

STRATEGIC ARTS-BASED PEACEBUILDING

by Michael Shank and Lisa Schirch

The arts offer peacebuilders unique tools for transforming intractable interpersonal, intercommunal, national, and global conflicts—tools that are not currently prevalent or available within the peacebuilding field. The task for peacebuilding practitioners is to find strategic ways of incorporating the arts into the work of peacebuilding and to create a space where people in conflict can express themselves, heal themselves, and reconcile themselves through the arts. There is very little solid theory, research, or evaluation of arts-based peacebuilding. This article seeks to move beyond a simplistic approach that asserts the “arts are powerful” to a richer articulation of how they function in peacebuilding, when to use them, what they can do, and how to evaluate their usage. This article provides examples of and the conceptual frameworks behind strategic arts-based peacebuilding.

In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where music is a frequent mechanism for discussing social and political issues, youth use hip-hop to teach others about joblessness, corruption, class differences, AIDS, and other problems.¹ In the war-torn Batticaloa district of Sri Lanka, children and adults engage in music, painting, theatre, yoga, and sculpture in the Butterfly Peace Garden as a way of recovering from and transcending trauma.² In Israel, the Peres Center for Peace brings together Palestinians and Israelis to create joint theatre projects to foster dialogue.³ In Venezuela, Dr. Jose Antonio Abreu creates orchestras and choirs for low-income youth, as a means of contributing to social integration and improving self-esteem.⁴ In the Philippines, theatre artists tour the island of Mindanao using performance to introduce the concept of a peaceful coexistence between Muslim, Christian, and Indigenous communities.⁵

These examples illustrate the intersection between the arts and peacebuilding. Yet many peacebuilding organizations and projects do not have an artistic dimension. The arts remain marginalized within the peacebuilding field, perhaps because they are seen as “soft” approaches

(within an already “soft” field) to the “hard” issues of conflict and violence, or because peacebuilding practitioners frequently originate from social and political sciences rather than the arts and humanities fields, or because the methodologies are not readily available. Conversely, within the artistic community, many artists feel that their art needs no socio-political or sociocultural explanation, no explicit reason for existence. Art is for art’s sake, the saying goes, and any attempt to make it political and/or transformative for the community betrays the self-expressive nature of art.

Why encourage an explicit convergence of the arts and peacebuilding fields? The arts have been used for centuries to communicate the human experience in ways that have sometimes nurtured peace and other times fostered violence. While art is not purely functional, it can serve social functions. Art is a tool that can communicate and transform the way people think and act. Arts can change the dynamics in intractable interpersonal, intercommunal, national, and global conflicts.

Since the peacebuilding field requires tools that are as diverse and complicated as the human spirit, the arts emerge as a logical ally. The task for peacebuilding practitioners is to find ways of incorporating the arts into the work of peacebuilding and to create a space where people in conflict can express themselves, heal, and reconcile themselves through the arts. This article provides examples of and the conceptual frameworks behind strategic arts-based peacebuilding.

By *strategic*, the authors mean that arts-based methodologies be conceptually grounded, coordinated with other forms of peacebuilding approaches, infused with a long-term perspective vis-à-vis the nature of social change, and serious about evaluating their effectiveness and impact. While peacebuilding processes in general are critiqued for their lack of strategy, arts-based peacebuilding seems to fail to meet these criteria even more frequently. A strategic approach to arts-based peacebuilding can make the difference between a feel-good attempt at using the arts to address conflict and an effective, coordinated plan to use the arts for specific tasks that measurably contribute to peacebuilding.

By *arts*, the authors mean an expressive vehicle for communication. Art defies easy categorization. In this article the authors define the arts broadly to include both ephemeral and more classical approaches, and embrace the wide variety of forms including visual arts, literary arts, performance arts, and movement arts.⁶

By *peacebuilding*, the authors mean a wide range of efforts to prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from violence in all forms,

at all levels of society, and in all stages of conflict. If the arts are going to be useful to the field of peacebuilding, it is necessary to know *what* the arts contribute to peacebuilding, *when* different art forms are appropriate in the cycle of conflict, and *how* the arts are so effective in their contribution to peacebuilding. John Paul Lederach calls this analytical process the “strategic what,” the “strategic when,” and the “strategic how” of peacebuilding.⁷

Both artists and conflict resolution scholars have helped to lay the foundation for this discussion. Conflict resolution scholar Cynthia Cohen’s work lays a rich conceptual foundation for understanding the interplay between aesthetics and peacebuilding efforts.⁸ Articles by Craig Zelizer⁹ on the role of the arts in conflict resolution and Michael Shank¹⁰ on art activism also provide helpful frameworks for analyzing the contributions made by the arts to the process of building peace. John Paul Lederach’s *Moral Imagination* and Lisa Schirch’s *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*¹¹ situate the creative process as a central element of peacebuilding.¹² Art therapist Marian Liebman’s *Arts Approaches to Conflict* takes a therapeutic approach to the functions of art in peacebuilding.¹³

There are more articles and books written by artists on these themes. Bronson, Conte, and Masar’s book explores how to integrate conflict resolution into youth arts programs.¹⁴ Books by Augusto Boal, Jan Cohen Cruz, Michael Rohd, and Patricia Sternberg examine the role of theatre in exploring conflict and social justice issues.¹⁵ The Animating Democracy program helps artists learn dialogue skills to engage the public in reflecting on public problems and civic themes related to their artwork.¹⁶

This article builds on these foundational writings on art and peacebuilding. It conceptually organizes and summarizes some of the conflict resolution literature on art and translates the writings by artists on the social functions of their work into a form geared for an audience of readers interested in peacebuilding. In the first section of the article, the authors will explore *what* can be accomplished with the use of arts-based peacebuilding, with a direct application to the four stages described in Lisa Schirch’s *Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding*. In the second section of the article, the authors will propose *when* to use arts-based peacebuilding, examining the appropriateness of specific approaches as they relate to the stages and intensity of conflict. In the third and final section of the article, the authors will explore *how* arts-based peacebuilding approaches are particularly useful for the field, highlighting the elicitive, contextually appropriate, nonverbal, and transformative nature of arts-based techniques.

