

Psychological and Research Perspectives on Reconciliation Models: Dealing with the Impact of War and Political Oppression on Children

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Roundtable #3 “What Works: What Types of Social Change Projects Show
Promise in Reducing Violent Conflict”

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ABSTRACT

The author has participated in a number of projects focusing on a reconciliation model to deal with the impacts of war and oppression on children and families. These have included the “Compassionate Listening” model used in Israel/Palestine and the Fereirian empowerment model used in the “Children of Chernobyl” project in Ukraine/Belarus. He is also familiar with various “Truth and Reconciliation” projects began in South Africa and now being used or proposed in other war-torn nations, including Bosnia and perhaps in the U.S. to deal with the effects of racism and other systematic oppression. The study of reconciliation as a method of peace making and conflict resolution in large scale systems such as international conflicts is relatively new and has its roots partly in clinical experience with small systems such as couples, families, and groups where the short and long term effects of “conflict resolution” without emotional and social healing can be readily seen. We have learned, in these endeavors, the fundamental commonality of respecting the dignity and humanity of every “side” in conflicts and the belief that every one of us, be they victim or perpetrator, holds a piece of the truth. As Thich Nhat Hanh says, “Please call me by my true names, so I can hear all my cries and my laughter at once, so I can see that my joy and pain are one. Please call me by my true names, so I can wake up, and so the door of my heart can be left open, the door of compassion.”

However, each situation has its own history, culture, and other uniqueness. How can we begin to look at “what works?” What are the criteria for success? How can we begin to distinguish between short term and long term outcomes and measure them? Are there specific theoretical and practical factors that have demonstrated their usefulness in guiding future endeavors? What have we learned about preventing trans-generational trauma and its

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effects on the most vulnerable of us, our children? How can we frame these issues into practical research that respects the human rights of participants?

My fervent hope is that we can explore these issues together in this roundtable.