaller children, we shall confine ourselves mainly to the sphere of microanalysis, i.e. interpersonal relations, while in higher grades, without neglecting this aspect, we shall increasingly deal with social and international conflicts.

The main objective is not to have teachers learn to resolve students’ conflicts, but to work with them so that they can learn to resolve their conflicts on their own, making such resolution not only a goal in itself, but also a learning experience for other situations that they will encounter in daily life.

### **Conflict vs. violence**

There is a tendency to confuse or consider synonymous the terms conflict and violence. Thus, any expression of violence is thought of as conflict, while the absence of violence is considered a conflict-free situation or even peace. From our point of view, however, a situation is defined as conflictual not on the basis of its outward appearance, but according to its content and its deeper causes.

The first basic idea is that not every dispute or difference of opinion implies conflict. These are typical situations of daily life in which there is some contention between parties but no basically antagonistic interests or needs. In almost every case, resolving them is a matter of establishing levels of connection and effective channels of communication that will allow a consensus or compromise to be reached.

We shall speak of conflict in those situations involving a dispute or difference of opinion in which there is a clash of (tangible) interests, needs and/or values. We shall define such a clash of interests as a **problem**: satisfying one party's needs prevents the other party's from being met.

On the basis of this definition, we can differentiate two situations that may be confused with real conflict: pseudo-conflicts and latent conflicts.

With **pseudo-conflicts**, although there may be the appearance of a quarrel, there is not really a problem as previously defined, even though the parties involved may believe so. Almost always, what we are dealing with is distrust, misunderstanding or a breakdown in communication. The way to tackle these pseudo-conflicts is therefore to improve trust and communication so that the parties can discover that they really have no problem and that both can satisfy their needs and interests.

**Latent conflicts** generally do not have the character of a quarrel, since one or both parties fail to perceive any contradiction between their interests, needs or values or are unable to confront that contradiction (through powerlessness, perhaps, or unawareness), although it does exist. Both in daily life and in the educational sphere, we very commonly encounter situations where conflicts do exist but are not dealt with, not confronted or not even recognized as such so long as they have not come to a head and no quarrel or violence has occurred. For that reason, they will continue to grow till they do blow up, so that we get into the habit of not dealing with conflicts until the worst possible time, when they have already become enormous, unmanageable and have destroyed relationships, persons, etc.

### Conflict as a process

Conflict is not a single occurrence but a process. Its origin lies in **needs** (economic, ideological or biological): this is the first phase. When these needs are satisfied, either because there is no contradiction between them or because we have achieved sufficiently cooperative or synergetic relationships, what we have defined as a problem does not exist.

When one party's needs do clash with another's, when the needs become antagonistic, the problem arises. This is the second phase. By not

confronting or resolving the problem, we open the door to the dynamic of conflict. Other elements then get mixed in: mistrust, lack of communication, fears, misunderstandings etc. Sooner or later, all of this will burst out in what we call the crisis - the third phase - which generally takes the form of violence and is what many people identify as conflict. One should not wait until this phase to confront conflict. In fact, this is the worst point at which to resolve conflicts in a creative and non-violent manner; still less is it the right time to try and learn to do so. This is the very moment at which none of the conditions for a positive resolution of the conflict exists: time, tranquillity, detachment... This is the moment when the conflict has become biggest and most unmanageable: it blows up in our face and we have to deal with it immediately. As a result, we don't think, we don't analyse what is happening or why, we don't consider what resources we may have or look for alternative solutions, but only react - almost always in the manner we have been used to, although it is a negative one and we don't like it. Even afterwards, we don't necessarily think about what has happened.

If we keep on waiting for conflicts to reach the crisis stage before we begin to resolve them, it will be difficult to reach a true solution. Just as conflict is a process that may take some time to develop, its resolution, as previously defined, must also be seen as a process and not one discrete action that will do away with all the problems. It is a process that we can and must initiate as soon as possible so that when conflict arises, we shall be already trained and will have prepared and assimilated more positive responses.


