


Negotiating the Nexus: Symbiotic Relationship of Theory and Practice in Conflict Management

Benjamin J. Broome 

Hugh Downs School of Human Communication, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, U.S.A.

Keywords

theory-practice nexus, symbiosis, reflective scholar, collaborative inquiry, knowledge coproduction.

Correspondence

Benjamin J. Broome, Hugh Downs School of Human Communication, Arizona State University, PO Box 871205, Tempe 85287-1205, AZ, U.S.A.; e-mail: benjamin.broome@asu.edu.

doi: 10.1111/ncmr.12105

Abstract

The field of conflict resolution has long recognized that theory and practice are both vital in studying peace and conflict. But theory and practice often exist in separate worlds, each vying for privilege and recognition. However, many scholars and practitioners work in the theory–practice *nexus*, constantly negotiating as they move back and forth between the two domains. But even though tensions often exist between theory and practice, this essay proposes that they function together is a *symbiotic relationship*. Several ways are proposed for how a symbiotic approach to theory and research can be beneficial for the study and practice of conflict management, and the benefits of doing so are outlined. It is proposed that theory and practice come together in special ways in the classroom, and scholars and practitioners are encouraged to consider possibilities for promoting through teaching and pedagogy the coevolution of knowledge that is the essence of symbiosis.

It is a special honor to receive the Jeffrey Z. Rubin Theory-to-Practice Award from the International Association for Conflict Management (IACM). As described on the IACM website, this award recognizes important contributions to the nexus between theory–research and practice,¹ awarded to individuals whose contributions over the span of a career emphasize their ability to move effectively and skillfully between theory and practice in their professional activities. Jeffrey Rubin was a well-known social psychologist who directed the Harvard Project on Negotiation (PON) and was known for conducting research with important practical implications accessible to both student and professional audiences (see, e.g., Bercovitch & Rubin, 1992; Breslin & Rubin, 1995; Brockner & Rubin, 1985; Brockner et al., 1982; Deutsch, Bunker, & Rubin, 1995; Rubin, 1981, 1989; Rubin & Brown, 1975; Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 1990).

I am humbled to be in the company of the other wonderful scholars who have received this award: Stephen B. Goldberg (Northwestern University), Ellen Giebels (University of Twente, The Netherlands), David Johnson (University of Minnesota), Linda Babcock (Carnegie Mellon University), Lisa B. Bingham (Indiana University), Tricia S. Jones (Temple University), and Peter Carnevale (New York University, now at University of Southern California). All of these individuals have been prolific in conducting research with practical implications and have been engaged during their entire career in applying their

¹Theory and research are deeply intertwined scholarly activities, and to ease the language burden for both the author and the reader, I will generally refer to the “theory–practice” connection rather than constantly using the theory/research terminology.

findings in a variety of important social contexts. To sit at the same table with such outstanding people is a special privilege.²

Although the Rubin Award is given to a specific individual, it is designed to bring attention to work that is being done to advance the practical applications of theory and research in the field of conflict management. One of the purposes of the award is to provide encouragement for those whose work lies at the intersection of research and practice. This is the case for many people across the IACM community. I am pleased to accept this award on behalf of all those who are engaged in developing practical theory and pursuing applied research, and who are constantly pursuing ways to utilize the vast storehouse of knowledge about conflict, peace-building, and dialogue.

When you receive an award, it not only recognizes your own efforts but also honors those whose influence brought you to this point in your career. There were many individuals and organizations who pushed me forward and often carried me over hurdles, during my journey within the nexus of theory, research, teaching and practice. First, I have benefited from outstanding mentors both inside and outside the academy.³ A career progresses (and sometimes regresses) through many stages, and at various points along the way I have received wise and inspiring advice and guidance from people who believed in me and helped me take advantage of many incredible opportunities. Second, I owe much to the many colleagues with whom I have had the privilege to collaborate on both applied and academic projects.⁴ No project is a solo effort, and credit for all accomplishments listed on my *vitae* goes to the hundreds of individuals with whom I have had the privilege to work and from whom I have had the opportunity to learn. Third, I am grateful to the institutions that have been so generous in supporting my work, particularly Arizona State University (ASU) and George Mason University (GMU), which have served as my academic homes for most of my career.⁵ Having a supportive and encouraging institutional base has provided both refuge and resources that are crucial in working with groups in conflict. Finally, I would like

²I am immensely grateful to the IACM awards committee—Shirli Kopelman, Jessica Jameson, and Anne Lytle—for their work in reviewing potential recipients of the Rubin award, and for placing their trust in me to represent those who are working at the nexus of theory and research in conflict management.

³I do not have space to recognize all the people who have played a mentoring role in my academic career, but some of the most influential were Nobleza Asuncion-Lande, Kim Giffin, Coleman Bender, Anita Taylor, Don Boileau, Alexander Christakis, John Warfield, Jack Condon, Dennis Sandole, Kevin Clements, and our very own Dan Druckman. I would also like to acknowledge the following individuals outside academia who have influenced my career in significant ways: Yvonne Keefer, Wess & Marilyn Dubrisk, and Ladonna Harris. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Daniel Hadjitoffi, who was Director of the Cyprus Fulbright Commission during my years in Cyprus, and also the following individuals who served as external third-party pioneers in the peace-building work in Cyprus, and with whom I had the opportunity to work: Ronald Fisher, Louise Diamond, Diana Chigas.

