Two students' journeys of thinking about the notions of peace through the tragedy of Hiroshima: A comparative case study of the effect of students' historical backgrounds on peace education[1]

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Abstract

This comparative case study explores two students' journeys of deconstructing and reconstructing the notion of peace based on their historical background. Thirty-eight students, coming from five different countries, participated in the Hiroshima Summer School in 2017 that aimed at considering what peace is through learning about the tragedy of Hiroshima from diverse perspectives. The authors, all participating in the program as instructors and facilitators, took field notes, collected students' materials, and conducted semi-structured interviews after the program finished. The data of each student were coded by an individual researcher, and the processes of the students' thinking journeys were illustrated after several instances of peer check. In this research, we focus on two students' narratives: Yuliya from Honolulu, Hawaii and Yuka from Hiroshima, Japan; both cities were iconic victims of the WWII. While participating in the summer school, Yuliya and Yuka moved from stereotypical "peace" images to more complex and diverse notions of peace. However, the details were not the same. Yuliya mainly focused on understanding multiple perspectives of Hiroshima, saying that she "wanted to find something else" to define her notion of peace. She approached Hiroshima in a compassionate, yet calm tone and tried to redefine the narrative that portrays Hiroshima simply as a victim. On the other hand, Yuka tended to emphasize her meta-recognition about Hiroshima because of her exposure to other perspectives. Her emotion toward Hiroshima derived from her historical background and impacted her learning experience at the summer school. From the comparison, we discovered that what students learned from peace education differed in deeper levels as influenced by students' historical backgrounds such as collective memories, beliefs, and

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personal experiences. From the findings of this research, the authors argue for the necessity of open-ended peace education and a holistic approach in designing and analysing the intervention research of peace education.

Introduction

On August 6, 1945, the American bomber Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb over Hiroshima, Japan. It was the first use of the nuclear weapon against human beings and caused heavy damages and casualties. On the debris of the tragedy, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum (from now on, HPMM) now stands. The HPMM remembers the people who were sacrificed by the bomb and sends the message "No More Hiroshima" to the world (Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, 2015). For the HPMM, elimination of nuclear weapons is the required condition of a peaceful world.

Yet, it is not the only way of remembering the tragedy of Hiroshima. After seeing the HPMM, the people from Honolulu, which has a history of an attack by Japanese military during WWII, may react differently from what the HPMM intended (Yaguchi, Morimo, & Nakayama, 2011). The victim discourse, such as "I remember Pearl Harbour," as President Trump said, affects how Hawaiian (also, American) understand the catastrophe that is also based on another victim discourse. When the people from Honolulu think about peace through the tragedy caused by the nuclear weapon in Hiroshima, the discourse of Hawaii may remind them of other values such as fairness and justice.

The history of a community and the memory that its members have created, shared, revised, and reproduced plays a critical role in how to understand historical events and how to think about peace (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995; Olick & Robbins, 1998). Many interventions in peace education, which collaborated with history education, have considered the relationship between collective memory and students' understandings of historical events (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2012). For example, Kolikant and Pollack (2009) problematized the discourse gap between Israeli Jewish and Israeli Arab students and the situation that the chasm affected the students' different interpretations of the same historical event. To bridge the gap, they created opportunities that the students could exchange one another's discourse and attempted historical reconciliation between the two groups.

The mentioned intervention research supported the participants'

communications and conduced to their mutual understanding of certain historical events. Focused on the discourse gap between the communities, however, they assumed that the students who participated in the research were sharing the same (or, at least similar) amount of collective memory of their community. Each student individualized the community's collective memory based on their own context and other individual-level factors, such as friendship and personal character, may have affected their historical understanding and the way of thinking about peace. In other words, the researchers of the earlier studies did not properly examine the possibilities of "individual." Therefore, to remedy this shortcoming and receiving hints for designing rigours study, this research aims at holistically exploring what and how individual students learn in an intervention of peace education.

A Framework: Students' historical backgrounds

Each community has its own way of remembering history. For building and maintaining the identity, the community narrates stories, shares them, and creates the collective memories (Bamberg, 2010). However, there is no perfect collective memory. The memory changes depending on time and space (Lewicka, 2008; Lipsitz, 1990). Additionally, the power struggles surrounding *whose memory it is* cause modification of it (Chirwa, 1998). Depending on the desire of the community, a certain way of remembering receives attention. As more and more members embrace the memory, it acquires the status of the official discourse of the community (Cubitt, 2003).