THE STRATEGIC *WHAT* OF ARTS-BASED PEACEBUILDING

How do peacebuilders decide *what* approach is most suitable when using the arts? The options are limitless, as peacebuilding involves and requires a range of approaches: nonviolent activists pushing for human rights; peacekeepers separating groups in conflict and demobilizing combatants; religious leaders encouraging their followers to make peace with neighbors; relief workers bringing aid; community mediators and restorative justice practitioners facilitating dialogue between conflicting parties; business leaders giving material aid to victims; and government leaders initiating change through public policy.

While the options may be limitless, it is helpful to strategically categorize these approaches into themes and tasks. Grouping these approaches into four categories that focus on specific tasks—for example, waging conflict nonviolently, reducing direct violence, transforming relationships, and building capacity¹⁷—the map below and the detailed descriptions that follow show the cyclical nature of peacebuilding approaches and the various activities that fall within each category. Within each of the four sections detailed below the map, examples of appropriate and relevant arts-based peacebuilding initiatives are explored and elucidated. This is where the conversation begins on the *what*, the *when*, and the *how* (Figure 1).

Waging Conflict Nonviolently

In conflicts where power is unbalanced and there is little public awareness of the issues, it is often difficult to get conflicting parties to negotiate. In such cases, it may be important to wage conflict nonviolently. Far from being passive, strategic nonviolence is a direct and assertive form of addressing conflict. Nonviolent action aims to raise public awareness and sympathy, increase understanding of how groups in conflict are interdependent, and balance power by convincing or coercing others to accept the needs or desires of all involved. In this peacebuilding approach, advocates and activists seek to gain support for change by increasing a group's power to address issues and ripen the conditions needed to transform relationships and structures.

Artists waging nonviolent conflict can work to balance power by creating an artistic platform that is highly imaginative and provocative and demands serious attention. Artists can raise awareness about latent local issues and conflicts (e.g. social injustice) through specific artistic

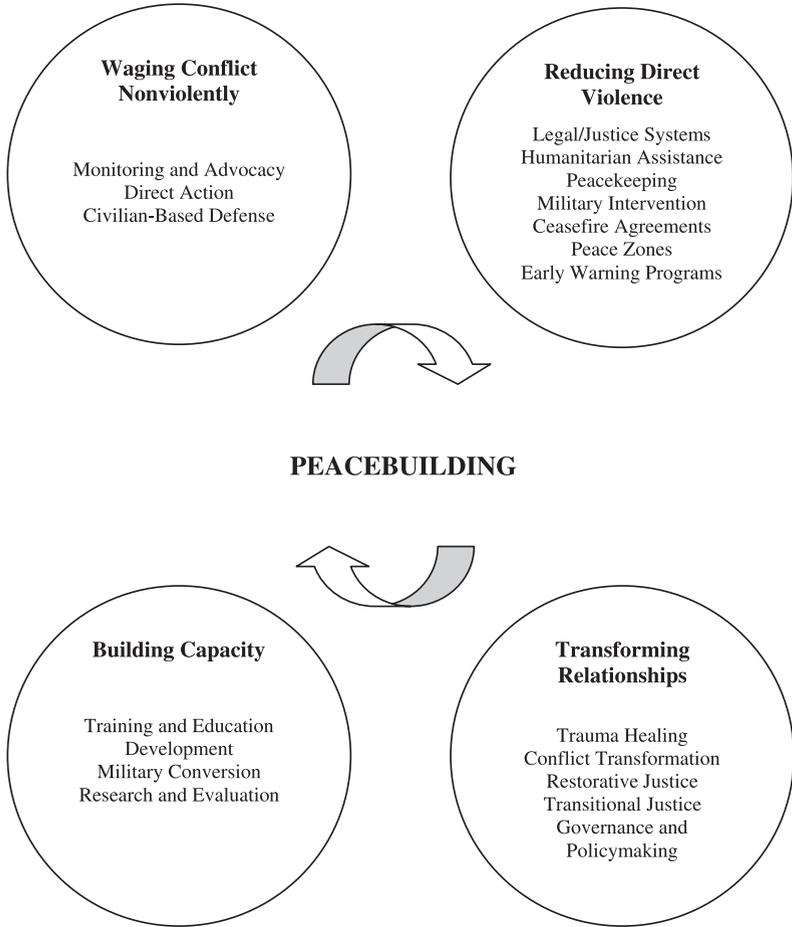


Figure 1. Map of Peacebuilding © Lisa Schirch 2004

media, escalating the intensity of the conflict so that it cannot be ignored. Art forms that potentially fall within the Waging Conflict Nonviolently category can include (but not be limited to): invisible theatre, symbolic reinterpretation, spoken word, hip-hop, documentary filmmaking, public murals, agitprop, installation art, and chants.

In Mexico, public murals have a long history of waging nonviolent conflict by communicating dissent against social, political, and economic

structures. Artists like Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, for example, challenged economic structures that benefited the elite with elaborate public murals glorifying the revolutionary struggles of the working class.¹⁸ Mexican murals became famous as a method of addressing social injustices. Mexican muralist Jose Clemente Orozco's "Destruction of the Old Order," "The Aristocrats," and "The Trench and the Trinity," for example, communicate the social dynamics between the worker, the soldier, and the peasant.

