

Fostering Spaces of Peace: Conversations about Identity, Biographies, and Social Justice

Milagros Ugueto, Language Teacher, Olympic High School/Charlotte Teachers Institute
Dr. Scott Gartlan, Executive Director, Charlotte Teachers Institute
Patricia Sheffer, Senior Fellow, Alliance for Peacebuilding
Larry Bosc, Civil Rights Trip Organizer



Introduction

I am a Venezuelan immigrant in the United States of America. I came here to be a foreign language teacher with an open heart and mind. However, being able to be part of the civil rights trip and the peacebuilding program this summer, have influenced my teaching self-reflections. Both projects impacted my need to teach my American, Hispanic and Latinx students that part of the African American history which I learned and saw in different spaces. For instance, in the EJI Museum, I saw how African slaves were brought inhumanly to the country. Also, I saw monuments representing hundreds of thousands of wrongful deaths, some of them could not even be identified because of the way those humans died. At the Lorraine Motel, I walked through the same halls in which the great civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. walked. I stood up in front of the bedroom in which he wrote parts of his deep reflections, slept and regrettably then was assassinated. The I Am a Man square made me realize that at a certain point in the history of humankind, men and women had to stand up and fight so that their universal right to be treated as human beings was accomplished. This fact moved me to tears. As a Venezuelan female teacher who grew up in a very pacific country, being able to stand in front of the history markers regarding lynchings and bombings, was something I would not have thought about. Moreover, I admire the influence of the African American Christian Churches in the equal justice fight to protect their community. As a Teacher, I consider it super important that every student in the country from any background, learn about the nonviolent events that changed the world in a fight for social justice and identity. Consequently, spaces of peace are going to be fostered for them to have conversations about what happened in this country, and how it intersects their identity, biographies, and the history of social justice where they live. I wonder whether I will have the enthusiasm of Shirley Cherry, our first tour guide in the Civil Rights Trip, to start conversations with passion and authority in a peaceful environment guided by students at the Olympic High School. How am I going to facilitate for them to accomplish the goal of talking about identity in regard to social justice and peace building while creating a peaceful environment? Our conversations are going to be bilingual, at a Spanish I novice level, following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Maslow’s pyramid of needs, the blanket game and the first part of HEALING from the 7H framework.

Objectives

- Students will talk/build their identity, biographies and social justice, following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Students will analyze Maslow’s pyramid of needs along with HEALING from the 7H framework, to find out how to understand ourselves better to become our best selves using the target language (basic vocabulary and grammar from the Spanish language)



Research/Data collection

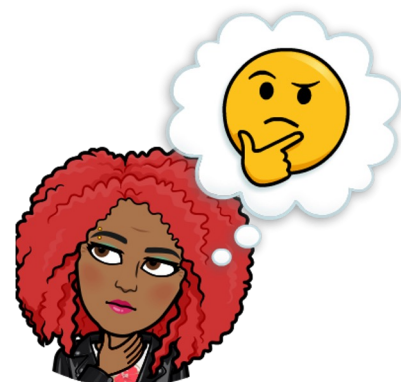
Conversations about identity, biographies, and social justice, will be fostered in the Spanish I class. Lessons are going to be taught in both languages, English and Spanish simultaneously. Many of the students come from a Spanish speaking background and they are fluent in the language. Some of them are going to reinforce some of the skills while others may not know how to respond although they understand forms of speech. Moreover, there are also many nonnative learners who come to the classroom to learn the language at a novice level. Every lesson is going to be linked with essential questions (E.Q.) from each unit of the Spanish I curriculum. Questions based on the Peacebuilding program part one on HEALING from the 7H framework, will be used to guide conversations about identity and social justice in their school community. For instance:

- Where do I come from? E.Q: *¿De dónde soy?*
- Who am I? *¿Quién soy?*
- What is my identity *¿Cuál es mi identidad?*
- How do we understand ourselves better and become our best selves? *¿Cómo es mi descripción física y de personalidad?*
- How can we build stronger relationships with others in our social groups/environments? *¿Cómo eres?*
- Why is it important to learn civil rights abuses? *¿Cuáles son las reglas de la escuela, y de la clase?*

Then more complex questions that may be answer in both languages, English and Spanish:

- Why do we need to learn the US system of coexistence and civil protection?
- How do we implement compassion and empathy?
- How can I advocate for identity, social justice and the civil rights in my classroom, school, community, city, etc?
- How can I implement the Universal declaration of Human Rights to support my community?

Students will also play the blanket game to introduce themselves as part of scaffolding their biographies based on their identity. Knowing that they may become Peacebuilding agents, will give them a broad spectrum to know how to solve conflicts on civil rights abuses and how to appeal to their universal rights.MLK once said: “Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children...” and the call is still valid and needed.



Nature of Students Inquiry

The idea for this project comes from the importance to create spaces for Latinx and Hispanic students to talk about identity and social justice in a peaceful environment. This came to life with the spark ignited by listening to MLK Jr. speech I have a dream, which is a call for immediate nonviolent actions, Shirley Cherry’s passion and authority to teach the social justice history and and Deb Semmler and Patricia Shafer for being the bridges between teachers and students with peacebuilding.

MLK’s commitment to fostering a universal environment of social justice along with the EJI.

Shirley Cherry’s knowledge of history, her passion and authority to guide people in time to apprehend the importance to continue creating spaces for social justice based on the precedents set by the first civil rights leaders. (CTI- Civil Rights Trip Summer 2022. Scan the QR code for more information about Shirley Cherry).

Patricia Shafer and Deb Semmler knowledgeability about the NEW GEN Peacebuilding program, and their synergy with important organizations like the Rotary Club, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI),Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), Latin America and National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM).



Classroom Implementation and results

Approximately 105 students from three different periods of classes and different grades at the Olympic High School, will engage in fostering conversations every week in the Spanish I class. Both languages, English and Spanish are going to be allowed in the conversations, using essential questions from the curriculum framework to be able to use the target language while talking about identity, creating their biographies, and learning about social justice in a nonviolent environment. I will start the course with the Cultural Identity exercises of “This is who I Am” and I will culminate it with “Where I stand for Human Rights.” Every conversation will allow students to interact with their peers and with me. They will read the Universal declaration of Human Rights, play the blanket game, learn about Maslow’s pyramid of needs using vocabulary in Spanish regarding descriptions, school, places in which people live, food, likes, dislikes and abilities. Students will also design social justice posters and flyers to reinforce the knowledge of the target language inviting the community to know more about the topics discussed in class and inviting them to form part of an extension of this conversations which is going to be an international club that will gather students from different nationalities. Nevertheless, that will be a long term plan beginning in the second quarter.

Digital Archive

Scan the QR code below to access My Personal Archive, there you will find:

- A photo gallery of my Civil Right Trip, June 16th-19th 2022. Places in: Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee.
- A universal declaration of the Human Rights booklet with some exercises students will do in class.
- The 5 Spheres of Peace as reference of one of the peace building tools to foster future conversations with an advance use of the target language.
- Maslow’s Pyramid of needs linked to Spanish I vocabulary to use in classroom conversations.
- The blanket game instructions.
- Some models of posters and flyers donated by artist and activist Favianna Rodriguez for interested people to use in class.
- Videos of EJI museums, the Lorraine Motel and more important places visited in the civil rights trip.



References

NewGenPeacebuilder. 2021. *My Peacebuilder Foundations Online Course*. Accessed June 2022. <https://youthpeaceaction.thinkific.com>.

A universal declaration of the Human Rights booklet. 2015. United nations. Accessed July 2022. https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf