Nurturing cultures of peace with dialogic approaches to language and literacy

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This paper argues that violence in society can be reflected in the microcosm of the classroom, primarily taking the form of a range of bullying behaviours, and that TESOL educators can play a role in addressing conflict by connecting individuals and communities through a dialogic approach to TESOL. The article goes on to describe the nature of dialogic pedagogy and identifies its relationship to past paradigms of methodology, using as a framework three questions taken from Prator's (1979) Cornerstones of Method: (a) What is known about the nature of language? (b) What is known about the nature of the learner? (c) What are the aims of instruction? The paper concludes that a dialogic approach assists TESOL educators not only to support the learning of all students from a wide range of ability levels and ages but also to go beyond the classroom to view praxis as connecting with all communities with a global perspective for social justice and peace.

Keywords: *cultures of peace; dialogic approach*

Introduction

What does it mean to nurture cultures of peace? How can teachers support cultures of peace in their own classrooms? How can we create educational spaces that are safe, secure and peaceful? Perhaps at no other time in history have we looked to education and educators as crucial forces for advancing social, political and cultural enlightenment and global harmony. As tension, conflict and war increase around the globe, many see education as the last best hope for advancing world citizenship, global awareness and social justice. Eisler and Miller (2004) declared that "we believe it is now necessary to replace the culture of war and injustice that pervades so many

societies and nations with a culture of peace and compassion" (p. 1). Even as the USA is embroiled in a "war on terror" that is everywhere and nowhere, many of its citizens, including the authors, reject militarism, occupation and violence and are able to envisage a future of peace and unity because we see in education the potential for transformation.

Few would question that schools are repositories for the collective knowledge(s), values and ideas of peoples and nations. As a consequence, a major role of education institutions has always been the transmission and reproduction of dominant ideologies and systematic inequalities of a society. At the same time, however, there have always been teachers and schools that have been sources of resistance to oppression, war, racism and other injustices (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Kumashiro, 2002). Throughout history, in times of war and prosperity, schools have been used to promote the social and political agendas of nation-states. Eisler and Miller (2004) assert that "education must serve a purpose beyond economic productivity or personal triumph in the competitive marketplace" (p. 1). It is within the spirit of this call for change that we address how language teachers can use dialogic approaches in their own classrooms to foster peace and hope.

As we struggle to make sense of tragedy and countless acts of violence and brutality throughout the world, it is important to acknowledge the connection that acts of violence and intolerance have on children and youth. Children experience violence in several common settings where they grow and learn: their homes and communities, their schools and workplaces, and their care takers and the justice systems. The UN Secretary General's study on violence against children (2006) indicates that every day around the world millions of children experience violence. In one year, more than 53,000 children die as a result of homicide, and 150 million girls and 73 million boys are sexually abused. In the United States, each day 8 children are murdered, 3 million children each year are abused or neglected, and young people typically watch tens of thousands of simulated murders by the time they reach adolescence (*Children's Defense Fund*, 2009). Violence against children is pervasive and in the media, video games, film and television, violent acts are normalised as a way of life or presented as collateral damage.

Educators at every level have great challenges to face as political, economic and cultural globalisation has meant greater mobility for children and their families. We are indeed experiencing a time of unprecedented movement and displacement within and across borders. Increasing links between nations and the growth in more complex multicultural societies means that our classrooms are a microcosm of languages, races, religions, cultures, politics and histories of the wider society. As a result, children and youth are not isolated from, shielded against, or immune to the violence, destruction and losses caused by conflicts and war. According to UNICEF (2006), an estimated 2 million children have been killed, 6 million disabled, 20 million left homeless and over 1 million separated from their parents due to conflicts in the last decade. Surviving children are often displaced in unfamiliar places, apart from their families, community and country. War and conflict have indeed taken a toll on our children and youth and the sustaining impact is that classrooms often reflect mainstream ethnocentrism and hegemony that fuels a barrier to connecting individuals and communities.

In light of our goal, to provide a framework that supports educators in their efforts to build and sustain cultures of peace in schools and classrooms, it is necessary, first, to define what we mean by "a culture of peace". Stallworth-Clark (2007) summarised the 1998 United Nations definition of a culture of peace as "a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour, and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling the root causes of these problems" (p. 360). Therefore, individuals, groups and nations operating within a culture of peace engage in dialogue and negotiation to resolve and, we would emphasise, *transform* conflict.

