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Tom Bachtell. The artist's distinctive drawings and caricatures appear in 'The Talk of the Town' and other sections of *The New Yorker*.

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Relational Constructionism

Generative Theory and Practice for Conflict Engagement and Resolution

Nikki R. Slocum-Bradley*

Abstract

This article draws upon relational constructionist ideas to facilitate a meta-theoretical shift in conflict engagement and transformation. Based upon insight into conceptual and relational inter-dependency, two tasks are suggested as key aims for future work: 1) nurturing a profound respect for inter-dependent self/other and appreciation for relationships, and 2) developing skills to construct nurturing, generative relationships. Underscoring that research, theory-building and other aspects of scholarship are in themselves practices, the author encourages the design of these and other practices to facilitate conflict transformation. Exploring the implications of relational constructionist insights, an approach is proposed that merges the boundaries of theory-building, research methodology, and conflict engagement: Action Research for the Transformation of Conflicts (ART-C). While ART-C provides a process that facilitates the construction of cooperative relationships, insights from Positioning Theory illuminate how actors co-construct relationships by evoking meanings and norms that guide action. These concepts are applied to a variety of examples from around the globe that illustrate the transformation of identities, relationships and conflicts.

Keywords: Conflict transformation, conflict resolution, action research, positioning theory, relational constructionism.

No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite – Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (1994: 749)

As a journal that focuses on theory and practice of conflict engagement and resolution, and especially the nexus of the two, IJ CER fills a lacuna not only in the field of peacebuilding but also in social science more generally. This inaugural edition presents a welcomed opportunity to scope future directions of the field, as

* Associate Research Fellow, United Nations University (UNU-CRIS). I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer of the first draft of this article for the helpful comments and suggestions. All views expressed herein are the author's personal views.

well as to examine some existential assumptions upon which much scholarly work and practice have been based. In order to achieve rigor in both theory and practice, we first need to address what it is, exactly, that we are trying to achieve. Once we have specified our over-arching purpose, we can design practices and theories that will help us achieve it. A useful theory is one that illuminates *how* the goal is achieved, and best practices are those most effective in facilitating that process.

Literature in the field largely converges on the “central goal of transforming potential violence into non-violent change” (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2011: 425). Concurrent with the focus on non-violent change, Richmond (2008: 147, in Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011: 407) has advocated that “peace” be “radically re-conceptualized” as a “method and process, and never a final end state”. For him, “this requires the acceptance of difference as a method of peace, rather than an emphasis on sameness or universality” (*ibid.*). In contrast, Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall (2011) conclude their impressive third edition of *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* by tasking the next (‘fifth’) generation of conflict resolution scholars and practitioners with a ‘cosmopolitan’ agenda that is based upon our *common* identity as humans:

In the end, therefore, it is an awareness of shared humanity that underpins the global enterprise of cosmopolitan conflict resolution. And the task of the next generation of workers in the field is to push forward the widening of the circle of recognition towards the culminating point when it is acknowledged in all parts of the world – particularly by young people – that subordinate identities, whether of family, clan, ethnic group, nation, state, class, gender, culture or religion, do not cancel out the deepest identity of all – humanity – even in the most intense political conflicts. (p. 426)

At this point, one might be inclined to ask whether our work in the field of conflict engagement and resolution should be aimed at accepting difference or highlighting our shared humanity. In my view, the answer is ‘both’, and their inseparability is key to appreciating the full significance of the norm of non-violence.

