

# **Educating Citizens Who Are Open to the Discourse of Others: “The Last 10 Feet” Project and the “Making a Better Hiroshima Textbook” Project**

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to clarify how the citizens who are open to the discourses of others understand historical events and how social studies education can contribute to that goal. With the use of atomic bomb in Hiroshima during WWII and its related events, which is one of the representative events that is remembered in dissimilar ways in different countries' discourses, I developed and implemented two projects whose participants can bridge the discourse gap and develop cross-border mutual understanding. One is to redesign the last 10 feet of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, and the other is to make a better Hiroshima textbook. In this paper, firstly, I explain the theoretical and philosophical background of the projects. Then, I describe the details of the projects and the participants' learnings. Finally, I will propose what education can contribute to developing mutual understanding that transcends national borders.

## **Keywords**

Mutual understanding, Authentic communication, Hiroshima, Social studies, Museum, Textbook

## **Introduction**

From the advent of the modern nation, the autobiographical narrative of a nation has supported the imaginary community of nation-states (Anderson, 2006; Korostelina, 2013; Smith, 1991). The government of each country selected the narrative matching the context of their own country from among the collective memories domestically and abroad and granted the authority of national public records (Apple, 2000; Zajda, 2015). National history, which is shared within its people, is the border that divides the internal and external cultures.

Narratives of the nation are transmitted through various mediums such as mass media, novels, and museums (Morris-Suzuki, 2005). Among them, the public education system has played the role of systematic reproduction (Cassel & Nelson, 2013; Nakamura, 2000). National narrative, which is managed by the national curriculum and textbook certification system, gains an absolute position in the classroom and is passed on to teachers and children as the truth (Carretero, Asensio, & Rodríguez-Moneo, 2011; Coulby, 2000).

However, the nation's narrative loses its position outside of its borders. "Our" narrative about an event is only a fragment of multiple narratives around the world. The theme of this symposium, Hiroshima, is also recalled in various forms (Crawford, 2003; Hogan, 1996; Morris-Suzuki, Low, Petrov, & Tsu, 2013; Naono, 2005; Schwenger & Treat, 1994; Taylor & Jacobs, 2018; Yoneyama, 1999). In their respective textbooks, each country—Japan's suffering from the atomic bomb, the United States dropping the atomic bomb, and Korea's colonization by Japan—remembers Hiroshima as follows<sup>1</sup>.

- Japanese textbook [Hiroshima in the present tense]:
  - Cutting off Hiroshima from the history before the atomic bombing.
  - Damage, reconstruction, the abolition of nuclear weapons, peace, and succession.
- American textbook [Hiroshima in the past tense]:
  - Centered on the Pacific War.
  - Discussing the event of dropping the atomic bomb as a controversial issue.
- Korean textbook [Hiroshima in the past tense]:
  - The marginalization of Hiroshima.
  - Appeared as a trigger for Korea to become independent.

A Japanese textbook depicts Hiroshima as an event that continues to be present while keeping a distance from history before the atomic bombing. A U.S. textbook discusses Hiroshima as a past event and the suitability of the decision at that time. A Korean textbook emphasizes independence from Japan, marginalizing descriptions about Hiroshima. Even with the same Hiroshima event, *what* and *how* to remember, which is the politics of memory surrounding Hiroshima, is dependent on the context within the country.

Insisting only on the memories of one's own country in the presence of diverse

memories would be contrary to the inclination of the times when coexistence with others in other countries is required. However, considering the nation-state-based world order, it is not possible to solely criticize school education aimed at forming a nation. What can school education do under today's demand for a balance between the two? To answer the above question, I, as a specialist in social studies education, have utilized the theory of social sciences to develop, implement, and refine projects to nurture citizens who are open to the discourses of others. This paper briefly introduces the outline and results of the two projects developed and implemented with Hiroshima as the subject. It then considers the prerequisites for developing citizens who have an openness for the discourses of others in other countries<sup>2)</sup>.

## Research Design

In this paper, citizens who are open to the discourses of others are those who pursue “progressive” mutual understanding. Sudo (2001) explains the impossibility of perfect mutual understanding between oneself and others as with the case of the “Prisoner’s Dilemma” game. However, that does not mean giving up on coexistence with others. He argues that only by acknowledging that oneself and others are unable to understand one another fully, or by “agreeing to disagree,” raises the possibility of the two mutually living together. I agree with his approach to mutual understanding and aim to foster a “citizen who acknowledges the impossibility of mutual understanding, but who can continue to communicate with others towards it” through this research.