To enhance our understanding of what it will take to plant seeds for peace, we turn to the growing field of peace studies for insight into how we can empower students to resolve their conflicts as we nurture a climate for peace that can be sustained well beyond schools. Tradition within peace theory teaches peace through three approaches: peace through strength, peacemaking and peace building (Harris, 2007). Peace through strength "relies on force and threats of force to deter violence or punish aggressors" (p. 350). In educational settings the second two approaches, peacemaking and peace building, are well suited to sustaining attitudes and actions that teachers can foster to promote the social and emotional wellbeing of children, especially those who are victims of bullying and other conflict among

students. Peacemaking applies communication skills to resolve conflicts. Peace building is proactive and promotes nonviolent means to address problems of violence.

Because our focus in this article is on building cultures of peace within schools and classrooms it is important to point out the kind of acts that threaten a climate of peace in educational contexts. Bullying is the common action that calls for peace building and peacemaking. Bullying, pecking orders and even hate crimes can disrupt a community of learners' commitment to embracing a culture of peace. Many of the tragic school shootings in the USA during the 1990s and the first decade of 2000 have been linked to acts of bullying which can take the form of violence, threats, name calling or cyber attacks. In the USA annually over five million elementary and junior high schools students are affected by bullying. It can, of course, take familiar forms such as the use of terms of abuse such as "poofter" by primary school children in Sydney, the hanging of nooses under a "whites only" tree in Jena, Louisiana, mimicry of a student's accent, or Arab student "othering" and Islamophobia in the UK (Rich & Troudi, 2006). For many children who are learners of English the taunts and insults specifically target their accent, first language, religious and cultural identities, as well as practices such as fasting during Ramadan or prayer rituals that govern their daily lives. Although bullying often starts outside classrooms, it nevertheless affects the quality of learning within the classroom as well as the safety of all students and their teachers. Bullying reflects students' racialised and gendered positioning and their abilities to negotiate new identities in schools (Kubota & Lin, 2009; Motha, 2006; Norton, 2000).

As TESOL educators we can assume the duck-and-cover position, choosing to ignore the political, economic and social fallout of war and conflict and their impact on children. As language and literacy researchers who are concerned with the role schools can play in conflict-ridden contexts, we wish to address these divisions and hierarchies of difference that divide individuals and communities. We offer instead *dialogic* approaches to TESOL (Wong, 2005) as a means of connecting individuals and communities.

We begin by utilising Prator's *Cornerstones of Method* (1979) as a heuristic to examine paradigm shifts in TESOL methodology that are relevant to designing curriculum for cultures of peace; from the 1960s, when the audiolingual method dominated the field, to twenty-

first century ideologies and practices. We discuss the shifts in linguistics concerning the nature of language from structural to dialogic and the shifts in psychology from behaviourist to cognitive to sociocultural. We then utilise an example from a middle school classroom to illustrate how the four features of dialogic pedagogy enable teachers to attend to the needs of diverse learners and resolve conflicts in the playground, in the hallways, and in schools and communities.

Cornerstones of method

As a precursor to Prator's *Cornerstones of Method*, it is important to note that we value his insistence that methodology should be based on the needs of our students and that instruction should revolve around the learner, rather than allowing the textbook to dictate syllabus. However, the passage of time has brought new understandings to those reflected in Prator's work of colonialism and power, race and class, and other cultural and social contexts with respect to language learning. For example, Prator (1968) took exception to those who would accept that other models of a language, as in the case of Indian or African American English, are valid. We do not. Taking into consideration that, to be fair to an author, his or her work must be judged within the historical context in which it is written, Prator need not be criticised for his views as colonialist or racist; rather we should use his work to understand the depth of colonial legacy within the discourses of English (Pennycook, 1998). At the same time, we should analyse and critique his views because all ideologies (racism, misogyny, tastes) reflect the ideas of the ruling classes, but do so in ways we ourselves were taught and are second nature to us. As educators we need to interrogate what we see as "normal" or "natural". Critical discourse analysis is a tool that can enable us, as teachers, to work our own positions of dominance and subordination to be better advocates for racial, linguistic and ethnic minority students.

