Peace Education: Experience and Storytelling as Living Education

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Abstract

Peace Education is a living, dynamic organism, and as much as life itself is education, education must be living. This necessitates the transformation of anesthetized and oppressive classrooms into dynamic, participatory spaces of sharing and creating knowledge. Storytelling and experience, thus, is considered herein as substantial teaching methodology for education for peace, whereby listening to and vocalizing the lived experiences of those in subjugated roles within society counters the hegemony of dominant groups and ‘conscientizes’ minds. As education is a form of intervention in this world, able to both reinforce the status quo and unmask dominant ideologies, Peace Education as articulated herein is informed by the educational praxes of Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal, and Betty Reardon. A specific story of a colleague’s experience with the A-Bomb in Hiroshima 1945 is shared as an example of subjective reflective teaching and learning. The article ends with a classroom activity for educators using creative writing and storytelling with participants for envisioning a better future.

It has become appallingly clear that our technology has surpassed our humanity.

--Albert Einstein

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men [and women] that the defenses of peace must be constructed.

--Preamble to the UNESCO Constitution

STORYTELLING TO REMEMBER

Teachers College lives up to its reputation. As we sit in the chilled room on the 4th floor of the Mitsui Seimei Building, it’s raining outside. Other towering complexes surround us and the sound of subway trains passes through the windows. The walls are freckled with poster paper. We’re here to study peacemaking and conflict resolution, and our friend Kuniko Soga is telling a story from her youth. She begins the narrative following a sociodrama, and when I realize what she’s talking about I’m awestruck.

Hiroshima 1945

All of a sudden, a flash of light, similar to what is often emitted by a light bulb when it goes out, but is much, much stronger and sharper, blinded our eyes. Then, a big exploding sound pierced our ears, and strong and uncomfortably lukewarm wind almost knocked us down, shaking the whole house and shattering into pieces all the windowpanes of the rooms facing toward the city. Terrified, we all ran into a half-finished shelter my uncle had
carved out on the side of a hill right behind the house. After a while, it became very quiet as if nothing had happened. We came out of the shelter and walked up to the top of the hill. There up in the sky, we saw a strange-looking cloud, somewhat like a huge mushroom, in shiny bright pink. We said to each other, “What is it? I haven’t seen anything like that in all my life. The color is so beautiful.” Then, we all fell into silence, stunned by the extremely unusual sight in the sky. I said to myself, “Yes, it is beautiful. It is “my color,” the girls’ color,” the color of clothes and toys for me, an only girl child of the family.

However, it didn’t take long before we realized that what had happened and was happening in the city then was nothing at all beautiful. Thousands of people were thrown alive into hell. Two hours later, breaking the silence of bewildered villagers, badly–injured or severely–burned relatives and friends from the city came running into their houses. Mother’s younger brother who owned a sake shop near the central train station was among them with his wife and two boys whose faces were all covered with blood. They were hit in their heads by falling roof tiles as they escaped from the sea of fire.

That evening, we eagerly and anxiously waited for the two cousins to return home from their schools. Masae, the girl, finally dragged herself home late at night, walking all 20 kilometers from the city. Tsutomu, the boy, did not come home. The following day, my uncle and aunt walked into the city and to the junior high school Tsutomu attended, and saw the school building completely demolished; but they found metal lunchboxes left there placed in a neat line, one after another about 50 centimeters apart. The students who were to eat those lunches their mothers had packed that morning were nowhere to be seen. For nearly a month afterwards, my uncle and aunt went into the city every day, visiting makeshift clinics to look for their son. Tsutomu has never made it home.

One day in late September when the weather got a bit cooler, we had a funeral for Tsutomu. We put in a small wooden coffin his uniform and satchel from his elementary school days, his books and his carpenter’s knife. He was fond of carving broken branches he found in the yard into objects of various shapes for his younger brother and cousins. My mother told me to put something in, too. I didn’t want to put anything pink in the coffin. I chose a white seashell I found by the beach when we went swimming on a more peaceful day a few years earlier.

Sixty–one years later, I still see that huge pink mushroom whenever I look up at the sky and close my eyes. The image of the color is beautiful, but all those ugly scenes underneath keep coming back into my mind, too. Yes, any nation or group can start a war with such beautiful slogans as “Love your country,” “Save those oppressed,” “Bring peace to the world,” etc. Under those beautiful words, lie agony, misery, and the inconsolable sorrow of individual families.