Murals like Orozco's raise public awareness about conflict by acting as a mirror to society, showing in sometimes exaggerated, vivid color a symbolic portrait of oppression and conflict between different groups in society. Murals can also portray an idealistic vision of the future, such as Diego Rivera's "Man at the Crossroads." Commissioned in 1933 by the Rockefellers in New York City, Rivera's futuristic mural envisioned a large May Day worker demonstration that symbolized the quest for social, political, industrial, and scientific change.¹⁹ Rather than take up arms to deliver a message of opposition to the ruling class, these and other artists around the world use murals to permanently register their voices within the public domain. And unlike the fleeting and temporary nature of other art forms, the mural's message is enduring, delivered constantly to passersby, making the mural a potent form of waging conflict nonviolently.

Hip-hop music is another excellent example of art's capacity to wage conflict nonviolently. Hip-hop artist Chuck D, for example, from the US-based Public Enemy, is a devout believer in the political power of hip-hop music. In the 1980s, Chuck D used hip-hop to capture black rage with the album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* and is now using hip-hop to protest America's military involvement in the Middle East.²⁰ Chuck D's lyrics frequently focus on prison reform, funding for schools, ending tax cuts for the wealthy, and antiwar anthems. His music has become a medium for the message, or as Chuck D once quipped, hip-hop is the "CNN for black people."²¹ Hip-hop artists like Talib Kweli, Mos Def, OutKast, Black Eyed Peas, and countless others are following in Public Enemy's footsteps and "getting political" by questioning the U.S. government's role in global conflict situations. These prominent artists are urging their listeners to become more politically active and are directly challenging the Bush Administration's policies in Iraq and Africa.

Hip-hop activism is now pervasive throughout the world. In Africa, artists and activists use hip-hop as a platform to organize youth, instigate

social and political change, and raise awareness vis-à-vis issues like globalization, famine, poverty, corruption, AIDS, and black pride.²² In Accra, Ghana, for example, a hip-hop hybrid has emerged called Hiplife,²³ which combines elements of American-style hip-hop and the Ghanaian pop genre known as high-life. Through Hiplife music, these artists are ripening the conditions for transformation by highlighting Ghana's poverty crisis, political and social corruption, rape, child abuse, and injustice.

Reducing Direct Violence

Efforts to reduce direct violence aim to restrain perpetrators of violence, prevent and relieve the immediate suffering of victims of violence, and create a safe space for peacebuilding activities. This category of peacebuilding processes includes state-based legal and judicial systems and military as well as civilian peacekeeping efforts and programs such as refugee camps and shelters that give people a safe place to live. These programs interrupt the cycle of violence and lay the foundation for further peacebuilding in three ways: preventing victimization, restraining offenders, and creating safe space for other approaches.

Artists working to reduce direct violence can interrupt the cycle of emotional, spiritual, physical, and/or psychological violence through visual, literary, performance, and/or movement art forms. Artists can also use the artistic medium as a safe place for victims to find respite and security from ongoing racial, political, or economic conflict.

The following story gives testimony to the transformative power of the arts, particularly music, to interrupt even the most brutal cycle of violence. Using the arts to interrupt or reduce direct violence is by no means an easy task. Short of stopping a bullet, however, the arts have the capacity to prevent, if only temporarily, further victimization. The music-based revolution in South Africa is one example of how music and dance were used to protect thousands from immediate violence.

In South Africa's struggle for freedom from apartheid, formerly exiled soldiers belonging to the African National Congress introduced an innovative and creative form of civilian peacekeeping²⁴ known as the *toyitoyi*. Part dance, part civilian resistance (to the direct violence), "this powerful, rhythmic stomping of booted feet was copied from Zimbabwean freedom fighters and soon became an integral feature of camp life."²⁵ Spreading quickly into the townships, *toyitoyi* left an indelible mark on the demonstrations of the 1980s.

White security policemen from South Africa, when interviewed in the documentary *Amandla!* about the effectiveness of the nonviolent toyi-toyi “military,” describe how intimidating “the chanting crowd was to young white soldiers, and how hard it was to get the raw recruits to stand their ground. It was the white nation’s nightmare: a huge black crowd ... voices and thumping feet, and yet surging forward as if it were they who held the power.”²⁶ The toyi-toyi movement was able to interrupt the cycle of violence by demonstrating a nonviolent form of power that was impervious to the threat of traditional violent power—making the guns impotent or irrelevant within the new equation.

A revolution in four-part harmony, they called it, and indeed it was. No one who went to an African National Congress meeting in Maputo or in Lusaka could “fail to be inspired by the spontaneous communality of singing and dancing.”²⁷ This nonviolent civilian force had prevented further victimization by government forces through the collective, coordinated performance of community power. As the newspaper *The Guardian* put it, “The scenes of huge crowds gathering strength from the sound of their own voices may lead us to wonder how different recent history might have been if the Palestinians, the anti-globalization warriors and the antiwar demonstrators in London had songs as powerful as those used by the people of South Africa to fuel their drive for freedom.”²⁸

Transforming Relationships

For peace to replace violence, broken relationships are re-created using an array of processes that address trauma, transform conflict, and do justice. These processes give people opportunities to create long-term, sustainable solutions to address their needs. Transformation is a key principle of all peacebuilding programs.