⁴A full list of individuals would take pages, but I am especially indebted to my Greek-Cypriot, Turkish-Cypriot, Greek, and Turkish friends and collaborators in peace-building efforts in the eastern Mediterranean; Native American leaders who invited me to facilitate design sessions with Tribal Nations and indigenous groups in the mid-west and southwest United States; and partners in projects I have been involved with in Greece, Turkey, Ireland, Belgium, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, and other global settings.

⁵At ASU, my academic home is the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication. While at GMU I was faculty in the Department of Communication, and I also worked closely with what was then the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR), Center for Interactive Management (CIM), and the Institute for Advanced Study in the Integrative Sciences (IASIS). I would also like to acknowledge a number of other institutions with which I have had the opportunity to work, including (outside the United States): American College of Greece (Deree) in Athens; Conflict Analysis and Resolution Program at Sabanci University in Turkey; Centre for International and European Studies at Kadir Has University in Turkey; Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at Queensland University in Australia; National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at University of Otago in New Zealand; Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University in Sweden; Department of Psychology at National University of Ireland Galway; Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy in Greece; Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey in Mexico; Logos Public Affairs in Brussels; Cyprus Fulbright Commission; U.S. Embassy Nicosia; United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Cyprus; and (inside the United States): Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO); Comanche Nation; Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity; Navajo Parks and Recreation; and Intercultural Communication Institute (ICI).

to point to the important role played by professional organizations such as IACM, which provide a critical space for exchanging ideas with fellow scholars, and which publish the journals and edited books that disseminate the theories, research, case studies, essays, and reports that advance our understanding of conflict dynamics. Our work would be lonesome and limited without the support provided by the professional associations to which we belong.⁶

The Rubin Award recognizes contributions to the *nexus* between theory–research and practice. Nexus is a Latin word that means binding, joining, fastening, connecting, or linking disparate entities. For example, in the study of public policy, there is recognition of the nexus between large corporations and political power. Nexus can also refer to a center or core where connections between various parts of an entity come together. For example, the Greek *kafenion* (coffee-house) is often the nexus of life in a village or urban neighborhood. Thus, the nexus serves important functions in a variety of situations and settings.

The field of conflict resolution has long recognized that theory and practice are both vital in the study of peace and conflict. As Cheldelin, Druckman, and Fast (2008) note, integrating theory, research, and practice is a central tenet of the field. This is evidenced by the important published works that use theory and practice in the title. More than 30 years ago, an edited volume pulled together papers from the inaugural meeting of the Council for the Facilitation of International Conflict Resolution and titled it *International Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (Azar & Burton, 1986). As the field blossomed in the 1990s, influential volumes brought together prominent scholars and practitioners to focus on theory and application in the young field of conflict resolution (Sandole & van der Merwe, 1993; Schellenberg, 1996). These broad surveys were soon accompanied by books that explored specific areas of conflict management: negotiation theory and practice (Breslin & Rubin, 1995), mediation in international conflicts (Bercovitch, 1996), and ethnic conflict theory and practice (Ross & Rothman, 1999). As we entered the new millennium, Deutsch and Coleman (2000) published their *Handbook of Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice*; Abu-Nimer (2001) examined reconciliation, justice, and coexistence through the lens of both theory and practice; and Hastings (2006) looked at theory and practice of nonviolence. More recently, Kelman and his colleagues put together a set of essays that explored theory and practice in group identity and social conflict (Kelman, Eagly, Baron, & Hamilton, 2010); Bercovitch (2011) published a collection of his essays on theory and practice of international mediation; Duckworth and Kelley (2012) brought together essays that demonstrated Boyer's (1996) scholarship of engagement; Matyók, Senehi, and Byrne (2011) edited a book focused on theory and practice of peace and conflict studies; Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2013) collected essays that offered perspectives on theory and practice of conflict from the field of human communication; the Deutsch-Coleman Handbook was updated (Coleman, Deutsch, & Marcus, 2014), and Georgakopoulos (2017) recently assembled essays from an impressive group of scholars writing about theory and practice of mediation. In addition to these influential books, several articles and book chapters have focused on the relationship of theory and practice in conflict management (see, e.g., Botes, 2003; Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011; Druckman & Broome, 1991; Druckman, Broome, & Korper, 1988; Gaynier, 2005; Gerami, 2009; Gilligan, 2006; Hansen, 2008; Noce, 1999; Reimers, 2016; Ross, 2000; Sandole, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 2007). Finally, the emphasis given to both theory and research is evident in the work of the IACM Lifetime Achievement Award winners, four of whom were celebrated in a recent special issue of *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* (Gross, 2016): Elise Boulding (Boulding, Clements, Morrison, & Yodsampa, 2016), Jeanne M. Brett (Adair, Behfar, Olekalns, & Shapiro, 2016), Linda Putnam (Paul, Geddes, Jones, & Donohue, 2016), and J. Keith Murnighan (Conlon, Bazerman, Malhotra, & Pillutla, 2016). The publications referenced above are not meant to be an exhaustive list, but they clearly demonstrate that both theory and practice have been of concern to the field from its earliest days.

⁶In addition to IACM, I also owe a great deal to the National Communication Association (NCA), International Communication Association (ICA), Western States Communication Association (WSCA), and International Academy of Intercultural Research (IAIR).

