

Qualitative Analysis: Conflict Resolution Framework and Building Relationships
Through Dialogue in the *Peace It Together*, 2008 Initiative

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Introduction:

Imagine an opportunity where young adversaries can step outside the “pressure cooker of war and recognize their shared humanity, tear down the walls of misunderstandings, and build new bridges to peace” (Scott, 2008). My sixteen year old Canadian cousin had the opportunity to participate in the 2008 *Peace It Together* initiative on Bowen Island with 10 Canadians, 12 Palestinians, and 12 Israeli youth. He described this as a “life altering experience.” Through dialogue, conflict resolution exercises, and the experience of creating short documentaries he developed new knowledge, empathy, and tolerance for both Israeli and Palestinian participants and the very complex problems between their respective nations including their mutual legitimate claims to the same land. This qualitative research paper will examine dialogue as the conflict resolution framework utilized in this initiative to effect social change. In addition, the paper will explore and conduct a qualitative analysis, through interviews and surveys, of the role of the Canadian youth participants and their transformation with respect to their new found empathy, tolerance, and relationships developed during the three week residency.

Background:

Peace It Together (PIT) was started in 2004 by the Creative Peace Network whose members believed that social change can be achieved from social conflict; by transforming human relationships through dialogue, cooperation, creativity, and education. In the summers of 2004, 2006, and 2008 Israeli, Palestinian, and Canadian youth participated in residential camps with the goal of transforming relationships and creating a culture of peace through dialogue and film making.

In the 2006 and 2008 initiatives, the program participants created short films and documentaries related to the historical struggles and conflicts of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. Reena Lazar, Co-Executive Director states that the “film production is what separates *Peace It Together* from other public peace building camps.” Film making was not a part of the 2004 process and was not part of the initial 2006 planning.

However, the 2006 camp was set up to take place on Galiano Island, which is home to the film making program, *The Gulf Island Film and Television School (Gifts)*. Kenna Fair, the school's director believed that "collaborating with the *Peace it Together 2006* initiative was a natural extension of the school's vision of working for the betterment of our societies" (Scott, 2006). The partnership was so successful that it was repeated for the 2008 *PIT* initiative.

Film making was a new skill for most of participants and therefore, provided a common ground and a 'level playing field' as the groups were all learning a new skill at the same time. This notion of being equal is described by Galtung (2004) as a condition of "transcendence" whereby both parties enter (the conflict resolution process) as equals (Galtung, 2004: 10). In this instance, all delegates were equal in terms of this specific conflict resolution step utilizing creative film production as most, if not all, according to a Canadian participant, had little to no film production experience.

In addition, film production required collaboration, cooperation, and other negotiation type skills to not only achieve a common vision for the film's success but also, to manage differences during production. Lazar, of *Peace It Together* discussed the importance of this creative exercise in the conflict resolution process as "participants needed to let go of something in order to allow something new to emerge" (Lazar, 2008). In essence, Lazar is suggesting that the film production process itself demonstrates the significant if not final outcome of participants' transformation or shift in attitude(s); attitudes about war, peace or about each 'other.' As one Canadian participant identified, the documentaries were "definitely a collaborative outcome and each film was free of bias and fair to all parties, thereby fulfilling the purpose of bringing *all versions of truth* to the surface" (Canadian Participant, 2008). An example to demonstrate this collaboration and negotiation during film production was the following experience shared by one of the Canadian participants. During film production, a Canadian participant suggested that a scene should depict a Palestinian running away. Much conversation followed between the Canadians, Israelis, and Palestinians working in this documentary group and in the end, the group agreed to change the scene. However, it is important to note that the reason for the change was because the Palestinian members stated they "could not look as if they were running away as this would discredit the power and pride

of his people” (Canadian Participant, 2008). This outcome demonstrates not only the collaboration between parties but also, the understanding and legitimization of values, emotions, and sufferings important to each group and thus, to the “truth” that is portrayed in each documentary. Brett (2007), states that it is important to understand that “different cultures have different norms that regulate their behaviour in social dilemmas” (231) and understanding those values is important to changing human relationships and effecting new ways of looking at conflict. The concept of transformation will be discussed in more depth in the section about the use of dialogue as the conflict resolution framework.

As importantly, the films provide an end product that are “easy to show and are lasting” whereby participants can use the films to educate, facilitate dialogue, and deliver a powerful social message at different venues in their own communities and countries after the residency camp; an opportunity to create a culture of intelligent discourse and promote ongoing social change (Lazar, 2008). Although it would be difficult to conclude any enduring or sustainability of attitudinal change vis-a- vis these thirty - four participants taking leadership roles in peace related activities and utilizing the films as teaching tools, it is important to understand that research on the process for social change from Everett Rogers Stanford Research Institute suggests that even when 5% of society accepts a new idea, it becomes ‘embedded’ and when 20% adopt the idea, the idea becomes ‘unstoppable’ (Traubman, n.d. A). Clearly then, *PIT* leaders are optimistic that this particular peace process has the potential to grow.

