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Introducing Peacebuilding Philosophy to Language Teacher Education

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Abstract

Rebecca L. Oxford's contributions to academia extend well beyond language learning strategy research, for which she is well known, to embrace peace education in language classrooms. Inspired by her peace education philosophy, this study first describes the influence of Oxford's scholarly research in peace approach. Then, it presents a case study of five preservice teachers, all native Turkish speakers, who were guided to adopt the peace approach philosophy to develop creative teaching materials to be implemented in the *Practicum course*. Throughout six hours of weekly lessons at a state middle school, the preservice teachers integrated peacebuilding activities into their English instruction. The analysis of the qualitative data from lesson plans, classroom observations, and reflective writings, revealed compelling findings. Preservice teachers who implemented peacebuilding activities showcased increased competence and awareness of peace education philosophy, and they reported feeling more confident and fulfilled in their teaching. Children exposed to peacebuilding activities experienced a shift in their emotional state. It was also found that peacebuilding activities fostered inner harmony, boosted self-confidence, and enhanced children's English learning engagement. The study highlights the crucial role of integrating peace education into teacher education programs, particularly for language teachers. Equipping educators with the tools and philosophies of peacebuilding can empower them to become agents of positive change, cultivating global citizens who embrace harmony and understanding.

Keywords: *Peacebuilding Approach, Preservice Teachers, Inner Peace, Interpersonal Peace, Intergroup Peace, Language Teacher Education*

¹Introduction

I had the pleasure of meeting Rebecca Oxford at the 2001 TESOL conference in the USA, which I was attending as part of the International Leadership Program. Rebecca was

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participating in a session, in which the presenter was delivering a paper on a topic related to strategy training. After the presentation ended, I had a talk with her explaining how widely she is known and referenced in Türkiye, and across the world for her outstanding work on strategies. As a researcher and a teacher educator, her works on strategy have always enlightened me. I have read most of her books and articles on language learning strategies, and applied the principles in my English classes.

I first became aware of the peace education approach when I watched a webinar about an in depth interview with Professor Oxford. The interview focused upon the book *Peacebuilding in language education: Innovations in theory and practice*, which Oxford edited (Oxford et al., 2020). Up to that time, the topic of peace education had never caught my attention. What interested me most in the webinar was the way Oxford conceptualized peace. Giving a very simple definition of what peace is, she attributes her concept of peace to Martin Luther King Jr., whom she regards as one of her great heroes. He believed that peace is the harmony that grows when people with different points of view get along well, and positively. She admitted that establishing peace is not always easy as it takes effort and compassion, especially if people are arguing about something and want to get it in their own way. People can be closely involved in the conflict, but peacebuilding makes us turn down the temperature and helps us to really listen and communicate. In fact, Oxford maintains that the important point is recognizing the other points of view rather than necessarily agreeing with them.

Impressed by Oxford's mindset of peace, I started to explore the notion more deeply. My starting point in this professional journey was to read the aforementioned book (Oxford et al., 2020), and other related works on peace education (e.g., Birch, 2022; Kester, 2012; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Oxford, 2013; Pentón Herrera, & Martínez-Alba, 2021). I have come to realize that peacebuilding is not merely a political action, but it involves developing an attitude of mind in the classroom, which enables teachers and students to have good relations through respecting differences in social and personal experience, nationality, gender, and so on, contributing more to a peaceful world.

This article first presents a brief literature review on peace education, followed by a description of the research participants, data collection and data analysis procedures. As is common practice with qualitative research designs, the findings of the case study and the discussion are presented together. The final section of the article presents implications of the findings and suggestions for future research.

Review of Existing Literature on Peace Education

The concept of peace education is still comparatively new, so literature on the subject is relatively limited, but growing. At its most basic level, peace is simply the absence of conflict. It encompasses a state of inner and external tranquility where understanding bridges differences, and cooperation thrives between individuals and among members of communities such as countries, societies, families and classrooms. Education is a fundamental medium to promote peace. School is a place where peace education can be introduced and promoted to reduce acts of violence, increase social awareness, provide opportunities for students to communicate, and build relationships (Birch, 2022).