Artists keen on transforming relationships can use the artistic medium to heal personal and/or collective trauma, transform negative energy into positive energy, and make public demands for justice. Artistic modalities utilizable within the Transforming Relationships category can include (but not be limited to): visual arts therapy, drama therapy, movement therapy, music therapy, playback theatre, rituals, and image theatre. (The authors recognize that the therapy treatments referenced above are not “art” per se, but rather represent the integration of artistic modalities within the therapeutic setting.) While innumerable organizations implementing arts-based therapy exist globally, the Children’s

Movement for Creative Education's (CMCE) work to heal trauma through the arts is especially noteworthy.

The CMCE's mission is to help children and youth understand and overcome the effects of violent world events at both a personal and group level through art-based curricula.²⁹ Working in inner-city school classrooms in New York City, Children's Movement used visual, literary, performance, and movement arts to help students process the trauma of witnessing and experiencing 9/11. Additionally, in Bosnia, CMCE worked with teenagers who survived the 1989–1995 war to create arts-based projects as a means of articulating past events, present pain, and hopes for the future.

In 2002, Children's Movement returned to Sarajevo to “begin working with twenty-five mainly Muslim and Croat teens who lived through the 1992–95 siege of the city. Over the following year the teens produced a large collection of artwork and writings about their wartime experiences. In the summer of 2003 these works were exhibited at the International Peace Center Gallery under the title *Portrait of a Siege Generation*. The combined art and writing of the Sarajevo and Lukavica teens now make up the bulk of a traveling exhibition called *Aftershocks: Art and Memoirs of Growing Up in the Aftermath*, which has appeared at the United Nations headquarters in the US and in galleries throughout Europe.”³⁰

Another vivid example is the *Shakespeare Behind Bars* prison-based theatre program operated by the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival's director Curt Tofeland. The inmates at the Luther Luckett Correctional Complex in LaGrange, Kentucky, not only study Shakespeare, they produce and act in full-length First Folio productions of Shakespeare's plays, allowing the prisoners to grapple with emotions they would not otherwise be able to confront safely. *Shakespeare Behind Bars* was designed to “allow the adult prison population the opportunity to examine relevant personal, familial, social, and societal issues within the context of an aesthetic experience.”³¹ This arts-based peacebuilding approach offers participants the opportunity for safe encounters with complex issues and encourages the development of the interpersonal life skills that could contribute to the adult prison population's successful reintegration into society—and the effective end to a cycle of violence.

Building Capacity

Longer term peacebuilding efforts focus on cultivating existing capacities and skills in order to meet human needs. Efforts include education and

training, development, and research and evaluation. These activities aim to build just structures that support a sustainable culture of peace. Beyond ending violent conflict, peacebuilding also seeks to create the capacity for a *culture* of JustPeace (i.e. peace through justice). Sustainability is a key principle of this category of peacebuilding. It requires long-term thinking and planning; constructive relationship patterns between people and their environment; and the human resources and abilities to oversee these processes so that human needs are met for many generations. Capacity building includes training and education programs, development, and transformation.

Artists can use visual, literary, performance, and movement art as capacity-building mechanisms to build self-confidence, enable self-expression, and provide training in leadership, public speaking, and creative problem solving. Art forms that potentially fall within the Building Capacity category can include (but are not limited to): forum theatre³² and arts education programs. The Interactive Resource Center (IRC) in Lahore, Pakistan, is one such arts-based organization working to build community capacity within Pakistan through the use of forum theatre specifically.

The Interactive Resource Center strives to build a “consciousness among marginalized sections of society regarding their basic rights”³³ and uses interactive forum theatre techniques to facilitate democratic dialogue on social issues like honor killings, bonded labor, and gender equality. Theatre practitioners throughout Pakistan are witnessing forum theatre’s efficacy as a dialogical forum to address social injustice, engage marginalized communities in democratic decision-making, and analyze and resolve pervasive community conflict. Forum theatre is so popular in Pakistan, in fact, that over sixty theatre companies have been trained by the IRC in forum theatre techniques.

It is popular because it works. The success stories are ubiquitous and have inspired international nongovernmental organizations, like ActionAid for example, to integrate interactive forum theatre into their peacebuilding initiatives. ActionAid’s 3-year report summarizing peacebuilding and development initiatives in Pakistan listed interactive theatre as one of the most “effective ways of raising public awareness about domestic violence, child abuse, child marriages, rape and girls’ education.”³⁴ Additionally, villages that traditionally excluded female participation in public forums or in any public sphere [and are participating in forum theatre in a sustained manner] are beginning to allow and/or actively integrate women into the public arena.³⁵ Change is happening in Pakistan

and theatre-based capacity-building techniques are a critical peacebuilding component in this process.

Another example of artists building capacity is the work of Dr. Jose Antonio Abreu and his founding of the National Symphony Youth Orchestra in Venezuela in 1975. The orchestral system is explicitly oriented toward children of low-income families and has been credited with contributing to social integration in Venezuela. (Studies have shown that orchestra participants perform better in other areas of academic and social life.) Today, thanks to Dr. Abreu's capacity-building efforts, 130,000 young people take part in a national system of 180 orchestras and a network of choirs. The Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra—the culmination of the national system established by Dr. Abreu—has performed widely in other nations and has been hailed as the best ensemble of its kind in the world.

Beyond building marketable musical skills among low-income youth, the social benefits of the orchestra system are evident throughout Venezuela and, as a result, Abreu's initiatives have inspired similar programs in other Latin American countries. The National System also includes workshops in which children learn to build and repair instruments, special programs for children with disabilities or learning difficulties, and specialist centers or institutes for phonology, audiovisuals, and higher musical education. In response to Dr. Abreu's capacity building endeavors among Venezuela's poor communities, educational, cultural, and government institutions have honored Abreu for his efforts and have called the universal appeal of the orchestra system to Venezuelans a beacon for hope in this troubled world.