I was studying in the Peace Education program at Teachers College Columbia University in Tokyo with Dr. Betty Reardon, Janet Gerson and Tony Jenkins; and Kuniko, with her wisdom and kindness, had become a good friend. As the story recounts, Kuniko witnessed the tragedy and the dawn of the nuclear age from the distant safety of her home on the outskirts of Hiroshima city. She continues to teach for peace and seek answers to the questions in her heart; but what followed for her that day was a bombardment of psyche and a long reconcilable process between her world, of distant horizons and a shared future.
It was in this learning moment, in this space, when Kuniko first shared her story with us that opened me up to, as an educator, for the possibility of using storytelling as a substantial teaching methodology for education for peace. This moment of experience sharing gave me a personal connection to one of the most horrific moments in the annals of humanity, and gave a grim face to old, yellowed pages in a history textbook. Suddenly history was very real, it was a part of today—today yesterday, yesterday today, and both informing the future—and the periphery of the present broadened for me. It was a collision of the famous words of T.S. Eliot—*Time present and time past are perhaps present in time future and contained in time past...In my beginning is my end...In succession houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended, are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass—and a living, breathing encounter of Elise Boulding’s concept ‘the 200-year present.’* Boulding (1988) contends that in our 200 year present—those living today born a hundred years ago, and those living a hundred years from their birth today—we will have met many people, created great networks, and made great possibility. In that moment with Kuniko I met another world, and in the span of time of ‘the 200-year present’ extraordinary change is possible.

WHY PEACE EDUCATION?

Akin to Hiroshima 1945, current world conditions necessitate the urgency for Peace Education as education for social transformation. We live in cultures of violence that silence the voiceless and dying, and cultures of apathy that sustain the oppression of the weak and marginalized. Racism and sexism are active. Nations continue to stockpile weapons of mass destruction and use violence to resolve issues. Thousands of children around the world die each day from hunger, nearly half the world population lives in extreme or moderate poverty, and billions lack decent nutrition, health, shelter, and other basic needs of life to ensure happiness and full participation in society—rights that many of us take for granted (Sachs, 2005).

It is easy for many in the hegemonic North to blame undeveloped nations (by dominant hegemonic standards) for their problems, to ignore the role the North played and still plays in the origin of certain enigmas, to facade ignorance of the matters of other states that don’t directly effect the North, and to lose sight of the connections between all life. Many live in shielded bubbles of isolation where they feel they do not have to interact with the larger community of life (Boulding, 1988). Recently, however, Hurricane Katrina illustrated the interconnectedness of all states and environs when it shocked and humbled the US by exposing the radical social inequalities that remain present in a country in which institutions, laws and norms seem to overlook inequalities in favor of meritocracy, and in which many don’t see these inequalities as legitimate.

Tremendous injustices and inequities thrive in our presence, and it is important for us to constantly question what is and what can be. We must awaken ourselves and address the problems of our time, to develop strategies for the elimination of obstacles to a fuller humanity, for liberation. For the realization of a culture of peace, Peace Education as living education is an absolute necessity. Boulding (ibid, p. xxii) writes: “By drawing on our own life experience, with a little help on how to make the linkages, we can begin to map the outlines of the emerging world community, with all its diversity and challenge.” Additionally, the Hague Agenda (1999, p. 13) states: “In order to combat the culture of
violence that pervades our society, the coming generation deserves a radically different education—one that does not glorify war but educates for peace, nonviolence and international cooperation.”

*Peace Education and Classrooms of the Oppressed* In the schools, classrooms are sites of oppression. They are learning sites generally dominated by an authoritarian facilitation of subject matter that keeps students silent and unengaged with the material and their peers. In such a classroom: 1) the teacher lectures for an entire period without space for students to raise questions and be critical of the agenda, 2) the teacher allows one or a few students to dominate concepts and class time, 3) students are encouraged to memorize ‘facts’ rather than think deeply about the content, 4) material is not relevant to the students and/or the ideas are brought in from another global region (i.e. US textbooks being used to teach Sudanese children), and 5) student-bullying goes unchecked and unchallenged by teachers and administrators who brush it off as ‘kids just playing.’

