

From Media Anthropology To Nonviolence

Several years ago I began working in the field of nonviolence education. It was an epiphany when I realized the arguments I long had made for the creation of media anthropology also applied to nonviolence. Underlying both is a need to understand systems, build holistic perspectives, and modernize the ways we manage conflict (whether it is life or in news story about it).

My goal for media anthropology was to create systematic ways for news stories to transcend a framework for reporting that leads us toward extremes; and, instead, build ways to give us access to more realistic/holistic perspectives about the world and our place in it. With nonviolence, I try to find ways to anticipate, organize and prevent crises that likely will become the news story. Both depend on renovating our worldview.

If we think of journalism and anthropology as kinds of detective work to help us make sense of the world, nonviolence adds an important element. Instead of practicing "CSI" or crime scene investigation, like the popular TV show; nonviolence asks us to examine potential problems before the crime! Instead of analyzing crime scenes, we learn to practice "conflict scene investigation," and thus learn to get ahead of the violence. In addition, since we are practicing nonviolence ahead of the crime and crisis - as a means of correcting the course of our relationships - all of us can participate - we don't have to wait for traditional professionals who almost always are "a day late and a dollar short" and who intentionally or not may be helping to maintain a status quo that engendered the conflict in the first place.

The fact is, when most of us confront a problem or conflict, we follow the traditional cultural "mo" of waiting for the crisis before we act. How could it be otherwise? We wait because the organizational principle we learn from journalism and from all other forms of culture learning adhere to a limited and limiting world of polarities. When we see conflict, we deny it as long as we can and then react to one extreme with "the other" extreme.

What we need to do, on the other hand, is **reframe** the conflict (instead of **react** to it) within the context of the whole system so we can begin to recognize more precursors and alternatives, sooner; in journalism this means adding the sixth W: who, what, when, where, why and a W for the whole.

In my work today, I try to teach students that by applying an anthropological definition of nonviolence and giving ourselves permission (and skills) to "be the change," as Mahatma Gandhi urged, we can "intervene in dysfunctional systems to bring better balance (hopefully) before the crisis." The tactics, tools and strategies we develop to correct a systemic imbalance (which we usually see as abuse of power and other kinds of poor system health) without resorting to extremism and violence, ourselves, is what I call 'every day' nonviolence.

In the years since I began working on the notion of media anthropology at the East West Center, I have recognized that we need multiple avenues for sharing messages of holism, interconnectedness, balance, and sustainability. The perspectives of anthropology plus the "people-power" and overarching language and organizational structure of nonviolence can join forces to do that. (Allen, 7/07)