

Andrew Finch, [aef@knu.ac.kr](mailto:aef@knu.ac.kr)

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## Peace Begins in the Classroom

Andrew E. Finch, Kyungpook National University, Republic of Korea

*Andrew Finch, Ph. D., is assistant professor of English Education at Kyungpook National University, Republic of Korea.*

### **Abstract**

It is the responsibility of teachers to model a peaceful society in their classrooms, so that root causes of corruption, institutional aggression, poverty and sickness may be examined in a safe microcosm of world society. Language classrooms are, however, known for promoting anxiety, stress and competition, rather than collaboration and sensitive awareness. This paper suggests how language teachers might identify and address sources of negative affect, and how they might promote humanistic values through appropriate learning materials and a non-threatening learning environment.

### **Introduction**

This paper proposes that peace is a desirable state for society as a whole, that this state has not been (and will not be) achieved by means of competitive and exclusive educational policies and methods, and that humanistic educational goals, approached in a holistic setting, offer a path to the realisation of such a state. This issue is not simply one of making life comfortable for the greatest number of people, for the current destructive potential of weapons technology and the corporate plundering of the world's resources have made it increasingly a matter of preserving the human race:

Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe. (H. G. Wells: <http://www.quotationspage.com>)

Now the whole question of the educator's role in dealing with planetary crisis becomes prominent. (O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 46)

Some type of holistic, or participating consciousness and a corresponding sociopolitical formation have to emerge if we are to survive as a species. (Berman, 1981, p. 23)

Establishing lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is keep us out of

war. (Montessori, cited in McCarthy [Ed.], 2001, p. 35)

## **The Present Situation**

The society in which we live is based upon aggression: the “market economy” espouses the survival of the fittest; international politics bows to the superiority of the aggressor; and competition is a fact of life, in which the winner takes all. Violence is the language of governments as they oppress weaker states, squeezing them of their natural resources in return for dubious aid and huge debts; genocide, domestic violence (human rights abuses), pollution, and corruption, are routinely overlooked as countries rush to share the spoils of global trade; developed countries supply arms to the rest of the world (America supplies 75% of the weapons used in current conflicts, [McCarthy 1997, cited in McCarthy 2001, p. 92]), and defense budgets dwarf those for education and welfare (the Pentagon receives \$700 million a day from Congress [McCarthy 1997. cited in McCarthy 2002, p. 92]). In the United States, 22,000 murders are committed annually, and the leading cause of injury for women is being beaten at home by a man. In Korea, official statistics tell us that one murder is committed every nine hours, and one rape every two hours (Korea Times, November 26, 2000). This situation extends to education, where children are continually educated for violence (McCarthy, 1999): history is delineated in terms of battles, and war-heroes are praised above peace-makers (Harris 2001, p. 37). When they go home, children learn violence in cartoon books, movies, the news media, the internet, and family relationships.

Budding members of society learn quickly that success is about being first in the cue, gaining more than others, and preserving rights and possessions through the use of force. There is always something to be gained, and always people (competitors) to take from, in fear that they might take something from us. Educational systems preserve these “realities” by equating academic success with competition and exclusionism. Thus, students who cannot (or will not) perform the intellectual contortions demanded of them for the purposes of gatekeeping (entrance to a “good” high school, university, job, etc.) are defined as failures by society. Going further in this investigation, we find that even students who have been defined as successful by the educational system “typically do not display an adequate understanding of the materials and concepts with which they have been working” (Gardner, 1993, p. 3).

Educational success according to the criteria of the university entrance test or a TOEFL score is not an accurate predictor of application, problem-solving abilities, critical thinking abilities, or even of team-work. The system that has preferred industrial pragmatism over the original humanistic definitions of education has produced and perpetuated a selectionist, intellectualized, competitive society, in which consumerism is the only mark of success. In doing this, education has failed even by its own standards (Gardner 1993), and society is

violence. While technological advances have produced jetliners, cable TV, the internet, and travel to the moon, 75% of the world population have no safe drinking water, the majority of the world live on less than 2 dollars a day, and disease, conflict, and hunger are the norm for most of humanity. In other words, the present system of government and education has not brought peace.

