

# A PROPOSAL TO COMBINE COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND PEACE EDUCATION IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE SUBJECT

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## AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

## ABSTRACT

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The present article offers a proposal for teaching using cooperative activities within the framework of peace education in a foreign language subject. The said activities imply that students work in groups in order to accomplish a common goal, and therefore they are involved in the teaching-learning process. This research thus aims at offering a pedagogical proposal based on peace education by showing that the principles of peace education are useful for students to be successful in cooperative activities because they deal with global issues and social and peace-related content. They also promote negotiation, peaceful conflict resolution, dialogue and respect for diversity.

The study reveals that the combination of peace education and cooperative learning allows students to acquire not only content but also social competences such as critical thinking, cooperation, empathy, assertiveness, conflict resolution and active listening, among others. The combination of cooperative learning and peace education offers the opportunity to use pedagogy to produce social transformation because it promotes the teaching of values throughout the teaching-learning process. In this sense, peace education can contribute to developing global and human values so that students can make a contribution to improving the world.

**Keywords:** Peace education; cooperative learning; teaching-learning process; competences; global issues.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

We live in a globalised society, and the university needs to offer answers to the demands of the twenty-first century. Peace education (PE) is a pedagogical proposal that can contribute to improving not only the teaching-learning process but also the world. In this sense, teachers concerned with social education and social justice will find in PE a philosophy and a model to follow because it promotes the notion that students can be active agents in social change [1,2,3]. At the same time, PE allows teachers to guide the process of change and offer tools to facilitate it. This approach also makes students aware of the relationship between what they learn in the classroom and what they do in their social life.

Consequently, the traditional role of students as passive learners is modified. Students are now active participants who take decisions and establish connections between what they learn and the labour market [4]. As a result, students, who are twenty-first-century citizens, need to develop and to acquire skills such as critical thinking, cooperation, empathy, assertiveness, conflict resolution and political literacy.

PE is also a proposal to deconstruct power in the classroom. A classroom framed in the principles of PE highlights that teachers and students share the responsibility in the teaching-learning process, so that the traditional role of teachers as authority and source of knowledge is substituted by that of facilitator, guide, coach, and tutor, among others [5].

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Teachers who want to promote PE in their classrooms should know that their way of behaving is the main message [6,7,8,9]. Moreover, teachers need to solve conflicts in a way that students can benefit from the conflict and learn that negotiation and dialogue are key aspects in overcoming difficulties. When teachers assume the role of peace educators, they try to find creative and non-violent ways of solving conflict. This role implies being aware that the way of behaving is the main and most significant message [10].

There are many conflicts in the world, and it is necessary to learn how to solve them. The nature and philosophical foundations of PE are normally pointed out by contrasting them with the conflicts that take place in all areas of society and in educational environments [11,12,13,14, 15,16,17].

My teaching proposal is based on cooperative learning, which means that students work together in order to accomplish a common goal. Working in groups requires the capacity to negotiate, take decisions and solve problems, all of which need dialogue [18]. In this sense, it is essential to promote peaceful interaction in the classroom [19,20,21,22] so that students learn that any conflict can be solved in a peaceful way. Conflict resolution skills can be seen as one of the central components of PE [23]. Salomon and Cairns [24] highlight the key points in this kind of education:

The various definitions and conceptions, [...], share in common the idea that peace education is to negotiate violence and conflict and to promote a culture of peace to counter a culture of war. Underlying this common denominator is the assumption that peace education, although it is to serve other goals, such as human rights and democracy, is primarily an educational process operating within the context of war, threat, violence, and conflict that addresses attitudes, beliefs, attributions, skills and behaviours.

Cooperative learning has a lot to offer to promote peace education and non-violence in the classroom, due to its emphasis on group skills, its promotion of peer support, the necessity of sharing responsibilities and the importance of cooperation, as opposed to competition and oppression, as Harris and Morrison [3] make clear:

Teachers who promote non-violence in their classes draw upon the principles of cooperative learning. In their classes they set up democratic learning communities where students provide each other feedback and support so that they become proficient

in techniques of group process. Such classes, based upon positive interdependence among group members, teach individuals to care for others.

This article presents a teaching proposal based on using cooperative activities that deal with social topics to make students think about the changes necessary in the world. Having PE as a framework offers the opportunity of using pedagogy to produce social transformation because PE promotes the teaching of values throughout the teaching-learning process [25].

PE can contribute to improving the situation in the world because it promotes egalitarian, respectful relations so that living together is peaceful and enriching. In addition, it promotes the social development of the human being and solving conflicts in a peaceful way. According to Bajaj [26] : “(1) the process of education can impart in all students social ‘goods’, in this case, the skills and values needed for peace and social justice; and (2) once given the relevant information and experience, individual students can be agents in promoting local, national, and international peace.”

