



February 2026 Newsletter



CT Winter dinner. From left: Phyllis Stinson, Kristen Mullins, Shannon Bohler, Craig Maravich, Erin Anderson, Lida Winfield, Carlos Vélez, Netta Avineri, Amit Prakash, Mads Middleton, Kailee Brickner-McDonald and Michael Rohd.

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Conflict Transformation Collaborative at Middlebury partners,

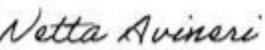
What does it take to build a partnership? How can partnerships help to foster community? What productive tensions may arise when working in partnership? How can being in partnership help us navigate conflict and change, in the communities where we participate? Being in partnership is like getting on a seesaw - engaging in the ongoing balancing act of communicating needs, wants, and preferences to move the process/project/relationship forward. This month's newsletter theme is *partnership in community*. You will read about the range of innovative conflict and change projects that CT Collaborative participants (students, staff, faculty, organizations) are engaged in, through youth-centered creative pedagogies, on-campus community building, community-based partnerships focused on relevant social issues of the day, fellows in international contexts engaging with local communities, and ongoing research partnerships with diverse stakeholders. These projects span disciplines, methodologies, and stakeholders - from theater in schools to restorative practices in a range of organizations, from

community-engaged research with Indigenous communities on Chile to critical experiential learning with domestic organizations focused on poverty and income inequality. These meaningful partnerships are intentionally designed to create “with” relationships, centering intentional listening, humility, and a slowing down to foster longer term impact. They also highlight the role of partnerships in community for efforts that are both responsive to change and proactive for change.

During the Winter Term at Middlebury College and as part of our Social Change Series, we had the opportunity to engage meaningfully with Michael Rohd ([CoLab for Civic Imagination](#) founder), learning about the innovative ways that he works with local communities and stakeholders in Montana to envision a better future in healthcare around the state and beyond. In the Winter Term CT Skills class, students practiced mediation, negotiation, structured dialogue, storytelling, conflict analysis, and nondefensive communication strategies - focused on building community and partnership at small and large scales. Students in the course also engaged with a range of guests, including leadership coach and consultant Laura King (listening for values), Dr. Curt Gervich (Middlebury School of the Environment Director) (environmental paradigm awareness), Dr. April Edwell (Projects for Peace Alumni Award recipient and pediatric critical care physician) (conflict transformation in healthcare), and peer conflict coaches Ruby Ly and Daniza Tazabekova (community circles for on-campus conflicts). I facilitated two workshops as part of the College’s Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research Winter Term Pedagogy Series, focused on critical incident analysis as a reflective practice for educators - designed to foster opportunities for individual and collective growth through vulnerability, humility, and openness to change. And I worked with students in the MiddCORE program, to develop team-based attentiveness to conflict and change, with an eye towards partnership with external organizations. Colleagues across Middlebury are deepening their toolkits around conflict and change through communities of practice - focused on critical pedagogies, mediation-related skills, and recognition of conflict styles across individuals and teams.

As part of our ongoing external partnership engagement, we were recently featured as a core case study during the January convening of the [Institute for Citizens and Scholars College Presidents for Civic Preparedness](#). In those materials, we highlighted the role of community engagement and partnerships across the CT Collaborative, recognizing that our work integrates the ‘what, how, and why of liberal learning’. It is incredible to see the ongoing impact of work with communities across sectors and scales, as students, colleagues, and partners engage collectively to *make hope concrete*. We look forward to engaging with you throughout the coming year. See below for more opportunities to connect and collaborate.

My best,



Dr. Netta Avineri

Middlebury Conflict Transformation Collaborative Executive Director

Impact and Connection through Community Partnerships

Pillar One: High School Education

Beyond the Page in South Carolina: A Bridge for Understanding

This fall, students in my English classes at Aiken High School engaged in a unique partnership with Middlebury’s [Beyond the Page](#) (BTP) program, via the [Bread Loaf Teacher Network](#) (BLTN). Our project centered on a rigorous research process where students identified and analyzed pressing local community issues and then translated their findings into original scripts, using theater as a medium for dialogue and civic engagement.

The partnership was deepened by the residency of Craig Maravich, BTP’s director. With support from a Conflict Transformation grant, Craig worked with students to bring their scripts to life. Together, we became a production company, teaching students how to focus on the relationship among the performer, the message, and the audience. Students learned how to communicate complex community issues in an interactive, accessible way.



