

Community at Odds in Liberia: An Introduction to Conflict Mapping

Experiential Learning Activity (ELA)
Guide for Instructors

The Undergraduate Experiential Learning Project

Learning Objectives

This experiential learning activity has been designed to help students:

- Understand the relationship between theory and practice
- Link the diagnosis of conflict dynamics with intervention strategies
- Learn to recognize the realistic parameters of an intervention
- Consider how third party goals for intervention align with local community goals
- Explore how the nature of the third party (who they are, how they are organized) shapes the kind of intervention they are interested in and able to implement
- Explore collaborations and tensions that arise when a variety of third party actors intervene in the same environment
- Learn to evaluate available information
- Learn to work as a team (including resolving conflicts)
- Explore the ethical implications of interventions

Materials needed:

- Student packets for each participant
- Flip chart paper and markers

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Preparation

Assign students to 1 of 4 groups each representing one of the following organizations:

- Group 1: International Service Corp
- Group 2: QUEST for Understanding, Solidarity, and Transformation
- Group 3: Interfaith League of Lofa County
- Group 4: National Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation

Distribute student packets electronically or in hard copy in advance of the activity and ask the students to familiarize themselves with their organizations. The student packets are the same for each group so that students are aware of all the organizations that are defining intervention strategies in the community.

Pre-Activity Lecture (20 min.): If presented as a stand-alone activity

- In the class session before you plan to do the second part of the ELA, provide the students with an overview of the Liberian context. A short brief is included with this guide.
- Provide an overview of the conflict assessment that was conducted in Voinjama, Lofa County following the clashes in February 2010. A summary of the conflict assessment is included in the student materials.

Part 1: Analysis of Conflict (50 min.)

- Students should be divided into their groups at the start of the activity. Ask them to arrange their desks so they are sitting in a tight circle.
- Provide each group with flip-chart paper and markers to aid their presentation. Each group should display their analysis of the conflict on flip-chart paper.
- Have each group introduce themselves to the rest of the class. Augment their introductions by helping them to highlight the following points:

Group 1: International Service Corps

- Long Term Presence
- Outside Interveners
- Living in close proximity to the community
- Not focused on conflict resolution per se
- Intervention is ongoing

Group 2: QUEST for Understanding, Solidarity, and Transformation

- Long term presence
- Outside interveners
- Not living within the community
- Primary focus is conflict resolution
- Intervention is ongoing

Group 3: Interfaith League of Lofa County

- Ongoing and long term presence
- Religious leaders from the community
- Primary focus is conflict resolution
- Intervention is ongoing

Group 4: National Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation

- Long term presence
 - Representatives of Liberian Government
 - Not community members
 - Not focused on conflict resolution per se
 - Intervention is situational
- Explain that the students are expected to develop an intervention for the conflict from the perspective of their organization using the guiding questions provided in their materials.
 - Explain that they will be presenting their intervention design to the class in the following session.
 - If students ask questions about the conflict, point them back to the information contained in their packets.
 - Collect their flip-chart paper and materials at the end of the session and return them for the following session.

Part 2: Presenting Analysis and De-brief (50 min.)

Materials needed:

- Flip charts from previous session
- De-brief question (provided or improvised)

Group Presentations (20 min.):

- Have students present their intervention designs to the class (about 5 min. each). They may choose a spokesperson or present as a group.
- At this point, students may begin to discuss the challenges of intervention from their group's point of view. Save questions about this for the de-brief session.

Debrief (30 min.):

After each group presents their proposed intervention the whole class will discuss the process of third party intervention. Use some or all of the following questions to guide the discussion:

1. How did you decide what kind of interventions were appropriate?
2. Did you think that you had sufficient information to design an intervention?
3. What kind of additional information about the local context (community and conflict) did you think you would need in order to be able to design an appropriate intervention?
4. How did the relationship of your organization to the community shape the process of your intervention strategy design? Did it matter and if so how?
5. How does the type of organization you are shape the kind of intervention you design?
6. How do you think the local community would see an organization such as yours? What are some of the challenges that different types of third parties (organizations) may encounter as they design and implement intervention strategies?
7. How did you determine what kind of outcome the community wanted out of the intervention? What kind of information do you need to make such a determination?
8. How did you decide what your organization was able and was unable to do about the conflict in Voinjama?
9. How do you go about assessing the limitations of what your intervention can achieve?
10. What are the issues that need to be addressed to move the community toward reconciliation that are beyond the capacity of your organization?
11. Given the interventions that you have designed are there ways in which your groups could cooperate in implementing the interventions? Why or why not?
12. Are there any parts of the intervention your group designed that could undermine another groups' intervention?