According to Olivero et al. (2020), peace education has six dimensions; inner peace, interpersonal, intergroup, intercultural, international, and ecological peace. *Inner Peace* refers

to “harmony within a person” (Oxford et al., 2020, p.17–18). A person is said to have achieved inner peace if there is a balance of emotional, cognitive, social, and physical needs. Inner peace is central in relation to any other dimensions of peace, such as, interpersonal and intergroup peace (Oxford, 2013). *Interpersonal peace* relates to “sustaining harmonious, respectful and cooperative [social] relationships” (Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021, p.76). *Intergroup peace* is harmony between and among groups. This kind of peace is crucial to human life in society, and it requires ongoing effort to gain and maintain. Griffiths (2023) also stresses the importance of interpersonal peace as well as *intercultural* and *international* dimensions of peace, and she points out the need to respect cultural values and international identities, while always remembering the importance of forgiveness and tolerance in challenging circumstances. According to Oxford and Olivero (2021, p.10), *ecological peace* involves “deeply appreciating and reconnecting with nature” and working to protect the environment, ourselves, and all other forms of life on earth.

Language can be a powerful tool for promoting peace, but it can also be a fearful weapon. Along with the idea that verbal aspect of language is an essential means of communication, nonverbal use of language is also critical to enhance peace and harmony (Griffiths, 2023). Since communicating peace is not only a matter of words but also a matter of using body language and voice tone appropriately, it is recommended to use all forms of nonverbal language effectively to allow the flourishing of peace in the classroom ecology (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2020; Oxford, 2013).

Studies have been conducted in different national contexts to promote peace awareness when teaching English to different levels of learners. In a study conducted by Arıkan (2009), fourth-year preservice English teachers contextualized grammar teaching using environmental peace education activities with secondary school students in the School Experience (Practicum) course at a state university in Türkiye. The author reported that most participants found teaching grammar through peacebuilding activities much more effective than traditional grammar teaching activities. Similarly, students’ response to such activities were also favorable. They became aware of environmental peace education through contextualized grammar teaching.

In an online teacher-training course in the Gaza Strip (Palestine), Imperiale (2022) encouraged preservice English teachers to develop teaching materials to promote students’ wellbeing and vulnerabilities. Adopting creative language pedagogy suitable for Grades 9 and 10 students, 13 preservice English teachers developed drama, role-plays and poems, linking the English classroom to the conflictive context in which they live. It was reported that this pedagogy nurtured students’ wellbeing and helped preservice teachers support each other in the face of adversity. McNair and Herrera (2022) incorporated peacemaking circles to teach English learners’ global citizenship and peace. It was found that using peacemaking circles transformed English classrooms into safe and caring environments where students can heal and learn positive steps to grow emotionally, build positive relationships, and practice mindfulness. Peacemaking circles gave English learners the opportunity to build new knowledge about other cultures allowing them to see themselves as part of a global community. McNair and Herrera (2022) stress the need for creating opportunities to learn restorative and humane peacemaking and literacy spaces in order to have a more peaceful global society.

Building on the aforementioned literature, the questions that the present study aimed to address were:

RQ1: How can preservice teachers contribute to children's peacebuilding?

RQ2: What are children's opinions about peacebuilding activities?

RQ3: What are the opinions of preservice teachers about using the peacebuilding approach in language classes?

Method

The program on which this study is based aimed to promote the peacebuilding competence of preservice teachers so that they could help children at school have a more peaceful and happy learning experience within the classroom ecology. Specifically, it was hoped that integrating the notion of peace into teaching and learning English through a range of peacebuilding materials and activities would have an important influence on creating an environment in which peace can flourish.

Research Design

The present study adopted a case study research design using qualitative data collection tools. As reported by Creswell (2013), the case study method explores a real life case or cases over a period through a detailed collection of data from multiple sources of information. According to Cohen et al. (2018, p.376): "A case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply presenting them with abstract theories or principles".

Setting and Participants

The five teacher candidates, three males and two females between the ages of 23 and 26, and all Turkish native speakers, volunteered to take part in the study. The participants were fourth year preservice teachers, and they were taking the Practicum (School Experience) course, lasting 14 weeks during the spring semester at a Turkish university. As the course requirement, they were expected to teach six lessons of English (each lasting 40 minutes) a week, in a state middle school to children aged 11-14 (Grades 5-8) under the supervision of a mentor, an English teacher in the school, and a university supervisor, the author of the present study.

Collecting Data

Data was collected using multiple data collection tools, since, as Cohen et al. (2018, p.376) explain: "Case studies accept that there are many variables operating in a single case, and, hence, to catch the implications of these variables usually requires more than one tool for data collection". The tools employed for this study include documents, namely, lesson plans, lesson observations, and reflective writings.

