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Embodied Conflict Resolution: Resurrecting Roleplay-Based Curricula Through Dance

*Nadja Alexander & Michelle LeBaron**

*Editors' Note: Moving on from the same authors' seminal 2009 critique of the overuse of role-plays in negotiation teaching, *Death of the Role-Play* (chapter 13 in *Rethinking Negotiation Teaching*), Alexander and LeBaron have taken the rapidly increasing enthusiasm for experiential learning in a new direction: multiple intelligences. Their particular interest is in a use of experiential learning that focuses on kinesthetic intelligence, employing actual physical movement, particularly dance, to unlock creativity in other mental domains, as well as to encourage authentic participation by people whose skills are not primarily verbal or mathematical. Those who may be inclined to be skeptical should note that this work is receiving increased attention among people whose dominant skills are definitely verbal: this chapter serves as a brief introduction to a project whose longer work is to be published soon by the American Bar Association.*

"I would believe only in a God that knows how to Dance." Friedrich Nietzsche

Introduction

M: *Who would have thought that many conflict resolution trainers have second thoughts about the use of role-plays?*

N: *I guess we are not alone!*

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- M:** *No, some trainers have voiced concern about the standardization of the whole role-playing scene!*
- N:** *No pre-work . . .*
- M:** *Which means that participants are unprepared . . .*
- N:** *And may reject the entire experience, or at least not take it on board as something to integrate into their own practice . . .*
- M:** *How can they really experience conflict without being led safely to a context in which they can access and connect their own experience to that of another?*
- N:** *It's like throwing people into the deep end . . .*
- M:** *Yes, and some can't swim!*
- N:** *You mean they . . .?*
- M:** *Quite possibly, but the instructor might never know, especially if there is limited debriefing and post-work for role-plays.*
- N:** *Gosh . . . so if not everyone can swim, what's something they can do?*
- M:** *They can breathe.*
- N:** *And if they can breathe, they can move.*
- M:** *And if they can move, they can . . .*
- N:** *Dance!*
- M:** *Precisely!*

After writing a piece entitled *Death of Role-play* (Alexander and LeBaron 2009) we received many responses from conflict resolution trainers, mediators and other readers. As mediators, we had watched with mounting dismay a tendency toward “roteness” in conflict resolution pedagogy, in particular in practice areas involving multiple repeat mediations based on the same technical subject-matter, e.g., landlord-tenancy disputes or bank-customer disputes. We worried that this tendency was reinforced by “canned” role-plays. As conflict resolution trainers, we wondered about the effectiveness of this approach to foster mindful, responsive and emotionally skilled practice. Consequently, we critically examined the widespread use of multiple standardized role-plays in mediation and negotiation training, to awaken fresh interest in why we do what we do as conflict resolution trainers and, through our critique, to provoke responses and conversation. By publishing *Death of Role-play*, we hoped to stimulate increased creativity, reflexivity and methodological diversity in conflict resolution and mediation training.

Death of Role-play appeared to hit a nerve. Readers, like us, did not desire to abolish role-plays altogether. In fact, many continued to rely heavily on standardised role-plays, while acknowledging questions about the ways they and others were using these ready-made resources. As will be explained in more detail in the next section, our concerns with this ubiquitous teaching method included its inflexibil-

ity; too-frequent appeal to dramatic excesses of participants; limited adaptability across cultures; and dubious generalizability to actual conflict interventions.

In this chapter, we elaborate on a set of alternatives to standardized role-plays that are more dynamic and embodied, and therefore more likely to yield proficiency in practice. Borrowing from fine arts, neuroscience and intercultural communication among other interdisciplinary fields, we explain why dance and movement are useful and even essential components of conflict resolution education (Honeyman and Parish 2012). From our own and others' experiences in the field we examine why practitioners and parties can benefit from the gifts of mirror neurons, somatic empathy and other recently-elaborated insights, if they only step away from their tables and – yes, we mean it – dance! Shall we?

Who Said What About Role-Plays and Why?

In *Death of Role-play* (Alexander and LeBaron 2009) we critiqued the use of role-play in negotiation training, from a number of perspectives. We questioned its cultural appropriateness as a methodology, illustrating how participants from some ethno-cultural groups are uncomfortable with pretending to impersonate others. Drawing upon relational-identity theory (Shapiro 2006), which highlights the variability of human behavior according to context and roles, we examined the utility and resonance of prescribed, standardized scripts with which participants may have limited experience or connection. Our discussion also probed pre- and post-work, exploring the adequacy of preparation and advance briefing when role-plays are used. Finally, we questioned whether the dramatic adventure of playing a role actually results in durable and reproducible new behaviors in post-course interventions (Lewicki 2000; Movius 2004; Druckman and Ebner 2008; Van Hassalt, Romano, and Vecchi 2008).

In the 2009 chapter, we suggested that continuing the current over-reliance on culturally-encapsulated, standardized scenarios and character roles could prove to be the death of the popular pedagogical vehicle known as the role-play. Christopher Honeyman and James Coben (2010: 2) picked up on this theme when, drawing upon feedback from an international group of negotiation teachers, they wrote that

. . . negotiation teachers:

- 1) over-rely on “canned” material of little relevance to students; and
- 2) share an unsubstantiated belief that role-plays are the one best way to teach.

Here, we re-engage with this topic, exploring it in the light of embodied pedagogy. Can we find ways to vary training methodologies that are culturally sensitive, foster creativity, and meaningfully develop third-party capacities for our globalizing world? Can essential elements of embodied practice be identified that apply across training methodologies and cultural contexts? How can we take a giant leap forward and move beyond role-play-based training to multi-sensory, experiential, and culturally fluent training activities that may include – but by no means be limited to – role-playing?

Since the publication of *Death of Role-play* in 2009, significant international attention has been directed to innovative ways of enhancing and complementing role-play methodologies with diverse experiential learning approaches. For example, the second (Istanbul, 2009) international conference on Rethinking Negotiation Teaching was shaped around a series of adventure learning activities with a focus on authenticity, real life engagement, creativity, and the role and value of emotional experiences (Honeyman and Coben 2010: 2-3).

