

1.2 Conflicts and Violence in Schools

Conflicts in schools can be classified into various categories:

- 1) conflicts between students
- 2) conflicts between students and teachers
- 3) conflicts within the school staff (teachers, directorate, counselors)
- 4) conflicts between the students' parents and the school staff

Most conflicts between youth are of a short-term nature, and seem to have less long-term effect than conflicts among adults. Yet, they need to be taken very serious as they usually disturb the teaching efforts and may have detrimental effects on the concerned youth. Usually, the trigger of conflicts is the following⁵:

- 1) "borrowing" or taking away things without asking
- 2) touching or hitting by accident
- 3) getting on each others nerves
- 4) purposely hurting each other
- 5) not leaving each other alone
- 6) making fun of others
- 7) mobbing (intended continuous exclusion of one person)
- 8) scapegoating/bossy behavior (one student is always the "loser" and blamed for everything; one student is always leading the group being the boss or the "clown" of the class)

Youths' reaction to conflict varies depending on age, sex and degree of education. Young students tend to use verbal violence and might get in a brawl. With older students, the degree of violence may escalate. Students with a higher degree of education rather tend to deal with conflicts in a subliminal way by aggressive competition, spreading of rumors, intrigues such as mobbing, or exclusion. Boys usually carry out conflicts in a more open (physical aggressive) way, while girls tend to subliminal methods. This is much less physical but rather verbal such as breaking friendships, giving dirty looks.

Conflicts between teachers and students take a different dimension. Usually, the conflicts revolve around the following topics:

- 1) maintaining a workable atmosphere in the classroom
- 2) students damaging school equipment
- 3) students breaching general school rules and regulations
- 4) educational performance of the students
- 5) students challenging the teacher's authority

Most of the teachers' time and energy is spent on establishing quiet in the classroom in order to pursue the educational assignment. Common reactions are demands for quiet, menacing or waiting.

There are also conflicts within the staff; between teachers as well as between teachers and the directorate. Usually, these conflicts are not only a strain for the people involved in the conflict but also affect the larger atmosphere within the schools.

Finally, there are conflicts between teachers and the parents of the students. Many times, it is about the educational performance of the students. Parents feel their child(ren) are given unjustified grades. In addition, conflicts arise around the perceived methods of bringing up the



children. Conflicts between the students and their parents at home will usually have an effect on the situation in schools or vice versa.

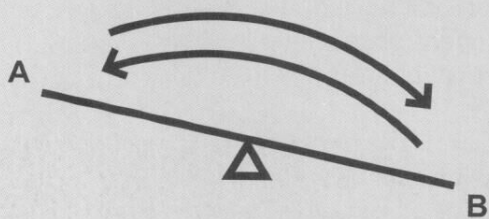
1.3 Types of Behavior in Conflict

People react differently when involved in conflict. In the Conflict Resolution Network Manual,⁶ the different behaviors are classified into three categories: fight, flight and flow.

- 1) Fight is an aggressive reaction to a conflict. It is controlling, involves blaming, threatening and punishment. The person refuses to deal with the other's needs and concerns, is manipulative and dumps the responsibility on the other while denying ownership of the problem. The message sent is usually: "I am right and you are wrong".
- 2) Flight is a passive reaction. One submits to another's power, withdraws, and tries to avoid the confrontation. One's own needs are surrendered for the sake of maintaining the peace. The message is: "I am not all right but you are okay".
- 3) Flow is an approach that works towards sharing the power or working towards it. The aim is to solve the problem, not to attack or avoid the other person and to find a solution that everyone can live with. The message is: "I am okay and you are okay."

The following models⁷ elaborate on these different types of behavior a little more. Let us take the example of one student constantly being annoyed by a fellow classmate.