### Attitudes to conflict

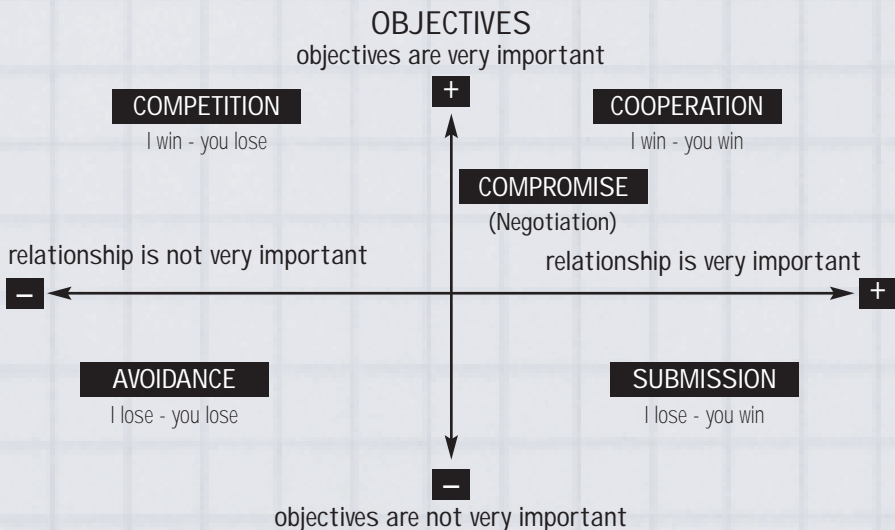
There are five main attitudes to conflict. Before we get to the stage of resolving conflicts, it would be valuable to discover what our own attitudes and others' may be. When we analyse our own attitudes, we often discover with surprise that our attitude to conflicts is avoidance or accommodation and that is the reason why our conflicts are never resolved.





**competition (I win/you lose):** a situation in which getting what I want, asserting my objectives and goals, is the most important thing, even


though in doing so I have to tread on someone else's toes. The relationship is unimportant. In the competition model, when it is taken to its ultimate expression, the important thing is for me to win, and the easiest way to do that is to make sure the other person loses. Sometimes this "loss" does not mean only that the other person fails to achieve his or her objectives, but that the person is eliminated or destroyed (death, annihilation). In the educational field, we seek to eliminate the other party not through death but through exclusion, discrimination, contempt, expulsion, etc.

 **submission (I lose/you win):** so long as I do not confront the other party, I do not assert or advance my own objectives. This model is as widespread as competition or more so, in spite of what we may think. Often we confuse respect with good manners, with not asserting our rights because that could provoke tension or discomfort. We keep on bearing up until we can no longer do so, then destroy ourselves or destroy the other party.



 **avoidance (I lose/you lose):** neither the objectives nor the relationship are catered for and both are lost. We do not confront conflict, we “stick our heads in the sand” out of fear or because we believe that the conflict cannot be resolved through our unaided efforts. However, as we said earlier, conflict has its own dynamic and once it has begun it never stops on its own.

 **cooperation (I win/you win):** in this model, achieving our own objectives is very important, but the relationship is, too. The model has a lot to do with something that is inherent in non-violent philosophy: the end and the means have to be consistent. This is the model towards which we try to direct the educational process, one in which only I win/you win solutions are acceptable, so that everyone wins. Cooperation is not accommodation, nor does it mean giving up what we see as fundamental. It is possible to negotiate without giving in completely, and in fact we must learn **not** to yield on fundamental points. It is something quite different to yield on less important points.

 **negotiation:** to reach full cooperation is very difficult, and for that reason another model is usually proposed in which both parties try to win on the most important points, though they cannot achieve outright victory. Some people, when they speak of negotiation, are actually thinking about a mere tactic in the competition model. If either of the two parties leaves the table with a feeling that they have not won their main points, we are not in the negotiation model but the competition or accommodation model.

It cannot be said that any of these attitudes is ever seen in a pure and unalloyed form in any situation or person. Nor is it our intention to assert that there are some attitudes that are good and others that are bad for every situation. But the diagram we propose does give some hints. In circumstances where what is at stake is not of great importance to us, or the person we are dealing with is someone we barely know or have hardly any relationship with, perhaps the best option is something that in theory we consider very negative, that is, avoiding the conflict. It should be recalled that a basic principle of almost everything is “economy”. Our energy is finite and embarking on a conflict means investing a lot of energy. Therefore, we need to consider which conflicts are worth the trouble.



However, the diagram teaches another very important lesson, namely, that **the more important the objectives and the relationship, the more important it is to learn to cooperate.** That being so, the I lose/you win and I win/you lose models will **not** work in the short and medium term and will lead us to a situation in which all of us lose. Let us suppose, for example, that a university council puts a decision to a vote, which is narrowly won or lost. The group that loses the vote will not go away particularly happy. If this happens often, what will normally occur is that the group that lost will do one of two things, each worse than the other: either they will throw up obstacles so that what has been decided never comes about or they will begin to shirk their responsibilities and duties at the Centre.

Learning cooperation is an important topic to work with, particularly now, since on every side we have been hearing the message of competitiveness (which does not mean being a competitor) and that message only. It implies providing alternatives at all levels: learning methodology, games and sports, incentives, etc.