The article is divided as follows: Section 2 offers the theoretical background with some of the main ideas promoted by PE. The next section concentrates on contextualising the study by paying attention to the main objectives, the context of this study, the participants and the methodology. Section 4 describes some cooperative activities that contribute to promoting PE in a foreign language subject. The article ends with a discussion and conclusions based on the study.

### **1.1 Theoretical Background**

In 1945, the United Nations was established to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to reaffirm faith in the [...] dignity and worth of the human person [and] in the equal rights of men and women, to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom [...]” [27].

The founding of the UN in 1945 contributed much to teaching about social problems such as poverty, racism, gender discrimination, and war. Consequently, PE teachers encourage students to examine key social problems, which contributes to the development of emotional education and to critical thinking when paying attention to what might be behind these problems: the possible interests, discrimination, injustice, etc.

PE has developed as a means to achieve these goals. It is education that is “directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. It promotes “understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups” and furthers “the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” [28].

Many teachers practice PE without calling it by name. Historically, in various parts of the world, PE has been referred to as Education for Conflict Resolution, International Understanding, and Human Rights; Global Education; Critical Pedagogy; Education for Liberation and Empowerment; Social Justice Education; Environmental Education; Life Skills Education; Disarmament and Development Education, among others. These labels illuminate the depth and diversity of the field. Using the term *peace education* helps coordinate such global initiatives and unite educators in the common practice of educating for a culture of peace.

PE involves putting into practice a pedagogy that contributes to developing peace in the world. One of the key ideas of PE is the promotion of non-violent means of solving conflict in the classroom and the promotion of values towards peace [19]. Harris and Synott [25] provide a clear definition of PE: “By ‘peace education’, we mean teaching encounters that draw out from people their desires for peace and provide them with nonviolent alternatives for managing conflicts, as well as the skills for critical analysis of the structural arrangements that legitimate and produce injustice and inequality”.

PE promotes respect of diversity, active participation and equal opportunities [29,30]. In this sense, Danesh [19] offers an “Integrative Theory of Peace (ITP) based on the concept that peace is, at once, a psychological, social, political, ethical, and spiritual state with expressions at intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, international, and global areas of human life”.

There have been many studies on PE in the last decade, to point out the advantages and principles of such education [29,19,3,31,32,33]. Some authors concentrate on sharing practical experiences framed in PE [34,17,35]. Most of the studies on PE have concentrated on the importance of this pedagogy in conflict resolution [36,37,38,39,40,41,16]. There are also studies that highlight how PE can contribute to a higher quality of education in the future [42,43].

All these studies confirm that PE implies respecting the environment and all forms of life. That is why it is an appropriate framework to promote integration in the classroom and to observe the differences between human

beings as opportunities to be enriched. In addition, PE allows working with the skills necessary to solve problems. Consequently, peace is built through pedagogy, because ethics and morals are constantly present in the classroom so that students share their best. Moreover, this pedagogy involves individual and group responsibilities.

A central and key idea of PE is building and equalising relationships, humanizing others, and moving towards an ideal state of peace and understanding [44,45]. It also promotes the acquisition of a nonviolent disposition, conflict resolution skills and the promotion of a culture of peace that includes human rights. The purpose of an educational model based on PE should be to help students be active citizens in society. In this way, they can contribute to the development of a better world by cultivating a consciousness of the social, economic and political problems of society in order to understand them and improve them. As a result, PE includes concepts of care, compassion, and connectedness; therefore, peace educators are committed to teaching respect for cultural diversity.

Ian Harris [46] identifies ten goals for effective PE: to appreciate the richness of the concept of peace, to address fears, to provide information about security systems, to understand violent behaviour, to develop intercultural understanding, to provide for a future orientation, to teach peace as a process, to promote a concept of peace accompanied by social justice, to stimulate a respect for life, and to end violence.

## **1.2 Contextualising the Study**

### **1.2.1 Objectives and context**

The main objective of this paper is to introduce PE into a foreign language subject by the topics used in written and oral activities. This article also establishes links between PE and cooperative learning. It describes ways of promoting a peaceful atmosphere of work in the groups that have to prepare cooperative activities. Consequently, this involves the promotion of a peaceful way of solving conflict.

English Language V is a core subject in the degree English Studies (*Grado en Estudios Ingleses*) at the University of Alicante. It is a six-credit subject, so students spend 60 hours in the classroom and are required to work an additional 90 hours. During this time, students have to work individually and in groups, inside and outside the classroom, in order to acquire the competences established in the subject.