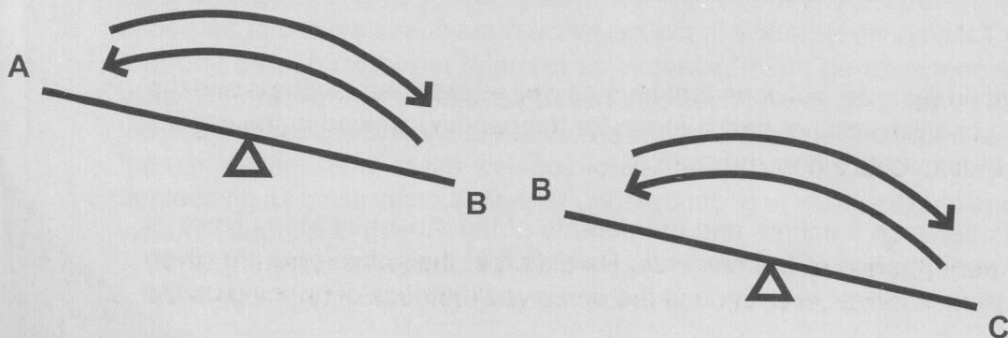
1) Strike – Counterstrike:



In Case 1, the student will strike back when aggressed. In other terms, Person A attacks person B. This may be a verbal, non-verbal or physical attack. B reacts with a counter attack. It refers to the above-mentioned "fight" reaction. Very often, the "natural" reaction to an attack is to counterstrike. Adults tend to refrain from these reactions for "intellectual reasons" ("using violence is not okay"). They may resort to other means not necessarily

more constructive ways ("talking behind the back", "intrigue"). Youth usually reflect their anger in a much more spontaneous and honest way. They tend to counterstrike immediately. Yet, behavior of youth mostly is what they have learnt from adults.

2) Shifting:

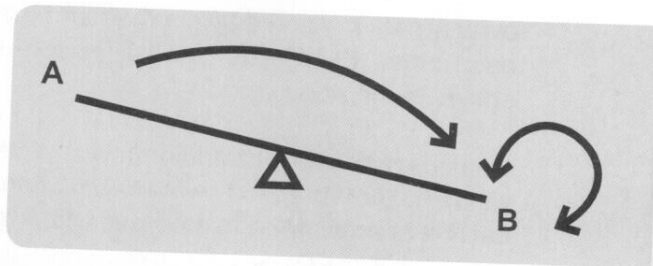


In Case 2, it is likely that the student will not strike back because s/he faces the whole group. Possibly, s/he might react by

passing on the aggression to a little sister or brother. Schematically speaking, A attacks B. B receives the aggression and passes it on to C. This usually happens in situations of a significant power imbalance between the aggressor and victim. B does not dare to counterstrike because A is too powerful. Power imbalance is also a fact in the relationship between teachers and students. It does not imply that such a dynamic will always take place. However, if a teacher disputes with a student, the latter will tend not to oppose. The student will much more likely pass on the anger taken in to peers or younger children.

3) Self Suppression/Destruction:

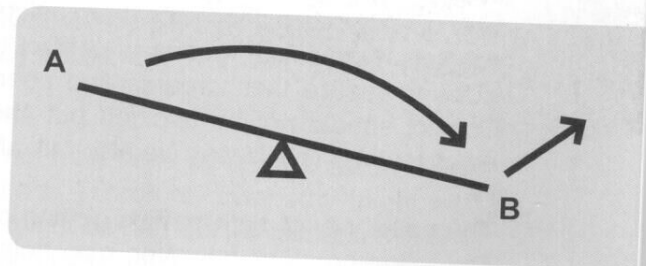
The student mentioned above might as well react with auto aggressive behavior. A drop in his/her educational performance, withdrawal from others (even the ones who do not aggress him/her) refusal to communicate etc, can reflect this. In the abstract: A and B are in conflict. B absorbs all the aggression, and thus develops auto-aggressive or self-destructive behavior. Auto aggressive behavior is also very common among youth who are abused at home or elsewhere. Having little opportunity to oppose/defend or simply to talk about it, there is a tendency to become auto aggressive.



Cases 2 and 3 can be interpreted both as fight or flight reactions. Case 2 is fight, because B attacks C. At the same time B avoids the confrontation with A. Case 3 shows is a form of fight because B acts aggressively to him/herself. Yet, at the same time, B escapes the confrontation choosing instead to be self-destructive.

4) Flight:

The student mentioned above may decide consciously or unconsciously not to confront with the fellow students. Yet, on the long run this avoidance will be difficult, because s/he cannot really escape class every day. In other words, two people have a conflict. While A keeps on putting pressure on B, B does not oppose or confront the conflict but tries to avoid it through flight. It is a different case if there is a space for flight. In this case escaping a confrontation can be more reasonable and effective.



1.4 Constructive conflict transformation

Constructive conflict transformation takes a different approach. The above behavioral tendencies shown in Cases 1 through 4 are mostly instigated by our education or upbringing, often simply a reflex that is little reflected and spontaneous.