Sameness and difference are two sides of the same coin: without the ‘front’, you cannot have the ‘back’. All concepts are ‘relational’ in that they acquire their significance only in relation to something else – something that is different or ‘other’ (Beck, 2006). Thus, ‘red’ makes sense only because there is something not red. ‘Female’ and ‘male’ depend upon each other for their meaning. The significance of ‘Belgium’ relates to that of other States, as well as to concepts of non-State boundaries (Europe, Wallonia, Flanders, Benelux and so forth). The concept of ‘race’ could not exist without notions of difference, such as ‘Asian’ or ‘Black’. Recognition of these dialogical relationships, and the inter-dependency of opposing concepts, is key to appreciating conflict as an *opportunity* (Rothman, 1997) to think and even perceive (see, hear, smell, taste or feel) something that previously would have been literally inconceivable and imperceptible. Ideas (and opinions, perspectives and convictions) are formulated and advanced in relation to a counter-idea. In ancient Taoist philosophy, this dependency and complementarity of

opposing (not oppositional) forces is symbolized in the taijitu. More profoundly, the taijitu reflects that apparently opposing forces, yin and yang, actually become each other.

These insights have important implications for our understanding of self and other. In particular, they suggest an alternative to the traditional Western notion of the individual as a separate, bounded being (Gergen, 2009). In *Relational Being*, Gergen has illuminated the inter-dependent or relational nature of all that exists and underscored that all meaning is generated from and through relationships. He discusses human relationships as the cradle or birth-place of all that is meaningful, demonstrating how each person becomes him- or herself only with and through others. Violence against an 'other' harms oneself, and the destruction of relationships leads to annihilation. As a consequence of these insights, Gergen (2009: 386) concludes that, "If I am in you and you are in me, then mutual caring should replace antagonism". In my view, this insight and value should constitute the foundation and purpose of future conflict engagement and resolution.

To take this seriously requires a fundamental shift for much theory and practice. It entails moving away from a utilitarian, individualistic mode that advocates cooperating, rather than fighting, *because* it is a more effective strategy for attaining one's (individual) interests and needs. Rather than using cooperative relationships as a means to other ends, the cooperative relationship *is* the end. The concomitant value is a deep respect for self/other, which are understood relationally (different yet the same and mutually inter-dependent). Once this end or value has been taken on, the rest is about learning how to achieve it in practice. This is a skill that can be acquired, as evidenced by Rothman's (2012) observation that,

when groups can themselves surface their internal differences effectively and bridge them, not by closing ranks against outsiders but rather by reaching internal agreement about ways forward that could include the other, they are on their way to intergroup cooperation.

Thus, we can summarize that nurturing "relational coordination" (Gergen, 2009) or honouring relational dignity¹ entails:

1. Nurturing a profound respect for self/other (humanity) and appreciation for relationships; and
2. Developing skills to construct nurturing, generative relationships.

To be most effective, I believe that these should be the aims of future conflict engagement and resolution scholarship and practice. As Ramsbotham and colleagues (2011), Gergen (2009), and others have pointed out, a variety of resources throughout the world cultures can be drawn upon. The challenge is to engage with these discourses and develop theories and practices that facilitate these goals.

1 I would like to thank Barry Hart for sharing this expression with me.

1. Scholarship

The first issue we need to address in our scholarship on conflict engagement and resolution is our basic understanding of scholarship. The root of the problematic lacuna between theory and practice is the failure to recognize theory-building and other aspects of scholarship as practices. Like other practices, they have impacts, and they are significantly shaped by the practitioner's (in this case, the scholar's) interests and beliefs. Once we accept scholarship as a subjective practice, we can decide to be more transparent about our beliefs and pro-active towards our aims. Let us look at the implications for two main aspects of scholarship: research and theory-building.

1.1 *The Practice of Theory-Building*

Underlying every practice, including research and theory-building, is a model (or theory) of the human being. This model often remains implicit, but it is reflected in the methods we choose for doing research and attempting to engage in and resolve conflicts. The underlying model influences not only the methods we choose, but also the results of our studies or practices, our interpretation of the results, and subsequent impacts. One important subsequent impact is that the model itself is promulgated and reinforced as a model for people to think about themselves, others and relationships.