In summary, the primary goals of the public peace intervention/process of the *Peace It Together 2008 initiative* is three fold:

- provide participants with the opportunity to work through their fear and anger in a safe, neutral environment shifting their negative attitude(s) of one another
- empower youth to embrace the concept of conflict resolution through active listening and dialogue which can lead to increased empathy and tolerance, increased tendency to listen and suspend judgment
- produce a series of short videos or documentaries that can be used as tools for teachers and youth worldwide to educate peers in their respective countries to facilitate a move from a position of adversity to one of mutuality and peace

Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Theory; Understanding the Nature of the *PIT* Conflict

Preliminary literature reviews on the study of negotiation and conflict assist to further define the nature of this “meso conflict(s)” that the *PIT* leaders have committed to mediating (Galtung, 2004: 47). Carnevale (1995) discusses that ownership is a significant feature of social identity and self (309). Further, Carnevale defines the importance of the concept of collectivism and individualism in various cultures (309). The complex and long standing mid east conflict originates from a disagreement over the ownership of land between the Israelis and Palestinians. In addition, mid east cultures value connections between groups of individuals rather than individuals themselves and therefore, compared to North American cultures, mid east cultures have a bias towards collectivism. High collectivism translates to a notion about ‘ours’ or ‘us.’ This information helps to clarify the significance of the land ownership conflict especially in cultures that are allocentric and value the concept of ‘we own this’ and ‘this is *ours*.’ One might assume that having similar cultural values might facilitate reaching a solution because both parties share a common philosophy, however, in this case, it would appear that similar allocentric values lend themselves to a more difficult negotiation as both parties have approached the conflict with an unwillingness to accept a compromise because their claim to land is *more* legitimate or is considered the *right* claim.

It is evident then that in this negotiation, both parties are polarized and that this polarization can be explained in part by the Rashomon effect. The Rashomon effect refers to the “perception by which observers of an event are able to produce a substantially different but equally plausible account” (dictionary.com). In effect, both parties claim that their version is the right one. One might then ask what is the right account and is it possible that both parties’ perceptions of the cause and effect components of the conflict are right. One of the Canadian participants recounted an exercise during the second week in camp that required each delegation to collectively write down the name of important events that had taken place within the history of the Palestinian -Israeli conflict on cards and place these on a timeline. The Canadian stated that their group identified very few events compared to the other delegates and this demonstrates how little this Canadian group of youths knew of the conflict (Appendix 1).

In contrast, the Israeli and Palestinian groups' timelines were very detailed with some similarities and some differences around the same historical event(s). I maintain that these two *different* accounts of the *same* history demonstrate the Rashomon effect. Each delegation's account of history includes similar elements and facts; however, their respective emphasis on causal effects was different. Their respective perceptions are truthful but, for all participants, the stories are not verifiable due to lack of evidence. Therefore, the Canadian participant interviewed stated that "all parties came to agree that in order to work towards a peaceful future, including the creation of a documentary, that we had to leave the past behind" (Canadian Participant, 2008).

Understanding the Rashomon effect on the mid east conflict is important in understanding the choice of conflict framework utilized. Most of the formal mid east negotiations including the *Camp David* case study, which will be discussed in more detail, are based on a settlement framework whereby the mediators are "looking for an agreement" (Kolb, 1994: 471). In *PIT*, the organizers have chosen a communication framework whereby they hope that parties will achieve a "different and better understanding of the conflict" through enhanced communication and dialogue (Lazar, 2008). By focusing on dialogue, there is less focus on which party's perception is the right one and less focus on finding a solution, and instead, more focus on transforming relationships through improved understanding of one another. By choosing the conflict framework, the *PIT* organizers strategically attempt to mitigate the impact of the Rashomon effect in this conflict resolution process. Another example of an attempt to lessen the Rashomon effect was the choice to locate the camp on Bowen Island; a neutral environment, especially for the Palestinians and Israelis.

Much of the current discussion has been focused on the Israelis' and Palestinians' positions on this conflict and their perceptions of causal events. However, it is important to understand the Rashomon effect through media and how this has impacted all participants, including the Canadian youth. The role of the Canadians will be discussed in more detail however, it would be challenging to argue that they have entered into this conflict resolution process as unbiased or neutral. True, they likely have not personally experienced the devastating impact of this long standing conflict that their Israeli and Palestinian peers have endured but most, if not all, allude to some knowledge of the

conflict through the media and have to some degree formed some opinions about who is right, who is the victim, and what the solution should be. For example, two Canadian participants commented on their bias in terms of a “sympathetic attitude” to one group more than the other before the camp even started. Further, they commented that this initial bias created an immediate anger towards the other group (Canadian Participant, 2008).

In addition, when one examines the media promotion of this initiative on websites and small local outlets such as the *Bowen Island* community newspaper and *The Salt Spring News*, it is clear that this initiative is not about further fighting and conflict analysis but rather, moving on, building relationships, and opening up new lines of communication for future generations. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that this positive media build up by the *PIT* organizers as well as funders has had a favorable effect on the group recruitment - individuals that are seeking change; on the process - a public peace process versus a more traditional negotiation such as the *Camp David* negotiation process that was structured to be a joint problem solving exercise; and on the leadership team development and recruitment - pro peace activists versus more neutral, traditional mediators. Finally, North American media treatment of the mid east conflict and a resulting interest in international conflict was identified by several Canadian youth participants and compelled several participants to apply to the 2008 *Peace It Together* camp.

