

# Resolving Social Conflicts

*Kurt Lewin*

新闻学与传播学经典丛书·英文原版系列

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## 理解社会冲突

Kurt Lewin 著  
[美]库尔特·卢因

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## 图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

理解社会冲突 (英文版)/(美)卢因著.  
—北京:中国传媒大学出版社,2015.7  
(新闻学与传播学经典丛书·英文原版系列)  
ISBN 978-7-5657-1402-3

I. ①理…

II. ①卢…

III. ①社会冲突论—研究—英文

IV. ①C91

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2015) 第 141689 号

新闻学与传播学经典丛书·英文原版系列

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策划编辑 司马兰 姜颖昞

责任编辑 司马兰 姜颖昞

封面设计 运平设计

责任印制 曹 辉

出 版 人 王巧林

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出版发行 中国传媒大学出版社

社 址 北京市朝阳区定福庄东街1号 邮编:100024

电 话 86-10-65450532 或 65450528 传真:010-65779405

网 址 <http://www.cucp.com.cn>

经 销 全国新华书店

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印 刷 北京艺堂印刷有限公司

开 本 880mm×1230mm 1/32

印 张 7

印 次 2015年7月第1版 2015年7月第1次印刷

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书 号 ISBN 978-7-5657-1402-3/C·1402

定 价 29.80 元

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翻印必究

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# 出版说明

“新闻学与传播学经典丛书·英文原版系列”，选取了在新闻学与传播学历史上具有里程碑意义的大师经典名作，如传播学“四大奠基人”哈罗德·拉斯韦尔、保罗·拉扎斯菲尔德等，及加布里埃尔·塔尔德、罗伯特·帕克、哈罗德·伊尼斯、马歇尔·麦克卢汉、库尔特·卢因、卡尔·霍夫兰等这些学界耳熟能详的名家佳作。这些是传播学与新闻学的奠基之作，也是现代新闻学与传播学发展的基础。许多名作都多次再版，影响深远，历久不衰，成为新闻学与传播学的经典。此套丛书采用英文原版出版，希望读者能读到原汁原味的著作。

随着中国高等教育的教学改革，广大师生已不满足于仅仅阅读国外图书的翻译版，他们迫切希望能读到原版图书，希望能采用国外英文原版图书进行教学，从而保证所讲授的知识体系的完整性、系统性、科学性和文字描绘的准确性。此套丛书的出版便是满足了这种需求，同时可使学生在专业技术方面尽快掌握本学科相应的外语词汇，并了解先进国家的学术发展方向。

本系列在引进英文原版图书的同时，将目录译为中文，作为对原版的一种导读，供读者阅读时参考。

从事经典著作的出版，需要出版人付出不懈的努力，我们自知本套丛书也许会有很多缺陷，虚心接受读者提出的批评和建议。

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奥尔波特序

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**PART I. PROBLEMS OF CHANGING  
CULTURE**





# I

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## SOME SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND GERMANY

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(1936)

EDUCATION is in itself a social process involving sometimes small groups like the mother and child, sometimes larger groups like a school class or the community of a summer camp. Education tends to develop certain types of behavior, certain kinds of attitudes in the children or other persons with whom it deals. The kind of behavior and the attitude it tries to develop, and the means it uses, are not merely determined by abstract philosophy or scientifically developed methods, but are essentially a result of the *sociological* properties of the group in which this education occurs. In considering the effect of the social group on the educational system, one generally thinks of the ideals, principles, and attitudes which are common within this group. Indeed, ideals and principles play an important part in education. But one will have to distinguish the ideals and principles which are "officially" recognized from those rules which in reality dominate the events in this social group. Education depends on the real state and character of the social group in which it occurs.

The educational processes, even within a small educational unit like the family, depend to a high degree on the spirit of the larger social body in which the persons are living. Any change in the political, economic, or social structure of this larger group, like the nation, deeply affects not only the organization of education, but its whole spirit and technique as well.

Of course the educational system in every nation varies greatly within different families and schools. Nevertheless, there exists a *general cultural atmosphere* which is the "background" for all special situations. In sociology, as in psychology, the state and event in any region depend upon the whole of the situation of which this region is a part. The general atmosphere has, therefore, a direct bearing upon the education within any sociological unit. The degree of this influence depends mainly upon the degree to which the educational unit in question (the particular family or school) is dynamically separated from the larger enclosing region.