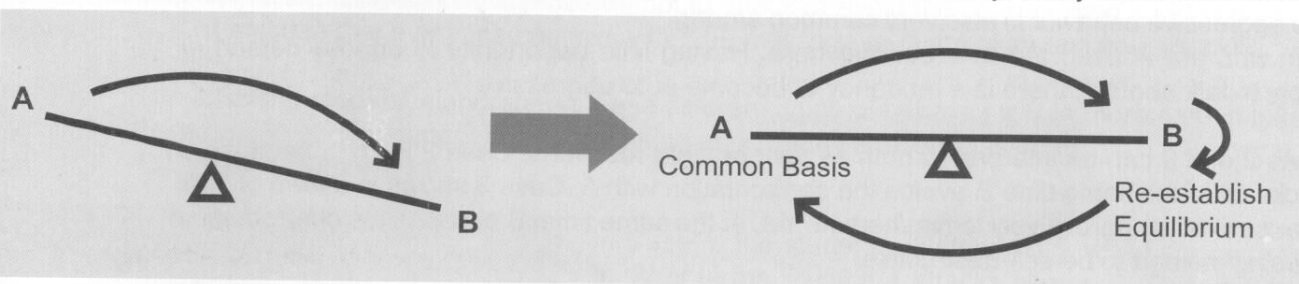
Constructive conflict transformation seeks to work on the conflict itself, the process of interaction and the conflict evolving and the relationships between the actors during and after, rather than



simply ending the visible conflict. A common ground should be found that both A and B can live with. In a conflict between A and B, B chooses, as a first step to consider the dispute taking into account his/her own position. A strong self-awareness is necessary in order to reestablish the equilibrium that was shaken by the fight. Only from this point, is it possible to start looking for a common ground with A.

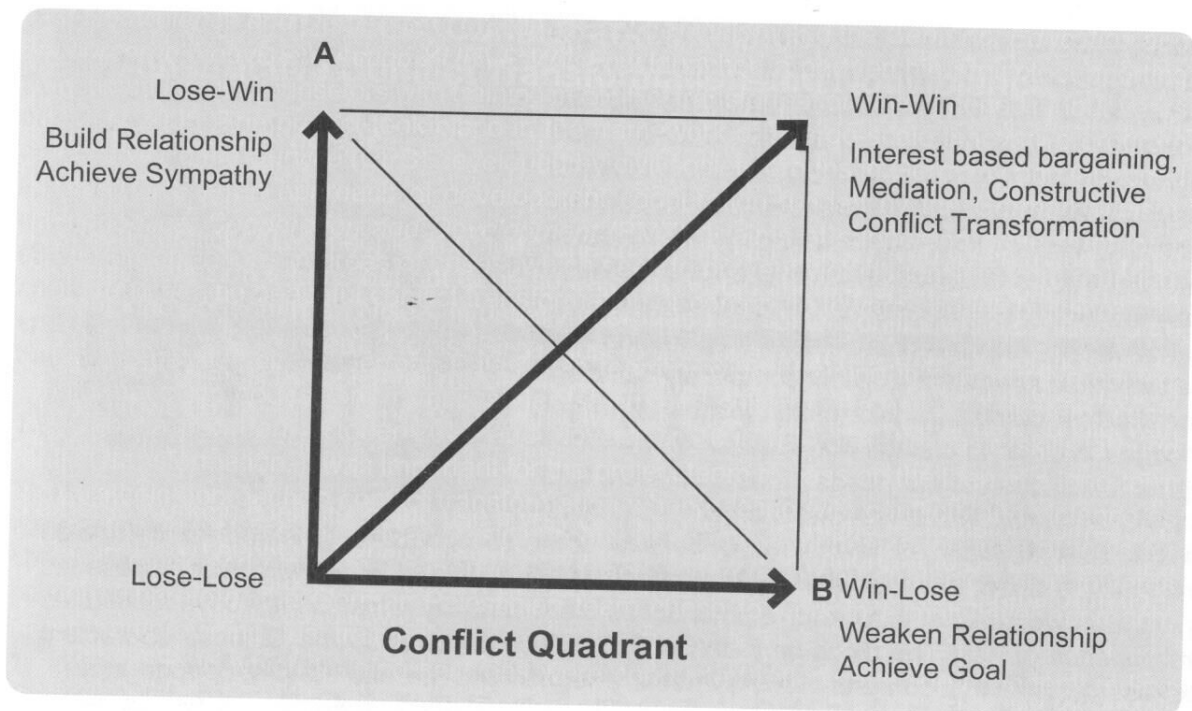
In the example of the student, s/he will most likely find it difficult to initiate the search for a common understanding because s/he is facing the whole class and as such a big opposition. Therefore, such an attempt is likely to be unsuccessful. Therefore, constructive conflict transformation is not an emergency tool that can be applied just in case of conflict. The immediate action as shown in the model is part of a process. With students, it is necessary to work on their self-awareness, support them in their conflict understanding and the relationships they build with each other. Eventually, this will enable them to deal with conflict in a constructive way as shown in the above model.

