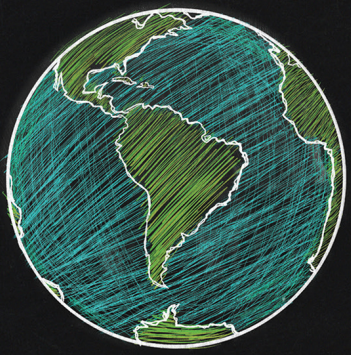
TEACHING ENGLISH FOR *Reconciliation*



PURSUING PEACE THROUGH
TRANSFORMED RELATIONSHIPS
IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

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Teaching English for Reconciliation: Pursuing Peace through Transformed Relationships in Language Learning and Teaching
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Chapter 1

Teaching for Conflict Resolution, Peacebuilding, and Reconciliation

Introduction

While writing this book, some of our friends and colleagues reacted with puzzled looks upon hearing the title *Teaching English for Reconciliation.* "What do you mean by that, and how do you do it?" was the sometimes unspoken sentiment. In this first part of the text, we attempt to provide the answer to the question of *why* by providing foundational understanding in three areas: the field of peace, reconciliation and conflict, the field of language and language learning, and Scripture.

First, however, let's take a moment to address the meanings of the words in the title of this book. *Teaching English* may be fairly straightforward. The English language is taught and learned all around the world, and is the de facto "lingua franca" today. Our use of this term includes any and all English learning contexts—from school children learning English in Bolivia to immigrants learning English in Canada to business executives learning English in Hong Kong. The teaching contexts could be formal educational institutions, or more informal classes in home or church environments. One term often used for this diverse field is TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). Everywhere that English is being learned, there is potential for coupling it with reconciliation!

This second term in the title, *reconciliation,* is the trickier term to define. While our understanding of this word will become clearer in each successive chapter, at the outset we define it as the

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restoration of relationships, particularly where there has been a history of harm, conflict, or misunderstanding. Even when a particular harm has not happened, reconciliation can occur as people engage in beliefs, attitudes, and actions which foster better relationships between individuals or groups. Various terms are used in different fields of research and practice that relate to this idea, including peacebuilding, peace education, and conflict resolution. We have these ideas in mind when we use the word "reconciliation." As Christians, however, peace between people is not our only concern with reconciliation. We also hope that our English students will experience the interrelated reconciliation with their Creator through the work of Jesus Christ, who gives us both the gift and the ministry of reconciliation. This aspect of *teaching English for reconciliation* will also show up in some of the chapters in this book.

Historical and Theoretical Foundations

The emerging fields of peace education and peacebuilding relate closely to teaching English for reconciliation. As others have pointed out, the idea of building peace through education is not a new idea and appears throughout history and in cultures around the world (Burns and Aspeslagh 2014; Keeves and Watanabe 2013). So, peace education did not start out as a comprehensive field, but has emerged from these different cultural and educational contexts, overlapping and intersecting the fields of education and peacebuilding. In some cases, educators are interested and working in peacebuilding, and in others, peacebuilders are working in education. The field of peacebuilding "seeks to prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from violence in all forms, even structural violence that has not yet led to massive civil unrest. At the same time, it empowers people to foster relationships at all levels that sustain them and their environment" (Schirch 2004). Educational programs for reconciliation and peacebuilding are varied and may have different goals, approaches, and concepts that include acquiring skills, understanding the causes of violence, changing attitudes, and even healing from trauma (Salomon and

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Nevo 2002). Teaching English for reconciliation encompasses the diversity and complexity of these fields as well.

An important value in peace education is empowering learners through creating meaning together and acting that meaning out in the classroom and beyond (Harris and Morrison 2012). This is a focus on building authentic relationships so that learners can work together to create positive change in their lives and communities. In education, this is often described as a constructivist approach which sees learners as actively involved in putting knowledge together and recognizing how the contexts and structures that surround them shape their learning. Paulo Freire's (2000) foundational work relates to this key aspect of participation and empowerment, highlighting the role of education in enabling people to make change within their contexts. In peace education, the educator's role in this process is less like a fountain of knowledge poured out to the students, and more like a facilitator and co-participant working to create a healthier and more peaceful society.