Tim Archer, (NGO guest lecturer) spoke about fashionable or buzz words such as empowerment, participation, peace building, and reconciliation that are used by media or in literature produced by NGO's. Archer suggests that use of these words are strategic in that they foster ongoing support from funding agents but can not be construed to imply successful outcomes (Archer, 2008). The Co-Executive Director of *PIT* summarized the initiative by using similar words including “inspire, empower, and peace building.” As an NGO, *PIT* relies heavily on grants and donations so it could be argued that media treatments of *PIT* or written by *PIT* using these specific phrases do indeed foster grant dollars as suggested by Archer.

After my initial interview with Lazar (2008), I prematurely concluded that dialogue between the participants *just happened*. In fact, during interviews with the

Canadian participants, it became clear that the dialogue was facilitated by very strategic exercises and that conflict and differences of opinion did indeed arise during these early days. Similarly, in an interview with Len Traubman of *Jewish- Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group* that will be discussed in more detail later, the importance of the presence of a mediator or leader with conflict resolution skills to facilitate early dialogue between the Palestinians and Israelis in this initiative was highlighted and described as “sometimes the facilitator, who was neither Jewish or Palestinian, had to be a lion tamer” (Appendix 2). In retrospect, the value of the interviews with the Canadian participants can not be overestimated in the quantitative analysis as a very different perspective on the residency was shared.

Further, the use of specific words such as *inspire*, *empower*, and *peace building* could have significant impact on the recruitment of participants. For example, some *PIT* applicants had previous experience working with other peace initiatives which dealt with issues of war in third world countries and the war’s ramifications on the people, where others were interested in meeting other like minded youth from different cultural backgrounds who held similar ideologies about peacemaking. The use of specific words can influence recruitment to the extent that the initiative is ‘speaking to the converted.’ For example, Archer suggests that words such as *empowerment* used in objective or goal statements could be construed as a false concept in some cases because people that are attracted to groups such as the *Peace It Together* initiative are already like minded and motivated to promote peace; in other words the initiative does not necessarily empower them as they come to the initiative with some sense that they can make a difference. On the other hand, a predisposition for and a desire for empowerment could be realized by participants in *PIT*.

Finally, Archer maintains that the process may only empower the participants in a neutral, safe environment such as the Bowen Island location used in 2008 peace camp. Archer maintains that when participants leave the safe environment, the power to promote peace is met with all type of risks including the “haters” and “spoilers” (Archer, 2008). Suddenly, the empowered, transformed individual may not experience the same type of power to express and spread their new found message of peace. To illustrate this point, one of the *PIT* objectives includes “motivating and empowering participants to

take risk for peace once they return to their communities” (Lazar, 2008). One Canadian participant spoke about e-mail dialogues with one of the overseas participant/friend and he speculates that his new friend is depressed since his return home. The Canadian believes that his friend’s feelings of depression are related to “the disappointment and frustration he is experiencing in facilitating peace related activities in his own community and that his initial efforts have been met with less than enthusiastic audiences”(Canadian participant, 2008).

Negotiation is a “process of discovery and includes a range of interactions between the disputing parties” (Gulliver; 1979: 71). Gulliver also describes the process of bargaining, a component of negotiating, as “demand, offer, bid, and counters” (Gulliver, 1979: 71). It is important to note that for negotiations to continue effectively, a willingness to enter into a negotiation process requires that the disputing parties choose to participate and must be open to considering a compromise if an agreement is to be reached. One can assume that all *PIT* participants through their application to the camp were willing to enter into some sort of negotiation or conflict resolution process.

Brockner et al (1985) discuss the concept of entrapment whereby individuals choose “to remain committed to a chosen course of action” (232). This is an important concept in any negotiated process because if one or both disputing parties choose not to move from their commitment to a certain philosophy, ideal or course of action or “group think,” then the opportunity for a successful outcome is minimal. It could be argued that as nations, both Israelis and Palestinians fear not only the loss of cohesion with their group but also, the loss of their dream of rightful ownership of land if they *give up* anything in terms of a compromised solution. Therefore, it could be argued that in most previous formal negotiating attempts of the mid east conflict that both groups approach conflict resolution attempts with an attitude of *doing business the old way*.

Conflict Resolution Framework:

A successful outcome of any negotiation process requires building a relationship that “enables parties to come away with a different or better understanding of the conflict” (Kolb, 1994; 474). As noted by Galtung (2004), a solution to conflict “lies in dialogue as a way of penetrating deeper into a conflict” (46). Further, Galtung notes

another important factor of dialogue in that “dialogue makes people (in a conflict) visible to one another” (48). Generally speaking, in articles that are not specific to negotiation or conflict resolution, the importance of dialogue and good conversation is highlighted in the description that “conversation is a meeting of minds; when minds meet they don’t just exchange facts, they transform, reshape and draw different implications”(Pat, 2005)

Dialogue is not the only necessary component of negotiation. In addition, in Brett’s (2007) discussion regarding “power based” or “rights based” approaches to negotiation and conflict resolution, she notes that we must develop listening skills in order that we hear and understand the different values and norms that different cultures hold and therefore, how they deal with conflict and approach resolution (231).