An individual who lives in multiple communities such as family, school, religion group, and nation state cannot be free from collective memory. By investigating how Americans have commemorated national wars and heroes, Schwartz (1982) clarified that the way of remembering those histories as a nation has influenced how individual Americans understand them. Halbwachs (1992), who is one of the pioneers in social memory research, elucidated how physical and non-physical spaces influence the creations of collective memory and how the memory guides the community members' thoughts.

Considering that remembering is a context-based activity (Sutton, 2008), the explained relationship between collective memory and individual's understanding about the memory seems reasonable. From the perspective of social constructivism, however, collective memory is not the only determinant to shape individual's understanding. People construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct their own identity while encountering meaningful experiences (Burr, 2003; Hall & Du Gay, 1996). Passing through the lens of an individual's historical background, which is whole experiences and thoughts as a human being, *our* collective memory turns into *my* understanding on community's history.

Research Design

To understand what and how students learn in an intervention of peace, the authors conducted a comparative case study focusing on their historical background. The 38 participants who came from five different countries participated in the Hiroshima Summer School in 2017, which conducted a program to think about peace through the tragedy of Hiroshima. Among the students, we focused on two individuals: Yuliya from Honolulu, Hawaii and Yuka from Hiroshima, Japan. Because the cities were iconic victims of WWII and have shared a strong collective memory about the period, the students are suitable samples for exploring the relationship between the collective memory and an individual's understanding about an historical event and the notions of peace.

Context: The Hiroshima Summer School in 2017

The intervention of this research was associated with the "Global School" project that aimed at creating visions for a sustainable society. Hiroshima hosted the project in 2017 after the first school in Hawaii in 2016, and the authors were asked to take charge of the Hiroshima Summer School in 2017, which was a three-day long preliminary event of the global school. Thirty-eight high school students from Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, and the U.S. participated in the project and had opportunities to think about peace through the tragedy of Hiroshima.

The authors saw the summer school as an opportunity to create a rigorous collaboration between peace education and history education. History education, which tends to be limited within the domestic context and isolated from other discourses beyond a nation (Apple, 1979; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991), is one of the major obstacles to developing a peaceful atmosphere (Korostelina, 2013; McCully, 2010; Page, 2000). Grounded in contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Brown & Hewstone, 2005) and social constructionism (Burr, 2003), the authors designed and practiced a peace education unit which aimed at rethinking Hiroshima with multiple perspectives from inside and outside of Japan. The first author engaged in the summer school as the main instructor and the others participated as facilitators and observers.

The unit "What is the lasting impact of the use of the nuclear weapon during WWII in Japan?" was designed to deconstruct and reconstruct students' notions of peace (Kim & Kusahara, in press). To address the main question, the same as the title of the unit, students went through three supporting questions: a) "What events during WWII led the U.S. to use nuclear weapons in Japan?" b) "How did the use of the atomic bomb affect Hiroshima, and how did the city's residents react to this?" and c) "Who should the word 'we'

represent in the memorial cenotaph for the atomic bomb victims, which reads, 'Let all souls here rest in peace for we shall not repeat the evil?'" In details, the students learned what happened in Hiroshima before and after the use of the atomic bomb, conducted research about how people in Hiroshima dealt with the issues surrounding the use of the weapon, interviewed visitors of the HPMM who had diverse historical background, listened to a story from a *Hibakusha*, a survivor of the catastrophe caused by the nuclear weapon, and encountered varied views on Obama's Hiroshima visit in 2016. The unit culminated with a summative performance task to create and propose a design for the last ten feet of the HPMM, where the message for most museums is condensed. Based on the inquiry so far, students created their design and wrote down the explanation about the design as the answer to the main question. At the last step of the program, students presented the designs at the mock exhibition, and the visitors from outside of the summer school enriched the interactions at the exhibition.

Data collection and analysis

The authors utilized grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) in answering the research question: "How do students' historical backgrounds affect their understanding about peace?" Before the summer school started, the authors had asked the participants to pick up an image that represented their notions of peace and explain why they chose the it. To understand what the students learned, the authors recorded the whole process of the intervention, transcribed it, and extracted the moments that the students actively expressed their thoughts on Hiroshima and the notions of peace. Yuliya and Yuka's reactions at these moments were coded and cross-checked by other data such as field notes and all the learning materials that students created.

To explore the two students' learning more deeply, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with Yuliya and Yuka individually. In the interviews, the students were reminded of their meaningful moments from the intervention and shared what they thought at those moments and why they became to have those kinds of thoughts (for details of the questions, see Appendix). Firstly, we conducted open coding to understand their learning paths holistically. After classifying the results of the open coding, we re-coded them focusing on students' learnings and the reasons for the learnings. Based on the derived codes, we created an image of each student's learning path. These images were the visualization of the effect of students' historical backgrounds on this intervention. By comparing the two cases, we intended to draw abundant discussion between students' historical background and peace education.

