

DEPICTION AND DESCRIPTION OF WAR AND PEACE: A PILOT STUDY

Kristi Kõiv, & Liis Leilop

Institute of Education, University of Tartu (Estonia)

Abstract

The aim of this study is to reveal adolescents' depiction and description of peace and war through drawings and semi-structured interviews. The study is a pilot study evoking two research questions: *How do adolescents reflect peace and war in their drawings?* and *How do adolescents reflect their opinions about peace and war?* Participants included 25 volunteer adolescents (12 boys and 13 girls) aged between 12 and 15 in one Estonian school. The participant students were asked to draw a picture of war and peace (Egüz, 2020) and the analysis of drawings was coded based on the war and peace categories developed by McLernon and Cairns (2001). Group-based semi-structured interviews were conducted about peace and war according to the adapted methodology (de Souza et al., 2006) and students' responses were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Students used peace and war icons and symbols as interpersonal peace and absence of conflict in their drawings. In the interviews, the meaning of peace and war was defined as a social phenomenon between people and between countries. The students described war as conflict or violence and peace as in negative peace (absence of conflict) or positive peace (social justice). The analysis of drawings revealed that female students were more likely to depict emotions anger, sadness, happiness than male students. The male students however used more elements of weapons and elements like dead bodies or blood in their pictures to express war. Research on students' conceptualizations of war and peace is essential to the development of education programs in the field of social studies at the curriculum level.

Keywords: *Conceptions of war and peace, students' drawings, group interview, pilot study.*

1. Introduction

War and peace influence children globally, whether it be through visuals on the media or because they are directly in contact with war activities in their near and far environment (Hakvoort, 1996). The understanding of war and peace in children has been developmentally researched and it has been found that children first develop an understanding of what war or conflict is. The definition of positive and negative peace (Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1998), where positive peace refers to active co-operation among groups and negative peace is defined as the absence of conflict, develop later on in childhood (Cherney et al. 2006; Hakvoort, 1996; Hakvoort & Häggglund, 2001; Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1998; Jabbar & Betawi, 2019; Kose & Bayir, 2016; McLernon & Cairns, 2001; Oppenheimer & Kuipers, 2003). First understandings of war and peace have become evident in 6-8-year-olds, where the verbalization of war precedes the definition of peace (Hakvoort, 1996). Previous research has used questionnaires (McLernon & Cairns, 2001); group-based interviews (de Souza et al, 2006; Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1998) and art-based drawings (Egüz, 2020; Özgür, 2015, Walker et al., 2003) about the conceptualization of war and peace among younger and older schoolchildren. Although there is a long research history in understanding of children's and adolescents' understanding about peace and war in different cultural contexts (Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1998), this research topic is actual in the present day cross countries. While some of the previous research had studied children who have been in direct contact with war (Jabbar & Betawi, 2019), the others have used samples where the participants have not been in direct contact with war activities (Hakvoort, 1996). Myers-Bowman et al. (2005) have compared children's responses with different experiences where children with less or no contact with war activities describe peace verbally more as prosocial behavior and the children with direct contact with war more as negative peace, as when there is no war/conflict. Less common is the simultaneous use of both discussion and drawings in the conceptual study of peace and war (Egüz, 2020) among students.

The aim of this study is to reveal students' depiction and description of peace and war through drawings and semi-structured interviews. Two research questions were posed: *How do adolescents reflect peace and war in their drawings?* and *How do adolescents reflect their opinions about peace and war?*

2. Methods

2.1. Sampling and research methods

The study follows a qualitative research design as a descriptive pilot study. The sample consisted of 25 students (12 boys and 13 girls) who were included in four groups in one of the Estonian schools as a convenience sampling. The research procedure consisted of two parts using two research instruments: (1) semi-structured interviews about peace and war according to the adapted methodology (de Souza et al., 2006), and (2) drawing of pictures about war and peace based on the art-based methodology (Egüz, 2020).

2.2. Data collection and procedure

For the study, at the end of the academic year 2022/2023, the data was collected via students' group-based interviews and artistic drawings. Permission to participate was obtained from parents and the school principal before data collection. The volunteer students with permission were informed that taking part in the research would not affect their daily routine or any marks given in class and that the responses would remain confidential and anonymous. The semi-structured interviews were carried out in four small (6-7 students) groups. The room was set up to be quiet and comfortable in the school area. Each group was presented with the same open-ended questions using the same research instrument developed by de Souza et al. (2006). The questions were translated for the pilot study, whereby the linguistic validation included the phases of translation and back translation of the questions: *How would you explain what war is to a friend?; What is going on when there is war?; Who do you think is responsible for war?; How would you explain what peace is to a friend?; What is going on when there is peace?; Who do you think helps most to make peace?.* During the semi-structured interview lasting about half an hour, open-ended questions about war and peace were asked and students were encouraged to discuss the topic freely.

