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PEACE EDUCATION PROGRAM IN HIROSHIMA:
AN ARTFUL NARRATIVE OF TRANSFORMATIVE
EXPERIENCES

Ayako Nozawa

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PEACE EDUCATION PROGRAM IN HIROSHIMA: AN ARTFUL NARRATIVE OF TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Ayako Nozawa

Abstract

This article is an artful narrative of my transformative experiences as a teacher educator of the Peace Education program, Oleander Initiative 2018 in Hiroshima. Hiroshima is where endless stories are told and retold by many Hibakushas, the atomic-bomb survivors in an effort to give meaning to this tragic experience. They both refigure the past and create purpose for the future. I invite readers to walk through this experience while considering the following questions: What are the stories of Hiroshima? What and how did I learn from the program? How could these experiences influence and give meaning both professionally and personally to me as a teacher educator and as a whole person? I hope this article expands understanding of peace education with respect to adult education, exploring how it can lead to transformative learning experiences and give insights into artful narrative. It reminds us to be hopeful in the challenging times.

Résumé

Cet article constitue un récit artistique de mes expériences transformatrices comme formatrice d'enseignantes et enseignants au programme d'éducation à la paix Oleander Initiative 2018 à Hiroshima. À Hiroshima, d'innombrables histoires sont racontées encore et encore par les hibakushas, les personnes ayant survécu à la bombe atomique, dans un effort de faire sens de cette expérience tragique. Ces récits à la fois reconfigurent le passé et créent une intention pour l'avenir. J'invite le lectorat à considérer cette expérience en se posant les questions suivantes : Quelles sont les histoires de Hiroshima? Qu'ai-je appris du programme et comment? Comment ces expériences peuvent-elles influencer et créer pour moi un sens professionnel et personnel comme formatrice d'enseignantes et enseignants et comme personne à part entière? En explorant les manières dont cette formation peut mener à des expériences d'apprentissage transformatrices et offrir de nouvelles perspectives sur les récits artistiques, j'espère que cet article élargira la compréhension de la formation à la paix relative à l'éducation des adultes. Il nous rappelle de garder espoir dans les périodes d'incertitude.

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Figure 1. Hiroshima Peace Dome. Photo: A. Nozawa, 2018.

Foreword

Hiroshima, Japan, has been called the “City of Peace” since 1949, when Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Construction Law was established. Hiroshima attracts thousands of people from around the world, as this city is instrumental in sending out a message of peace to the world. *Hibakushas*’ (the atomic bomb survivors) voices mobilized the 2017 Nobel Peace Award recipient, the ICAN or International Campaign for Abolishment of Nuclear Weapons, a coalition of non-governmental organizations. As a result of decades of advocacy, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons passed at the United Nations in July of 2017. Hiroshima has a “power of place” (Oleander Initiative, 2018) embedded with stories of resilience and hope.

Introduction

In 2017, I led a workshop for The Oleander Initiative (OI) and members of the Global Campaign of Peace Education. The OI is a peace education program for educators from around the world, and is implemented by an American non-profit organization based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Later, in 2018, I served as a lead academic facilitator in the OI, co-led several workshops, and accompanied the OI group. This article is an artful narrative of my experiences, of being a teacher educator of this program in 2018.

These words by F. Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin (1990) echoed in the back of my mind during the program: “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p.2). Hiroshima is where endless stories are told and retold by many *Hibakushas* in an effort to give meaning to this tragic experience. In the process, they both refigure the past and create purpose for the future.

The OI exposed participants to these stories throughout the program. Dialogues and interactions happened during workshops, lectures and field trips. I used art forms such as narratives, poems and photos to recreate the essence of these dialogues and interactions, to communicate it and to “clarify my authentic experience” (Aoki, 1983, p. 15). I invite readers to walk through this experience with me while considering the following questions: What are the stories of Hiroshima? What and how did I learn from the program? How

could these experiences influence and give meaning both professionally and personally to me as a teacher educator and as a whole person? By asking these questions, I hope this article expands understanding of peace education with respect to adult education and gives insights into artful narrative.