In this chapter, we place the spotlight on experiential learning of a different type. We explore possibilities of using dance and movement-based activities to supplement, complement, inspire and potentially transform experiential education, and take it to a new level of teaching and learning potential. This includes both “somatic” and “kineshetic” dimensions of such activities – in other words, attention to and experience of the body “from the ‘inside out,’” as well as of the body in motion, through the complex interplay of sensation, emotion, and cognition (Hervey 2007). From our experiences as educators and interveners in diverse contexts, from law firms, corporations and universities to conflicted communities from first and third world regions, we have observed the vitality and usefulness of embodied methodologies. Not only are they vital because role-play methods have been over-used, creating a need for more balance and diversity in pedagogical methods, but also because the complex issues and identities at stake in today’s conflicts call for multiple modalities of intervention. Training must help third parties develop the capacities to work effectively not only in cognitive realms, but also in emotional, physical, imaginative, intuitive and spiritual dimensions.

Our experience has taught us firsthand the importance of a multi-modal approach. Working with women, youth and chiefs from remote villages in the fragile and transitional economies of the Pacific and Africa has opened our eyes to the traditional transformative power of dance in many non-Western cultures. In indigenous settings around the world, people have long used dance, movement, music making, storytelling, mime, theatre and ritual to surface and address conflict.

In such contexts, kinesthetic elements are understood as integral to resolving conflict, making decisions and effecting change.

Shifting our attention to modern industrialized societies, we note the mushrooming trend of health and mindfulness retreats that focus variously on achieving balance and perspective through mental relaxation and nurturing the body. There is also a significant increase in the popularity of ancient pilgrim trails – taking a period of days, weeks or even months apart from fast-paced lives to walk in rhythms that gradually re-connect physical, natural and spiritual aspects of being (Nolan 2010). These and other developments indicate an increasing collective questioning of the widespread focus on rationally-oriented production and linear achievement in modern Western society.

The artificial and still deeply entrenched separation of mind and body; logos and ethos; and brains and brawn is a legacy of the eighteenth century Age of Enlightenment, also referred to as the Age of Reason. In order to preserve the purity and perceived superiority of intellectual reason, cognitive intelligence was separated from the arts, skills and other intelligences associated with physicality, creativity, imagination and emotionality. As a result, the Western intellectual tradition yielded pedagogy in universities and professional training contexts that privilege rational functioning, often to the exclusion of other senses and intelligences. Such approaches can be described as “disembodied” because they block access to, and reject, ways of being and knowing that explicitly engage the body. This intellectual privileging has continued despite recent acknowledgement of the importance of kinesthetic approaches to learning (Grinder and Bandler 1976; Coffield et al. 2004; BenZion 2010a; 2010b).

The Western philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche recognized the inadequacy of this approach when he turned his back on the academic circles and institutions of the nineteenth century. Nietzsche recognized what neuroscientists are now confirming, namely that the Cartesian assumption of mind-body splits is unfounded, and sound thinking and decision-making involve the synergy of multiple intelligences (Damasio 1994; 1999; Barsalou et al. 2003; Niedenthal et al. 2005: 186; Koch 2006). In other words, knowledge in the sense of “know-why” is inextricably linked to “know-how” and is optimally situated in bodily experience and somatic memory. Today, fields as diverse as neuroscience (see, e.g., Niedenthal et al. 2005; Barsalou et al. 2003), political science (see, e.g., Young 1980; Heyes 2007; Butler 1993), education (see, e.g., Coffield et al. 2004; BenZion 2010), dance therapy (see, e.g., Berroll 2006; Bloom 2006; Hervey 2007), and philosophy (see, e.g., Givler 1924) have begun to explore and attest to the significance of aesthetics, emotional intelligence, and somatics to all areas of human activity.

If conflict resolution education is to be effective, then we must ask ourselves how concepts and skills integral to resolving conflict can be learnt and taught in ways that (re-) connect them with physical dimensions of emotion, intuition and imagination. Given that cognition and emotion are braided processes that cannot be separated from the body as an instrument of knowing, training methods that target or isolate the intellect can no longer be seen as defensible. It is time that conflict resolution caught up with these developments, reflecting them in its pedagogy. In the next section, we examine why dance and movement are particularly potent tools for training repertoires.

Just as unexplored terrain can seem dangerous to the untraveled mind, so body-based work can feel risky and threatening to people whose attention has been focused from the neck up. Yet working in a universe that tries to match competing rationalities of conflict parties without accessing the richness of physical resources is a bit like passing on a feast in favor of a bowl of watery gruel: it is far less enjoyable and truly unnecessary when abundance is available.

Dance, The Moving Imagination

Dance teachers are fond of saying, “if you can walk, you can dance.” We would go one step further and suggest that if you can breathe, you can move, and if you can move, so too, you can dance. Dance is, after all, our moving imagination. It is the kinesthetic manifestation of expression, or as modern dance pioneer Martha Graham famously exclaimed, “Dance is the hidden language of the soul.”

Of course, Martha Graham and her contemporaries were working at a time when an essential “true” and stable core identity was taken as a given. Modern dance was meant to give this core “authentic expression.” In the protean world of the twenty-first century, complex dynamics of identity and meaning-making are understood to animate conflict. As Robert Lifton (1999) has written, solving contemporary conflicts calls for suppleness, creativity and resilience. Those who would intervene in contemporary conflicts are therefore less focused on the imprecise idea of working with stable core personalities and more concerned to help parties find ways through labyrinths of contested meanings and identity-shaped narratives (Foster 1997, 1998; Desmond 2001).

Dance and movement help with these challenges because they assist parties to bypass conscious stories of conflict, while summoning creativity as they:

- articulate and recognize deeply-rooted feelings and needs;
- embrace new ways of knowing through heightened mind-body (somatic) sensations, connections and awareness;

- develop increased awareness of inner geographies where habitual responses to conflict reside, thus increasing repertoires of possible conflict behaviors; and
- experiment physically with new ways of being for the future.

