

Three Sessions Using Hawaiian-Style Reconciliation Methods Inspired by the Ho'oponopono Problem-solving Process

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Introduction

In this paper we will examine how some elements found in a traditional Hawaiian problem-solving process can be used in different contexts.

The first part will highlight the distinction between “Ho’oponopono” on the one hand and “Hawaiian-style Reconciliation Methods” on the other. Indeed, we need to distinguish the original and traditional Ho’oponopono process with modern methods inspired by it.

The second part will describe how specially designed sessions using “Hawaiian-style Reconciliation Methods” have been used to promote mutual understanding and harmony in both real situations and role playing exercises, and the roles music has played in these sessions.

1. Ho’oponopono and Hawaiian-Style Reconciliation Methods

1.1. Historical Background and Traditional Process

Ho’oponopono is a centuries-old traditional way to solve problems in the Hawaiian community. The most reliable source of written information about it can be found in the two volumes entitled *Nana I Ke Kumu*, meaning “Look to the Source”, written by the respected teacher (*kumu*) Mary Kawena Pukui. It has a sacred character that should be respected, and therefore in this paper, a process happening outside of the Hawaiian traditional community will be referred to as “Hawaiian-style Reconciliation Methods” or HSRM, to distinguish such activity from the traditional Ho’oponopono process.

What is remarkable about Ho’oponopono is that it allows all participants to apologize, to forgive, and to move on with their lives in their community. It means “setting to right” (Shook, 2002:1). Here is a short description of the steps of a typical Ho’oponopono process described by E. Victoria Shook (2002:11-12).

The session was traditionally led by a healer (*kahuna lapa’au*) or senior family member. First the meeting starts with a prayer (*pule*), strengthening the emotional commitment of the participants.

The first phase consists in identifying what the problem is (*kukulu kumuhana*). The healer/senior family member has a great responsibility here, because it is necessary to introduce the situation in a way that will not offend any participant from the start.

Once the participants are ready, the leader states the transgression, (*hala*) the action that has caused the problem. Both victim and aggressor are entangled in a negative relationship (*hihia*) which needs to be healed.

Each participant then shares his/her personal experience, (*mana'o*) stating the reason why they are suffering from the problem, making efforts to avoid blaming anybody.

Next, people are invited to confess what they have done wrong, they apologize and receive forgiveness (*mihi*). This allows the “untying of the negative knots” (*kala*), enabling participants to restore a harmonious relationship.

The closing phase (*pani*) is a declaration that the problem is solved and will not be brought up again. This last part includes a closing prayer (*pule ho'opau*). The leader and family usually share a meal after the end of the session.

Ho'oponopono is an integral part of the life and culture of the Native Hawaiians, and should be respected as such. It is only natural that its tremendous power for reconciliation should be used outside Hawaii, but we will use the term “Hawaiian-style Reconciliation Methods” or HSRM when mentioning the numerous uses of similar activities organized outside the traditional setting of Ho'oponopono.

1.2. “Hawaiian-style Reconciliation Methods”: Secularization, Simplification and Standardization.

The founder of Peace Studies, Johan Galtung, has analyzed and compared different conflict-resolution methods and has come to the conclusion that Ho'oponopono was one of the most effective and powerful available (Galtung, 2004). He uses a simplified version during his seminars and workshops, and therefore contributes to the worldwide reputation of wisdom and peacefulness that characterizes the Hawaiian traditional cultural practices. The author of this article has first heard about Ho'oponopono from Galtung in 1996, and has designed a “Hawaiian-style Reconciliation Methods” (HSRM) procedure based on Galtung's own simplified version. The HSRM described below can be characterized as a secularized, simplified and standardized version of the original Ho'oponopono process.

Secularization: the opening and closing prayers (*pule* and *pule ho'opau*) have been replaced by opening words allowing the participants to feel comfortable and committed to the process. This allows the use of this HSRM in many different contexts, regardless of the religious background of the participants.

Simplification: this HSRM uses only five of the numerous steps of the original Ho'oponopono process, described below. Following Galtung, the leader is called a “Wise Person”:

Step 1: The Wise Person welcomes the participants, thanking them for their willingness to participate in the session, and emphasizes that all blame should be avoided, that we are all in the same painful situation and are trying to solve it together. Then the Wise Person states the facts in a way that does not offend any of the participants, a very difficult task that requires a lot of preparation. This is inspired by the original *kukulu kumuhana*.

Step 2: The Wise Person leads all participants to share their personal experience. Each takes a turn, and all listen carefully the others's speeches. The point is not to lay blame on anybody else, but to share one's personal experience and feelings, why one is suffering from the situation that all are now trying to resolve. This is inspired by the original *mana 'o*.