Documentary Analysis

Documentary analysis was used to analyze the lesson plans prepared by the participants. Each lesson plan detailed the objective of the activities, the peace dimension that activities aimed to invoke, language focus, interaction type, materials, allocated time, and the children's school

grade. Drafts of the lesson plans were submitted online, and the supervisor provided written comments weekly before the participants implemented them in their lessons.

Observations

For each participant, two lessons were observed by the supervisor as a non-participant observer (Cohen et al., 2018) in order to have a greater understanding of the classroom implementation of the peacebuilding approach adopted, and its effect on the children. While observing the lessons in schools, descriptive notes were taken relating to actions and movements, gestures, eye contact, voice, words spoken by the participants, their interaction with the students' reactions to activities, and their engagement with peacebuilding activities. Following the lesson observation, a post-observation debriefing was held in the teacher's room in the school. Participants' feelings about the lesson they taught were elicited, highlighting key moments, inviting reflection on them, and encouraging links to the peace approach. Notes were taken on the essential points of the discussion.

Reflective Writings

In qualitative research, the participants' reflections are direct statements expressing a description of their experience. Through reflection, the preservice teachers were able to refresh their memory of their teaching practices in the Practicum course, and thereby they could attain a deeper understanding of their implementation of peacebuilding activities. Each week, the participants wrote a reflection on their teaching experiences. Each reflection included information that varied between 300-350 words.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using inductive content analysis in an interactive and iterative manner progressing through stages. First, the participants' reflective writings were read multiple times to identify the emerging themes in relation to the research questions (Gall et al., 2007). Then, emerging themes were compared with data from the observation notes. Lesson plans were used to triangulate data with the reflective writings and observation notes. The use of data from multiple sources allowed the opportunity to determine the extent to which different sources of data converged, helping to establish trustworthiness (Silverman, 2005). Subsequently, member checking was conducted with the participants to ensure that their views had been accurately interpreted.

In order to comply with ethical requirements, the participants were asked for written informed consent, which they granted. Similarly, two children whose drawings were used in the study also gave their permission for their drawings to be displayed in the article. The teacher and the school administration were informed about incorporating a peacebuilding approach into the preservice teachers' practices, and their consent was obtained. Each participant was anonymized, and they were identified as PST1 to PST5 for confidentiality and anonymity.

Procedure

The first stage of the study aimed to increase the preservice teachers' competence and their awareness of peace education and empower them about the philosophy of peacebuilding. The preservice teachers were first given information about the peace approach, and they were

informed about the objectives of the study. Following insights from an exploration of peace education, the preservice teachers were scaffolded to embrace peacebuilding activities, and apply them in their teaching practice.

According to Oxford (2013), effective activities should be designed around clearly defined goals and objectives that align with targeted learning outcomes. Therefore, the preservice teachers were guided to connect the language of peace approach to the goals and objectives of the lesson by designing activities that would have a memorable and healing effect on the children. They were given some practical strategies demonstrating how peacebuilding activities can be incorporated into the current English curriculum to help them communicate peace and increase children's wellbeing.

The main objectives of peacebuilding activities were to help children have peace of mind in learning English, to get children's minds at ease, to have inner peace and harmony, and to make them feel comfortable while learning English. In other words, the preservice teachers were expected to act as a catalyst for promoting peace through designing activities that would help establish peace of mind and inner peace in children (Gkonou et al., 2020). Care was taken to ensure that activities were meaningful, appropriate to children's level of language proficiency, and at the same time develop their language skills.

The preservice teachers were also helped to apply the notion of peacebuilding to their personal attitude in the classroom. To do so, they were assisted to regulate their own psychology to stay calm and peaceful under the occasional stress of working with the target language in the classroom, and to have a feeling of caring for children (Olivero et al., 2020). In addition, Oxford (2013), and Gregersen and MacIntyre (2020) advise the use of all forms of nonverbal language effectively in language classrooms. Accordingly, the preservice teachers were trained to use verbal and nonverbal language more positively and effectively, thereby generating greater possibilities for peace by using peaceful ways to use words, body language, and the language of visual images.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the results of this study are analyzed, and the findings are discussed in relation to the research questions. Some excerpts are provided from the participants' reflective writings, peacebuilding activities developed by the participants and the researcher's observation notes.

How Can Preservice Teachers Contribute to Children's Peacebuilding?

The preservice teachers focused upon three dimensions of peace: *inner*, *interpersonal*, and *intergroup*, and they developed a variety of innovative activities to embrace each dimension. To be more specific, they tried to weave peacebuilding into English instruction and enhance children's wellbeing through teaching materials to help build children's inner, interpersonal, and intergroup peace, as promoted by Oxford et al. (2020).

