

**Transdisciplinarity and a Culture of Peace**  
*Invited Contribution*

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**Abstract**

This paper shares a brief explanation of the essence of the UNESCO culture of peace idea, followed with a more detailed discussion of transdisciplinarity and how it fits so well with building a peaceful culture.

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This is the inaugural issue of the *Culture of Peace Online Journal*. The intent of the journal is to provide a creative and flexible publishing medium both to educate and to enhance the free flow of information, knowledge and wisdom associated with creating a culture of peace. Of equal importance is the intent to provide an online medium where people can contribute to a new body of knowledge emerging as people strive to create a culture of peace. There is an abundance of knowledge related to the culture of war. But, a new language, new concepts and new relationships are needed to foster a global culture of peace (Stewart, 2000).

To that end, I have been asked to contribute to this issue by discussing the synergy between a culture of peace and transdisciplinarity, a new approach to world problems. The philosophical anchor for the journal is the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions for a Culture of Peace. Of special relevance to this paper is that UNESCO intended many stakeholders to play key roles on the journey toward a culture of peace. In Articles 5 through 8, UNESCO (1999a) identified the following agents of a culture of peace: civil society, the media, parents, teachers, politicians, journalists, religious bodies and groups, intellectuals, those engaged in scientific, philosophical, creative and artistic activities, health and humanitarian workers, social workers, managers and non-government organizations. The interplay between all of these agents and academia is at the core of the transdisciplinarity approach (Nicolescu, 1997).

I will share a brief explanation of the essence of the UNESCO culture of peace idea, followed with a more detailed discussion of transdisciplinarity and how it fits so well with building a peaceful culture. The notion of transdisciplinary is very, very complex and I cannot do it justice in this short article. I invite you to read another paper I have written on this topic (McGregor, 2004) and to read the exciting work of the scholars I cite in that, and this, paper.

## **CULTURE OF PEACE**

A culture of peace aims for the transformation of values, attitudes and behaviours within each individual, leading to a culture shaped by peace, rather than by war and violence. A culture of peace is one where the definition of security will have changed from just national security to include human security. The criteria for the agenda and success of our leaders will have shifted from wealth, power and domination to harmony, inclusiveness, respect, integrity and healing (of self, family, community and nation). There will have been a shift away from low citizen political involvement, combined with powerful non-democratic institutions, including the military, information industry and corporations, toward regular, well subscribed elections, a code of ethics for government, a comprehensive justice system, public participation (civic engagement), a sustainable global economy based on localism, education for everyone, and a compassionate health and welfare system. We will have redefined the value system from power as a reference point (combined with a “poverty of vision”) to community as a reference point, with the well-being of all citizens coming before the self interest of the few. The concept of community will have expanded beyond people to include: animals, fish, birds, plants, air, water, earth and wind, all seen as interconnected, interdependent, cooperative and mutually supportive (Nota, 2000).

A culture of peace represents an everyday attitude of non-violence, and fierce determination to defend human rights and human dignity. Peace will be a permanent feature of all social institutions, especially schools, the economy, and the political scene. The media, sports and relationships will all be premised on peace. Hope, persistence, solidarity, inclusiveness and morality will be the norm. Principles of tolerance, open mindedness, sustainability, participation and democracy are paramount. A global awareness and perspective, cooperation and a deep respect for interdependency are key features of this culture. Responsibility and accountability, the sharing and free flow of information and notions of empowerment and emancipation are central tenets of a culture of peace (Adams, 1997).

Intercultural understanding leading to sustainable dialogue, cross-cultural exchanges and a shared vision of peace are cornerstones of a peaceful culture. Mutual support, empathetic listening and unwavering respect for human rights and dignity are solid anchors for peaceful cultures. Constant striving for justice, freedom, non-violence, equity, equality and ongoing, rigorous critique of the status quo are the roots of a culture of peace. Respecting the role of history, the arts and peoples’ lived stories is central to creating a peaceful culture. Constituting such a culture is a vast project, multidimensional and worldwide in scope (Adams, 1997). This is where transdisciplinarity comes into the picture. The following text draws heavily on McGregor (2004, 2005).

