

George Mason University
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

CONF 795: Practices for Re-Constellating Conflict

FALL 2009

Saturday, October 10, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm, “Point of View,” Lorton, VA
Sunday, October 11, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm, “Point of View,” Lorton, VA

Instructors

Mark Thurston, PhD

Contact information: mthursto@gmu.edu

Mary Elizabeth Lynch, J.D.

Content Summary

This course explores methods of practice for reframing conflict – inner and outer. It is about the relationship of energy patterns that are inherent in tension and discord. Whether it’s disputants in the external world or competing voices of our personal, inner life, energy constellates itself in conflicted patterns. And the transformation of conflict is enhanced by seeing deeply into those energy relationships and finding ways to help re-constellate them.

This course will include considerable emphasis upon demonstrations of specific practices for using constellation-based models to awaken expanded consciousness about the dynamics within specific conflicts, and for the use of these tools to facilitate reconciliation.

The course will incorporate exercises which are adaptations of work pioneered by Bert Hellinger (“Systemic Constellations” and his publications such as *Love’s Hidden Symmetry*) and systems psychologist David Kantor. Much of the course will address how we first apply these practices to understanding and transforming our own conflicts, so that we can become more effective in our peacebuilding, mediation, or conflict transformation work in the external world.

There will be several articles and papers to read for the course. Optimally, the student would complete the reading before October 10. However, if necessary, the final two items in the list below can be read after October 11. There is no required text purchase for the course.

(E-reserves) Issacs, William. *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together* (NY: Doubleday, 1999) p. 192-202. This section describes the systems psychology of David Kantor. During the course we will learn “the Four Chair Exercise,” an adaptation of Kantor’s work.

(E-reserves) Liebermeister, Svagito *The Roots of Love: A Guide to Family Constellation*. This opening chapter is a concise introduction and overview to Bert Hellinger’s “Family Constellations.” During the course we will have a demonstration of this method for dealing with family conflict and learn some of the fundamentals of the practice of this methodology.

(E-reserves) Thurston, Mark. “A Model for Understanding the Personality” and “Getting in Touch with Your Individuality” from *Soul Purpose: Discovering and Fulfilling Your Destiny*.

San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989. These two sections describe a way of self-understanding that comes from a constellation-based model of the self.

(E-reserve) Selsky, David. "Languages for Peace: Intersections of Thought in Buddhism and Conflict Transformation," in *Mediators and Mediators: Buddhism and Peacemaking* (edited by Chanju Mun). Honolulu: Blue Pine Books, 2007.

(Online book excerpt) Hellinger, Bert and Gabriele ten Hovel. *Acknowledging What Is: Conversations with Bert Hellinger*. Phoenix, Arizona: Zeig, Tucker and Company, 1999. This volume is a record of journalist Gabriele ten Hovel's probing interview with Bert Hellinger. In this interview Hellinger sheds new light on his unique use of family constellations to reveal hidden, often destructive family conflicts and to activate resources for reconciliation. The free-access online excerpt includes a lengthy Foreword and the provocatively titled first chapter, "Suffering Is Easier to Bear Than Resolution." Please read at least through Chapter 1 (i.e., through page 21), with further reading optional. See this web site: http://books.google.com/books?id=QXBhSk0yQUwC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_navlinks_s OR, more simply just go to <http://books.google.com> and type in "Acknowledging What Is."

Completion of the course will involve attendance and participation in all sessions in October, plus a single paper of 1500 words on the topic of "How Re-Constellation Methods Can Be Applied to Conflict Resolution." It is to be submitted by November 16. That paper will address

- a **synthesis of the concepts** presented in the course, plus
- reflections on possible **personal application and practice** of the principles presented at the October sessions plus those found in the reading assignments.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, the student will be able to

- To create a personal statement of intentionality which can serve as a focal-point-of-reference for efforts to re-constellate an internal conflict of one's own.
- Describe the theory behind "the Four Chair" exercise and the "Family Constellations" methodology for dealing with conflict.
- Recognize and articulate how at least one internal, personal conflict could potentially be "re-constellated" as a step toward internal reconciliation and peace.

Assignments after October 11

Complete all reading assignments. Write a 1500 word reflection paper, due by November 20, as described above.

Grading

This course will be graded on a standard grading scale with the following weighting:

60% Attendance and participation with an open mind. Attendance at both the days as Point of View is required in order to successfully complete this course.

40% 1500 word reflection paper

Instructor Bios

Mark Thurston, Ph.D. is Senior Fellow at George Mason University's Center for Consciousness and Transformation. With an academic background in psychology, Mark has worked for 35 years in adult education related to consciousness, holistic health, and personal transformation. He is author of numerous books related to personal spirituality, dream psychology, meditation, and the transformation of consciousness. Information about the new Center at Mason can be found at <http://cct.gmu.edu> Mark and his wife Mary Elizabeth, co-instructors for this course, have been married for 29 years.

Mary Elizabeth Lynch, J.D. is an attorney/mediator, educator and conflict transformation specialist. She is a graduate of the University of Virginia Law School and practiced employment and family law for many years before transforming her professional work into mediation. In 2000 she was a co-founder of the Personal Transformation and Courage Institute, a non-profit educational organization conducting small group course intensive related to enhanced awareness around personal growth and the transformation of internal conflict. She now serves as president of the Institute and is one of its principal course leaders. More about Mary Elizabeth's work can be found at www.transformationANDcourage.org