In order to help children achieve inner peace and harmony, the preservice teachers created a peaceful and caring atmosphere in the classroom. One basic strategy they used was to help children express their emotions. For this purpose, the preservice teachers taught some of the most commonly used words to express emotions, explaining and using them through pictures, and emoji with facial expressions, each representing different emotions and feelings: *happy*, *uncertain*, *anxious*, *exhausted*, *tired*, *hopeful*, *amused*, *joyful*, *annoyed*, *humorous*, *cheerful*,

sad, nervous, angry, surprised, excited, and scared. Then, they handed out a paper asking children to draw a face or emoji that represents how they are feeling, and then write a word or an expression underneath it expressing the reason for their feeling. In this way, they helped children to articulate their emotions. As suggested by Curtis and Oxford (2020), the preservice teachers avoided using the negative 3-H words (hate, hurt, and harm), instead they used the positive 3-H words (hope, help, and harmony), and they were observed to use positive language such as:

I hope you are feeling well. Well done! This was a lot of fun! Thank you all so much for your answers.

Is everything understood? If you have any questions, feel free to ask me anytime.

How are you feeling today, how was your weekend? Good, I am happy to hear that.

Let's learn how to express these dreams in English.

I believe you'll enjoy this topic but before we start learning new vocabulary and grammar, we'll do an introduction activity and find out how you are feeling.

Did you all understand this activity? Great, let's start doing the activity together!

Great, thank you all so much for participating! (From observation notes)

The preservice teachers prepared innovative and creative peacebuilding activities to boost children's inner peace in line with the lesson objectives. To illustrate, PST1 set up a "prepare an invitation card" activity. He first explained what an invitation card would look like, and asked children to make one. This activity, performed individually, made children very happy and have inner harmony as reported by PST1 in his reflective writing:

They were most interested in making invitation cards and all of them made an effort to make one. Although it was our first lesson together, I think it was a good one.

Additionally, the preservice teachers used interactive vocabulary building activities to enhance children's wellbeing. To illustrate, PST2 prepared an interactive "missing a word activity" using wordwall as a technological tool. He showed sentences with one word/phrase missing. Children were asked to choose from the options given to complete the sentences.

Storytelling can be used as a teaching strategy to promote wellbeing (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020), contribute to building joyful learning communities (Barkhuizen, 2018), and boost student motivation (Alemi et al., 2022). It is due to such benefits that storytelling has been used in language classes as an outlet for restoration and peace in the face of global crises. In the present study, the preservice teachers explored the potential of storytelling as a process of transformation and healing that would lead to restoration of children's emotions and inner peace. They explored innovative ways of practicing storytelling in digital, traditional, and multimodal forms to support their storytelling with various artefacts such as toys, visuals, and so on. To illustrate, while teaching Grade 6 students on the topic "Holiday", PST5 told a mother duck story depicting humbleness, togetherness, and peacefulness. While reading aloud the story, he used visuals and rhymes to make the story vivid and memorable. His experience of introducing the duck story into his class was highly positive as he reports in his reflective writing:

Overall, I think my story about mother ducks finding their ducklings beautiful no matter what they look like, and realizing it was pointless to gloat about their eggs while looking down on another duck had a positive effect on children. In my previous lessons, I observed that students would pick on each other in a half-serious half-joking way. In today's lessons, I observed that it was quieter and more peaceful inside the class. They talked to each other instead of stepping on each other.

To promote the interpersonal dimension of peace, interactional peacebuilding activities were set up to allow children to share the feelings of compassion, love, kindness, trust, and respect mutually (Oxford et al., 2020). Given the situation experienced by children, the preservice teachers designed drama, games, and role-plays that would be fun, interactive, and peacebuilding to cultivate peace, as depicted in Figure 1 prepared by PST4.

Figure 1

A Sample Interpersonal Peace Activity



In another example, PST2 combined the topic of the lesson “sports” with “dreams”. Having introduced the topic noting that we all have different dreams and goals to accomplish in our lives, he taught some basic phrases that students could use while talking about dreams. A colorful matching activity involved matching phrases: “buy a car”, “be a famous musician”, “live in a big city”, “study abroad”, “travel around the world”, “be a famous athlete”, with the corresponding pictures, which were carefully prepared to make children feel happy and hopeful for the future. In fact, *hope* is considered an important concept in learning English (Ghadyani et al., 2022). To foster the interpersonal dimension of peace, he continued with a role-play activity. He developed an activity called “Dreamer and Interpreter”, as illustrated in Figure 2. The dreamers were asked to write four of their future dreams, and the interpreters, without looking, had to guess what those four dreams were. The children were given time to think.

