

# Foreword

What James Joyce said of Mr. Duffy, that he “lived a short distance from his body,” can be said of many of us involved in conflict resolution. We are heads walking around, unfortunately, at great distances from our bodies, especially whenever we are caught in our own conflict or are working with others’ conflicts. We have forgotten the ancient teachings of Socrates to Plato that our minds need close connection with our bodies in order to think clearly and especially to understand and generate true dialogue with and among others. The mind-body connection is apparently so obvious that its very obviousness makes us oblivious to it. Unaware that physical and verbal expressions are ancient relatives, located in the same region of our brains, we become lost in the ozone of our minds. We lose all contact and connection with our bodies. As a result, we lose awareness of the simple, relaxing quality of breathing mindfully, of the open, receptive state that arises when we shift our awareness from our constantly perseverating minds to the open clarity of our bodies and allow that connection to quiet our minds and nurture our beings. We have inured ourselves to the devastating consequences of this disconnection, leaving us striving to *do* conflict resolution, rather than relaxing into the natural, fundamental mind-body connection that allows us to *be* conflict resolution.

Participants in the *Dancing at the Crossroads Project*, a four-year exploration of new directions in conflict theory and practice, wrote this ground-breaking, marvelously creative book. Conflict resolution scholars Michelle LeBaron and Carrie MacLeod facilitated the project, along with renowned Canadian dancer and dance instructor—Margie Gillis. The project included a gathering of experienced conflict resolution scholar/practitioners at the European Graduate School in Saas Fee, Switzerland. The project’s dual purposes were: (1) to highlight our bodies as paramount in both the origin and transformation of all conflict, and (2) to make the case for including those same bodies in our conflict resolution work, through invigorating conflict theory and practice with a physical vocabulary. The project was premised on the fundamental belief that human *being* needs to be featured in conflict resolution work as consciously as human *doing*.

When I am personally caught in conflict, I feel heavy, weary, and dull, if I pay any attention to my body at all. I am stuck inside my mind, which is either racing between disconnected thoughts and exaggerated fears, down familiar neuronal grooves of negativity and separation, or is numb and lifeless, unable to focus, even though I know that the simplest physical movement, such as taking a walk outdoors, will begin to soothe and focus my mind to deal more skillfully with that conflict. Yet how often do any of us think of this distinction when we find ourselves caught in our own personal conflict or facilitating a tense, seemingly intractable conflict among others? Anywhere we look in our world, we see my individual pattern

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repeated in our politics, in our business and personal relationships, in our sectarian divisions, and, above all, in our treatment of the Earth.

Consider, for a moment, your own body in conflict. What are your habitual, unconscious patterns? Does your stomach become queasy? Do you clench your hands or your jaw? Do you toss and turn, unable to sleep? Do you eat compulsively or lose your appetite? Also, think of your most recent conflict resolution experience. Recall the tension and stress you felt in your own body exuding from the participants as they entered the room. Recall the manner in which they moved around the room or gathered in safe groupings. Recall their lack of eye contact or acknowledgement of the other side.

I was quite fortunate, as a young public defender in Charleston, South Carolina to have a book on yoga literally fall into my hands as I walked through a bookstore one Saturday morning. While learning yoga from a book was not the best way to begin, it awakened my awareness of my breath and body and began my personal journey of bringing my own mind-body connection into my work. One day in the courtroom, I noticed another attorney stiffly reading his closing argument to a jury, totally disconnected from his body, and I watched the bored and sleepy jury, totally disconnected from what he was saying. That lesson ultimately led me to the discovery that if I listened to witnesses, not just with my mind, but with my body, I could reliably feel or sense when they were lying, almost always about some irrelevant, tangential issue. Nevertheless, like a cat with a mouse, I had them, no matter whether their lie was relevant to the facts of the case. When I challenged their lie, they would immediately get stuck in their heads, conveying their physical discomfort to the jury, opening the door for me to convince the jury that all their testimony was false.

Until the *Dancing at the Crossroads Project* and this book you are holding, the literature and pedagogy of the conflict resolution field have generally ignored my yoga-derived courtroom learning. They have failed to focus on the nexus of conflict and the bodies that contain conflict to inform and deepen our understanding or generate new questions and insights about conflict resolution, despite the fact that research has demonstrated that a high percentage of our communication is non-verbal. While many of us are already deeply aware of the positive shifts that occur in our overall sense of inner health and wellbeing after some physical movement or exertion, we likely struggle or fail to bring that same awareness into our work, often because we simply do not know the distinctions necessary to bridge this gap. This courageous, revolutionary book invigorates this fundamental but oft-forgotten connection between mind and body. Reading it will provide new insights that will reshape your approach to conflict.