Step 3: The Wise Person leads all participants into the confession of what they have done wrong. Sometimes people have simply omitted to do the right thing, and in this case they explain what they should have done but did not do. At other times people have done something that is clearly wrong, thereby contributing to the problem directly. In all cases, each participant takes responsibility for the part they have played in the creation of the problem, and apologize to the whole community of participants. It is expected that the other participants will forgive the speaker, and all take a turn. Forgiveness is facilitated by Step 2, since all participants are aware of each other's sufferings. This is inspired by the original *mihi*.

Step 4: The Wise Person leads all participants into making a promise, a commitment that they can respect. It should not be an earth-shaking plan to change the world, but rather something that can be done realistically. Each participant takes a turn promising to do something concretely in order to improve the situation from then on. This is inspired by the original *kala*, but whereas *mihi* and *kala* happen almost at the same time in Ho'oponopono, they are in different phases in the HSRM described here.

Step 5: The Wise Person declares the problem solved, and reminds the participants that the only thing they should remember from the whole session is their promise. The Wise Person will check will all participants from time to time in the future to see how they are fulfilling their promise, and to ask whether anybody needs help in doing that. There is then a celebration of the success of the reconciliation process, a cheer, a song, a dinner, or a whole festival depending on the occasion. This is inspired by the original *pani*.

To summarize this HSRM as it is used by the author in workshops and courses:

Step 1: stating the facts (inspired by *kukulu kumuhana*).

Step 2: experiences by the participants (inspired by *mana 'o*).

Step 3: apology and forgiveness by all participants (inspired by *mihi*).

Step 4: promise by each participant (inspired by *kala*).

Step 5: closure, and celebration (inspired by *pani*).

Compared to the original Ho'oponopono process, this particular HSRM is thus secularized, simplified, and since the same formula is used each time, it is standardized, whereas the original Ho'oponopono is used in different ways depending on the community.

1.3. Stating the Problem: How to Universalize a Local Tradition?

Perhaps it is safer to recognize that this is impossible. Ho'oponopono belongs forever to the Native Hawaiian community, and it must be considered as a cultural treasure of humanity, and measures should be taken to allow native Hawaiians to continue using it as they have done for centuries. However the essence of Ho'oponopono, with its remarkable power for apology and forgiveness, the joint resolution of problems, and nonviolent conflict transformation that does not leave anybody out, should be spread as much as possible throughout the world, especially in these troubled times when violence and retaliation reign supreme. We suggest the careful use of the term "Hawaiian-style Reconciliation Methods" when it comes to secularized, simplified and standardized versions, leaving the term "Ho'oponopono" for the traditional process reserved for native Hawaiians, whose communities have been keeping the flame burning for centuries.

2. Three Sessions Using HSRM, and adding Music.

The author has used the HSRM described above on three separate occasions. The first two involved real people with real problems, whereas the third one was organized in a conflict transformation classroom with students playing roles.

2.1. _October 8, 2003 HSRM Session on the Peace Boat.

The Peace Boat is a Japanese organization promoting peace and transcultural understanding. They rent a ship, and organize cruises around the world, allowing participants to meet people in different countries, to find out about the reality of conflicts around the globe, and the cruise includes seminars and workshops on board. The author was invited to give workshops and lectures on the Peace Boat from October 2 to October 9 2003, embarking in Singapore and disembarking in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The October 8 session took place over the deep blue sea between Chennai and Colombo. Three Japanese and three South Korean passengers agreed to have a session to overcome their complex feelings concerning the Japanese colonization of Korea in the 20th century.

The three Koreans were outraged by the fact that Japanese textbooks still do not mention what happened, hiding the truth to entire generations of Japanese citizens. They felt they deserved a sincere apology but could not get any from the successive Japanese governments.

The three Japanese were fed up with Korean complains about the past, and could not understand why Koreans constantly blame Japanese for the colonization, insisting on receiving apologies again and again. The three Japanese felt that since they did not contribute to a situation taking place before their birth, they had nothing to do with it, and they could not understand why they had to hear criticism of their country repeatedly.

We used a room on the ship just for the seven of us, and I acted as the Wise Person. Each phase went very well, with some participants confessing events that occurred in their lives for the first time, after keeping them bottled up for years, even 40 years in

one case. Each one was able to make a realistic promise and it was a beautiful sight to see all six of them discussing with a fantastic smile on their face after the session.

2.2. November 3, 2003 HSRM Session During the Soka University Festival.

Each year in the fall Japanese universities hold a festival open to the public. The International Student Center (*Gakusei Kokusai Center*) organized a HSRM session with three South Korean exchange students and three Japanese students, with the author of this paper as the Wise Person. The problems were quite similar to the ones on the Peace Boat, but an added challenge was that this session was open to the public. It was very difficult for the six participants to share such intimate feelings in front of a crowd of about 50 people, but they did it bravely, and the audience was very impressed with this method inspired by the traditional Hawaiian wisdom. For instance during Step 3, it seemed that the whole audience, made of Japanese students, was apologizing together with the three Japanese participants, and forgiving the three Koreans when it was their turn to apologize. Realistic promises were made, and are being fulfilled even now, (June 2004), about seven months after the HSRM session took place.