Through his emphasis on meeting the needs of the learner, Prator's contributions to teaching and methodology are still valuable to us today, especially as newer critical and postcolonial paradigms emerge (Lin & Luke, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 2001). We remember that he encouraged teachers "to know about the history of teaching approaches and to not get caught up in the passing fad of the moment" (Wong, 2005, p. 6). He thought that teachers should become familiar with many approaches and methods and make informed decisions concerning which methods to utilise for the

benefit of their students. Three questions posed by Prator provide the springboard for what should be considered in the design of curriculum for language learners. We see Prator's questions as essential to understanding education's potential to liberate, resist, reinvent, empower and transform, sometimes in unexpected ways.

Cornerstones of Method was published in 1979. In it, Prator framed the cornerstones using three questions that should be considered in designing curriculum for English language learners. We believe these questions are informative in determining how we might develop instruction to foster cultures of peace:

  1) What is known about the nature of the language?
  2) What is known about the nature of the learner?
  3) What are the aims of instruction?

Prator believed that the discipline that would most inform questions of language was linguistics, and that the field that would provide most understandings of the nature of the learner was psychology. Since then, there have been major paradigm shifts and debates in linguistics and psychology from cognitive approaches and autonomous models of language and literacy (Street, 1984) to more social views of language learning that incorporate cultural and historical context (Grant, Wong, & Osterling, 2007).

Cornerstone 1: What is known about the nature of the language?
The paradigm shift implied in this first question reveals a shift from an emphasis on the phonology of language to a view of the native speaker as norm, associated with the audiolingual method. Prior to World War II, there were three approaches: the grammar translation method, the direct method, and reading approach, guided language learning and instruction. We focus our attention here on shifts in language teaching, beginning with the audiolingual method because of its influence on Prator. Audiolingualism stressed mimicry and memorisation and encouraged speakers of the language to avoid "fossilisation" or bad habits of language. The field of TESOL has moved from the audiolingual paradigm to the communicative paradigm with shifts in the views of the nature of grammar and language moving from formal ideal approaches to pragmatic views of language in use. The field of TESOL has evolved from Chomsky to functional systemic structural linguistics, from formal to pragmatic perspectives of language in use, and is transitioning from a focus on items of the language to discourse approaches to language.

The framework for analysing language, text and context as a social semiotic or system of meaning developed by Halliday and Hasan (1985), and Bakhtin's dialogics (1981, 1986), stand in sharp contrast to the sender/receiver or computer metaphors of language. Viewing language as a social semiotic system enables us to see the limitations of models of communication such as the computer input-output metaphor which has dominated the field of second language acquisition (SLA) (Hall & Verplaetse, 2000; Lantoff, 2000).

For Bakhtin, language is dialogism. We use language that we have heard from other voices. These voices manifest themselves in speech genres, stylised, predictable formats or scripts. They are also stratified and both support complicity in hierarchical, unequal power relations as well as resistance and challenges to the established order.

Cornerstone 2: What is known about the nature of the learner?
In understanding the second question, addressing the nature of the learner, we acknowledge there has been a paradigm shift from the behaviourist view of the learner to an emphasis on understanding the lived experiences of the learner as a conscious or sentient being. Prator saw the discipline of psychology as the field that enabled us to understand the nature of the learner or student. Today, in addition to psychology, we would look at anthropology, cultural studies, women's and ethnic studies, area studies (e.g. Latin American) to understand the nature of the student and would interrogate singular views of the "nature" of the student. More recent studies ask us to look at the construction of difference; rather than seeing any culture as being fixed or a series of traits, we need to recognise the differences within any culture and the taxonomies framing experience as emerging from "the natives".

Within the communicative approach there are two contending paradigms: cognitive and sociocultural. Cultural psychology, in contrast to cognitive psychology, explores the development of mind, rather than brain and physiological functions. Vygotsky (1978) is credited with a major breakthrough for the establishment of a social and cultural theory of mental functioning. His Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) has revolutionised how educators view learning and development. The ZPD is the difference between what a child can do independently and what he or she can do with the assistance of a more capable peer or adult. Vygotsky considered human thought to be more than reflexes, or responses to stimuli, an obvious contrast to empiricists such as Pavlov and Skinner. The three tenets of

sociocultural theory assert that learning is a social process, connected through dialogic interaction or learning in community; knowledge is not "in one's head" but is revealed through social practice or activity; and cognition is embodied in activity which is both physical and artistic.