After the interview the students were instructed to draw two pictures. Each participant was given an A4 size paper sheet that contained two prompts (war and peace): *What does war mean to you? Draw the first image that comes to your mind, and What does peace mean to you? Draw the first image that comes to your mind,* based on methodology used by Egüz (2020) with validation of quality of translations of the questions by translation/back translation method. The participants had about 25-30 minutes to draw, and then the procedure ended. The drawings were numbered and coded. If any students wanted to ask questions about the research or the procedure, they had the chance to do so.

2.3. Data analysis

After the pictures were gathered from the participants, the symbols, figures and colors in them were listed in accordance with the participants, marked by code. The analysis of drawings was coded and categorized based on the war and peace categories developed by McLernon and Cairns (2001) and categorized qualitatively.

Inductive content analysis was used to analyze the data gathered through transcribed interviews in the evaluation of keywords, meanings, and themes during the data analysis: the data was grouped and re-linked in order to find recurring themes in the definitions of war and peace, as stated by the participants. Also, the responses of boys and girls were categorized separately.

3. Findings

3.1. Findings of drawings

Based on the research question *How do adolescents reflect peace and war in their drawings?* and previous research on the topic, the participants' responses were grouped into two main categories war/peace and from there on to subcategories as in McLernon and Cairns (2020).

In drawings it appears that the average number of elements in war drawings is for both male and female participants 7, and the average number for items in peace-related drawings is 4. This agrees with previous research which states that children's comprehension of war precedes peace and therefore the drawings are less nuanced (Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1998).

When analyzing the drawings of males and females (Table 1), the emerging themes are mainly similar and agree with previous studies (e.g., Egüz, 2020; McLernon & Cairns, 2020). A difference in drawings between male and female participants was revealed in the depiction of emotions – female participants depict emotions like joy, sadness, anger, fear in facial expressions and speech bubbles in most of their drawings, male participants rarely depict emotions in such a manner. Emotions can be found in male drawings about war where the figures have screaming or angry expressions, although many male drawings have figures without facial features at all.

The categories that agree with previous (e.g. Egüz, 2020; McLernon & Cairns, 2020) studies when looking at drawings about war are universal like different human aspects like soldiers, citizens, dead bodies, symbols like the anarchy symbol, crosses, skulls, war activities like shooting, killing, crying, explosions, negative consequences of war like destroyed houses, blood puddles, burning buildings, natural landscapes that depict places where battles take place, emotions varied from joy to anger and sadness, instruments of war that were represented, were tanks, guns, bombs. While in previous research more universal symbols like the peace dove or the olive branch were depicted (Egüz, 2020; McLernon and Cairns, 2001), in this study, those were not evident. National symbols in drawings about war were flags that had to do with the current conflict in Ukraine.

Table 1. Categories and sub-categories emerging from drawings about war and peace.