The teacher decided at the beginning of the academic year that the principles of PE framed the teaching-learning process so that students could benefit from this pedagogical proposal. The main objective of this subject is that students develop the five skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and interaction) for advanced students of English, (level C1). This subject was taught four hours per week, one hour of theoretical work and three of practical. Students were introduced to the main aspects of academic writing in the theoretical class. The teacher explained the main characteristics of different text types and their relationships with the context in which they are used, the main cohesive devices in English and the structure of the academic essay. In the second hour, students were asked to prepare an oral presentation on a social topic of their choice.

The next hour was used to revise grammar. A week in advance, students were asked to prepare the topic suggested by the teacher, e.g., the use of articles, reported speech, the passive voice, or adverbs. Every grammar lecture started with a brief theoretical explanation of the grammatical topic under study. Thereafter, the exercises that students had prepared at home were corrected, and the teacher could observe both how students could put their grammatical knowledge into practice and the main difficulties. The teacher always asked students how the grammatical point under analysis could be explained at the high school level, so that they could benefit from as many opportunities as possible to act as teachers in the classroom. The last hour of the week consisted of a debate organised by the group that had given the oral presentation in the previous class. The topic was the same as that of the oral presentation. This activity gave students the opportunity to promote interaction in the classroom and to use different techniques so that they could participate in the debate, expressing their opinions and developing their critical skills.

### **1.2.2 Participants**

There were 125 students registered in the academic year 2014-15; around 85% were women and around 15% were men. Most of the students were 21 years old. All these students have studied English in the previous 2 years of the degree. The level they achieve in the first year is B1 while B2 is the level they reach in the second year.

Many students wanted to be high school teachers, and for that reason the lecturer made them think about the methodology and the pedagogic techniques used in the classroom so that they could apply them in their future career. There were also students who wanted to work as translators and interpreters or in international companies.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The teacher decided at the beginning of the academic year that the principles of PE framed the teaching-learning process so that students could benefit from this pedagogical proposal. The methodology used in the subject was based on interaction so that students were the protagonists during the teaching-learning process.

Due to the number of students registered in the subject, students were asked to create groups of five people in order to prepare the cooperative activities proposed. Moreover, the teacher wanted to highlight the acquisition of social competences because of their relationship with the principles of PE. For this reason, social content was introduced in the classroom through the selection of texts and the topics used for discussion.

Moreover, curriculum topics for discussion and materials were chosen taking into consideration the principles of PE. This means that the topics covered in the subject have to do with a culture of peace. Consequently, students read and analyse texts with social content such as feminism, immigration, sexism, poverty, racism, and homophobia. These texts promote critical thinking (promotion of multicultural understanding) and offer the opportunity to show respect for others who are culturally different.

The main cooperative activities that students had to carry out during the semester were the following: the cooperative analysis of texts connected with peace education and global issues, the preparation of a cooperative oral presentation and a cooperative debate based on social topics, the evaluation of the oral presentation done by another group and the participation in two group tutorials.

The designed activities involve the subject being student-centred rather than teacher-centred, i.e., students are the protagonists of the teaching-learning process and are therefore crucial when taking decisions in the classroom. This contributes to the creation of a peaceful dynamic and to effective language learning [47]. Due to space limitations in this paper, in the next section we only explain in detail only two cooperative activities and their relationship with the principles of PE.

## **3. EXAMPLES OF COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE PEACE EDUCATION**

Engaging in cooperative activities in a language classroom implies that students work in small groups in order to accomplish a common goal. This way of working is very useful because it offers students the opportunity not only of learning content but also of learning social

competences such as active listening, conflict solving, and taking decisions or leadership. Moreover, social topics were used to contribute to social consciousness and critical thinking. In this way, students will be able to apply these competences in the labour market, and therefore there is a connection between the classroom and real life. Following Kruger [21]: “I argue that TESOL teachers should add dimensions of social consciousness to their curriculum in order to equip learners with the necessary skills to contribute positively to both local and global society. One possible way to achieve this would be to introduce concepts of peace education to the curricula.”

Due to the fact that students were asked to work in groups from the beginning of the semester in order to carry out some of the compulsory activities of the continuing evaluation process, PE was chosen as the framework for all educational activities. The teacher was able to explore the distribution of power in the groups in order to create an environment of peace. In this sense, PE offers the opportunity of working on the social, moral and emotional aspects of students, as the description of the following activities will make clear.