Far too many conflict resolvers are stuck in being technicians, following a one-size fits all, repetitive approach no matter the conflict. For example, the legal Alternative Dispute Resolution field has virtually been stripped of its intellectual capital and is dominated more and more by retired judges who conduct stripped-down, no-joint-session, traditional labor-style bargaining—essentially settlement conferences masquerading as mediations. The contributors to this book repeatedly remind us that such cookie-cutter approaches are rigid and fragile, lacking in imagination, curiosity, relationality, flexibility, creativity, or emotionality. Learning to focus on our bodies, on the other hand, calls forth these qualities in us as well as in the

conflicting parties, enabling us to meet the greatest challenge in conflict resolution—seeing the essence or heart of the stuck places in and between the minds of the parties. Seeing this essence can only be achieved through ways of knowing that include the whole in addition to the parts, through developing capacities and pathways that rely on intuition as well as cognition and, therefore, must rely on a connected mind and body.

One of the contributors quotes a beautiful, poetic description of a conflict resolver’s work, written by T.S. Eliot in his immortal *Four Quartets*:

“At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
 Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
 But neither arrest nor movement, And do not call it fixity,  
 Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
 Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
 There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.  
 I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.  
 And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.”

A young Russian woman helped me begin to understand the meaning of these words and the importance of developing awareness of my own mind-body connection, as well as that of the conflicting parties, while I was engaged in a conflict facilitation/team-building session years ago for the international staff of a large health and wellness retreat in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. The young woman remained silent and withdrawn from everyone else in her department, refusing to participate in any of the exercises or to speak a word during the first four days of the facilitation. I never observed her interacting with anyone, including during the breaks or at the beginning and ending of each day. The night before the final day, some of the staff played music while the guests at the retreat center enjoyed a festive dance. I watched as the young woman played a huge bongo drum with great skill and complete abandon, totally opposite from her withdrawn presence in the facilitation.

Without a clue as to what I was going to do or say to her, the next morning I walked to the corner of the room where she was sitting, wrapped in a blanket, almost hidden from view. Watching my own breathing and recognizing I could not “think” my way through how to work skillfully with her, I softly invited her to talk with me about her experience of working at the retreat center and in this department. She remained silent, buried in her blanket. I surprised myself by describing watching her playing the drums the night before, how beautiful it was to see the skill and enthusiasm with which she played and drove the rhythm of the music. I asked, “Do you endeavor to bring that same skill and enthusiasm to your work on this team?” More silence, but she did allow the blanket to slide off her. I waited, completely stumped.

Then I heard and felt the music from the previous night begin to run through my body. Without taking my eyes off her slumped form, I said to the group, “Please begin to drum together with your hands on the tables or your chairs or however you wish.” They began, stiffly and uncertainly, but they soon found a rhythm that slowly built momentum. As I felt

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her body begin to respond, I waited until I sensed the drumming more fully engage her. Then, I reached out my hand and said, “Will you move around the room with me to greet your teammates?” When she finally took my hand, I gently pulled her up, and we began to move slowly around the room to the rhythm of the now thunderous drumming, but her eyes remained downcast. She made no eye contact with me or any of her teammates, until I said, “I sense a great deal of love and appreciation for you and your courage in the room right now. Would you like to look around and see it?” When she did, she saw many broad smiles and tears, yet I noticed she only quickly glanced up and looked indirectly at a few of her teammates.

After we completed our impromptu dance around the room, I waved the drumming to a stop and asked her to look at me. She met my gaze with great difficulty through her own tears. I asked her to tell me the story that was running in her head at that moment. She replied, “In my native Russia, we never, ever made eye contact with anyone. We never knew who would report us to the KGB for any reason, or no reason, so wherever we went, we never met anyone’s gaze.”

I allowed the power of her story and what it revealed about her inability to connect with her teammates to penetrate the room before I spoke quietly. “Well, you are no longer in Russia, dear friend. You are safe now. Please look at your teammates and experience for yourself, your new freedom and safety.” She did, and a shy smile spread across her face. There were no dry eyes, including my own.

This memory arose as I read the varied descriptions by the scholar/practitioner participants in the *Dancing at the Crossroads Project* of their experiences with spontaneous and improvised movement, followed by periods of critical reflection that opened pathways of mindful awareness to their own deeply ingrained, habitual thought patterns, biases, and feelings. As you read, you may have similar memories of instances in which you intuitively allowed your body-mind connection to guide you, rather than staying locked in your head. The contributors explain how focusing on physical movement pushed to the surface flawed assumptions underlying their habitual thought patterns, thereby creating dissonance and new openings to experience a more balanced, body-mind integrated self-understanding, both personally and professionally—just as physical movement did for the young Russian woman, her teammates, and me.

