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Ethical Mediation and Peace Education: Teaching Conflict Memory through Hiroshima for Post-Conflict Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This article examines how Hiroshima's peace education mediates traumatic historical memory through structured ethical and pedagogical practices. Building on the author's earlier study of ethical mediation in Hiroshima (Wijegoonawardana, 2026), which drew on a larger set of the same data, and drawing on semi-structured interviews conducted between October and December 2025 with retired and current junior high school teachers, peace practitioners, and memorial guides, together with analysis of students' experiential reflections on peace learning activities in Hiroshima, the study explores how atomic-bomb survivor testimony is presented to young learners. The findings show that emotional engagement with difficult history is moderated through age-appropriate narrative framing, guided classroom dialogue, and collaboration between schools and memorial institutions. Students' reflections indicate a movement from emotional response toward commitments to peace and intergenerational responsibility. The article argues that ethical mediation operates as a structured pedagogical mechanism through which traumatic memory is transformed into moral and civic learning. Applying this concept to the contrast between mediation and avoidance, the study offers analytically grounded insights for post-conflict societies such as Sri Lanka.

Keywords

Peace education, Conflict memory, narrative pedagogy, post-conflict societies, Hiroshima, Sri Lanka

Introduction

Peace education in post-conflict societies faces a persistent pedagogical dilemma: how to engage younger generations with histories of violence without reproducing fear, resentment, or renewed antagonism. While education systems are frequently tasked with contributing to reconciliation and social cohesion, the question of whether and how conflict of memory should be addressed in classrooms remains deeply contested (Paulson, 2015; Zembylas, 2018). In many post-war contexts, curricular approaches emphasize universal values such as tolerance, coexistence, and non-violence, while avoiding direct engagement with violent pasts. Such avoidance is often justified on ethical and political grounds, particularly the concern that revisiting conflict narratives may destabilize fragile intercommunal relations among children (Cole, 2007; Davies, 2017).

Sri Lanka exemplifies this dilemma. More than a decade after the end of its civil war, formal education promotes peace-related values primarily through civic and life-skills education, while the war itself remains largely absent from classroom pedagogy. This strategy reflects legitimate anxieties: educators and policymakers fear that explicit discussion of the conflict may cultivate grievance, reinforce ethnic boundaries, or revive competing victimhood narratives. Yet research on collective memory suggests that silence does not neutralise the past. Memories of violence persist through informal channels such as families, communities, media, and political discourse (Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann, 2011). When formal education avoids engagement with violent histories, children encounter fragmented and often polarised narratives without pedagogical guidance.

This avoidance creates what may be described as a pedagogical vacuum. Peace values may be taught in abstract terms, but they remain disconnected from the historical experiences that shape children's social worlds. As a result, peace education risks becoming emotionally thin and ethically superficial (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013). Addressing this gap does not require exposing children to unmediated trauma or politicised narratives. Rather, it requires careful pedagogical design that translates difficult pasts into forms of learning appropriate to children's cognitive, emotional, and moral development (Paulson, 2015).

Within peace education scholarship, growing attention has been paid to the roles of memory, emotion, and narrative in shaping ethical understanding. Learning peace is increasingly recognised as an affective and relational process, involving moral imagination, empathy, and opportunities for dialogue and reflection, rather than solely cognitive acquisition (Galtung, 1996; Zembylas, 2018). Narrative-based approaches are central to how children process complex social realities such as violence and loss (Hirsch, 2012; Davies, 2017). However, despite increasing recognition of youth participation in peacebuilding, children's own expressions and interpretations of peace remain underexplored as pedagogical evidence. Too often, children appear in peace education research as recipients of curricula or as symbolic bearers of hope, rather than as active meaning-makers whose voices reveal how peace values are internalized, reworked, and enacted (McEvoy-Levy, 2012).

This article positions children's narratives not as illustrative material but as analytically significant sources for understanding peace learning. It asks how conflict of memory can be mediated for young learners in ways that cultivate empathy, ethical responsibility, and civic orientation without reproducing blame or antagonism. To explore this question, the study turns to Hiroshima not as a historically equivalent case to Sri Lanka, nor as a model to be transplanted but

as a pedagogically instructive context in which traumatic memory has been systematically transformed into child-centered peace education.