In any conflict, somehow, paradoxically, the parties do cooperate, but generally in their own destruction. What needs to be learned is that what may seem to be the best individual strategy may be the worst collective one; that there is no reason for the person with whom we are in conflict to be our enemy; and that the best alternative may be not to compete with him or her, but for the parties to cooperate to resolve the conflict in the manner most satisfactory to both. The great challenge is to begin to teach the parties that cooperation is better, not only from an ethical point of view, but also from the standpoint of efficiency.

### Ways of acting

Education for conflict implies looking for spaces in which teachers and students alike can prepare and develop tools that will enable them to deal with and resolve conflicts with greater creativity and satisfaction.

Our idea is to work with the very conflicts that arise within the educational environment. We do not want to wait for them to come into the open, but rather work with them in their first stages or even before they arise, so that we can learn to analyse them in a less tense atmosphere, in a leisurely, dispassionate manner, and develop creative

ideas for solving conflicts that will enable us to deal with them better when they do arise. One of the problems we encounter when a conflict arises is that we respond reflexively (action/reaction) and lack points of reference on how to confront the conflict in a non-violent manner. If we are looking for spaces within which we can work with conflict and develop ideas for its non-violent resolution, it would be better, when conflict does arise, for these ideas to occur to us as spontaneously as violent or destructive impulses now do. The main task of education for conflict will be learning to step back, to analyse the conflict and to respond in a constructive way.

There are many possible ways to do this. We may set aside a few hours in our own class, during tutorial duties, in the playground or within a specific conflict resolution and mediation programme or credit at the Centre, in such a way as to give full meaning to social life committees (sometimes we refer to the discipline committee as the social life committee, but we do not change its duties or proposals).

MEDIATION  
•  
ANALYSIS  
AND  
NEGOTIATION  
•  
PROVENTION

↑  
NON-VIOLENT ACTION

We who are involved in education for peace work with conflict mainly at three consecutive levels and in a simultaneous parallel process: prevention, negotiation, mediation and non-violent action. With smaller children, almost the whole programme time will be spent at the prevention level, while in higher grades, work at the other two levels will start. With prevention and negotiation, the persons involved in the conflict will try to resolve it by




themselves. In mediation, a third party will help with the process (see discussion below). Whatever the case, education for peace does not exclude the use of the methods of non-violent action even in situations where a serious power imbalance exists. We try to learn to use non-violent force and aggressiveness: in other words, a way of asserting yourself and fighting for your rights, while still respecting your opponent.

It is customary to speak of “conflict prevention” when talking about the need to act before the situation comes to a head (crisis) and a conflict becomes overt. However, prevention is a term that has negative connotations: not facing up to the conflict, avoiding it, not analysing it, not letting everything that is inside come out, not getting down to its root causes. We have said that we believe conflict is inseparable from human interaction, inescapable and even positive in that it affords an opportunity for growth. For these reasons, we cannot and will not speak of conflict prevention. We shall use the term when speaking of war or armed conflict or any other type of destructive consequences. That is, we shall continue to speak of prevention of armed conflict, for instance.

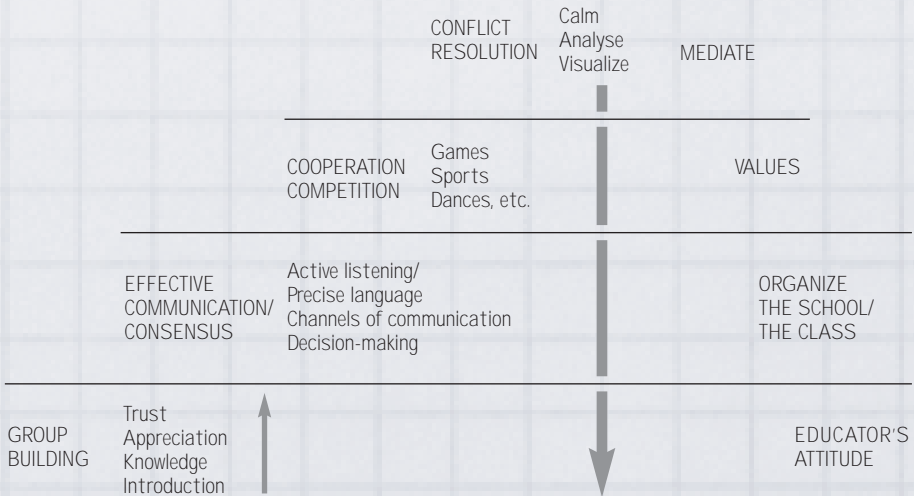


## Provention

However, for all of the reasons given above, we shall speak of **provention** (following J. Burton) as the process of pre-crisis intervention that leads us to:

-  an appropriate explanation of the conflict, including its human dimension;
-  an awareness of the structural changes necessary to eliminate its causes;
-  the promotion of conditions that can create a proper climate and foster cooperative relations that will diminish the risk of new outbreaks of conflict, as people learn to deal with and resolve contradictions before they have a chance to change into antagonism.