Students are afraid to make mistakes because they’ve been taught to dichotomize everything into categories of ‘right and wrong’ and asked questions that supposedly have ‘right’ answers. Anya Jacobson (2007, p. 2) writes, “In practice the structure of a classroom requires an omniscient teacher who ‘knows’ the right answer.” The focus on this facile division is a hindrance to future accords because students are taught that ‘right and wrong’ can’t coexist, essentially nullifying attempts to respect the Other—if Other is perceived as wrong instead of different.

Educational practice must be consistent with the mission of the education itself. If the goal is to create an engaged, critical, and active citizenry, valuing knowledge, understanding, skills, identity, and peaceful coexistence, then the philosophy and pedagogy used in the educational process must reflect this. The practice of authoritarian teaching, hence, is inconsistent with the transformative objective of peace education. Peace educators assist learners in understanding “a full range of possible world views, explanations, and solutions to social issues and problems” and “engage their learners in a constant dialogue, in order that basic assumptions underlying any worldview are critically analyzed and not passively accepted as given truths” (Toh Swee-Hin & Floresca-Cawagas, 1987, p. 30).

Chapters One argues that oppression, in the form of racism and gender biases, is perpetuated in Kentucky and Japanese schools, and across the globe. And, withal, the enigmas are ardently illustrated herein. So how do we transform this historical and present station to nurture a culture of peace? What does a culture of peace entail? What is Peace Education? Peace Education in homogeneous schools, as a radically new approach to educating, helps raise consciousness and validate non-mainstream ways of life in a way that traditional didactic, axiomatic classrooms cannot. Peace education is teaching for interdependence rather than compartmentalization, cooperation rather than competition, aesthetics as well as science, and empirical knowledge as well as abstract. Peace Education is a living, dynamic organism, and as much as life itself is education, education must be living.

**WHAT IS PEACE EDUCATION?**

Peace Education, its history, goals, social purposes and pedagogy, is described in Reardon (1988), Boulding (1988), Harris (1988), Hicks (1988), Reardon and Cabezudo

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Peace Education is a mechanism for the transformation from a culture of violence to a culture of peace through a process of ‘conscientization’ (Freire, 2006). By raising consciousness of peoples to their world, their rights, and the issues at the core of our contemporary terrene—through exploration of our common values and aspirations—it is possible to negotiate a shared future based on love, respect, and human dignity. Coexistence in peace is not a utopian myth. “Peace education as ‘conscientization,’ then, is not a factory of dreams, but a school of realism. It is neither sectarian nor prophetic. Neither an ideology or religious offering of miracles” (Borelli, 1979, p.391).

To this analogous end, in its application Peace Education is holistic. The conceptual frameworks developed for the implementation of Peace Education programs emphasize comprehensive programs that are thoroughgoing. Holism refers to the “essential and integral interrelationship among and between all spheres of human experience, as well as all levels and areas of social organization. It asserts that peace education should be presented so as to illuminate interconnections among various knowledge concepts and pedagogical practices” (Jenkins, 2004, p. 12). Peace Education as holistic serves to educate from multiple perspectives, including values education (Swee-Hin and Cawagas, 1991), cultural understanding (Boulding, 2000; Groff and Smoker, 1996), human rights (Reardon, 1995; Muntarbhorn, 1998), anti-racism education (Sefa-Dei, 1997), indigenous views (Bull, 2000), non-violence (Sharp, 1973; Adams, 1989), and education for the future (Hicks, 1994; Carson and Smith, 1998). And these are but a few amongst many that comprise the holistic values system upon which peace education is based.

Informed by John Dewey, Peace Education is grounded in active citizenship, preparing learners for assiduous participation in a democracy, through problem-posing and problem-solving education, and a commitment to transformative action in our societies. Dewey (1938, p. 67) writes, “There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process.” This philosophy seeks to prepare learners with sound understanding of peoples’ principles through context and learner-centered exploration of normative values and creating a citizenry prepared for social agency.

Peace Education is most widely defined as aiming to prevent, mitigate and end violence; the core problematic to a culture of peace. Violence is manifest in varied ways across cultures and to address the multiple expressions of violence certain educational fields have been developed (i.e., global education, sustainable development education, multicultural education, etc.). Each of these fields chooses one or a few forms of violence to address. Respectively, there are multiple perspectives concerning peace and a number of conceptual frameworks that mirror these differing paradigms (i.e., Hague Agenda, Earth Charter, etc.). Though called by different names they serve a similar purpose—to bring awareness to the obstacles of peace. In the contexts of Kentucky and Japan—two homogeneous settings—racism and gender bias pose two hurdles to the establishment of peacebuilding mechanisms and peaceful behaviors.
At the heart of Peace Education philosophy is the conviction that teachers are learning with the students in the classroom. This concept is integral to the subversion of oppressive educational structures. “Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with students, who in turn while being taught also teach” (Freire, 2006, p. 80). Peaceful, democratic education is based on the notion that we are all lifelong learners and agents for learning.