In recent decades we have had striking examples of the high degree to which a changing distribution of political power has changed both the aim and practice of education. Those who have had the opportunity to observe closely enough the behavior of schoolteachers (for instance, in Germany between 1917 and 1933, especially in the period 1931-1933) could easily see how even small changes in the general political situation affected, almost from day to day, not only the ideals which they taught, but also the educational methods which they employed (such as the type and frequency of punishment, the amount of drill, and the degree of freedom and independence in learning.) Times of political change show very impressively the high degree to which education, in nearly all of its aspects, depends upon the social structure of the group. *It seems to be easier for society to change education than for education to change society.*

#### METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As obvious as this influence of the sociological situation on education is, and as sensitively as education reacts even to the smallest changes in society, it is nevertheless difficult to determine just what these changes are and to find concepts which express them adequately. The influence which the change in a social situation has on education can not be characterized adequately by describing the changing of programs and organizations, because these facts do not sufficiently determine the dynamic factors of the educational situation, that is, those factors which constitute the influence of educa-

tion on the behavior, the personality, and the ideals of the growing child. The degree of pressure under which the child stands is generally more important than any particular educational measure or single educational act.

One may argue that such general characteristics as "freedom," "authority," and "social atmosphere" are too vague and too delicate to be grasped through any really strict concepts. Yet one will have to realize that such general terms are not only commonly used in characterizing a particular education, but are, in fact, most important dynamic characteristics of any social-psychological situation. To some extent "human nature" is everywhere the same and certain social characteristics are alike in all capitalistic states within the so-called "western culture."

## OBSERVED DIFFERENCES

### THE SPACE OF FREE MOVEMENT

If one approaches the description of a situation from a dynamic point of view (that is, from a point of view which should finally allow prediction), one has to understand the situation as a totality of possible events or actions. Every change in its social position, like promotion from one grade to the next, or becoming friends with a group of children, or change in wealth of one's family, means that certain things, persons, or activities are made available or cease to be available. One may speak here of the *space of free movement* and its boundaries. By movements, we have to understand not only bodily locomotions but, above all, social and mental "locomotions." These three kinds of locomotion are somewhat different, but all three are to be recognized in psychology and sociology as real events.

The space of free movement of a person or a social group can be represented as a topological region encircled by other regions that are not accessible. Mainly two factors prohibit the accessibility of regions. One is the *lack of ability*, for instance, lack of skill or intelligence. The other is *social prohibition* or any kind of taboo which stands as a dynamic "barrier" between the person and his

goal. The child may be able to grasp an apple, but the mother may have forbidden him to do so.

For the educational situation, the extent of free movement is a most fundamental characteristic. In an institution, for instance, it is generally more restricted than in a family. If the progressive movements of the last twenty-five years in education have emphasized the idea of freedom, this has meant chiefly two things: the recognition of the child's own needs and will, and the avoidance of too many restrictions. Such tendencies should increase the child's space of free movement.

It is not easy to compare the actual space of free movement of the average child in the United States and in pre-Hitler Germany. To compare, for instance, the general instructions for teachers does not lead very far, because the same words have different meanings in different countries; and the gap between the ideals which the educational procedure pretends to follow and the actual procedure is often remarkable. A more reliable symptom seems to be the technical procedures the teachers use, such as the frequency of intervention, the conditions under which they intervene, whether they talk commonly with loud or low voices, etc.

A second difficulty for the comparison is the fact that one can find in both countries families and institutions which grant very little freedom to the children, while the children in other families and institutions are quite free. Furthermore, there are differences between the educational institutions in different parts of the United States and within Germany, and differences between different social classes. In comparing the two countries one should, therefore, as far as possible, refer to children of similar classes and to institutions of equivalent status and function in both countries. Since my experience in the United States concerns mostly people of the middle class, I will refer mainly to this group. Nevertheless, somewhat similar differences may be found between other social strata in both countries.