Whether it is Dr. Jose Antonio Abreu, Shakespeare Behind Bars, CMCE, or the IRC, arts-based peacebuilders think carefully about the *What*, the *When*, and the *How* when developing their work plan. The previous section highlighted *what the arts can do to contribute to peacebuilding*. The following section delves into *when* peacebuilders should consider implementing arts-based strategies based upon an analysis of the intensity and phase of a particular conflict.

THE STRATEGIC *WHEN* OF ARTS-BASED PEACEBUILDING

These four approaches to peacebuilding mentioned in the previous section—waging conflict nonviolently, reducing direct violence, transforming relationships, and building capacity—are most effective when employed during specific stages of conflict, that is, as conflict increases, progresses, and/or diminishes. In analyzing and assessing a conflict, an important

first step prior to an intervention, it is helpful for peacebuilders to be mindful of the intensity and stage of a conflict. For example, it would be inappropriate and potentially dangerous for a peacebuilder to *wage nonviolent conflict* if the conflict already reached a dramatic climax. Waging nonviolent conflict is helpful primarily when a latent or nascent conflict needs highlighting, lest the conflict be ignored or intentionally forgotten by the powerful social order that prefers the status quo.

Thorough analysis of a conflict situation prior to intervention helps to ensure (but does not guarantee) that the peacebuilding approach is appropriate and stage-sensitive. The intensity of a conflict, as well as the stage in which a conflict resides, dramatically affects the options afforded a peacebuilder. The diagrams below are useful visuals for peacebuilders mindful of the importance of careful analysis and strategy, in all stages of the peacebuilding process.

The first diagram details how the four approaches fit into a phase-sensitive model that relates to the intensity of a conflict, moving from conflict escalation, to conflict management, conflict transformation, and conflict prevention. The terminology in the field of peacebuilding is often confusing, with organizations sometimes using all of these words to describe similar sets of activities. This diagram connects the terminology of peacebuilding with the stages and intensity of conflict. The second diagram then sets up a visual model to demonstrate how the arts can be useful in different stages of conflict and references specific examples of arts-based peacebuilding mentioned in the previous section (Figure 2).

The second diagram (e.g. Diagram of Strategic Arts-based Peacebuilding) references only a small portion of all available arts-based approaches afforded peacebuilders. Undoubtedly, the list is long and every peacebuilder will invent and/or select which art form is most appropriate for his or her setting. The purpose of this diagram, however, is to encourage strategic analysis and implementation. The overall efficacy of arts-based action improves when preceded by thorough analysis, that is, appraising the intensity of the conflict and evaluating the current stage in which the conflict resides.

Assuming that peacebuilders have comprehensively analyzed a conflict situation, properly assessing the *what* (i.e. which peacebuilding approach to use), and the *when* (i.e. stage in which conflict resides), what else is left to do? Spread the word. Tell people *how* arts-based peacebuilding approaches are so effective. The third and final section of this article elucidates a few reasons why arts-based peacebuilding is an effective method of building peace within communities.

Art Form	Description of Art Form
Invisible Theatre	Invisible theatre is public theatre that involves the public as participants in the action without their knowing it.
Symbolic Reinterpretation	Symbolic reinterpretation is art that intentionally mirrors an existing symbol (e.g., flag, logo, or icon) but “reinterprets” the symbol by adding new text, new colors, or new design.
Spoken Word	Spoken word is a form of music or artistic performance in which lyrics, poetry, or stories are spoken rather than sung. Spoken-word is often done with a musical background, but emphasis is kept on the speaker. ³⁶
Hip-Hop	Hip-Hop is a popular subculture of big-city teenagers, which includes rap music, break dancing, and graffiti art. ³⁷
Documentary Filmmaking	Documentary filmmaking is an art form that attempts to document on film or digital tape that which is factual or nonfictional.
Public Murals	Public murals are paintings displayed in public spaces, for example, unused sides of buildings, highway partitions.
Agitprop	Agitprop, known as “agitation and propaganda,” is political propaganda expressed through various art forms: film, theatre, and visual arts.
Installation Art	Installation art takes a specific environment (e.g., park, government building, or plaza) and temporarily transforms it into a gallery.
Chants	Chants are repeated syllables and/or vibrations that deliver a prayer, message, or intention.
Drama Therapy	Drama therapy uses role-play, improvisation, and performance techniques for healing, catharsis, problem solving, and other psychotherapeutic purposes.
Visual Arts Therapy	Visual arts therapy uses painting and sculpture for healing, catharsis, and other psychotherapeutic purposes.
Movement Therapy	Movement therapy connects the mind with the body and uses dance and expressive movement for physical healing, catharsis, and other psychotherapeutic purposes.

Art Form	Description of Art Form
Music Therapy	Music therapy uses sound, music, and music-related strategies for healing, catharsis, and other psychotherapeutic purposes.
Playback Theatre	Playback theatre is a form of improvisational theatre in which audience or group members tell stories from their lives and watch them enacted immediately by an ensemble of actors.
Rituals	Rituals are formal or informal symbolic acts that take place in a ritualized space and aim to form or transform some aspect of people's worldview, identity, or relationships.
Image Theatre	Image theatre is a process in which participants make still images of their lives, feelings, and experiences, using nonverbal communication to reveal truths about society.
Forum Theatre	Forum theatre is a process in which an unresolved problem is shown theatrically to an audience, after which the audience is invited to suggest and enact solutions.
Arts Education	Art education is a school-based curriculum that actively incorporates visual, literary, performance, and movement art forms within the classroom setting.

