Student and teacher beliefs about Peace Education

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Abstract

Over the past 25 years, researchers have focused on the effects that teachers' and students' beliefs can have on classroom pedagogy and language learning. Until now, the majority of studies in the field have exclusively examined beliefs about Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and the bulk of research reports on how teachers' beliefs can influence those of their students or how students' beliefs can effect perceptions of their success learning the target language. Very few studies have examined teachers' and students' beliefs about content-based education and none have been conducted in the Japanese context. Because the International Communication (IC) Department at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) offers a curriculum which can be defined as content-based Peace Education, it is valuable to explore teachers' and students' beliefs about this kind of teaching and learning. This study reports on results gained from a year-long research project involving students and staff at KUIS. It identifies and categorizes beliefs held by teachers and students and examines the extent to which teachers' and students' beliefs are congruent.

Introduction

UNICEF's working paper on Peace Education defines this interdisciplinary pedagogical approach as the process of developing in students the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values which are needed to create peace at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national, and international levels (UNICEF, 1999). According to the working paper, peace does not simply imply the absence of

violence, or a negative peace, but also the presence of social, economic, and political justice, or positive peace. The paper lists some of the goals of Peace Education to be the following:

1. Knowledge Building: self awareness, an ability to mediate, and an understanding of one's rights and responsibilities as a global citizen.

2. Skills Building: active listening, good self-expression, the ability to co-operate, critical thinking, and the ability to generate solutions.

3. Attitudes and Values Development: an awareness of bias, an ability to tolerate difference, empathy, self-respect, and balancing what makes us and others happy.

The Sano Educational Foundation, the body overseeing Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), appears to officially support the development of some of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values recommended in the UNICEF working paper. For example, the foundation expresses its vision as "Communication builds a peaceful world" which suggests that communication, particularly the ability to communicate in another language, is a contributor to positive peace. In addition, the Sano Foundation's mission statement, "We support language learning and cultural understanding for all ages" seems to imply that part of learning another language should include cultivating some measure of cross-cultural knowledge and understanding. KUIS itself also appears to reiterate some of the values listed as important to Peace Education. Namely, it expresses in its vision statement that the university "aspires to a congenial world of respectful communication."

The Sano Foundation and Kanda University both appear to have official vision and mission statements which lean towards what a large international body has defined as some of the main tenets of Peace Education. In addition, the International Communication (IC) Department at the university runs courses which have content and goals that are in keeping with the content and goals of Peace Education as defined by UNICEF. In this context, the question as to what the teachers and students believe about combining language education with Peace Education is a valid one and may be helpful in shedding some light on how teachers can proceed with curriculum development and renewal. The following paper reports on a study conducted within the IC Department which aimed at exploring teacher and student beliefs about combining Peace Education with language education and the extent to which those beliefs are congruent. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are IC teachers' beliefs about teaching the content in IC Department units and are there any commonalities between teacher beliefs?

2. What are IC students' beliefs about studying the content in IC Department units and are there any commonalities between student beliefs?

3. To what extent are teacher and student beliefs congruent?

Literature Review

In the field of TESOL, an interest in the study of beliefs began to develop in the mid-1980's. In previously conducted research, beliefs were defined in a plethora of ways which include folklinguistic theories, learner representations, learner philosophies, metacognitive knowledge, cultural beliefs, and conceptions of learning (Ferreira Barcelos, 2003). Dewey offers a particularly helpful definition of beliefs as a "form of thought which covers all the matters of which we have no sure

knowledge and yet we are sufficiently confident to act upon, but which may be questioned in the future…" (Dewey in Ferreira Barcelos, 2003, p. 10). This definition is helpful because it includes the "contextual nature of beliefs" and stresses that beliefs are not only cognitive concepts but are also socially constructed by individual and group experiences and problems (Ferreira Barcelos, 2003).