Cornerstone 3: What are the aims of instruction?
Students who need to read scientific journals in English, but have no use for spoken English, will need a very different curriculum than students who want to learn English to be tour guides. If we want our students to be able to use English functionally in their daily lives we need to pose the question, "Where and when do students need to learn English?" Conducting a needs analysis, as Prator suggests, can assist in designing curriculum and instruction so that students can learn by doing or learn from life. Learning more about our students as individuals and the communities they inhabit enables us to imagine how our classrooms could integrate more *life* into language learning and teaching.

Four features of dialogic pedagogy
Having reviewed paradigm shifts in linguistics and psychology from a more formal to a more social view of language learning, we now return to dialogic pedagogy that connects individuals and communities and cultures of peace. Dialogic pedagogy is clearly the newest approach on the landscape of evolving conceptions of language teaching methodology. The aim of dialogic pedagogy is to support the inclusion of voices of those who have traditionally been excluded from academic discourse, reflecting new answers to Prator's old question: "What is the nature of the learner/student?" In TESOL we can contrast the communicative with the dialogic not only with respect to psychological approaches to language instruction, but also with respect to the theories of language. The communicative approach to foreign and second language learning emphasises that learners should be able to use the language. The dialogic approach overlaps with the communicative approach with regard to sociolinguistics, anthropological linguistics and functional systematic linguistics.

The four features of dialogic pedagogy are:
- Learning in community
- Problem posing
- Learning by doing
- Posing the question: "Knowledge for whom?"

Our students should be the starting point for curriculum or syllabus design. Important questions for us as curriculum designers are how we can get a deeper understanding of our students' realities and their families, how we can understand their dreams and aspirations for using English, and how we can realise their dreams and aspirations through cultures of peace. In the following section we explain briefly the features of dialogic pedagogy and present a classroom exemplar that captures the four features of the dialogic approach for establishing cultures of peace in classrooms.

Learning in community
Dialogic inquiry is a powerful resource for teaching and learning that is related to problem-based or issue-based learning. Dialogic inquiry uses the power of group dialogue to advance shared reflections, which, in turn, raises questions for further inquiry. By conceptualising the classroom as a *community of inquiry*, we build on the legacy of Vygotsky's theory of learning and development, and we can see how collaborative group work, dialogic knowledge building and an inquiry-oriented curriculum are essential and interdependent components.

Problem posing
Problem posing is an approach to teaching that was developed by Freire in the context of adult literacy instruction (1970, 1985). He used the problems in students' lives as the starting point for dialogue. This dialogue is one in which students reflect on their learning strategies from their own linguistic and cultural awareness as resources. Dialogic pedagogy is based on the premise that teachers should draw on learners' knowledge about themselves and their world as the basis for teaching. Moreover, it emphasises a process of inquiry and exploration. This inquiry and the process of problem posing reflect Vygotsky's psychological theories of learning including the idea of the ZPD. Dialogic inquiry through problem posing can help teacher researchers develop a richer knowledge base about students' backgrounds, motivations, cultures and the learning strategies they use.

Learning by doing
Students learn the language through actual communication. They experience assignments, activities and evaluation that emphasise the dialectic practice, dialogue, theoretical reflection and further transformed social practice. Speaking and writing are conducted with real audiences. Forms are taught with respect to their function in

actual communication. How can TESOL teachers make connections with communities?

Knowledge for whom?
The fourth feature of dialogical pedagogy asks who the intended recipients of knowledge are and what the knowledge will serve. These questions reveal Prator's stance on the nature of students and the aims of instruction and challenge us to interrogate educational participation with respect to multiple dimensions of language, culture and power (i.e. race, gender, class, ethnicity, and so on). Asking the questions "knowledge for whom?" or "who does knowledge serve?" includes critiquing textbooks and materials that support domination and symbolic violence against marginalised peoples (Grant & Wong, 2008). Incorporating and honouring indigenous metaphors for learning, local knowledge and epistemologies supports cultures of peace (Marika, 1999; Marika-Mununggiritj & Christie, 1995).