THE STRATEGIC HOW OF ARTS-BASED PEACEBUILDING APPROACHES

The arts, much like the media, the law, or the education system, are tools for humanity to use in peacebuilding, tools that can be used both constructively and destructively. The arts, like any other tool, can be used for destructive purposes, such as inspiring hatred and division. The arts are powerful tools to be used wisely, nonviolently, and strategically. In this section, the authors explore how to use the arts to maximize their effectiveness through careful elicitive processes, sensitivity to high and low cultural contexts, maximization of art's nonverbal capacity to communicate, and careful planning and evaluation of art's transformative impact on peacebuilding efforts.

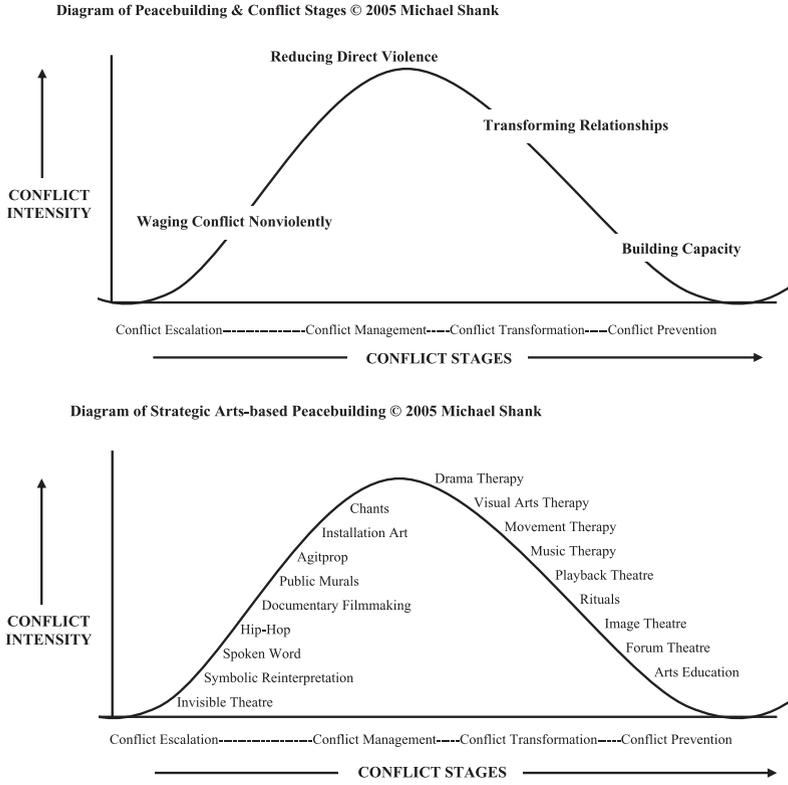


Figure 2 Diagram of Peacebuilding & Conflict Stages © 2005 Michael Shank

Strategic Arts-based Peacebuilding Approaches can be Elicitive

Within the emerging and ever-evolving peacebuilding field, practitioners are placing high value on elicitive, culturally appropriate methodologies. John Paul Lederach’s emphasis on elicitive peacebuilding in his book *Preparing for Peace* and David Augsburger’s emphasis on culturally appropriate peacebuilding in his book *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures* are prime examples of the move towards elicitive, culturally responsive approaches. The arts work well within this value system, offering tools for peacebuilders interested in elicitive methodologies.

The elicitive approach to peacebuilding values participants as resources not recipients. The elicitive approach shows respect for the cultural context and views the cultural knowledge of the participants as the foundation upon which peacebuilding models are grounded. Consequently, an elicitive peacebuilder is a catalyst and a facilitator rather than an expert in a particular field. His or her central role is to provide a highly participatory democratic process for relationship building and decision-making. In an elicitive approach to peacebuilding, everyone teaches and learns, so leadership is shared; learners' experiences and concerns are valued; there is a high level of interactive participation; people co-create new knowledge and engage in critical reflection; there is a connection made between the local and the global; and people work together for change.³⁸

While the arts maintain enormous potential for elicitive and dialogical interaction, the realization of this capacity is often missing. The field of peacebuilding offers skills in facilitation and dialogue that can help artists maximize the elicitive nature of their work. Peacebuilding practitioners can help facilitate a safe space where the participants or "audience" of an art project can engage in a dialogue with professional artists and other audience members on important issues in their lives.

Elicitive approaches to art can also invite people to reveal their own cultural knowledge and cultural resources via the canvass, the journal, the musical instrument, the stage, or the clay. Art therapists, for example, can work with local communities to, respectively, elicit familiar symbols and cultural art forms as resources for expression, particularly as they struggle to communicate about events that may be traumatic or difficult to articulate. For participants who may feel uncomfortable sharing publicly and verbally their cultural knowledge and cultural resources within the traditional workshop setting, the visual, literary, performance, and movement art forms provide peacebuilders with an alternative medium to elicit this valuable information.

The Animating Democracy program in the United States encourages artists to be elicitive and engage in dialogical interaction with their audiences. Grounded in the belief that the arts offer a potent format for enabling communication vis-à-vis conflictual issues, Animating Democracy boosts artists' skills in making participatory democracy viable by encouraging civic dialogue between and among diverse audiences. Through a series of conferences, trainings, learning exchanges, and grant programs, Animating Democracy helps artists create dialogical interactions that elicit cultural knowledge.³⁹

For example, Animating Democracy offered funds and consultative advice to City Lore, an organization in New York City that brought together diverse young artists to reflect, via poetry, on conflicts and issues in their communities. In their dialogical poetry project entitled *Poetry Dialogues*, City Lore offered an elicitive forum for artists to present their poems within a community library setting.