Furthermore, Peace Education is overtly values-oriented and peace educators make explicit at the outset of the educational process (Toh Swee-Hin, 2004) that its intentions are “to educate for the formation of values consistent with peace and the norms that uphold it” (Jenkins, 2004, p. 13). All forms of education are intrinsically values based, although in many circumstances the values are part of a subtle curriculum, including such values as meritocracy, neoliberal globalization, ‘survival of the fittest,’ and didactic education. These values are part of the dominant ideology and become obstacles to educational change when they are assumed as natural and historically deterministic. Concurrently, many educators claim education to be neutral, apolitical, and areligious, thus not recognizing, or intentionally ignoring, the political underpinnings of such hegemonic values. However this is denial of the reality that we all, as humans, are biased according to our experiential basis for understanding the world, and educators thus teach through their subjective ideology (Freire, 1998). Peace Education is earnest however, honest with its purposes and values as a liberating force, in the words of Dylan Thomas, to the exaltation of truth: ‘do not go gentle into that good night; rage, rage against the dying of the light!’

PEACE EDUCATION AS LIBERATION PEDAGOGY

Peace Education pedagogy is participatory and dialogical, using such methods as dyads, cooperative learning projects, discussion groups, brainstorming sessions, problem-solving frameworks, alternative futures exercises, and case studies of peace movements across the globe in order to foster critical thinking (Reardon and Cabezudo, 2002). The participatory process is learner-centered and facilitated through a horizontal act of love, respecting learners as equal in human dignity, and exemplifying the idea that we are all learning. The pedagogy values diverse ways of life and examines the normative principles of varying societies. Lived experiences as the expression of those very principles is explored through storytelling methodology. Peace Education pedagogy, as practiced by the author, is informed by the peace praxes of Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal, and Betty Reardon.

Paulo Freire, as an adult educator, theorized about systems of oppression afflicting the poor in Brasil. He wrote a landmark work in 1970 titled Pedagogy of the Oppressed explaining his educational theory and practice. This work was subversive toward traditional forms of education, what he calls the ‘banking’ model (Freire, 2006, p. 72), and sought to rethink modes of teaching and learning. He articulated the oppressive nature of this system of education and charged that through dialogue and a constant reflection on ‘reality’ and systems, peoples would be liberated. Freire proclaims (ibid):

If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings…And
since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s “depositing” ideas in another…. (pp. 88-89).

Freire emphasizes the development of a resistant attitude towards violence and uses dialogue to seek alternatives. Peace educators produce critical thinkers who question the emphasis upon militarism [violence] found all around the world (Harris, n.d.). Education as conscientization focuses on 1) raising awareness to the oppression that steeps our states and institutions, as well as to the possible alternatives to the oppression that exist (in overcoming oppression Freire warns of the dangers of becoming the oppressors), and 2) true conscientization must lead to action for transformation. Freire, as well as the author, sees Education as conscientization as essential for an educators true humanistic devotion.

Augusto Boal, also a Latin American educator working in non-formal contexts, created in 1971, the Theatre of the Oppressed, influenced by Freire, and like Freire sought to rethink theatre and the role of a peoples’ theatre in liberating minds and societies. Boal differentiates his Theatre techniques between Image, Invisible, Forum, Newspaper, Rainbow of Desires, and Legislative. On Image Theatre he explains (Boal, 1992):

We must not forget that words are only vehicles which convey meanings, emotions, memories, ideas…which are not necessarily the same for everyone: the word spoken is never the word heard [italics by Boal]…When, in Peru, I understood that most of the time we were using the same words to mean very different things, or different words to mean the same thing, but that never were those things, or feelings, or opinions, or memories, completely rendered by the words, I started asking my students to make images…Of course those images don’t replace words but they cannot be translated into words either—they are a language in themselves. They connote words just as words may connote images—they can be complementary (pp. 174-175).

