



# ESL MiniConference

## English Learning as Peace Education Journal Article by Dave Hopkins

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*Peace Education does not teach students what to think, but rather how to think critically. In the process, its holistic and participatory approach may conflict with more traditional curriculum design or strict standards-based schooling. Peace education aims not to reproduce but to transform. It consists of people "consciously striving to educate their successors not for the existing state of affairs but so as to make possible a future better humanity." (John Dewey, Democracy and Education)*

*"I have something to say..."* We ought to be thrilled when we hear our students say this, but are we ready to listen? Our students are not just blank slates waiting for our views and opinions. They have the ability to think for themselves, as we have the responsibility to give them a chance to try out their ideas. Do you think our students might have something to "say" about *peace* as opposed to war; about "*peace*" as opposed to violence?

The question is, will they merely express the ideas of those around them, repeating the litanies that fuel the conflicts and dissension in their world? Or, will they question, and consider the alternatives? This paper is about providing students with the opportunity to consider and weigh the options available. It's about ...

### Life Skills

- Communication, active listening and reflection
- Cooperation & collaboration
- Empathy and compassion
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- The artistic and the aesthetic
- Mediation, negotiation and conflict resolution
- Patience and self control
- Responsible citizenship
- Imagination
- Leadership and vision

It has become popular to treat these topics as teaching "critical thinking." I have a bias in this regard, which may simply be a function of age, but I find it presumptuous to pretend to teach people how to think. I prefer to use the older terminology of "values clarification," "problem solving," and "intercultural awareness." These are the tools offered in this paper for Peace Education, empowering our students to think for themselves.

The use of language is a marvelous thing because it gives us the opportunity to define ourselves in a way that we would wish others to see us. The activities that follow are “user friendly.” In other words, they provide opportunities for expression under controlled and “avatar-like” conditions. *Freedom* is the acceptance of limits upon that freedom. Through these activities learners can experiment with their freedom to choose and express in a safe context, and, perhaps, gain some insight into the prerequisites for peace.

## I. The Problem Solving Model

The version of the *problem-solving* model that I will use here will focus on the following basic elements.

1. Problem definition – how you define the problem limits the range of possible solutions.
2. Generating alternatives – this involves both suspending judgment, and considering alternatives that you don't agree with.
3. Choosing an option – this must take into account conscious understanding of the values, attitudes and beliefs involved.
4. Projecting the results – finishing the story. If you choose this alternative, how will the situation develop or resolve.

The graphic below gives a better perspective on this process as a cycle where all the elements are strongly affected by the *values, attitudes & beliefs* of the center. The task will be to apply this model to a cartoon story involving Popeye, Olive Oil and Bluto. The teacher's role in this exercise is to keep the students on task, but not to tell them what to think. It is important that the students,

- Proceed in sequence – in other words “problem definition” first, etc.
- Work in small groups, but ‘privately,’ not sharing with other groups until the end
- Write down their ideas at each stage for sharing with the teacher and later with other groups
- Consider & note on paper the values, attitudes & beliefs involved at each stage

It is no small task for the teacher to monitor and mentor this process, without injecting their own attitudes, values & beliefs.

Read and consider the following story.

**CROCODILE RIVER, adapted by Dave Hopkins**

Popeye was walking along the Crocodile River one day when he heard a cry,

"Hello! Hellooo there!"

He looked across the river and immediately fell in love. She was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen, and she was calling to him.

"Uh, me? Are you calling to Me?"

"Yes, you handsome brute. What's your name?"

Why, my name is Popeye. And what's yours, if I may ask?"

"Well yes you may, and my name is Olive Oil."

"And what's a beautiful damsel such as yourself doing strolling along the river?" ventured Popeye.

"Well, I was just out for a little walk, dreaming about a prince who would come and carry me away to his castle. And what would you be doing, hanging about the river bank?" asked Olive.

"Uh well. I was thinking it would be nice to have someone to clean up around the castle. Would you be interested in marrying?"

"I might be," replied Olive, "but you'll have to court me."

Popeye courted and courted as much as he could with a river of crocodiles between them. Oh yes! The crocodiles!! Vicious man-eating brutes that swarmed in the river and devoured anything that ventured into the water. This limited to a great extent the courting activities of Popeye. He sang songs of love, and displayed his great strength. Olive responded with swoons and dances and exclamations of eternal devotion. The day came when they could wait no longer.

