



2020 Plenary Speaker • Rebecca Oxford

The Language of Peace Approach

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This article outlines the *Language of Peace Approach*, including six peace dimensions and other key concepts (Oxford, 2013, 2014). I draw upon ancient and current sources, ranging from the globally inspiring words of Lao-Tzu, the sixth-century BCE Chinese sage, to the 2021 book, *Peacebuilding in Language Education: Innovations in Theory and Practice* (Oxford, Olivero, Harrison, & Gregersen), with contributions from most continents.¹

Peace Dimensions in the Language of Peace

The six peace dimensions are inner, interpersonal, intergroup, intercultural, international, and ecological peace. This system of dimensions provides a common language with which L2 teachers, teacher educators, and

learners can talk about conflict and work toward peace. As shown above, inner peace is the hub, empowering individuals for action and reflection regarding any other peace dimension. Simultaneously, inner peace can be strengthened through compassionate involvement in any of the other dimensions, e.g., being interpersonally kind, working for social justice for all, promoting peace among cultures or nations, and working on solutions to environmental problems.

Inner peace, or harmony in the heart, was a key theme for the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu, mentioned earlier. He said that if there is no peace in the heart, there can be no peace elsewhere: the home, the town, the nation, or the world (Miall, 2000). Developing peace in the heart is possible



through meditation, music, writing, imagery, mindfulness, art, or doing good works for others and the world at large.

Interpersonal peace involves caring about family members, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers. It involves compassion, love, kindness, trust, and respect. Mother Teresa stated, “Love begins at home, and so from here—from our own home—love will spread to my neighbor, in the street I live, in the town I live, in the whole world. . . . Works of love are always works of peace” (Nichol, 2007: 53, 72–73, 91).

Intergroup peace is harmony among groups that are classified by race, age, gender, sexual orientation, intelligence, ethnicity, class, religion, (dis)ability, and other criteria. Fear of difference can stoke intergroup hostility, social injustice, or violence. Civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. (2001) encouraged groups and individuals to let go of fear and to work for love and unity.

Intercultural peace means harmony that exists among societies, each of which views itself as internally united by a common history (Boulding, 2000). The cultural iceberg is a visual metaphor devised by Hall (1976). The iceberg’s tip represents visible, conscious, external aspects of culture, such as marriage customs, clothing, and holidays. However, the larger part of the cultural iceberg is below the waterline, where invisible, unconscious, internal aspects (unspoken attitudes, values, and beliefs) exist. Peace cultures are inspired by our imagination of how things might be in a world of courageous compassion.

International peace is strongly challenged at this time. Waves of nationalism are rising, along with political impulses to opt out of international collaboration. Consider Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union and the United States’ withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement and the World Health Organization. Constructive nationalism allows pride and love of country while encouraging international cooperation (Judis, 2018), but “us versus them” nationalism reflects and breeds separation, sometimes spilling over into violence.

Ecological peace (Oxford et al.; Oxford & Lin, 2011) involves reconnecting with nature, actively caring for the environment, and taking positive steps to slow climate change. Ecological peace also involves effectively handling specific crises. For instance, some people dump plastic products into oceans, seas, and lakes, thereby killing much underwater life; some intentionally burn the Amazon rainforest, the “lungs of the world”; some let “space trash”, as

¹ This book, copyrighted as 2021, was published Oct. 31, 2020 and is now available.



big as a truck or as small as a paint fleck, to float in space; and some allow imbalanced agriculture to feed the rich and deprive or starve the poor.

Other Concepts in the Language of Peace Approach

Here I explain some additional concepts that support the Language of Peace Approach.

- *Conflict* (disagreement) is ubiquitous because people are different from each other. Skills of conflict management and resolution are learnable and teachable, as Bickmore (2011) demonstrated in elementary school classrooms. If well handled, conflicts can even be transformed into something exceptionally positive: they can generate respect for the values and hopes of the parties involved, spark greater problem-solving creativity, encourage productive change (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008), and foster peace cultures (Boulding, 2000). Such conflict transformation is a great part of *peacebuilding*, or creating harmony out of difference. Peacebuilding is important to L2 teaching, learning, and communication, which inherently involve linguistic, cultural, and cognitive-emotional diversity. See Oxford et al. for examples.
- Peacebuilding addresses not just conflict, but also *violence*. Violence means intentionally inflicting harm for one's own or one's group's purposes, either indirectly (through social injustice and discrimination) or directly, through harming a person or a group physically or in some other obvious way (Galtung, 1990). Peacebuilders dig deeply to uncover the root causes of violence and seek to transform them.

Conclusion

I explained above that the six peace dimensions help L2 teachers, teacher educators, and learners deal effectively and multifacetedly with inner and outer conditions. I showed how peacebuilding can transformatively deal with both conflict and violence. Insights from this article can be woven into L2 instruction and L2 teacher education, as richly illustrated by Oxford et al. Peace dimensions and peacebuilding go hand in hand with much-needed “global skills” (Mercer, Hockly, Stobart, & Lorenzo Galés, 2019), such as communication and collaboration, creativity and critical thinking, intercultural competence and citizenship, and emotional self-regulation and well-being.

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