Although significant attention has been given to theory and practice in conflict resolution, and there are strong indications that both are valued by those in academic settings and those working in the field on a daily basis, the relationship between theory and practice is often an uneasy one. Particularly for those who work within the nexus, it is not always a comfortable place to exist. I often hear practitioners who complain that the language of theory and research is not accessible—it is too abstract, it is removed from the “real world,” it is intimidating. Researchers will sometimes complain that practice is not evidence-based, that individual situations cannot be generalized, that those involved in practice depend on highly suspect intuition or base their work on fads that are espoused by individuals without credibility in the academic world. Indeed, it seems that theory and practice are often separate worlds, each vying for privilege and recognition. Anyone who spends a lot of time in the theory–practice nexus knows well the pressures that seem to come at them from both sides.

Living in the nexus requires constant negotiation as one moves back and forth between the two domains. As a place where two somewhat different sets of concerns and interests meet, the nexus is a place of high activity, and collisions are common as various forces flow through this space. But even though there are often tensions between theory and practice, and it sometimes seems that the two worlds are far apart, I believe they are joined together in an integrative fashion. In searching for how to best navigate the theory–practice relationship, I have found the concept of *symbiosis* to be heuristic in describing how these two important pillars of conflict resolution function together in advancing the field.

Symbiosis is from the Greek prefix *syn* (σύν), meaning “with” or “together,” and the word *biosis* (βίωσις), which means “life.” Symbiosis refers to two different entities (i.e., two species or populations) having close long-term interaction that affects both entities. Symbiotic interactions can range from those that are mutually beneficial, to those that are parasitic, to those that are predatory. All higher plants and animals depend on symbiosis in one form or another, and symbiosis has played a significant role in evolution.

Common examples in the natural world include certain species of birds that eat bugs off the skin of elephants, and bees that eat the nectar of flowers and then spread the pollen to other flowers, making possible reproduction in the flowers. An example popularized by Disney is the Clown Fish and its partner the Sea Anemone—Nemo has a safe home, protected from predators, and in turn he removes parasites and dirt from the anemone, as well as feeds the anemone through the nutrients excreted in his waste. Many traditional farmers take advantage of symbiosis to help control pests, cultivating together plants that repel insects harmful to the other. In the social realm, long-term associations such as marriage are often symbiotic relationships, with each person dependent on the other, and the relationship providing benefits for both.

Outside the biological sciences, the concept of symbiosis is not often used as an explanatory concept. However, symbiosis is occasionally applied as an analytic lens by individuals in a diversity of fields, including the study of political theory (Magnusson, 2014), entrepreneurship (Meyskens, Carsrud, & Cardozo, 2010), industrial systems (Yap, Nonita Tumulak, & John Fredrick, 2017), community psychology (Kloos, 2016), art and design (Allison, 2008), psychoanalytic theories of early childhood development (Mahler & Furer, 1968; Pine, 2004), and criminal law (Cooper & Frank Rudy, 2003; Ehrenreich, 2002).

Although rare, symbiosis has been used on occasion to examine issues related to conflict management. Viotti (2007) explores the degree of symbiosis that might be possible between humanitarian aid and the action of the UN Security Council in armed conflicts. Brants and his colleagues (Brants, de Vreese, Möller, & van Praag, 2009) studied the mistrust between politicians and journalists, finding a waning symbiosis, leading to a spiral of cynicism. Uddhammar (2006) examined how conservation, development, and tourism could work together symbiotically with local interests, particularly in economically developing countries. Cacioppo, Semin, and Berntson (2004) proposed that the often divisive tension between scientific realism and instrumentalism could be brought together through symbiosis to develop more adaptable, integrative, and cumulative theory in psychology. Zaccaro and Horn (2003) call for symbiosis between leadership theory and practice in order to rectify the tendency to approach leadership

problems using trial and error tactics derived from anecdotes and popular fads rather than validated scientific data and models. Langella, Carbo, and Dao (2012) examine the symbiosis between corporations and society, emphasizing corporate social responsibility and sustainability of environmental impact.

Of course, there are risks involved in applying a concept rooted in the biological sciences to an analysis of the social scientific realm in which we usually study conflict. For example, a symbiotic relationship in the plant and animal world usually involves two completely different species, having no intrinsic similarity to one another. Within conflict management, theory and practice are better viewed as part of the same family, with inherent common characteristics. And there is an essential overlap that intrinsically demands some level of integration. Even though it might seem at times that academic theorists and field practitioners are two different “species,” their correspondence is probably much stronger than between a bee and a flower or a bird and an elephant. Nevertheless, I believe it can be instructive to examine the theory–practice relationship through the lens of symbiosis. Doing so can help us understand that each exists because of the connections they share and the goals they have in common. And by working together more closely, both theory and research are each stronger and more vibrant.

A good starting point in discussing the symbiosis of theory and research is Kurt Lewin’s oft-quoted statement “there is nothing so practical as a good theory.” It is useful, however, to consider this quote in its fuller context:

Many psychologists working today in an applied field are keenly aware of the need for close cooperation between theoretical and applied psychology. This can be accomplished in psychology, as it has been accomplished in physics, if the theorist does not look toward applied problems with highbrow aversion or with a fear of social problems, and if the applied psychologist realizes there is nothing so practical as a good theory (Lewin, 1951, p. 169).