Underlying a great deal of contemporary social science scholarship is a model of individuals as bounded beings (Gergen, 2009) and, furthermore, as automata. From Realistic Conflict Theory to Social Identity Theory to the multitude of Bio-evolutionary interpretations of human practices, these theories do not merely objectively reflect an independent human reality; their use influences it! As Bruner (1990: 26) has emphasized, rather than merely asking whether a particular theory "gets it right", more "pragmatic, perspectival" questions are in order, such as 'What would it be like to believe that?' or 'What would I be committing myself to if I believed that?' What Bruner (1990: 23) wrote over two decades ago remains as true today as it was then:

For all our power to construct symbolic cultures and to set in place the institutional forces needed for their execution, we do not seem very adept at steering our creations toward the ends we profess to desire. We do better to question our ingenuity in constructing and reconstructing communal ways of life than to invoke the failure of the human genome. Which is not to say that communal ways of life are easily changed, even in the absence of biological constraints, but only to focus attention where it belongs, not upon our biological limitations, but upon our cultural inventiveness.

What kind of theories and practices can be helpful towards inventing cultures of non-violent conflict engagement and resolution? Most importantly, the theories and practices should be founded upon a model of humans as mutually interdependent co-constructors of our world (who act within evolving constraints). Theories that illuminate the processes of co-construction, the impacts of different

kinds of constructions, and the interplay between contexts, construction processes and impacts would all be useful. Instead of reifying 'culture' and entrenching an automaton model of humans, such theory-building would contribute to the empowerment of people by raising their awareness of their own agency. This awareness makes people less vulnerable to those who manipulate static, naturalized notions of identity and culture to further their political interests and instigate hatred and violence (Rombbothsham *et al.*, 2011: 346; Slocum-Bradley, 2008a: 1).

As all meaning is created in relationships through discourse,² Gergen (2009: 47) considers '*generative*' those discursive practices that are 'catalytic', 'inject relations with vitality' and through which 'new and enriching potentials are opened through the flow of interchange'. He distinguishes these from '*degenerative*' processes, which are "corrosive and bring co-action to an end". Accordingly, the challenge is to generate practices that facilitate collective dialogue and deliberation. While this conclusion has been reached by many, the crucial aspect here is that it is overtly based upon the value of "relational coordination" (Gergen, 2009). This transparency allows us to "[...] be conscious of how we come to our knowledge and as conscious as we can be about the values that lead us to our perspectives" (Bruner, 1990: 30) and to thereby assume accountability "for how and what we know" (*ibid.*). Furthermore, to be consistent with its own premises, the value requires a welcoming approach towards other perspectives and dialogue that challenges it (Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 2009).

1.2 Research Practices

The insight that 'how we know', or how we do inquiry, is constitutive of our reality has led many to question the positivist views and practices that have dominated social science endeavour (see, *e.g.*, Beck, 1998; Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 2009; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; Slocum, 2001; Smith *et al.*, 1995; Van Langenhove, 2007). For McNamee and Hosking (2012: 35),

[...] a key issue concerns the kinds of realities that we are a part of and contribute to making, for example, in our (research) work. So what sort of world do we invite each other into when we act as if it is possible to represent the one way things really are? And, in contrast, what sort of world do we invite each other into when we assume realities are community-based local, historical, and cultural co-constructions? Both sorts of inquiry construct local-communal realities – but very different ones. One where there are experts and non-experts versus one where there are multiple and perhaps conflicting realms of expertise.

These authors present an approach to social inquiry that is consistent with, and supportive of, the value of relational coordination. Distinguishing their approach from other veins of 'social constructionism' (such as that depicted by Berger & Luckman, 1966), they refer to it as 'relational constructionism'. Conceiving

2 Here discourse refers to all forms of symbolic speech, action or other forms of communication.

inquiry as ‘engaged unfolding’, McNamee and Hosking present Action Science (Argyris *et al.*, 1985; Reason & Torbert, 2001), Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991), Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) and other forms of ‘transformative dialogues’ (Gergen *et al.*, 2001) as ‘potentially transformative orientations to inquiry’. They use the term ‘transformative’ to refer to “change that unfolds ‘from within’, in patterns of relating over time, where the ‘unfolding’ goes on in different but equal (not subject-object) relations [...]” (McNamee & Hosking, 2012: 61).