Thus, provention at the educational level will mean intervening in the conflict when it is at its very earliest stages, without waiting for it to develop into a crisis. What is needed is to provide a set of skills and strategies that will enable us to better deal with conflict. Essentially, we need to set in motion a process that will lay the groundwork for dealing with any dispute or difference of opinion as it arises. We speak of a process because the development of each of these abilities builds upon the one before it and because it is essential to work in a planned, systematic way if we want the skills to be effective.



The above illustration shows, on the steps to the left, the topics to be worked through with students, and on the right the implications these have for teaching staff.

The abilities to work on are as follows:




**group-building in an environment of appreciation and trust:** every person has two very basic human needs: the feeling of belonging to a group and identity. We want to feel that we are part of a group and that we are accepted and valued just as we are. Rejection or non-integration is one of the primordial sources of conflict.

We need to put into practice techniques and games that will give us an insight into our own nature and help us integrate into an environment of appreciation and trust. To that end, we shall be using introduction and knowledge games whose object is to form groups by seeking affinities and cohesion.

Dynamic processes will also be generated to enable us to create a climate of **trust** in ourselves and others to enable us to confront conflicts without fear, putting our cards on the table without concealment and facing facts, speaking directly to the people with whom we have problems. We always work on trust hand in hand with responsibility. Trust without responsibility is ingenuousness, a very negative trait.

This part also includes work on **self-esteem** and on **appreciating others**, to develop a self-image and help others develop their own, accentuating the positive rather than the negative. A person's self-esteem is initially formed from the image he or she sees reflected from others. As educators, we have a great responsibility in our hands in that we can bring our students to believe in themselves or not, to develop a positive self-image or not. We shall be working not only with the values each of us has as an individual, but also with our values as members of a culture (our **identity**).

Seeking an opportunity for group building at the beginning of the course, rather than leaving it to chance, is a good form of prevention. We can do this in the class group only, or we can devote a few days to activities throughout the Centre. It's not a bad idea, either, to do something similar in our own council, where new arrivals also often have difficulty becoming integrated.

 **fostering communication:** effective communication is fundamental to the process of learning to resolve conflicts in a non-violent way, since dialogue is one of the principal tools in that process. We need to make use of games and dynamic processes that enable us to develop **effective communication**, that really teach us to engage in dialogue and listen to one another actively and empathetically.


We shall be working with the various **communication channels** and learning about their importance. On the one hand, we have the verbal channel. It is important to observe that, even though this is the most commonly used and most precise channel for transmitting messages, it may create a lot of confusion and misunderstanding. We need to learn to establish a **common code**, not taking anything for granted but verifying that we really are hearing one another and speaking of the same things and/or understanding the words we use in the same way. All this will be particularly relevant in conflict situations.


In spite of the importance of verbal communication, we must not forget the non-verbal channels. Also, communication is more than the simple transmission of information (the message), as there is also the relational aspect, which will cause a given message to be interpreted in many different ways. Through non-verbal channels, we convey emotions and feelings that are very often underlying the positions or stances we take in

the event of a conflict. It is essential to learn that there is a congruency between the two aspects of communication (informational and relational) and between what is conveyed by one channel or the other. If words say one thing while non-verbal channels are saying another, credibility and trust are lost. The message does not get through, and conflict and confusion are aggravated.

It is also very important to work on **active listening**. The point is not just to listen but to make the other person feel that what they are saying is important to me and is being heard. This can be done both verbally (paraphrasing in an empathetic way, verifying what is said, asking clarifying questions, etc.) and non-verbally, through eye contact, body language, etc.

Working on aspects of communication involves many other things: learning to take the floor and make good use of it, to express oneself, to respect the other person's right to speak, and to allow everyone an equal right to speak.

 **consensus decision-making:** everything we have said up to now has to be put into practice by learning to make decisions on the basis of consensus, in an egalitarian, participatory and non-sexist way. We have to get beyond head counts and majorities and learn to make decisions in such a way that everyone has had the opportunity to express their point of view and feels that their opinion has been taken into account in the final decision. In order to learn this, we need to put it into practice, and that involves giving up some of our power or responsibility and allowing room for decisions to be made. Here again, the idea of process is important. We shall begin by giving students an opportunity to make decisions on simple matters, then gradually offering them the opportunity to decide on things of increasingly greater importance. An effort should be made to make use of or stimulate class assemblies, providing a forum for people to speak and to implement everything we have mentioned.