The individuals buried under the nation must first be restored to the agents of mutual understanding in order to develop mutual understanding among people belonging to different countries. For that purpose, it is necessary to create a place where people can communicate with those in other countries beyond the context of their own country, that is, a public sphere that transcends national borders. From the context of international and comparative education, the author devised the concept of “authentic communication” (Kim, 2016; 2017; 2019), which is the actual dialogue by the agents of mutual understanding, based on critical patriotism (Banks et al., 2003), critical theory (Habermas, 1991), and dialogic constructivism (Sakurai, 2002). For details of the concept, please refer to the cited references. Here, I only refer to design principles extracted from authentic communication.

- Challenging the existing cognitive framework by visualizing one's own discourse narrative and then suggesting the possibility of new discourse.
- Assisting students in capturing the (political) context surrounding the discourse of oneself and others. Also, providing opportunities to analyze and criticize it.
- Providing opportunities to convey the results of the inquiry/discussion of the internal group to the members of the external group. Also, supporting the continuation of the exchange of opinions among students.
- Selecting a medium for communication that symbolizes the discourses of the group and is familiar to students.

I have developed and implemented the following two projects based on the above principles; one is to redesign the last 10 feet of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, and the other is to make a better Hiroshima textbook. In the following section, I will describe not only the details of the projects but also the participants' learning. For that aim, I collected the documents and works created by them, asked them to write an essay about their learning during the projects, and conducted a semi-structure interview to understand their learning in more depth. All data were qualitatively coded, and the result was utilized to refine the project.

### **“Redesigning ‘The Last 10 Feet’ of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum” Project**

This project, which was developed and implemented for summer school at the “Hiroshima Innovation School” held in the summer of 2017, was an attempt to create a public sphere for 37 students from five different countries to exchange the discourses of Hiroshima in each country. A museum is a place where the memories of the exhibitor and the viewer intersect and a place of public memory familiar to children (Dickinson, Blair, & Ott, 2010). Therefore, in this project, I selected the museum as the medium for authentic communication.

This project was a journey to find the answer to the question, “What is the lasting impact of the use of the atomic bomb during WWII in Japan?” The following supplementary questions were added to support the participants' inquiry: “What events

during WWII led the U.S. to use nuclear weapons in Japan?,” “How did the use of the atomic bomb affect Hiroshima, and how did the city’s residents react to this?,” and “Who should the word ‘we’ represent in the memorial cenotaph for the A-bomb victims, which reads, ‘Let all souls here rest in peace for we shall not repeat the evil?’” The first question is to explore the cause of the atomic bombing while the second is to understand the damage caused by the atomic bomb and the subsequent response of the Hiroshima people; the last question is to grasp the difference in reaction in the Japanese, Korean and Chinese media regarding Obama’s visit.

The redesign of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum “The last 10 feet”<sup>3)</sup> was the highlight of this project. Participants determined their responses to the primary question of this project, redesigned "The last 10 feet" of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum accordingly, and gave a presentation of their work and the reason designed in a specific way. At the mock exhibition, additional authentic communication happened based on the result of the authentic communication held thus far.

In the essays created after the project, the participants stated that they became aware of the existence of others different from themselves and began to think about how to live together. Although there were many positive results from communicating with others, such as respecting others' discourses and becoming open-minded and tolerant toward differences, some participants noted the difficulty of communication itself with those who have different discourses from themselves. Through communicating with others that they never encountered before, the participants learned a lot, but, at the same time, the negative aspects arose. From this, it became clear that as future practice, adding to create the opportunities of authentic communication, it is necessary to support students in order to overcome the challenges that arise from the communication.

### **“Making a Better Hiroshima Textbook” Project**

This project was developed and implemented as part of the lectures at JP University in Japan and KR University in Korea in the first half of 2019. Twenty students from JP University and fifteen students from KR University who wanted to become social studies teachers had authentic communication to recognize, analyze, and criticize the discourses of Hiroshima in Japanese and Korean history textbooks and propose to each other a “Better Hiroshima Textbook.” Since the textbooks directly reflect the public memory of the state and are familiar to children, I selected them as the medium for authentic communication in this project (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1992/2017). Additionally,

considering the school cultures of Japan and South Korea, which consider textbooks as a “Bible” or answer books, “authentic communication” through textbooks, which the opportunity for self and others to dismantle and recreate textbooks, also has the effect of repositioning the participants from “consumer” to “producer” of knowledge (Kim, 2016; 2017).

