

# Review

## Peacebuilding in language education: Innovations in theory and practice (a review)

Original work by Rebecca Oxford et al. (Eds.) published by Multilingual Matters 2020

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'We live in a world today where peace is unprofitable'. So begins Gregory Hadley's foreword to *Peacebuilding in Language Education*. Nevertheless, he goes on to say language teachers are in a special position to encourage the building of peace. Our job, he says, is not just to teach how the language works and help learners become proficient in its use but to teach in a way that fosters peacebuilding. 'Few educators', says Hadley, 'have access as we do to students who come from a variety of countries and cultures. By teaching languages in ways that foster peace, we have the potential to make helpful contributions that eventually will be felt around the world'.

That is what *Peacebuilding in Language Education* sets out to do. Organised in five sections, it contains sixteen chapters focusing on teacher personal development, the role of peacebuilding in universities and classrooms and raising critical awareness, peace language and linguistics, and classroom activities for building peace awareness and commitment to interpersonal, intergroup, intercultural, international and ecological peace.

As such, the book is valuable not just to language teachers but to teacher trainers and academic staff in language schools, cultural institutes and universities around the world. It is a detailed well-referenced read and teachers and researchers will find it a valuable resource.

What emerges immediately is that peacebuilding is not just about political action but developing an attitude of mind in the classroom which allows participants, teachers and students to allow the building of good relations through respecting differences in social and personal experience, nationality, gender, politics and faith. Therefore, although it encompasses intergovernmental and NGO initiatives in peacebuilding as examples, it is much more about interpersonal psychology and how teachers can instil mutual respect in the groups they are teaching and raise their own and their students' inner harmony through teaching the target language.

Section 1, *Language Education Responds to the Call for Peace*, explains why teachers of languages are well placed to be peace awareness builders in

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the classroom by focusing on the four competences of ethnocultural empathy, intercultural understanding, cognitive flexibility, and emotional regulation, and showing how these can be included in teacher training courses. It also focuses on the fact that the communicating of peace is not just a matter of words but a matter of body language and voice tone, the aim being to achieve a harmony which allows peace to flourish.

Section 2, *Applying Peacebuilding for Inner, Interpersonal and Intergroup Peace*, applies the notion of peace-building to personal attitude and behaviour both in the classroom and in teacher training – how to help teacher trainers and trainees regulate their own psychology to stay calm and peaceful under the occasional stress of working with the target language in the classroom or training room. This psychological approach is supported by practical activities trainers and teachers can use in person-to-person relationships as in teacher to student, but also between colleagues and between groups. One key area is discussed by Carmen Amerstorfer who explores a holistic teaching approach called COOL (Cooperative Open Learning) and its use in an Austrian secondary school. One key element in peacebuilding is accepting and celebrating the fact that there are differences in background, experience, personality and attitude in both teachers and students and in between classroom groups. Josephine Prado and her co-authors examine how this can contribute to peacebuilding. Their chapter, *Seeking Connection through Difference*, examines how groups can

come to recognise differences as positive, not negative, a very important aspect as a common recognition and valuing of difference can actually lead to greater unity.

Section 3, *Applying Peacebuilding for Intercultural and International Peace*, is one of the most valuable sections in addition to the detailed lesson plans presented in Section 5. Section 3 explores the role and potential of peacebuilding language in institutional settings including minority communities, government institutions and universities.

In Chapter 8, *Can Foreign Languages be Taught for Peace at US Government Institutes*, James Bernhardt and his co-authors examine the work of the United States Foreign Service Institute (FSI) in training international students and professionals in foreign languages. In a fascinating example they describe how US and Russian cosmonauts working together on the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project in 1975, the first joint Soviet-US space flight, cosmonauts were taught English and Russian by US and Russian educators. This process has continued and is a significant contribution towards détente and effective cooperation. Summarising one of the five core principles in FSI teaching Bernhardt et al. write: *‘The FSI does not teach French (or any of the other 60+ languages in our course catalogue. Rather it teaches foreign affairs professionals how to use language, such as (French) in their jobs and in their lives’*.

The notion of using language to focus on positive results is expanded by Michael Wei and Yalun Zhou in their chapter on *International Faculty and International Students in Universities: Their Roles in Fostering peace across Languages and Cultures*. Here the emphasis is on using language training to promote intercultural understanding through the encouragement of open dialogue and the analysis of critical incidents. The opportunity for open dialogue is taken up by Laura Mahaligappa and her co-authors in their chapter on working with migrant minorities (Chapter 10). Stressing the importance of Critical Language Awareness (CLA) and Critical Media Literacy (CML) they show how important it is to teach how language is used to express and convey bias. As well as analysing text for

bias teachers can also encourage 'counter-storytelling' narrative in the classroom, an opportunity for students from minority communities to reflect on and tell their stories of their own lives and their own experiences.

Section 4, *Applying Peacebuilding through Positive Psychology, Peace Linguistics and Peace Language*, addresses the language of peace and hate and how to move from one to the other. A useful activity is to take what the authors call the Negative 3-H words (hate, hurt and harm), show how they operate as noun, verb and adjective (hateful, hurtful and harmful) and how they can be substituted by the Positive 3-H words (hope, help and harmony). In doing so the authors explain how to move from hate speech to empathy.

Section 5, the final section, focuses on peace building classroom activities, oriented towards all levels of education. Fifty-five activities are featured, some with page references to earlier chapters. Each activity describes its purpose, the language level and student age group it is most appropriate for, the peace dimension it seeks to invoke, language focus, interaction type, materials and time needed, followed by a detailed lesson plan.

The last three activities focus on activities to enhance ecological peace and, as an example, activity 54 is called 'Protect our oceans'. The activity is aimed at higher intermediate teenage and adult students and deals with plastic pollution and en-

vironmental protection. The materials are a short video about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (available on a video sharing site). The teacher plays the video and gets the students to discuss what causes the pollution and in groups to suggest five concrete actions to reduce pollution. The teacher can help with language and pre-teach vocabulary needed. Each group looks at online news and articles and agrees on three actions to present to the class. Then the class comes together and each group share their key actions. Finally, the class discuss how protecting the environment might facilitate peace. The timing is estimated at 25-30 minutes. I personally would estimate up to an hour and the activity might well extend over more than one class period but the basic lesson plan is systematically and well presented.

The chapter on classroom activities begins with a quote from Albert Einstein: '*Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding*'. After Covid-19 retreats and things begin to return to normal, maybe it is something we can all use if we aren't already.

As can be seen, the activities are adaptable both to in-class and online teaching and the lesson plans alone are worth the price of the book. Overall, this is a very rich book addressing personal attitudes, theory and practice in a more open approach to language teaching and learning and a valuable addition to university, teacher training and teacher's libraries.