### **3.1 TEXT ANALYSIS AND ESSAY WRITING**

One of the main aspects of the subject English Language V is the development of writing skills. For this reason, at the beginning of the semester, the teacher explained the main cohesive aspects of English (reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion) and examples of their use in authentic texts. Next, students were asked to read and analyse the said cohesive devices in texts with social content based on global issues, e.g., ecology, racism, equality, fair trade, in order to work on critical thinking and some of the principles of PE such as the importance of respect for diversity and the vindication of equal rights for every human being. Global issues make students think about different topics that affect humanity in different parts of the planet and broaden students' perspective. They must contrast what they know about the topics with what they learn by studying aspects of these issues in different countries.

The teacher selected some texts on two important global issues such as racism and gender equality from English newspapers, so that students could work with recent texts from the press to analyse the way the said cohesive devices were used to express meaning. An important activity related to racism consisted of the analysis of the discourse of Martin Luther King's speech “I Have a Dream” in the same groups that had prepared the oral presentation and the debate. Each group was given some paragraphs of the said discourse to analyse the main cohesive devices explained in class and to observe the

main discursive strategies used by the author to create meaning and add vividness and feeling to discourse. The teacher pointed out that the expressive language used in the discourse pronounced in 1963 makes it important for its social message many years later. This activity highlights cooperation because each group had to analyse only some paragraphs and depend on the other groups to complete the analysis.

The texts on gender issues were on the unequal situation for women in different parts of the world, just for being women, on gender violence and on the importance of women's physical appearance in advertisements. Students had to analyse both the importance of the cohesive devices used to express meaning and the image of the women. Therefore, at the beginning of the semester, the teacher explained the basic principles of visual grammar following the model proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen [48], so that students could read the visual and the written text because they go together. Then, the teacher presented an outline with the main linguistic and structural characteristics of the different texts types and their social purpose.

At the end of the semester, students were asked to select a text on gender in which there was a visual apart from written text. They had to write an essay based on the text. This meant that students had to put into practice what they had learned during the semester: to analyse the main cohesive and visual devices in a text on a social topic. Moreover, they had to write an essay based on a text of their choice so that they could put into practice the competence of taking decisions and being leaders in their learning process. They had to use the different cohesive devices in their essay so that the text was coherent and cohesive. In addition, they had to express their opinion and be critical with the text under analysis in order to work on critical thinking and establish relationships with the different aspects on gender discussed in the classroom.

### **3.2 THE COOPERATIVE ORAL PRESENTATION**

At the beginning of the semester, students were provided with the necessary skills to organise, evaluate, and critique information so that they could be critical with the texts used in the subject (see the previous section) and with their group in oral presentations and debates. The teacher selected some videos and texts that could be improved so that students could criticise them in a respectful way before they had to be critical with the work of their classmates.

The teacher used the first three classes to explain the main characteristics of an effective oral presentation using Prezi and PowerPoint presentations. Different examples of the main types of oral presentations were offered using videos and DVDs in the classroom. At the beginning of the semester students organised themselves in groups of five. The main guidelines to prepare the presentations were the following: they should be based on a social topic and they had to incorporate different visual devices such as videos, DVDs, pictures or music so that students could put into practice a pedagogical application of technology in teaching. The presentation had to be cooperative, i.e., it should not consist of different disconnected sections prepared by each student but of sections that were clearly connected and organised logically so that the final product was coherent and concise. Moreover, each student had to talk for seven minutes. In this way, their capacity to summarise and to manage time was also observed. Finally, it was compulsory that, on the day of the oral presentation, students gave the teacher an outline with the following information: the names of the group members, an index with the main sections of the oral presentation, a section devoted to vocabulary with at least ten words they had learnt preparing the topic, and the main bibliographical references used to prepare the oral presentation following the APA guidelines. They also had to include a section with questions to be used in the cooperative debate that would take place in the next practical section.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The cooperative activities presented in the previous section point out the application of the main principles of peace education, such as: integration, respect for diversity and peaceful conflict solving [49,50,51,52,53]. In this sense, it is essential that students observe the acquisition of different social competences and the different ways of gaining interpersonal effectiveness that they can use in the labour market if they acquire competences such as the following, doing the cooperative activities presented in previous sections: using bibliographical sources and doing research in groups so that they can interact and negotiate what information should be included in a determined task, such as the oral presentation and how it should be organised; developing attitudes of responsibility in group work, dividing the tasks in a way that everyone can contribute ideas, promoting balanced participation and consensus when taking decisions; defending arguments orally in English in front of people; encouraging reflexive capacity and defending the work done from possible criticisms; being able to apply theoretical knowledge of English grammar to practical and real situations in the classroom; being able to communicate in clear written and spoken English;

working as autonomous and critical learners and undertaking research on some proposed topics.