## TRANSDISCIPLINARITY

Transdisciplinarity is the temporary name for a new vision of humanity, of human knowledge and human relationships (Cicovacki, 2003). It is an evolution from mono, multi and interdisciplinary studies. While these three approaches for working together in academia each generate new knowledge, transdisciplinary takes us *beyond* separate academic disciplines by weaving a new kind of knowledge through interactions among academia *and* civil society (Nicolescu, 1997). Traditional academic work involves trying to solve a particular question, problem or issue. Transdisciplinary work involves a higher stage of interaction that entails an overarching framework that organizes people, knowledge and solutions in new ways, in new discourse, in new forms of cooperation and transformative engagement, all while addressing complex problems (instead of just complicated problems) (Klein, 2002). The objective of transdisciplinarity is to understand the present world, the human condition, in all of its complexities, instead of focusing on one part of it (Nicolescu). *Trans* refers to that which is *across* the disciplines, *between* the disciplines and *beyond and outside* all disciplines. Transdisciplinary is not a discipline but an approach, a process to increase knowledge by integrating and transforming different perspectives. It means ‘practicing knowledge’ in a reflective manner that recognizes the inherent plurality and complexity of the human condition (Lattanzi, 1998).

Transdisciplinary inquiry involves: (a) multiple disciplines, (b) other elements of society *and* (b) the space between them, with the possibility of new perspectives beyond those disciplines and actors (Nicolescu, 1997). When engaging in transdisciplinary inquiry (this means zigzagging or weaving back and forth), academics would work with academics *as well as* civil society organizations, actors, artists, musicians, dancers, government officials, youth, singers, poets, gardeners, journalists, businesses, story tellers, videographers and the like (remember the UN recommendation that many actors be involved in creating a culture of peace).

Each of these minds have been prepared differently so they will *see* the world differently. The intent would be to weave totally new knowledge together from these *many ways of knowing* that exist along side academia and the scientific method. Using a metaphor, they all would work together in the form of a dance, counting on new perspectives to generate new information, insights, concepts and growing relationships. They would assume that a new type of knowledge is emerging from the dance, with complex and complicated insights. They would rely on *each other* to interpret this new knowledge as they work together to deal with large global issues including: human aggression, harmonious distribution of resources, development of anthropocentric (human centered) world views, and the realization of human empowerment and potential through education.

As other people approach the group of co-learners in the dance, the other *knowledge dancers*, they would be willing to suspend their views of reality at that moment (by willingly

crossing through the veil of resistance) and be open to the new insights that will emerge from working together as they weave their collective knowledge to form new knowledge and concepts. Information will literally be '*in-formation*' as people work together and watch their consciousness merge into one for the moment. People would learn to see things in open unity, more complexly, rather than in black and white. Also, constantly adapting relationships lie at the heart of what makes solving these complex problems so special. Any information brought to the dance by someone will be modified as it is passed from one person to another within these changing relationships - it is *in-formation*.

Transdisciplinarity is a new form of learning, inquiry and problem posing involving cooperation among *different parts of society*, including academia, in order to meet the complex challenges of society. Through mutual learning, the knowledge of all participants is enhanced and this new learning is used to collectively devise solutions to intricate societal problems that are interwoven (Regeer, 2002). Out of the dance and the dialogue, a new vision of reality is possible (Nègre, 1999), in our case, a culture of peace and non-violence for the children of the world. Also, a *new intellectual space* is formed in which resides a gradual cross-fertilization resulting from the convergence of different paths in the spirit of conviviality and celebration (Lattanzi, 1998). This robust *intellectual outerspace* would consist of a collection of differing disciplines and members of civil society that have found a way to live and work together to create integrative, embodied knowledge about living in a peaceful culture. This type of knowledge is globally open and entails both a new vision and lived experiences. It is also a way of self-transformation oriented toward the knowledge of the self, the unity of all knowledge and the creation of a new art of living (Nicolescu, 1997) - peacefully, non-violently and respectfully.

Conceiving our work through the lens of the transdisciplinary dance is a powerful way to move forward to accomplish the creation of a culture of peace. One powerful tenet of transdisciplinary work germane to building a culture of peace is the notion of multiple realities. If we accept that reality is a coherent whole comprising several layers, then we can agree that we must be constantly aware of all layers as we look at anyone layers in particular. This realization prevents us from ever again looking at just one aspect of a problem. We would have to entertain the role of the (a) invisible particle layer; (b) the material layer; (c) the biological (ecological), social and psychological layers; and, (d) the economic, political and technological layers of a complex problem (Aerts, 2001). We are challenged to never lose sight of the whole while we deal with complex social issues underlying the transition from a culture of war to one of enduring peace. From this perspective, it is easy to see why transversing disciplines is so necessary to create a culture of peace in today's world, for the future.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Bringing transdisciplinarity to a discussion of creating a culture of peace moves us far beyond the original UNESCO (1999b) programme of action. Although it called for the sharing of

information among actors, transdisciplinary inquiry *generates and creates* new information as the actors interface in evolving, dynamic relationships. Although it recommends that institutions of higher education expand their initiatives to promote a culture of peace, transdisciplinary inquiry requires that they do so in full engagement with all aspects of civil society (Klein, 2004). Although the 1999 programme of action asked that those promoting a culture of peace support the role of media, transdisciplinarity inquiry assumes that problems cannot be solved without actors from the mass communication sector being at the core of the creation of totally different kinds of information and knowledge.