In the conflict resolution field, we are witnessing increasing interest in, and applications of, embodied knowledge. Consider the application of meditation principles focused on breath and self-awareness in the practice of mindfulness mediation (Riskin 2002). Breathing is the most vital activity for the human body. It massages our organs, carries oxygen to all parts of body and feeds the brain. By slowing down and controlling breath, we expand and deepen our capacity to focus on different levels of dialogue, problem-solving and understanding.

During the third Rethinking Negotiation Teaching conference (Beijing, 2011) Vivian Feng Ying Yu demonstrated her use of the ancient Chinese art form of calligraphy to bring slowness and centeredness into her life and her conflict-related work. The process of engaging in calligraphy summons meditation, beauty and creativity in the practitioner, and is said to engender a higher state of creative mind. What if negotiation trainers and practitioners tried calligraphy as a core practice both in preparation for intervention and as a training activity? Forget your haste to memorize the top twenty brainstorming techniques! Instead, find a quiet corner and “lose yourself” in the deep concentration and sense of flow and inner calm that comes with practicing calligraphy, meditation, yoga or tai chi. Practicing calligraphy can become a way of life bringing a calm confidence and creative state to inform everything the calligrapher does, including negotiation.

At the Beijing conference, Andrew Wei-Min Lee and Vivian Feng Ying Yu also introduced the Chinese ritual of the tea ceremony, to facilitate a decelerated pace and corresponding somatic attention to breath, body and being. Tea ceremonies assist those participating in them to connect with one another through the meta-language of embodied silence; they generate an unspoken dialogue that communicates a meta-message of connection, respect and interdependence. As we participated in both calligraphy and the tea ceremony, we noticed increased calm and concentration, and became intrigued about the applicability of these body-based practices to our work.

While these practices involve slowing down, they do not necessarily undermine efficiency. Many negotiation trainers will have heard of the maxim “You have to go slow to go fast.” Perhaps these meditative practices are a vehicle for doing just that! Slowness in the tea ceremony or calligraphy does not involve sloth, laziness or other negative attributes associated with its vernacular usage. Rather slow-

ness refers to what musicians call the *tempo giusto*, the pace that is “just right,” that maximizes our ability to access the combined wisdom of our bodies and our minds (Honoré 2004). In negotiation contexts, slowness can be nurtured through a wide variety of practices. It may involve doing visualization and breathing exercises, or using Reiki or therapeutic touch to calm nerves before or in challenging negotiation contexts. It may involve preparing and serving tea to those involved in a negotiation. Slowness can foster a calm and centered approach even in the midst of an aggressive environment, adding to people’s confidence, and enhancing abilities to think clearly and make smart decisions in pressured situations.

In another example of embodied work, constellation methodology (Hellinger 2007; Sparrer and Onn 2007) challenges participants to create physical and emotional maps of conflict that yield insights and possibilities outside the reach of conscious cognitive processes. By inviting people to “stand in” for parties in conflict, a synthetic pattern is unfolded that may mimic the actual conflict dynamics, yielding insights for parties or third parties. The use of constellations and other related work offers participants creative opportunities to develop a deep somatic understanding of underlying issues and relationships from a systemic perspective. Likewise, conflict resolution workshops which integrate elements of meditation and physical self-awareness encourage participants to access their inner dancers as they examine ways they move in personal relationships and how they respond to conflict (Sparrer and Onn 2007).

In yet another illustration, Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974/2000) – directly influenced by Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000) – has been used worldwide to engage disadvantaged communities in processes of reflection, innovation, decision-making and collaborative law-making (legislative theatre). Participatory theatre has been used by inmates, trade unionists and hospital workers; by peasants and workers, students and teachers, artists, social workers, psychotherapists, and non-profit organizations. It has empowered people with marginalized voices and supported the development of innovative solutions to conflict precisely because it uses the embodied and symbolic language of theatre rather than conventional approaches. Theatre of the Oppressed and Diamond’s Theatre for Living are powerful vehicles for articulating often-excluded, undervalued, or ineffable realities of those in conflict, and generating creative practical solutions (Diamond 2007).¹

Whether simple attention to breath or more elaborate body-based methods are used, many negotiators and negotiation educators will find aspects of their work reflected in the above discussion. Few of

them, however, would think of using dance as resource. Dance and movement have long enjoyed legitimacy as transformative vehicles in therapeutic circles. The application of dance therapy principles to help people deal with the aftermath of violent conflict is one area where the mind-body connection is nurtured and the ruptured threads in those areas may be healed. Therapeutic use of creative movement has yielded profound effects in accessing and processing traumatic memories and strong emotions, stored in the body – making these precious aspects of conflict conscious, less charged, and more accessible (Rothschild 2000; Koch 2006; Homann 2010; Berroll 2006; Winters 2008).

For some, this discussion may seem to take us far from the everyday understanding of the term “dance” and have little connection with recognized forms of dance such as the fox trot, hip-hop, jazz or classical ballet. Let us take a look at a standard dictionary definition. The New American Dictionary defines dance as:

- 1) a series of movements that match the speed and rhythm of a piece of music; and
- 2) a particular sequence of steps and movements constituting a particular form of dancing.

The first definition is much narrower than our understanding of dance. We are not aiming to train participants to move in ways that match pace and rhythm to a particular piece of music. In fact, movements that clash with a given rhythm or defy a prescribed tempo can be just as communicative in revealing undercurrents and group dynamics.

The latter definition is broader, referring to a patterned sequence of movements as dancing. But when do emerging forms get recognized as dance? Hip-hop, for example, was not always a recognized form of dance. It grew from expression and commentary on everyday life, yet today is a recognized dance form with a huge following. In recent years, hip-hop has become an accessible catalyst for conflict transformation in marginalized youth culture from south central Los Angeles to South Africa. Various other forms of contemporary dance continue to push the envelope and challenge the boundaries of what is recognized as dance, and what is not.