These ‘orientations to inquiry’ are based upon a model of the human being that respects human agency and acknowledges the relational nature of meaning. Furthermore, the processes they entail are designed to facilitate relational coordination. Yet the success of all of these orientations in nurturing ‘generative’ processes depends upon *how* they are conducted. Key to them all is that they invite and explore multiple voices and emergent self-other relations through dialogue that is based upon respectful listening, questioning and being present; willingness to suspend assumptions and certainties; and reflexive attention to the ongoing process (McNamee & Hosking, 2012: 68).

These insights invite us to transform research on conflict resolution into research that *is* conflict resolution. One option for so-doing is to adopt a PAR approach (see McIntyre, 2008; Wadsworth, 1998) and orient the process towards the aims of ‘relational coordination’, which dovetail nicely with the goals of conflict transformation (CT), as expressed by Lederach (in Weis, 2011: 51): to change “the flow of human interaction in social conflict from cycles of destructive relational violence toward cycles of relational dignity and respectful engagement”. By merging CT theory with a PAR approach that is rooted in the insights of relational constructionism, we can design an iterative process which we can call Action Research for the Transformation of Conflict (ART-C).³

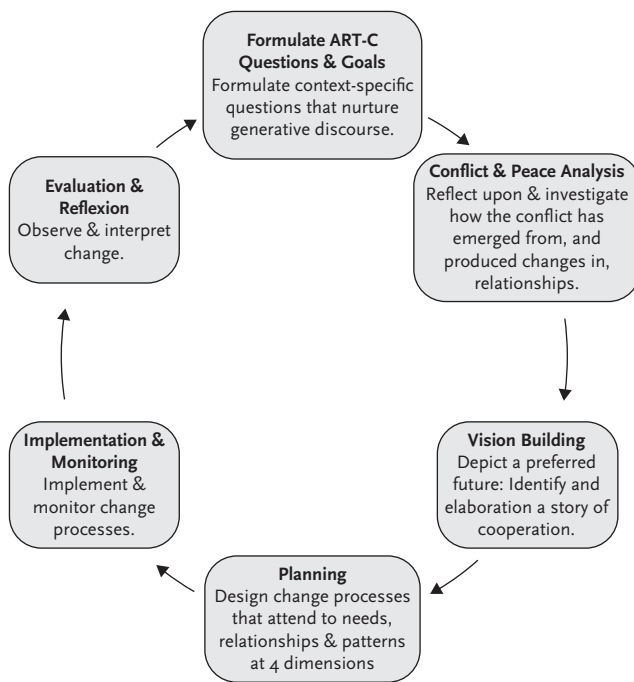
As such, ART-C is a process of inquiry and action that nurtures relational coordination. It entails “a recursive process that involves a spiral of *adaptable* steps” (McIntyre, 2008: 6), which aim to transform the “flow of human interaction in social conflict from cycles of destructive relational violence toward cycles of relational dignity and respectful engagement”. Figure 1 illustrates a template of the emergent process, which comprises six recursive phases:

1. Formulate Action-Research Questions and Goals
2. Conflict and Peace Analyses
3. Vision-Building
4. Planning
5. Implementation and Monitoring
6. Evaluation and Reflection

The phases need not be strictly chronological. In particular, a great deal of thought and work is well invested prior to, or as part of, Phase 1. By explicitly inter-linking the formulation of questions and goals, Bruner’s pragmatic

3 The adjective, participatory, is dropped here in the assumption that it is redundant within this approach to action-research and because it makes for a cuter acronym.

Figure 1 The ART-C Cycle



approach is adopted. The kinds of questions that are asked largely determine not only the sorts of answers that could be feasibly coherent, but they also position the inquirers in relation to the quest of the answers and to each other. For example, consider the following two formulations: “How can both tribes become wealthier?” compared with, “What can we do to help our community thrive?” The latter formulation not only broadens the scope of possible solutions; it also positions the members of the inquiry team both as unified within a common community and as agents whose active participation is invoked in the process.