Approaching the creation of a culture of peace from a transdisciplinary mode of inquiry necessitates a new mindset for problem posing, solving and implementation and different theories, methods and analytical frameworks (Henagulph, 2000). This new research and practice stance has to weave together the pillars of complexity, emergence, the fertile space between disciplines (the included middle), levels of reality, intellectual outerspace, new notions of holism, crossing zones of resistance, and new patterns and metaphors. To aid in this period of transition from multi and interdisciplinary to transdisciplinary peace work, I am pleased to share a self-learning tool in the Appendix. I tried to create a fun, least-threatening way to move people from one world view to another. I used metaphors to share complex ideas. Metaphors can be conduits or passage ways to help people learn new, abstract concepts. They help us extend our familiar knowledge of the world to a region that we have not yet experienced. From a transdisciplinary perspective, this region is very complex, composed of many interconnected parts and difficult to understand because of its intricacy. Metaphors simplify and augment our joint learning process, giving us a temporary common language while we navigate the space between the disciplines. Metaphors give us new degrees of conceptual freedom, releasing us from the chains that bind us to our root discipline or life work. They are useful tools for conveying very complex ideas (Judge, 1991), and what could be more complex than a culture of peace.

Although a culture never stops proliferating new knowledge, it is as if these new ‘knowledges’ can never be fully integrated within those who live in the culture (Nicolescu, 2005). This seems to be the case right now. David Adams wisely noted that “the concept of a culture of peace... has grown so rapidly that I am sometimes asked in bewilderment whether the culture of peace has any specificity, or is it rather ‘all things for all people’ (1997, Preface). This telling observation implies that those engaged in the process of creating a culture of peace are getting ready for transdisciplinarity. It seems that they recognize that there is a complexity to the concept that needs to be respected, managed and transformed. The challenge now is to adapt our mentality so we consciously dance the dance.

Multidisciplinary work involves juxtaposing many different academic specialists, studying one topic at the same time. Interdisciplinary work involves coordinating expertise to create synergy between disciplines so they can transfer methods from one discipline to another. Both approaches create a new ‘whole,’ with original contributions still evident. With

transdisciplinary work, not only is the whole greater than the sum of its parts, the whole has totally different properties, to the point that the original contributions are no longer identifiable. Transdisciplinary, emergent teamwork involves the assimilation of each others' knowledge (Lattanzi, 1998; Nicolescu, 2005). The goal is to understand the present world of a culture of war and collectively determine what a culture of peace would look like. This is possible through the unity of new knowledge, generated together, in the gap, through the dance. The result is a whole new map of integrative knowledge about how to create and sustain a culture of peace, knowledge created in a newly recognized space between all societal actors.

“The transformation from a culture of war to a culture of peace represents a radical and far-reaching historical change. Every aspect of social relations can be affected... Everyone from the centers of power to the most remote villages may be engaged and transformed” (Adams, 1997, p. 121). Since the culture of peace is a both a vision and a process, it needs a visionary process to make it happen. I propose that transdisciplinarity is that process. As of October, 2005, 75 million people had signed “Manifesto 2000” (UNESCO, 2005). I think this is telling evidence of the world’s readiness for a transdisciplinary approach to building a culture of peace. These signatories come from all walks of life, each holding a vision of a culture based on peace. The transdisciplinary approach hinges on people from all walks of life being involved in the solving of world problems. Indeed, since joint problem solving is the aim of a culture of peace, then the means must provide for an integration of perspectives in the identification, formulation and resolution of what becomes a shared problem - this ‘means’ is the transdisciplinary approach (Nowotny, 2003), with how to build a culture of peace the shared problem.