Still, many people harbor the illusion that they do not dance, at least not outside specific occasions. By *defining* dance, these standard explanations have effectively *confined* dance, creating a sense that dance is a thing that artists do, not something we all do in our everyday lives. A look at colloquial language tells another story (Gadlin, Schneider, and Honeyman 2006). “I’m afraid I stepped on her toes,” we say, or “How can we shift the painful dance between us?”

In conflict, references to dance are frequent. Seeking to identify issues, we urge others to “stop dancing around the topic.” When offered an outcome, we may “waltz around the offer,” playing for time and seeking to look at the proposal from different angles. In the German language, the phrase “to dance at several weddings” (*auf mehreren Hochzeiten tanzen*) provides an equivalent to the English, “to have your cake and eat it too” – words often uttered in situations involving some level of tension or conflict. Similarly, “to dance on someone’s nose” (*jemandem auf der Nase rumtanzen*) means to “walk all over someone.” Muhammad Ali uses dance as a metaphor for boxing when he says, “The fight is won or lost far away from witnesses – behind the lines, in the gym, and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights” (Cevallos 2010: 15). Then there is the ubiquitous “negotiation dance” referring to the sequence of strategies and “moves” negotiators make as they work towards agreement. Mark Young and Erik Shlie (2011), for example, explore the metaphors of the dance of positions, the dance of empathy and the dance of concessions. Once we begin to notice dance as a powerful metaphor that is well-integrated in our everyday communications, conflicts and resolutions, we realize its potency as a way of understanding situations and offering mobility in stuck places.

In this chapter, we embrace dance and – more broadly – movement, as forms of embodied expression not limited to a recognized sequence of movements. Dance is and should be available to anyone who wants to explore it, regardless of rhythmic and coordination ability. Dance extends to all forms of movement whether visible to the human eye or not. Dancing on the inside, beneath your skin, or in your mind’s eye can be every bit as expressive, exhilarating and exhausting as a vigorous jive. Indeed, it is possible to be very calm on the outside and feel vibrant on the inside, or to move vigorously on the outside from a deep, calm center. Thinking of dance this way, it becomes inclusive, accessible and much less threatening to many people who might not feel confident “dancing” in a public space.

We would go so far as to contend that you cannot *not* dance. What happens if you see a day of your life as a dance? You become aware of your movements: their rhythms, textures and nuances as they express inner states, as they affect others, and as they influence the relational fields around you. Imagine you are on a crowded subway during morning rush hour. How does your body shift, slide, pause and adaptively dance around the physicality of others? How do you breathe and situate your kinesthetic awareness in the space? What attitudes are communicated by your dance? What do the textures of your movements say? Do you experience the crowded subway as op-

pressive and invasive as you press yourself against a wall and close your eyes, feigning sleep? Or does your presence comfortably fill the space in and around your relational field? The “frame” of dance brings a clear focus on nuances of spatial, place-related influences we navigate every day. Was your day spent at a computer working on a long document? How did your posture shift over time? What were the physical sensations you experienced during that day: heavy/light; tense/relaxed; alert/sleepy; engaged/detached? How did the walk to the refrigerator whisper relief to your muscles, coaxing your circulation to restoration? When your cat brushed against your leg, did you hug back? When your partner called to check on dinner plans, did your state change? These are the kinds of questions that arise from “thinking dance.”

If you still feel resistant to the notion of dance as a staple of conflict resolution training, please join with us in jettisoning images of negotiators switching business suits for tutus. Consider times when you have experienced a breakthrough in a problem or received a sudden insight. Often, movement is a catalyst, whether in the form of a walk in the park or mopping the floor. Neurobiologically, we will see that there are good reasons for this. In addition, conceptualizing relations between people in conflict as a dance takes away from binary zero/sum, simplistic notions that pervade much colloquial conflict language. Dancing, as anyone who has tried ballroom dance with a partner can attest, is complex and requires attunement to the others’ intentions and the environment, and sympathetic responses to surprises. Let us explore more of the fruitfulness of these ideas as we examine the links between dance and kinesthetic communication.

Dance and Kinesthetic Communication

The immense volume of literature around the notion of kinesthetic or body language and nonverbal communication points to the power of kinesthetic communication. A new book, *Making Movement Matter: Conflict, Dance and Neuroscience*, connects dance and kinaesthetic communication to conflict transformation and negotiation (LeBaron, MacLeod, and Acland 2012). Too much literature, however, has focused on translating the language of the body into words, rather than encouraging the exploration of communication at a kinesthetic level through breath, body awareness and movement in relation to others (Riskin 2002; Freshman 2010; Riskin 2010).

Expressive arts therapy, in particular dance therapy, has been at the forefront of experimentation with “dance language” grounded in physical experience. In intercultural or post-conflict settings from Iraq to Haiti to Bolivia, from Sub-Saharan Africa to Israel to Peru, expres-

sive arts modalities have been applied for decades to address conflict-related trauma. This work has consistently revealed the capacity of expressive, embodied practices to shape and re-shape identities, understandings, and relations. By engaging the creative and imaginative capacity of individuals in addressing situations of conflict or trauma, these methods have been potent in generating change in both mental and material domains (Levine and Levine 2011).

One of the concrete reasons that embodied communication proves effective in conflict and post-conflict settings is that it can quickly and deeply foster inter-group trust, receptivity, and flexibility when encountering the unfamiliar. This is captured succinctly in the comments of one student from a tango dance class.

Learning to be a good Argentine Tango follower is about surrender. So in Saturday's "Followers' Workshop" we practiced exercises in trust (yes, gently tipping to the side or backwards or frontwards with our eyes closed, trusting that someone would break the fall), feeling our partner's weight change and again, with eyes closed, being in tune with and following our partners' movement around the floor. I had to slow down, let go of everything else on my mind, and be totally present in the moment. . . . Leave a desire for control at the door. And take the lesson home.²

As you read this comment, consider the parallels to negotiation skills. How often do we encourage students to trust the process and surrender to it without worrying about the outcome? And what about the skills of mindfulness and being in the present? Sound familiar?