Constructive conflict transformation aims at both conflict parties emerging from a conflict as winners: the so called "win-win solution". Usually, we learn through our socialization that it can be of advantage to step over other people and push them away. Many movies advocate



the idea that being strong is equal to using violence and is the most efficient way to achieve something. Especially, for boys and male youth it is difficult to renounce violence because very quickly peers denounce them as cowards. However, there are also other ways to resolve conflicts. Nonviolent means of conflict transformation entail finding solutions that allow both sides to realize their dreams and needs. Being nonviolent does not mean being passive. Conflict should not be avoided but should be dealt with in a conscious, constructive and creative way. This is why we also talk about constructive conflict transformation.

The possibility of both parties getting out of a conflict as winners may seem absurd at first. The following story, however, may help to understand the various solutions to a conflict that could lead to a "win-win" solution. There are two girls fighting over one orange. Both want to have it and do not want to let the other get it. The fight has been going on for quite a while and they have not been able to reach a solution to their conflict as their Mum comes in. Now what happens? The mother does, what most people would do: She cuts the orange in half. Both parties receive 50% of what they wanted. This is what we call a *compromise*, a solution we quickly tend to choose when it seems impossible for both parties to receive 100% of what they are fighting for. In the "Conflict Quadrant", a model that visualizes different ways of transformation, 'Compromise' is in the middle of the square. Another possibility is that the mother gives the whole orange to one or the other girl. That is – depending on the perspective – a "win-lose" (bottom right) or "lose-win" (top left) situation. Finally, the mother can also decide – as the sisters have been fighting so nastily – not to give the orange to either of them: the



"lose-lose" option (bottom left).

Now let us suppose the mother has divided the orange. The sisters accept the decision as it finally ends the fight and because it was their mother's suggestion. Yet, neither really seem very happy. How come? Well, it turns out that one only uses the peel because she wants to bake a cake. The pulp goes in the trashcan. The other squeezes her half to make a juice and throws away the peel. If the mother had asked what they want to do with the orange, she could have found that out. By dividing the orange into two halves, every girl only got 50% out of it while there was a true possibility for both of them to gain 100%: The "win-win" solution (top right).

A "win-win" solution is not always possible. It also does not mean that all other solutions are bad. "Lose-win" usually means to give up on certain goals. Therefore, sympathy might be achieved or the relationship could be strengthened. This might be harmful if this leads to self-destructive behavior. However, it can also be a good solution if the goals given up do not touch fundamental needs and maintaining a good relationship is more important. The "win-lose" option applies conversely in a similar sense. A compromise usually means that both sides give up part of their interests. If the parts given up do not touch basic needs of either party this can be an acceptable solution. However, if too much was given up, this will eventually lead to another conflict.

1.5 Working with Constructive Conflict Transformation

"I cannot change the world, I can only change myself and by changing myself I can change the world."⁸



Dealing with a conflict in a constructive way encourages the recognition of a positive aspect of conflict: Usually, that is not a very easy exercise. When getting into a conflict our first reaction is anxiety, tension, fear, aggression, animosity etc.. In most societies, conflicts are much more perceived as destructive, disturbing, annoying rather than acknowledging its creative potential. Yet, conflicts are not an incident in a vacuum. They are simply a symptom, an indicator of something that is wrong, not the cause itself. That means that the individual needs are also not completely satisfied. Constructive conflict transformation invites us to get engaged in order to change our situation in favor of a higher satisfaction of our needs. Thus a different light is shed on conflict which reveals its creative potential, the possibility to teach us how to deal better with solving our problems, the opportunity to also bring people closer together afterwards and certainly to learn a lot about ourselves. It depends on us what we make of this creative potential as there certainly remains the above mentioned ambivalence of risk. The dichotomy of 'Conflict' is well captured in the Chinese characters expressing conflict. It consists of two symbols: one meaning risk and the other opportunity.