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**Appendix**  
**Transdisciplinary Self-Learning Tool**

(copied with permission from McGregor, S.L.T. (2004). The nature of transdisciplinary research and practice. *Kappa Omicron Nu Human Sciences Working Paper Series*. Retrieved December 30, 2005 from <http://www.kon.org/hswp/archive/transdiscipl.html>

<b>Characteristics of the transdisciplinary approach</b>	I am aware of it	I can explain it to others	I have begun to use it in practice
the ultimate agenda is to understand the present world in all of its complexities instead of just bits and pieces of it. To begin to reach this level of understanding, people who know stuff about the bits and pieces will agree to work, and mutually learn, together.			
someone initiates the collaborative work and tells people the work will be happening in the fertile space between and beyond the disciplines			
people from more than one discipline meet with non-academics (dance, music, arts) to solve these complex, intricate problems. <b>The nature of the problems</b> dealt with in this space is unique - each problem is a rich weave of societal structures and functions and cannot be seen as a single entity. For example, pollution, disease, population growth and lack of peace are all linked together. Addressing just one of them is not enough.			
<b>the nature of this mutual learning is quite unique</b> - it involves always questioning assumptions, always building bridges (no separate paths or roads), always seeking to find out what has conditioned us to be the way we are, continually working on how to be with others while continually working on finding one's own potential and inner core, and always striving for creativity rather than selfish retainment of "my" knowledge.			

<p>conversations and contributions brought to the fertile space by each person(s) are put forth knowing they are going to melded with all of the others (there can be no ownership of separate bits of information). People have to know they are going to have to let go of what they brought to “the table.” To arrive at a level of comfort with this letting go, people involved in these initiatives may want to create a website where they can add and edit their ideas freely as they evolve. This is called a <b>creative commons</b> and there is software that facilitates copylefting. It seems appropriate to call this emerging knowledge “outerspace knowledge” because it is created in hyperspace!</p>			
<p>the inquiry into the issue will not stop with the first <i>best</i> answer because everyone there appreciates that the issue is profoundly complex and linked to other issues that are also complex. They will continue to dig deeper in unison, knowing that their collaborative efforts will pay off.</p>			
<p>people who come to these “meetings” know that the intent is to create a new space where everyone’s credible ideas will be integrated into a new “whole.” In order for this to occur, the people involved have to bravely walk out of their zone of resistance into a <b>common zone of acceptance</b>. From then on, those people involved could not see things as “her idea versus my idea” because they are no longer standing in their safety zone. They have entered the fertile space that is constantly in flux - their sound footing is no longer there. They have to learn to work in uncertainty knowing that something will emerge that all can support and that will support all involved.</p>			

<p>if people from different disciplines and from civil society have no way to talk to each other then the people at these meetings will have to respect the power of metaphors and narratives/stories/dance et cetera. They will be open to using these as tools that create a temporary language to help everyone navigate the unfamiliar space between their respective disciplines.</p>			
<p>Everyone attending these problem solving sessions will have to learn to accept that what they think is true is only true until they encounter someone else’s interpretation of the issue. This open-mindedness prepares the way for a shared truth to emerge from the work being done in the fertile space.</p>			
<p>Those working together will know the difference between a complicated problem and a complex problem with that difference being the property of emergence. Simply put, as people work together, new ideas and insights will continue to appear and bubble up as conversations simmer and perk over time. Because people are changing in this interactive net of relationships, so does the energy flow, with solutions to the social problem emerging, grounded in an embodied knowledge. Embodied means people have made it part of them. They cannot see the world the same way anymore because they have “put on” a new set glasses with new lens.</p>			

<p>The people dancing in the fertile space will know in their hearts that they have to move beyond creating teams that are only temporary and work toward <b>creating concepts</b> that form the foundation of the dance floor. These concepts (which are ideas that exist in peoples’ minds) are formed by everyone actively looking for common patterns so that a common language can be formed that helps people express themselves as they work in the fertile space. Although the people who develop these concepts came to the fertile space with ideas from their respective disciplines (or civil society activities), all of these old ideas are gone now.</p>			
<p>People working in this fertile space will appreciate the strength of patterns as grounding concepts. Imagine a pattern for making a dress. While many people may make different dresses using the same pattern, there will be similarities because the foundation, the basic pattern, is what makes the dresses similar. A pattern can also be defined as an activity done without thinking. After working in the fertile space, the people involved will develop patterns of relating to each other and mutually learning, that will become second nature to them, strengthening our ability to eventually understand the world in all its complexities.</p>			
<p>As people work together in this space, they will be constantly weaving ideas back and forth until the original yarn (contributions) is lost and a new fabric takes shape. This new fabric will be a richer approach to addressing the social problem and will bring us closer to understanding the world as a whole. Many new pieces of cloth will be able to be created and eventually, even the yarn being used will be different because people will be using the new concepts as their starting point!</p>			