The connection between dialogue and drama, what each brings to the classroom, is clearly complementary. And it is through this discourse, this communication, between dialogue as discourse and Image as dialogue that informs a comprehensive exploration of the problematic in Peace Education. Image is a catalyst for discourse and dialogue an agitator to the status quo. Betty Reardon teaches a Pedagogy of Democratic Engagement. This pedagogy encourages the active and equal participation of all in the learning community, is experiential and inquiry-based, committed to cognitive dissonance, provocative yet respectful in exchange. It promotes active resistance to the forces that silence. Reardon and Cabezudo (2002) declare:

Education for global citizenship in a culture of peace requires a pedagogy of democratic engagement. Active and participatory engagement of students in the learning process initiated by peace curricula is the most relevant and effective pedagogy to prepare students for active participation in the global change process now being carried forth by global civil society (p. 70).

On Pedagogy of Democratic Engagement, Jenkins writes (2006, p. 3): The Peace Education Center at Teachers College, Columbia University utilizes a pedagogy of engagement in facilitating transformative learning…A pedagogy of engagement fosters student reflection on reality and possibilities for action at the level of the individual learner;
critical engagement with and analysis of existing knowledge; and engagement with the community around the issues under study toward the achievement of change. A pedagogy of engagement intentionally fosters a commitment to learning, and a commitment to others through the building of learning communities, both for the benefits of learning from and with each other and for the political and action possibilities…One of the intended political outcomes of learning in community is to foster community values and practices, such as sharing, participation and fellowship. This is in direct contrast to typical political processes that fragment and divide, rather than bring people together (p. 3). Each of the educators uses critical communication as a means of peacebuilding. For Freire it’s the dialogical process, a participatory atmosphere where facilitators and participants exchange lived experiences and aspirations in order to create new possibilities. For Boal it is also the dialogical process, though not necessarily of words but actions, the recognition that there are multiple ways of expressing oneself, particularly recognizing the strength and clarity of avoiding verbosity. The use of theatre as a tool of social change is to realize the value of the dialogical process but to take it a step beyond oral exchange. For Reardon it is the nurturance of learning communities committed to the development of new modes of thought.

Inspired by Freire, bell hooks, a critical pedagogue from Kentucky and noted Black feminist scholar (1990) accedes:

I have found that students are much more engaged when they are learning how to think critically and analytically by exploring concrete aspects of their reality, particularly their experience of popular culture. Teaching theory, I find that students may understand a particular paradigm in the abstract but are unable to see how to apply it to their lives. Focusing on popular culture has been one of the main ways to bridge this gap (p. 6). In consequence, the arts—theatre, music, film, literature—are used in the development of the curriculum intervention proposed herewith, because it is a paradigm with which Kentucky and Japanese youth can easily relate and understand. It is, for middle class White students ‘their world,’ and for minorities an expression of their enduring difference and marginality.

Much of my work with feminist theory has stressed the importance of understanding difference, of the ways race and class status determine the degree to which one can assert male domination and privilege and most importantly the ways racism and sexism are interlocking systems of domination which uphold and sustain one another” (ibid, p.59).

She begins her explanation of critical pedagogy: “For me, critical pedagogy is fundamentally linked to a concern with creating strategies that will allow colonized folks to decolonize their minds and actions, thereby promoting the insurrection of subjugated knowledge” (ibid, p.8). In this way critical pedagogy questions knowledge and power relations, and is fundamentally epistemological. This aspect of the pedagogies unites them in peacebuilding efforts, and is precisely the rationale for the employment of these practices in Peace Education, as well as the intervention program proposed herewith for Japanese and Kentucky schools.

STORYTELLING AS PEACE PEDAGOGY

The fundamental thesis behind this research is that schooling in homogeneous contexts
perpetuates racist and sexist attitudes because students, teachers, administrators, and parents have not been exposed to non-dominant life perspectives, and the diversity that does exist within these schools goes unnoticed, or is intentionally ignored. However, this is not to suggest that growing up in homogeneous conditions warrants discriminatory attitudes, but that the singular context may reinforce such beliefs. Consequently, the subordinate groups quietly present within homogeneous situations experience a type of ‘blind’ oppression; and so long as the educators within these homogeneous schooling locales do not experience education and life within diverse areas, they are probably doomed to replicating the homogeneous education they received with all its insidious power dynamics.