Teachers and school counselors may find themselves in despair with the situation in schools. Despite a lot of effort and lifelong work difficult circumstances seem to persist, as conflict and violence continue. The problem might be that they see themselves as the only responsible figures to solve problems and conflicts and to lower the level of violence. Moreover, they take up this task all alone. The approach of constructive conflict transformation (CCT) is different. CCT gives the group as a whole the responsibility to make a change, solve problems and decrease violence. It is not (only) the responsibility of the teacher(s)/counselor(s) (or director) to create such an environment in schools that is most favorable for good learning results. The students must also take responsibility for this.

Constructive Conflict Transformation will not make conflicts and violence disappear. It will not change the whole world (or specific situation) at once. However, conflict transformation suggests tools to manage conflict and violence in a different way. It aims to work on the behavior of people, who will eventually change the situation. For everyone that means dealing with oneself deeply first. In the following step it encourages one to deal with relationships. The ultimate aim of the program is the establishment of a certain (teaching) culture in schools: an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust, of acknowledgement, acceptance, good cooperation and taking responsibility among the students and teachers and the teachers among themselves.

The functioning of this concept is based on the assumption that a high level of individual self-awareness, a comfortable atmosphere and good cooperation within the school is the basis of a constructive way of dealing with conflict and to decrease the tendency towards violence. All tools suggested in the manual need to be put in this context and be part of a ongoing learning process. Therefore, Constructive Conflict Transformation will not work as an emergency method; it is not a fire brigade against conflicts and violence. If the tools are applied in a vacuum for a short-term goal, they will never function effectively. Every tool given needs to be

connected very gradually and concretely to the real life situation in schools.

Finally, working with constructive conflict transformation needs a clear aim. In the previous paragraphs many options were given on how and where to work on conflict. One can work on all the facets: behavior, the attitude, the contradiction (conflict triangle), the culture, direct and indirect violence (violence triangle), with the students, the teachers, the parents, the directorate. Anyone taking such an approach is doomed to fail. It is important to be very clear about one's resources and capacities: ("We cannot change the world"!). It seems much more appropriate to first work with a small group. For example to work with one class on the behavior and relationships between teachers/counselors and students before going to the whole staff, the directorate, the system or the parents etc

1.6 Basic Assumptions for Constructive Conflict Transformation⁹

The following assumptions define the nature of constructive conflict transformation. All mentioned aspects play an important role when learning about constructive conflict transformation and should be promoted during a learning process. There is no particular order because all of them play an important role.

1) Work on Self-Awareness, Confidence and Respect for Oneself

Being aware about oneself, the personality, the weaknesses, the strengths, the reactions in various situations etc. is a crucial point for one's own conflict transformation capacity. Through awareness and reception of the feelings of oneself and others, of the own body and behavior, a stable self-confidence is established. Especially for youth this is very important as their self-awareness is still in process of development. A positive image of oneself helps to break out of a vicious circle of negative enforcement in situations of conflict and violence.

2) Take responsibility

We are all part of a system and therefore all actors within this system. This makes it actually impossible to think in categories of good and bad and right and wrong. We are part of each conflict that we get into and the violence around us. It might be hard to accept this but at the same times opens many possibilities. Being part of a system means that if we change it also changes! Therefore, it is crucial to assume responsibility for our situation and ourselves. If we keep on blaming others to be responsible for our situation, nothing will change. Why should the others change things for us? Only if we take action and work on the situation ourselves things will start changing.

3) Be Aware about the solution being with each one of us

Teachers and counselors cannot resolve the conflicts for students! The solution is already with the conflict parties. A solution is only sustainable if it is in accordance with their needs. Usually, the conflict parties know best about their own needs. All it possibly needs is a facilitator to support the opponents in realizing their needs and finding their solution. This is where teachers and counselors play an important role.

4) Separate Person and Problem

It is important to separate problem and person. The aim is not to change the other person



but to work on the problem: It is not that we dislike a person; much more, we dislike what s/he has done. Respect for the person enables us to work together on the problem rather than getting caught up in accusations and blaming.