## **Peace in the Classroom**

The concept of the EFL classroom as a non-threatening learning environment is based on the premise that the classroom is a microcosm of society (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 163; Lantieri & Patti, 1996, p. 46), and that the recognition and exploration of social problems and impediments to learning in the “safe environment” of the classroom will promote development of the social mores and qualities (positive self-images, a sense of responsibility for self and others, a capacity to trust others [Harris 2001, p. 42]) which are essential for future world citizens. This premise follows from a series of assumptions:

1. state education systems have not been successful in producing informed, responsible, creative members of society (Gardner, 1993, p. 5);
2. state education systems have focused on intellectualism and competition, rather than on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (emotional management, interdependence, personal/social responsibility) (Krishnamurti, 1992, p. 2);
3. teachers need to teach according to their beliefs (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 54);
4. teachers are agents of social change (Finch, 2002, p. 52);
5. classrooms should model a society based on mutual respect, trust and accountability, promoting responsibility and collaboration above individuality, exclusion and competition (Harris 2001, p. 42);
6. a humanistic perspective to education, implicitly present in holistic syllabi, non-threatening learning environment, and appropriate learning materials, empowers students to think about the world and their place in that world (Legutke & Thomas, 1991, p. 45);
7. a teacher/student (T/S) relationship built on mutual respect (T-S, S-S, S-T) impacts favorably on future relationships in work and elsewhere (long term), in addition to enhancing learning in school (short term) (Siccone & López, 2000, introduction);
8. a peaceful language-learning environment reduces affective filters in the classroom (short term), and prepares students to become responsible members of society (long-term) (Finch, 2001, p. 145);

Firstly, the classroom can be transformed into a non-threatening learning environment (Finch 2001) in which students can learn to become responsible members of society. With the teacher present as counselor and mentor, students can learn social skills (e.g. collaboration) through

trial and error, reflecting on their mistakes, and turning them into learning experiences. Counseling skills (Kelly, 1996, pp. 95-96), take on crucial importance for the teacher in this situation, being essential for the development of a stress-free, mutually respecting learning community. In such an environment, the growth of the “whole person” is primary, with language acquisition following naturally, as an outcome of personal and social growth, and the role of the teacher/counselor becomes one of:

1. encouraging realistic expectations about accuracy and errors (Foss & Reitzel 1988);
2. offering training in affective strategies, to help students manage anxiety and improve performance (Crookall & Oxford, 1991);
3. reassuring students that they are not alone in their affective reactions and that these feelings are normal (Foss & Reitzel 1988; Campbell & Ortiz 1991);
4. showing that the teacher/evaluator understands the tension caused by being anxious about appearing anxious (Phillips 1992, p. 20);
5. employing “alternative” evaluations involving partner and small-group work, interviews, problem-solving, and role-plays, which are usually enjoyed by students (Phillips, 1992, p. 21; Young 1990) and can reduce anxiety-raising competitiveness (Bailey 1983) and apprehension (Foss & Reitzel 1988);
6. developing a stress-free climate, helping students to relax, developing peer-support networks and promoting self-confidence (Moskowitz, 1978; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Legutke & Thomas, 1991, p. 35; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). (Finch, 2001, p. 145)

Secondly, teachers are social, affective and cognitive role-models for their students, who pick up verbal and non-verbal clues from the teacher and often discuss these outside of class. If the teacher appears distrustful, arrogant, autocratic, nervous, bored, or uncommitted, students observe this, and will react accordingly. On the other hand, if the teacher offers trust, respect, honest concern, and a passionate love of learning, students will react positively.