In another example, Diane Levin's *Dog's Tale* (2011) highlights the power of kinesthetic and emotional wisdom in a mediation setting and reminds us of the limitations of our rationality. The story, from one of her mediation sessions, is set out below.

A husband and wife came to me, seeking help with their divorce. In addition to the real and personal property they had acquired during many years of marriage, they had also run a business together for many years, so untangling their lives was complicated, with many difficult decisions to face.

Just hours before their meeting with me, the wife called to ask if they could bring their dog with them. "He's very sweet and well-behaved," she said, "and I think we'd both feel better if he were there with us." An animal lover myself, I had no objections and encouraged her to bring the dog along. The husband and wife soon arrived, followed by an enormous

dog, one of the biggest I'd ever seen. After they introduced themselves and their dog to me, their dog drank deeply from the water bowl I'd provided for him and curled up in the corner of my conference room with his head on his paws. He didn't close his eyes but remained watchful, looking from one of his humans to the next.

The mediation began. The one issue not in contention was what they wished to do in planning for their dog following the divorce. They were working in consultation with their vet and an animal behavior expert to come up with a visitation schedule and residence plan that would meet their dog's best interests. With that issue set aside, we began identifying and working our way through the other issues to be addressed. Not surprisingly, the discussion became emotional. First, the wife raised her voice, pressing her case against the husband's proposal. The dog suddenly stood up from his corner, strode to the wife's side, sat down beside her and leaned against her, resting his head in her lap. She stroked the dog's head, and her voice assumed its normal tone. After a few minutes, the dog returned to his corner. Soon it was the husband's turn to become agitated, and as the volume of his voice began to rise, the dog once more stood up, came to his side, leaned against him, and rested his head in the husband's lap.

And so it went. Sensitive issues were raised, one spouse or the other became upset, and time and again, there the dog would be, leaning against the person who needed his comfort most in that moment, the great furry head resting upon a knee. The moment would pass, clarity would come, the anger would evaporate, the discussion would progress, and back the dog would go to his corner.

We took up a particularly difficult issue next. As the conversation continued, both husband and wife became increasingly agitated. I could see that the mediation was approaching that make-it-or-break-it moment. This was where it all falls apart, or it all comes together.

For a brief second or two I gathered my thoughts, thinking how best to frame what needed to be said to shift the discussion into "make it" territory away from "break it." As I was about to speak, I felt something warm and heavy lean against me. I looked down, and there was the dog, his head resting in my lap this time, looking up at me with his dark brown eyes. Evidently this time I was the one who needed support, at least in the judgment of this wise dog.

The husband and wife both stopped in mid-sentence, their voices falling silent. In amazement, they gaped at the dog with his head in my lap. Then, tension broken, they each smiled, shaking their heads. In an instant, the moment had changed. They were laughing now. "How about if we . . .," said one. "Great idea," said the other, "how about if we also . . ."

A few minutes later, they were standing up and hugging each other, the most difficult issues addressed to their mutual satisfaction. Their dog bounded about the room, his tail wagging.

Kinesthetic communication and body language are considered to be an expression of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, which Howard Gardner (1993) has identified as one of the different types of intelligences that humans possess. In the next section we consider these multiple intelligences and their links with dance.

Dance and Multiple Intelligences

In the 1980s, Howard Gardner wrote about the concept of multiple intelligences, among them the linguistic, logical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial-visual, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, spiritual, and existential (Gardner 1993). Such work effectively demonstrated that conventional conflict approaches – so often linear, verbal, deliberative, and disembodied – are insufficient to address the diversity of human modes of understanding. When we come to see the self as a multi-faceted perceptual, expressive and relational center, engaging multiple intelligences becomes integral to engaging complex and diverse individuals in conflict settings.³

Neuroscience has recently explored how many forms of intelligence – cognition, emotion and attitudes – are embodied. For example, Antonio Damasio (1994), among others, examines the physicality of emotion and shows us that what we come to experience as "emotions" are in fact interpretations of physical sensations. Examples of physiological expressions of feelings recognizable to many of us include goose bumps, blushing, sweaty palms, shortness of breath, butterflies in the stomach and other manifestations of energy in the body. Physical sensation not only informs our perception, but also structures or limits it: the autonomic nervous system which controls our ability to access thoughts, discover new ideas, and change our behavior is shaped by physical contact and rhythm from an early age, and influenced by physical cues in later life (Ledoux 1998; Porges 2004, 2009; Homann 2010: 3). Because all perception is filtered through the

body, with its corporeal memory of experiences including trauma, the body shapes and limits our understandings of and responses to the world. Much of this is precognitive; therefore it becomes crucial to directly engage the body to bring perceptions, judgments, and emotions to a conscious level of choice (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 5; Merleau-Ponty 1968: 253; Diprose 2002: 174). Seasoned conflict practitioners know the role that intuition or gut feeling can play in reading situations; increasing body awareness can work to enhance perception of the subtle cues and signals – both internal and external – in which such intuition is grounded.

Just as the body shapes perception, so too can embodied approaches re-shape it. Physical practices have been shown to have significant effects on cognition, learning, mood and motivation. Physical exercise not only promotes development in these areas, but does so relatively quickly (Neeper et al. 1996; Widenfalk, Olsen, and Thoren 1999; Cotman and Engesser-Cesar 2002; Meeusen et al. 2006; Berg 2010). As well, embodied practices that emphasize proprioception (awareness of the body in space) and encourage internal attunement have been shown to have beneficial effects on the neurophysiological regulation systems that foster openness to change and receptivity towards others (Schoore 2003). Thus, an accent on physical dimensions and engaging these dimensions through movement can lead directly to conceptual, emotional and behavioral shifts.