5) Be aware about the existence of several truths

Our truth – or the way we perceive and explain reality - is certainly subjective, coined by our values, upbringing, and culture, political as well as historical background. There certainly is a truth of the other and maybe even a third party. Accepting the truth of the other however, does not mean to agree with it. Yet, it is important to give empathy to others in order to understand where they are coming from.

6) Look for Transformations to Conflict beyond Victory and Defeat

Constructive Conflict Transformation renounces violence as a way to deal with conflicts and suggests looking for a solution beyond victory and defeat. That does mean one should remain passive or simply not use violence. It needs to be replaced by a very conscious action. The very common way of dealing with conflicts is to absolutely fight in order to achieve what we want. Mostly this happens at the expense of the other (win-lose). This approach is very aim-orientated: end the conflict, end the violence. It bars us from looking at the process: What are the interests or needs behind the action of the other, what is the history of the conflict, what aspects are involved in the violence, what are the relationships? If we manage to step back from the victory-defeat approach, we are much more open to explore the backgrounds and – like in the orange example – achieve surprising solutions.

7) Understand Conflict as an Opportunity for Change and Growth

It seems hard to accept conflicts as an opportunity. However, first they are an indicator of something that is not right. Thus, they can be understood as an opportunity for improvement. This helps us to look at the context of a conflict rather than just at our aim. It clearly depends on us if we make something of this opportunity or not.

8) Listen to and understand others

Success in conflict transformation is based on many things. One of them is the ability to receive and name ones feelings and thoughts. On the other side, it is also important to be willing to listen carefully to others. The more the level of relationship is clarified the better a solution on the formal level will be.

9) Work on Cooperation and Group Building

A well functioning group usually deals with conflicts in a constructive way. Therefore, it is important to work on building relationships within the group. There is a need to deal with issues like trust building and the ability to cooperate. Cooperation means working together on a common goal while letting go of individual and egoistic interests.

10) Be clear about the aim

It is not the aim to obliterate conflicts and not possible to make violence totally disappear. Constructive Conflict Transformation (CCT) and nonviolence is a way to deal with conflicts and to exit a cycle of violence, not the solution. We should understand CCT not only as a tool. It needs to be filled with life every day.

We also cannot change the whole world, not even the society. It is important to limit the

work on a clearly limited task and group in order to achieve some concrete results. Constructive conflict transformation accordingly asks for a great deal of self-control, creativity and democratic abilities such as participatory decision making or accepting diversity as an opportunity of development, just to mention some of them. It also requires one to be able to deal with ambiguity and diversity. Common interest and responsibility should be in the center of a sustainable and future orientated conflict transformation. This does not mean that someone who has not internalized all above listed points is incapable of dealing with conflict in a constructive way. Each one of them represents a building block and is part of a life long process of learning: Conflict Transformation is the way, not the solution.

¹ Friedrich Glasl: Konfliktmanagement, Bern/Stuttgart 1990, p. 14.

² Johan Galtung: Peace By Peaceful Means, London: 1996.

³ According to The Conflict Resolution Network: Trainer's Manual. Chatswood/Australia, 2004. p. III.4 (<http://www.crnhq.org>). Friedrich Glasl has presented a much more elaborated model. Cf. F. Glasl: Konfliktmanagement, Bern 1990.

⁴ Johan Galtung: Violence, Peace and Peace Research. Journal of Peace Research, 6 (3), (1969), p. 167-191 (p. 168).

⁵ The first classification and the interpretation of conflict in schools in the following paragraph are adapted from Jamie Walker: Gewaltfreier Umgang mit Konflikten, Berlin 1995, p. 12 ff.

⁶ According to The Conflict Resolution Network: Trainer's Manual. Chatswood/Australia, 2004. p. 1.3 (<http://www.crnhq.org>)

⁷ Model inspired by Pat Patfoort: An introduction to Nonviolence. Brussels 1987 and a model designed by the organization "Graswurzelwerkstatt" Köln.

⁸ Robert Muller, Chancellor of the UN University of Peace/Costa Rica, former UN Assistant Secretary General

⁹ All basic assumptions inspired by: "Sabine Koerner, Monika Engel: Zivile Konfliktkultur und Konfliktmanagement, Soest/Germany 2001 p. 10 and „Auf dem Weg ins freundliche Klassenzimmer, Bund für Soziale Verteidigung, Minden 1999. p. 16ff.



2. Constructive Conflict Transformation Training