Then, they started speaking in pairs and discussing to see how many dreams, the interpreter guessed correctly. Later PST2 shared the results with the class.

Figure 2

Dreamer and Interpreter Activity

| Dreamer and Interpreter | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Dreamer | |
| My dreams are... | |
| 1- | |
| 2- | |
| 3- | |
| 4- | |
| Interpreter | |
| I assume, my friend's dreams are... | |
| 1- | |
| 2- | |
| 3- | |
| 4- | |

The children found the activity fun and entertaining, as reflected by PST2:

Children had a lot of fun. There was a lot of laughter. I believe this role-play encouraged them to speak more and supported them emotionally. At the end of the lesson, the children thanked me for the lesson and said they really enjoyed it. Almost all of them drew a happy emoji in the feelings activity, which means the majority of the students' moods changed from feeling bored and tired to feeling happy.

Intergroup peacebuilding activities were practiced through collaborative tasks. Such tasks, carried out in small teams, were intended to promote intergroup peace and collaboration among the children to recognize themselves as potential peacebuilders working in harmony. The collaboration activities also featured language that is used to express inner, interpersonal, and intergroup dimensions of peacebuilding. In this way, children were given an important message of how living together peacefully in a changing world could be achieved.

The following is an example of a collaborative peacebuilding activity performed by PST4 while teaching the topic "Occupation" to Grade 6 students.

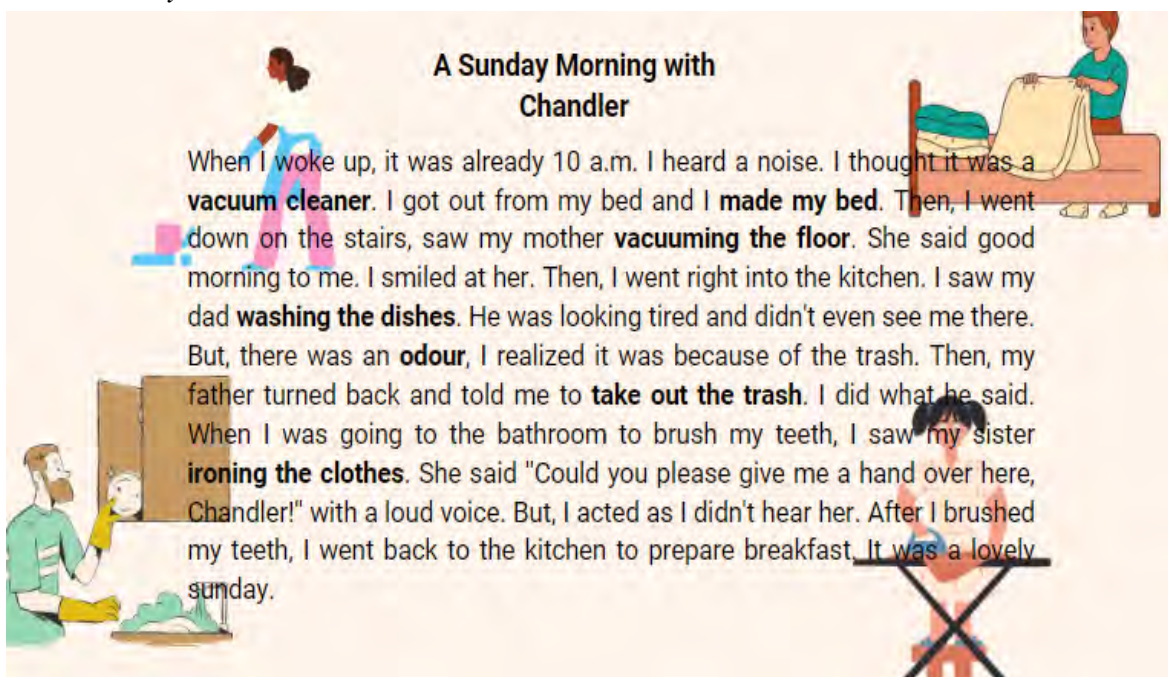
The teacher prepares different cards, on which the names of occupations are written. She explains the game to the students. She divides the class into two teams and asks one student from each team to come in turn and choose a card. The student tries to explain the occupation written on the card to his/her friends by miming or drawing it on the board. Those who can guess it correctly can get a point. (From the lesson plan of PST4)

