CHAPTER 4

Bringing Peacebuilding into the English Language Classroom

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In this chapter, we consider the intersection between peacebuilding and English language teaching. We begin by sharing our personal paths to peacebuilding and we then provide general guidelines for bringing peacebuilding into the classroom. We highlight examples of peacebuilding in practice to illustrate the implementation of these guidelines.

Introduction

What does it mean to teach peace? How do we engage language learners in difficult conversations around identity, conversations that encourage individual and group reflection and lead to social change? How do we privilege the stories of our students when those stories bring conflict front and center in our classrooms? As educators, we have to challenge ourselves to think through our assumptions, to open ourselves to multiple perspectives on tricky social and political topics in order to create a space that welcomes our students to do the same as we teach for peace.

Teaching peace is a commitment. It is hard and it is constant and at the same time it feeds the soul. Those who choose to bring peacebuilding into the classroom often have their own journey to share, as do the authors of this chapter. In order to understand the perspectives presented here, it is important for us, the authors, to share who we are and how we came to the work of social justice and peacebuilding (two overlapping concepts). Self-reflections are a critical step in engaging in social justice education. Knowing ourselves helps to create a mindfulness that encourages us to think about how we see and interact with our students and our peers around social issues. And this reflection can facilitate the creation of a space in which our students feel comfortable exploring who they are and how they fit in the world.

Alison Milofsky

> Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
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> —*Martin Luther King Jr.*

My formal path to social justice and peacebuilding began when I served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Slovakia from 1996 to 1998. While there, I developed a hyper-awareness of the discrimination the Roma face on a daily basis. For 2½ years I worked as a teacher trainer in the pedagogical faculty of a university, preparing my students to be English teachers. My own teacher education in a master's program in TESOL equipped me to teach these students the English language and to prepare them to teach others, but nothing in my past experience shaped my ability to address the discriminatory views of my students and my colleagues. My attempts at having rational conversations to address their othering of the Roma did nothing to shed light on the plight of the Roma or on my students' deep-seated prejudice. I needed a different knowledge base and a new set of skills to engage those around me in conversations about identity, othering, discrimination, and the conflicts that can arise when groups mistrust one another.

When I left the Peace Corps, I left the formal classroom as well and began working at a nonprofit organization that has, as part of its mission, prejudice awareness and reduction. My job included providing workshops for students and teachers on combating discrimination (Milofsky, 2014). What I learned from this work is that hate is not rational and, therefore, attempts at rational discussions to address hateful attitudes are ineffective. I also learned that empathy and understanding the lived experience of those different from ourselves is key in building relationships and breaking down barriers. Today, I try to incorporate this understanding as a facilitator of intergroup dialogues around race and gender for undergraduate students and conflict transformation trainings for emerging young civil society leaders in conflict zones.

Valerie Jakar

> It is hard to imagine a more important task than the struggle for what Jewish tradition calls Tikkun Olam—the repair and healing of our world.
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> —*Shapiro, "Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Peace"*

More than 50 years ago, as a high school senior in London, England, I was introduced to the Council for Education in World Citizenship (CEWC), which was a United Nations–sponsored organization seeking to bring young people together in a learning situation. That early nurturing process, instilling into us an understanding that we, the privileged Westerners, should seek to reduce inequity in the world, has remained with me. Since that time, I have always been associated with UN entities and other social-responsibility oriented groups: as a student, as a teacher of ESOL, and as a member of a UNICEF educational development committee in Israel, where I have lived and worked for the last 35 years. Throughout my years in the teaching profession, inspired by colleagues such as teacher-educators Natalie Hess and Esther Lucas and folklorist Simon Lichman, I have sought to promote mutual understanding and appreciation among my peers, my students (and by association, their students), and my fellow teachers. The people who live in my region are known to be in an intractable conflict situation, with little movement toward political conciliation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority[1] over the last 20 years.

It was Amos Oz, a revered Israeli author, who asked, "What do you do when both sides are right?" (2002). In my role as teacher-educator and EFL specialist, I have striven to acknowledge that both "sides" may well be "right" and that it is my role to help them understand each others' "rights" and reasons. Within Israel there are conflicts of opinion on religious issues and practices among Jews, among the Christian sects, and among Islamic groups. In some sectors of our society, family conflicts have created horrible situations where lives are lost or bodies are mutilated. Within families and within schools, conflicts arise that cannot be resolved without help. In many of these situations it is the children who are harmed, either physically or emotionally (or both). I continue to try to create opportunities for encounters between individuals or groups of educators (mostly teachers of English) from different ethnic, national, or religious heritages, despite comments such as "That's ludicrous! Why bother when you are in an intractable situation?"