Hiroshima occupies a distinctive place in global peace education due to its dense ecosystem of schools, memorial institutions, civic organizations, and community-based initiatives dedicated to memory transmission. Since 1945, the city has developed educational practices that engage children not only as learners of history but as participants in articulating the meaning of peace (Yoneyama, 1999; Saito, 2009). Through carefully curated survivor testimony, children's literature, commemorative practices, and guided reflection, Hiroshima demonstrates how traumatic pasts can be translated into age-appropriate moral learning. Importantly, these practices foreground human suffering, empathy, and ethical reflection while avoiding collective blame or nationalist antagonism (Yoneyama, 1999).

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with educators and civic practitioners in Hiroshima, together with analysis of published student reflections from the Peace Tour programme, this article examines how traumatic memory is ethically mediated within peace education. The analysis focuses on three interrelated dimensions: (1) how survivor testimony and historical narratives are framed as moral rather than accusatory resources; (2) how guided reflection enables children to process emotional responses and articulate ethical commitments; and (3) how institutional linkages between schools and civic organizations support the intergenerational transmission of peace values. Together, these dimensions illuminate peace education as an emotional, ethical, and participatory process rather than a purely instructional one (Paulson, 2015).

This article builds on the concept of ethical mediation introduced in the author's earlier study of Hiroshima (Wijegoonawardana, 2026). Its contribution is twofold. First, it brings that concept into dialogue with Sri Lanka's avoidance-based approach, treating avoidance and mediation as contrasting responses to the same ethical risk. Second, it considers which elements of Hiroshima's practice might be adapted to a post-conflict society where students' communities hold divergent memories of the same war.

By reframing conflict memory as a pedagogical challenge rather than a political risk, this study argues that peace education for children must move beyond avoidance toward carefully mediated understanding. When young learners are supported to learn, feel, reflect, and communicate peace, they are not burdened by the past; they are equipped to engage with it ethically. This article conceptualises ethical mediation as a pedagogical mechanism through which conflict memory is translated into age-appropriate moral learning,

providing an analytical lens for understanding peace education beyond descriptive case analysis.

Conceptual Framework: Ethical Mediation as a Pedagogical Process

Peace education scholarship increasingly recognizes that learning peace is not solely a cognitive process but also an emotional and relational practice. Understanding violence, empathy, and reconciliation require pedagogical approaches that engage students ethically as well as intellectually. Narratives play a crucial role in this process because they allow complex historical experiences to be communicated in ways that are meaningful and accessible to younger learners. Through stories, testimony, and guided reflection, learners are able to encounter difficult histories while developing moral imagination and empathy. In this sense, peace education involves not only the transmission of knowledge but also the cultivation of ethical sensibilities and relational understanding among students.

This understanding builds on memory theory (Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann, 2011) and affective approaches to peace education (Zembylas, 2018), while extending them by specifying how pedagogical mediation operates in practice.

Memory as Pedagogical Mediation

Collective memory is not a passive inheritance of historical facts, but a socially mediated process shaped through institutions, narratives, and educational practices (Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann, 2011). In societies marked by mass violence, decisions about what is remembered, silenced, or emphasized are inherently pedagogical. Memory is transmitted not only through textbooks and official commemorations, but also through rituals, storytelling, visual culture, and everyday educational encounters that frame how the past is morally interpreted.

Peace education scholarship increasingly recognizes memory as a pedagogical site in which ethical orientations toward violence, responsibility, and coexistence are formed (Paulson, 2015; Zembylas, 2018). Avoidance of difficult histories does not prevent memory transmission; rather, it displaces it into informal and often unregulated spaces such as family narratives, social media, and politicized discourse (Assmann, 2011). When formal education withdraws from this terrain, learners particularly children are left without

structured opportunities to contextualize, emotionally process, and ethically reflect on inherited narratives.

Understanding memory as pedagogical mediation shifts the focus from whether violent pasts should be taught how they are framed. The ethical task is not to reproduce historical detail or adjudicate political responsibility, but to translate experiences of violence into forms of learning that cultivate empathy, moral reflection, and nonviolent civic orientation (Davies, 2017). Memory, in this sense, becomes an educational practice that requires deliberate ethical design.

Emotion, Narrative, and Moral Formation

Peace education is not solely a cognitive endeavor. Ethical understanding and moral commitment are shaped through affective engagement, imagination, and narrative meaning-making rather than abstract instruction alone (Galtung, 1996; Zembylas, 2018). Emotions such as empathy, sorrow, and moral unease can enable learners to recognise the human consequences of violence and reflect on their responsibilities within shared social worlds.