Oleander Initiative (OI) and Peace Education

This program began in 2016 and was named for the oleander flower, which bloomed in the irradiated town and symbolizes the dangers of nuclear war and the hope of a more peaceful future. As OI's website (n.d.) states,

The Oleander Initiative gathers educators from around the world to transform the lessons of Hiroshima into relevant and impactful peace education activities for their students. The Oleander Initiative generates deep awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons and equips participants with intellectual tools for conflict resolution and mutual understanding. (<https://oleanderinitiative.org>)

In its third year, the 2018 OI gathered twelve peace educators from secondary and higher-level education as well as consultants from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and the United States. Ray Matsumiya, Director of the OI, has a strong mission to work in conflict resolution and education. His grandfather was only 15 miles away from Hiroshima on August 1945, and as a result of that proximity, lost his vision. From his grandfather Ray learned to embrace the lessons of forgiveness and resilience (Matsumiya, 2016). As one of the academic facilitators for this program, I led three debriefing sessions to help participants integrate their experiences, while supporting them as a cultural interpreter during their study tour. I also helped foster a positive group dynamic and maximize their learning and growth as educators in this peace program.

This immersion program consisted of field trips, special lectures and workshops on peace-related topics as well as presentations by *Hibakushas*. Participants visited significant historical places in Hiroshima like the World Conference against A and H Bombs and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony. They took part in the Peace & Art & Music event and attended the floating lantern event on August 6. They also participated in peace education at the various local schools. A report in the OI (2018) highlights Hiroshima as the only modern-day city in the world with an educational system that requires all grade levels—from pre-school to high school graduation—to include a peace education component in its curriculum. At the end of the program, it should be noted, these educators created their own peace curricula that would be presented in their own home.

Since World War II, there has been a vast amount of research and resources in the field of peace education. This makes it challenging to summarize what peace education is, depending on the context and purposes (Harris & Morrison, 2012; UNESCO, 2001). According to Bajaj and Hantzopoulos (2016), peace education is “a field of scholarship and practice that utilizes teaching and learning not only to dismantle all forms of violence but also to create structures that build and sustain a just and equitable peace and world” (p. 1). OI uses the lessons of Hiroshima to evoke deep awareness of the impact of nuclear weapons while preparing educators for conflict resolution. This is in addition to tools that are offered

for developing knowledge about peace-making skills so that human beings learn alternative nonviolent ways of dealing with conflict. Harris and Morrison (2012) point out that

In order to eliminate war and violence humans must understand, desire, and struggle to achieve peace. If and when the desire for peace becomes strongly rooted in human consciousness, people will strive for it, demanding new social structures that reduce risks of violence. (p. 17)

Because of this tragedy, desire for peace has become strongly rooted in the consciousness of people in Hiroshima as well as in an international network of people who have been striving for it. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (United Nations, 2017) is the result of strong demands for a new social structure. Therefore, peace education goes beyond learning about the knowledge, skills and actions required to make lasting and meaningful change; it also addresses the deeper aspects of humans' emotional and spiritual growth.

Jung referred to peace as an archetype that exists within the collective unconsciousness (Harris & Morrison, 2012, p. 70). In a video (Shift Network, 2019), Philip Hellmich, the Director of Peace at the Shift Network, summarized his interviews of 100 peace builders about their inner, intrapersonal, community, national, international and planetary perspectives for the World Peace Library project and suggested that conflicts are the result of thoughts and emotions that focus on separation. Peace education, in essence, is learning how to recognize the illusion of separation in the world and to bring us back to an innate spirit of being, to help us remember we are part of the larger whole. This notion is also the foundation of holistic education (Miller, 2005).

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning theory focuses on reflecting on adult learners' assumptions and beliefs as they build new meaning of their experience. Over the years, it developed into a more holistic approach (Taylor & Cranton, 2013). When faced with an evocative event such as the A-bomb in Hiroshima, transformative experience involves a shift on all levels. I resonate with holistic transformative learning perspectives and with what O'Sullivan (2005), one of leading adult educator in transformative learning, states,

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body-awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (p. 76)

Would transformative learning always lead to a positive outcome? For example, when the issues of conflict and war are deeply embedded in participants' social context, would not the Hiroshima experience be too evocative and disturbing for some participants? Taylor and Cranston (2013) caution against an inherently positivistic view of outcomes in transformative learning. Educators must support learners experiencing a structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. Harris and Morrison (2012) suggest

acknowledging and sharing deep feelings of fear and vulnerability with others to provide a basis for joining together to address problems.

In peace education, Luo (2010) suggested that peace curriculum teachers need a rich spiritual experience, deep understanding of nature, and a holistic worldview in addition to being able to transmit academic content of what peace is and what it is not. When we engage in social change anchored in our rich spiritual experiences, there is a deeper and more sustainable transformation. I believe what Hellmich describes in a video:

[T]here is intelligence in humanity that is expressing itself to find peace and cooperation and it's doing it in all these different individual expressions. But from that bird's-eye view you can see there's a larger impulse of humanity and that impulse is really leading people to find creative solutions to problems that bring out the best of humanity. (Shift Network, 2019)

This statement also relates to Jung's understanding of peace being an archetype in our collective consciousness as mentioned earlier. As a holistic educator, I suggest that transformative learning in adult education includes a spiritual perspective.

