Introduction

At the conference, I’m planning to share with the professional educators from Asian countries children’s reflective works and their visions on humanity after the storytelling of Sadako Sasaki told by their homeroom teacher, Jinju (pseudonym).

This storytelling activity, as part of my doctoral research (A Narrative Inquiry into the Reflective Experiences of Children, a Homeroom Teacher and a Researcher Working with Science, Technology and Society Moral issues in an Elementary Classroom), was done as a 2-hour long lesson in the year of 2003. Even though this story is personally conceived as the best part of the research, it has not been given any chance to reveal its narrative meaning to any audience in academic arena except my university students.

The purpose of this storytelling was to provide children with a reflective space in which they 1) come to know how society impacts on the misuse of science and technology and 2) come to learn how to live with others in different countries in the age of technology and globalization.

Jinju and I went to a big bookstore in downtown in one of the major cities in Korea to buy books for children’s reading. At the children’s corner in the bookstore, an interesting book caught my eyes. The original English title is Barefoot Book of Heroic Children written by Rebecca Hazell. I carefully read all the stories and found a wonderful story about Sadako Sasaki. Sadako was the victim of leukemia from Hiroshima Atomic Bomb. She had been a healthy adolescent before she was hospitalized from leukemia. In the hospital, Sadako remembered a Japanese saying that if a person makes a thousand paper cranes, the gods make one’s dream come true. There was another 5 year-old girl who was suffering from leukemia in her room too. That little girl developed leukemia from the Hiroshima Atomic Bomb even when she was inside her mother’s womb. Sadako started to make paper cranes out of her wish for healing her body. But a hopeless accident happened. The 5 year-old girl in her room passed away. Sadako saw the peaceful face of the little girl at the funeral and, that night, she went up to the top of the hospital. She looked into the sky and imagined that little girl becoming a twinkling star. Then, Sadako ended her desperate wish of healing her body. Instead, she made a new wish for world peace. She again started to make new paper cranes with the hope of world peace. Everyday, she prayed that no one life in this world would be harmed by war any more. But this world did not give her much time. She died on the day of October 5, 1955. It was when she had made 634 paper cranes. Many of her friends made the other paper cranes and put those in her coffin. Sadako Sasaki’s story has been remembered in many countries around the world as a real heroine of world peace.

From Hatred to Love
As soon as the class started, Jinju, showed the pictures of atomic bomb, the ruined city of Hiroshima, collapsed buildings, and dried tangerines. She, then, asked some questions until she got the words such as ‘radioactivity’ and ‘deformed child’ from the children. By the time she heard those words, she said, “I will tell you a story about a girl who was harmed by radioactivity. This is a real story that happened in Japan. I hope you listen to this story by imagining you are right there in her room” (Class Recording, 11/10/2003).

She started reading the book by saying, “This room is a dark, scary hospital room but a room filled with mysterious colours dancing. Hundreds of paper cranes are hanging down the ceiling…”

Despite Jinju’s good introduction, however, the class became noisier, and many children, particularly, girls, did not pay much attention to the story. It was weird to see girls not paying attention to Jinju’s storytelling because I noticed they loved listening to stories so attentively in other classes. Jinju had to stop to get children’s attention three times. However, the children started to concentrate on listening to the story right after they heard that Sadako got leukemia from the Hiroshima Atomic Bomb. Children continued to concentrate on listening to the story, and they finally became silent right at the moment of listening to Sadako Sasaki’s death. They all clapped their hands when Jinju closed her book.

Jinju led a whole group discussion until the end of the first class. In the second class, each child received a coloured paper and started to write either a poem or a letter to Sadako Sasaki. The classroom was soon filled with light music. Jinju toured around the class and encouraged their writing. After the whole class finished their work, children had a time to read their poems or letters in a whole group setting, and they discussed ideas and feelings about each child’s writings. After the class, she mounted all the poems and letters on the children’s work board at the back of the classroom. Each child received a reflective post-it from Jinju, read each one’s work, wrote reflection on their post-it, and mounted it on the work they were interested in most.