Narrative pedagogy occupies a central role in this process. Storytelling through oral testimony, literature, or mediated historical accounts renders complex and painful histories intelligible without overwhelming learners (Hirsch, 2012). For children in particular, narrative provides an entry point into ethical reflection. Carefully curated testimony, illustrated texts, and guided discussion can function as emotional scaffolds, supporting moral engagement while avoiding unfiltered exposure to trauma.

However, emotional engagement must be pedagogically guided. Unstructured confrontation with traumatic narratives risks reinforcing fear, resentment, or moral polarization (Zembylas & Bekerma, 2013). Ethical peace education therefore requires deliberate framing that foregrounds shared vulnerability, human dignity, and responsibility rather than blame or antagonism. Within such framing, emotional response can be transformed into moral understanding and civic orientation (Davies, 2017; Paulson, 2015).

In this framework, memory is not mobilized to secure political consensus but to cultivate ethical imagination with the capacity to recognize suffering and to envision nonviolent futures.

Youth Agency in Peace Learning

Traditional approaches to peace education have often positioned children as recipients of values or as future beneficiaries of reconciliation. Contemporary scholarship challenges this assumption by emphasizing children's agency in interpreting, articulating, and communicating peace-related meanings (Hart, 2004; McEvoy-Levy, 2012). Children are not passive vessels into which peace values are deposited; they actively negotiate moral understanding within their social and communicative environments.

Recognizing children as agents requires attending to their written, spoken, and performative expressions as analytically significant. Youth-produced narratives and reflections provide insight into how peace education is internalized, reinterpreted, and enacted (Paulson, 2015). Such expressions illuminate the relationship between institutional pedagogy and learners' own moral reasoning.

Participation in communicative practices speaking, narrating, presenting, and sharing enables children to move from learning about peace to practising peace as a civic activity (Galtung, 1996). In contexts of historical trauma, this agency assumes particular importance. As participants in intergenerational memory transmission, children become active mediators between inherited histories and future possibilities. Ethical peace education does not burden children with responsibility for the past; rather, it equips them with interpretive and communicative capacities to engage with it constructively (Zembylas, 2018).

Analytical Orientation

Bringing these strands together, this study conceptualizes peace education as a pedagogical process in which memory, emotion, narrative, and youth agency intersect. Memory is understood as mediated educational practice; narrative and emotion as mechanisms of moral formation; and children as active participants in meaning-making. This framework provides the analytical lens through which youth-oriented peace education practices in Hiroshima are examined, and through which their relevance for post-conflict contexts is interpreted.

Following Wijegoonawardana (2026), ethical mediation is understood here as the structured pedagogical process through which traumatic historical memory is translated into age-sensitive narratives, guided emotional

engagement, and reflective dialogue that enable moral internalization without reproducing antagonism.

Methodological Approach

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design situated within the fields of peace education, memory studies, and ethics in education. Rather than evaluating the effectiveness of specific programs through measurable outcomes, the research seeks to understand how Hiroshima's peace-education practices mediate traumatic historical memory and how such mediation may inform post-conflict pedagogical approaches in Sri Lanka.

Research Design

The study draws on two principal sources of qualitative material:

1. **Semi-structured interviews** with five educators and civic peace practitioners involved in Hiroshima's peace education initiatives, conducted between October and December 2025. Participants included current and retired schoolteachers, memorial guides, and a civic peace practitioner.
2. **Published student reflections** from a Hiroshima Peace Tour, documenting the experiences of primary, junior high, and high school students following their engagement with atomic-bomb survivor testimony and related memorial activities.

These sources are examined interpretively to identify recurring pedagogical practices, including narrative framing, guided reflection, and the facilitation of dialogue around difficult historical experiences. The study does not seek statistical generalization or establish the measurable effectiveness of particular educational programs. Instead, it considers how selected practices from Hiroshima may inform reflection on peace education in post-conflict contexts such as Sri Lanka.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Between October and December 2025, five semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators and civic practitioners engaged in Hiroshima's peace education initiatives. Participants represented different areas of educational and institutional practice, including classroom teaching, memorial guidance, and civic peace education.