Crucially, each of these phases is oriented towards achieving relational transformation through the ART-C cycle itself. Thus, a process-goal can be articulated for each phase of the iterative cycle. The process-goal underscores the importance of *how* each phase of the cycle is approached. In Lederach’s (1995: 22) words:

Process matters more than outcome. [...] At times of heated conflict too little attention is paid to how the issues are to be approached, discussed, and decided. There is a push toward solution and outcome that skips the discipline of creating an adequate and clear process for achieving an acceptable result.

In the heat of conflict, it can be challenging to remember that it is not an illusory final ‘outcome’, but rather successfully transformed ways of relating that make ‘peace’ sustainable.

Conceptualizing the CT process as *joint research* can help nurture the curious and respectful attitude of engagement that is crucial to transformation in relationships (Anderson, 1997; Gergen, 2009; Winslade & Monk, 2008). The metaphor invites participants into positions as a team of investigators with different types of equally-valued knowledge. Each phase of ART-C addresses what Lederach (2003) has described as four dimensions of human experience: personal, relational, structural and cultural. While these distinctions can be helpful, it is important to underscore that all of these dimensions are generated through relationships. Social institutions and cultural norms are produced and re-produced continuously through discourse. Personal experience (including private thought) is enabled by the tools generated discursively in relationships (Harré & Gillet, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). While they restrict, to an extent, what can be feasibly constructed at a given point in time, they also provide the resources to alter the constraints themselves and to thereby stretch the conceivable.

Different methods, tools and techniques can be used to achieve each process-goal, rendering ART-C a flexible process that can be adapted to the needs and idiosyncrasies of the particular contexts in which it is implemented. Due to their promising potential, techniques developed out of a relational constructionist approach are emphasized in the brief description of the ART-C process that follows.

2. The ART-C Cycle: A Facilitative Research Practice

2.1 *Formulate Action-Research Questions and Goals*

In ART-C, we acknowledge that the nature of our questions influences how we go about seeking the answers and the kinds of answers that seem plausible. Since how we formulate the questions actually impacts the outcome, formulating research questions and goals is understood as *action*. Thus, participants discuss and formulate context-specific questions that aim to support relational coordination and nurture generative discourse. The questions can be more specific and nuanced variations of the over-arching one: *How can we change the flow of our interactions from cycles of destructive relational violence towards cycles of relational dignity and respectful engagement?* By asking constructive questions, we aim to orient our thoughts towards possibilities, our energy towards hopefulness and benevolence, and our actions towards respectful engagement.

2.2 *Conflict and Peace Analyses*

In this phase, we aim to re-humanize 'the other' and ourselves, to understand our own and others' needs, hopes, fears and values, and our inter-connectedness, and to gain confidence in the community's ability to transform constructively. First, participants reflect upon and investigate how the conflict has emerged from, and produced changes in, the dimensions of human experience (Lederach, 2003). This process can be facilitated by providing space for all participants to share their perspective of the 'conflict' or 'problem' using language that focuses on problematic situations or actions, rather than on personal attributes (Winslade & Monk,

2008). The variety of descriptions that emerges highlights that “the facts of what happened can always be viewed from multiple perspectives” (Winslade & Monk, 2008: 234). Participants can share and ‘map’ their experience of the consequences of, or changes resulting from, the conflict or problem. They can also discuss and map how existing patterns in relationships (the dimensions of human experience) have contributed to producing the problem or conflict. What emerges from this dialogue is an elaborated and multi-voiced story about the conflict or problem. However, this is only a fraction of the participants’ experience.

Next, the challenge is to illuminate experiences that were not perceived as problematic or destructive, and when conflict or differences in perspective were used constructively. Also drawing upon insights from Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), participants can publicly acknowledge these positive experiences and use them as a platform to build upon. What ensues is the development of an alternative story that is just as real and valid as the one of ‘conflict’. It provides a more promising and effective starting point than a principle focus on what is *not* working (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990).