In addition to being difficult to define, beliefs are also problematic to study because they are elusive and rather fluid. As Pajares notes, beliefs are a "messy" construct. (Pajares, 1992, p. 307). Despite the problematic nature of conducting research into teacher and student beliefs, it is important to make the attempt for two main reasons. First, because teachers, who occupy a position of authority in the classroom and who are often considered to be experts by the students, have the power to exert a measure of influence on students' beliefs (Horwitz, 1988; Rubin, 1987; Wenden, 1987). Second, it is thought that more effective teaching and learning can occur when there is a degree of congruence found in teachers' and students' beliefs (Kumaravadivelu, 1991).

Not only has defining and researching beliefs proven rather problematic in our field but so has the introduction of Peace Education into language classrooms. Precisely because of the facts that the teacher is often considered to be the expert in the class and because language teachers are often from cultural backgrounds different from their students, there is a danger of teachers, in their positions of power, exerting their values and beliefs onto students and of teacher and student beliefs being incongruent.

From within the context of Japan, there have been several studies conducted which address these issues. The first group of studies deals with justifying the need for Peace Education in this context. Dyer and Bushell (1996) cite the Japanese Ministry of Education's directive that students should be exposed to content that deals with social, cross-cultural and global issues. Cates (1990) offers a rationale for Peace Education in the Japanese context by arguing that each individual needs to know about the interconnected nature of the global village, something which is not normally addressed in school in Japan, and that young people need to be critical consumers of media who can cope with the issues facing our world in the 21st century.

A second group of studies provides teachers with guidelines for introducing such material in Japan's language classrooms. Yamashiro (1996) recommends a focus on the development of critical thinking and an emphasis on multiple perspectives. Other teacher-researchers discuss the importance of what they call "process-mindedness" meaning that learning should be co-operative and open-ended (Dyer and Bushell, 1996). Finally, Brown (2004) provides teachers with a Moral Dilemma-Moral Imperative chart which helps deal with some of the most common problems expressed by teachers when they consider introducing Peace Education into their classrooms.

Moral Dilemma	Moral Imperative
Communicative Language Teaching's cultural Bias	Try to respect local culture while using an eclectic methodological approach
Teaching English=Teaching a set of values	Open an exploration of of values, pragmatics, and focus on contrastive analysis
	Balance of multiple perspectives
Polarization of students Our own bias	Student-centered teaching and bias awareness

As the studies mentioned above show, beliefs have a powerful influence on learning. Because teaching Peace Education in the context of the language classroom can be contentious, studies such as this one can contribute to a better understanding of the issues and help inform curriculum develpoment and pedagogical practice.

Educational Context

Within KUIS there are four departments: English, International Communication (IC), International Languages and Culture (ILC), and International Business Communication (IBC). During their academic careers, students registered in one of the four departments take some of their required courses and some of the optional courses in the English Language Institute (ELI). The ELI is staffed by over 60 native English speakers from around the world and each department has a research committee responsible for managing curriculum development and renewal.

Students registered in the IC Department are required to take two core courses in

the ELI entitled EIC1 and EIC2 in their first and second years respectively. In their third and fourth years, students must take three content-based courses in the ELI which are developed by teachers' on the subject of their choosing. However, teachers are encouraged to develop courses which expand on the content introduced to the student in their first and second years of study. The content of EIC1, EIC2, and the courses offered to third and fourth year students provide them with ample opportunities to explore local and global issues from a variety of perspectives. For example, EIC1 contains curriculum which addresses the multi-cultural side of Japan, focuses on pressing issues which affect the globe such as overpopulation and food security, and introduces students to the different varieties of English. EIC2 has units on cultural stereotypes, world religions, conflict, the environment, the global economy, and global government. Some of the third and fourth year content-based courses include Human Rights, Global Issues in the Media, Modern Africa, and World Cultures and Traditions. Some specific goals listed in the course outline for the units include: introducing students to multiple perspectives on a global issues, exploring responsibilities as global citizens, promoting critical thinking, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and promoting economic justice.

Participants and Methods

In May, 2010, a Likert scale pilot survey was made to gather information about students' beliefs on combining Peace Education with English language education. The survey was administered to 60 IC students in their third and fourth years of study. In addition to indicating their belief on the Likert scale, students also provided a qualifying statement following each item. After examining the

qualifying statements, some items were eliminated from the survey and others were adapted either because they were misunderstood or because students' qualifying statements indicated that they found certain items problematic to answer.