The interviews included a representative of a Hiroshima-based civic peace organization, two retired public junior high school teachers (one of whom also served as a Peace Park guide), a current junior high school peace education coordinator, and a volunteer guide associated with Hiroshima Interpreters for Peace (HIP).

Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. The semi-structured approach provided consistency across the interviews while allowing participants to elaborate on their professional experiences and perspectives. Questions addressed the objectives of peace education, approaches to communicating atomic-bomb survivor testimony to younger audiences, students' emotional and reflective engagement, and the relevance of Hiroshima's educational practices to other post-conflict contexts.

To protect confidentiality, participants are identified by their professional roles and interview numbers. Personally identifying information and sensitive institutional details are excluded from the analysis.

Interview List

Interview 1 – NGO Peace Practitioner (Hiroshima-based civic organization), interview, October 2025.
Interview 2 – Retired Public Junior High School Teacher (over 30 years of service), interview, November 2025.
Interview 3 – Retired Public Junior High School Teacher & Peace Park Guide (Hibakusha-affiliated organization), interview, December 2025.
Interview 4 – Current Junior High School Peace Education Coordinator, interview, December 2025.
Interview 5 – Volunteer Peace Park Guide, Hiroshima Interpreters for Peace, interview, October 2025.

Published Student Reflections

In addition to interview data, this study draws upon student reflections published in *Tour of Peace: The Experience of Listening to Hiroshima Atomic-Bomb Survivor Stories* (The Association of Primary, Junior and High School Students of the People Education Union of Yamaguchi, Japan, 2018). The volume documents reflections written by primary, junior high, and high school students who participated in the 19th Study Tour for Peace held on 6 August 2018 in Hiroshima. The tour brought together fifty student participants from the Chugoku and North-Kyusyu regions, alongside additional educators and

organizers, to listen directly to atomic-bomb survivor testimonies and engage in structured memorial activities.

The English edition, translated by the author with permission from the publisher, preserves students' written accounts of their experiences following direct engagement with Hibakusha testimony. These reflections provide qualitative insight into students' immediate emotional, moral, and civic responses within a guided educational setting.

The narratives are analyzed as pedagogical artefacts rather than statistically representative data. Recurring themes including expressions of shock, empathy, commitment to peace, and intergenerational responsibility are examined as indicators of ethical internalization within a mediated learning environment. Citations refer to the officially published 2020 English edition, and student quotations are interpreted within the broader analytical framework of ethical mediation developed in this study.

Researcher Positionality

As a scholar from Sri Lanka working within a post-conflict society marked by ethnic division and civil war, my engagement with Hiroshima's peace education is informed by a comparative lens. The research is not neutral observation, but a reflective inquiry into how narrative mediation of trauma may support reconciliation-oriented education in other contexts.

This positionality shapes both the selection of interview questions and the interpretive framework adopted in the analysis.

Analytical Approach

Data from interviews and student narratives were examined thematically, focusing on patterns related to:

- Emotional mediation of trauma;
- Age-sensitive pedagogical framing;
- Narrative transmission across generations;
- Ethical formation and civic responsibility;
- Adaptability to post-conflict societies.

The analysis does not claim comprehensive coverage of Hiroshima peace education but identifies pedagogical and ethical tendencies that appear consistently across institutional, practitioner, and student levels.

Ethical Framing of Narrative Mediation

Given that this research engages with survivor testimony and post-war memory transmission, ethical sensitivity is central to both data interpretation and representation. Hiroshima peace pedagogy operates within a delicate ethical terrain: it seeks to convey the catastrophic consequences of nuclear violence without reproducing trauma or instrumentalizing suffering for political purposes. This study therefore approaches interview and student narratives not as raw emotional data, but as ethically mediated expressions shaped by institutional and pedagogical frameworks.

In analyzing practitioner reflections and student responses, particular attention is given to how educators balance emotional exposure with age-appropriate guidance. Several interviewees emphasized that graphic content is filtered depending on developmental level, and that emotional shock is intentionally accompanied by structured reflection and moral dialogue. This pedagogical moderation forms a key analytical lens in this study: it demonstrates that ethical peace education is not simply the presentation of traumatic history, but the careful framing of that history within a protective educational structure.

Thus, rather than treating emotional reactions as spontaneous or uncontrolled, the analysis interprets them as occurring within pedagogically curated environments. This distinction is crucial when considering potential adaptation to post-conflict contexts such as Sri Lanka, where unmanaged exposure to traumatic narratives may risk traumatization or political polarization.