We can see from this expanded quote that Lewin was not just telling practitioners that theory is useful; he had words of advice for theorists as well. More importantly, he focused on *cooperation* between the theoretical and the applied. Building on Lewin’s call for cooperation, there are several ways in which a symbiotic approach to theory and research can be beneficial for the study and practice of conflict management.

First, theory can prepare practitioners for recognizing and responding to opportunities that arise in their work. The famous photographer and environmentalist Ansel Adams was fond of saying “Chance favors the prepared mind” (a saying that originally comes from Louis Pasteur, the French microbiologist who invented the process of pasteurization). Adams understood very well the theory of light and composition, which prepared him to recognize the set of unique combinations of place, time, and context that led to many of his great images. He was able to recognize an opportunity and capture the moment within the frame of his camera, offering to the world a new perspective on familiar places. Without theoretical preparation (as well as having the right photographic equipment ready for use), he probably would have missed the scenes that have inspired generations of photographers and which contributed to the development of an environmental consciousness within American society. Likewise, practitioners who work in highly dynamic and volatile conflict situations will make more useful diagnoses and take more appropriate action if they have a grounding in theoretical concepts such as ripeness (Zartman, 1985), escalation (Pruitt, Kim, & Rubin, 2004), turning points (Druckman, 2001), human needs (Burton, 1987), and other important theoretical advances in conflict resolution. Indeed, knowledge of theories in conflict management and human communication studies have been critical in my own work with peace-building groups in Cyprus, where the circumstances are constantly changing and the complexity of the situation requires much more than a cursory understanding of the underlying variables (see, e.g., Broome, 2004; Broome, Anastasiou, Hadjipavlou, & Kanol, 2012).

Second, it is through practice that theoretical developments are given birth, take shape, and are tested. The term theory is derived from the Greek *theoria* (θεωρία), which means observing, looking at, or viewing things in a thoughtful manner. Although the term is often used in everyday speech to refer to

something that is speculative (“it’s just a theory”), the scientific meaning refers to the ability of a theory to explain aspects of the natural or social world through repeated testing. Theories can be used to both explain and predict. Theories are always open to change or even rejection, based on the evidence that accumulates to support or rebuff them. In line with its ancient roots, a key component of theory as it is used today is *observation*. Although observation can be done in an artificial environment, an important aim of theory in conflict management is to ensure that the statements and models that comprise the theory are well-grounded in the reality of conflict. This requires working upward, starting from observations, to generate plausible explanations for the phenomena under study. In this way, theory is hinged upon practice. Interpreting any data without reference to practice creates the risk of making false claims. As pointed out by three pioneers in our field (Bercovitch, Clements, & Druckman, 2005): “Scholars, for their part, cannot hope to replenish and improve their conclusions unless they study real life situations, and do so systematically” (p. 140). By grounding our theories and our research in the experiences of practitioners, we can develop theories that have the best chance of informing policymakers, managers, trainers, development organizations, and others whose daily task is dealing with conflict.

Third, theory allows critical reflection of practice. Donald Schon (1983) introduced the notion of the “reflective practitioner,” arguing that through a feedback loop of experience, learning and practice, we can utilize a wider repertoire of understandings to transform difficult situations into positive action. He suggests that we do this in two primary ways. First, he describes “reflection-in-action,” which involves attending carefully to the situation in front of us and drawing upon our past experiences, as well as the theoretical perspectives we bring to the situation, to inform our actions in the circumstances that are unfolding. The second process is what he calls “reflection-on-action,” which is done afterward, allowing us to examine through a theoretical lens the actions that took place and why they happened. This helps us develop questions and ideas about our practice, and it provides a test of the theories we brought to the situation. In both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, conflict theory plays a major role. This has become evident in my own role as a third-party facilitator with peace-building groups. The work is often intense, and expectations of the group are high. It is emotionally demanding and requires constant effort to stay on track and help groups move forward. Important decisions must be made as events unfold, with serious consequences for the group’s progress. To navigate the minefields, I must draw upon theories of group dynamics and intercultural communication processes. I certainly do not always make the best choices, but afterward I can reflect critically on what happened and link my experiences and observations to models and theories that try to explain what is going on in the social and natural worlds in which we operate.

Fourth, from the nexus of theory and practice, ideas and insights emerge that would not be possible from either in isolation. The process of biological symbiosis allows species to evolve in response to each other’s activities, in a process known as coevolution. The same is true for both theory and research, each of which evolves because of its interaction with the other. But they not only benefit as separate entities from the contributions of the other, they are able to produce together new understandings within the nexus itself, advances that belong neither to theory or practice but that exist in the between. One of the theoretical concepts I have tried to explicate over the past two decades is “relational empathy” (Broome, 1993, 2009), which advocates a move away from viewing interpersonal understanding as a “product” and thinking of it instead as a tensional, emergent, relational process. Relational empathy suggests that understanding is dynamic and provisional, is embedded in context, and involves synthesis more than compromise and bargaining. In my view, a similar process occurs in the nexus of theory and practice. The tension that exists in the nexus gives rise to explanations and insights that are constantly shifting and are tied to the context in which they emerged. And they evolve not as much through tradeoffs and deal-making as through a creative process that involves fusion and synthesis. Through symbiosis, the disjointed worlds of theory and practice are stretched to create a more inclusive and adaptive space where both can coexist, coevolve, and coproduce knowledge.