The *PIT* initiative utilizes dialogue as a conflict resolution framework rather than the settlement approach to conflict. It uses dialogue “to not just reshuffle the cards but to create new cards” (Pat, 2005) and the metaphor of creating the “new cards” is reiterated by Reena Lazar, as “building the relationship that enables parties to come away with a better understanding of themselves and their role in the conflict” and ultimately, “an opportunity to open up new kinds of thinking, dialogue, and communication” for the near future and the long term (Lazar, 2008).

The details of dialogue as a conflict resolution framework and especially the use of story telling and active listening are discussed more fully in the section on case studies. In the 2008 *PIT* initiative, thirty four youth, who did not know each other, were brought together in dialogue to tell their stories and for each and every participant to really and truly listen. One Canadian participant describes her impressions of early days in the camp as “overwhelming feelings of awkwardness and apprehension” (Canadian Participation, 2008). She found conversation was hard to start as she did not want to seem as if she were favouring one group over another or appear more empathetic to one delegation over another. Moreover, she noted that most of the Canadian participants believed that because they lead such a different life than the other delegations, they were unsure as to what to talk about or what subjects might be taboo (Canadian Participant, 2008). In addition, because they understood that the Palestinians’ and Israelis’ only relationship was through violence and pain, they believed that when these participants were speaking to each other in their native tongue with raised voices, the Canadians

feared that they were arguing and yelling at one another. According to one male Canadian participant, some of the initial discomfort and awkwardness was eased when he discovered some commonalities that each party shared: sports, television, and music (Canadian Participant, 2008). Even at this early stage in the residency camp, the “you” and “me” positions started to become “us” through this discovery of some commonality, equality, and humanity.

Of course, discovering similarities is not enough to resolve this complex conflict but it does set the important stage for more dialogue, more listening and as Traubman points out, these are “entry points to successful deliberation” (Appendix 2).

Further dialogue and listening was facilitated by engaging the participants in several exercises during the first week of residency. These exercises, according to Bowling (2003) served to “create a little disturbance or twitch” (39) whereby the participants had to listen to learn versus react; a common response in a conflict situation.

The listening led to inquiry. For example, a Canadian participant described one of the exercises using layers of an onion to symbolize each party’s wants and needs. The outer layer of the onion required the participants to list “what they want.” The second layer dealt with the topic of “one country access” and the middle of the layer revealed the *heart* of the onion explaining why each party wants what they have listed on the outer layers and these reasons included pride, human rights, and freedom. The Canadian explained that this activity was used to show each party’s core needs. The discovery for many of them was to learn that the wants and needs of the three groups were not that significantly different from others (Canadian Participant, 2008). One can begin to understand the philosophy and purpose behind this particular mediation strategy and that being, to facilitate each individual and party entering further dialogue as equals (Galtung, 2004; 49).

A final exercise focused on stereotypes and the attitudes and biases that individuals develop from these labels. In this exercise, words such as “separation wall, checkpoint, solider, and Hamas” were introduced. The participants were instructed to write down what they believed the meaning of the word held for them and then place the card with their definition into a bucket. Each individual then randomly reached into the bucket and read from the card. The Canadian youth participant stated, “This activity was

so powerful as it provided a platform of discussion regarding the connotations of each word” (Canadian Participant, 2008). A further value to this exercise was providing an opportunity for each delegation to voice and acknowledge that people in their respective countries have done both right and wrong and that peace will only be achieved collaboratively. Participants in negotiation and conflict resolution would agree that an important step in deliberation is acknowledging one’s own role in the conflict. Traubman (2008) maintains that “dialogue is not so much about being right as understanding what has meaning for self and ‘other.’ He goes on to quote that, “out beyond right doing and wrong doing there is a field. I’ll meet you there” (Appendix 2). It is this paradigm shift from blaming and adversity to the beginnings of mutuality and peace that this exercise used in *PIT 2008* initiative is attempting to achieve.

Case Studies:

Two case studies were reviewed; *The Camp David Negotiations* as well as, *Jewish- Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group*. While both case studies refer to the same mid east conflict, the former review provides a contrast outlining more traditional, formal negotiation processes utilizing a settlement framework, while the latter case study, illustrates several similarities to the *PIT* initiative, especially with respect to the use of dialogue as a conflict resolution framework.

The Camp David Negotiations:

This case study represents a more formal, traditional, and well studied negotiating process of the mid east conflict. The participants included Anwar Sadat, President of Egypt and Begin, Prime Minister of Israel, and U.S. President Carter and the discussions took place in Camp David, Maryland in 1978 -1979. This process involved a very strategic, scripted framework as President Carter, the third party intervenor or external helper, struck a preliminary task force to “derive methods or tools of mediation, to invent solutions and identify compromise language” (Raffia, 2002: 321) prior to the Camp David discussions. This external helper could not be construed as neutral or a buffer (as some negotiators are) as they had significant reason to seek a solution between Israel and Arab nations; namely the risk of war and to ensure their economic stability and the supply of oil. As Raffia describes, the U.S. was a “third party intervenor with clout.”