Within the field of English language teaching, integration of peace education and peacebuilding research and practice has started to take place in a variety of ways. In some contexts, English language teachers have used materials from global issues to address meaningful topics for conversation. In others, English language teaching has been shaped by critical education, which has played an important role in considering learner agency and empowerment, as well as larger issues of power and oppression related to language. Some researchers and educational leaders have used terms such as social justice or social responsibility to speak broadly of issues of language in relation to various forms of violence, oppression, and conflict. English language teachers have also been influenced by diversity education and multicultural education literature and training. The book *Social Justice in English Language Teaching* (Hastings and Jacob 2016) published by TESOL International Association demonstrates just how influential peace-related research and practice has become for English language teachers.

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Given the broad nature of the historical and theoretical foundations of teaching for peacebuilding, peace education, and social justice, there's much that can be applied to our goal of teaching English for reconciliation. But where do we start? The rest of this chapter will introduce five conceptual approaches to teaching English for reconciliation that are drawn from the fields of language learning and peacebuilding: relationships, issues, skills, methodologies, and systems.

Approaches to Teaching English for Reconciliation

These conceptual approaches to teaching English for reconciliation are summaries of what appear throughout the diverse fields of peace education and peacebuilding in relation to English language teaching. They are some of the main ways that peace practitioners and researchers envision building peace through education, and they relate directly to our discussion of the English language classroom. Each section begins with a description of the approach to provide some background and ideas for further reading, followed by ways the approach applies to English language teaching.

Relationships

The first approach that often emerges when educators notice the need for peace is a focus on people connecting face-to-face. The relationship approach suggests that reconciliation happens when people from across conflict lines meet in person and get to know each other as human beings. Based on Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, this does not mean that just by getting together people will solve their conflicts, but that under certain conditions, individuals from groups in conflict meeting face-to-face can help these groups move towards reconciliation. These conditions include a supportive and cooperative environment, equal status between members of conflicting groups, close enough contact, and a certain amount of motivation to overcome differences (Tal-Or, Boninger, and Gleicher 2002). Many projects use this as their underlying approach to creating a context for reconciliation. One example is a youth peace program in Israel and Palestine called

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the NIR School of the Heart, which brings together a high school from each cultural group for intensive science courses using English as a common language. Another is the cultural exchanges, run by Mennonite Central Committee, which invite young people to spend a year in another country, living with a host family and volunteering at a local organization. The hope is that these quality encounters will help to transform individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors towards the other.

For English teachers, this approach may provide an opportunity for reconciliation when we have multiple cultures in one class. Even if students are not necessarily coming from countries or regions in conflict, emphasizing good relationships can be a helpful way to encourage reconciliation across very different worldviews. For example, one of my (Cheryl's) classes had several students each from Saudi Arabia and from the Dominican Republic. At the beginning, there were quite a few judgmental comments from one group to the other and an argument regarding one of our discussion topics cropped up in class. Each group had very different viewpoints and there were a few vocal people on each side who made it known what they considered culturally acceptable or not. After the argument, I was more careful about the topics we brought up and tended to avoid ones that I knew would cause further difficulty. Instead, I focused on creating a sense of community in the classroom, using lots of activities in small groups and partners where they got to know one another on "safe" topics, and doing a few fun activities like participating in a field trip. Over the course of these activities, students gradually warmed to one another. During the break time, I even saw two girls, one from the Dominican Republic and one from Saudi Arabia, joking and laughing while watching a video, then walk away with arms linked. Toward the end of the semester, our textbook brought up another difficult topic. This time, however, there was a much more nuanced discussion. The strong relationships we had built in the class prompted students to use less dogmatic language like, "In my opinion," and hedging, such as "could be" or "might be," in their speaking. They were more willing to listen and by the end, came to the conclusion that

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