Artful Narratives

Using the arts in research has long been supported and illuminated by researchers (see Barone & Eisner, 1997; Diamond & Mullen, 1999; Eisner, 1991; Leavy, 2015, 2019; McNiff, 1998). Research can be conducted and represented through narrative inquiry, fiction-based narrative, poetry, music, dramatic performance, and visual arts, to name a few. Researchers are creative, authentic, and powerful in what they express using the arts. When integrating my artistic side using the arts, I find that I am more expressive, whole and present. As an educator, I value the holistic experience that arts can embrace. This article reports my experience through an artful narrative. It is also built on the idea that it is vital to start with ourselves (Hunt, 1987; Miller et al., 2014; Palmer, 1993).

I integrated the arts to describe, explore and challenge our views, and to bring critical consciousness, awareness and empathy (Leavy, 2019) to this exploration. The photos of the peace dome, or lantern event, can inform one more than my descriptions. In the same way, poems can take one more directly to the intense experiences I had. The immediacy of the arts is powerful.

Through artful narratives that integrate photos and poems, I tried to capture the essence of some of the experiences during this program and express what I could not explain otherwise.

I also varied the fonts, and to help me describe and communicate the full experience. As it is participatory (Leavy, 2019), I invite readers to join this journey of transformative experience in Hiroshima with me beyond time and space.

So My Story Begins...

Growing up in Japan, I heard about Sadako's story. At the age of 2, Sadako was exposed to the atomic bomb radiations in Hiroshima. It was not until the age of 12 that Sadako first encountered the symptom of leukemia resulting from the radiations. Though the leukemia took over her body, her spirit was strong enough to use every small piece of paper

to continue folding 1000 cranes for her recovery as well as the recovery of many others. Unfortunately, her life ended before reaching her goal. Her classmates completed the 1,000 cranes, fundraised and built her statue, which now stands as a symbol of peace in the center of Peace Park. 1000 cranes sent from all over the world decorate it. When I shared the story of Sadako world-wide, I wondered what kind of inspiring children they were to accomplish such an extraordinary project in the midst of chaos 70 years ago.

After our family moved to Hiroshima in 2017, I registered my son at a local public junior high school. At the school entrance, I noticed the one-meter tall replica of the Sadako statue in a glass case. The vice principal explained it is because this junior school used to be Sadako's school. I finally found her and her friends there.

Encounter

On Aug 2, 2018, the Oleander Initiative participants from afar as well as local staff gathered at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research's (UNITAR) Hiroshima office, directly in front of the A-bomb dome. At the introductory session, we shared reasons for why we wanted to participate in the program. Upon sharing my name, my teacher partner told me that Aya means God's miracle, or sacred God's words in Arabic. I felt that our miraculous week had started.



Figure 2. Peace Museum Entrance. Photo: A. Nozawa, 2018.

*Hundreds of people injured and killed in ruins
 In these ruins, teachers gathered children
 with hope on their minds*

*They are warriors without weapons
 In this room today,
 I encountered courageous peace warriors*

School Visit and Talk

After a lecture on "Facets of Hiroshima and Hibakusha Testimony", the group visited an elementary school closest to ground zero where over 400 students and teachers died from

the atomic bomb. According to the Oleander Initiative report (2018), this school re-opened its doors for classes less than six months after the bombing and some students participated in an art exchange with American youth in 1947.

The volunteer *Hibakusya* guide showed us drawings from the students, artifacts from the A-bombing as well as a scale model of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. He pointed the path his family walked on the day of the A-bomb. Our eyes silently followed his laser pointer as he marked his journey in a ghost town created by the bomb's blast.

During the first debriefing session, one of the questions from the group was: How could *Hibakushas* forgive and become peace educators/messengers? After learning how devastating the aftermath was for people in Hiroshima, participants just could not believe how that was possible. Below, I re-created a poem from one of the *Hibakusya's* comments as depicted in the Oleander Initiative report (2018, para 13–15), as it was one of the most profound words of transformation.

