

STEP 1: Accepting our own nature; intellectually brilliant, emotionally not so much.

Our species is brilliant at bridging divides in science and technology. We can fly to other planets and communicate instantly across the world. But we're still not capable of bridging divides between one another. If you and I are ideologically different, you're considered some variation of ignorant, crazy or bad. We criticize and/or "feel sorry for" each other. We talk about "empathy" and demand it from others, but realistically, WE'RE NOT CAPABLE of genuinely entering the psychological experience of the other, wearing their shoes until we understand them in a deep and meaningful way, and communicating appropriately and effectively across our vast human divides.

We may think we're empathizing when we say things like, "they don't know any better; they were raised to be...." That's not empathy, that's pathologizing, and it's off-putting to the other group.

The first step in moving beyond this problem is to stop blaming ourselves and others and accept that WE CAN'T HELP IT. If you're a neuroscientist, the problem lies in our brain pathways. If you're a psychoanalyst, the problem lies in our childhood experiences, core unconscious fantasies and defenses and individual and large group identity dynamics. Vamik Volkan, the psychoanalyst who mediates between large groups on the brink of war, believes that we fight wars BECAUSE we're smart enough to fight over abstract ideas like honor, glory, prestige, identity, etc. Other fields explain the problem in their own languages.

My point is that the problem exists, and it's serious. But it exists NOT BECAUSE WE'RE BAD, BUT BECAUSE WE'RE HUMAN. When we're faced with The Problem of Difference we don't know what to do, so we fight or we flee. ("You're an imbecile!" or "He's an imbecile; I'm out of here.")

"Sapiens" means "wise," but our species is rapidly losing its capacity for wisdom. Humans are becoming robots and robots are becoming human. We search for hard data and concrete fixes to help us feel more centered. But tolerance of paradox and ambiguity, the search for meaning and meaningfulness, and the time it takes to attain self-other insight en route to genuine and sustainable conflict resolution, is less valued. The best people rise to the top in other arenas, but not as leaders.

We might delay it for a generation or two, but unless and until *humanity* regains a leadership position and science and technology follow, our species is at risk for self-destruction.

STEP 2: The need for a new leap in evolution; changing our consciousness, consciously.

If this impasse, based on core identity dynamics, is going to be resolved and forward movement re-initiated, a new evolutionary leap will be necessary. It won't be enough to say, "Let's stop doing that." Even if that becomes a movement analogous to the anti-bullying movement, it won't work. We tried it, and we not only still have bullies in schools, we have a bully in the White House.

Here's my Big Idea: In the past, evolution just happened, in small increments punctuated by larger leaps.

The next evolutionary leap will need to be made in our consciousness, using our consciousness. That leap won't just happen. It will be made consciously and deliberately, as *a new language for communicating across human divides emerges.*

Neuroplasticity suggests that we're capable of changing our brain wiring, slowly, with motivation, education and practice over time. Epigenetics suggests that we're capable of passing these changes on to our children. If a tipping point is reached and a significant percentage of people come together and decide to do this, we can begin an effort that coming generations will make their own. They will be able to rewire our species' brains to enable us to intuit the internal world of the other and communicate effectively across human divides.

STEP 3: The emergence of a new language for bridging divides

Music has a language. That language enables people with innate musicality to make the leap to the Philharmonic. Physics, astronomy and engineering have languages. Those languages helped us put a man on the moon and (coming soon) a group of people on Mars. Computer science has a language. Architecture has a language. Those languages enable us to erect beautiful, sturdy bridges across massive divides. My field has a language, or languages (actually a Tower of Babel). You can find it in Freud, in Shakespeare, and in the DSM 5.

The language of Emotional Literacy doesn't exist yet, except to the extent that parts of it can be found in multiple, separate disciplines, including psychology, neurobiology, psychoanalysis, education, history, political science, literature and philosophy. We see it in good teachers, good partners and good parents.

All of those fields have their own too-narrow ways of examining, labeling and talking about human nature. Or they don't talk about it at all; they live it. The best leaders are good parents. Good teachers and good schools bring out the best in their students.

All we need to do is pull from these different ways of knowing and teach Human Understanding in a K-12-PhD curriculum that will eventually be given the same weight as the other major subjects. Human Understanding IS rocket science, and it needs to be taught in the same incremental, problem-solving way.

Right now the language of emotional literacy is either too intellectual (psych 101), too touchy-feely (let's all be kind to one another), or too directed toward mental illness and pathology. Lesson plans that use thought experiments will make theories experience-near without becoming too personal. Emotional Literacy cannot become therapy-lite, though personal benefit will be a side effect as it is with any course of study.

Sample lesson plan: *A classmate walks into your playground and says, "Your sand castle is crooked." List 6 different reasons why s/he might have said that to you, and 6 different responses based on those hypotheses. Pick one of them and test it out in an extended in-person or online dialogue. It doesn't have to end "nicely"; it has to be deep and authentic.*

What if the child is competitive with you? What if he wants to play with you? What if her parents criticize her and she's turning passive into active? What if he is on the autism spectrum and is stating a fact without considering that it might hurt your feelings? What if she has OCD and crooked things make her anxious? What if he's about to knock it down?

What if our children did these kinds of exercises daily, learning theories and imagining their usefulness, over the course of their academic careers....? A university permutation of that question would address different world leaders and their personal "castles in the sky" - the core fantasies and beliefs around which their personalities and ways of governing emerge.

STEP 4: Do it yourself

The best way to learn a language isn't by reading a book; it's by trying to speak it yourself. This is the step that everyone can begin to imagine doing.

