Chapter 21

Love and Language:
Peace Building in the Foreign Language Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Language is a necessary tool to understand the world. It can be used as an instrument of hate, harm, exclusion, and dehumanization or as an instrument of love, help, inclusion, and humanization. Language is a component of peace, and the language classroom can be a place where communicative competence is expressed through communicative peace. This chapter will explore the relationship between language acquisition, emotion, critical thinking, and peace building. It will demonstrate how applied peace linguistics can help teachers create empathetic and equitable foreign language classroom environments. The author will describe the characteristics of a language acquisition classroom that encourages both critical thinking and peace building. Strategies for teaching language learners by centering emotion during language activities, encouraging critical thinking, and creating peaceful connections among diverse learners will be suggested.

INTRODUCTION

In a world burdened with ongoing conflicts among nations, cultures, and diverse linguistic groups, often stemming from prejudice and miscommunication, peace building is an essential component of education. In order to build peace, the ability to communicate in thoughtful and peaceful ways is necessary. Because the foreign language classroom is a place where much more than language and literacy are learned, it is an ideal place for increasing connection, diversity, and peace building.

Language classrooms are often populated with learners from countries or cultures that are in conflict. Yet within the classroom, all learners are striving for similar goals. Language learners interpret, receive, and internalize classroom language through learning activities. Since language learning goes beyond the accumulation of words and grammar, sometimes influencing how a person sees themselves and others,

second language and literacy acquisition can influence both personal identity and global perception. Thus, the language classroom can be a place where stereotypes and biases are challenged and eradicated, a place where literacy and peace building are encouraged.

Research indicates that being multilingual impacts language choice and usage in emotionally charged situations. These may occur inside or outside of the classroom and be contained within classroom relationships, and interactions with strangers (Grabois, 1999; Grosjean, 1982; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Classroom language and literacy activities are important factors in the construction of global competency for multilinguals. Thus, it seems reasonable that language classrooms be places where a new language and the emotions it generates is practiced and used for humanizing and peace building purposes.

To teach a language is to delve into all the areas that are affected by the human condition. Because of this, teachers and learners benefit from being taught not only to communicate about peace, but how to communicate in peaceful ways. Gomes de Matos (2010) suggests that communicative peace is a deeply rooted feature of communicative competence and that adding the language of peace to the language classroom is necessary as part of global human rights. Language teacher education programs that prepare teachers to employ peace building language and literacy practices as part of communicative competence are functioning in globally competent and culturally relevant ways.

This chapter will explore why and how the foreign language classroom should incorporate peace building to provide an environment where language and literacy are developed in humanizing ways. The inclusion of emotion and the valuing of the first language in the classroom will be discussed, and suggestions provided for creating classrooms where critical thinking is encouraged through language acquisition activities that promote literacy through peace building. The goal is for the language classroom to become a place where language is acquired in a context that supports emotional expression, promotes peace, values diverse ways of knowing, and inspires critical thinking about global issues.
Objectives:

- Explore the concept of language classrooms as places that value and welcome the expression of emotion through learning activities centered on emotional topics.
- Discuss how Peace Linguistics can help teachers create culturally responsive classrooms that value diversity and promote literacy through peaceful language practice.
- Consider the language classroom as a context for building both communicative competence and communicative peace through critical and creative thinking.
- Describe how a language acquisition friendly activities are conducive to positive emotional responses, peace building, and increased connection among diverse learners

BACKGROUND

For the language classroom to be a place where not only language is practiced, but also a place that encourages the expression of emotion and peaceful communication, learners and teachers must be aware of the inherent worth of all world languages. While no scientific evidence exists that using a certain linguistic variety correlates with accomplishment or intelligence (Friedrich & Gomes de Matos, 2012), misunderstanding and violence can result from negative attitudes towards users of specific languages and dialects. Accent, vocabulary choice, and regional variation, when questioned or challenged, can lead to negative emotional responses from speakers, affecting classroom learning in harmful ways.

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