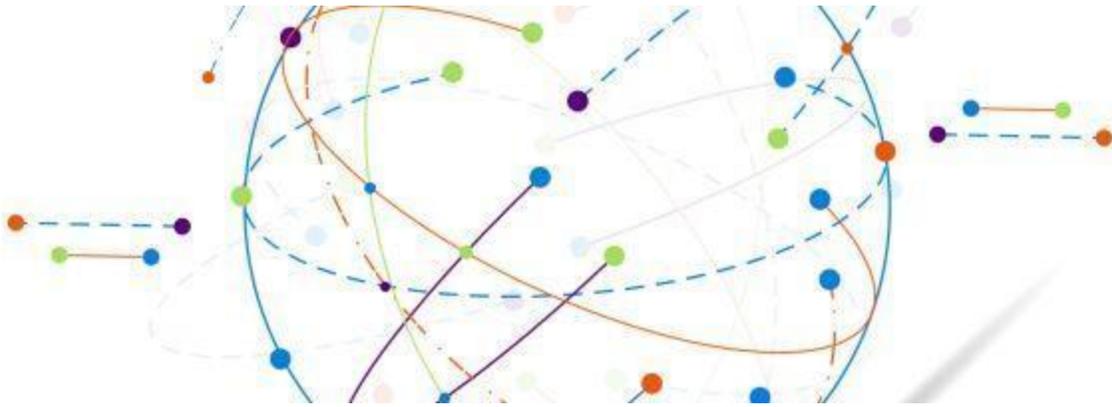




March 2026 Newsletter



Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Conflict Transformation Collaborative at Middlebury partners,

Having spaces and places where we can make meaning - of our teaching, learning, community-based work, research, and lives - is essential to the work of conflict and change. This meaning-making can manifest in quiet reflective practice, discussion of challenges with a classmate, celebration of a consequential encounter, sharing resources with a colleague, and more. In this newsletter, we highlight the role of **communities of practice and convenings** as powerful spaces for educators, students, and partners to come together for short term and sustained engagement. In these 'third spaces', conflict and change practitioners gather to move 'best practices' to 'contextual practices', alongside one another. These third spaces become meaningful opportunities for accompaniment in ongoing engagement with conflict and change at multiple scales. They are also significant opportunities for intercultural communication - across the 'cultures' of faculty, staff, students, departments, and institutions. They can open up novel discoveries, and insights, through these 'intercultural' encounters - describing norms and values, crystallizing tensions, interpreting their day-to-day work, sharing openly about one's hopes and dreams for their practice. Convenings (intensive gathering opportunities) and communities of practice (longer term cohorts to whom one returns over time to hone one's practice) are mutually informing - convenings can beget communities of practice, and communities of practice can create the drive to gather again. These ripple effects can be felt across departmental, institutional, and structural 'siloes' to allow for new ways of thinking, being, and doing. By coming together with intention and building relationships through vulnerability and sharing, individuals can return to their contexts with renewed visions and hope for the future.

I have just returned from participating in the Pillar 1 Bread Loaf School of English [Winter Institute](#), during which over 40 high school English teachers from around the country gathered to learn, share, and connect with one another around common interests and unique paths. Last week, we had another "CT Community of Practice" monthly session during which colleagues across Middlebury departments met with one another to continue deepening their mediation-related skillsets. Just yesterday, I participated in a generative meeting with educators across Pillar 3 undergraduate experiential learning programs, sharing about their range of programs and celebrating their impact for students, faculty, staff, and community partners.

In this newsletter, you will read about gatherings across the CT Collaborative pillars, including Bread Loaf faculty and students co-presenting about their collaborative learning at a conference, Middlebury College faculty and staff coming together each week in restorative practices circles, graduate Cohort Fellows and Mentor Fellows building communities of practice with one another, and educators and students across U.S.- and global institutions sharing ideas and insights for moving the collective work forward. It is through this multi-layered, relational approach that the CT Collaborative is deepened and made more meaningful. I encourage you to read our [2025 annual report](#), and continue your own engagement - through participating in

events, sharing your ideas, and moving things forward in the contexts that matter to you. It is through these connections that impacts are felt for individuals, for relationships, and for systems as a whole.