We held final performances for an audience including Aiken community members, parents, and organizers from local agencies. This layered process allowed students to see themselves as active agents of local change. Eleventh grader Paul Hale shared:

"Learning how to act on stage really solidified the companionship within our classroom community. Sharing with an authentic audience made me realize how impactful we can be as teenagers."

Through this partnership, the "conflicts" in local issues were transformed into a bridge for understanding, proving that when students are given the tools of artistic expression, they can advocate for a better community.

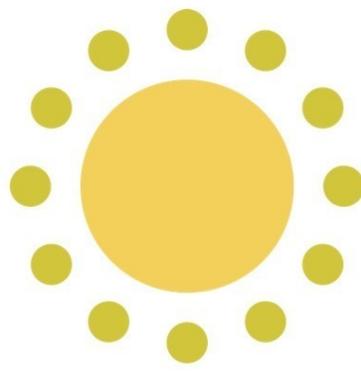
-Dr. Kayla Hostetler, M.A. '24, Bread Loaf School of English

Pillar Two: Undergraduate Campus Life

Vermont Restorative Approaches Collaborative Lunch and Learn

In December, Dr. Netta Avineri (CTC Executive Director), Lida Winfield (Pillar Two Lead), and three Peer Conflict Coaches joined the [Vermont Restorative Approaches Collaborative's \(VTRAC\) "Lunch and Learn."](#) VTRAC is a Vermont-based, community-resourced network dedicated to bringing restorative approaches to schools and communities that hosts virtual meetings monthly to foster statewide connection.

Of the 20 attendees on the call, all are deeply connected to restorative process work across Vermont. Netta framed the conversation by asking participants to reflect on the changes they are navigating in their professional and personal lives. Lida introduced the [Engaged Listening Project](#) followed by Namrita Ghani, Charlie Fisch, and Maria Gutierrez Delgado, who shared their experiences with the [Peer Conflict Coaching \(PCC\)](#) program. The PCC's spoke eloquently about how their training supports the Middlebury College community and how this work has transformed their personal interactions with friends and family. Restorative work and PCC training are rooted in listening, empathy, and welcoming complexity in ourselves and others. While this can be slow work, it is fundamentally tied to sustainable, long-term change.



vermont **restorative**
approaches collaborative



Pillar Three: Undergraduate Experiential Learning

"Privilege and Poverty" Student Reflection on Engagement with Teen Center

The [Privilege & Poverty Academic Cluster](#) (P&P) brings classrooms and communities together to critically examine and address the causes and consequences of poverty, supported in part by funding from the Conflict Transformation Collaborative. P&P staff and faculty work year-round with our community partners (who are our co-educators and learners) by participating in local coalitions, supporting class and volunteer engagement with their organizations, co-creating community programming and professional development opportunities, and more. Student interns work full time over the summer, fully embedded in the staff and work of the organizations and providing critical capacity for the community. They meet as a cohort in classes both prior and after their summer experiences, and meet weekly among the nine local interns all summer. It's in these cohort-based spaces that they ask deep questions about the complex interpersonal, community-wide, and contextual/systemic conflicts that shape their learning experiences.



P&P Students working with Middlebury teens.

One P&P summer 2025 student, Liliana, reflected: “This summer at the teen center was one of the most meaningful experiences I’ve had. What really stuck with me was how much having a safe, welcoming space matters. It reminded me that little things can carry so much weight when you’re building trust and community. I also learned a lot about myself. It wasn’t always easy, but it helped me grow as a leader and as a person. This internship left me with a deeper commitment to supporting equity and access, and it showed me how much joy there is in walking alongside young people as they figure out who they are.”

Pillar Four: Graduate Training and Research

Embedded in and Engaging with Communities in Cameroon

Written from the perspective of Emma Beveridge, MIIS International Policy & Development, CT Practicum Fellow in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Input from Cameroon CT Practicum Fellow Allie Frankel and Middlebury School in Cameroon Program Director Christiane Magnido.

[Middlebury’s School in Cameroon](#), located in the capital, Yaoundé, serves as a hub of political, historical, and anthropological education, bringing in conflict transformation theory and practice. The School’s position in the capital demonstrates a range of community engagement and partnership opportunities. The school is nestled among embassies and development bank headquarters. It also shares a driveway with a family whose children peek out of the window and wave, play tag in the yard, and dry cacao beans from their tree, as Middlebury Cameroon students arrive, attend lectures, and, during breaks, toss a ball with their neighbours.