If a symbiotic relationship can be more firmly established between conflict theory and practice, it would have several benefits for both areas. First, it would allow theory development to create a stronger connection to the concerns and problems faced by practitioners. Those who work with peace-building groups, with policy leaders, with aid organizations, with activists, and with other entities in the field can help the scholarly community better understand the challenging realities they face within the conflict zones in which they operate. This can lead to the development of more viable, robust theory and is more likely to be applied by those who need it most. Likewise, it would encourage more applied research. There are well-recognized advantages to conducting research in natural settings, but it is usually more difficult to arrange and time-consuming to carry out. But having strong links with those who are working in the field will increase the possibilities for research that is co-developed between academics and practitioners, and it would encourage research that is more directly applicable to the needs of those working in conflict settings.

Additionally, a symbiotic relationship between theory and practice would help practitioners broaden what are usually short temporal horizons. Facing immediate demands and concerns of daily tasks, deadlines, and social pressures emanating from the individuals, groups, and organizations with which they work, it is not easy for practitioners to keep the larger picture in mind. Having a comprehensive theoretical framework, particularly one they have helped co-create, can free the practitioner from some of the limits imposed by the realities of everyday concerns. Finally, theory–practice symbiosis can help mitigate the tendency of practitioners to become infatuated with intervention trends that are based primarily on anecdotal evidence, and which often drive applications despite insignificant evidence of their validity. The mistakes that often occur because of popularized advice can be costly and are less likely when theorists and practitioners have worked together closely to create and test intervention techniques that are based in established theory and that simultaneously respond to what practitioners face on the ground.

Despite the potential advantages and contributions of a symbiotic approach to the relationship between theory and practice, it is not likely to happen naturally, and the divide will not go away on its own. It is not enough to work more diligently at translating theory into practice, or encouraging the practitioner to be more aware of academic theories. What will it take to promote symbiosis between theory and research in conflict management? I agree with Barge and Shockley-Zalabak (2008), who point out that enhancing the relationship between theory and practice “is not an intellectual cognitive activity that can be constructed in one’s head; rather, it is an embodied relational activity that necessitates bringing members of scholarly and practitioner communities into conversation with one another” (pp. 252–253). Although the conversation can start with bringing academics and practitioners into the same room for discussions at conferences, universities, and in the field, it will need to go beyond the meet-and-talk stage. We will need a concerted effort by academics and practitioners to establish a level and quality of interaction that genuinely recognizes different “truths” and ways of knowing, respects diversity of perspectives on problems, and values unique experiences with difficult situations. As Van De Ven and Johnson (2006) contend, it will require a form of collaborative inquiry in which scholars and practitioners *coproduce knowledge*, leveraging each constituency’s specialized expertise and distinct contributions in order to understand complex problems and design potential solutions to the many challenges we face in a world characterized by conflict, violence, and injustices.

Moving toward a more collaborative form of inquiry is not without hurdles. In addition to questions about resources and the practical difficulties that confront those working in the nexus, joint projects between scholars and practitioners will encounter issues such as specialized language for describing phenomena, contrasting interpretations of events, the tendency to blame one another for breakdowns and failures, and struggles over power and prestige. But if these sound familiar to us, it is because teamwork is inevitably linked with conflict, a subject about which we know much. It is probably safe to say that managing conflict lies at the heart of collaborative inquiry, and there is no field better suited than conflict resolution to pursue the goal of bridging the theory–practice gap.

Cacioppo et al. (2004), in their discussion of the opposition between scientific realism and instrumentalism, wisely suggested that the dichotomy between the two “should be assigned to history” (p. 222). Perhaps the same should be said for the unnecessary separation between theory and practice in conflict management—it is time to put the dichotomy behind us. But we must do more than erase it from our rhetoric. We need to recognize that theory and practice are joined together in a symbiotic relationship, and we need to focus on exploiting the dynamism and creativity that is inherent in this connection. With often competing concerns and interests intersecting, and sometimes colliding, it is not easy to negotiate the nexus, but it provides a powerful space where we can develop useful, adaptive, and cumulative knowledge to inform our understanding and help mitigate some of the pressing conflicts we face in our world today.

Afterthoughts: Teaching as a Symbiotic Activity

Although this essay has focused specifically on the nexus of theory–research and practice, the classroom is one of the places where theory and practice come together in vibrant fashion, particularly in the field of conflict management. In many respects, teaching is itself a symbiotic activity. Instructors seek to translate theory and research in ways that are relevant to the lives of students, bringing more abstract concepts to the practice of negotiation and conflict management. In like manner, instructors seek to connect cases and examples to theory and research that allows deeper understanding of the dynamics that underlie conflict situations. It is often in the classroom that theories are first tested and sharpened through discussion and questioning with students. Research results are confirmed or called into question as students seek to relate them to their own lives. Even without leaving the academic environment, practice is linked with theory and research through the concerns and examples brought to the classroom by students.

Additionally, those who teach courses in conflict and negotiation are often individuals with significant experiences working with conflict and negotiation in community settings, and they bring their own knowledge as practitioners into the classroom. Indeed, in some cases it is the instructor’s own experience in field settings that draws them to teaching about conflict and negotiation. The classroom provides a way of sharing with others the experiences and knowledge they have gained in their work with groups that are struggling to manage conflicts. By entering the classroom, practitioners place themselves in the nexus of theory–research and practice.