The followings are some of the children’s letters (All the children’s names are pseudonyms):

**Dalai:**

How are you?.. I am Dalai living in Korea. The book having your story drove our class into a touching impression. I wished your little ‘peace’ [story] and the child wouldn’t have happened to you all, but more and more children are appearing who suffer more than you did [now]. Innocent children and adults are dying because of the oil struggle between the United States and Iraq. Even if nobody wants this kind of war…

I will write again with a mind of joy and happiness when your dream comes true…

2003. 11. 10. Mon.

On a day that something seems to be accomplished

Dalai in Korea (Children’s Work, 11/10/2003)

Based on our collective interpretation, Dalai was one of the most capable children who were able to catch the social issues of science and technology in Jinju’s class. Dalai said she related Sadako Sasaki’s story to the war in Iraq because she frequently had seen innocent people dying in Iraq.

**Chosun:**

Dear Sadako Sasaki:

I am Chosun living in Korea. Your country and our country are enemies to each other. Your country ruled over our country for a few decades. So, even if I heard that there are good Japanese people, I didn’t even try to believe it is true and I hated Japanese. But today after I listened to your story, my thought has changed. I’ve come to know that there are good-natured people in Japan who are truly concerned about the future. In fact, I tend to avoid the people who have leukemia with the mind that they are ugly and strange. And I didn’t feel any kind of pity toward the people whose head became bald and the people who suffered from the pain. But after listening to your story, I feel like I could become just like those because North Korea wish to unite North and South [North Korea and South Korea], and wish to rule over our country by force. If we fight each other, we might be suffering from the nuclear weapons more that you did in your country. I wouldn’t have
thought of others, if I had become ill from leukemia. How come did you think of flying paper cranes? I wouldn’t have thought it, if I had been like you. You wished but couldn’t make your wish come because you needed 366 paper cranes more to pray. But your friends and many other countries [friends] in the world are still making paper cranes. Do you feel good? But there are many who cry for world peace but there are few who take actions for it [world peace]. I hope everyone takes an action personally in order that your death does not become nothing and nobody die like you. Don’t you think? I will be there where you are now some time, but here I will inherit your thought, and I will become a person who thinks of others well. Good-bye Sasaki.

Chosun - (Children’s Work, 11/10/2003)

While listening to Sasaki’s story, Chosun positioned herself in the imagined hospital where Sadako lived, and she repositioned herself with some moral insights both in two Korean contexts: her past life experiences with the people who had leukemia on TV and her present life with North Korea’s nuclear threat. By imagining her past life, she was transforming her moral self in such a way that she should care for others more as Sadako did. By imagining her present life, she was building her moral viewpoint that people should take action to avoid wars.

It is interesting that there are four children who expressed their attitudinal changes toward Japanese people after this activity: Chosun, Sora, Hana, and Gangmin. They all wrote about their antagonism toward Japan at the beginning and talked about the changes they made after listening to the story. So, I asked how Sadako Sasaki’s story had changed their thoughts. Chosun said:

When I read history books, Japanese invaded our country and troubled us, and they still claim Dokdo Island [an island claimed by Korea and Japan] as their land… I’ve never believed that there is a good person in Japan no matter how much people say that there are good people in Japan. But I’ve come to know that there are people who make efforts for world peace in Japan too. I will consider why [they do] when Japanese people do bad things, and I will judge a person after I think in that person’s position from now on. (Field Note, 11/13/2003)

Sora said:

When I read Admiral Lee [he is one of the most famous national hero in Korea who defended Korea from the Japanese massive invasion in 16th century], Japanese people killed so many people in our country… and stole ceramics [from Korea]… I hated everything about Japan. I tried my best to believe she [Sadako Sasaki] would not be different from anyone else [in Japan] even if there are many good people in Japan… But now I will see people bad only if they do bad things, and I will see people good if they do good things. I will judge people after hearing their stories first. (Field Note, 11/13/2003)

Sora told me that she wanted to avoid listening to Sadako Sasaki’s story, and this was the reason she tried her best to pretend to play with other girls at the beginning (Field Note, 11/10/2003). Hana and Gangmin also told me similar experiences (Conversation, 11/14/2003). By these conversations, I found two commonalities. First was that they would judge people in a more careful way. Second was that they would blame Japanese government rather than Japanese common people for the two Japanese invasions in history.