The next type of peacebuilding activities used were nonverbal activities. As previously stated, nonverbal actions convey most of the message in communication. We often need to actually say very little as our body language says it all (Oxford, 2013). Nonverbal language, such as the effective use of gestures, tone of voice, eye contact and facial expression, were often used by the preservice teachers to establish good interpersonal relationships, as in the examples given below:

PST3 prepared a story while teaching the topic “Chores” (see Figure 3), which she presented via the smartboard. The story is interspersed with visuals and while reading the story aloud, she illustrated the highlighted phrases by using her actions very effectively. Similarly, the participants used such nonverbal behavior as miming for fun and entertainment.

Figure 3

A Short Story



PST2 applied the following pantomime as a mood increasing activity in relation to the unit on “Sports”, to Grade 6 students. He divided the class into groups of three or four. Each group takes a flash card from the teacher. On the card, there is a picture of a sport with its name on. Each group comes to the front of the class in turn, and pretends that they are actually playing this sport all together. Other students have to guess what sport the group is playing.

What are the children’s opinions about the peacebuilding activities?

As noted earlier, the children were asked to draw a facial expression of how they feel at the start of the lesson. They repeated the same task at the end of the lesson to help evaluate any

possible change in their emotions. The analysis of the preservice teachers' written reflections and the children's drawings enabled us to identify the emergence of three themes: *Bringing about a change in emotions, fostering inner harmony and increasing self-confidence.*




Bringing about a change in emotions

It has been observed that incorporating peacebuilding activities into the lessons led to a change in the children's feelings. Children who felt unhappy, tired, and confused at the beginning of the lesson tended to change their emotions to be more positive and hopeful, as evidenced by their drawings at the end of the lesson (see Figure 4 for an example). In other words, they were able to take a more positive step to grow emotionally, and increase their wellbeing, as illustrated in the following reflection by PST2:

As I first entered the class, the students were looking at me curiously. They were expecting an ordinary lesson, but when I told them that the purpose of the lesson was to make them feel better and that I prepared some activities for them to enjoy, not just learn, I realized that their attention increased. Yes, my activities improved their mood. As we can see from the "Feeling" paper, all of the students were feeling tired and confused at the beginning of the lesson. In the end, they were all happy. I could see that the activities were enjoyable for them. They attended the lesson not because they had to, but they liked it and enjoyed the way I taught.

Figure 4

A Sample Drawing from a Student Before and After the Lesson

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Name: | Feelings |
| Class: 7/D | |
| Start Of The Lesson | |
|  | |
| Draw and Express Your Feelings | |
| Draw your facial expression, showing your emotional state and why you are feeling this way. | |
| 1 I feel excited Because (murak ad-jarum*) | |
|  | |
| End Of The Lesson | |
|  | |
| Draw and Express Your Feelings | |
| Draw your facial expression, showing your emotional state and why you are feeling this way. | |
| 1 I feel happy because play game. | |

In a similar fashion, PST3 reported that she observed a great change in the students' emotions from feeling sad as reflected through their drawings of sad faces at the beginning of

the lesson to smiley faces at the end of the lesson, after she had applied peacebuilding activities in her Grade 7 class to students, age 12. The unit in the curriculum was “Celebrations” and her lesson objectives included “Feelings and preparations for celebrations”. The lesson objectives also included getting students to articulate their feelings and moods in addition to activities related to inviting friends to a party.

Fostering Inner Harmony

Using peace language, along with peacebuilding activities enabled children to gain harmony inside themselves, and with people around them such as their friends. This finding confirms Oxford’s (2013) idea that when the student is engaged in any peace language or communication activity, such activities can lead any student to feel more engaged in life as a whole, and feel better. To illustrate, after a warm and welcoming introduction, PST2 started the main topic of the lesson, which was “Dreams” by explaining and introducing the vocabulary and showing children a colorful presentation that he prepared. An interactive activity that he created was called “Missing Word”, where the students had to complete the missing word or a phrase in a particular sentence using a technological tool called wordwall.net. In his reflection, PST2 explains his impression of teaching this particular class of students:

The students were surprised to see a new teacher. As in the other classes, when they saw me for the first time, they did not show much interest in the lesson. Most of them wrote that they were tired or just bored in their drawings of facial expressions.