The project was elicitive and dialogical on multiple levels. “In collaboration with Urban Word NYC (formerly Youth Speaks NY) and Poets House, City Lore created three intergenerational poetry teams, defined by identity and comprised of young poets, elder master poets or ‘mentor poets,’ and poet-facilitators. As a participant on the Muslim American team, Tahani Salah explained, ‘In the ten-week workshops, we experimented with many different writing techniques from haikus to page-long masterpieces and different writing styles.’ Within each team, there was an exchange of poetry genres and traditions. Assisted by the poet facilitator, youth and elder poets learned about the form and content of each other’s work, discussed issues in their own communities, and planned and implemented a community presentation generating broader community dialogue on issues identified through the teams.”⁴⁰

The writing process employed by City Lore in the *Poetry Dialogues* project was intentionally elicitive: creating structures for young poets to interact intergenerationally with older poets and mentors; exchanging experiences, ideas, and imagery; and eliciting cultural wisdom and insight from the lived experiences of the youth and their mentors. The dialogical process encouraged the teams to exchange poetry genres and traditions—that is, diverse cultural methods of assigning words to a melody, hip-hop beat, Muslim prayers, Filipino *balagtasan*,⁴¹ and other oral art forms. And in the eventual performance of the poetry, the public audience joined in the dialogue with the poets on the themes raised in their poems,⁴² allowing both artists and audience to be active participants in a dialogue that valued everyone’s experiences and cultural context.

The values embraced by Animating Democracy and City Lore’s *Poetry Dialogues* project—that is, the importance of understanding and working with different cultural contexts—are the subject of the next sub-section.

Strategic Arts-based Peacebuilding Approaches Can Be Contextually Ambidextrous

Peacebuilding practitioners working in multiple locales, regions, nations, or continents understand that diverse communication styles are

required, depending upon the cultural context. In *Conflict Mediation across Cultures*, David Augsburg recognizes the existence of style diversity and categorizes these divergent communication and conflict resolution approaches using the concepts of high-context and low-context cultures.⁴³ According to Augsburg, high-context communities (i.e. contexts maintaining a high level of norms guiding behavior) and low-context communities (i.e. contexts maintaining a low level of norms guiding behavior) have significantly different needs when it comes to communication and conflict resolution. The authors recognize that most communities cannot be so easily identified and instead fall somewhere into a high- and low-contextual continuum, maintain characteristics of both high- and low-context cultures, and constantly adjust and shift their contextual status.

Peacebuilding practitioners working in higher context communities may find participants more responsive to communication that is indirect, informal, relational, face-saving, and collectivistic. Conversely, practitioners working in lower context communities may find participants more responsive to communication that is direct, formal, rational, explicit, and individualistic.

Arts-based peacebuilders interested in utilizing art forms to meet the needs of both lower and higher context communities may take an example from theatre’s aptitude for contextual ambidextrousness. Applied to a low-context conflict situation, theater can satisfy the need for directness and objectivity by staging conflict scenes that illuminate the specific community conflict. Community members, including both stakeholders in the real conflict and spectators of the staged conflict, are then afforded the opportunity to assess the problem objectively, witness theatrically staged options for resolving the conflict within a formalized setting, and implement these proposed conciliatory processes into the real conflict.

High-Context Communities	Low-Context Communities
Indirect-----	-----Direct
Informal-----	-----Formal
Relational-----	-----Rational
Face-Saving-----	-----Explicit
Collectivistic-----	-----Individualistic

Applied to a high-context conflict situation, theatre can satisfy the need for indirectness and interconnectedness by acting as a third-party mediator via the stage. Adapting the high-context conflict for the stage requires a fictionalization process: name changing, location alteration, and situation modification. These adaptations ensure indirectness and guarantee ease of access for audience members accustomed to circuitous dialogue processes. Ideally, the actors originate from within the community, enabling an interrelated, relational approach in addressing the conflict.

Synthesizing low- and high-context peacebuilding processes reveals theatre's ability to simultaneously satisfy contrasting cultural needs from low- and high-context paradigms. Theatre can give the lower-context community the opportunity to view and gain perspective on their own conflict objectively through the recreation and reenactment of an isolated conflict. Concurrently, theatre can allow the higher-context community to save face by witnessing someone else's story—which is, in fact, their own—performed by a concerned cast of recognizable, local actors. Most importantly, interactive theater challenges the multicultural, multi-context audience to transform conflict collectively and constructively.⁴⁴

Strategic Arts-based Peacebuilding Approaches Can Be Nonverbal

Some art forms, though not all, have unique aptitude and propensity for nonverbal expression, an important asset in peacebuilding work. According to communication experts, 65–93 percent of all communicated meaning is nonverbal.⁴⁵ People send and receive messages both verbally through the words that we choose, and nonverbally through the ways we hold our bodies, the direction of our eyes, the tone of our voice, and the expressions on our face. If communication theorists are correct, why do peacebuilders spend so much time talking, and encouraging others to talk, when most information is communicated nonverbally? Paying special attention to the messages sent to others through the symbolic channels of facial expression, body posture, and eye movement is essential, for these channels carry important information about emotions, energy, and thought.

Arts-based peacebuilding recognizes the limitations of verbal communication and suggests practitioners use the arts to elicit information and convey meaning difficult to communicate. Art forms such as music, dance, theatre, or the visual arts use symbolic references to nonverbally communicate something about the real world that is missed when communicating through the direct logic of words. Art can explain emotions, ideas, or feelings that words alone cannot. Many art forms communicate

through symbols, the nonverbal, the human body, the senses, and the experience and expression of emotion. Consequently, the more peacebuilders know about the physical body, senses, and emotions, and how to use them, the more effective they can be in peacebuilding work and the more receptive their bodies will be to conveying physical, emotional, and sensual communication—a capacity essential in performance and movement art forms. Additionally, art helps reclaim the body (alienated by oppression, abuse, violence) and is an important tool in liberating, transforming, and revolutionizing individuals, relationships, and societies.