Until soon,

Netta Avineri

Dr. Netta Avineri

Middlebury Conflict Transformation Collaborative Executive Director

Building Communities of Practice

Pillar One: High School Education

BLTN in the "Zoraverse": Fellows Present at Zora Neale Hurston Conference



From left: Dr. Michelle Bachelor Robinson, Mackensi Crenshaw, Katie Cheng, and Donté Tate

Celebrating the life, legend, and legacy of the anthropologist, folklorist, writer, and change agent Zora Neale Hurston, in her hometown of Eatonville, Florida, high-school educators and Bread Loaf Teacher Networkers Donté Tate, Mackensi Crenshaw, and Katie Cheng joined Bread Loaf School of English professor Dr. Michelle Bachelor Robinson on a panel exploring Hurston's continuing legacy in and beyond the classroom. This past January 2026, Michelle convened the panel titled "[Woman on the Mountain: Exploring Hurston at Middlebury College, Bread Loaf School of English and Beyond.](#)" Donté presented "Hurston, Progenitor of Womanism, the Liberation of Mules, and ALL! The Unapologetics of Black Womanhood in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston." Katie and Mackensi (whom Michelle credits with coining the term "Zoraverse" at Bread Loaf) both presented on how Hurston's ethnography has inspired podcasting projects they have introduced to their students, celebrating the empowerment that comes when students are given the opportunity and freedom to study their own communities.

Pillar Two: Undergraduate Campus Life

Restorative Practices Circles on Middlebury College Campus



For several years, the Restorative Practice (RP) team has offered biweekly Community Building Circles for faculty and staff. The participants have prior training or exposure to RP, allowing the group to dive straight into the circle process without needing an introduction to the structure at every session.

Restorative Practices circles can be used to help build community, reflect, share and listen to each other. The goal is to make connections and deepen understanding. By developing relationships in this way, we are better able to address the inevitable harms that occur within a community or relationships.

Each session explores a new theme, recent topics have included boundaries, friendship, supporting students, navigating global issues, and risk-taking. Questions in an RP Circle are intentionally designed to welcome complexity, ensuring that everyone can participate fully through the lens of their own lived experience.

"For me, the RP community building circles have been one of the few places on campus where I feel a true sense of belonging. There is a sort of magic that comes from holding space to both hear and be heard. When we feel safe enough to be authentic and vulnerable, I believe it strengthens the community to be one that calls people in instead of keeping them out." Michelle Audette, *Assistant Director for Community Standards*

"When I go to a Circle, I get to listen to thoughtful colleagues speaking from the heart. It's not time for gossip or politics or argument. It's time for respectful sharing. It's a still pause." Jennifer Molineaux, *Telecommunicator in Public Safety*

"I look forward to attending circle each time because it's an opportunity to take intentional time to be reflective, connect with colleagues I wouldn't otherwise get to know, and think strategically about my growth." Kirstin Kelley, *Residence Director- Old Battell, Forest, Chateau, and the Language Houses*

Pillar Three: Undergraduate Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning and Conflict Transformation Convening

Sixty-eight students, faculty, and staff from 17 institutions joined the first ever "Experiential Learning and Conflict Transformation" convening this past November. Hosted by the Experiential Pillar (along with Middlebury's Center for Community Engagement and Projects for Peace), this three-day gathering centered student experience and focused on two questions: "What does a commitment to vibrant, peaceful and just communities look like?" and "How do we educate and learn for this commitment?"

All in attendance were experiential learners and/or educators whose teaching, learning, and interests have direct connection to conflict transformation, peacebuilding, and social justice. Fittingly, as a gathering of experiential learners and educators, the entire event was designed and implemented as a participatory, reflective, and skill-building space. Students from each attending institutional team were asked to lead (or co-lead, with staff or faculty) a session to share and demonstrate experiential approaches, activities, and tools offered in their own courses and programs, and that connected to one of the three "subthemes" of the conference: 1) skills and concepts of conflict transformation and peacebuilding; civic identity; and reflective practices.