Teaching through a culture of peace
News media, history books and popular culture consistently focus on the results achieved by violence. Moreover, considerably more attention is given to violent struggles that fail to achieve their objectives than to nonviolent struggles that succeed, "hence, few people are aware of the alternative ways to wage serious efforts to resolve and transform conflict within cultures of peace" (Blair, Miller, & Tieken, 2009, p. 63). In the following example, all four features of the dialogic approach are employed to address the increasing problem of bullying which is a primary form of violence that invades the daily lives of children. In addressing bullying we see an opportunity for educators to break down the cultural conditioning that perpetuates reliance on violence and war. This assignment, and the interconnecting activities that evolve from it, demonstrate the potential for classrooms that foster an atmosphere where students feel, act, and know what it means to reside within a culture of peace.

The middle school ESOL students of a colleague, Ann-Marie Foerster Luu, in the state of Maryland, USA, designed a survey on bullying to ask the entire school population, students, staff and faculty if there was a problem with bullying at their school. While bullying is not an uncommon experience for children of this age, repeated incidences of bullying for one member of the class led, through discussion and student interest, to a community effort to overcome its impact through inquiry and self-empowerment. The students discussed the incidents that occurred and, with a little prompting and

guiding from their teacher, developed a full research project intended to help their friend. They not only developed their cognitive academic language through practice with what became a full academic study of the issue of bullying, they helped a classmate understand that he was not being bullied because of any personal faults. They moved the discussion of bullying from problem to solution: to one of advocacy with decision-makers for the entire student body.

These students found a way to connect individuals to communities in the face of a problem when others had advised them to "tough it out". They reported and published their research findings to the leadership of the school, social studies classes at each grade level and the Parent Teachers Association (PTA). Somewhere along the way, they learned how to create data charts in Excel and construct the passive voice for their research paper.

Cultures of peace: Connecting individuals and communities
Dialogic inquiry informs curriculum and teaching by giving teachers a better sense of their students' strengths and weaknesses as well as a better understanding of the issues that are of concern to them. Teachers become more aware of the communicative situations their students encounter because they integrate all four features of dialogic pedagogy into the design of the curriculum. The first three features of dialogic pedagogy are features that are Vygotskian sociocultural approaches to learning that support the learning of all students from a wide range of ability levels and ages. The fourth feature of dialogic pedagogy is connected to the first three by addressing structures of historic inequality. By asking "knowledge for whom?" or "who does knowledge serve?", the fourth feature of dialogic pedagogy engages with critical race theory and pedagogies of liberation. By looking at the students who have historically been excluded from education, for example women, the sons and daughters of indigenous people, slaves, those who have been colonised and whose voices have been absent from the curriculum, the fourth feature of dialogic pedagogy looks at power and marginalisation, and interrogates what is viewed as *normal.* As teachers, we must ask the political questions: Whose knowledge counts in schools today? How can we transform what counts as knowledge? Queer theory, postcolonial and womanist pedagogies are newer curricular frameworks that ask us to listen to voices from the margins to enrich our understanding of history from the ground up. Through conducting needs analysis utilising Prator's cornerstones of method, teachers fashion a curriculum that extends and enriches traditional curriculum to imagine other possibilities.

When teachers ask what help a student needs and how, as teachers, we can provide it, we embark on a journey of cultural and linguistic inquiry as learners.

Dialogic pedagogy has a central concern with power structures and their influence over the conditions of language learning. Within the dialogic paradigm, it is important to understand how these power structures manifest themselves within classroom practices. How can we expand our ways of knowing to include diverse epistemological foundations? The work of Moll (1990) and Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005), in utilising community funds of knowledge in curriculum and instruction, offers a model that we in TESOL can use to ensure that we have an additive approach to teaching the second language; that we build on the languages and cultures of our students in teaching English, rather than replace the home language with English in a subtractive way.

Finally, dialogic pedagogy enables us to go beyond the classroom and school to view our praxis as connecting with all communities with a global perspective for social justice and peace, to imagine a world without war, torture, land mines, violence, killings and destruction. As educators, it is important to create spaces for diverse perspectives to be heard. TESOL and bilingual educators, who promote heritage languages and infuse multilingual and multicultural perspectives, have a special role in standing up to bigotry, misogyny, racism and xenophobia.

Acknowledgements

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