Furthermore, courses in conflict and negotiation, which by their very nature deal with social issues and social change processes, are ideal places to incorporate community-based learning. In courses with a service learning component, for example, students complete projects involving an organized service activity with a specific community group or organization. The goal is to give students an opportunity to work directly with groups that can benefit from their involvement, while simultaneously allowing students to reflect on how their involvement with the outside group connects with the course content. While such forms of community engagement are usually organized around pedagogical purposes, they also provide possibilities for knowledge creation and theory development (see, e.g., Hayes, 2011; who describes a course built on community engagement with a goal of producing quality scholarship).

In general, the classroom provides an ideal setting for theory–research and practice partnerships to form and be nurtured. This sometimes takes place through instructor–student relationships that form in the classroom. Particularly at the postgraduate level, many students enroll in classes focused on conflict and negotiation because they are already practitioners or because they hope to offer their services in the future to groups and organizations facing difficult issues. Practitioners are often willing and eager to work with their former professors on research projects, case studies, training programs, and other forms of collaboration that characterize the symbiotic relationship between

theory and practice. In many cases, these partnerships lead to the types of symbiosis discussed in previous sections of this essay.

Partnerships can also emerge through opportunities for coteaching. In my own career, the first course I taught in conflict was with Bryant Wedge,⁷ a practicing psychiatrist who responded to every theoretical point, research study, or conceptual presentation I made with a story that drew from his extensive experience in serving as a mediator in various conflicts. Coming not long after receiving my PhD, and not yet having a wealth of experiential examples to offer students, coteaching with Bryant Wedge played an important role in helping me understand the symbiotic relationship of theory and practice. I have talked with several colleagues over the years who had a similar experience with coteaching. Perhaps more than any other field, the study of conflict management and negotiation lends itself to academic-practitioner coteaching, and from such arrangements can emerge symbiotic partnerships that further strengthen the nexus of theory, research, teaching, and practice.

Although in many cases symbiosis is a natural result of the teaching environment, I believe we could use the classroom more consciously and strategically to strengthen both theory and practice in conflict management. The classroom is a relatively safe and somewhat low-stakes environment in which theoretical ideas can be offered for discussion and refinement, and in which practical ideas can be subjected to a test run. And the classroom is a natural place for instilling habits involving both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. For these reasons and more, I believe the pedagogical arena is ripe for promoting the symbiosis of theory–research and practice in the study of conflict. I encourage all of us to consider ways we can promote through our teaching and pedagogy the type of coevolution of knowledge that is the essence of symbiosis.⁸

References

- Abu-Nimer, M. (Ed.) (2001). *Reconciliation, justice, and coexistence: Theory and practice*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Adair, W. L., Behfar, K. J., Olekalns, M., & Shapiro, D. L. (2016). Celebrating the work of Jeanne M. Brett: Building bridges and making connections. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research, 9*, 292–308. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ncmr.12082>
- Allison, J. (2008). *Symbiosis* (Master of Fine Arts), East Tennessee State University, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (304652867).
- Azar, E. E., & Burton, J. W. (Eds.) (1986). *International conflict resolution: Theory and practice*. Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books.
- Barge, J. K., & Shockley-Zalabak, P. (2008). Engaged scholarship and the creation of useful organizational knowledge. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 36*, 251–265. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00909880802172277>
- Bercovitch, J. (Ed.) (1996). *Resolving international conflicts: The theory and practice of mediation*. Boulder, CO: Rienner.
- Bercovitch, J. (2011). *Theory and practice of international mediation*. London: Routledge.
- Bercovitch, J., Clements, K., & Druckman, D. (2005). On bridging the gap: The relevance of theory to the practice of conflict resolution. *Australian Journal of International Affairs, 59*(2), 133–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357710500139540>

⁷Bryant Wedge was the founding director in 1981 of the newly established Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR) at George Mason University. During the 1970s and 1980s, he led the fight for a National Peace Academy, which eventually resulted in the creation of the US Institute for Peace (USIP). I had the good fortune to coteach a course with Bryant for the first class of students in the M.A. program of CCR.

⁸I applaud Jennifer Parlamis and Noam Ebner for their vision to bring a focus on teaching into the nexus, and for proposing and editing this special issue of NCMR, which gives needed attention to the important connections among theory, research, teaching, and practice. And we are all grateful to Michael Gross, editor of NCMR, both for his tireless work in support of the journal, and for his recognition of the importance of this special issue.