Two students' journeys

"I want to think about something else": Yuliya from Honolulu, the U.S.

For her peace image before the Hiroshima Summer School in 2017, Yuliya chose a picture of a building that had two paintings; One was a skull, and the other was a pretty woman. Depending from which vantagepoint one views the building, the number of pictures that a person can see is different. Yuliya said, "The two paintings represent … different perspectives in life." For her, peace is a situation to celebrate diversity, and it can be achieved "by the ability to thrive with one another and learn from differences."

As an introductory activity, the participants of the summer school were asked to evaluate Obama's Hiroshima visit and exchange one another's opinions about it. From Yuliya's perspective, the former president did a 75 percent good job. Mentioning "(Obama) acknowledged the mistake of the president at that time," she evaluated his bravery to come to Hiroshima and face the history highly. She did not give him a 100 percent good job rating because he did not apologize to the victims of the nuclear weapon. Considering "it was never his action," however, she evaluated his visit positively and thought the apologies were not essential at this time. In the U.S., there has been a discourse collision surrounding the way of remembering Hiroshima (e.g., Boyer, 1995). Her reaction also came from the competing discourses in the U.S.; therefore, it is possible to say that she referred to the U.S. context at this moment.

After seeing the HPMM, Yuliya problematized a mono-discourse atmosphere of the museum. Even though it was informative and "gave … steps (for bringing) you right into the past," she thought the museum needed "diverse opinions," such as adding "colours" into a "black and white" picture. At a glance, it seems that she wanted to add the Hawaiian discourse to the HPMM for pursuing fairness. However, her "colours" were not limited in the victim discourse of Hawaii. She was a person who celebrated diversity. For her, including "the whole story" and creating meaningful discussion were more important than seeking fairness.

Yuliya also mentioned that a speech from a *Hibakusha*, a survivor of the tragedy of the nuclear weapon, was "very powerful." Before hearing the speech, the tragedy of Hiroshima was just content in a history textbook. She said, "I didn't know (her struggles) before hearing the story … even though the person being affected by radiation … was discriminated for that." By encountering the new perspective, which facilitates to humanize the tragedy of Hiroshima, Hiroshima was not just a historical event in the textbook to Yuliya any more.

When Yuliya was asked to decide who should be "we" in the memorial cenotaph, in other words, who should be responsible for the tragedy of

Hiroshima, her answer was Japan. When exchanging the opinions with others on Obama's Hiroshima visit, she was inspired by one student's comment who argued "accepting own's flaws" was a precondition to achieve peace. Yuliya said she had a similar experience; after she accepted her flaws first, she could see the world peacefully. After learning how Korea and China saw Obama's Hiroshima visit, she realized that there were "so many perspectives" surrounding the use of the nuclear weapon during WWII in Hiroshima and how Japan was also responsible for the tragedy. For her, accepting the flaws of what Japan did during WWII was a premise to reconcile with others and the catastrophic past.

Based on the inquiry so far, Yuliya and her teammates created their last ten feet of the HPMM, title "The Tree of Peace," with the following proposal statement.

> With all these conflicting opinions and values, peace seems difficult and nearly impossible, but it is necessary to hope and strive for peace to reach a better future. To nourish the Tree of Peace, all conflicting views must come together, compromise, and reach unity with one another and learn to accept one another, no matter how difficult that may be. Only once acceptance and mutual understanding are reached may peace be achieved.

Yuliya said her group agreed on valuing the whole story of the tragedy of Hiroshima even though some perspectives collided with one another. For them, peace cannot be achieved by escaping conflicts. Rather, they thought that conflicts were the process to realize a peaceful world. With the design, they argued the necessity of developing tolerance to face with those conflicts like a nurturing tree. Through the efforts of those who strive for peace and tranquillity, they thought "the Tree of Peace will flourish."

Being asked a question "what is peace?" one more time in the interview, Yuliya said, "I really can't think about it at the top of my mind." Instead of mentioning the images that came up in her mind, she deferred answering the question and said, "I want to find something else." Through the intervention, she realized that peace was not a simple notion as she had previously thought. The desire to explore peace more in depth was her biggest learning at the summer school.

Beyond "my peace": Yuka from Hiroshima, Japan

As her peace image, Yuka picked up a photo of six people freely jumping on the seashore at sunset. She explained this picture depicted "a situation that people can do what they expected as expected." Before the summer school started, the notion of peace that Yuka had was an individual idea, in other words, "my peace."