Findings

Affective Encounter with Traumatic Memory: Structured Ethical Mediation

A defining feature of Hiroshima's peace pedagogy is the deliberate mediation of children's affective engagement with traumatic historical memory. Educational exposure to the atomic bombing does not occur through unfiltered graphic representation but through carefully structured narrative framing. Interviews with both retired and current educators indicate that emotional response is anticipated and pedagogically guided rather than left unmanaged.

A retired public junior high school teacher with over three decades of classroom experience explained that teachers consciously adjust the depth and tone of wartime content depending on students' age and emotional readiness (Retired Public Junior High Teacher, interview 2, November 2025). Younger students are introduced to the historical event through simplified narrative and contextual explanation, while older students gradually encounter more detailed accounts. This staged exposure reflects a pedagogical ethic that recognises children's vulnerability while affirming their moral capacity.

Similarly, a retired public junior high school teacher who now serves as a Peace Park Guide affiliated with a Hibakusha organization described how educators frame survivor testimony within reflective discussion rather than presenting it as isolated emotional shock (Peace Park Guide, interview 5, October 2025). According to her account, students often exhibit visible emotional reactions silence, tears, or expressions of fear but teachers follow these moments with guided conversation, encouraging students to articulate what they have understood and how they interpret the experience.

A current junior high school peace education coordinator likewise emphasised that graphic visual materials are used selectively and cautiously. He noted that excessive exposure may overwhelm younger learners and undermine reflective learning, reinforcing the importance of teacher mediation (Current Junior High School Peace Education Coordinator, interview 4, December 2025). The pedagogical objective is therefore not to intensify emotional shock but to channel emotional engagement toward thoughtful consideration.

These practitioner accounts correspond closely with patterns found in student reflections recorded in the Peace Tour volume. Students frequently described initial feelings of sadness, fear, or disbelief after listening to Hibakusha testimony. However, these emotional responses were rarely expressed in isolation. Instead, they were immediately accompanied by moral statements such as commitments to "never create war again" or intentions to "tell others what happened." The transition from affective disturbance to ethical articulation suggests that the pedagogical context plays a formative role in shaping interpretation.

The affective encounter in Hiroshima peace education thus appears neither accidental nor purely emotive. It is structured through institutional planning, teacher sensitivity, and guided dialogue. Emotional engagement functions as an entry point into ethical reasoning rather than as an end.

For post-conflict societies, this finding carries particular significance. Exposure to narratives of violence without structured mediation risks

traumatization or polarization. The Hiroshima model illustrates that traumatic memory can be introduced to young learners in ways that cultivate empathy and civic responsibility when accompanied by reflective scaffolding. Emotional response, in this context, becomes pedagogically productive rather than destabilizing.

Intergenerational Transmission and Pedagogical Continuity

Hiroshima's peace education does not operate as an isolated curricular intervention but as a sustained intergenerational pedagogical culture. The interviews conducted for this study reveal continuity between retired educators, currently active teachers, and civic actors engaged in memorial practices.

A retired public junior high school teacher described how peace education was integrated annually into school programming rather than treated as a one-time commemorative event (Retired Public Junior High Teacher, interview 2, November 2025). She emphasised that repeated engagement across grade levels allowed students to revisit the topic with increasing cognitive maturity. The goal, she noted, was not simply remembrance, but gradual deepening of understanding.

Similarly, a retired public junior high school teacher who now serves as a Peace Park Guide explained that collaboration between schools and memorial institutions reinforces this continuity (Peace Park Guide, interview 5, October 2025). In her account, the Peace Memorial Park functions not only as a historical site but as an educational extension of the classroom. Students' encounters with survivor testimony are framed as part of a longer civic learning trajectory rather than as exceptional experiences.

The perspective of a current junior high school peace education coordinator further illustrates this institutional consistency. He indicated that contemporary classroom practices continue to follow principles like those implemented by previous generations of teachers, particularly regarding age-sensitive presentation and structured reflection (Current Junior High School Peace Education Coordinator, interview 4, December 2025). While materials and formats may evolve, the ethical orientation remains stable.