To one who comes from Germany, the degree of freedom and independence of children and adolescents in the United States is very impressive. Especially the lack of servility of the young child

toward adults or of the student toward his professor is striking. The adults, too, treat the child much more on an equal footing, whereas in Germany it seems to be the natural right of the adult to rule and the duty of the child to obey. The natural relation of adult and child is in the United States not considered that of a superior (*Herr*) to a subordinate (*Untergebener*) but that of two individuals with the same right in principle. The parents seem to treat the children with more respect. Generally they will be careful, when requesting the child to bring some object, to ask them in a polite way. They will let the child feel that he is doing them a favor in a situation in which the German parent is much more likely to give short orders. It is more common in the United States to hear a parent thank the child after such action. The parent may even do so after he has had to apply considerable pressure in order to make the child comply, whereas the same situation in Germany would probably lead to "the next time you should do it right away." In Germany the adult will tend to keep the child in a state of submission, while the American may want to put the child back on an equal footing as soon as possible.

The American will often say to a child, "If I were you, I would do that and that," in a situation in which a German might say, "You have to do that immediately." Of course such difference may be merely a matter of differences in the style of language. For on the whole, the American is more apt to use polite language. But such differences of style are themselves significant (see below). At any rate there seems to be a real difference in the degree of respect for the right and the will of the child as another person. In America, when traveling with a young child, one has to protect the child against being fondled or kissed by strangers less often than in Germany.

The same difference in the basic relationship between the child and the educating adult is found in the schools and nursery schools. Coming from Germany, one notices how slowly and reluctantly a nursery schoolteacher approaches the scene of a tussle between two youngsters. At first such procedure seems almost to indicate a lack of interest on the part of the teacher. But, in fact,

the nursery schoolteacher has been taught to follow this procedure. Whenever the teacher wants to interfere with the child's activities, she has to approach the child slowly and gradually. If there is any possibility of settling the problem without her she has to avoid interference. In the progressive German nursery school of the pre-Hitler period the idea of the child's independence was stressed too, especially in the Montessori nursery schools. But the degree of difference in the actual procedure can hardly be exaggerated and is easily noticeable even in the most representative German training schools for nursery schoolteachers. A similarly marked difference exists in regard to a second rule for the American nursery schoolteacher; namely, to be friendly and to speak in a soft voice to the child regardless of his reaction. In Germany, interference of an adult is not only more frequent, but generally more loud and sudden. It occurs much more often in a spirit of command, demanding obedience. I have learned that under the Nazi régime the leading training school for nursery schoolteachers in Germany has to advise its students not to explain an order, even if the child could understand the reason. In this way, the children should get the habit of obeying blindly and absolutely, not from reason, but from belief or love. Such principle is in line with a basic rule of the totalitarian state, which was announced again and again, especially in the first year of its régime: to command those below, to obey those above. Certainly such advice to the nursery schoolteacher goes much farther than that given in pre-Hitler Germany. Nevertheless, one might consider such procedure as an extreme expression of a relation between adult and child which, in comparison with the United States, has always been noticeable in Germany.

The battle of the totalitarian state against reason and intellectual discussion, as "liberalism," is quite logical, because reasoning puts the person involved on a basis of equality. To give reasons in education is therefore a "democratic procedure."

Closely related to the respect for the rights of the child is the tendency of American education to help the child in every way

to become practically independent as soon as possible. Much care is taken to develop means and techniques which permit the child to dress himself, to feed and serve himself, and to perform other parts of the daily routine independently. Similar tendencies are common to progressive education in all countries, but the actual freedom of choice and the actual degree of independence intended by the adult, and reached by the child, seem to be considerably higher in the United States than in a comparable German milieu.

All these facts seem to indicate that the space of free movement for the child in American education is greater than in pre-Hitler Germany. Yet there are facts which might make such a conclusion doubtful. American education may recognize the right of the child to a higher degree, yet the American educator certainly cannot be called more compliant than the German one. I was sometimes impressed by the rigidity with which the same nursery schools, which carefully follow the rules mentioned above, will enforce certain procedures. In spite of his greater independence, the American undergraduate, and even the graduate at the university in many respects, stands under more school-like regulations than the German student. The difference between the educational situation in the two countries seems, therefore, to be not only a difference in the amount of free space of movement, but a structural difference as well.

