

## Beyond Empathy: From Justice to Reconciliation

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**Abstract :** This paper aims to question the practice of bringing together people belonging to groups in conflict with the aim of bridging differences through universal empathy and interpersonal connections. It is argued that in cases where one group has the power, and the other is in a struggle to change the balance assuming universal equality between the groups and encouraging emphatic understanding is a non-emphatic practice. Accordingly, a new concept is posited—justice-sensitive empathy, conditioning empathy in such situations on the acknowledgement of an imbalance of power/injustice. With this reframing in mind, educational practices promoting social justice are discussed. In order to create conditions for justice-seeking or politically sensitive empathy, we need to go beyond the conventional definitions of empathy and offer other means and possibilities. Three possibilities are discussed. The first focuses on intra-group (as opposed to inter-group) processes within each group. It means temporary and tactical separation that may allow each group to focus on its own needs and values and perhaps to return to the dialogue more confidently. The second option emphasizes the notion of "constructive conflict," which means that each side still aspires to promote his own interests but without demolishing the other side (which is a rival but also an unwanted and forced partner). Here, alongside the "obligation to resist" and to act to promote justice as we view and understand it, we have to take into account the other side. The third and last option relates to the practice of Restorative Justice. This practice originated in the Truth and Reconciliation committees in South Africa, but it is now widely used in other contexts. Those committees had the authority to punish (or pardon) people; however, their main purpose was to seek truth and, from there, nourish reconciliation. This is the main idea of restorative justice; it seeks justice for the sake of restoring relationships. All the above options involve action and are aware of power relations (i.e., politics). They all seek justice. They may create conditions for the more conventional empathic practice to evolve, but no less than that, they are examples of justice-seeking and politically sensitive empathetic practice.

**Keywords :** education, empathy, justice, reconciliation

**Conference Title :** ICPSCRE 2024 : International Conference on Peace, Security and Conflict Resolution Education

**Conference Location :** Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

**Conference Dates :** February 01-02, 2024