*My grandparents were killed by the A-bomb.
It is a lie if I say there was no anger, agony and hatred.*

*It was only when my children were born-
these precious lives that brightened my life.
They brought healing to my life.*

*I asked myself,
“Is the world full of anger and hatred.
the one I want to pass down to these children and grandchildren?”
I needed to let the past go, no matter how painful.
“Mizu-ni Nagasu” (let it flow down the river) that’s what it was.
Directing my energies towards the future and these children.
I vowed to do everything I could to create a peaceful future.
They will never have to experience what my family did.
And then I changed,
for their lives, I changed.*

This *Hibakusya* transformed himself and his whole life for future generations. The powerful love for his children and grandchildren in this gentle elderly man was limitless. The group was silent. It made me feel hopeful as this was living proof that the strongest hatred, anger and agony from losing your beloved family could turn into peace. This story reawakened my deepest desire to be an educator. Then, the group explored the theme of compassion and forgiveness based on a Buddhist-embedded culture. A keen interest was growing among the audience which included Muslim, Jewish, and Christian participants.

Upon their return from the Peace Park tour, I introduced the essence of Connection Practice, a peace-building skill to help us find connection within ourselves as well as with others. In this session, participants learned to identify their feelings and needs so that they can develop empathy. They learned to focus on breathing and filling the heart with appreciation, which can lead to creative insights. I was surprised to see how peaceful they had become even after their provocative Peace Park visit.

The whole big heart
 Beating together
 The whole big space
 Breathing together
 Connecting our souls
 Blending to one
The whole big us
 Staying together
 The whole big life
 Unfolding together

Nursery School Visit

One of the highlights of the program was the visit with eighteen 3–6 year-old children and ten staff members at a local nursery school. Group members marveled at the speed and accuracy with which these little ones demonstrated Origami folding. Each child then brought these colourful handmade cranes to the guests. Later, they gifted us with a peace song they had created. Children were asked for their images of being in peace, and staff gathered these words to craft the text below for the song which was translated by the author into English:

What is peace (hei-wa)-
 Helping each other when in trouble
 Being kind to friends and family

"Feeling good!"
 "Hang in there!"
 "You did great!"

There are nice words you can say
 Playing with friends and having fun
 Greeting our friends every single day

We don't need atomic bombs
 We don't need wars and fighting
 As each life is a precious gift

Hearing this simple yet powerful song, many of us had tears. They showed us all the peace we have within ourselves. I became more aware of the importance of peace education. I believe that they will create a different world from the one we are in through continued peace education.

The Day Before August 6

After several lectures, we proceeded to the "Peace, Art and Music" event held at the Former Bank of Japan. I created the following poem after hearing the story of this bank.

*The only bank that survived that day
 With the black shadow of a person
 that remained on the steps
 Remaining bankers also from other banks
 Gathered here to give any amount of money
 To each client, asking for no proof
 with only trust and faith they had that
 They will somehow make it together*

*Suffering and pain
 Turned into courage that is celebrated
 Gratitude that has been created
 By songs of children
 By colourful art from the world*

On the way to the World Conference against A+H bombs, the participants from conflict zones discussed? Wondered? how teaching peace would be possible in intense despair and frustration. Though it made my heart sink and I felt helpless with the heaviness of these emotions, I listened to what needed to be expressed. The voice inside me still knew that there was peace in everyone, empowering them to find their ways.

It was time for quiet reflection and integration. I asked the participants to sit in a circle around the cranes that they had folded and tied together for the school's annual peace memorial ceremony. Next, I invited the group to express their emotions by creating clay sculptures. I wrote the following reflective poem.

*By closing our eyes, we can feel
 Under all the screams, grief, and despair
 The echo of a strong yearning that we all feel
 Molding our prayer
 Into the clay
 Made with the cranes
 from all over the world
 In a circle of friends
 from every corner of the world*

*Peace it is
 In our hearts*

*Joining our prayer
 Together on our earth*

August 6th Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony Day

It was 73 years since the atomic bomb hit Hiroshima. Thousands of people from around the world gathered at the Peace Memorial Ceremony at the Peace Park. At 8:15 a.m., the sound of sirens was heard all over the city. We were guided to stop for a moment of silence for those who lost their lives. All of a sudden, all we could hear were the cicadas on the trees.

After the ceremony we were handed flowers by the local Boy and Girl Scouts to place at the monument. I could see a flame, in the middle of the water behind the monument, burning quietly.

On the night of August 6th, Oleander educators joined more than 50,000 people from all over the world on the river banks in the center of Hiroshima City for the floating lantern ceremony. This river was once filled with floating corpses and ghost-like *Hibakushas*. This time, though, lanterns with messages to loved ones whose lives were lost as well as pledges of peace were floating on the river in the dark. The whole city turned into a silent prayer. It was no longer the city I had known; it was mysterious and beautiful. One teacher was crying, others were standing and sending off the lanterns that they had made with messages written on the sides. The lanterns were slowly moving with the water, joining others as they floated in the river. I will never forget this scene.