"Olive! Olive! I must marry you. I can wait no longer."

"Oh yes, Popeye, yes! We must marry now"

"But how will you cross the river Olive?"

"I don't know Popeye. I just don't know."

After searching the banks of the river for many days Olive came upon a large man with a great beard rowing a boat.

She cried out,

"You! You there! Take me across the river."

"What is it you want young lady?" he says.

"Take me across the river. I must cross to marry my prince."

"The name's Bluto my young lovely. What's your name, and, why are you in such a hurry," he asked.

"My name's Olive. . . Olive Oil to you. You shouldn't be so nosy about other people's business. I just need to get across the river," she replies.

"Well, if you're in such a hurry, BUT.... you have to give me a KISS."

"A KISS! You dirty swine. I won't give you a KISS!"

Olive goes back to talk with Popeye crying.

"Oh Popeye, I can't cross the river unless I kiss that dirty pig Bluto. What can I do?"

"Well, if you KISS Bluto, I can't marry you."

So much for Prince Charming.

### Objectives

The students will be able to...

- develop awareness of values, attitudes and beliefs as they affect choices.
- withhold judgment while searching for alternative solutions.
- develop awareness of the "problem-solving" model as an on-going cycle
- see "solutions" not as an end, but as a point for redefining problems.

### Process

1. Define the problem. What is the main issue, the key that, if resolved, will lead to a successful solution?
2. Generate alternatives. There should be at least five alternatives for solving the "problem" Participants should be encouraged to avoid pre-judging solutions, and to treat each alternative solution as "possible."
3. Choose a solution. In choosing, the group should discuss and write down the **values, attitudes and beliefs** that have affected this choice.
4. Analyze solution. This is a process of projecting, "If this solution is implemented, what will be the result?" In the case of Popeye and the Crocodiles, this means completing the story to see what happens if a particular solution is chosen.

1. The groups then proceed to move through the tasks, putting their results up on poster paper.
2. The facilitator should move among the groups to assure that they understand the problem-solving model, and, are really generating alternatives before they choose a solution.
3. When finished each group will presents its "alternatives," "solution," and "analysis," or, in the case of Popeye, the completion of the story.
4. Brainstorm a "redefinition" of the problem with the whole group. The facilitator encourages participants to view the "problem-solving" model as a cycle, or spiral of defining and redefining problems as we apply solutions.

Problem solving activities can have a variety of core contexts. Popeye, and other cartoon and movie animation characters provide a lot of possibilities, as well as TV situations such as Sesame Street. Real life situations are also options, but should be used with care and sensitivity.

The progress of the groups through the steps of the problem-solving model need very careful monitoring and mentoring to make this work.

1. Problem definition - this step needs care, as awareness of the range of problems that might be defined is great. For example, in the Popeye piece, often students say the "crocs" are the problem, but what about Popeye's male chauvinist attitude?
2. Generating alternatives - the critical ingredient here is "reserving judgment." You can't really "consider" alternatives, if you can't hold back on pre-determining the answer.
3. Choosing a solution - the influence of ones cultural baggage and principles programming needs to be conscious here. Students need to make the connect between their on board values, and the choices they make. If not, this is not really effective.
4. Projecting the results - The influence of the values set needs to be mapped into the results or completion of the scenario. The goal is to build awareness of the degree to which we are guided by our principles and values, in other words, "values clarification."

## II. Proverbial Mini Dramas

Proverbial mini dramas are mini morality plays. They incorporate more or less traditional activities like collaborative story writing, play-writing, role-playing and theater techniques to allow students to consider dramatic interactions one step removed from real life. As such, they meet our values clarification and peace education theme by providing the teacher and the students with the raw material for further discussion. Whether or not they raise the students' consciousness and awareness is up to the facilitation of the teacher. As mentioned above, the problem-solving model is a ready-made technique for examining the interplay of *attitudes* and the development of the *life skills* involved, and is readily incorporated with mini dramas.

## The Objectives

The students will be able to...