This continuity suggests that Hiroshima's peace pedagogy is not dependent on individual charismatic educators but embedded within broader institutional norms. Civic organizations reinforce this structure. A representative from a Hiroshima-based peace initiative described public seminars and youth engagement programmes as efforts to cultivate shared responsibility rather than to preserve historical grievance (NGO Peace

Practitioner, interview 1, October 2025). The emphasis on forward-looking civic commitment reflects alignment between classroom practice and civil society programming.

Student reflections recorded in the Peace Tour volume echo this intergenerational dynamic (The Association of Primary, Junior and High School Students of the People Education Union of Yamaguchi, Japan [APJHSS-PEUY], 2020). Several students expressed not only emotional reactions but explicit intentions to transmit what they learned to others, including family members and future generations. The repeated formulation of responsibility "I want to tell others" Or "I will remember and share" indicates that students internalize peace education as participatory transmission rather than passive reception.

Taken together, these accounts demonstrate that Hiroshima's approach to peace education operates through layered reinforcement: classroom instruction, memorial engagement, civic programming, and student reflection interact to sustain a coherent ethical narrative across generations. This intergenerational structure may be one of the most transferable features of the Hiroshima model for post-conflict societies seeking durable reconciliation-oriented education.

Institutional Mediation and Civic Framing of Peace Education

Hiroshima's peace education is not confined to classroom pedagogy but supported by a broader network of civic institutions that sustain its ethical orientation. Interviews conducted with educators and civic practitioners indicate that institutional collaboration plays a central role in shaping how traumatic memory is publicly transmitted to younger generations.

An NGO peace practitioner described public seminars, youth workshops, and Peace Park programmes as coordinated efforts to cultivate reflective civic responsibility rather than merely commemorate historical suffering (NGO Peace Practitioner, interview 1, October 2025). According to this account, initiatives are designed to connect historical memory with contemporary questions of nuclear disarmament and global citizenship. The emphasis is placed on dialogue and shared responsibility, rather than on national grievance or political accusation.

The Peace Park itself functions as an educational environment structured around guided interpretation. A retired teacher currently serving as a Peace Park Guide explained that visits are organized so that students encounter testimony within curated pathways, often followed by structured reflection sessions (Peace

Park Guide, interview 5, October 2025). The park is not treated as a site of passive observation but as a space for guided ethical engagement.

Similarly, a current junior high school peace education coordinator noted that school visits to the memorial are integrated into curricular planning and are accompanied by preparatory and follow-up activities in the classroom (Current Junior High School Peace Education Coordinator, interview 4, December 2025). Students are encouraged to formulate questions before visiting and to articulate reflections afterwards, reinforcing the idea that experiential learning must be cognitive and ethically processed.

These institutional practices demonstrate that Hiroshima's peace pedagogy is collectively maintained. Classroom teachers, memorial guides, civic organizations, and survivor-affiliated groups operate within a shared normative framework: the prevention of future violence through moral awareness and dialogue. The coordination between formal education and civil society reduces the risk of fragmented or politicized memory transmission.

Student reflections recorded in the Peace Tour volume illustrate the impact of this structured civic environment (APJHSS-PEUY 2020, 24). Students frequently refer to organised marches, group discussions, and collective listening sessions as part of their experience. Their statements suggest that moral commitments emerge not only from hearing testimony but from participating in structured communal activities. The experience is thus framed as collective responsibility rather than individual emotional response.

For post-conflict societies, this institutional mediation offers an important lesson. Traumatic memory introduced solely through textbooks or isolated commemorations may lack the communal scaffolding necessary for ethical transformation. Hiroshima's model indicates that sustained collaboration between schools and civic institutions can stabilize narrative transmission and orient it toward reconciliation rather than division.

In this sense, peace education in Hiroshima is less an event and more a civic ecosystem one in which institutional alignment reinforces ethical messaging across multiple educational sites.

Student Moral Internalization and Future-Oriented Agency

The preceding sections have shown how Hiroshima's peace pedagogy structures affective engagement and institutional continuity. The ultimate measure of its ethical orientation, however, lies in how students articulate their

responses after participating in memorial programmes and listening to Hibakusha testimony.

Student reflections recorded in the Peace Tour volume reveal a recurring pattern: emotional reaction is quickly transformed into moral positioning (APJHSS-PEUY 2020, 6). Many students describe feelings of sadness, fear, or shock upon hearing survivor narratives. Yet these affective expressions are rarely isolated. They are immediately followed by statements that project responsibility into the future.