- Bercovitch, J., & Rubin, J. Z. (Eds.) (1992). *Mediation in international relations: Multiple approaches to conflict management*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Botes, J. (2003). Conflict transformation: A debate over semantics or a crucial shift in the theory and practice of peace and conflict studies? *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 8(2), 1–27.
- Boulding, J. R., Clements, K. P., Morrison, M. L., & Yodsampa, A. S. (2016). Elise Boulding's legacy to the twenty-first century: Reflections on her contributions to understanding conflict and peace. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, 9, 274–291. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ncmr.12078>
- Boyer, E. L. (1996). The scholarship of engagement. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 49, 18–33.
- Brants, K., de Vreese, C., Möller, J., & van Praag, P. (2009). The real spiral of cynicism? Symbiosis and mistrust between politicians and journalists. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 15(1), 25–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161209351005>
- Breslin, J. W., & Rubin, J. Z. (Eds.) (1995). *Negotiation theory and practice*. Cambridge, MA: Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School.
- Brockner, J., & Rubin, J. Z. (1985). *Entrapment in escalating conflicts: A social psychological analysis*. New York, NY: Springer-Verlag.
- Brockner, J., Rubin, J. Z., Fine, J., Hamilton, T. P., Thomas, B., & Turetsky, B. (1982). Factors affecting entrapment in escalating conflicts: The importance of timing. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 16(2), 247–266. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0092-6566\(82\)90080-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0092-6566(82)90080-0)
- Broome, B. J. (1993). Managing differences in conflict resolution: The role of relational empathy. In D. J. D. Sandole & H. van der Merwe (Eds.), *Conflict resolution theory and practice: Integration and application* (pp. 95–111). Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Broome, B. J. (2004). Reaching across the dividing line: Building a collective vision for peace in Cyprus. *International Journal of Peace Research*, 41, 191–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343304041060>
- Broome, B. J. (2009). Building relational empathy through an interactive design process. In D. J. D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Staroste-Sandole, & J. Senihi (Eds.), *Handbook of conflict analysis and resolution* (pp. 184–200). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Broome, B. J., Anastasiou, H., Hadjipavlou, M., & Kanol, B. (2012). Opening communication pathways in protracted conflict: From tragedy to dialogue in Cyprus. In L. R. Frey & K. M. Carragee (Eds.), *Communication activism: Struggling for social justice amidst difference*, Vol. 3 (pp. 69–104). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Burton, J. W. (1987). *Resolving deep-rooted conflict: A handbook*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Cacioppo, J. T., Semin, G., & Berntson, G. G. (2004). Realism, instrumentalism, and scientific symbiosis: Psychological theory as a search for truth and the discovery of solutions. *American Psychologist*, 59, 214–223. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.59.4.214>
- Cheldelin, S. I., Druckman, D., & Fast, L. (Eds.) (2008). *Conflict: From analysis to intervention*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Coleman, P. T., Deutsch, M., & Marcus, E. C. (2014). *The handbook of conflict resolution: Theory and practice*. Somerset, MA: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Conlon, D. E., Bazerman, M. H., Malhotra, D., & Pillutla, M. M. (2016). Celebrating the work of J. Keith Murnighan. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, 9, 332–344. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ncmr.12081>
- Cooper, F. R., & Frank Rudy, C. (2003). Understanding “depolicing”: Symbiosis theory and critical cultural theory. *UMKC Law Review*, 71, 355–955. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.380022>
- Cuhadar, E., & Dayton, B. (2011). The social psychology of identity and inter-group conflict: From theory to practice. *International Studies Perspectives*, 12(3), 273–293. <https://10.1111/j.1528-3585.2011.00433.x>
- Deutsch, M., Bunker, B. B., & Rubin, J. Z. (Eds.) (1995). *Conflict, cooperation, and justice: Essays inspired by the work of morton deutsch*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Deutsch, M., & Coleman, P. T. (2000). *The handbook of conflict resolution: Theory and practice* (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Druckman, D. (2001). Turning points in international negotiation: A comparative analysis. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45, 519–544. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002701045004006>

- Druckman, D., & Broome, B. J. (1991). Value differences and conflict resolution: Familiarity or liking? *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 35(4), 571–593. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002791035004001>
- Druckman, D., Broome, B. J., & Korper, S. H. (1988). Value differences and conflict resolution: Facilitation or delinking? *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 32(3), 489–510. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002788032003005>
- Duckworth, C., & Kelley, C. D. (2012). *Conflict resolution and the scholarship of engagement*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Ehrenreich, N. (2002). Subordination and symbiosis: Mechanisms of mutual support between subordinating systems. *UMKC Law Review*, 71, 251.
- Gaynier, L. P. (2005). Transformative mediation: In search of a theory of practice. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 22, 397–408. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.110>
- Georgakopoulos, A. (Ed.) (2017). *The mediation handbook: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Gerami, A. (2009). Bridging the theory-and-practice gap: Mediator power in practice. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 26, 433–451. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.242>
- Gilligan, C. (2006). Traumatized by peace? A critique of five assumptions in the theory and practice of conflict-related trauma policy in Northern Ireland. *Policy & Politics*, 34, 325–345. <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557306776315813>
- Gross, M. A. (2016). Legacies of scholars, scholarship, and praxis from the international association for conflict management: Celebrating a lifetime of achievements. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, 9, 271–273. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ncmr.12079>
- Hansen, T. (2008). Critical conflict resolution theory and practice. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 25, 403–427. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.215>
- Hastings, T. H. (2006). *The lessons of nonviolence: Theory and practice in a world of conflict*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Hayes, S. (2011). Community engagement in peace and conflict studies: Connecting and advancing pedagogy, research, and practice. In T. Matyók, J. Senehi, & S. Byrne (Eds.), *Critical issues in peace and conflict studies: Theory, practice, and pedagogy* (pp. 329–348). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Kelman, H. C., Eagly, A. H., Baron, R. M., & Hamilton, V. L. (Eds.) (2010). *The social psychology of group identity and social conflict: Theory, application, and practice*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Kloos, B. (2016). Cultivating community psychology for future generations: Symbiosis, synergy, and separation. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 58, 303–308. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12105>
- Langella, I. M., Carbo, J., & Dao, V. (2012). An examination of the symbiosis between corporations and society with lessons for management education and practice. *Global Virtue Ethics Review*, 6, 51–82.
- Lewin, K. (1951). *Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical papers (edited by dorwin cartwright)*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Magnusson, W. (2014). The symbiosis of the urban and the political. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38, 1561–1575. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12144>
- Mahler, M. S., & Furer, M. (1968). *Human symbiosis and the vicissitudes of individuation*. New York, NY: International Universities Press.
- Matyók, T., Senehi, J., & Byrne, S. (Eds.) (2011). *Critical issues in peace and conflict studies: Theory, practice, and pedagogy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Meyskens, M., Carsrud, A. L., & Cardozo, R. N. (2010). The symbiosis of entities in the social engagement network: The role of social ventures. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 22, 425–455. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985620903168299>
- Noce, D. J. D. (1999). Seeing theory in practice: An analysis of empathy in mediation. *Negotiation Journal*, 15, 271–301. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.1999.tb00196.x>
- Oetzel, J., & Ting-Toomey, S. (Eds.) (2013). *The SAGE handbook of conflict communication: Integrating theory, research and practice* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Paul, G. D., Geddes, D., Jones, T. S., & Donohue, W. A. (2016). Revitalizing conflict research with a communication perspective: Celebrating and learning from Linda Putnam's contributions to the study of conflict. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, 9, 309–331. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ncmr.12080>