Student dinner in Cameroon

Certain moments unify a Middlebury Cameroon student's experience: early-morning conversations in shared taxis on the ride to school; host *mamans* who welcome students as one of their own; wanderings through the markets, exploring vivid fabrics and tasting beignets prepared warm by hand. The office of Middlebury Cameroon itself stands tall and regal, equipped with Wi-Fi, filtered water, and air conditioning. Many students live in middle class neighborhoods, where they have opportunities to grow, integrate, and adapt under the steady care of host families and program director Christiane Magnido, meeting each day as it comes. Some days bring bucket baths and water retrieved from reserves; others call for dressing to the nines for family dinner parties, weddings, and funerals.

Both the community and courses equip students with skills to comprehend, embrace, and lean into contradictions. One such course, taught with care and precision by Director Magnido, focuses on historical conflicts shaping the lives of internally displaced women. This class in particular brings Cameroonian and American students into a shared, warm learning community. Later in the semester, the students will connect with the women the class centers, actively challenging dynamics of exploitation, power, and inequality.

Middlebury Cameroon approaches points of contradiction with intention and self-awareness. Students are supported to lean into tension and be transformed by it, held by community, nourished by shared meals, and guided by relationships rooted in mutual respect. The school becomes not merely a site of study, but a beating heart and active hub of conflict transformation.

Pillar Five: Global Engagement

Middlebury Students in Chile Research in Mapuche Community



CT-funded projects in Chile have impacted several local communities since a 2024 CT-funded [research project](#) brought together students from the [Middlebury School in Chile](#) and the Universidad de la Frontera to address socio-ecological conflicts in the Monkul wetlands in Chile. Six Middlebury and Chilean students carried out research with the Mapuche community *Mateo Nahuelpan*, investigating the value of biocultural memory related to wetlands and identifying and analyzing socio-ecological conflicts from the Mapuche community's perspective. Their analysis proposed strategies for transforming present and future conflicts related to land management.

Students engaged in individual and group reflections that deepened their understanding of conflict transformation processes and connected theory with practice. Activities included conflict mapping, interviews with key informants, and a community presentation of findings. This partnership not only strengthened conflict transformation skills for all on the research team, but also fostered an interdisciplinary and intercultural understanding of socio-ecological conflicts, encouraging dialogue between local communities and students. Projects in 2025 and 2026 have built on this foundation, embedding CT into research, enriching partnerships with Chilean university students and faculty, and connecting students to local communities. Middlebury School in Chile Assistant Director and Sustainability Lead Paulina Solís Iturra will present on this work at the Forum on Education Abroad's annual conference in March 2026.

The Monkul Wetlands, Chile

RECENT AND UPCOMING EVENTS





We can hardly believe it's been three weeks since renowned teaching artist and activist Michael Rohd came to the Middlebury campus, as part of the Conflict Transformation Collaborative's Social Change series! Michael is the Director of the Co-Lab for Civic Imagination. Co-sponsored by the Conflict Transformation Collaborative and Beyond the Page, Michael Rohd's two-day residency featured a class visit, panel discussion, and two workshops.

At the panel, Michael told an audience of Middlebury students, faculty, staff and community members about his ongoing Montana-based project State of Mind, "a statewide theatre and public dialogue tour aimed at community listening, tackling stigmas around mental and behavioral health, sharing resources and exploring strategies for care across our communities." Participants in this project tap into their curiosity, creativity, courage, and compassion while observing and engaging with a range of stakeholders in various Montana community settings.

The next morning, Michael led a workshop for students, faculty, staff, and community members, applying Michael's process and facilitation methods to Middlebury College's core questions around institutional impact from local to global levels. Michael also worked with the Middlebury College Theatre Department to explore the intersection of devised theatre, civic imagination, and public dialogue.

We appreciate Michael for making such a deep impression on Beyond the Page fellows, undergraduate students, faculty, staff, and community members at Middlebury interested in stewarding conflict for productive change across contexts. What a way to begin the new year!



- Feb. 10** [Middlebury Social Impact Corps Information Session](#)
7:15–8:00 PM ET (4:15–5:00 PM PT) Zoom - Register [here](#)
- Feb. 18** [Conflict Transformation Global Courses Funding Information Session](#)
4:15 PM ET Zoom - Register [here](#)
- Mar. 31** [Migration between Justice and Democracy: Rethinking Border Openness](#)

Interested in Conflict Transformation? Consider enrolling in a class!

Students who complete the five cluster components and a short reflection earn a CT Certificate. If you are interested in learning more, and seeing what courses are offered, head over to [go/ctcluster/](#) or [contact](#) Professor Sebnem Gumuscu

That's all... for now!

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