Right now we're in a state best described in Yeats' poem, *The Second Coming*: *"The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate*

intensity." That's because we can't have a conviction about nuance and paradox. That's not a thing to have conviction about (yet)!

If you can see out of two eyes at the same time, you're most often told, "You don't have an opinion, (stupid)!"

This is the step that invites the best - people who have an innate capacity for insight, empathy, nuance, and tolerance of dynamic tension to uncover their passionate intensity and the motivation to channel it effectively.

This doesn't mean that the people I'm calling "the best" are conflicted and wishy-washy and don't have strong beliefs. Our bodies have left and right sides, with one side dominant and leading. Our psychological "eyes" should be the same. Two eyes that focus on a shared horizon give us clarity, perspective and depth perception. When one eye argues that the landscape it sees is the only reality and the other eye has no right to exist, the body (politic) will go nowhere fast. Aristotle's line speaks to me: *It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.* It's what you teach your students in Debate Club - to see both sides. We need to teach our kids to see both sides, but not to have one triumph over and annihilate the other, but to focus on a shared horizon and solve the problem creatively, with one side dominant and leading.

This "do it yourself" step is the step that I invited colleagues to try last year in a Facebook project that I called "The Paper Airplane Project." If human understanding IS rocket science, all we can do at the moment is build paper airplanes and see how long we can keep them in the air.

If you want to try it, this is what you do. Invite friends who come from different ideological centers to talk together. You can do it in person or on social media, but you have to frame it as a psychodynamic project, not just call it "chatting." The idea is to think twice before defaulting to the all-too-human fight or flight position. Stay in the arena, find ways to reach out across that vast human divide and help others to do the same. Remain true to yourself, and present your thoughts in a way that the other might begin to hear. If their words are directed toward you, try to understand what the other person is trying to say to you, whether it feels right or not.

You'll reach a point where you'll think it's hopeless. Keep going. If you do, you'll begin to see that new and as-yet-uncharted territory and the new language that will eventually be used to codify it.

Find other people who are doing the project and share [#whatworks](#) and [#doesntwork](#).

Be curious. Make it interesting. Make it fun. Make it a game. Add the perspective of your field of interest. Do it and talk about it. Write papers about it.

Can you begin to imagine it? I'm talking about a huge change in human evolution, brain wiring and consciousness, but I'm also talking about simple, concrete steps all of us can do right here and right now. Changing the emotional climate is as difficult, as complex, as possible, and as necessary, as harnessing Mother Nature's changing climate.

I've had young people instantly get it and imagine making it happen. *Hey, if we can stay in a room for an hour without killing each other, we'll beat the level and write the code for it!*

STEP 5: Normalizing cognitive and dynamic constructs and teaching them. Fill the space between people with ideas that can be taught and practiced.

My model pulls from theories and methodologies that I've learned over 40 years in psychiatry and psychoanalysis. I use these examples as ways to begin to fill the vast uncharted space that lies between two people with ideological and thinking style differences.

I believe that what we know should not remain in the arena of "psychopathology" taught only to "mental health professionals" so we can "treat" people with "mental illnesses." ALL OF US use these ways of thinking, feeling and knowing, and ALL OF US can learn more about how to recognize and work with defense mechanisms, thinking style differences, personality differences, unconscious processes, traumas and triggers, transferences and projections, etc. We need to normalize them and make them useful for the common person to recognize and develop appropriate responses to.

This is the stuff that lies in the space between people.

I use examples from the mental health field because it's what I know best. People who come from arenas like theology, philosophy, education, history, political science, anthropology, literature and language, art, music and theater, etc, will add their ways of knowing to any developing curriculum.

STEP 6: Step 5 is not enough. The source of the problem of war lies within us all. "War" - the quotation-mark kind - is essential for peace.

Understanding people in more nuanced ways in an Emotional Literacy educational track will help in the development of empathic imagination, communicating across divides, improved ability to relate to others, and simple problem solving.

That's necessary, but it's not sufficient.

When ideological differences exist and form the core of an individual or group identity, that dynamic needs to be confronted in a deeper, darker, more complex way that extends over a long period of time.

Fighting a “war” in the right way, using my developing methodology, will not only avoid bloodshed, it has the potential to lead to a "transformational moment" in which both sides are able to preserve their identities, empathize, and envision new pathways for creative problem solving and forward movement over time. Emotions can be tamed until the dimension of Time intervenes.

Heward Wilkinson, a psychotherapist/philosopher in the UK, has been a Facebook friend for many years. He wrote a 34 page discussion that he calls, *Alice Lombardo Maher's Concept of the Transformational Reversal of Conflict Situations: Some Illustrations and Comparisons*. He uses references from literature, history, philosophy, psychotherapy and the media to paint a picture of different kinds of transformational moments. (The film “The Journey” is a marvelous depiction of that process, with Ian Paisley , Evangelical Protestant/Unionist, and Mark McGuinness, leader of the IRA, trapped in an imaginary journey.)

We see those moments in art and in the consultation room and we know how to make them happen in those arenas. Novels, sitcoms and movies typically have rising conflict with a terrifying climax followed by tension resolution. We can make them happen in those arenas, but we don't have a way to recognize those forces in the real world and learn how to make them happen there.

In my book, I describe a “war” that happened to me. It's the way my theoretical model, methodology and conviction about it arose. I don't have time to tell you that long story now, but if you read the book, you'll understand how I arrived at my model and why I'm so convinced of its validity.