Thirdly, a number of learning environment deficiency analyses have been devised by researchers. These questionnaires are designed to examine teacher/student perceptions about the learning environment and to identify differences and preferred changes. An example of such a questionnaire is the Classroom Environment Scale (CES, Fraser, 1986), which tries to discover how students and teachers perceive the learning environment. Questions focus on affective aspects of classroom activities and on T-S roles. Another example is the Classroom Learning Environment (CLE, Pine & Boy, 1977), which looks at the classroom from a humanistic perspective, focusing on personal identity, trust, love and concern. A third classroom deficiency analysis is the Classroom Environment Questionnaire (CEQ, Fraser, 1986), which is concerned more with classroom management, and is in two parts: *preferred* and *actual*. In the first part, students and teachers record the sort of learning environment they

would like to experience, and in the second part, they give their perceptions of the environment as it actually is. This data can provide feedback, not only on discrepancies between the *preferred* and the *actual*, but also on differences in perception between teachers and students. A fourth example is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS, Horwitz et al., 1986), which examines causes of student anxiety. These questionnaires focus on the learning environment itself, on the assumption that “without a positive learning atmosphere, students may well gain little or nothing from new curricular infusions” (Mantle-Bromley, 1995, p. 383), and also in view of Ely’s claim that:

[there is] considerable evidence to support the general proposition that the nature of classroom environments does have an important influence on students’ achievement of cognitive and attitudinal goals ... often beyond that attributable to student characteristics such as pretest performance, general ability or both. (Ely, 1986, p. 118)

Other needs analysis-related issues that might be examined in the language class include learning preferences, beliefs about language learning, teacher needs, and student needs. Whatever the issues, it is important that students and teachers participate equally in their examination, so that differences in perception may be identified and feedback utilized formatively.

### **Peaceful Learning Materials**

Appropriate materials play an important role of the promotion of peace, in terms of format, content, and underlying assumptions. Peaceful language learning materials should be directed at the learner, and should ... :

- empower the student as an autonomous learner;
- promote self-esteem;
- reduce affective filters;
- develop personal and social responsibility;
- include linguistic goals;
- include learning-for-life goals;
- encourage personal reflection on cognitive, affective and social achievements.

While it can be claimed that language learning materials to date have largely ignored these factors (Sinclair, 1996, p. 149), it can also be said that humanistic learning materials *per se* have paid little attention to learning content in their “experience-activating exercises” (Legutke & Thomas 1991:64). These two concerns can be brought together by combining Siccone & López’s (2000, introduction) fourfold approach to humanistic learning materials (interdependence, independence, social responsibility, personal responsibility), with Tudor’s

(1996) three main target areas for learner training instruction: i) language learning and language learning processes; ii) language structure and language use; iii) the learners themselves as language learners.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that: i) a return to humanistic guiding principles of education is essential in order to prepare students for society by developing in them qualities of personal and social responsibility - qualities that will empower them to positively address root causes of discrimination, corruption, poverty, sickness, and violence; ii) that a non-threatening learning environment is a practical and effective setting for humanistic language learning; and iii) that learning materials can be designed to incorporate both humanistic and linguistic goals.

While many would agree that a humanistic approach to education needs to be present in every aspect of the learning environment, from government policy making, to program design, syllabus considerations, T-S/S-S/S-T relationships, learning materials and alternative assessment, it is nonetheless easy to despair of ever realizing such goals, in view of the exam-driven lessons EFL teachers are often required to supervise. However, governments are beginning to acknowledge that education of the heart is essential for the growth of a healthy society, and official policy documents, such as the Korean 7th National Curriculum, are describing educational objectives in terms of “the ability to achieve an independent life and acquire the qualifications of democratic citizens, and to be able to participate in the building of a democratic state and promoting the prosperity of all humankind” (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2001, p. 3). Teachers can therefore take heart from such developments, and can, in addition to setting up their own peaceful learning environments, push for humanistic and holistic reforms in education, safe in the knowledge that their demands are sanctioned by Ministry policy documents.

If we are to reach peace, then we must teach peace. (McCarthy, 2001, p. 35)

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