Further, not only did the U.S. know historical information and positional attitudes about both sides, they also knew what they believed to be preferred solutions and as such, it was important that Egypt and Israel did not come to the table with their own ideas of solutions or “fixed packages.” Instead, the American negotiators used a technique of “single negotiating text (SNT);” a starting point for discussions that could be modified and improved upon. This technique manipulates the process by ensuring that both sides concentrate on the same issue in this very complex, long standing conflict. As the parties reach a compromise on the first single negotiating text, a second text is introduced and the process of negotiation and compromise continues with joint gains. Obviously, the starting SNT is very critical as it can have significant impact on where the process ends. The outcome of this process was the signing of a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel and recognition of the first Arab country to recognize Israel as an independent state. Unfortunately, the majority of Egyptians were not supportive of this treaty and as a result, some historians and politicians believe that President Sadat was assassinated by Islamic radicals in the Egyptian army in early 1980’s.

This negotiation process is very different from the process in *PIT*. The *Camp David* process utilized a positivist approach in the conflict analysis; trying to find some truth in a compromised solution rather than a process that focused on changing human relations. The 3rd party intervenor is perhaps the most significant difference; the U.S. president utilizing a very contrived, scripted approach versus a group of leaders skilled in conflict resolution processes engaging the youth in various team building exercises that stress dialogue and listening. The outcomes of each negotiation and dialogue process were very different as well; a treaty instead of the creative outcomes of films and documentaries used to further the message of social change in the *PIT* initiative.

The public peace process utilized by *PIT* initiative as well as the *Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group* (which will be discussed further) use story telling and dialogue to promote deliberation and understanding. In fact, both group’s philosophy includes the belief that “an enemy is one whose story we have not heard” (Appendix 2). In a recent email conversation with Len Traubman, co-founder of *Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue* group, it is argued that “professional politicians including those involved with Camp David process may know the streets of U.S. and

Camp David and some of the history of the conflict, but do not *really* know the Israelis and Palestinians as the Camp David negotiations does not allow for story telling and authentic dialogue” (Appendix 2). Further, Traubman and his followers will argue that “before there is a will and skill development by politicians to listen to both narratives equally, the likelihood of creating successful and proper national and international agreements is poor.” Interestingly, it is the opinion of this group that someone like past president Bill Clinton not only has the intellectual capacity and knowledge of this complex conflict but also, has the abilities to facilitate sustained dialogue and story telling; essential components of successful negotiated peace process (Traubman, n.d. *B*).

Jewish- Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group:

This grass roots dialogue group comprised of Arabs and Jews started in the U.S. in 1992 and was based on the Albert Einstein’s premise that “we can’t solve today’s problems with the same kind of thinking that produced them.” Instead, this small San Mateo, California group led by Len and Libby Traubman, met face to face in someone’s living room and listened to each others stories and began to view themselves as friends instead of enemies. Through active listening and dialogue, the questions of *who am I* and *who are you* transformed to *who are we* (Traubman, n.d. *B*). Today, this group has met or sponsored 199 meetings while its counterpart in San Francisco, has met 138 times (Appendix 2). In addition, Traubman states the circle is growing as there are other living room dialogue groups in North America and Israel (Traubman, n.d. *B*). The living room dialogue groups have grown from informal living room discussions to presenting and facilitating dialogue at educational forums in schools and neighborhoods, hosting multi-cultural dinners, and creating the 2007 film productions, *Dialogue at Washington High* and *Peacemakers; Palestinian and Jews Together at Camp* which are used in various schools and at other educational forums.

Traubman and his followers maintain that the success of the living room dialogue group is primarily because of two significant components of dialogue; story telling and listening. Story telling facilitates a discovery at both the personal and group levels. More specifically, it is thought that the while “one hears the story of others, one begins to better understand one’s own history leading to not only a stronger sense of self but a growing

appreciation of the equality and humanity of others” (Traubman, n.d. C). Secondly, developing the skill to listen “without the yes...but” behaviour is an important indicator of a successful dialogue. To illustrate this point, Traubman points out that one must listen rather than “debate, object, diminish others or set out to win the conversation” (Appendix 2).

Proponents of this type of meaningful dialogue and deep listening believe that these skills and strategies provide the basis for transforming relationships. Further, they argue that this exchange of ideas and experiences can result in “divergent views converging” which in turn leads to a “new social intelligence” (Traubman, n.d. A). This new intelligence, a by product of “me” and “you” truly listening to one another and suspending judgments and opinions is referred to as a triologue. Ultimately, the transformation of relationships and the new social intelligence forms the basis of transforming social conflict to social change. This transformation is known as a public peace process. The approach of the *Living Room Dialogue Group* is very similar to the philosophy and framework used for the *PIT* initiative. Both initiatives utilize an interpretivist approach focused on not about finding the truth (as the truth can be complex...) but about changing human relationships through “connection, communication, and cooperation that creates new found community” (Appendix 2).