For many educators who leave these contexts to later return, travel to metropolitan regions, study in different locales, and appropriate cosmopolitanism, they bring back to their schools a radically different education. This education is not necessarily to be valued over, which in so doing would contradict the value of diversity, but is to appreciate the intercultural experiences gained through such an education. These experiences hopefully accompany greater understanding and sensitization toward others, particularly if gained through an experience of oppression, hence developing increased comprehension of motives of oppressors.

Christine Sleeter (1996) writes:

Teachers bring to their work a worldview that is constructed within unequal racial relationships, but they usually do not recognize it as such…Most whites live in racially homogeneous neighborhoods, families, social groups, and churches, and consume media that are dominated by whites. Most whites spend little or no extended time on non-white “turf,” although they may incorporate a few people of color into their own worlds…Travel and contact experiences can sometimes help whites realize how much they do not understand about race relations and sensitize them to injustices and to perspectives and experiences of other groups (pp. 79-80).

One of the great successes of the feminist movement and other movements of the 20th century has been to expose the injustices that perpetuate social institutions (i.e., schools, governments, patriarchy, marriage, etc.). In unclothing these injustices feminist scholars have documented struggles by sharing and recording histories. This process of sharing, listening, and recording lived experiences of the marginalized empowers those ‘without a voice’ by giving the silenced vociferation. Essentially this act is accomplished through the art of storytelling. Listening to, respecting and earnestly being interested in the experiences of all helps to counter the hegemony of the dominant groups. Mies (1983) writes:

Women have so far not been able to appropriate, i.e., make their own, the social changes to which they have been subjected passively in the course of history. Women do make history, but in the past they have not appropriated their history as subjects. Such a subjective appropriation of their history would lead to something like a collective women’s consciousness (in analogy to class consciousness) without which no struggle for emancipation can be successful. The appropriation of women’s history can be promoted by feminist scholars who can inspire and help other women to document their campaigns and struggles (p. 127).
Senehi (2000) claims storytelling is a means of peacebuilding:

Storytelling—like all cultural production is a means through which community is constructed. Through stories, groups and societies create, recreate, and alter social identities, power relations, knowledge, memory, and emotion...Thus, peacebuilding involves community building in a way that is driven forward by the parties themselves and not imposed from above or without (p. 97).

This style of respecting and being engaged with others’ experiences is potentially accrediting for the subjected and presents the opportunity to rehear and understand the world from varied perspectives, especially those of the subjugated classes. And what is storytelling but an act of art. Like the recording of oral histories, storytelling also acts as a form of historical documentation. Storytelling is one of the great forms that give song to the unsung. As discussed above, this thesis proposes the intervention of Peace Education and the arts to deal with issues of injustice in the classroom. Cynthia Cohen (2005) writes:

Engaging with the arts can generate, for both individuals and collectivities, for creators and spectators, special qualities of attention and response -- such as disinterestedness, committed participation, meta-cognitive alertness, receptivity, and blissful serenity. These qualities of attention and response afford unique opportunities for learning, empathy, reflexivity, creativity, innovation and experimentation. The engagement with a work of art or cultural form that gives rise to these special qualities of attention and response can best be understood within the framework of aesthetic experience (n.p.).

Storytelling is, therefore, apparatus for conflict transformation. Through the use of storytelling an opportunity is given for participants to share their lived experiences, affirm each other, and create and internalize new possibilities. The use of the arts in the classroom leads to richer discussion and more complete engagement by the students who are aesthetically engaged, as well as scientifically, which in return promises deeper reflection, altered attitudes, and changed behaviors.

If all societies have elements of peaceful behavior (Boulding, 2000), the practice of peace storytelling then could be utilized as a technique for eliciting stories of peace, as well as for envisioning peaceful futures. This would in effect help to raise problems, dialogue solutions, and potentially lead to reconciliation through storytelling. Essentially this is a participative process of community building between the individual and society. Boulding refers to the influence of Fred Polak’s work on her research as a sociologist. Polak discovered that the images of the future that peoples hold for themselves in fact influences their behaviors. Societies ‘tended to be empowered by positive images of the future’ (ibid, p.105). Peace storytelling acquaints us with stories of peace from the past and constructive ways of dealing with adversity, conflict and injustices today and in the future. Each society has numerous peace heroes of the past to write volumes on and to share with children. Augusto Boal’s Theatre as a form of storytelling aids education cohorts in imaging peaceful cultures through exploration of human relations, particularly transition images from a system of oppression to a world of liberation.

