

Book Review: *One Paradigm, Many Worlds: Conflict Resolution across the Disciplines* (edited by Mitch Rosenwald) Published 2008 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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One Paradigm, Many Worlds: Conflict Resolution across the Disciplines has one goal and that is to demonstrate that the paradigm of collaborative conflict resolution has a broad application across the social sciences. Edited by Mitchell Rosenwald, the book is a collection of essays written by various scholars from disciplines like: human services, elementary and secondary education, higher education, philosophy, and international relations.

As it promises, One Paradigm, Many Worlds: Conflict Resolution across the Disciplines provides something that has been missing in the genre and that is a cross discipline approach. A number of books have been published about using peaceful methods to resolve disputes. But each book was focused on one area of interest. Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall's A Force More Powerful: A Century of Non-Violent Conflict examines world history to demonstrate that peaceful methods brought an end to dictatorships, colonialism, and civil injustice. Colman McCarthy's All of One Peace: Essays on Nonviolence is a collection of McCarthy's essays from his career with *The Washington Post* advocating the use of peace in a variety of areas ranging from international relations to abortion. Conflict Resolution by Daniel Dana is designed for the business world and provides the tools managers need to resolve workplace conflicts. James A. Schellenberg's Conflict Resolution: Theory, Research, and Practice is a study of classical and contemporary conflict theories. Finally, David and Roger Johnson's book, Reducing School Violence through Conflict Resolution, educates students on how to reduce peer violence

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peacefully. Rosenwald has moved the genre one step forward by using a cross discipline approach to further the discussion on collaborative conflict resolution.

An added bonus is that the reader will definitely get the feel that the essays are more like a conversation among peers sitting at a roundtable sharing insightful stories and experiences or debating worst case scenarios. Undoubtedly, this is a result of the fact that an interdisciplinary conference on conflict resolution inspired the work and that most of the essays share anecdotal evidence rather than concrete research data. This reliance upon anecdotal evidence is one of the weaknesses of the book. It is most noticeable in the chapters that do not discuss human services.

The first four chapters concentrate upon social workers and their dealings with a variety of people. In this section, real evidence is interspersed among personal narratives and persuasive discussions. The examples in these four chapters range from mediation between parents and troubled teenagers to divorcing couples. All in all the discussion is convincing and builds upon the existing literature. Readers will relate to this section easily because the general belief is that conflict or dispute resolution has been most utilized in the human services.

The rest of the book lacks the ingredients that make the first four chapters convincing. Chapters Five and Six attempt to demonstrate that conflict resolution in the public school system will improve the learning environment for students. It is an admirable goal, however, the argument that “universal support” will facilitate acceptance of “emotionally disturbed” students by the rest of the student body ignores a most recent case. Fifteen year old Lawrence King of California was shot twice in the back of the head by a classmate during class in February 2008 after declaring that he was gay. An article in *Newsweek* magazine discovered that the school had attempted to provide a tolerant environment for the teenager, forced teachers and students to accept Larry the way he was, and even allowed Larry to dress like a girl down to stiletto shoes.

The result was the opposite of what school officials had hoped for. Such situations should have been included in the discussion and explained using the paradigm.

Perhaps what is most startling in these chapters is the way they ignore the importance of school funding for initiating changes in elementary and secondary schools. Yes, it is necessary to involve students, parents, teachers, and administrators while implementing conflict resolution programs. But without adequate funding such programs look better on paper than in practice. It is a fact that schools across the country are suffering from the lack of funds as tax revenues continue to fall. Schools already suffer from inadequate staffing and overworked teachers and counselors. It would be highly unrealistic to expect these schools to be able to implement demanding new programs into state mandated curricula, especially with the modern day emphasis on passing standardized tests.

Unlike, the chapters on elementary and secondary education, Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine do describe the practical application of conflict resolution programs at colleges and universities. These three chapters combined illustrate the struggles and rewards of student and faculty efforts to rise above the stigma of “peace studies” and establish strong, fiscally viable programs. The idea that universities can use existing programs like interdisciplinary studies to promote student training in dispute resolution is realistic and adaptable.

Chapters Ten and Eleven change the direction of the book from the practice of conflict resolution and its implementation in various areas of life to the philosophical origins of the paradigm. Much of this section reads like a self-help book.

Chapter Twelve stands alone as the only part of the book that deals with conflict resolution on a global scale. This chapter is an essay that was written by three contributors and focuses upon United States foreign policy and how it can be improved following the conflict resolution paradigm. Unfortunately, this essay tends to sound like a conspiracy theory about the Bush Administration trying to conquer the world with the help of neoconservatives and the military-industrial complex. Since it is the only chapter that tries to apply the paradigm to international relations it makes a poor case by being diverted from its goal. It would have done better to examine situations like that of Costa Rica abolishing its standing army or that of Japan not rebuilding its military after World War II. The argument made in this chapter is that the United States has become a police state since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and is intent upon global domination. The more compelling discussion in this chapter is the belief that the United States is unwilling to differentiate between freedom fighters and terrorists. The essay does make a valid point that without clearly defining the term “terrorist” we can never know who the real enemy is.

Another way to approach conflict resolution on a global scale would have been to discuss the potential for success by following the United Nations existing mandate to be a peaceful forum for dispute resolution. The United States could also increase its support of organizations such as Doctors Without Borders, Peace Corps, and CARE. The importance of conflict resolution in international relations could also have been demonstrated by showing that cases that prefer spending all of their resources upon military expansion to peace suffer long term problems. Excellent examples of this would be North Korea, Iran, and Pakistan.

As the title suggests One Paradigm, Many Worlds: Conflict Resolution across the Disciplines does attempt to apply the paradigm of conflict resolution in many different areas. In this respect, Rosenwald achieves his goal. As the essays are organized by discipline and begin with conflict resolution as a useful model at the individual level and ends with the model being applied at the aggregate level in the arena of international relations, it does demonstrate this paradigm's broad applicability.

However, the book would have benefitted from two things that currently are missing. The first is evidence or data to support the conclusions made in the chapters about elementary and secondary education and international relations. The second is more discussion about conflict resolution at the global scale. The emphasis appears to be on the human services and higher education. In these essays, contributors describe the successes they have had following this paradigm in real world applications. But this aspect is missing on a global scale. The essay that takes on the responsibility of applying the paradigm to international relations is woefully inadequate. A few more essays about successful examples of conflict resolution on an international scale would have balanced the discussion between the individual and aggregate levels and strengthened the book's argument. (No pun intended.)