Category		Sub-category		Male: Examples of Key Codes	Female: Examples of Key Codes		
War	Negative war	Universal	Human aspect	<i>Soldier without face, fist, citizens, tears, dead bodies, opposing sides, screaming people, people in trouble, sad figures.</i>	<i>Soldier without face, sad figures, dead bodies, surrendering people, sad head of state, sad nation, happy head of state, fighters.</i>		
			Symbols	<i>Anarchy symbol, onions, cross, hammer and sickle, swastika, skull.</i>			
			War activities	<i>Shooting, crying, shouting, cursing, showing a fist, air raid, nuclear explosion, conflict between people.</i>	<i>Explosion, shooting, screaming, burning.</i>		
			Negative consequences of war	<i>Destroyed house, blood puddle, barb wire fence, burning buildings, apartment building.</i>	<i>Burning building, crossed out house, blood puddle, building, burning house, cry for help.</i>		
			Natural landscapes	<i>Battlefield, landscape, mountain.</i>	<i>Sad sun, grass, fire, black ground, storm cloud, smoke.</i>		
		Emotion	<i>Cursing, tears, crying, laughing people.</i>	<i>Fear, sadness, anger, vengeance, conflict, joy, surrendering, depression, regret, innocence, emptiness.</i>			
		Instruments of war	<i>Gun, automatic weapon, tank, helicopter, plane, shooting, bomb, nuclear weapon.</i>	<i>Plane, bomb, cannon, gun, tank, automatic weapon, knife, nuclear weapon, bullet.</i>			
		National	Flag	<i>US flag, UA flag, RU flag, red flag, pink flag.</i>			
		Peace	Positive peace	Universal	Symbol	<i>Heart, kiss, hug, smile, holding hands.</i>	<i>Heart, smile, infinity sign</i>
					Human aspect	<i>Citizens, happy people, friends.</i>	<i>Happy heads of state, happy child, smiling women, family.</i>
Natural landscapes	<i>Park, trees, landscape, mountain, dog, blue sky, flowers.</i>				<i>Sun, blue clouds, snowflakes, flower, cats together, river, landscape, puddles, bloom.</i>		
Positive consequence of war	<i>Houses, statue</i>						
Peace activity	<i>Shaking hands, hugging, smiling, kissing, walking, sitting.</i>				<i>Negotiation, making a snowman, making cookies, holding hands, hugging, playing ball.</i>		
Negative peace	Universal		National	Emotion	<i>Joy, peace.</i>		
			Symbol		<i>No fighting, house, flower, house, deal, peace sign, infinity sign, white flag, globe, balance.</i>		
			People		<i>No expression, figures, happy girl.</i>		
			Natural landscape	<i>Trees, green grass.</i>	<i>Blue sky, flowers.</i>		
			Peace activity		<i>Talking.</i>		
National	Item		<i>Smiling food, crown, plane, film.</i>				
National	Flag		<i>Ukraine, Russia.</i>				

3.2. Findings in interview responses

The group-based semi-structured interview responses revealed that when speaking about war, the students refer to conflict: *It's like when two kindergarten children are having an argument but it's two countries; violence, ...when there's like planning and looking for shelter; panicking: when people are mass buying stuff in stores; and consequences of war: there's inflation, family members are missing, there's mobilization and men have to go to war.* The participants mainly discussed war through the activities that have happened during war and the negative consequences that can be seen from the outside. It is noteworthy that the participants have experienced war only indirectly through social media and contact with Ukrainian refugees at their school.

Female participants used more emotion-related vocabulary, in peace more positive emotions: *It's like when two kindergarten children are playing together,* and absence of conflict: *There is no need to protect your family* at an individual level, this agrees with Hakvoort (1996) longitudinal study (Table 2).

Table 2. Categories and sub-categories defining war and peace in discussion.

	Category	Subcategory	Examples of Key Words
War	Negative war	Universal	<i>Argument, conflict, invasion, mobilization, gathering weapons and machines, preparation, planning, panic of civilians, mass buying, inflation, fear, violence, verbal conflict, weapons, war machines, bombs, people are nervous, sanctuary is needed, worry, missing family, people dying, no toys, no peace.</i>
		National	<i>Ukrainian war, Estonian War of Independence, power imbalance between Russia and US, NATO.</i>
Peace	Positive peace	Universal	<i>Good decisions are made, countries co-operate, caring for each other, heartfelt relationships, two friendly children, everyone gets along.</i>
	Negative peace	Universal	<i>No conflict, something impossible, people live their lives, peaceful people, no worries, freedom, price control, higher population, good living standard, positive, no war, no one gets beat up, no global news on TV, no fear of bombing, no need to protect family and loved ones, get to be at home, you have a good head of state, breathe in and out, no need to hurt anyone, people calm, regular life, babies.</i>

3. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this pilot-study it can be said that students were aware of war even when they were not directly involved in a conflict. In their drawings and verbal statements, respondents in this study associated war with group conflict, identified the violent activities and consequences of war with negative feelings – war was defined as an interpersonal and interstate social phenomenon. In depictions and descriptions of peace students used peace symbols as interpersonal peace and absence of conflict between people – peace was defined as a social phenomenon between people. While the results reveal that depictions and descriptions of peace and war were mostly similar between male and female participants, the findings demonstrate that female students were more likely to describe or depict emotions like joy, sadness, anger, fear, despair. At the same time male students depicted more weapons in their drawings.

However, further research is needed especially in the area of artistic studies, but a limitation of this qualitative pilot-study is the small scale of the sample, which does not allow generalizations on the subject. This pilot-study adds some information to other topical studies in various regions of the world.

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