2.3 *Vision Building*

As underscored by Rothman (1992; see also Winslade & Monk, 2008), conflict transformation often entails building a vision or story of cooperation. In this phase, participants have the opportunity to discuss and choose which ‘story’ they want to depict the way forward. Drawing upon the alternative story highlighted earlier, which is based in past experience, participants can depict how they would like to see the story unfold in future. Rather than dominating the entirety of participants’ experience, the ‘conflict’ or ‘problem’ is woven in as a challenge to the community’s story of cooperation – a challenge that they are now constructively engaging and overcoming. “Generative metaphors” (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990) can be evoked to elaborate stories of collaboration that expand participants’ perceptions and options for action. Furthermore, their ongoing experience of engagement in the ART-C cycle has not only provided participants with a shared story of cooperation; it has also honed their skills to further develop that story (in narrative and deed).

2.4 *Planning*

In this phase, participants invite each other to share what they would need to see happen, in order for the Collaboration story line to be not only an empty narrative but a lived reality (Winslade & Monk, 2008). They design change processes that attend to needs, relationships and patterns at all dimensions of human experience. They agree to take responsibility for concrete steps within a specified timeline. The planning phase is an opportunity for participants to acquire and hone skills for constructively discussing options and addressing differences, while working as a team towards a common goal.

2.5 *Implementation and Monitoring*

Participants implement and monitor the change processes. Here, it is not only the implementation of an action plan that is monitored, but also the broader context,

the relevance of the community's working assumptions, and intended and unintended impacts. All of these need to be monitored with regard to their impact upon relationships. Collaborating in implementing the action plan can generate a positive team feeling and build the community's common identity. 'Us versus Them' is further transformed into 'We'.

2.6 *Evaluation and Reflection*

Participants observe and interpret change. In this phase, participants take a step back to harvest the fruits of their efforts, to celebrate and build upon successes, and to identify challenges as potential new points of inquiry. Acknowledging and appreciating the positive changes that result from collaborative effort can nurture a sense of community belonging and motivate further constructive dialogue and cooperation. The relational skills gained, and the psychological, social, practical and spiritual benefits experienced, throughout the ART-C process can empower and motivate participants to expand respectful engagement and increasingly honour relational dignity. Thus, like the other phases of the ART-C cycle, the process of evaluation is also action (see Ross & Rothman, 1999; Rothman, 1999).

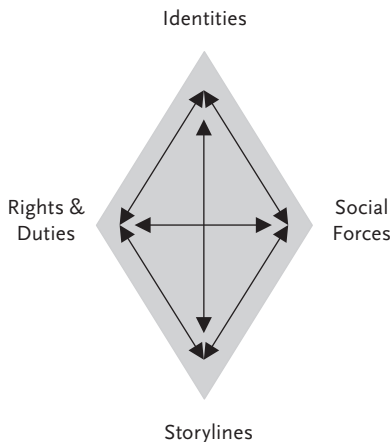
3. **Practical Theory**

The efficacy of the ART-C cycle depends largely upon participants' success in building cooperative relationships. To facilitate this, it is crucial to have an understanding of how relationships are co-constructed in and through discourse. To this end, Positioning Theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999) can be particularly helpful. Positioning Theory illuminates how, from moment-to-moment, actors co-construct meaning and invoke norms that guide action. They do this by performing discursive acts that have 'social forces' and evoke (often implicitly) storylines and identities which entail an allocation of sets of rights and duties to the relevant actors. Collectively, these four mutually interdependent 'facets' of meaning – identities, storylines, social forces of discursive acts, and sets of rights and duties – have been referred to as the "Positioning Diamond" (Slocum-Bradley, 2008b, 2010a, 2010b), which is visually depicted in Figure 2. People can conform to, contest, or provide an alternative to acts of positioning and the norms they entail.