The authentic communication began at KR University in Korea. As an instructor, I extracted and translated the description of Hiroshima in the textbooks of sixth-grade elementary school students in Japan and presented it to students at KR University. Korean students, who saw that the Japanese textbook contained a discourse of Hiroshima differing from that they knew, expressed a sense of discomfort. Thus, I called out, “Let’s make a ‘Better Hiroshima Textbook,’ and propose it to students who want to become social studies teachers in Japan.” Students of KR University recognized, criticized, and analyzed not only textbooks of Japan and Korea but also various discourses surrounding Hiroshima using multiple materials such as specialized books on Hiroshima. Based on the results, the KR University version of a “Better Hiroshima textbook” was completed and sent to Japan.

I translated the KR University version textbook and showed it to the Japanese social studies pre-service teachers at JP University, inquiring on what they thought. I called out to the Japanese students, who had many things to say about the textbook, “Let’s make a ‘Better Hiroshima Textbook’ and make a counter-suggestion to Korean social studies pre-service teachers.” Similar to Korean students, the JP University students fully acknowledged the discourses on Hiroshima in both countries and examined it critically, created JP University's version of the “Better Hiroshima textbook,” and made a counter-proposal to Korean participants.

As mentioned above, a public sphere transcending national borders is constructed by repeating the process of “understanding (the other’s discourses) → recognizing (the inherent perspective in the other's discourses) → analyzing/criticizing → proposing.” As the course instructor, I played the role of discussion facilitator and interpreter/translator for the exchange of opinions.

A profound gap exists between Korean students who try to capture Hiroshima on the historical relationship between Japan and Korea, and Japanese students who believe in Hiroshima's universal value as a peaceful city, maintaining a distance from the past. For the students of KR University who are trying to take up Hiroshima in the course of history, the position of JP University students that Hiroshima should be taught as Hiroshima itself seemed to be challenging to understand. As a result, the narrative gap between students in both countries did not fuse. However, from this exercise, the

participants did veritably learn. From the post-project feedback and interviews, many students said they felt the presence of others and the importance of continuing to communicate with others despite seeming difficulties. Also, through this project, the progression of communication led to participants becoming aware of the constructability of the textbook, active participation in the communication, and accepting Hiroshima as a personal matter with a sense of ownership.

### **What Education Can Do for the Cross-border Mutual Understanding**

How will citizens who are open to the discourses of others remember Hiroshima? Based on the results of the above two projects, they might remember it as a place where human rights, peace, and the future of humankind are preambles, where various ideas compete, and that complete mutual understanding cannot exist; therefore, constant communication is necessary. An authentic communication about Hiroshima has provided the opportunity to learn the value of “progressive” mutual understanding through experience.

In closing this paper, I would like to describe the conditions necessary for deepening mutual understanding that transcends borders. First, it is essential to position the citizens, who are apt to be buried under the nation, as the agents of mutual understanding. After that, it is crucial to create a place where individuals in the nation can converse with others from other countries who have different discourses. That is, public spheres beyond the nation, in which authentic communication can continue. In other words, it is a transition from school education as a device to “reproduce” public memory to school education as a public sphere that “reconstructs” memory through constant communication. The point to be noted is the “safety” of the public sphere. In a public sphere, where people with different discourses gather, conflicts can arise at anytime and anywhere. However, if the creation of a public sphere that transcends national borders is evaded, one can only expect to nurture citizens who are trapped by a nation rather than those open to others. It is important to create an environment where conflicts can be safely diffused. As attempted in the “The last 10 feet” and “Making a Better Hiroshima textbook” discussed in this paper, having a third party like the author acting as an intermediary to visualize and verbalize new memories to set the agenda may be one strategy to improve public sphere safety.

## Notes

- 1) This is the result of discourse analysis, extracting the descriptions of Hiroshima from the social studies textbooks in junior high schools in Japan, the United States, and South Korea, and considering the relevant context.
- 2) Yamana (2019) who recognizes education as an institution of memory, argues that it tried to transmit, but at the same time, ironically, to deconstruct and reconstruct memory (p.204). However, he indicates the details of transmission, deconstruction, and reconstruction is still unclear. This paper can be understood as a response to the issue set forth of subject-matter education, especially social studies pedagogy.
- 3) “The last 10 feet” can be understood as space where messages that the museum wishes to convey to the audience are condensed.

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