In fact, the body has been shown to play a role in mental processes where we least expect it. Research has shown that mental processes once thought disembodied are, in fact, physical phenomena. Almost 100 years ago, researcher and philosopher Robert Chenault Givler (1924), drawing on the neuro- and physical sciences of the time, found that the expression of physical and bodily experiences influence understandings of, and meaning ascribed to ethical notions such as what constitutes right and wrong. This line of inquiry continues today. For example, in her review of research linking body awareness and movement to decision-making, Lenore Hervey (2007) highlights Warren Lamb's system of movement pattern analysis and its application to corporate settings. Essentially, the research confirms that all processes of decision-making have observable kinesthetic elements, both shaping and being shaped by relational factors. In other words, our bodies play an integral part in conflict, communication and choice-making.

Understanding the influence of the body in shaping perception, responses, and relations is a complex task. While there is evidence for certain pan-human expressions and gestures (Ekman and Friesen 1986), it has also been shown that our bodies interpret and code the

world around us in culturally specific ways. Anthropologist Judith Hanna (1990) explains that cultural differences are usually reflected in movement and that paying careful attention to the body can therefore reveal pivotal cues to cultural differences, uncovering nuances, textures and relational habits relevant to conflict. At the same time, she warns that phenomenological experiences and expressions also differ from person to person. This is because relationships between body and self are rooted not only in biology but also deeply in social and cultural forms including rituals, rites of passage and festivals. Both collective and individual identities are expressed via movement; it is a language that reveals whole worlds to an attuned observer. It is also a language which, Hanna suggests, may be a more accurate, less filtered and adulterated communication vehicle than spoken language.

Dance also heightens kinesthesia, or awareness of both one's own and others' bodies; in fact, learning about the subtle cues, demands and tendencies of one's own body has been linked to understanding empathy, or how *other* moving bodies might feel (Foster 1982: 13; Noland 2009: 13). Dance therefore provides an essential avenue to more accurately perceiving not only personal states but others' personal and cultural positions.

Recent work in neuroscience has explored empathy as an embodied phenomenon. When people observe or plan actions, motor neurons become activated in the same way as they do when the action is actually being performed (Jeannerod 1994, 1997). As well, neuroscientists have found that the area of the brain associated with pain and affective experiences is activated when witnessing the pain or fear of others (de Gelder et al. 2004; Jackson, Meltzoff, and Decety 2005.) When people watch each other move, their brains are essentially practicing ways of relating to others. The human capacity to imitate, learn, and feel with others is, at base, a kinesthetic experience (Dosamantes-Alperson 1984; Dosamantes-Beaudry 1997; Berroll 2006; Hervey 2007: 98-9; Winters 2008; Berlucchi and Aglioti 2010).

In addition, dance and movement have been shown to stimulate new neural pathways and shift cognitive habits. Understanding the neuromuscular transformations that accompany movement can reveal the inner grammar of cultural and social patterning. In addition, movement releases emotions and latent memories, uncovering new connections between people, and fostering alternative interpretations of personal, cultural and political transactions (Bloom 2006; Noland 2009; Homann 2010). Out of this kinesthetic intelligence, new vantage points and solutions can surface, as parties develop awareness and choices about what was previously unconscious (Homann 2010.) The acknowledgment and incorporation of kinesthetic dimen-

sions into conflict intervention could maximize resources available for transformation of intractable conflict. For example, imagine that a group is struggling with a complex series of issues related to an environmental problem. Watching or participating in a dance or movement experience on ecology, diversity, harmony and balance may deepen conversations and introduce vitality, nuance, and texture to the well-worn tracks of disagreement.

Malvern Lumsden describes the richness of body-based resources this way:

Our sense of what is real begins with and depends crucially upon our bodies, especially our sensorimotor apparatus, which enables us to perceive, move, and manipulate, and the detailed structures of our brains, which have been shaped by both evolution and experience (Lumsden 2010: 4, citing Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 17).

Neuroscientists have demonstrated something that dancers and others have long known: that all decision-making involves rational *and* emotional processes centered in the body, so we cannot observe, think or respond clearly without our bodies and our feelings. Emotocognitive processes cannot be neatly excised from each other, but occur in concert. The body is an essential channel into understanding and engaging these processes. Thus we can engage our kinesthetic and emotional intelligences to help us move through differences with less resistance than if we rely on rational thinking alone to find our way out of negative feelings or into positive thoughts. As negotiation practitioners and teachers incorporate insights from neuroscience and dance theory and practice, we will be better able to assist people with complex problems.

Building Dance and Movement-Related Intelligence

In dealing with challenging conflict situations, we need diverse inner resources and intelligences. Chief among these is somatic, or movement-based intelligence. This way of knowing assists us in drawing on physical cues and resources to:

- Sense and shift group, interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics;
- Discern physical movements in others that signal internal changes;
- Discern changes in vocal rhythms that may relate to shifts in attitudes, relationships or perspectives;
- Notice via physical cues when processes are safe or unsafe for others; and

- Learn ways of working with strong emotions using breath and movement to promote flexibility rather than rigidity.

Here are some suggestions for cultivating somatic intelligence, along with tips on increasing it:

- Notice your physical responses to stress and conflict, and learn ways to center and calm yourself through using breath, visualization or movement;
- Adopt a physical practice in your life: an activity, or an art form like dance. Keep a journal about what you learn about your body and its ways of signaling as you engage in this practice.

In negotiation contexts you can:

- Incorporate centering techniques when tensions are high – the simple act of breathing deeply or shaking limbs can do wonders in shifting mental and emotional states;
- Pay careful attention to nonverbal cues, devising an internal interpretive map as the process proceeds;
- Respond effectively to spatial, temporal and kinetic dimensions of negotiation; if dialogue reaches an impasse, suggest changing postures or positions in the room; if empathy proves difficult, incorporate subtle forms of physical or conceptual mirroring; if a direct approach is not shifting dynamics, use a creative or embodied method to help parties “step out” of entrenched antagonistic roles;
- Use physical language to give implicit permission to parties to attend to physical needs and cues. For example: “My back needs to stretch. How about taking a few minutes to get our circulation going?”