 **working on cooperation:** in this part, we establish a kind of cooperative relationship that teaches us to deal together with conflicts, by inquiring into everyone's perceptions and using everyone's strengths to reach the common objective. These techniques will enable us to discover and

assimilate the knowledge that difference is valuable and the source of mutual enrichment. They also teach us to discover the other party's values, and bring us to see the other as someone with whom we can cooperate, learn and teach, and not as an enemy to be eliminated because he or she has a way of being or thinking that is different from our own and may ultimately prevent us from getting what we want. We shall also develop cooperative games, look for cooperative ways of working and learning, find alternatives to competitive sports and games, and come up with educational stimuli other than contests and prizes.

Working on prevention does not, however, mean that there will not be some conflicts, perhaps many, that persist. For that reason, the second step is important: in it, we learn to analyse, negotiate and seek creative solutions that are mutually satisfactory and will enable students to learn to resolve conflicts on their own.



## Analysis and negotiation

**Separating the person from the process and the problem:** the first job to be done is learning - both at the time conflicts are analysed and when dealing with them - to separate and treat differently the three aspects of any conflict: the **people** involved, the **process** (the way of dealing with it) and the problem or **problems** (the opposing needs or interests in the dispute).

Normally, we do not separate these three aspects, but take a harder or softer approach to all three, depending whether our attitude to conflict is a competitive or a submissive one. If we choose to be conciliating, we are normally sensitive to the persons involved, but a little lax when it comes to defending our interests or dealing with the problem itself. Conversely, if we decide to compete or attack, we strongly defend our rights, but we are also harsh with the person with whom we disagree.

We personalize conflicts by attacking the person rather than our joint problem, which then leads to an escalation of personal attacks in which sometimes the problem that generated the conflict can itself be forgotten and left aside while we spend all our time and energy attacking the other party rather than resolving the problem. It is always the other person who has the problem and for that reason, it's a small step to thinking that it is not that the other person has a problem but that he or she is the problem. Thus we very often hear references to unruly students, quarrelsome co-workers, discipline problems, instead of social or relationship problems.


We have to separate the three aspects, trying to be sensitive to persons with whom we have problems, equitable and participatory in the process and the way of dealing with it, and firm with the problem, as we assert our needs.





Below are some of the things that need to be worked on in each of these three aspects:


## PERSONS

The purpose here is to learn to see people as parties with whom we have problems and with whom we can cooperate to resolve them. In this part, we shall mainly be working on:

 **perceptions:** in every conflict, there are as many perceptions or points of view as persons involved. We need to bring the parties to learn both to express their own perceptions and to listen to and take an interest in what the other party has to say. There are various tools for that: writing, narrating or presenting different versions of stories or tales, role-playing, working with history books and newspapers, etc.

 recognizing **intense emotion:** when a conflict arises, many emotions and feelings are generated. It is very important to recognize them and to accept our anger. We need to look for ways of expressing this anger without subjecting the other party to it in a destructive way. It is also important to recognize the anger and realize that until it is worked out, the time is not right to confront a conflict.

 **image:** in any conflict, the image or prestige of the persons opposed are at stake. Not taking this into account either in the analysis phase or when dealing with conflict may cause one or other of the parties not to accept any solution, however good it may be. The parties have to feel that their image has not been damaged.


 **power:** in every human relationship, there can be a power imbalance. In conflict, too, such imbalances are present and, when they are very important, the conflict is practically impossible to resolve. In order to resolve it, you must first rebalance the power relationship. For that purpose, we need to teach the underdog to take power (empowerment) and learn to disempower the person in a position of authority (disobedience).

On the one hand, we attempt to work on self-confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness (the capacity to assert our own ideas and positions) and, especially, **empowerment**, which is understood to be the process by which we discover the basis of our power and influence. Our rights or needs in any conflict cannot be asserted if we do not know how to restore balance in the power relationship. For that reason, not teaching this would be tantamount to inculcating submission and conformity.


On the other hand, it is also important to discover the nature of the power base of the person who is on top in any given situation. Often, that person's power is based on the submission and cooperation of the person in a position of inferiority, on their obedience. "Educating for peace and for conflict" will therefore mean **educating for disobedience**. These are words that strike fear, particularly, in the hearts of those in a position of authority. However, authority is not what is in danger, but only authoritarianism - which is almost always precisely the opposite. Blind disobedience is not what we are looking for, but rather an awareness of what we are doing and why we are doing it, so that we can refuse, giving reasons why we should not proceed in that way, proposing alternatives, and accepting the responsibilities and consequences of disobedience. It is a matter of educating for responsibility. In the words of Martin Luther King, we need to teach that cooperating with what is good needs to be as obvious as not cooperating with what is bad.

