

PELSTE Peace Education Forum

March 20, 2021

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Participant commentary

First, I would like to thank the Hiroshima educators (and their students) for sharing their experience and expertise with us. It is always a joy to learn from others doing the possible (and impossible) to achieve a better world through education. The commentary, queries, and pedagogic possibilities that I will raise in a moment are in direct response to these very practical illustrations, but also draw from my own theoretical thinking on the issue of peace education. I will first offer some responses to the videos, and then turn to the theoretical thinking that offers a practical step forward, for me, toward a more just and sustainable peacebuilding through education.

First, in the videos, there were a number of impressive elements that demonstrated well, for me, peace education in practice. The elder educator, Mr Morishita, spoke of his experience as a hibakusha and the ways that his personal experience with the A-bomb significantly wove throughout his career, including social challenges faced from students and later opportunities to teach for peace in schools. The power of his approach is in its humanity and connectedness.

Then, importantly, the second educator, Mr. Taga, expanded peace education outward (and inward) in dynamic and critical ways. He addressed the cultural and structural violence within and beyond Japanese society looking toward issues such as the Zainichi, burakumin, and Japanese colonialism. He linked these internal critiques to dictatorships and authoritarianism elsewhere in the 20th century. In this, he illustrated well how “peace” may be used ideologically by some actors to force compliance and silence upon a population – such as in the ways the Japanese brought “peace” to their colonies, or how contemporary modernization brings “peace” to those whose traditions and cultures it forsakes in the march toward “progress”. In this, he indicated well how peace educators who fail to look inward and outward, reflecting critically on ourselves and our societies, may be implicated in the process of perpetuating naïve and uncritical forms of peace education.

The third educator, Mr Nomoto, then emphasized the importance of pedagogical coherence, that is, the alignment of the methods of peace education with the content. For example, he suggested that if educators aim to achieve democracy through education, then classroom and school governance itself should mirror such a democratic society. Or, if dialogue is encouraged as a modality of peace in society at large then surely this is mutually incompatible with the approach to punitive discipline in schools.

Next, in the student videos, I was especially impressed with the module/s examining the different theoretical orientations toward peace and peace education. I particularly appreciate how these theories then provided anchors for the students and teachers to better understand the varied ways that actors approach peace and conflict in diverse settings. All in all, the peace education I have witnessed at HIGA through these videos is exemplar.

I will now turn to offer a few critical reflections on the peace education in the videos in the interest of constructive dialogue.

In the videos, I think it could have been beneficial to define what peace is from the standpoint of each of the educators. Although I trust that we can take for granted there will be no universal consensus on how to define this important and contentious issue, clarity on what each educator is seeking to achieve in the name of peace is necessary to even begin to explore the complexity of the issue. Otherwise, educators run the danger of further obfuscating an already complicated and urgent issue like peace. The lesson learned must not simply be that people (i.e., a who) think differently about peace (i.e., a what, why and how), but rather that people in particular times and particular places (i.e., a when and where) have different responses to the issue. Moreover, it is important to clarify that not all perspectives on peace are valid in the light of human rights and social justice.

Furthermore, the theoretical premises on which the practices of peace education are based must be made explicit and scrutinized, that is, what theories and social purposes underscore the educators' practices [e.g., $(C + Tr + CI = ABC) \times N = PwL$]. Peace education must be committed to the nonviolent transformation of conflict. It needs to be intentional and systematic, yet also adaptive and locally relevant.

Additionally, while it is tremendously valuable to hear from successful cases of peace and peace education in practice around the world, such models must never be externally imposed. This raises important questions about the legitimacy of accepted universalisms in peace education, such as human rights, science, democracy and capitalism. Though uncomfortable and disorienting – particularly in a context like South Korea, where lingering Cold War animosities pose an existential threat, post-colonial tensions remain unresolved, and where only a little over 30 years ago a brutal dictatorship oversaw human rights abuses – these questions must be asked. For, there are necessarily unresolved tensions between the universal/particular, global/local, exogeneous/endogenous, and traditional/modern.

At the core of what I am saying is peace and peace education, if it is to be sustainable, healthy, and based on mutually respectful relationships, must interrogate its basic assumptions and theoretical premises. Here, decolonial thinking and decolonial action may be helpful.

This highlights three important ideas: firstly, peace education must resist modernist thinking/Eurocentrism and recognize the contributions of diverse populations across the globe. Secondly, it must emphasize a moral imperative for righting the wrongs of colonial domination (whose peace, when, where, why, and how), and an ethical stance in relation to social justice for those peoples disempowered by persistent forms of coloniality and modernity. (Having thought about these issues for some time I must again reiterate how impressed I was by the inclusion of such discourse within the practices of some of the peace educators in Hiroshima). To promote justice and rights through peace education in theory and practice implies the interrogation of educational assumptions, curricula, pedagogies, and policies to unveil the lingering colonialities that shape and constrain peace and peace education around the world.

In practice, decolonizing peace education curricula and pedagogy entails the inclusion of the histories and experiences of colonized and marginalized peoples in all societies, offering accounts of peace and peace education that would force European (and other hegemonic forms of) thinking/knowledge to confront its coloniality.

In order to transcend Eurocentricity (and other hegemonic forms of thinking/being) in teaching and learning, educators could, for example, draw on the groundbreaking work of Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010), Raewyn Connell (2007), Arturo Escobar (2011), Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2015), and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) to provide students Southern and Eastern Theories through which to analyze and digest the world of peace and peace education beyond the North and West. It is exigent to emphasize here that I am recommending *theories* from the South and East, not simply cases from these regions that have either been theorized in the North or theorized in the South with Northern theories. The fundamental point is to name and examine the world through different onto-epistemic positionings.

Finally, peace educators should not expect peace education alone (especially when the sector is so often itself implicated in the production of violence) to solve issues that are far more complex than education alone can address. Instead, embracing the fleeting moments of transformation – and enabling more of these moments to emerge through building the structures that facilitate them in classrooms and beyond – without treating education as a social panacea or expecting too much – may offer a much more practical (and inspiring) way forward.

With this, I wish to close and thank again the team in Hiroshima for sharing their experience and expertise in peace education with us. It was a pleasure to learn from you all. Thank you.

*** For more reading on the issues raised in this short commentary, see **Kester, K.**, Zembylas, M., Sweeney, L., Lee, K., Kwon, S.-J., & Kwon, J.-I. (2019). Reflections on Decolonizing Peace Education in Korea: A Critique and Some Decolonial Pedagogic Strategies. *Teaching in Higher Education* 26: 145-164.