“We only think when confronted with a problem.” – John Dewey

“Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. Like It instigates invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving...conflict is a sine qua non of reflection and ingenuity.” – John Dewey

Erikson argues that throughout the life cycle, the ego becomes structured on the basis of the types of challenges associated with stage-specific tasks… **Without challenges to resolve, the ego becomes structured in ways that produce passive and weak responses to subsequent demands.**

It is crucial to note that the challenges confronting the person must be “meaningful” to the ego, and not just senses as a series of random or arbitrary social obstacles, otherwise the person has difficulty understanding the experience… Furthermore, as the ego derived meaning (content) from the challenges it experiences – as it synthesizes experiences - it becomes stronger in its ability to master more complex challenges, namely, to execute (process) increasingly complex behaviors.

For Erikson, the ego is created by tension… and it thrives on tension and challenge, in amounts corresponding to the ego’s strength. **Without challenges to master, the ego becomes passive and weak…**

*Côté, James E., and Charles Levine. Identity Formation, Agency, and Culture: A Social Psychological Synthesis, 2002*

“In analyzing narratives for this book, I found that values are the ground on which cultural discourses are developed. **Values give unifying meaning to the events in people’s lives and are a primary means through which individuals interpret and explain reality.** Values facilitate the connection between the mundane events of everyday life and the macro-social, historical, political and economic contexts in which lives are lived and cultural constructs are shaped. Not only are the values integral to cultural-specific guidance and direction, they become the basis for common-sense constructions of the world and may lead to the creation and perpetuation of ideologies as well.

As we see throughout this book, values are entrenched in people’s lives. People in chaos cling to their values as a source of order. **Values inform cultural discourses, which often encompass several related values. Values may be linked to memories of significant life experiences to form an individual belief system**, to life experiences and goals for action, or to the ways in which dominant social ideologies are connected to experience.”

*Becker, G., Disrupted Lives: How People Create Meaning in a Chaotic World, 1997*

**Eight Thoughts About Conflict**

**Movement:** When water is not in motion it becomes stagnant and infected. As individuals, if we are not engaged in some sort of conflict, if we are not moving, growing and learning, we will begin to feel a sense of unquiet and restlessness, and then of bitterness and resentment.

**Desire:** When there is conflict, it’s because we want something that we don't have, and which exceeds our ability to contain it. Conflict stems from desire. Namely, tension between two desires (we don't always know to articulate them) and where there is desire and passion, there is life.

**Journey:** The opposite of conflict is comfort and convenience, and when conflict is missing, we become stagnant, passive, myopic or apathetic. As such, discussing the personal benefit of engaging in a lifelong personal journey is an important precursor to engaging in conflict.

**Instability:** One cannot explore from a place of stability. One cannot transform from a place of stagnancy. To feel passionate is to be open to the possibility of disappointment. Conflict and frustration go hand in hand.

**Question:** Are we willing to be open to conflict, risk and change? This is a question that needs to be explored and discussed. It also needs to be empathized with: we need to humanize aversion to conflicts, and to the temporary chaos it may create.

**Balance:** As educators, we need to develop and facilitate conflicts that are optimal and appropriate catalysts for growth; there are some conflicts that will put too much stress on the systems of the learners. When posing conflicts, we need to make sure that our learners have the resources and strengths that can equip them to deal with the conflict.

**Security:** One of the major causes for aversion from conflict is disappointment, and a history of burnout. We know this in education. There are conflicts which are not only unresolved: they left us exposed. When this happens, we may be afraid to engage in new conflicts. Conversely, what will encourage our learners to openly engage in conflict is the degree of security we feel in a relationship. The more secure we feel, the more willing we will be to engage in grey areas.

**Resolution:** Conflicts may not always be resolved. I am not sure they are ever solved. Catharsis is a type of resolution. Psychological health can be seen as the ability to hold ambivalence.

Archetypal Conflicts are frames for core, existential tensions that we may encounter at different points and times in our lives. Often, we’re engaged and engrossed in these conflicts to the point that we don’t know to name them, or don’t even recognize that they are at play.

The Conflict Pedagogy Theory suggests that as educators, when educating towards values, we can - and should - create experiences that are framed in context of these conflicts, for they will open up for our learners wide and wonderful opportunities for exploration and contemplation.

This list of archetypal conflicts is neither scientific nor conclusive. It has emerged out of observations, reflections and collaborations with educators in our network. We invite you to contribute to it.

Obligation-Autonomy; Dependence-Independence; Responsibility-Carefree; Safety-Risk; Openness-Defensiveness; Individual-Collective; Predetermination-Free Choice; Agreement-Challenge; Innovation-Preservation; Self Definition (Internal)- Self Definition (External); Receptiveness-Control; Self Actualization-Self Resignation; Pride- Humility; Loving Kindness-Truth; Justice-Peace