## PROCESS

Here, the purpose is to establish processes, ways of dealing with conflict that allow both parties to express themselves and to find solutions that both can accept. For that purpose, it is important to learn to:

 **control the destructive dynamics of communication:** accusations, insults, generalizations, digging up the past, putting words in the other's mouth ... what is needed here is to go from the "you" message, in which we always speak of the other person, normally in a negative way, to the "I" message. The person one knows best is oneself. We speak in the first person, expressing our feelings, giving precise information on what has affected us, how and why. This, which seems easy, really is not, and involves

a learning process in which we generally begin with exercises or communicate in writing. (See activity booklet.)

 **analyse the processes followed** up to the present in order to learn both from the successes and from the mistakes that have been made. We then draw an analytical map of the conflict: who began it, who participated, what is their power and their influence, how is it wielded, what solutions have been tried ... in sum, we contextualize the conflict with regard to both its past and its present and so gain a lot of information to enable us to deal with it.

### A brief sketch of a conflict

#### Persons:


- Who is involved in the conflict and how?
- What is the basis of their power and/or influence?
- What perception do they have of the conflict and how does it affect them?

#### Process:

- Analyse the process followed up to the present: what touched off the conflict, what factors aggravated it, what moderating influences may there have been, what solutions have been tried and with what result?
- How efficiently is communication proceeding? Distortions: stereotypes, rumours, misinformation, etc.

#### Problem:

- Describe the core of the conflict. What are the interests and needs that lie behind the position upheld by each party (the one it favours)? Basic human needs that must be taken into account to satisfy everyone. Differences in values.
- List problems to be solved.
- Analyse existing resources that could be used: people that could be helpful (mediators), interests and needs that the parties have in common or which are at least not mutually exclusive, concessions they are prepared to make.

 **establish consensual processes** to enable all parties to express themselves, to assert their needs and satisfy them. **Agree on rules for how to deal with conflicts:** what we will do, what we will not do. Setting out standards on how we will deal with conflicts is fundamental, but it is important to develop them as a group. In that way, they will be consented to by the whole group and it will be easier to comply with or enforce them.

## PROBLEM(S)

In this part, we learn to distinguish between stances or positions and interests or needs. Our stance or position is our preferred solution to the problem. However, our needs or interests are the origin, the root of the conflict. We need to focus on these needs, learn to recognize them, prioritize them and express them, and not just by taking a stance. We need to move from the typical negotiation, based on a stance, to a type of negotiation that is based on needs. This will open up the scope of possible solutions, since a negotiating stance restricts us to two solutions only, namely, the ones preferred by each side, which are also normally most opposed one to the other and have nothing in common. If we focus on needs, the range of solutions is broader; we shall be focusing on the core of the conflict and may find that we have interests or needs in common in addition to those that are opposed. These common interests or needs may be the basis for an agreement and may generate optimism as we seek solutions.

The main difficulty is that we want to go directly to the solution to the problem without considering its roots or analysing how it came about. To draw a medical parallel, we first need to examine the patient before we can make a diagnosis, and the prescription comes last of all.

The final objective is to succeed in finding what problem or problems lie at the heart of the conflict and therefore need to be resolved.

## Seeking solutions

In this part, the most important topic is the development of educational processes that stimulate creativity and imagination in seeking solutions




which satisfy both parties' needs or interests. For this purpose, two things are important: one is to look at the resources we have available to us, which may afford a broader range of solutions; the second is to separate the solution-generating phase from the agreement phase.



The solution-generating phase is not the time for discussing or imposing limits. The idea is to come up with as many potential solutions as possible, however unworkable they may seem. A crazy and unworkable idea may suggest another brilliant and entirely feasible one.

At the agreement phase, we do need to make an effort to take stock of the proposals that have been made, to put them in concrete form, to see which of them are feasible and how they could be carried out, and finally to settle on those that satisfy both parties. In this phase, concrete agreements need to be arrived at, with concrete responsibilities and verification mechanisms.

## Methodology

The main tool used to work on all of the aspects mentioned above is visualization techniques (role-play, simulation games, drama, puppets, etc.), which, as the name indicates, are techniques that enable us to visualize the conflict(s) and which have particular characteristics:

-  they take into account not just the rational aspect of things, but also the emotional side: feelings are very often in a conflict situation the most important factor when registering a perception or a position;
-  they enable us to "step back" and to see the various perceptions in a more dispassionate way;
-  they allow us to put ourselves in the other persons' place and share their perceptions, to understand them and have a better idea of the conflict, and to develop a certain empathy that will give us a better sense of what the other person is feeling and enable us to seek solutions satisfactory to both parties;

-  it will help us to analyse the conflicts, beyond their outside appearance, examining their underlying causes or roots, discovering unsatisfied needs or interests on which they are based;
-  it will enable us, in a sort of small lab, to try out solutions and make the greatest possible use of the potential of the group/class in which we are working in terms of helping us to analyse conflicts and seek solutions to them. Developing imagination and breaking the typical blockage whereby we limit ourselves to thinking that there is one single solution (normally the most conventional one), even though it may be one we have tried repeatedly with negative results.