Reclaiming the body is a peacebuilding task that is at the forefront of the study of dance/movement therapy, which uses nonverbal communication, creativity, and movement to explore relationships and feelings. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for example, Dance Movement Therapy class, taught by registered dance therapist and professor Rena Kornblum, helps undergraduate students “increase their awareness of the nonverbal aspects of human communication, an area that educators on all levels often overlook.”⁴⁶

“While students are taught the rules of grammar, math and science all the way through their schooling, people in our society are left on their own to learn how to read non-verbal cues and how they themselves communicate without words,” she says. “Yet approximately 80 percent of our relationships, whether personal or professional, are determined by body language.”⁴⁷ Kornblum, in addition to offering university students a chance to explore nonverbal communication and its relevance to emotion, relationships, and violence prevention, also works with school children who have experienced abuse through a public school program titled “Prevention through Movement.”⁴⁸

“The theory underlying dance therapy is that body movement reflects the inner state of the human, and that by moving the body within a guided therapeutic setting, a healing process begins. Emerging inner conflicts and issues from the unconscious to the consciousness of the person are addressed on all levels—physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Seeking the full integration of mind and body, and bringing harmony between all the aforementioned levels of the human being is what dance therapy is all about.”⁴⁹

The arts have the capacity to communicate in an elicitive, culturally ambidextrous, and nonverbal way. The *how* also includes careful planning and reflection on what, if any, transformative effect art projects have on the process.

Strategic Arts-based Peacebuilding Approaches Can Be Transformative

Peacebuilding is about social change, transforming people's perception of the world around them, their own identity, and their relationships with others. The arts can help to transform people's worldviews. In conflict, problems seem insurmountable and all encompassing. Discomfort with conflict often stems from the painful awareness or refusal to see that there are multiple truths and that right/wrong and good/bad are not clear categories.

Art can create a frame around an issue or relationship that offers new perspectives and the possibility of transformation; acting like a prism that allows us to view the world through a new lens. Rather than solving problems by negotiating the best solution, the arts can offer a new frame for interpreting the problem and the world around it. The artistic experience maintains the potential to transform people's worldviews, identities, and relationships.⁵⁰

Art's ability to aid in the transformation process is linked to planning. First, it is important to have a clear idea of the intention or goal in using the arts. The clearer the intention, the more likely it is that the goal will be achieved. What is the problem, transition, relationship, emotion, or need that requires this artistic process? What are the hopes, visions, or goals of the artistic process? What is the artist's peacebuilding methodology trying to communicate? Who is the audience for the project? How will success be evaluated?

For example, Howard Zehr uses photography to challenge widespread perceptions of victims and offenders in the justice process. Through black and white portraits of people doing lifetime sentences in his book *Doing Life*, Zehr intended to deepen public understanding of the humanity of people who have committed offenses.⁵¹ In *Transcending*, Zehr hoped to increase understanding for victims' journey after crimes, including the potential for transcending the experience.⁵² Zehr works with his students to refine their goals as they begin a project using photography or other arts-based approaches. The clearer an artist can be about their intended message and the audience for their project, the more likely these intentions will have a positive effect.

Second, it is important to consider how the intended message is encoded into the chosen art form. This is where talent and artistry become essential. It takes insight to choose the right symbolic forms that will communicate a message in a way that allows the receiver of the

message to take responsibility and ownership for its interpretation. Communication researchers claim that the best messages allow listeners to feel like they were not “given” a complete solution to a problem.⁵³ Rather, listeners are more likely to understand a new idea and change their minds when they hear information that is not complete or directive, and allows people to make their own conclusions. In direct modes of communication, listeners can feel patronized or overwhelmed with information. While direct communication may seem more “rational” it can be less effective.

Third, it is important to evaluate the impact of the encoded message on the audience. What effect did the approach have on the audience? What message did they receive? What changes or transformations occurred because of the art project? What worked well? What needs to be changed? Practitioners will want to be able to answer these questions and articulate their goals for transformation and their reason for choosing the medium or frame for their transformative message. The marketability of these methodologies will increase if practitioners can demonstrate through solid research the transformative impact of the arts on their work.

How peacebuilders use strategic arts-based approaches is as critical as discovering and naming *what* and *when*. This discussion of elicitive, contextually ambidextrous, symbolic, and transformative processes provides a conceptual framework for understanding the contribution the arts make to peacebuilding.

CONCLUSION

This article aims for a richer articulation of how the arts function in peacebuilding, when to use them, what they can do, and how to evaluate their usage. The authors recognize that more research and analysis is needed and call upon practitioners everywhere to begin (or continue) articulating the reasons why and how the arts are powerful vehicles for peacebuilding. The more that is known about strategic arts-based peacebuilding and the relevant tools available, the more effectual the field of peacebuilding will be.

The job for peacebuilders, therefore, is to analyze *how* the arts retain this transformative capacity, *what* to do with the arts in peacebuilding, and *when* is the appropriate time for different arts-based interventions, based upon a thorough analysis of the conflict situation. Most likely, individuals reading this article right now could easily reference a play, poem, painting, photograph, prose, ballet, or film that moved them in some significant way.

The arts, whether they are visual, literary, performance, or movement forms, maintain the capacity to transform. This article points to the untapped potential for arts-based peacebuilding and proposes ways to harness this potential through strategic implementation of visual, literary, performance, and movement art forms. Now the journey towards a more creative synthesis between artists and peacebuilders must continue.

NOTES

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