According to Traubman, the decision to engage is the first requirement and the selection process for participants in *Peace it Together* was designed to select those that were ready for change. The 2nd stage is about dialogue and exploring each party’s interest. As Traubman notes, this type of dialogue is different from more traditional negotiations where parties don’t really dialogue but exchange their respective positions on the issues. *Living Room Dialogue* group and *Peace it Together* participants were not looking for solutions at this early stage but rather, were experiencing the developing relationships with storytelling. Traubman describes the 3rd and 4th stage as developing the relationship by thinking together (Traubman, n.d. D). The leaders in *Peace it Together* initiative introduced the strategy of making films and documentaries where participants had to cooperate and collectively think to deal with the practical task of producing an original film or documentary. The final stage in the public peace process is known as “acting together” and it is in this stage where the changed human relationships of a few

attempt to effect a visible social change and expand the number of individuals that are courageous to work together to manage their differences (Traubman, n.d. *D*). The films produced in *Peace it Together* initiative are the group's conduit to deliver the powerful social message of peace, tolerance, and empathy.

Role of the Canadian Participants:

Literature reviews on negotiation and conflict resolution usually infer a conflict between two parties; be it individuals or groups. More typically in negotiation formats, a negotiator or mediator facilitates the session(s). In the *PIT* initiative, a third group, the ten Canadian youth participants were present and the question regarding their role arises. Did they assume a specific role such as a buffer between the two adversarial groups of Israeli and Palestinians youth, and/or did they act as mediators and/or facilitators? Why were they invited when a peace process could have just included professionally trained mediators, Israeli youth and Palestinian youth?

Lazar, of *PIT* organization, agrees that the role of the Canadian participants is indeed an interesting question and admits that in the near future, the organization is seeking research dollars to explore this further. However, she maintains that there was no strategic decision on the part of the organization to include the Canadians other than the camp took place on Canadian soil and the organization relies in part on Canadian funding and donors.

“The Canadians had to find their role in this public peace process,” states Lazar. Further, she adds that they did not receive any additional training in mediation, although, as noted previously, some Canadian youth did have previous experience in other peace initiatives including experience coordinating workshops province wide which focused on working with a diverse group of people to accomplish a task and peer counseling with church and school organizations. Finally, the four Canadian participants all identified that they had an interest in learning more about the Palestinian- Israeli conflict. Lazar maintains that with no additional mediation training, the Canadians participated in the camp with no ulterior motive other than to learn through the power of dialogue and listening about the conflict from others who have first hand experience with it and

ultimately, to assume the role of the voice of the organization educating and inspiring others as peace makers.

If the Canadian participants did not participate as trained mediators, then one must ask the question if they assumed either a deliberate or unconscious mediator role as buffers in this historical conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. Bowling (2003), discuss the qualities of mediators and their impact on the mediation process. More specifically, they suggest that “mediation sometimes works when the mediator is untrained” (13). In addition, they argue that the “mediator is not extrinsic to the conflict” and thus can assume an “omnipartial” rather than neutral or buffer role (Bowling, 2003; 22).

Were the Canadians neutral or unbiased? As previously mentioned, the Canadian youth identified through interviews that as a group, they had little detailed understanding of the mid east conflict apart from what they had read in the newspapers or heard on TV. However, in spite of this acknowledgement, some of the Canadians mentioned they often “felt in the early days of the residency camp as if each side (Palestinians and Israelis) were trying to win them over at times” (Canadian Participant, 2008). This may indicate that the disputing parties assumed the Canadians to be neutral with little to no bias.

Further, I maintain that the heritage and religious affiliation of the Canadians must be explored and better understood in order to address the question of neutrality and their possible roles as buffers in this conflict. With permission of *PIT* executive, a questionnaire was sent to the ten Canadian participants (Appendix 1). Only four of ten Canadian participants responded to the voluntary questionnaire, and answered the question regarding heritage and religious affiliation in the following way: an agnostic, half Chinese and Lebanese male, a Muslim female of Indian descent, a male of Swedish and British heritage who belongs to the United Church of Canada, and a Caucasian female who follows no specific religious doctrine.

In summary, Bowling (2003) caution the reader in their attempt to analyze the mediation process not to separate out the roles of the mediator or conflict partners but rather, to focus on the relationships that are evolving during the process (38). Perhaps this is the basis upon which to further explore the role and function of the Canadians; to understand how their role evolves in the process and to explore if in fact during the

process, they assume a variety of different roles. It is conceivable then at some point in the process, the Canadians may unconsciously assume a mediation role and may have some insight that this is about to happen as suggested by Bowling; “I, as the mediator, am about to become a part of this conflict” (Bowling, 2003: 39).

Transformation: An Outcome of Conflict Resolution Process:

Based on the premise suggested by Albert Einstein that “we can not solve today’s problems with the same kind of thinking that produced them,” advocates of the public peace process, including the *PIT* organization, hope to transform one’s thinking and worldview of this age old conflict. In addition, by choosing a conflict resolution framework using dialogue, they chose to focus on changing relationships rather than on finding solutions. According to Lazar, the *PIT* process goals and objectives include “transforming blame into responsibility and enemies into partners and ultimately, over time creating a world with a culture of peace” (Lazar, 2008); hence transforming social conflict to social change.