- Pine, F. (2004). Mahler's concepts of "symbiosis" and separation-individuation: Revisited, reevaluated, refined. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 52, 511–533. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00030651040520021001>
- Pruitt, D. G., Kim, S. H., & Rubin, J. Z. (2004). *Social conflict: Escalation, stalemate, and settlement*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Reimers, B. C. (2016). Building a bridge across the conflict theory-practice gap: Comprehensive conflict engagement in community contexts. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 33, 437–458. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.21166>
- Ross, M. H. (2000). Creating the conditions for peacemaking: Theories of practice in ethnic conflict resolution. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23, 1002.
- Ross, M. H., & Rothman, J. (Eds.) (1999). *Theory and practice in ethnic conflict management. Theorizing success and failure*. London, UK: Macmillan Press.
- Rubin, J. Z. (1981). *Dynamics of third party intervention: Kissinger in the middle east*. New York, NY: Praeger.
- Rubin, J. Z. (1989). Some wise and mistaken assumptions about conflict and negotiation. *Journal of Social Issues*, 45, 195–209. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1989.tb01550.x>
- Rubin, J. Z., & Brown, B. R. (Eds) (1975). *The social psychology of bargaining and negotiation*. New York: Academic Press.
- Rubin, J. Z., Pruitt, D., & Kim, S. H. (1994). *Social conflict: Escalation, stalemate, and settlement* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Rubin, J. Z., & Rubin, C. (1990). *When families fight: How to handle conflict with those you love*. New York: Morrow.
- Sandole, D. J. D. (2001). John Burton's contributions to conflict resolution theory and practice: A personal view. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 6(1). Retrieved from http://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol6_1/Sandole.htm
- Sandole, D. J. D., & van der Merwe, H. (1993). *Conflict resolution theory and practice: Integration and application*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Schellenberg, J. A. (1996). *Conflict resolution : Theory, research, and practice*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Schon, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ting-Toomey, S. (2007). Intercultural conflict training: Theory-practice approaches and research challenges. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 36, 255–271. <http://doi.org/10.1080/17475750701737199>
- Uddhammar, E. (2006). Development, conservation and tourism: Conflict or symbiosis? *Review of International Political Economy*, 13, 656–678.
- Van De Ven, A. H., & Johnson, P. E. (2006). Knowledge for theory and practice. *The Academy of Management Review*, 31, 802–821. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2006.22527385>
- Viotti, A. (2007). In search of symbiosis: The Security Council in the humanitarian domain. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 89, 131–153. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383107000914>
- Yap, N. T., Nonita Tumulak, Y., & John Fredrick, D. (2017). Explaining industrial symbiosis emergence, development, and disruption: A multilevel analytical framework. *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 21(1), 6–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jiec.12398>
- Zaccaro, S. J., & Horn, Z. N. J. (2003). Leadership theory and practice: Fostering an effective symbiosis. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14, 769–806. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.009>
- Zartman, W. (1985). *Ripe for resolution: Conflict and intervention in Africa*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Benjamin J. Broome is Professor in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University, where he teaches courses in intercultural communication, intergroup conflict, and peacebuilding. His research focuses on methods and practices for facilitating intercultural dialogue using a set of theoretically-grounded and experience-tested interactive methodologies and design processes. Benjamin has collaborated with educational institutions, policy centers, government agencies,

corporations, professional organizations, community groups, and Native American Tribes and organizations in the United States, Australasia, Europe, and the eastern Mediterranean. He has been involved with peacebuilding efforts in Cyprus for over twenty years, working closely with civil-society actors and the diplomatic community to promote a culture of peace, where individuals, groups, and organizations respond to conflict through focused and structured dialogue rather than resorting to psychological, social, and physical violence.