In the scene of evaluating Obama's Hiroshima visit, Yuka thought "the U.S.

does not have to apologize" for the use of the nuclear weapon because "Japan was bad too in light of providing a reason to use the nuclear weapon." While reflecting on this activity, however, she changed her opinion. Yuka said, "His visit can be evaluated as an important step, … but I am not sure if it was a perfectly good job without an apology." Through the intervention, especially encountering real voices on the tragedy, such as *Hibakusha*'s speech and the interviews with visitors of the HPMM, she became to realize that her understanding of the tragedy of Hiroshima was superficial, saying "I may not know anything about the tragedy." As understanding "the stories of the individuals, families, the death of precious people" and empathizing them, she started to humanize the tragedy of Hiroshima and connect it to herself.

Yuka said that the interview with a visitor of the HPMM who came from the U.S. was "impressive." She said, "While lips were shaking, the visitor expressed her anger" against the HPMM because "the exhibition of the museum seems to only focus on the nuclear weapon, and it does not refer to the background story, the overall flows." When Yuka participated in the Global School in Hawaii in 2016, she felt "attacked" by the discourse of Hawaii, which viewed Japan as bad in terms of the attack on Pearl Harbour. While in Hiroshima, she dramatically encountered this uncomfortable viewpoint again. Different from one year ago, she decided not to escape from this perspective and admitted that understanding "the whole story" of a historical event is important. Furthermore, she also became to comprehend the necessity to broaden her notion of peace, saying "When I talk about my peace, I did not consider these (the whole story) things."

When deciding "we" in the memorial cenotaph, Yuka argued the countries or people that related to the use of the nuclear weapon should be responsible for that. Against many students who insisted "we" should be all humankind, she said, "I thought it would be strange that the people who did not do an 'evil' thing would need to be responsible for the tragedy." Yuka thought that, if "we" means all humankind, it would be "unfair for the people who are not directly related to the tragedy." For her, fairness was an important element to define the notion of peace.

For the last ten feet of the HPMM, Yuka and her teammates created a poem titled "What is Peace?" By showing several cases that an individual might have a different notion of peace according to the context he or she is in, the students aimed at giving the visitors of the HPMM opportunities to "look (at the tragedy of Hiroshima) from different perspectives" and "think about their own definition of peace." With the decoration of the photos that explained the overall flow of the tragedy of Hiroshima, they tried to clarify the meaning of the poem. Additionally, they painted the edge of the frame with using yellow, red, black, brown, green and blue randomly. They said each colour represented different notions of peace, and it "creates the beauty when the

colours were united" as all of us as human beings who live in this world create the beauty of unity and peace on the earth.

When asked the question "If you can add some more images, what would be your additional ideas about peace after this summer school?" Yuka answered that she wanted to "add many peace images from different people." Through the intervention at the summer school, she learned that seeing a historical event from multiple perspectives and considering the whole story about it were valuable to think about peace. Creating a bigger peace image by admitting and adopting other's notions of peace was her way of celebrating diversity. Her notion of peace was not limited in an individual peace anymore.

Comparison and discussion

Both students could deconstruct and reconstruct their notions of peace while exploring the tragedy of Hiroshima. In the case of Yuliya, the intervention provided her with the motivation to find a better notion of peace. As continually encountering the others' perspectives in the intervention, she discovered the possibility that she may find a better notion of peace. Celebrating diversity was still valid for her, but she deferred to confirm her notion of peace. In the case of Yuka, the intervention was an opportunity to embrace differences. She knew that there were the multiple ways of remembering Hiroshima; however, she was not ready to confront the uncomfortable perspectives that differed from her community's collective memory. The experiences to encounter others' voices multiple times and discussing one another's thoughts helped her to overcome the fear of facing the uncomfortableness and, furthermore, to accept different notions of peace.

To compare these two students' journeys in the summer school in detail, the authors re-coded the result of each case study. Focusing on how students' historical backgrounds worked when the students encountered others' perspectives, which was the targeted learning opportunities in the intervention, we could draw three common codes: collective memory, belief, and personal experiences (Figure 1).
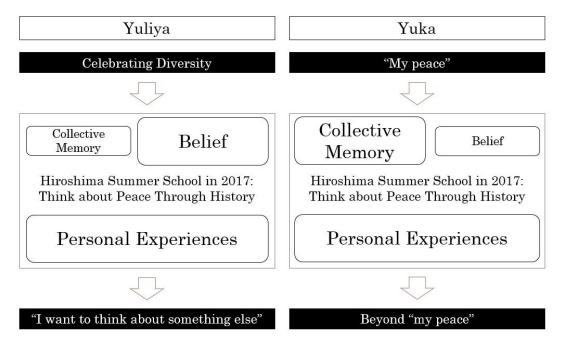
Figure 1. The comparison of the Yuliya and Yuka's leaning paths