Miok:

Sadako Sasaki

Sadako Sasaki! Hello! I am Miok who listened to your story. I felt so sorry after listening to your story. That atomic bomb was a really horrible thing. When we see it taking so many people’s lives… However, you thought about world peace, the death of other children rather than your death. You put that ardent passion of your mind in the paper cranes. Your mind of caring for others is really beautiful. You must have passed away with a mind of wishing your dream come true even right at the moment of your death. I will
desire for world peace too from now on. I will put my mind in paper cranes some time like you… Let me say Goodbye.

From Miok (Children’s Work, 11/10/2003)

In the above letter, Miok says that she feels beautiful about Sadako Sasaki’s mind of caring for others. Her imagination in bold is very touching and real. Her writing shows us that Miok’s knowing happened in emotional, aesthetical, volitional, and rational dimensions.

The followings are some of the children’s poems.

Eunhee:
Because of One Thing…
Like animals and plants die of tiny spark
Like a little argument becomes a big fight
I feel sorry for
The many dying people

Deformed children are born
From one atomic bomb

People made 1000 paper cranes
To soothe the pain
But it was after the atomic bomb exploded

Imagining people dying from that one thing

Isn’t there any other way?
Can’t people stop now?

Don’t we have any other ways but to see
The images of sadness and pity
With our two eyes? (Children’s Work, 11/10/2003)

Chosun told her reflection on Eunhee’s poem to the class in a whole group discussion by saying, “I can read Eunhee’s strong mind that we must not sit as a spectator but must take action over the problem of losing innocent people because of the atomic bomb. (Class Recording, 10/27/2003)

Chulsu:
War and Greed
Devilish War
Who provoke it?

Surely Surely
That’s people’s greed

People’s greed
Greed is our enemy

The big criminal who kills people
Is greed
We pray for the little and big lives on earth (Children’s Work, 11/10/2003)

While children were writing poems and letters to Sasdako, Chulsu’s poem stopped me and drove me to ask, “Why did you write ‘greed’ here?” (Field Note, 11/10/2003) He responded, “I think wars break out when people couldn’t control their greed to themselves.” It is interesting in his poem that he criticizes people’s lack of controlling their greed rather than shows antagonism to people. I also asked, “What do ‘the little and big lives’ mean?” He answered, “They mean animals and plants.” He said he put plants because of the picture of the dried tangerine Jinju had shown at the very beginning of this activity. Dalai put her reflective post-it on Chulsu’s letter and it says, “Chulsu expressed well that people’s greed drives people to engage in a war.” Geunho’s reflective post-it says, “From now on, people should learn how to control their greed.”

Bin:
War and Bomb
‘War’
By this word
Innumerably many people are dying

At this moment
Somewhere on earth
An innocent person is dying painfully

‘Bomb’
By this word
In a minute, or even in a second
It took away the lives of many people

At this moment
Now somewhere on earth
An innocent person is becoming ill. (Children’s Work, 11/10/2003)

Bin was the first child among all the children in Jinju’s class who wrote the negative aspect of science and technology in her journal (Journal, 9/30/2003). In her journal, Bin wrote her memory of Yugoslavian children who lost their home and parents by an air bomb attack from a newspaper a few years ago. She said war took all things from these children and drove them into misery. She was especially sympathetic with the innocent people who died from wars.

Jaemin:
Little Hope
Despite any crisis people face
There are people not losing their hope

When darkness casts over in the sky
Like the shining stars
Despite any hardship
There are people living by a little hope

Don’t lose your hope
Have a faith

Out of the unbreakable faith and hope
You will see happiness…
Hope is…
Faith is… (Children’s Work, 11/10/2003)

I was so curious about his two words: hope and faith. I asked where he got his ideas of using these two words when he was about to finish colouring his poem. He said, “I got the idea from Sadako Sasaki’s minds (Field Note, 11/10/2003).” I asked, “What kinds of mind are they?” He said, “Sadako Sasaki lived with the little hope of seeing world peace by making 1,000 paper cranes, even if she was hopeless before death.” I asked, “What about faith?” and he answered,