2.3. June 3, 2004 HSRM Session during a class held at Soka University, Japan.

This third session was part of a course entitled “Music, Peace and the Arts” which was taught at Soka University, Japan during the Spring semester of 2004. The 11 students were required to correspond by email with people in conflict situations, in this case Palestinians, Israelis, Afghans, Pakistanis and US citizens. They represented their partners in the class, imagining how much one could feel like blaming the “enemy” in their situation. The main part of the class was the organization of an HSRM session. Some testimonies from the students can be found in the appendix at the end of this paper.

2.4. Adding Music to the Mix in All three Sessions.

During the first session music was used during Step 5, to celebrate the closure of the problem. All seven of us joined hands and sang a few verses of a well-known Japanese song, and a popular Korean song, after a brief rehearsal. (The Japanese song was *Hana* by Shoukichi Kina and the Korean song was *Arirang*, a traditional folk song.)

During the session of the Soka University festival on November 3 2004, Korean pop music was played to welcome the participants, until the session started. *Hana* and *Arirang* were also sung at the end of Step 5.

During the session in the classroom on June 3 2004, Music was played before Step 1 to set the mood, and some music was also played during each step, to take a break from the emotional strain. Finally the song *We Can* by LeAnn Rimes, which had been rehearsed in class before, was sung by all participants at the end of Step 5. A mini-festival including music and songs was part of a prolonged celebration of the success of the reconciliation session.

Some comments by the students concerning the use of music can be found in the appendix at the end of this paper. _

Conclusion: Why Should the Spirit of Ho’oponopono be Spread Through HSRM Sessions?

Despite the hopes for a decent world briefly entertained after the end of the Cold War by Michael Gorbachov (New Thinking) and others, we have reversed to our age-old habits of handling conflicts poorly, with ultra-violence, no respect for human life whatsoever, and in an ever-increasing atmosphere of blame and retaliation.

It is often said that the history of the world has changed on that fateful day of September 11, 2001 giving an excuse to the Bush administration to attack Afghanistan and Iraq without the consent of the United Nation Security Council, and turning the United States into a model of restriction of freedoms with PATRIOT ACT I and II, under the name of a war on terrorism. Well informed people know that the attacks of September 11 were retaliation for wrongs done decades before that. This cycle of violence, retaliation, punishment and more violence is transforming the whole world into a hellish place where respect, understanding and harmony are disappearing.

Obviously the way “we the people” are handling the situation is not working, and if the ancient wisdom of Hawaii can provide us with hints concerning the importance of taking responsibility for one’s actions, apologizing, forgiving, and making a genuine commitment to harmony, it would be a huge mistake to keep those treasures hidden in Hawaii. At the same time one must show utmost respect for the Hawaiian traditional community, recognizing that no matter how many “Hawaiian-style Reconciliation Methods” sessions are organized successfully, one should never forget that they are not the traditional Ho’oponopono process, but branches and leaves that owe their very existence to the strong roots that have grown for centuries in Hawaii.

References

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Appendix:

Concerning the June 3, 2004 HSRM Role Playing Exercise:

Opinions of students participating in role playing concerning the difference they felt before and after the HSRM, and concerning the role of music during the session. Words in [] indicate an edit for the sake of comprehension. [...] indicates that the text has been cut. The students are not native speakers, and their text is not edited when comprehension is not hindered.

1. Before and after the HSRM:

A student playing the role of an Afghan:

Before

[...] I thought I have nothing to apologize to anyone because I was victim. US attacked to Afghanistan, and I was really suffered with it. In those days, many innocent people, include children and women, were killed. I tried to help people, but people died in front of us. I could not forgive and I hated US forces especially decision makers.

After

[...] I knew that everyone have some responsibilities for problems. In my case, I had responsibility as Afghan citizen. If I did something for Afghan society, I might prevent US's attack. I mean, US attacked because of Al Qaeda's terror in September 11, 2001. If I tried to change Taliban's actions, or talk with Afghan people about changing our situation, I might contribute to prevent terror. Therefore I could apologize to people in the world.

A student playing the role of a Pakistani:

Before

I was trying to defeat people who have different opinion because I was nervous and also angry . Actualy , in my country Pakistan about 19 innocent people were killed by suicide bombing last month . I hated criminals and I could not control explosion of my anger . I was just blaming people having other opinon , perhaps I was finding fault with other participants . [...]