All the competences mentioned in the previous paragraph are joined to the principles of PE because students are encouraged to care for the welfare of others inside and outside the classroom, to unmask the asymmetry of power while working in groups so that positive leadership is developed, and to find peaceful ways to solve conflicts. Moreover, the principles of PE have been combined with cooperative learning because our teaching proposal believes that students must learn values and social competences apart from content. In fact, PE can contribute to develop global and human values so that students can contribute to making the world better.

In addition, designing cooperative activities such as the ones described in the previous section yields positive results that allow the establishment of relationships between the classroom and real life for different reasons: a) Cooperative learning promotes creativity. For example, students have to be creative to organise the oral presentation or to develop their ideas in an essay. Creativity will be necessary in the labour market in order to offer creative solutions or perform a determined task. b) It is necessary to negotiate, to take decisions and to understand others' points of view in order to organise the oral presentation successfully. These are essential skills in the labour market where people work in teams in order to accomplish a goal. Sharing different points of view can often enrich the task that needs to be accomplished. c) The work of all group members is essential; everybody has something positive and something to contribute to in order to accomplish the goal. For instance, the analysis done by all the groups was necessary to understand Martin Luther King's speech "I Have a Dream" because without the analysis of all the paragraphs the meaning is not complete.

Organising the subject based on the principles of PE and on social content facilitates students' thinking about realities and situations in the world that might be different from their own. This means that students develop social responsibility and global citizenship [54,55], following Kruger [21]: "[...] peace education can be introduced into the TESOL classroom through introducing global issues and peace-related content into the curriculum. Through doing this, teachers provide learners with the opportunity not only to consider, understand and appreciate others but to become part of a global civil society."

Moreover, the subject applies the principles of PE whenever there are problems in the groups, because conflict in the classroom and in groups is addressed peacefully. Students disagreed on the topics to prepare the

oral presentation, on the way to organise the information, on the different resources of information and on task division among others.

The effects of PE in the activities done by students taking into consideration this pedagogical framework are clear: PE transforms worldview and behaviours, reduces prejudices, improves group relationships, gives an ethical approach to education, reduces conflicts and therefore creates an atmosphere of peace [56,29,36,34,40,41,31,33]. The cooperative activities described help students to develop their interpersonal skills because teachers empower them by giving students the opportunity to be critical and express their thoughts and impressions in a peaceful way. They also develop self-awareness and creativity in the way they interpret the texts under analysis. Consequently, promoting the development of the said skills in the classroom calls for emotionally competent teachers that can guide students, as Zins et al. [57] make clear: "Teachers influence their students not only by how and what they teach but also by how they relate, teach and model social and emotional constructs, and manage the classroom".

The teacher of the subject English Language V had received training in PE and believes that the classroom has to be a place where peace is realised in different ways. The subject promotes the integration of all students, all cultures and all opinions. The teacher has internalised the principles of PE [58,59] and consequently, she highlights the importance of respecting others' opinions during the question period after the oral presentations and in the debates. Integration is also pointed out by promoting group work and skills of organisation, by negotiating and taking ethical decisions in groups, for example, equal work for all group members.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The subject English Language V incorporates the principles of PE in teaching practices. It also introduces peace-related content into the curriculum with the topics of the texts selected for the analysis and with the social topics students have to research and discuss in the classroom in the oral presentations and debates.

PE has been used as the framework for all educational activities. For example, the texts selected contribute to the task of worldview transformation. The texts used for the analysis intend to contribute to the development of critical thinking and respect for the rich and unique cultural heritage of the human beings represented in the texts under analysis. Moreover, PE influences the way interpersonal relationships are established in the classroom, because teachers and students share

responsibility. In essence, peaceful interaction and nonviolent conflict solving are promoted.

The activities presented in this paper make clear that PE highlights an active pedagogy that favours participatory practices in which students become the protagonists of the teaching-learning process. Therefore, students develop their human capacities for peace-building by engaging in activities related to peace or social issues and by peacefully solving conflicts and problems in the teaching-learning process. In addition, they are involved through the teaching-learning process and therefore promote active citizenship. This is also promoted by introducing global issues in the classroom to develop their oral and written skills. Consequently, the combination of PE and cooperative learning helps students develop social competences essential for the labour market. In this sense, there is a clear relationship between what is learned in the classroom and real life.

This article has offered a proposal for teaching a foreign language subject within the principles of PE in this globalised period in which Spain is suffering a severe economic crisis. Because different countries suffer different types of crisis, we must continue thinking of possible ways to contribute to a global movement for a culture of peace through our educational practices so that pedagogy can make a contribution to social transformations that improve the world.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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