In preparing for negotiation workshops in multi-party contexts, invite people to consider how they hold themselves, their postures toward others, and their attunement to personal physical signals as a way of increasing somatic awareness and choice. Movement-based practices can assist people to learn ways to tap the body’s wisdom so that it is available even in the midst of stressful negotiations.

These strategies for negotiation will be more accessible if they have been practiced in advance. Hervey (2007) describes an activity where she asks training participants to move in relation to values that she calls out to the group. To debrief, participants discuss the process of moving and how they chose ways to move in relation to the values. Hervey observes that values like justice or fidelity evoke diverse responses from participants. As they examine movement choices, participants develop more awareness of the nuances, complexities and diversity of relationships to these values. These insights can support increased effectiveness in negotiation: as people recognize complex-

ity in relation to values, they are more able to discern and respond to complexity in negotiations.

In another example of applied somatic practice, University of British Columbia business law professor Janis Sarra recently convened an interdisciplinary movement-based workshop on fairness.⁴ With the assistance of two professional dancers, academicians used movement to examine corporeal aspects of fairness. Participants reported that movement assisted them in examining and deepening their understandings of fairness, deepening their capacities to work with the subtleties of fairness in their theorizing and practice. The possible applications of movement-based strategies to negotiation training are infinite. But it is also useful to ask how these approaches might link to existing methods, including role-plays.

How Do Dance, Movement and Role-plays Relate to One Another?

Now, hang on a minute, some of you may be thinking. We have just discussed at length the notion of dance as embodied expression. Isn't that exactly what role-plays do? Embody learning by inviting movement and experiential applications to a given scenario? So aren't we already "dancing"?

Well, yes and no. Yes, role-plays and a whole range of other activities do engage kinesthetic learning styles more than traditional classroom teaching such as lectures. And it is true that negotiation education has traveled a long way from the hierarchical days of predominantly theory-based, one-way oral communication between professoriate and participants. However, as explained previously, acting out a prescribed role within a limited time frame does not necessarily maximize learning. Deep insights arise more consistently and powerfully from authentic somatic experiences than from synthetic role-plays that operate at arm's length from participants' real lives. In the next section, we consider how the ideas in this chapter can enhance role-plays and other experiential methods in negotiation training.

Preparation

As negotiation teachers, we emphasize the importance of the setting of a process. We explain the importance of establishing a collaborative atmosphere, where parties can feel safe to voice their concerns without retribution and to engage creatively in problem-solving without being pre-judged by others. Safety is a paramount concern in using body-based approaches, particularly because these tend to be outside participants' experiences and comfort zones.

Lumsden (2010) explains the importance of creating a safe space where the rules of the regular learning setting are suspended and students can behave and move freely, differently and authentically. He stresses that the requirement of safety encompasses both physical and emotional elements, as the space should offer participants a link “between the internal and external worlds, facilitating the exploration of new ways of being and emotional expression, and experimenting with new dimensions of existence.”

How can this be achieved? Creating an environment which evokes playfulness, creativity, warmth and isolation from the “outside world” is a good start. In the much acclaimed 2010 British historical film drama *The King’s Speech*, King George VI works with an Australian speech therapist, Lionel Logue, to overcome his debilitating speech stammer. In one scene, Logue transforms the cold, impersonal but very stately room from which the King will make his speech into a cozy, inviting and very safe space draped with throws, curtains, rugs and cushions from the rooms in which he and King George VI had trained and rehearsed. The warm and familiar environment has an immediate relaxing effect on the King, both mentally and physiologically, and he goes on to make one of his most powerful speeches.

Similarly, it may be useful to make colorful props or art supplies available to participants of negotiation workshops, encouraging a variety of modes of expression. Inviting participants to bring objects of special significance to place in a circle or ritual space in a training room can also invoke a sense of safety and “home.”

While we may not have access to cozy rooms or custom-built dance studios, there is much we can do to enhance the somatic possibilities of training spaces. For example, participants can be encouraged to bring soft balls, non-fragile objects, scarves and other props. If you do not have access to a private space, see what can be done to “block out” the outside world, e.g., using old sheets, sofa covers and blankets as curtains. Bring in inflatable furniture – it is light and easy to transport. Consider how to integrate the restroom, kitchen, break-out or hallway spaces into the training space. How can you use creativity to design a comfortable, informal learning space?

In addition to preparing the physical space, think about how you frame the training in announcements and materials sent to participants. Mark Young and Erik Schlie (2011: 202) advocate the use of the dance as a metaphor for negotiation training on the basis that it “challenges such dichotomous constructs as fight versus flight, harmony versus war, and adversaries versus partners.” They posit that “creatively accessing a [dance] metaphor [...] can help us understand more of the varied facets of negotiation and approach the field in a

more differentiated way.” Using dance as a metaphor to frame negotiation language from the very start is a powerful way to invoke safety and spaciousness.

Applications

So how might dance intelligence manifest itself in a negotiation workshop? Here are some ideas you might like to try in your next workshop or training session. Feel free to vary aspects to suit your training needs. Be creative!

- Working with peripheral vision: Before students move into a role-play, ask them to form a circle and fix their eyes on a point on the opposite side of the room. Without moving their eyes from their chosen point, ask participants what they can see beyond it. For example, can they notice the color and texture of the walls, ceiling or floor? Can they (without moving the focus of their eyes) see any surrounding furniture or objects? How many people in the circle can they take into view, and what can they notice about them – clothing, hair, color? Invite participants to move across the room keeping their eyes on a point, navigating around people and objects as they go. In this second activity, movement is added to the use of peripheral vision, thereby heightening focus and self-awareness while expanding visual horizons. The debriefing that follows can address peripheral vision as a physiological skill for negotiators as well as a metaphor for how people experience conflict in very narrow ways. Negotiation thus becomes an exercise in supporting self and other to expand frames of reference. This exercise may also be a metaphor for the ability to identify resources that may not be obvious to those directly involved in the conflict.
- Embody excellence in negotiation: Invite participants to find a space of their own and to draw an imaginary circle of excellence in front of them into which they will step during the activity. Ask them to think of someone they consider to be an excellent negotiator and to imagine this person in the room with them. Now ask participants to notice as many details as they can about the negotiator. For example, how does the person hold themselves, move and sit; how do they express themselves through facial and bodily gesture; how do their eyes move and speak; how do they sound and feel? As participants calibrate these details, they step into their imaginary circle of excellence, close their eyes, and emulate and embody these characteristics. This can be a very powerful and trans-

forming experience for many, especially those who identify well with their chosen person. This activity is best done immediately prior to a role-play and at a stage in the training when participants have a realistic idea of what excellence in negotiation looks like.

