

COMMUNITY CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION AND PEACEBUILDING: FROM THE INSIDE OUT

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As a peace educator/builder/activist working at a grassroots and institutional level for many years, I believe peacebuilding must begin not at the UN level, not at the level of war, not at the level of textbooks and theories, and not with academics, state mediators and negotiators, but at the level of human relationships — relationships with ourselves, our families, communities, workplaces, governments and countries.

In this essay I reveal the radicalness of the Coady International Institute's *Community Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding* (Community Peacebuilding) *certificate* in that it begins and ends with people's stories — people exploring, understanding and taking action as a result of stories, which consistently demonstrates peacebuilding from a personal and community level as interdependent, interconnected and inseparable from peacebuilding at national, regional and global levels.

Dr. Peace: Practicing Peace from the Inside Out

I first met Dr. Thomas Turay (aka Dr. Peace, TMT and Super Sonic DJ) in 2000. He walked into my life with attention and presence — the roots, I believe, of peace and justice in all its forms. He introduced himself as a Peace Educator from Sierra Leone and Canada, his smile as big as the quarter moon pressed against a morning sky. This was his first day at the Coady, and as we sat at a picnic table outside the Tin Room, we began sharing stories. I was working on a Master in Adult Education while living and working in Grenada, West Indies, where I was collectively engaged in the revival of the National Literacy Campaign 10 years after the Grenada Revolution. Thomas shared his family's move from Sierra Leone to Toronto, and then to Antigonish, telling the complicated story of the civil war, his family and the powerful work of CD Peace

(Community Development and Peace), an organization he and his wife Mary founded and led in Sierra Leone.

In 2010, Thomas invited me to co-facilitate Community Peacebuilding, the course he founded. I was deeply honoured to step into a position that was held previously by another friend and peacebuilder, Sr. Joanne O'Regan, a Sister of St. Martha. Both were adamant about modelling peace and ensuring two genders were represented in the facilitation team, as well as other aspects of diversity such as race, culture, religion and experience. This reflected the multicultural diversity of participants in the certificate.

Thus began my journey encompassing the teachings, the language and the crucial educational process of being in community with leaders from around the world and learning from one another. Facilitators and participants alike were inspired by the principles and practices of the Antigone Movement, recognizing through ongoing evaluation our commitment to transformative adult education: education with and for the people with Dr. Peace leading the way.

On the first day of the certificate, Dr. Peace usually introduced an activity called the Peace Line. On one occasion he placed himself on the far end of this imaginary line labeled **peaceless** and wept. He shared the conflict he was experiencing with a family member, and wept from the heartache of the conflict's complexities. He shared his woundedness, and at the same time recognized his own capacity to wound. We, the participants, witnessed his pain. Dr. Peace then took a position closer to the other end of the Peace Line labeled **peaceful**, reflecting his state of peace six months before. He shared a story of a young man who was once a child soldier during the war and now worked as a driver for CD Peace. He had met him while visiting Sierra Leone six months before.

Over the years, hundreds of the Coady participants have stepped on the Peace Line with courage and vulnerability, while holding space for one another to share our wounded and joyous selves. From the beginning, we tore down our walls and witnessed our shared humanity. We also witnessed the shared humanity of communities we worked with and belonged to, such as LGBTQI+ communities, indigenous communities, people with visible and invisible special needs. Through those human stories, we explored and expanded our definition of peace. Peace was not just the absence of war, it was and is a well-worn tapestry of relative contexts, meanings and perspectives.

According to Dr. Peace understanding peace from a personal level, from the inside out, was not some Western romantic notion — this coming from a man who witnessed his family, community and country torn