As recorded in the preservice teacher’s reflection below, the students’ moods changed after the colorful and interactive peacebuilding activities, which caught their attention:

When I started to present the topic on the smartboard, I realized they started to pay attention. I choose presentation every time, as I think it is a great use for teaching vocabulary and, it catches the students’ attention if it is well done.

As in the case of other preservice teachers, he practiced vocabulary teaching in the form of an interactive game. Students would come to the board one by one, and guess or complete the right phrase, presented through a colorful slide show on the smart board. This activity made children feel confident and happy (see Figure 5). As he explained, in his diary, that he could see how happy the children were through their smiling faces and their drawings at the end of the lesson consisted of happy faces.

Figure 5

A Sample Drawing from a Student Before and After the Lesson

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Name: | |
| Class: 7/0 | Feelings |
| <u>Start Of The Lesson</u> | |
|  | |
| Draw and Express Your Feelings | |
| Draw your facial expression, showing your emotional state and why you are feeling this way. | |
| 1 I feel tired because I'm sick. | |
|  | |
| <u>End Of The Lesson</u> | |
|  | |
| Draw and Express Your Feelings | |
| Draw your facial expression, showing your emotional state and why you are feeling this way. | |
| 1 I feel very happy because the lesson fun. | |

Increase in Self-confidence

It has been observed that the language of peace and peace activities practiced by the preservice teachers helped boost children’s motivation, increased their confidence in learning English, and lowered their anxiety, particularly in relation to speaking skills. As one preservice teacher reported:

Peacemaking activities transformed the English classroom into a caring and safer classroom space where students could feel its healing effect, grow emotionally, and build positive relationship with their friends (PST5).

This is reflected in children’s feeling more confident in their language ability, as illustrated by the experience of PST1. The topic of the lesson was “Friendship”. To enhance the students’ confidence in their speaking ability, PST1 focused on the importance of the English language and speaking skills and gave some tips to overcome speaking difficulties. He prepared a creative slide show about what language is and what the role and importance of the English language is the common problems, and how to overcome them. The lesson was conducted in an interactive manner in which the students could express their feelings in English without any fear of making mistakes. Then, PST1 addressed speaking anxiety implicitly, and suggested ways of overcoming it, giving useful tips and using positive language. To help students with

comprehension, he used L1 when necessary. PST1 observed a decrease in students' level of anxiety, as reported in his reflection:

The students felt happy because I always encouraged them to express themselves. Even if they showed speaking anxiety or hesitation because they were not sure whether they were answering my questions correctly, I responded it is great, what you say is meaningful.

To summarize, through modelling, hands-on activities, and the presentation of topics such as future dreams, feelings and parties, children started to have more hope for the future. Such activities also created memorable effects on children, and they wanted to see such peacekeeping activities implemented in other lessons.

What are the opinions of preservice teachers about using the peacebuilding approach in language classes?

Two themes emerged in relation to how the preservice teachers felt about applying peacebuilding activities into their regular classes: "happiness" and "fulfillment". These themes are illustrated with sample excerpts.

Happiness

All preservice teachers reported to have a feeling of happiness for applying peacebuilding activities and seeing children having fun, as a result. PST2 expresses his reflections as:

This week, I taught the seventh graders the topic celebrations. I assumed many of them expected to be bored with this lesson or just to work with their books. In their initial drawings of facial expressions, most of them drew emoji that were tired, sad, or bored.

As PST2 started to explain the new vocabulary, he observed changes in the students. In his reflection, he mentioned that he noticed that students were becoming more and more interested in the lesson. He observed that after the presentation and brainstorming part of the lesson was over, most of the class became more talkative and engaged in the lesson actively.

Another important point in the lesson planning was the selection of pictures, teaching materials, and games. PST2 reported that he put a lot of importance on choosing nice, pretty pictures and images that would be more engaging than just using plain black and white ones. The button game that he used with children was also engaging as all children fully concentrated on the activity, as he mentions:

They were observing each other, and laughing with each other. There was a friendly competition to finish the game. From my observation, I could see that the last activity changed the mood of the class drastically.

Thanks to applying a series of engaging activities with peacekeeping dimension in mind, the children that were bored and tired at the beginning of the lesson became more energetic and engaged in the lesson. As expressed by PST2, at the end of the lesson, the students thanked

him, and said that they wanted all their lessons to be implemented in a similar way. They even asked him to give the flashcards he had prepared to their regular class teacher so that they could continue playing the game again. An additional reason that made the preservice teachers happy was the feeling of being appreciated by the students. This point is also illustrated below with reference to PST1's comments after teaching the topic "Friendship" in a positive and supportive way:

My observation of the students is that they were puzzled about what I could show them, but in the end, because of seeing some of their friends willingly do it, they felt good and secure because of my tone of voice. One of the students even told me that I am the best trainee he had ever seen, and thanked to me.