The contributors describe how physical movement enables more holistic access to decoding emotions that are invariably physiological, containing both mental and embodied nuances. The body and mind are in constant conversation. Emotions begin with physical sensations, and the neurological processing that gives meaning to these sensations is unconscious. The contributors remind us that when energy is blocked by conflict arising from aggression and fear, the related (and mostly unconscious) muscle contractions actually block further movement of energy, constrict breathing, and limit our capacity to think clearly. We thus lose our ability to find and stand on our own ground as we struggle with anticipatory, fear-driven reactions that blunt our awareness of whatever is being revealed in the moment. No wonder conflict resolution is so challenging! The contributors also underscore the importance of, and

present many creative ideas for, including physical movement in conflict resolution training. If, like me, you were trained to mediate from the neck up, you, too, will appreciate the ways in which the contributors illuminate the physical, emotional, and relational intelligences that relate to conflict resolution

This book takes us on an exploratory journey through the body as the fundamental place to which we must return with full awareness amidst the shifting ground and upheaval of conflict, reminding us how a closed body leads inevitably to a closed mind. The contributors advise us that the forward-thinking necessary for conflicting parties to escape conflict, and for conflict resolvers to support their process, calls on all these intelligences, not just mental, to cross the bridge from the known to the unknown, from the surface to the hidden. One contributor acquaints us with Albert Einstein's observation: "The intuitive mind is a sacred gift, while the rational mind is only its faithful servant . . . but our society honors the servant and has forgotten the gift."

Like most of you, I was originally taught mediation from an interest-based perspective and that work definitely marked a major, positive shift in conflict resolution theory. Several contributors teach us that interest-based negotiation is grounded firmly in our highly individualistic Western culture. It often lacks cultural and ethical sensitivity and places no emphasis on intelligences other than mental. It also fails to emphasize essential conflict resolution capacities, such as creativity, perspective-taking, and fluidity—capacities, that the contributors inform us, are particularly critical to effective conflict resolution, citing contemporary research on negotiation and peace-building training and processes.

Interest-based approaches arose prior to the recent breakthroughs in neuroscience that are revealing the profound effects of neuroplasticity, mirror neurons, and related brain capacities on conflict resolution. This book explores these exciting neuroscience breakthroughs from multiple perspectives. One contributor points out that neuroscience is now proving what dancers have known for centuries—that emotion, cognition, memory, communication, and empathy are all embodied processes. Our bodies contain the answers to the ever-changing unconscious factors that shape what we believe we know, as well as our perceptions and behavior. We all have well-worn neuronal pathways—literally grooves in our brains—that are created from habitual behavior and thinking, such as resistance to the very idea that movement can contribute to conflict resolution.

The new research is disproving our previous notions that the brain stays the way it was formed in our childhood. In fact, we can grow and develop our brain, especially if we consciously choose to train ourselves in new ways of acting, thinking, and perceiving that include the mind-body connection. For example, researchers taught a simple mindfulness meditation technique to individuals who agreed to practice for 15 minutes a day for eight weeks. When measured against a control group, the pre-frontal cortex—the youngest region of our brain that controls higher functions such as empathy, relationality, and insight—had grown significantly in each meditator. The contributors point to research that is also demonstrating that linear and verbal approaches to conflict address only one-half of any conflict story. Physical

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movement can and does activate and shift our concepts, emotions, and perspectives. As we open to the power of a more balanced, embodied approach, we gain access to many skills and deeper wisdom than is contained in interest-based thinking.

This book will begin a journey for you, a journey toward reshaping and developing your own mind, as well as your approach to conflict resolution. That journey will lead you inevitably to Eliot's "still point," the vast territory of the paradox where what we know is what we do not know and where we are is where we are not, to the place where we begin to understand the spaces in Japanese gardens described eloquently by one contributor as "the pauses between things that allow each to stand out from the mass" that "are not empty but lend feeling and texture to the whole as well as enjoying their own kind of fullness." These are the "spaces" arising through the mind-body connection, in which the source and meaning of conflict moves from the known to the unknown that is deeply, intuitively grasped, the "spaces" we experience when practicing mindfulness in which our empathy and relationship with ourselves and others expand and develop, the "spaces" in which authentic, lasting conflict resolution and transformation occur. I commend this ground-breaking work to you, confident that by opening yourself to the creativity it contains, you will traverse a great deal of territory on your journey to *being* a conflict resolver.

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