This methodology corresponds to what we, in education for peace, call the **socio-affective focus**. Consistent with the values we wish to convey it emphasizes not just content, but also attitudes and values. It is a playful, participatory, cooperative methodology that fosters thinking and a critical approach.

The socio-affective focus consists of experiencing the situation we wish to work with in our own skin, in order to have a first-hand experience that allows us to understand and feel what we are working with, to become motivated to investigate it and, finally, to develop an empathetic attitude that leads us to change our values system and behaviours, to commit and transform ourselves.

Mediation is currently in fashion, but its many and diverse origins are often forgotten. Mediation is presented as a modern invention that originated in the United States. However, in saying that we are forgetting that examples of mediation - more or less formalized - can be found in many cultures and traditions and that it has traditionally been part of programmes of education for peace and non-violent conflict resolution.



It is also forgotten that this is not the only way, nor should it be the primary way, of dealing with conflict. Mediation is one tool in the process of conflict resolution and should be used only in those cases where the parties have exhausted every possibility of resolving the conflict on their own, or where the situation of violence or communication breakdown prevents them from doing so. In these cases, they may call for the intervention of a third person or group of persons who can help them to build a fair process, restoring communication and creating the necessary space and atmosphere for them to deal with and overcome the conflict. Such a person is called a mediator. The final decision is always that of the parties, not the mediator.

Not every third-party intervention in a conflict is mediation. Lately we have been hearing of mediation every time a third party intervenes, no matter whether a commercial intermediary is involved, an interpreter in an intercultural problem, etc. In mediation, the mediator is mainly concerned with the process and the relationship, since the content of the conflict and of the agreement is something for the parties to determine, so that the mediator's only role - but a crucial one - is to ensure that this content is clear, concrete and well understood by both parties.

In this connection, it is useful to work on training mediators drawn from the student body and the teaching staff. This learning process will be valuable both so that the persons concerned can act as mediators and to ensure that, when they themselves are involved in a conflict, they will be more open to mediation and will facilitate the mediator's work because they know the mediation role.

## The burden of neutrality

One of the central themes of the debate on mediation is neutrality. A lot of people believe that in order to be able to mediate one must be neutral. From my point of view, neutrality does not exist, and if it did it would not be positive. Although it is true that no one can mediate if they side with one or other of the parties, this must not be confused with being neutral. The mediator needs to be in favour of the process. A position of neutrality leads much too easily to the supposition that mediation is a goal in itself rather than just a tool. The goal should be to achieve solutions that minimally satisfy the needs of both parties, in an equitable fashion, and as far as possible to restore the relationship; what we call win/win solutions. The goal, therefore, is not just to reach an agreement, but an agreement that meets the conditions we have just set forth.

When the power imbalance that is always present in human relations, and more so in any conflict, is very great, a posture of neutrality perpetuates the imbalance and almost always causes the agreement reached to be unfair, slanted toward the person in a position of power. The mediator's role will be to make the parties aware of this, making them see what the final goal of mediation is and understand that for that reason it will also be his or her job to restore balance in the power relationship or to help them to do so.


## Mediation process


A mediation process can have the following phases (and here we are using the terms of J. Paul Lederach, which seem simpler and more popular than those used for more formal mediations). These phases should not be taken to be something linear or rigid; on the contrary, in daily life we need to be ready to take a few steps forward or back as often as necessary, because of the process under way or the persons involved in it. These are guidelines to make us aware of the tasks and objectives to be achieved and should not be seen as coercive.

## ENTRY


When mediation is undertaken, three conditions need to be gathered:



 **acceptance:** both parties (students, teachers or both) need to accept both mediation as a way of dealing with their conflict and the particular person or persons who will be helping them. Later on we shall be speaking of various possibilities. It is important for the mediator to learn to listen and to develop the necessary trust and empathy to achieve acceptance by both parties;

 **gathering of information:** the mediator must obtain information on the conflict and the persons involved, draw up a list of points to be dealt with by the parties, design a first strategy on how to deal with them and present it to the parties for acceptance.

It is very customary for these first two steps to be carried out in separate negotiations with each party. Delays in bringing about face-to-face mediation will depend on factors such as: the degree of violence, the power imbalance, fear, etc. between the parties;

 **establishing and accepting the rules of the process:** the mediator has to see to it that the rules of the process are made very clear at this stage and that they are accepted by:

- defining his or her role and what the parties can and cannot expect of him or her: not taking sides, not saying who is right, not suggesting solutions, confidentiality, seeing that the terms of the agreement are clear.
- defining what can be done and what must not be done during the process: listening, non-aggression, speaking in turn.
- deciding on where, when and how the process is to be pursued: the mediator needs to achieve and maintain a pleasant atmosphere that gives both parties a feeling of confidence and security.