STORYTELLING FOR TRANSFORMATION

We return to Kuniko Soga’s story. Her vision of the future, 100 years following the
bombardment, and several generations after but connected to that catastrophic morning of August 1945. Kuniko’s vision offers faith, healing, and a critical mind. This chapter ends with her story as it exemplifies one possible classroom activity for schoolteachers—creative writing and storytelling as sharing and envisioning a better world—and is an exploration of values and, not least of all, hope. Storytelling is a means to remember, to share, and to create possibilities.

Hiroshima 2045

In July, 2045, Taro is sitting in a peace education class at a junior high school in Hiroshima. The class meets once a week, and what he learns has helped him a lot to resolve conflicts peacefully with his friends, siblings and parents. Since childhood Taro has been told by his parents and grandparents that an atomic bomb was dropped in Hiroshima by a US bomber in 1945, killing hundreds of thousands of people instantly. His great-grandmother was at school in Hiroshima city then, but she narrowly escaped from the sea of fire, by running for her life all the way home. Her younger brother was killed at the age of 12.

At that time in 1942-45 when Japan was at war with the United States, many young people went to battlefields, with the firm determination that they would put even their lives at risk in order to protect their own country, their parents or their families from the enemy. They believed that fighting fiercely was the only right way to resolve the conflict between the two countries, because information about situations in other parts of the world was not easily available due to the lack in information technology. The radio and the newspapers were practically the only means of mass media, and the news sources were strictly controlled by the government and the military. At school, students were indoctrinated to believe only what the military government wanted the young people to know. Taro is 12 years old now, the same age of his great-grandmother’s brother when he was killed by the atomic bomb in Hiroshima 100 years ago. Education and information technology have changed greatly ever since. The global network of the Internet has made it possible for anyone, even a young boy like Taro, to access information he needs to investigate and get hold of social and physical environments he’s currently surrounded with. Good English education has enabled the students to understand the vast pool of English information put out by diverse sources in the world. At school, students are taught how to analyze the information they acquire and raise proper questions to lead them into the next step in their search for the truth. Bringing together the results of their research to the classroom, the teacher and the students discuss a lot to broaden and deepen their knowledge and understanding of situations that surround them in the world.

In the past 30 years, Japan has maintained independent defense capability against a military or other violent attacks by any aggressive nation. It had taken Japan a long time since the end of WWII in 1945 to came out free of the US military umbrella by terminating the bilateral agreement of the Japan-US Security Treaty. Japan has put in efforts to train professionals who can develop advanced scientific knowledge and skills in defending the country. They have also been educated about high moral values of non-violence and respect for the basic human rights of any person on earth. At the same time, our diplomats are well disciplined in negotiating with others to arrive at a peaceful resolution to any conflict. With the strong defense body staffed and supported by these capable scientific, technical and diplomatic professionals, Japan can now stand firmly on her own
in dealing with other independent nations.

Such change in the attitude and structure of Japan’s self-defense body has been promoted by the increasingly strong commitment of all the UN member countries to the multilateral efforts in maintaining peace in the world. Whenever any disruption to world peace or any conflict among nations should take place anywhere in the world, the revitalized UN takes an initiative in listening to parties involved, and bringing their cases to the discussion table of the UN. After the deliberate and fair judgment of each case, the UN negotiates with parties concerned or organizes some defense body for action, if necessary, to restore peace. In the latter case, every member country contributes their defense capability in one form or another in accordance to what the UN decides.

One-hundred years after the explosion of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima, Taro lives in a much safer world, because of good education, a strong sense of responsibility and capability by Japan for her own self-defense, and the firm commitment by all the UN member nations for cooperative and multilateral efforts in maintaining peace in the world. His life won’t be violently nipped off early like his great-grandmother’s brother was, but he can look forward to putting what he received through education to the service of making the world a better and safer place for the next generation of people. On the other hand, Taro feels grateful to his great-grandmother for running for her life from the atomic-bomb catastrophe. Because she had survived he’s here today to enjoy a happy and peaceful life.

References


Footnotes


About the Author

Kevin Kester currently teaches in Chicago with Northwestern University’s Center for Talent Development. He was educated at University of Louisville, Teachers College Columbia University, and United Nations mandated University for Peace in Costa Rica.