Over the years, despite the despondency and frustration felt by those who endeavored to create peacebuilding situations but failed, social justice–minded people, including many educators, continue to develop programs that aim to generate positive feelings, empathy, and an appreciation of "the other." As in our famous irrigation systems, the effect of small but regular input (the drip method) in a stable environment, with some boosts of positive influences (the fertilizer) such as learning about empathy, may be more effective than other, more erratic approaches. Thus, through a series of workshops or ongoing encounter programs, we have succeeded in establishing a sense of community among teachers of English who are driven, with passion, toward creating a community of understanding.

OUR CHARGE, OUR EXAMPLES

Our experiences provide you with a sense of the lenses through which we see the world. They also give you a sense of what informs our peacebuilding perspectives. Most important, by sharing pieces of our stories, we raise the notion that stories and personal experiences matter. We, as educators, must reflect on who we are and what stories we want to share with our colleagues and students. Sharing stories builds trust and contributes to understanding, allowing our students to see the humanity within us and inviting them, as well as ourselves, to see the humanity within others.

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[1] Nomenclature is often tricky. Some refer to the two main opponents in the "Middle East struggle" as Jews and Arabs, some would note them as Israelis and Palestinians.

Peacebuilding as a Tool for Learning

Peacebuilding is a process of establishing peaceful relationships and building institutions that can manage conflict without resorting to violence. As such, peacebuilding occurs at multiple levels, ranging from intrapersonal and interpersonal to international. Peacebuilding is relevant in all contexts. It is not just the work of countries experiencing or emerging from violent conflict. Countries without violent conflict must work to secure structural peace, combating discrimination and seeking social justice and equality for all of its citizens.

Peace does not simply exist; rather, it is created through the work of individuals. The English language classroom can serve as a place of transformation, a space to engage youth in conversations around peace and conflict, to develop critical thinking skills as well as the skills that allow them to manage conflict, and to understand how they can participate in peacebuilding both individually and collectively.

The English language classroom can be a space for content-based curriculum rooted in social justice issues. Within such a curricular approach, conflict transformation and peacebuilding become the vehicle through which students learn English. The basic concepts and skills in conflict transformation and peacebuilding deal with reducing prejudice, building relationships, communicating effectively, and using negotiation to manage disagreements. With such closely aligned purposes, and since communication skills are a large part of language teaching, the English language classroom becomes a natural site for teaching peacebuilding.

What does it mean to have a peacebuilding lens in the classroom, to teach peacebuilding? And how do we teach peacebuilding? Teaching peacebuilding is not a step-by-step process but there are a few guidelines that can help you think about how to structure your classroom and frame your conversations with students in ways that contribute to peace. In essence, teaching peacebuilding is the application of good teaching practices (Milofsky et al., 2011).

Emphasize multiple perspectives. Conversations on difficult topics allow us to experience and learn different perspectives. It is, therefore, important for our students to develop the capacity to listen to one another and truly hear what each other has to say. In the process of conversation, disagreement may occur, but this provides students with an opportunity to clarify their own perspectives and consider how other people's views can inform opinions. Disagreement is natural and should be considered a healthy part of conversation. Learning to manage conflict is often about effectively dealing with disagreement before it escalates to violence.

Teach dialogue skills. Debate is a useful educational exercise and has a place in the classroom when discussing complex topics. However, the process of dialogue can contribute significantly to the classroom climate, encouraging an open mind and developing active listening skills. Unlike debate, which concludes with a winner and involves a process of listening for holes in the opponent's arguments, dialogue assumes there is no winner or loser. In the process of dialogue, listening is for the purpose of enhancing one's understanding of a topic and demonstrating that the listener hears the intended meaning.

Engage students in interactive lessons using creativity. The methods used to teach conflict management and peacebuilding focus on interaction between learners. These methods can include role play, small-group work, experiential activities, and large-group discussion. By using interactive strategies, educators are able move students from the abstract to the concrete, encouraging students to make decisions about how they will act when faced with conflict and what can be done to address conflicts beyond the interpersonal level.

Share real stories. It is important that students have the opportunity to share their stories and to hear the voices of other people whose lives have been affected by conflict. Stories can help clarify concepts that may otherwise seem elusive, making the abstract real. At a deeper level, real stories bring home the impact of conflict on individual lives by tapping into students' empathy.

Leave students feeling empowered. Difficult topics that involve human suffering can be overwhelming for any individual. It is important to alleviate any despair students might feel by helping them understand that they can take ownership of how they approach interpersonal conflicts. Teaching them these critical skills reveals to students that they have the possibility to empower themselves, that they can take action as an individual or as a community of young people, and that they can make a difference. These teaching practices can help English language teachers engage students in the conversations and skills development that will enhance their understanding of the "other." Peacebuilding is a process—an active process—that involves the work of individuals as well as of institutions. When educators provide the skills transfer that will allow their students to engage with the "other" and to communicate with one another to resolve differences, they are developing the capacity of their students to build peace while developing their own capacity as peacebuilders.