Bowling (2003) discuss the concept of symbiogenesis in a mediation model “where the participants grow, evolve, and change symbiotically” (32) and further, that the outcome of some mediations include participants that experience an “emotionally charged, cathartic resolution” (Bowling, 2003: 32). It is this moment of catharsis that interested me and led me to questioning the Canadian participants about their transformation in general and more specifically, if they could define a moment in the process that they considered as their *personal* transformation.

Two participants described their initial process of transformation as follows: “The first two weeks of the three week residency camp were devoted to dialogue sessions which some days ran up to eight hours long. At first, all parties were nervous as they were unsure as to what to expect and found it difficult to share personal stories, not only with strangers, but to so called ‘enemies.’ The key component related to early transformation during these dialogue sessions was listening. Listening, not because we were forced to sit there and participate but, to listen by turning off that little voice inside our head. In theory by turning off this little voice, we were able to *hear* personal accounts of stories. Further, we believed that our biggest connection with the Palestinian and

Israeli delegations took place outside of the formal dialogue session where people felt more comfortable talking on a one-to-one basis” (Canadian Participant, 2008).

Bowling (2003) refer to phenomena that influence mediated processes or outcomes in spite of mediator presence and intervention. The authors maintain that the Placebo Effect can influence a satisfactory outcome because the “circumstances are right for resolution” (Bowling, 2003: 18) and one might argue that the choice of a neutral environment such as Bowen Island, Canada would contribute positively to the transformation. Secondly, the author suggests that the Hawthorne Effect could be responsible for the mediated outcome as participants “make change when they realize they are being observed” (Bowling, 2003: 19). It is difficult to make any conclusions on this phenomenon’s impact on the *PIT* initiative as it was not within the scope of this paper to survey the Palestinian or Israeli participants about their transformation.

The moment of personal transformation varied amongst the four Canadians that participated in the survey; some reported the transformation as very superficial while others articulated it as a very deep, meaningful, life changing moment. For example, one participant replied that one dialogue group session became heated when the question was asked “If the Palestinians were to take back the land that they believed belonged to them, where would the home of the Israeli’s be?” This question provoked many emotional responses from the group, but no one could come up with an appropriate conclusion. The only conclusion that was made is that everyone wants a place to call home (Canadian Participant, 2008). This was articulated as this individual’s “ ah- ah” moment and from then on, she became very sure that she not only wanted to participate in this camp but was committed to getting involved in peace initiatives in her community.

A second example provided by a Canadian participant describes a smaller break out dialogue session which took place at a small chapel. In this session, the participants were encouraged to talk about anything that was on their mind or about any feelings they were experiencing. The Canadian participant stated, “it was here that people spoke with such sincerity, emotion, hurt, and pain, describing houses next to them falling down due to rocket attacks or of friends dying in the streets” (Canadian Participant, 2008). The Canadian said that the participant involved in this dialogue agreed that it was the setting of the chapel that made everyone’s stories so powerful. He stated that this was his

personal moment of transformation and described the moments as “this was the first time that they all felt connected on a deeper level by something spiritual, something that was bigger than they were” (Canadian Participant, 2008).

Lastly, another Canadian described another small breakout dialogue session where people were “sharing personal stories about simple things that we as Canadians take for granted, such as a pair of running shoes” (Canadian Participant, 2008). A Palestinian explained how important a decent pair of running shoes was to his survival; something that could determine whether he lived or died. He went on to explain that “shoes with holes in the soles make it much more difficult to run away from bombs and explosions.” As I was interviewing this Canadian participant on the phone, his voice started to break and he revealed that he had tears running down his face as he repeated this story, as it was still difficult some months later to speak of this personal experience and transformation.

Although I only had the opportunity to speak with four of ten Canadian participants, I was humbled by their stories and am convinced that it is the power of this kind of personal transformation that enables these individuals to engage and lead peace related activities in their communities.

Conclusion:

Many mediators would say, “Dialogue is a living experience of inquiry that creates the seeds of a new kind of interaction” (Pat, 2005). However, as noted in class, when expectations are high, (such as in mid east conflict), dialogue will most likely not succeed. In this instance however, the founders of this peace network used dialogue and the creative outlet of film making to facilitate a transformation of these two alienated groups to promote peace. It can be argued that more formal mid east negotiations with U.S. Secretary of State and former U.S. President Carter and others have certainly not produced any sustainable peace outcomes. It would be challenging to argue that *PIT* achieved any sustainable transformations with all or any participants. However, as a result of exploring this conflict resolution process and the wonderful, albeit limited opportunity to “get as close to the situation as possible” by interviewing the organizers, surveying the Canadian participants, and viewing the 2008 documentaries at the

Vancouver Public Library showing, I believe that empowering impacted youth in less formal, neutral negotiating environments and utilizing creative strategies such as film making may be more effective in building the “bridge of peace” than other negotiation processes.

Appendix 1:

Peace It Together Survey: Canadian Participants

- 1) What motivated you to apply for the *Peace It Together, 2008* initiative?
- 2) Why did you believe you were selected to participate?
- 3) Can you describe your initial attitudes or conflicts that you held regarding your fellow participants
- 4) Describe your feelings on first week of the residency, the 2nd week and the final week
- 5) Was there a specific time or event that you regard as being significant in your personal growth and change in attitude?
- 6) What part of the process did you believe was most effective in working towards a better, more peaceful life?
- 7) What do you believe was the purpose of film and documentary production?
- 8) How will you be involved in sharing your documentaries and films when you return home?
- 9) How will you continue to share your new understandings and messages of peace?
- 10) Please identify your ethic and religious background.