Positioning Theory highlights the relational nature of identities. By evoking a particular identity in a given context, I simultaneously evoke an identity of an (often unspoken) other. The 'storyline' provides the context for this relationship and suggests reciprocal sets of rights and duties for the actors, which constitute norms for action. When journalists at Radio Rwanda (RTL) evoked the 'Hutu' identity and equated it with being 'Rwandan', they implied that 'Tutsis' were foreigners (Slocum-Bradley, 2008c).⁴ By accusing (social force) Hutus of attacking

4 Slocum-Bradley (2008b) provides a more comprehensive positioning analysis of RTL journalists' discourse.

Figure 2 *The Positioning Diamond*



Rwanda, a ‘National Security’ storyline was evoked that was used to demand and justify acts of ‘defence’. In other words, it established the norm that Tutsis had not only the right, but even the duty to ‘defend’ themselves. Furthermore, acts of ‘defence’ were interpreted as the action of killing anyone identified as ‘Tutsi’. The analysis illuminates how evoked meanings established norms that provided the rationale for action with devastating consequences. It is crucial not to reify the facets of the Positioning Diamond. They, like all meanings, are only made (temporarily) determinate within a specific context, and they can change as people re-interpret the meanings in subsequent discourse – either a moment or centuries thereafter. This insight into the immediateness of acts of positioning and how they evoke social norms makes Positioning Theory particularly useful in raising awareness and reflexivity that can support social change. This includes fostering constructive relationships and generating new options for action.

For example, Winslade and Monk (2008) describe the transformation of a conflict in which actors shift from claiming positions of entitlement to weaving and living a story of cooperation. Smithy (2012) has discussed how lived and re-told stories in Northern Ireland have been transformed through art and other symbolic forms of discourse. He describes processes of ‘incremental identity change’ facilitated by events such as a lecture series entitled *Remembering the Future: Understanding Our Past, Shaping Our Future*. The series was organized by the Community Relations Council, which “was set up to promote better community relations between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and, equally, to promote recognition of cultural diversity”.⁵

Similarly, the Rural Women’s Peace Link was created in Kenya when Sarah Lochodo helped transform the conflict between Pokots and Turkanas (see Aker & Noma, 2012). For generations, the villagers lived within a meaning system that interpreted ‘providing for our families’ as a war. Accordingly, Pokot and Turkana

5 <www.community-relations.org.uk/about-us/>.

men assumed the identities of warriors, who raided each other's cows and goats, and killed each other. The accomplishment of these deeds was seen as the mark of a great man. Lochodo persuaded women in the communities that 'providing for our families' could be interpreted very differently – and in a way that was far more effective. To her, 'providing for our families' could be a *collaboration* of the *community* (inclusive of Pokots and Turkanas), rather than a war between Pokots and Turkanas. This collaboration was manifested in practices such as farming, starting businesses and going to school. Similar collaborations were achieved by the Liberian Women Mass Action for Peace, discussed by Aker and Noma (2012), and the Women of Zepce, presented by Hart (2012). In both cases, groups of women formed a transformational platform to overcome the violent and destructive practices that were rationalized by meaning systems characterized by oppositional ethno-religious identities.

4. Conclusion

Given that no “independent unpoliticized conceptual space” is available (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011: 406), we can take up Bruner's suggested pragmatic approach by starting with our end and working backwards to craft conducive means. We can start our theoretical and practical work by asking, “*What systems of meaning and practices would nurture 'relational coordination'?*” Seeking answers at all four of Lederach's dimensions of human experience will enable the development of a systemic approach (see Körppen *et al.*, 2011; Ropers, 2011), which is key to understanding and addressing the dynamism and complexity of relationships, whether inter-personal or institutionalized. What systems of meaning and practice could nurture our inextricably intertwined existence as 'I-Thou', as 'Anglophone-Francophone-Nederlandophones', as 'Muslims-Jewish-Christians-agnostics' as 'Europe-USA-Asia', as 'Democrats-Republicans'? It is our difference which allows us to recognize our sameness, and our sameness that enables us to appreciate our differences. Next our task, as humans, is to hone our skills and become “adept at steering our creations toward the ends we profess to desire” (Bruner, 1990: 23). This, in Madiba's⁶ words, is learning how to love.

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6 This is the people's affectionate name for Nelson Mandela.

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