Peacebuilding in Practice: Social Justice Programs and Israeli Education

There is no one way to engage in education around peacebuilding. Below are a few examples drawn from the experiences of educators in Israel who have sought out opportunities to bridge the divide between students in schools and communities. In the examples below, Valerie shares some highlights of her work.

PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOLS

Currently, an online project, TEC (Technology, Education, and Cultural Diversity) is being developed that brings together schoolchildren, preservice educators (English teachers), schoolteachers and teachers' college faculty from Israel (for Hebrew and Arabic speakers), New Zealand, Holland, and Northern Ireland using English as the language of communication (Shonfeld, Hoter, & Gayanim, 2012). The goals and the content of this project (meaningful topics of relevance to young people, including environment, individuals' communities, their places of worship, customs and rituals) are similar to a nondigital program that was used some 10 years ago in junior high schools where either Arabic or Hebrew (plus English) were the languages of instruction. The program of study was created for history or social studies classes. Two volumes of text were devoted to the major religions of the Holy City (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). One volume was devoted to rites, rituals, customs, and festivals; the other was devoted to religious texts of the three faiths. The idea behind the project was that people would read about their own faith group as well as the two other faith groups.

A unit of study that became an ongoing program. We used the same (English) materials in an in-service education course for a multiethnic, multicultural group of teachers who worked toward creating a curriculum of mutual understanding—knowing the other and knowing oneself—on topics such as mourning, birth rituals, and rites of passage. While working collaboratively on the materials, the teachers became a cohesive group, sharing their stories, their songs, their fears, and their aspirations; several teachers instituted curricular changes in their EFL programs so that they could introduce materials and activities connected to multicultural education into their programs of teaching.

Two teachers took topics that were featured in their textbooks and expanded on them, bringing in global issues and, in one case, a comparative religion unit. The teachers were in regular *mamlachti* (secular national) schools, at the junior-high level, so they had to exercise some behavior management before they could engage in talking about the content; certain students displayed prejudice and sheer antagonism regarding particular faith groups. These sentiments were dispelled through mutual understanding activities in which games, simulations, and focus groups enabled the boys and girls to express their doubts and fears, as well as their hopes and desires.

Thus, a cohort of empathetic teachers of English who had been jettisoned from their safe curricular nest—known as the Approved Materials for Textbooks—into the often stereotype-holding audience succeeded in bringing about a change which, by dint of their tenacity, was perpetuated. Their students created an exhibition of presentations on artifacts and texts representing religions and customs of their own and others' cultures. This exhibition has become a regular feature of the school calendar of activities. There is now an annual exhibit and activity day focusing on the local community and its neighbors.

A college program. Participating in content-based EFL instruction programs, prospective elementary school teachers—native speakers of Arabic, Hebrew, Russian, and French—studied multicultural education, and mentoring, and mentorship. The core content was concerned with knowing the other and knowing oneself, or, as Stuart (2005) calls it, "honoring diversity." Another aspect of our work was the organization of seminars and other preservice and in-service education programs for teachers of English, where we succeeded in getting people together to talk about common concerns, both personal and professional, while creating products collaboratively that could subsequently be used in ESOL classrooms (Jakar, 2006; Jakar & Deeb, 2009; Jakar & Lucas, 2006). A welcome development of those seminars came about because of a fortuitous meeting between Valerie Jakar and Alison Milofsky at a Peace Forum that took place at the TESOL Annual Convention in 2003.

Over a period of 5 years, Milofsky supervised workshops and ongoing programs of work for ESOL teachers using peacebuilding training materials developed at the United States Institute of Peace. The teachers who engaged in the workshops and meetings were from Hebrew- or Arabic-speaking communities in Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian locales. The composition of the groups was eclectic: They included orthodox Jews, devout Muslims, and Catholic and Protestant Christians, all of whom were Israeli citizens. Collaboratively, the teachers modified the institute's materials to fit their own contexts. In working together toward a common goal they used the very skills they would eventually be teaching their students. The outcomes of these programs can be witnessed in the schools and the seminars where the students create presentations and mount displays of materials, classbooks, and letters sent from New Zealand, Bethlehem and Aman.

Conclusion

Peacebuilding is a process—an active process—that requires ongoing effort. Regardless of the level at which one works (at the individual level in the classroom or at the institutional level), the experience of self-reflection, of sharing one's humanity and seeing the humanity in others, of honoring each others' stories, of listening in dialogue and being open to a multiplicity of perspectives, creates spaces of possibility in which we can begin to realize peaceful relationships.

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