- What's your ginch? "Ginch" is Canadian dancer Margie Gillis' expression for the embodied equivalent of what conflict interveners might call tension, impasse, deadlock or just plain being stuck (Gillis 2013a). We all can identify ginches in our body, so this activity draws upon people's somatic knowledge, inviting analogies between how we address tensions in our bodies and how we address interpersonal tensions. Now for the activity: invite participants to move around the room freely, loosely and comfortably, "dancing" out any discomfort or tension. After some minutes, ask them to identify their biggest, ugliest, most persistent ginch, whether it be a sore neck, nagging knee problem, locked jaw, tight back or other symptom. As they continue to move around the room, suggest to participants that they create space around their ginch and allow it to move and release itself. In other words rather than letting a robust masseur hammer the problem, focus on it and let it breathe, give it the space and time to sort itself out. Gillis sometimes suggests consciously connecting the part of the body in distress with a place in the body where ease is experienced. This can be done by participants individually, or in pairs; either may ease the tension or tightness in a particular area. The applications of this approach to negotiation are obvious; as participants are better able to bring health and well-being to their weak or tense areas, they can surround their emotional and intellectual challenges with a new level of ease and awareness (Gillis 2013b).
- Moving to which music? Select a piece of music with some texture and complexity, perhaps from the "world music" genre. Ask participants to move around the room responding to different aspects of the music, for example the "sad" or "melancholy" themes, the "happy" or "lively" themes, the high or low notes, the percussion, the melody and so on. How does the experience of the music change for participants? Are they "dancing" to the same music each time? How might this translate to their understanding of how different people experience the same conflict?
- Flowing and frozen embodied scenes: Body sculpting activities and other somatic methods of learning can be used in

numerous ways to explore negotiation dynamics. Drawing on Hervey's work (2007), participants can work individually or in groups to create a flowing tableau to concepts such as hope, fairness, justice, impasse, resolution, fear, trust and so on. Or they can be invited to create a physical sculpture conveying their experience of a role-play, whether they were a player or an observer. In another variation, they can be asked to create two physical snapshots to communicate the emotional texture of a group before and after a role-play experience. Finally, they can be invited to move in relation to each other in ways that convey their learning about values and ideas like fairness, closure, etc.

- Framing and reframing in the language of dance: As suggested previously, trainers can utilize the metaphor of dance in framing and debriefing activities, and in reframing comments and questions as they arise throughout a training. Using dance language throughout a course – as opposed to just in relation to one specific “dance” activity – helps to normalize the relationship between dance and negotiation and increase participants' comfort and creativity in experimenting and engaging in embodied activities.
- Our experience indicates that integrating these types of activities into training, and interspersing them among role-plays, heightens the level of authentic engagement of participants and improves the overall quality of role-plays and debriefing discussions. Participants who have experienced trainings in which body-based methods were integrated report increased abilities to play roles authentically, and a deeper capacity to share their personal experiences of successful negotiation with others.

Shall We Dance? Reflections and Closing Thoughts

Well, go figure . . . It turns out that dance is not as frightening as I had thought. I started using it as a warm-up in a bi-weekly class on negotiation and conflict resolution and it turned out to be the thing students looked forward to most!

Dance and movement, when used as part of training and framed as patterned physical activities, can help participants shift perspectives and increase physical health at the same time. Though academic cultures are notoriously physically phobic, it makes sense for people with physical bodies to use them! And doing so not only brings people into awareness of where they may be holding tension, it allows them to find ways to release it.

Who knew I could dance? One of the surprising outcomes of using dance and movement in teaching and training contexts is that people who expressed resistance or no affinity were often surprised at the positive impact of both dance and other movement. In one class, participants found ways to talk about mobility which positively affected their relations as a cohort, following movement exercises that included a wheelchair-bound member of their group. Resistance turned to positive anticipation as they moved beyond stereotypes of dance awkwardness and discovered its capacity to transport them into new, more nuanced conversations.

As a mediator and trainer, I am about to start developing my dance intelligence. After all, it's just a step to the left . . .

As conflict interveners and those assisting with negotiations, we ask a lot of disputing clients. We ask them to reveal themselves to us, trust us and expose their vulnerability – while we hide comfortably behind a shield of professionalism. Similarly, as trainers we may find ourselves slipping into the routine of asking participants to role-play while we safely ensconce ourselves behind the veil of “facilitator.” Dance intelligence is about using our essential somatic awareness. It helps us access other ways of knowing and being within ourselves, and to recognize them in others. It builds bridges between our inner and outer worlds. As conflict interveners and negotiation trainers, dance intelligence helps us to connect with others and build empathy and trust. It enhances our ability to weave fluently in and among cultures and to reach that deep level of human awareness that the Africans call “Ubuntu.”⁵ Surely that is what effective negotiation is all about.

Notes

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¹ See <http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org/en/index.php?nodeID=3> (last accessed April 4, 2012).

² See <http://myartfullife.wordpress.com/category/dance/> (last accessed April 4, 2012).

³ For an exploration of multiple intelligences in negotiation, see Alexander and Howieson (2010).

⁴ See <http://www.explorefairness.pwias.ubc.ca/> (last accessed April 4, 2012).

⁵ “Ubuntu” is an African philosophical term which offers an explanation of the essence of what it means to be human and the individual’s interconnectivity with others. According to Ubuntu we affirm our humanity when we acknowledge that of others as our humanity is bound up in theirs. See Tutu (1999).

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