#### DEGREES OF FREEDOM AND SHARPNESS OF BOUNDARIES

One has to distinguish within a life-space not only regions in which the person is entirely free to act and others which are entirely prohibited, but regions of an intermediate type: A certain activity may not be altogether prohibited, yet the person may feel somewhat restricted and hindered within this region. The different social groups a child belongs to, the atmosphere in the classes of its different teachers, the different social activities in which he is involved are often regions of different *degrees of freedom*.

One finds gradual and abrupt transitions between neighboring regions. The life-space as a whole shows different degrees of

homogeneity. There are educational milieus in which, let us say, a medium degree of freedom is characteristic for nearly all regions. A child in a certain boarding school, for example, may not be very much suppressed, yet he may always feel somewhat under regulation. In other cases, the life-space may contain regions of a very high, and others of a very low, degree of freedom. The school, for instance, may be a region of rigid discipline and little freedom, whereas the atmosphere of his family life may be soft and provide plenty of freedom. A similar contrast may exist within the family life of a child as a result of a despotic father and a weak mother. The *degree of homogeneity* of a child's life-space is obviously dynamically important, both for his behavior and his development.

It is furthermore important whether *gradual* or abrupt transitions between neighboring regions prevail in a life-space. The space of free movement of two children may be similar in extent and structure; yet for the one child, the boundaries between the permitted and the forbidden regions may be clearly determined, nearly inflexible, and their recognition strictly enforced. For the second child these boundaries may vary relatively much from day to day (although their position may be on the average the same as for the first child) and may not be very clearly defined. His daily time-schedule may not be punctual. When he is supposed to go to bed he may get permission easily to play just one record and again another record, and then to say goodnight lingeringly, interpolating several jokes before he finally goes to sleep. The frequency and the kind of exceptions granted to a child vary greatly. The reaction of the parents to a child's demand may be a clear-cut yes or no, whereas another child may get all degrees of intermediate answers. In other words, the prevailing sharpness of the boundaries between neighboring regions vary greatly.

The educational situation in the United States as compared to Germany seems to be characterized by *regions of very different degrees of freedom and sharply determined boundaries of these regions* (Figures Ia and Ib). In a Froebel nursery school in Germany, for example, the child is usually more guided and



regulated in his play and his outdoor activities than in a comparable American nursery school. The American nursery school, on the other hand, is more likely to emphasize the necessity of strict rules for the daily routines, e.g., at meals. On the whole, it seems that the educational atmosphere in German institutions, as well as in German homes, is more *homogeneous*, lacking regions of such a high degree of freedom, and having less strictly defined limits than are found in a similar institution or home in the United

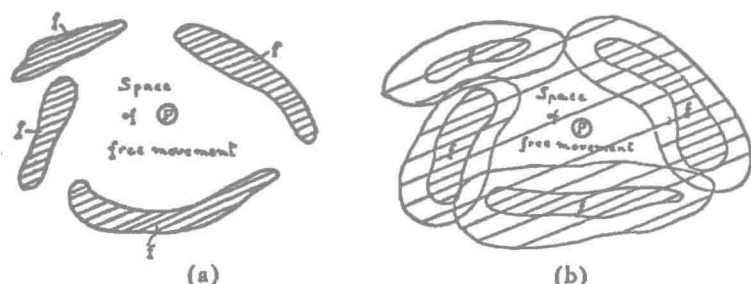


FIGURE I. TYPICAL SITUATIONS OF AN EDUCATIONAL ATMOSPHERE  
(a) THE UNITED STATES (b) GERMANY

(a) Life-space with sharp boundaries and great qualitative differences between neighboring regions.

(b) Life-space with unsharp boundaries and relatively small differences between neighboring regions.

The density of the hatching represents the degree of restriction.

$P$ =person  $f$ =forbidden region

States. The new totalitarian Germany, of course, has taken decisive steps to increase the homogeneity in education, as well as in every other field, thus creating an all-inclusive, highly regulated situation.

Besides its greater heterogeneity the life-space of the American educational situation seems to have *sharper boundaries* between its different regions. I have mentioned already that American education considers it a main issue to create in the young child a habit of greatest punctuality in the daily routine. That implies a sharp boundary of an important group of daily activities in the life-space of the child. A similar time structure is characteristic for the American student. The student at the American univer-