One primary school student reflected that hearing the testimony made them realise "how terrible war is" and expressed a desire that "such things must never happen again" (APJHSS-PEUY 2020, 27). A junior high student similarly wrote that listening directly to a survivor made the historical event feel "real rather than distant," leading them to resolve to "protect peace in the future" (APJHSS-PEUY 2020, 29). These short declarations, repeated across multiple entries, indicate that exposure to testimony is interpreted as a call to ethical commitment rather than mere historical awareness.

Importantly, several students extend this responsibility beyond personal reflection. Phrases such as "I want to tell others what I learned" or "I will share this with my family" appear repeatedly in the volume (APJHSS-PEUY 2020, 25). This language signals the internalization of peace education as participatory transmission. Students perceive themselves not only as recipients of memory but as future mediators.

The intergenerational dimension of this internalization aligns with insights from practitioner interviews. A retired public junior high teacher noted that students are encouraged to discuss their experiences at home and within their communities, reinforcing the idea that peace education extends beyond the classroom (Retired Public Junior High Teacher, Interview 2, November 2025). Similarly, a Peace Park Guide described how guided discussions after testimony often culminate in collective affirmations of responsibility (Peace Park Guide, interview 5, October 2025). These pedagogical practices provide reflective (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013) scaffolding that transforms emotional exposure into articulated civic intention.

What emerges from this triangulation of interviews and student narratives is a consistent pattern of future-oriented agencies. Students do not merely express empathy for past victims; they frame themselves as actors in the prevention of future violence. The ethical movement is therefore temporal: from historical memory to anticipatory responsibility.

For post-conflict educational contexts, this transformation is particularly significant. In societies where narratives of violence may be intertwined with ongoing political tensions, there is a risk that historical instruction reinforces grievance rather than reconciliation. The Hiroshima case suggests that when traumatic memory is mediated through guided reflection and civic framing, students may move beyond victim-perpetrator binaries toward universalized commitments to peace.

Thus, student moral internalisation in Hiroshima is not presented as spontaneous moral awakening but as the outcome of structured ethical pedagogy. The repetition of forward-looking commitments across diverse student voices indicates that the educational design successfully channels affective engagement into civic orientation.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Hiroshima's peace education operates through what this study conceptualizes as ethical mediation, in which traumatic memory is pedagogically structured to enable moral and civic learning. Rather than presenting atomic-bomb history as unfiltered narrative, educators consistently describe deliberate framing processes that moderate emotional exposure and embed reflection within guided dialogue. Memory is thus enacted as pedagogical mediation rather than passive transmission. Emotional engagement is neither suppressed nor intensified for dramatic effect; instead, it is anticipated and channeled through age-sensitive design and institutional coordination.

Examined against the Sri Lankan post-conflict context outlined in the Introduction, these findings acquire additional significance. In Sri Lanka, formal curricula have largely avoided direct engagement with the civil war, favoring abstract peace-related values such as coexistence and tolerance. This strategy reflects legitimate concerns about reopening wounds or reinforcing communal divisions. However, as memory scholarship suggests, silence does not prevent the circulation of narratives; it merely displaces them into informal spaces where they may become fragmented or politicized. The Hiroshima case suggests that structured mediation offers an alternative to both avoidance and unregulated confrontation.

The comparison is not symmetrical in empirical terms. This study does not present parallel fieldwork in Sri Lanka. Rather, Sri Lanka functions as an interpretive counterpoint that illuminates the ethical stakes of mediation versus avoidance. Where Sri Lankan educational policy demonstrates caution through silence, Hiroshima demonstrates caution through framing. The difference lies

not in the presence or absence of traumatic memory, but in how it is pedagogically structured.

The findings further highlight the importance of institutional continuity. In Hiroshima, peace education is sustained through collaboration between retired educators, current teachers, memorial guides, and civic organizations. This intergenerational alignment stabilizes narrative interpretation and reduces the risk of politicized fragmentation. In Sri Lanka, by contrast, there has been little sustained institutional coordination around conflict memory in schools. While contexts differ historically and culturally, the comparison underscores a transferable principle: durable ethical mediation requires institutional embedding rather than isolated curricular insertion.