## TELL ME

Each person tells her own story, and shares her own perceptions, emotions and feelings. Both parties need to be able to externalize, to unburden themselves, while refraining from attacking the other party. This phase requires great patience and much time. It is quite normal that there is a lot of repetition and a lot of verbiage in order for the deeper and more painful questions to be brought to the surface. If enough time is not allowed at this stage, many things may be left unsaid and represent obstacles later on in the mediation process.

The main objective is to have the parties listen to each other, exchange information, externalize their feelings and bring out points of agreement and disagreement. During this phase, the mediator is mainly concerned with ensuring that the parties keep talking and understand what is being said while ensuring relations of mutual respect between them.

## WHERE ARE WE?

In this phase, we try to move from each person's story - as expressed in the previous phase - to the construction of **our** story. There is not yet any idea of proposing solutions, but only of reaching a common analysis of the nub of the conflict and the underlying problems, which points the way to a common agenda outlining the matters to be dealt with and resolved. From this moment on, we cease to speak of the past and move on, laying the groundwork for the future. In this phase, it is important to set aside negotiating positions and to refocus on needs and interests. In doing so, it may be helpful to ask ourselves what lies behind the positions defended by the parties. Re-formulations may also be a valuable tool for the mediator.

## ORGANIZING

This is the time for developing creativity and seeking and proposing solutions to the problems that will satisfy both parties' needs. These solutions need to come from the parties; the decision is in their hands. The mediator helps them to develop their creativity (through brainstorming or other creativity-stimulating techniques) and takes care to note down all proposals so that none are left aside. In order to develop creativity and prevent the parties from sticking to their guns, we will remember that at this stage proposals are being made, not decisions.

## THE AGREEMENT

In this phase, the main objective will be to reach an agreement that satisfies both parties to a great extent (though it does not have to be exactly the same extent) and is realistic. The mediator's function is to

ensure that the agreement does meet these conditions and that both parties understand it in the same way and are satisfied. It should not be forgotten that all practical aspects and concrete responsibilities that are required for compliance with the agreement need to be spelled out (who, how, when, etc.).


## VERIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF AGREEMENTS


The greater the scope of the conflict being mediated, the more important it will be to include a mechanism and deadlines for verification of the agreements and undertakings arrived at. Again, it should not be forgotten that we are not simply trying to resolve conflicts, we are educating ourselves. Therefore, assessment is important, particularly for the person or team playing the mediation role. This will enable us to learn from our successes and failures, both in the process and in our own role.

### Educational spaces for mediation

In applying mediation in the educational environment, we might speak of different procedures, which can be divided in two different ways: by the way the mediation is carried out or by who acts as mediator.

With respect to the **way**, we can speak of two kinds of implementation, which are not incompatible but which can in fact reinforce each other:


 what we might call **spontaneous** or **informal mediation**: in this model, to the extent that everyone at the school or centre has been trained in mediation, whenever there is a conflict that the parties feel they are not able to resolve on their own, they ask a third party to help - directly and by mutual agreement.


 **formal** or **institutionalized mediation** or **mediation teams**: here, mediation teams are formed within the school or centre and work in a particular place, known to everyone, so that everyone can make use of their services. These teams must have representation from all the stakeholders: teaching staff, student body and even non-teaching staff and parents. It would be useful for their membership to be on a rotating

basis, both to avoid the creation of new power structures and to increase their educational value. Those who have acted as mediators in the past will be inclined to facilitate the mediator's work, when they themselves are parties to a mediated conflict.

These two approaches can go together and reinforce each other. The first may be better suited to an everyday routine conflict, while the second could be reserved for conflicts of greater scope, whether because of the stakes involved or the participants.

The division suggested above is mainly concerned with the way or context in which mediation occurs. However, we can also speak of the division according to **who** does the mediation; this is, in fact, the more usual distinction.

 **peer mediation:** the mediator is from the same group as the parties to the conflict. When conflict resolution programmes are first put in place, this may be a difficult formula to adopt. However, we believe that we should be aiming for this type of mediation, even in its informal version, since it will give people first-hand experience of a way of dealing with conflicts in their daily lives.

 **adult mediation:** conflicts are mediated by the teaching staff. Those concerned may be only the tutors, but it will be easier and more consistent to have the entire teaching staff take on this responsibility.

Student training can take place in a number of spaces. One option would be to have specific courses by volunteers, which in the case of the bachelor's degree could involve the teaching staff and the student body. Another option is training during tutorials. In the case of secondary school, another option may be variable credits.

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Paco Cascón Soriano

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