In October, 2010, an revised survey was administered to 60 IC students who had not participated in the pilot survey. The students were currently enrolled in either EIC1 or EIC2 or one of the content-based classes for third and fourth year students. In addition to responding to the Likert scale questionnaire, students also provided qualifying statements for each of their answers. Eight IC teachers also participated in the study and were surveyed using the same instrument as the one used for students. In addition to answering survey questions, teachers were interviewed about the general beliefs that guide them in their pedagogical practice on a daily basis and on their beliefs about teaching the content units of IC Department courses.

Results

1. What are IC teachers' beliefs about teaching the content in IC Department units and are there any commonalities between teacher beliefs?

According to the data collected from the survey and the interviews, all eight participating teachers in the IC department believe that the units of EIC 1 and EIC 2 contain content that is important to introduce in the language classroom and report that the goals of the units are in keeping with their personal beliefs about the value of exposing students to multiple perspectives. However, despite reporting that they believe all the topics they teach are important to address in the

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English language classroom, the interview data revealed several additional points. First, half of the teachers interviewed felt that the unit on World Religions was problematic to teach because they sensed students were uncomfortable with this topic. Second, all eight of the teachers reported that despite believing the content they introduced to the class was important, they did not feel qualified to make the materials and often felt unable to appropriately respond to students' questions because of their own lack of in-depth background knowledge on some of the subjects. Finally, all eight teachers reported that they experienced a certain tension in the classroom at different points because they felt that they were in danger of imposing their own personal beliefs about the subject matter on the students.

2. What are IC students' beliefs about studying the content in IC Department units and are there any commonalities between student beliefs?

In response to the various questions asked on the survey to gauge students' beliefs about the material they study in EIC1, EIC2 and the content-based classes, the majority (73% to 85% depending on the questions) reported that they believed the topics were important to discuss, meaningful to them personally, and appropriate for the English language classroom. However, small percentages of students (4% to 11%, depending on the questions) reported that they did not believe certain topics were appropriate for English class. For example, in response to the questions about the unit on religion, 11% of the students reported that they did not believe religion should be discussed in schools at all, especially not in English language classes.

3. To what extent are teacher and student beliefs congruent?

The surveys indicate that teacher and student beliefs are congruent to quite a high degree. While 100% of teachers reported that they believed all of the topics taught in the IC Department were important to raise in the English language classroom, 73% to 85% of students reported they also believed these topics were important. However, while none of the teachers reported they felt any of the topics were inappropriate, a small number of students reported that they believed certain topics, particularly religion, were inappropriate.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate three important points. First, the IC Department may want to consider focusing more on curriculum development rather than on curriculum renewal. Because the topics in the curriculum reflect the interests and areas of expertise of the teachers who made them (many of whom are no longer on staff to answer questions about the content), it may be better for teachers to develop units which reflect their own interests and expertise. While this may initially seem to be too time-consuming an endeavor, teachers might want to consider making students responsible for developing some of their own materials, thus taking more ownership of their classes and having more control over their own learning.

Second, the department as a whole may want to think about how global topics can be rooted in local connections. Six out of eight teachers surveyed expressed the need to make the topics more relevant to students by localizing them. 22 students out of 60 also had comments indicating that although they believed certain topics

were important, they felt quite removed from them and did not have enough background knowledge to discuss them, even in the L1.

Third, one way of circumventing the problems associated with constant materials development and renewal and a rapidly changing staff of teachers may be to focus on project-based learning. Three out of eight teachers reported experiencing success with projects in the content-based third and fourth year classes. Rather than introducing the content in fixed unit packages, topics can be introduced and students can then choose a focus area. They can work on a project with specific language and content goals which they establish in conjunction with their teachers and group members and present their work to the class at the end of the project. This type of learning would also help teachers avoid some of the issues they discussed in the interviews such as their lack of background knowledge on the unit materials and their concern about imposing their own beliefs and values on students.

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