Attendee feedback was overwhelmingly positive – and, frankly, quite moving. With much appreciation for the centering of students and the prioritizing of peer-to-peer learning. As one student participant wrote: After this convening, I have learned that conflict transformation does not follow a single path; it can take many forms, in many spaces, and everyone can participate in it. Each session demonstrated how all actions we take and the spaces we inhabit can become arenas for peacebuilding. We need to be intentional and continually reflect on how we approach others and the impact our actions may have. Through the experiential learning component, I saw how meaningful learning happens beyond the classroom, and how we can apply academic tools to everyday settings to create purposeful conversation spaces with tangible goals.

Planning has begun for our November 2026 convening.

Pillar Four: Graduate Training and Research

Embedded in and Engaging with Communities in Cameroon

Within the graduate pillar, the Cohort Fellows, Mentor Fellows, and Mentor-Mentee Groups are three interconnected communities of practice that allow for many ways to deepen and practice CT knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Communities of practice are the primary organizing structure for the Graduate Cohort Fellowship and are central to developing the curiosity, creativity, courage, and compassion required for productive engagement with conflict and change. Each of the 6 Mentor Fellows work with their mentee groups to create smaller communities of practice, which allows for deeper relationships, supportive inquiry, and peer review.

"Creating a community of practice is dedication, time, and joy! As our cohorts grapple with the wide array of conflict in our world, our mentee groups provide a space to come together and breathe. That next step may be interviewing an Environmentalist, analyzing podcasts, or reviewing research to inform the direction of their Fellowship project. While mentorship may only last for a specific duration of time, the sense of community long outlives the time spent collaborating (and breathing) together." ~Katie Claggett, MIIS International Education Management Candidate and Conflict Transformation Mentor Fellow

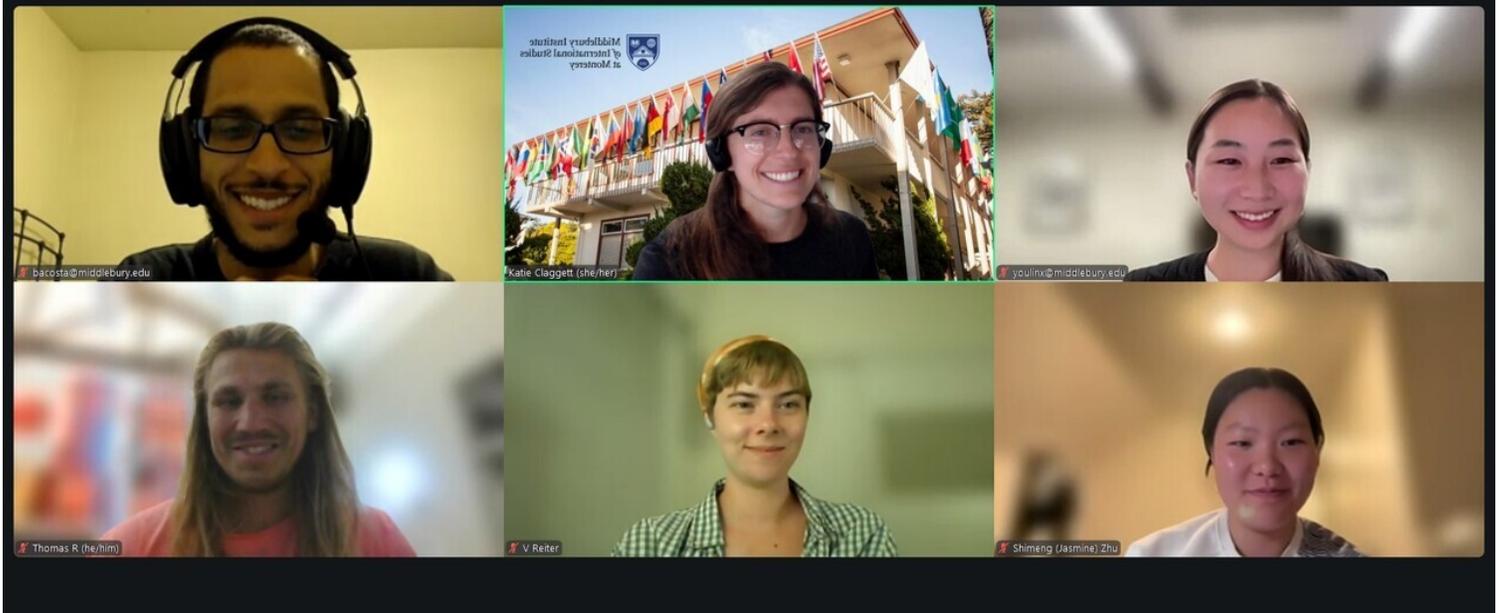


Photo from a Fall 2025 virtual gathering of Katie's CT Fellows during a Story Circles Activity

"Building a community of practice, for me, begins with intentionally coming together to share time and space. Creating space and time to connect in smaller groups, amidst all our other priorities and commitments, is certainly sweetened with a treat — I've found that we're all a little happier to meet early on a Sunday morning when there's a freshly-baked good and tea to share. When two fellows shared their interests in natural resource management conflicts, their peers saw connections to international diplomacy, inclusive language education, culturally-receptive communication, food security, and more." ~Sophie Doddimeade, Environmental Policy and Management & Conflict Transformation Mentor Fellow

Pillar Five: Global Engagement

Convening with Global Partners



In July 2025, Pillar Five hosted their first [CT convening](#). Over three days of programming, close to 70 Middlebury Schools Abroad Directors and visiting Study Abroad Advisors from institutions across the country shared best practices for making the most of transformative intercultural conflict, learned tools for productive dialogue, and practiced with embodied conflict exercises. One attendee shared that the convening "offered a new way of seeing", likening the CT framework to a "ladder: one that invites me to climb and look from another perspective."

That same month, three colleagues from Middlebury – Projects for Peace Director Betsy Vegso, School in Cameroon Director Christiane Magnido, and CT Program Manager Phyllis Stinson – attended The Forum on Education Abroad's Beyond Polarization Residency. This three-day immersive professional development experience was co-sponsored by Middlebury's CT Collaborative and brought together roughly 30 international

education professionals from institutions across the U.S. Participants explored generative conflict in international education from a variety of lenses: neuroscience, identity, peacebuilding, and more.

CTC External Advisory Board Member [John Paul Lederach](#) was the keynote speaker. Mejdi Tours founder [Aziz Abu Sarah](#) spoke about his life in Palestine and what led him to start an organization that works to create a more peaceful and interconnected world via socially conscious travel (note: Mejdi Tours led [Middlebury CT Global Course](#) students on peacebuilding dual-narrative tours in Northern Ireland in the Spring of 2025).

UPCOMING EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

☐ **Attention Middlebury College Students!**

Spend your summer in Burlington, VT working on real-world social impact and conflict transformation through the [Middlebury Social Impact Corps](#) (MSIC.) MSIC offers both Intern (undergraduate) and Scholar (graduate) roles, bringing students together in a cohort-based experience focused on community-partnered projects, training, mentorship, and reflection.

Summer 2026 Community Partner: nuwave

nuwave is a Burlington-based people science consulting and technology firm focused on building high-performing, inclusive organizational cultures. This summer's cohort will help develop conflict transformation tools, training, and resources for organizations across sectors. **[Applications due March 5.](#)**

Questions? Reach out to Dana Anderson at danaa@middlebury.edu.

☐ **Now accepting applications for our summer 2026 Language Access program.**

The [Center for Community Engagement](#) is sponsoring this **immersive, experiential** program is for undergraduates interested in translation, interpretation, and language access. Focus areas will include language access and language justice within immigration, health, and educational systems and settings; responsibilities and strategies of interpreters and translators in high stakes and crisis situations; and learning from (and supporting) those engaged in language access work, advocacy, and research.

Language Access is supported by the [Conflict Transformation Collaborative](#), and there are **no fees to participate**. Undergraduates who successfully complete the program are eligible to receive a \$500 stipend to off-set lost wages. Program information and application available now, please [apply](#) by or before **March 30**.

Questions? Reach out to Kristen Mullins at kmullins@middlebury.edu.



Mar. 31 [Migration between Justice and Democracy: Rethinking Border Openness](#)

4:30 PM Hillcrest 103, Middlebury College

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!

Follow~Contact~Engage



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