- Create their own stories based on proverbs
- Define the meanings in English
- Write an appropriate story collaboratively
- Act out a script expressing the story
- Articulate the values and conflicts involved

## Process

1. Groups of 4-7 students explore the meaning of different proverbs:
  - In L1
  - In English
  - As applied to everyday life
2. Each group chooses a proverb and further defines the meaning and expression in L1 and English
3. The group collaborates to write a story around the proverb using contemporary life circumstances that they can relate to.
4. Teacher assists the students in developing their story and the vocabulary and expressions needed, but should not direct the plot of the story.
5. Stories are read aloud, corrected and critiqued between student groups
6. Groups then develop a script from their stories.
7. Teacher assists students in developing the script and the needed language.
8. Groups practice their plays as script readings
9. Groups present their plays to other groups.
10. Mini dramas are videoed for review and critique

While proverbial mini-dramas are presented here as a single class activity, this activity can easily provide the content and process for much more extended periods. Proverbs provide a window on cultural beliefs and values. As such, they have a lot of emotional content and engagement built in. A class divided into two groups of 10-15 students can easily spend a semester developing the stories, scripts and theater presentations using the steps above. Borrowing from Richard Via's ideas, while one group performs, the other group can act as the stage cast – prompters. Prop people, cameramen, and costume and make up people, directors, etc.

Throughout this process the students should be encouraged to explore and

define their individual principles and beliefs, such as,

- Self respect
- Tolerance
- Respect for human dignity and difference
- Intercultural understanding
- Gender sensitivity
- Caring and sympathy
- Non-violence and reconciliation
- Social responsibility
- Global awareness

The very act of 'acting' allows us the one step removal to gain perspective and consider alternatives. The mini dramas allow participants to discuss and analyze the roles in terms of the *attitudes* above. It is the mentors job to facilitate reflection upon these critical feelings.

### III. The Scenario

The *scenario* is a group projection of a life situation that allows the participants to collaborate, negotiate, adapt, imagine and modify the story as it develops. One might imagine it as a *wiki*, or even develop it in this fashion on line. In other words, the teacher starts the story with something as simple as,

*The other day I was walking down the street when...*

Then the students working in small groups *discuss, negotiate, adapt...etc* to develop the story. The teacher may initiate the process with a case study or introduction, or, leave it up to the students' imagination. I like to use evocative pictures for this as they provide a *medium* through which the participants can realize their intentions.



The teacher might facilitate the process here with some key questions like,

1. What do you see in the picture?
2. Who are these people? How old are they?
3. What are they doing?
4. What's the situation?
5. How do they feel?
6. What's the story line?
7. What's going to happen next?

The initial sketch will look like the tracings of a short story or case study. It gains depth and color as the group process develops

The groups develop the situation, BUT it does not remain static. The difference between story writing and scenario development is the dynamic development of the situation in real time. The teacher can introduce new elements to the dynamic, such as characters, or events, or, make it part of the group process.

One of the things I like about collaborative scenario building is the inherent scaffolding that takes place. The students build on self and peer correction as a natural part of the process.

*...he's hard..*

*...you mean he's strong?*

*...no, he's tough*

*...you mean like obstinate*

*...yes, that's what I mean*

At the same time they are exploring feelings and emotions in a contextualized setting.

### **The Objectives**

The student will be able to...

- Imagine and project a story from the teacher's stimulus
- Develop the characters, modalities, context and scene
- Project the story as an on going scenario
- Respond to new inputs by modifying the scenario

### **The Process**

1. The Teacher provides a picture, phrase or case study to get the students started, and asks catalyst questions.
2. Students discuss and project.
3. At lower levels the process will begin with the students drawing and acting out the scenario as it develops.

4. Somewhat higher levels can start in their L1.
5. The teacher mentors and guides the students towards the English\*.

(\*Note: the use of the 1<sup>st</sup> language is OK, as long as the product – writing on poster or note paper, and guided discussion – is in English)

6. One technique might be to give pairs/trios of students specific group responsibilities, like – characters, the scene, the story, dialogue, clothing and props, moods and modalities.
7. The teacher might provide an outline for the development of the scenario, and have the students fill in the 'scenes' as it develops.

The lower the student level, the more that the teacher must provide supports to develop the scenario.

The intended result with these activities is to provide a safe medium through which the students can experience and examine the values, attitudes and beliefs that affect their opinions, choices and decisions. This is the starting point for Peace education. Our ability to use language to understand, define and adapt our world perspective is a critical act of empowerment. Our students can make a difference if we let them.

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