Figure 3. Lantern Ceremony. Photo: A. Nowaza, August 6, 2018.

Hibakusha, Shigeaki Mori

On the last day, we met Mr. Shigeaki Mori, the *Hibakusha* who greeted President Obama during his visit to Hiroshima in 2016 (Hiroshima historian, 2018). He was the subject of the award-winning documentary *Paper Lanterns* (Esposito & Frechette, 2016) and is known for his lifelong historical work on behalf of American soldiers who passed away due to the Hiroshima A-bomb. I summarized and crafted the following poem titled, "The Japanese historian honouring Hiroshima's American's dead" (Ryall, 2016), in order to capture the essence of his powerful story.

*Blown away from the bridge
I survived and walked back home
on that day*

*My old school was burned
All my friends and teachers were burned*

*12 American lives were lost
 Bodies remained silent in Hiroshima
 just like my friends and family*

*I wondered how their families felt
 not knowing what happened to them*

*For the next 40 years I dedicated my life
 to finding stories of the 12 American captives
 to find their families to tell their stories
 their names have finally been carved
 On the plaque of lost lives*

*Many wondered why I did it
 Just because of a simple reason
 Their loved ones need to know where they are
 To acknowledge their lives and bring closure to their stories*

At the end of his talk, we all stood and applauded with admiration for this elderly man who humbly bowed with a smile on his face and tears in his eyes. As described in the Oleander Initiative report (2018), one teacher said, “Today, I have become a peace educator in both my head and my heart” (para 1, line 8). His words say it all. He did not see the enemy and did not believe in the illusion of separation. By his noble example he reminded us that we are part of the whole.

Final Reflection

Through artful narratives, I revisited that summer in 2018 when I cried and laughed with participants in intense grief, despair, joy and hope. I integrated photography, poetry and narrative to recall my intense experience that seemed to have shaken off layers of the mundane in my life and reawakened the core of myself. As a collective group in this shared experience, our inner chords had been struck and vibrated so strongly that the deepest desire and commitment to peace re-invoked and re-emerged from the soul. It was “transformative learning” on every level, which nurtured my “whole person development” (Miller, 2005).

This is a story of connecting us to “the larger impulse of humanity, leading people to find creative solutions to problems that bring out the best of humanity,” said Hellmich (Shift Network, 2019). There was a strong feeling of solidarity. It confirmed that accessing feelings of fear and vulnerability freed us and provided the basis for joining together to address these problems (Harris & Morrison, 2012). Stories of resilience and hope in Hiroshima are also valuable in face of the current pandemic.

Having this experience in Hiroshima urged us to remember the past and consider the present so we can bring a sense of purpose to the creation of our future. This narrative gave me the opportunity to unpack what my experience was about. It also led me to understand why it has moved me to share the stories of Hiroshima at a local university, a Japanese school, and a Hiroshima Peace day event as well as to bridge local and international peace educators and students for future projects since I moved back to the USA. It made me

realize that peace is my core need for teaching Connection Practice as well as meditation/yoga to educators/adult learners.

There are also questions that emerged: Upon hearing that peace education becomes a burden for some students in Hiroshima or that some even feel distant from it, I wondered how we can integrate more holistic ways for teachers to keep engaging students in peace education. How can we better support educators in areas of conflict who need immediate attention and support to develop an inner capacity for peace? One educator said that inner peace was a religious issue. How can spiritual aspects in the peace education curriculum be addressed for teachers with multi-cultural/spiritual backgrounds? These questions need to be investigated further.

My knowledge of peace education in Hiroshima has become more enriched and refined so that I have become compelled to explore a variety of opportunities to apply it. I will continue to include lived experiences in the curriculum and to explore ways for learners to expand their knowledge and skill as well as to nurture their whole person development. This Hiroshima experience has become a part of me. There is almost an irresistible force emerging from within me, which is rooted in my consciousness. Immersing oneself in the field full of lived experiences and hearing the stories is a powerful gateway to teaching peace. Through this OI program, I have become more hopeful and convinced that together we can anchor our vision of peace in the world. I hope this artful narrative gives some insights to peace educators as well as adult educators regarding peace education and how it can lead to transformative learning experiences, and help us to grow as educators and as human beings, even in the challenging times we are facing now.

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