In the case of Yuliya, collective memory did not have a direct influence on her learning path. Even though she was born and raised in Hawaii, the victim discourse did not match her belief, which values diversity. She referred to the U.S. discourse when she evaluated Obama's Hiroshima visit; however, it was not the dominant cause to define her understanding of the tragedy of Hiroshima. On the other hand, in the case of Yuka, the collective memory that she has shared with her community, Hiroshima, was an important factor in her learning process. Her learning in the intervention was a struggle with others' perspectives that were different from the collective memory of Hiroshima, such as the interviewee's opinions on the HPMM. Like this, the degree that students absorbed their community's collective memory was different, and what and how students learned is also different from it. Considering the dynamics between collective memory and students' historical backgrounds, it is not possible to regard that all the students in a certain community share the same degree of collective memory.

Because an intervention of peace education frequently deals with values (Harris & Morrison, 2013), students' beliefs tend to connect to their learning. In the case of Yuliya, her belief in diversity was the grounds to voice a variety of opinions at the meaningful moments in the intervention. She was open-minded from the starting point of the program and became more open-minded through encountering perspectives that differed from hers and exchanging opinions with others who might have a dissimilar historical background. On the other hand, in the case of Yuka, belief was the second factor that influenced her learning, followed by collective memory. The narration of her journey unfolded with the

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collective memory that she interpreted in her way. The way in which students' historical backgrounds affects their learning is varied. There are also dynamics between students' historical backgrounds and the intervention in peace education.

The two case studies also showed the importance of personal experiences in students' learning. When Yuliya heard a student's comment about "accepting the flaws," she was reminded of her experience that she could overcome bad memories by accepting her flaws. Because of this experience, the student's comment resonated in her, and she had an opportunity to rethink about her notion of peace. When Yuka had an interview with a visitor who came from the U.S., she was reminded of her experience that she felt "attacked" in Hawaii. In 2016, she just thought "there is something" that she needed to consider, but she left the thought behind for a year. In 2017, when she encountered this uncomfortable perspective for the second time, she realized that it is not possible to run away from it and helped her to face with it. Considering what and how students learn differs according to students' personal experiences, the intervention of peace education needs to be grounded on the understanding of students.

Conclusion and implications

Because of the number of samples, it is difficult to generalize the findings of this research. Through the in-depth case studies, however, the authors at least clarified a small piece of the puzzle, the effect of students' historical backgrounds on the intervention of peace education. The two students' learning paths, which is what and how students learned in the intervention, were different according to how students interpret their community's collective memory, what they believe in, and what they have experienced in their life. In the students' journey of deconstructing and reconstructing the notions of peace, these factors intertwined with one another and made the students' learning complex but abundant.

There are two implications can be drawn from the findings for the future study. Firstly, the goal of the intervention of peace education should be open-ended. Considering the possibilities of "individual" that the authors explored in this research, it is impossible to control every factor that influences students' learning. Instead of catching a hare with a tabor, guiding students to inquire into their own notion of peace is necessary. As the intervention of this research, introducing multiple perspectives and real voices from others can promote students' journey to deconstruct and reconstruct their notion of peace. Secondly, the way to capture students' learning needs to be holistic. This research clarified the premise that students in the same community share the same (or, at least) collective memory is invalid, and, furthermore, collective memory is not the only

determinant of students' learning. These findings require a new research design based on the dynamics of collective memory, belief, and personal experiences.

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Appendix: Interview questions

1. The process of designing the last ten feet of HPMM and the design itself

    a. How did you like your group's design?
    b. Were they well reflected in your group's design?
    c. How did you like the others' ideas?
    d. Do you remember any points and discussions that was important in the process?

2. Obama's Hiroshima Visit

    a. What was your opinion to Obama's Hiroshima visit?
    b. Do you remember any other opinions from your friends? Could you give me some examples?
    c. How did you think about them? Did they make you change your own?

3. The HPMM and Interviews at the HPMM

    a. What was your opinion to the HPMM?
    b. Do you remember any other opinions from interviews with the HPMM visitors?
    c. How did you think about them?
    d. Do you think the peace that they thought is different from yours?

4. "We" in the memorial cenotaph

    a. What was your opinion about "we" and why did you think so?
    b. What were other "we" you remember? How did you think about them?
    c. If you answer to the supporting question one more time, what would you say?

5. Pre and post survey

    a. Let's look back your peace image. Do you still like that image?
    b. If you can add some more images, what would be your additional ideas about peace after this summer school? What does it mean to you?