Sadako Sasaki did not lose her faith of world peace. That’s why she continued to write peace messages in paper cranes and folded them until she died. So, I hope people in crisis would live with the hope and faith of Sadako Sasaki and don’t lose their hope and faith no matter what difficulty they face. (Field Note, 11/10/2003)

During our regular meeting after the class, Jinju and I enjoyed talking about each child’s poem and letter one by one. We especially liked Jaemin’s poem because he read the internal wills of Sadako and related it to the hope in his poem in such a way that people in crisis would live with the hope and the faith Sadako Sasaki carried to her grave. Miok read this story more in an aesthetical way by expressing Sadako Sasaki’s beauty of caring for others. Dalai, Chosun, and Bin read this story more in intellectual ways because they related this story to social problems such as wars, conflict between nations, and concerns on human dignity. Chulsu read this story more in a psychological way by mirroring the selfish inner self of human greediness. Additionally, Eunhee and Bin read this story more in emotional ways because they expressed their strong sympathy toward innocent people dying from wars in their poems. As we see in the above examples, every child responded to this storytelling activity in different ways, according to their different personality, ability, interest, and prior knowledge. But one thing in common was that they all created their own desirable humanistic values from learning through storytelling such as human dignity, dialogue, respect, and caring in one way or another which are essential values to live with others in the age of technology and globalization.

**Storytelling and Children’s Visions on Humanity/Messages with Peace Educators**

Throughout our human history, people’s moral values have shaped and have been shaped by their powerful socio-historical structures. We see how many wars and conflicts have erupted from the ideological aspects of community values such as nationalism, religion, racism, imperialism, ethnic groups, and interest groups. We also see how innumerable people have suffered from losing their rights of living happy storied lives on earth from the wars and the conflicts because of these community values. Community values are our essential values by which we live with belonging, love, and care. However, as Noddings (2002) pointed out, we need to be watchful of the dark sides of community values in the age of globalization and technology because they have possible ideological characteristics which can inflict valuable human experiences. This is the reason I believe we, educators, need to enable children to live with others harmoniously as global citizens based on the essential humanistic values such human dignity, dialogue, and respect and caring for (the self, others, and nature).

Korea suffered from losing over 5 million people during the Korean War in 1950s because of the ideological conflict between socialism and capitalism. Korea also suffered twice from Japanese imperialist invasions. However, it is not desirable for adult Koreans to force children to inherit their hatred toward Japan. Even if we should bring our painful lessons from Japanese imperialism, I believe it is more desirable to enable children to dialogue with Japanese people to overcome their adults’ painful memories and to create better relationships for children’s better lives in the future, which, I believe, will also contribute to children’s creation of more desirable national values. This was the reason Jinju and I used Sadako Sasaki’s story. Sora, Chosun, Bin, and many other children in Jinju’s class hated Japanese before the study. I still remember Sora’s
desperate effort to avoid listening to the Japanese girl’s story. However, we saw how these children changed their attitudes dramatically. Bin went further to say that Japanese common people who killed Koreans were also the victims of the misleading Japanese government, and she even felt sympathy for them. Chosun went further to say that the government which started a war is not killed, but it forces innocent people to pay for war by suffering. However, it is very interesting that Sora, Chosun, and Bin all became more watchful of the Japanese socio-historical structures which misled innocent people to go on a war while they increasingly saw Japanese common people as the victims.

While Jinju was working with Sadako Sasaki’s story, she did not make any moral judgment on Sadako Sasaki’s life. All the children constructed their desirable humanistic and critical moral values from their experiences based on their personality, ability, interest, and prior knowledge. What we did was to provide a reflective space for children to develop their moral capacity to live with others in the age of globalization and technology, which, I believe, can help them to prevent any forceful ideology from alienating their valuable human experience.

I believe this storytelling activity, as part of peace education is very useful when it is used in every country to enable children to form common people’s points of views on the misuse of science and technology. I believe it can help children both to make sense of the dark sides of our society and to make efforts to transform the dehumanized socio-historical structures which continues to produce and reproduce the negative aspects of science and technology into a better world for all of us on earth based on the common people’s point of views.

Thus, educators in peace education and global education may consider an international movement of using the stories of humanistic values to help our children to be equipped with more capacities to live with people in other countries, religions, and ethnic groups in the age of globalization and technology.

Reference