Supplemental Activity: Responding to A Changing Environment

One of the challenges that third parties face when designing and implementing intervention strategies is the dynamic nature of the social and political environment. This activity can be modified to allow students to explore the implications of such environmental changes. The instructor may interrupt the activity to distribute an announcement that two of the international groups are being evacuated from Voinjama because of the Ebola epidemic that erupted in 2014. A 2014 timeline of the Ebola epidemic should also be distributed to students. The announcement is included in the instructor's guide. The timeline of the 2014 Ebola epidemic is also included in the instructor's guide. An announcement should be distributed to all the students. We recommend distributing the announcement mid-way through the debrief although the instructor may also decide to do this at any time during the activity.

- Students should return to their groups to prepare responses to the questions included in the announcement.
- Each group presents their responses to the class.
- Debrief resumes and includes discussion of the questions in the announcement.
- Students may ask to write a reflection paper based on the announcement questions.

Evaluating the Activity

In order to later evaluate the effectiveness of this in-class ELA, we suggest one of the following activities:

- Ask for students to provide feedback on the activity itself via an online discussion sometime during the week after it concludes. Some questions to ask may include:
 1. Did you find the activity to be engaging? If so, how?
 2. What did you learn from participating in this activity?
 3. What would you keep and what would you change about this activity?
 4. Assign a short reflection paper based on the following questions:
 5. What kind of third party do you think would be best suited to resolve the conflict in Voinjama, Liberia? Do you think the organizations we used in our in-class exercise were the most well-suited for conflict intervention? Why was one better than the others? Can you think of some other organizations or individuals who likely could have been more effective in managing or resolving the conflict?

Note: For this assignment it is not essential that the students recall the details of the other organizations as it is that they have a sense of each organization's positioning in terms of the community.

- If you are attempting to collect data for the exercise consider video recording the activity and collecting the flip-chart sheets for analysis.

Modifications

- **Timing:** This activity can be adapted to a longer session with Parts One and Two taking place during the same session with a break in between the analysis and presentation.
- **Materials:** For the intervention session, the instructor may distribute one packet per group and ask them to go through it together or choose to give each student a packet. If using this activity in a short class session (50 min.) we recommend providing each student with a packet in advance of the exercise. This may also be useful in the long class sessions (2 hr. 40 min.) if the group size exceeds 6-7 students.
- **Space:** This activity can be conducted in any type of room. However, it would work best in a room that is large enough for the groups to spread out. This prevents them from overhearing the surrounding group discussions.

About the Project

This Experiential Learning Activity (ELA) has been developed as part of the Undergraduate Experiential Learning Project (UELP), U.S. Department of Education, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE)-funded initiative that aims to enhance Conflict Analysis and Resolution (CAR) pedagogy in order to improve undergraduate learning.

The CAR field is uniquely positioned to deliver educational experiences that help students make the crucial link between abstract theories and practical application through learning activities such as: conflict mapping, intervention design, role plays, and simulations. The ELAs developed as part of the UELP advance specific learning outcomes, including critical thinking, problem solving, and perspective taking.

Each ELA produced through the UELP has been designed either to augment existing course curricula or to be used as a stand-alone activity. Instructors are encouraged to adapt activities to meet the needs of their specific learning environments, including class size and course objectives.

All UELP project materials are available for public use and may be reproduced without permission. Please ensure that all printed materials display both the FIPSE and George Mason University logos as well as the project URL ([tp://scar.gmu.edu/experientiallearningproject/home](http://scar.gmu.edu/experientiallearningproject/home)).

As your partners in advancing undergraduate education, we are committed to improving the quality of the learning experience and encourage all feedback and recommendations to support that commitment. Additionally, we welcome stories that highlight moments of student insight that arise from participation in these activities. If you are interested in supporting the collection of data for ongoing research, please contact us through our webpage. ■



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