Student reflections analyzed in this study also illuminate the relationship between affective engagement and moral articulation. Across age groups, learners frequently transform emotional reactions into forward-looking commitments to peace and responsibility. This movement from affect to ethical positioning suggests that narrative-based pedagogy can support youth agencies without overwhelming learners. In the Sri Lankan context, where young people inherit narratives shaped by competing communal memories, such structured opportunities for articulation are limited within formal schooling. The Hiroshima model therefore invites reflection on how guided dialogue and age-sensitive testimony might create space for constructive engagement without intensifying grievance.

Importantly, the comparison does not imply direct transferability. Hiroshima's historical trajectory, civic culture, and relationship to global nuclear discourse differ substantially from Sri Lanka's ethnopolitical conflict. The aim is not replication but conceptual illumination. The central insight emerging from this comparative lens is that traumatic memory can function either as destabilizing narrative or as ethically mediated educational resource, depending on pedagogical design.

One difference deserves particular attention. In Hiroshima, students largely share a single relationship to the memory of the bombing, and reflection can be guided toward a common moral conclusion. In Sri Lanka, a classroom may contain students whose families remember the same war from opposing positions. Hiroshima's own memory culture has been criticised for framing the bombing as a universal tragedy in ways that obscured Japan's wartime aggression and marginalised Korean victims (Yoneyama, 1999). For Sri Lanka, borrowing such a universalising frame without engaging the specific harms suffered by specific communities would reproduce the abstraction this article criticises. The transferable lesson is therefore the structure of mediation (staged

exposure, guided reflection, and institutional support) rather than the content of Hiroshima's memory.

Within the broader field of ethics of education, this study contributes to debates concerning formation rather than mere instruction. The Hiroshima case demonstrates that moral imagination and civic orientation are cultivated through structured engagement with difficult histories. When considered alongside Sri Lanka's avoidance-based approach, the findings suggest that ethical responsibility in post-conflict education may require not silence, but carefully scaffolded interpretation.

Thus, the comparative dimension of this study lies in contrasting two pedagogical orientations: avoidance as risk management, and mediation as ethical design. Hiroshima illustrates how institutionalized narrative framing can transform traumatic memory into future-oriented civic learning. Sri Lanka's experience serves as a reminder of the pedagogical vacuum that may emerge when conflict memory is excluded from formal education. Together, these cases highlight the central role of ethical mediation in navigating the tension between memory and peace.

Conclusion

This study examined how Hiroshima's peace education mediates traumatic historical memory through structured ethical and pedagogical design. Drawing on interviews with educators and civic practitioners, together with analysis of student reflections from the Peace Tour volume (2020), the findings indicate that engagement with atomic-bomb history is neither unregulated nor commemorative in a purely ritual sense. Instead, it is deliberately framed through age-sensitive mediation, guided reflection, and sustained institutional collaboration.

Across classroom practice, memorial engagement, and civic programming, traumatic memory is translated into opportunities for ethical articulation. Students' written responses demonstrate a patterned movement from affective encounter to future-oriented commitment, suggesting that narrative-based pedagogy can cultivate moral imagination without intensifying grievance. Peace education in this context functions less as remembrance alone and more as a process of ethical formation.

Considered alongside Sri Lanka's post-conflict educational landscape, where direct engagement with civil war memory remains limited within formal curricula, the Hiroshima case offers a conceptual counterpoint. The contrast

does not imply equivalence or replication. Rather, it highlights a central pedagogical insight: avoidance and mediation represent distinct responses to the ethical risks of teaching violent pasts. The Hiroshima model illustrates how structured interpretation through moderated exposure, dialogical reflection, and institutional continuity can redirect traumatic memory toward civic responsibility rather than polarisation.

The contribution of this study lies in foregrounding ethical mediation as a core category within peace education. Traumatic history does not educate through exposure alone; it becomes educationally meaningful when embedded within interpretive structures that cultivate empathy, responsibility, and intergenerational awareness. In this sense, peace pedagogy is not the repetition of suffering, but the careful transformation of memory into moral orientation.

Future research may extend this analysis through comparative empirical work across additional post-conflict societies. Nonetheless, the Hiroshima experience demonstrates that when memory is pedagogically framed with ethical intentionality, it can sustain dialogue about difficult pasts without instrumentalizing trauma or diminishing historical complexity.

Building on the concept of ethical mediation introduced in Wijegoonawardana (2026), this study contributes to peace education scholarship by bringing that concept into dialogue with Sri Lanka's avoidance-based approach, and by identifying the structure of mediation, rather than the content of any one society's memory, as what may be transferable to post-conflict contexts.

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