Appendix 2:

Interview with Len Traubman, Director of Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group

-----Original Message-----

From:

Sent: Nov 9, 2008 10:46 AM

To: LTRAUBMAN@igc.org

Subject: Peace It Together

Dear Mr. Traubman,

My name is Danielle Sleiman and I am a fourth year Communications student with a minor in Dialogue at Simon Fraser University. I am currently involved in a course regarding negotiation and conflict resolution through dialogue taught by Mr. Bob Anderson.

Dear Danielle,

Marhaba. We were so pleased to hear from you about your study of Peace It Together and your interest in a new quality of Dialogue and of deliberation. We'll do all we can to help make your student experiences the best they can be. Also, Adri and Reena are so authentic, dedicated, and dear to us, and they too will surely be there for you.

In addition, I have Palestinian heritage as my father was born in Palestine. Consequently, I have been aware of and following the Peace It Together initiative, but have never had the opportunity to participate. However, when this assignment of conflict resolution and negotiation was described I immediately began to think of the Peace It Together initiative and believe that this is my opportunity to become more involved with my heritage and the incredible peace building work that you are doing.

As you've probably read and heard, our repeated experience is that "an enemy is one whose story we have not heard."

So two qualities of Dialogue are the power of Story - <http://traubman.igc.org/story.htm> and of a new quality of Listening, without "yes, but."

The one with the will and skill to listen has the power to transform the relationship. Danielle, one of the beauties of authentic, sustained Dialogue is that while hearing the story of the "other," one also begins researching, discovering, and better-telling one's own history and narrative.

So the participant gets a stronger sense of self while also expanding one's identification - <http://traubman.igc.org/expandid.htm> .

Part of my research with the Peace It Together process is exploring the transformation of participants and examining the conflict resolution processes and the steps towards social change.

In our experience, it's important to speak of both Dialogue and of Conflict Resolution, or Deliberation.

As we live it, Dialogue with its new quality of deep listening is the entry point to successful deliberation.

At <http://traubman.igc.org/theses.htm> please see the work of Nike Carstarphen, who clarified that initial heart connections and personal narratives are what assure the best results in resolving conflicts.

The difference, as we experience it, is in attitude: discovering the equality and humanity of the other through stories, each then wants the best not only for self but for "other," equally.

Is that congruent with your own life experience?

At <http://traubman.igc.org/change.htm> you will see links to graphics that also illustrate how we experience the process of change, a conversation which has yet to begin as it needs to, we believe.

My literature review includes the very impressive work that you have accomplished with the Jewish – Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group. I understand that your early work included informal dialogues and discussions and has now expanded to many such group discussions and events. I believe your group started in 1993 and wondered if you could confirm how long your project continued.

We began in July, 1992, and tomorrow evening will be the 199th meeting at the home of Nahida and Adham Salem.

The San Francisco group will have its 138th meeting.

And we're still learning and acting together.

At the bottom of <http://traubman.igc.org/dg-prog.htm> .

Or simply Google "Jewish Palestinian Progress"

You can also Google "AC360 Jewish Palestinian" for a contemporary CNN article to the public.

More importantly, though, I am really interested in understanding some of the strategies that you used in mapping the relationship and probing the dynamics of the relationship. I assume that one cannot just put people with

such strong opposing beliefs together in a room without formally facilitating dialogue.

For our first nine years, we did need a facilitator who was neither Jewish nor Palestinian.

Sometimes he had to be a lion tamer.

Dialogue is about belief, yes, but it is not so much about being right as understanding what has meaning for self and "other."

Rumi said: "Out beyond rightdoing and wrongdoing there is a field. I'll meet you there."

At <http://traubman.igc.org/wisdom.htm> see that and other useful statements that have meaning for us.

Too, all this takes time; it is not a quick fix.

We rarely refer to Dialogue, but rather to Sustained Dialogue.

See more at <http://traubman.igc.org/mission.htm> and <http://traubman.igc.org/faq.htm>.

I understand in a formal negotiation and or conflict resolution process that the negotiator or mediator skilfully manages the situation. Therefore, my query is in your informal 'living room' type discussions did you manage the early discussion in order to teach listening, develop empathy, etc.

First, we learned to listen to learn, rather than to object, debate, diminish, or win.

We did poorly in the beginning, but a core group never let go of one another's hands.

So here we are.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request for information,
Danielle Sleiman

We hope this is helpful, Danielle.

Perhaps the next step would be a good phone conversation, which is sometimes the very best.

Please do e-mail to us your fullest contact information so we can communicate well from now on.

If you know anyone in Houston, we'll fly there in a few days and will facilitate a few public Dialogue experiences for everyone.

<http://traubman.igc.org/houstonnight.htm>

and

<http://traubman.igc.org/houstonevening.htm>

We hope all this somehow helps, habibti.

With our support and affection, Libby and Len

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