Seeing that peacekeeping activities made the students happy as reflected through drawings and expressed by the students verbally, the preservice teachers felt very happy. The following reflection belongs to PST5 who applied the "Dreamer and Interpreter" activity, and interactive vocabulary games, as reported earlier.

The joy on my students' faces at the end of a lesson is my ultimate reward. Witnessing their genuine enjoyment while they are learning new topics fills me with immense satisfaction. Knowing that I have not only imparted knowledge but also fostered a love for learning makes the hard work that I put into constructing of each lesson worthwhile. This sense of fulfillment it motivates me to do even better the next time and eagerly look forward to our next lesson.

Fulfillment

It has been recorded that the preservice teachers gained a feeling of fulfillment due to incorporating peacekeeping philosophy into their teaching. This is evidenced from their reflective writings. For instance, PST1 who taught speaking in his lessons felt great self-satisfaction when he noticed a change in the students' feelings over the course of his lesson. As he reports: "After the class, I felt good about most of them who thought it was a soothing course."

The following reflections from PST3 and PST5, respectively, clearly illustrate how self-satisfied the preservice teachers felt when they observed that the children appreciated their teaching practices and use of peacekeeping activities:

Seeing students like my activities made me feel satisfied. I felt like I have done a great job, taught them something new, and made their day better. (PST3)

From my observation, I think the initial activities made students feel they are valuable, which made them feel happy. As a prospective teacher, I was very much touched and felt proud of myself when the students asked me if I would be their regular English teacher (PST5)

This finding confirms Oxford et al.'s (2020)'s argument that empowering language teachers (and in this study, prospective language teachers) can help them to be influential

peacebuilders. As seen from the presentation of research findings, peacebuilding activities with the underlying message of tolerance, understanding, empathy, and feelings of hopefulness for the future have been invaluable.

Implications of the Findings

This study suggests the crucial need to integrate peace education into teacher education programs. Equipping prospective language teachers with a peacebuilding philosophy and fostering their peacebuilding competence empowers them to be agents of positive change in education through their instruction. By incorporating peacebuilding activities into curriculum design and lesson planning, both for in-class and online settings, language teachers can help mitigate the negative consequences of disasters on schoolchildren. Moreover, they can cultivate classrooms dedicated to peacebuilding, contributing to sustainable national and international peace. As exemplified in this study, selecting topics and activities that promote various dimensions of peace can be a powerful tool in this endeavor. Finally, the peacebuilding activities outlined here serve as valuable starting points for both pre-service and practicing language teachers to develop similar initiatives for their own classrooms.


Conclusion

This case study explored the impact of peacebuilding activities on middle school students' peace, well-being, and emotional response, facilitated by five preservice teachers under the author's guidance. Future research can expand on these promising results by applying peacebuilding activities across education levels, from early childhood to adult learners. In addition, both preservice and practicing teachers can be equipped with the skills and knowledge to utilize a peacebuilding approach, creating harmonious classroom environments, and employing peace language and materials effectively. In the present study, three dimensions of peacebuilding have been focused on, namely, inner, interpersonal and intergroup peace. Further research can investigate additional aspects of peace explored here, such as intercultural, international, and ecological peace. Finally, context-sensitive peace education programs (building on Ghosn, 2005) can be developed that address specific peace-related challenges and cater to the unique needs of teachers and students in diverse settings.

Peace education holds immense significance for everyone, but its impact is particularly profound on children. Fostering inner peace, harmonious interpersonal relationships, and understanding between groups within them empowers them to build a more peaceful world. As aptly stated by Jones (2012), the positive ripples emanating from peaceful children can positively influence their communities and extend far beyond.

This study, inspired by the work of Rebecca L. Oxford, clearly suggests that prospective language teachers have the potential to make helpful contributions to be a peacebuilding model in language classes by encouraging the building of peace among their students. The study also suggests that teacher educators are in a special position to foster competences such as empathy and emotional regulation in preservice teachers and increase their awareness of peacebuilding philosophy. Likewise, language teachers would certainly be in a unique position to promote more positive and peaceful mindsets through their teaching practice, peace activities, selection of words, and effective use of nonverbal communication in a positive way to bring about pedagogical transformations.

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Ethics Declarations

Competing Interests

No, there are no conflicting interests.

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