After

I understood what is fact and who is victim . Through successive [phase] of this session,

I could hear opinions from foreign people with my head cool . Then I noticed holding strong prejudice against other participants . When I heard the nationality of the criminal , I naturally built the same hostility against innocent people live in that [country] . I think that is just happening in the world today as [between] the U.S and Afganistan. Before we are in certain nation , we are the same human being . Because we knew that , we started to seek the best way for ourselves . That might be a sympton of our cooperation .

A student playing the role of a US citizen:

Before

As an American, I was afraid a little because someone might have suffered by the U.S. government. I knew that the conflicts between the left-wing Americans and right-wing Americans, and also Palestine and Israelis are very complex and tangled. I could not imagine those people sharing their feelings together and forgiving each other.

After

[...] I've heard many types of experiences, and to my surprise, I felt sorry to people who's ideologies are different with me and also to people whom I thought I don't have strong connection with. Because I've heard many sad experiences, that made me really think about peace as we live in the same world.

A student playing the role of a Palestinian

[...] I was only investigating and thinking about the conflict from the point of view of one Palestinian. So, I started to hate Israel people and see them, like a devil killing or using violence to the Palestinians. [...] So I wanted to explain that I was becoming very selfish, believing everything from the Palestinians, either if it is a true notice or not, and trying to destroy the Israel State, putting in dangerous situation the innocent people are living there.

After

Because everyone is suffering something in this life and that's why they are here: to put away to these continue sufferings feelings as peaceful as possible. Therefore, if someone can feel respected by the enemy or the others members of the session, that member will be honest and pleasant to the others too.

A student playing the role of an Israeli:

[...] I just [felt] anger and even [wanted] to abuse to the other group as I experienced terrible suffering from Israel- Palestine conflict. And, I only saw what had the other group did to us. I didn't care what we did to the other group, and didn't care why another group did such a behavior like suicide attacks.

After

However, through this session, I found my horizons were really narrow. I can listen the reason why Palestine had to be so violent. I understood it completely including their pain and sadness. And I was ashamed not to know the reality.

To know the fear or grief of other group, (especially Palestine) made me feel remorse. I felt their anguish or effort to make situation better. I also felt relief because I understand that they are the same human beings with feeling like us. Furthermore, I found their real need is not attacking us but live their life with safety and hope. I think our goal is same as theirs.

A student playing the role of an Afghan:

Before

[...] I thought I have nothing to apologize to anyone because I was victim. US attacked to Afghanistan, and I was really suffered with it. In those days, many innocent people, include children and women, were killed. I tried to help people, but people died in front of us. I could not forgive and I hated US forces especially decision makers.

After

[...] I knew that everyone have some responsibilities for problems. In my case, I had responsibility as Afghan citizen. If I did something for Afghan society, I might prevent US's attack. I mean, US attacked because of Al Qaeda's terror in September 11, 2001. If I tried to change Taliban's actions, or talk with Afghan people about changing our situation, I might contribute to prevent terror. Therefore I could apologize to people in the world.

2. Comments by Students Concerning the Roles of Music during the HSRM Session:

I think music helps a lot for people to get relaxed. Relaxing is very important during the session, because if we were in high tension, we might have attacked the other people. I recommend smooth, slow, and soft music [...]

Music must be used. [...] I think we need quiet and solemn music. If it's possible, I'd like to use the song that shows great will to make peace.(from US, Israel, Palestine, Afghanistan etc.) Ethnic music is also good. (It shows the respect to other group)

Using music is good for us to relax, though we should be careful to choose music. I think music played by transnational artist is nice.

Talking about If music is necessary like a background, soundtrack or putting it between session by session, I think is a great idea and also a necessary thing to do. One of the examples is that when I was listening the music I could get relaxed and made me the possibility to think what to talk next and also to have a reflexion of myself between the

sessions. It a necessary thing to reduce the high tension atmospheres that this type of reconciliation method makes. Classic music or the popular songs of the countries are participating, are one of the variety of songs that I want recommend.

Music was very useful way to make moderate atmosphere and to relax [...] We have to be careful about choosing music because some music has special meaning.

I'd like to suggest that participants [...] share music as well as experiences after it succeeded. Music has big influences to heal, relax and recall us the background when we listen to the music. Music can be solution not to forget what they promise. For example, our university song will recall us school days of this university even after we graduate it. So, I believe that sharing music enable participants to memorize [...] their promises and happily feeling when they reconcile. It is easier to write lyric or to select music together than to compose the music.

Use of music in this session makes us comfortable and [clear] minded . This sometimes helps making cooperative and sympathetic atomosphere . But here we have a problem . We have to [prepare] for the music which is peaceful for the most of the people . Also nationality of the music is also a problem . If we take advantage of the music , we have to be sensitive to participants' thought , feelings , and patriotism .