

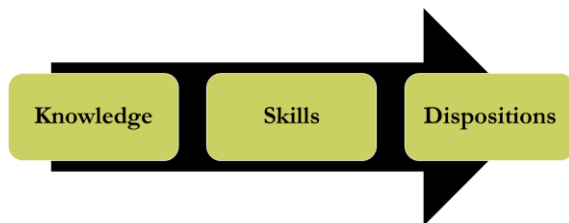
What Is Conflict Transformation?

Conflict is part of the human experience. Many of us hear the word conflict and we think of destructive dynamics - the stress of fights with loved ones, “us versus them” political polarization, or violence and wars. This is what Amanda Ripley calls “high conflict,” and it can destroy relationships and communities.



Whether conflicts enrich our communities or harm them, however, depends on how we engage with them. Conflict itself isn't necessarily bad. As John Paul Lederach describes, conflict can be a gift. Conflict helps keep relationships and social structures honest, alive, and responsive to human needs and aspirations.

The field of conflict transformation (CT) explores how destructive conflicts can change and become relatively constructive. Transformation is possible and sometimes necessary at multiple levels – personal, interpersonal, and structural.



CT is a compass - it tells us what to tend to as we negotiate conflict. Within this broad approach, various streams of work share a commitment to fostering constructive conflict. The CT Collaborative at Middlebury seeks to expand the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of our students, staff, and partners.

KNOWLEDGE: Good conflict intervention starts with good conflict analysis.

- **Contextual knowledge** involves extensive learning about the actors, dynamics, history, and values that have shaped a conflict.
- **Critical self-awareness** asks: “Who am I in conflict?” People have different conflict styles, personality traits, histories, strengths, and challenges.

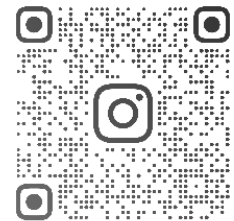
SKILLS: Several approaches to conflict can help disrupt destructive dynamics.

- **Structured dialogue** encourages participants to listen to understand.
- **Intercultural competence** engages across different frames of references and values.
- **Mediation** identifies the interests behind conflicting positions to support problem-solving.
- **Restorative practices** encourage accountability for harm while repairing relationships.

DISPOSITIONS: People can conduct themselves in ways that foster constructive conflict.

- **Curiosity** reveals deeper insights into views and experiences that are not our own.
- **Creativity** helps generate new possibilities to move beyond harmful patterns.
- **Risk-taking** is necessary, since first attempts may not succeed.
- **A relational focus** sees human connection as a place to redefine purpose.

For more on the Conflict Transformation Collaborative at Middlebury, visit our website (go.middlebury.edu/ctc) or follow us on Instagram



CONFLICTTRANSFORMATIONMIDD

CT and the Liberal Arts

The CT Collaborative's programs reach across global Middlebury (see our website for our biannual reports). At the College, the Collaborative is supporting co-curricular experiences (in CCE, CCI, Study Abroad, Student Life) new pilot courses on approaches to conflict analysis and conflict engagement.

In year two of the Collaborative (2023), **three key points** about CT and the liberal arts:

- *Conflict analysis is already woven into the fabric of our existing excellent liberal arts curriculum, but not necessarily visible as part of conflict transformation.* Courses on human psychology, American politics, resources management, the history of US global engagement, refugee narratives – these are all courses that help us understand various conflicts.
- *We are exploring how to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support constructive conflict engagement.* We convened curricular advisory boards in Fall 2022 and Fall 2023 to inform these pilot courses.
- *The CT Collaborative leaders are working to identify a short list of core learning goals that reach across the diverse programs we offer.* The 3 learning goals below were drafted in August 2023, and we have placed them alongside the faculty-approved college wide learning goals.

College Learning Goals (2014)	CT Learning Goals (draft, Fall 2023)
Think critically, creatively, and independently.	<i>New Understanding of Conflict:</i> conflict is not just destructive. Constructive conflict can deepen relationships and advance social change.
Collaborate effectively.	
Explore a range of disciplines and make connections among them.	
Read, listen, and observe discerningly.	<i>Desire to Understand Self and Others:</i> to constructively engage in conflict, we need to understand ourselves and the context in which we act.
Understand and appreciate difference, commonality, and connectedness across and within cultures and societies around the world.	
Apply acquired knowledge to solve new problems.	<i>Commitment to Action:</i> transforming conflict involves a commitment to carefully designed engagement at some level - interpersonal, institutional, or structural.
Cultivate intellectual integrity and the capacity for ethical citizenship.	
Demonstrate skill and sophistication in oral and written expression.	
Demonstrate skill and sophistication in quantitative reasoning.	
Explore a field of study in depth.	
Engage in independent research, inquiry, and/or creative expression.	