

*Processing Together*

South Korea

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<http://www.youtube.com/user/ProcessingTogether>

I-b) *Processing Together* brought South Korean and Japanese high school students together in Seoul to exchange cultures and learn about the history of the Japanese occupation of Korea through the making of short films. It helped to establish mutual understanding and build life-long friendships among the students from the two countries that have unresolved historical and political conflicts.

I-c) Gwanghwamun Visual Media Center, run by the Citizen Visual and Cultural Organization, believed in the purposes of the project and generously gave us a half discount on equipment and facility (editing and conference room) rental. In addition, the War Memorial of Korea let us use their conference room for free. These were not directly resulting from our fund-raising effort, but we were able to connect with people who were interested in this project while working on logistics.

I-d) To start up the project in Seoul, South Korea, I sought for collaborators who were living in Seoul by using Craigslist and other social networks. I had three collaborators who helped with recruiting Korean students, making schedules, and securing locations and volunteers. Through Craigslist, a writer from the Korea Herald contacted me and wrote a piece for their web in the link below. The article helped to spread the word about the project and helped to emphasize its importance:

<http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20110525000849>

Korean high school students were recruited through the International Youth Exchange Association and the MIZY Seoul Youth Center for Cultural Exchange. We had twenty three Korean applications and chose the participants based on the diversity in their interests and backgrounds. We selected six female students and two male students (we only had four male applicants).

On the contrary, it was extremely difficult to recruit Japanese students because of the internalized way the society worked. After five weeks of recruitment, what eventually worked was contacting high school teachers, who were teaching Korean or were interested in cultural exchanges. They asked their students for their interest in participating in *Processing Together*. Finally, we got eight Japanese participants. For unknown reasons, we only had female applicants.

The application reflected a significant gap between Korean and Japanese students, which this project intended to bridge. Most Korean applicants were eager to discuss the issue of historical conflicts, whereas Japanese applicants were mainly interested in learning about Korean language and culture, and filmmaking.

On the first day of the program in Seoul, in the beginning, the students were quiet, shy, and awkward, and they did not interact with each other. Physical team-building activities, such as "untying the knot of bodies", helped relax the students. Group discussions in a workshop to explore cultural understanding forced them to communicate with each other. I was relieved to hear more and more voices filling in the room.

Setting up semi-professional cameras and audio systems further excited and engaged the students. We had four sets of Sony HDV cameras, tripods, and boom microphones. Students interviewed each other by rotating roles using the camera, sound, and being the interviewer and interviewee within each group. At the end of the day, many of the students started interacting with each other on their own initiative.

What helped the program to achieve its goals the most were the volunteers and interpreters. I emailed many faculty members of Japanese studies at various universities in Seoul, and was fortunate to get in touch with Professor Aoki from the Department of Japanese Interpretation and Translation, Hankuk University. She organized her students, who were interested in volunteering, and also arranged one of her senior students as an interpreter. We also had another interpreter and other volunteers from different universities. All volunteers spoke Japanese to some extent, and many of them were fluent. Interpreters and volunteers facilitated group activities, discussions, and casual conversations among students. In addition, since they knew the city of Seoul and its lifestyle well, they also helped us finding

places to eat together. Throughout the program, these volunteers became its backbone, and without their help, it would not have been possible to implement the program successfully.

On the second day, we focused on historical conflicts and went to the Seodaemun Prison History Hall, which was built and used as a prison by the Japanese government during the occupation. Now the prison hall exhibits its history. After the museum visit, the students discussed what they learned, what the differences were in what they learned, and why there were such differences. From their presentation after the discussion, I found that visiting the museum together allowed the students to discuss emotional aspects of learning the history. Before going into the museum, there was a little nervousness on both sides for visiting a space that depicts the brutality of the Japanese government. Discussing what they felt and thought, the students were all surprised at how open each other was. On the other hand, one of the Japanese students mentioned at the end of the program that she became aware that the gap between Korean and Japanese was deeper than she initially thought.

In terms of cultural exchange, we had Japanese students do presentations on Japanese culture, such as traditional ceremonies, school life, snacks and manga. In addition, three Korean students offered to host Japanese students for grocery shopping, cooking, dinner and an overnight stay. We also asked the Japanese students to cook Japanese food, as many of them brought ingredients from Japan. It was sweet that one of the Korean students and her mother came to say good-bye at the airport when we left Seoul.

The biggest obstacle during the program was that we had to experience the heaviest rainstorm Seoul had seen in 100 years. Rain poured daily throughout the program except for one day. The students were very disappointed that we had to cancel filming Wednesday Demonstration in front of the Japanese embassy and interviewing former comfort women. We also planned to film our own activities as a documentary, however, it was too much of a concern to carry expensive equipment in the rain. The rain loaded extra work upon us as we constantly had to change the curriculum and locations. However, it was encouraging to see all the students come to the program everyday even in such heavy rain.

To make short fiction films, we divided the students into two groups, and each group discussed and created stories that related to how they, as a group, come to see the relationship between Korea and Japan. To overcome language barriers and visualize the process, we created storyboards to prepare for shooting. For most students, it was their first time making films, and each group spent many focused and energetic hours in structuring the stories and preparing necessary materials. The students asked many questions, and I saw how motivated and serious they were about making their own films. Group A created a romantic story of a young Korean and Japanese couple that had a hint of historical issues. Group B's film was about Korean and Japanese tourists in Seoul meeting with each other through strange coincidences. They were uploaded on YouTube at the address written on the top of this page.

On day 5, we invited a Korean film director, You Sang-Hun, to do a talk on filmmaking. He was a fantastic speaker and the students were drawn into his stories from the world of professional filmmaking. After his talk, Mr. You gave the students directing tips by accompanying each student group while shooting their fiction stories. Through the program, students gradually learned how to edit videos on Final Cut Pro. On the final day, they edited what they shot and presented their films.

At the end of the program, there were so many tears (for many hours!) as everyone was extremely sad that they had to part. I was amazed at how much the students were able to bond with each other in such a short amount of time despite their linguistic and cultural differences, and historical issues. It was moving to hear that some of them wanted to come back to the program next year as a volunteer. Some Japanese students made plans to save some money to come back to Seoul to meet with the Korean students again.

II-a/b) My idea of peace is to have the ability to work together towards a solution. *Processing Together* made me believe in the power of face-to-face contact in achieving such peace. I believe the program opened the participants' eyes, not to fear and/or assume what "others" are. They became aware of different views over historical issues, but saw the willingness on both sides to learn more about the issues and understand each other. Filmmaking led the students through the process of interacting, bonding, and working with each other. I felt that the program could be organized between many other cultures, societies, or countries that have conflicting issues to bring people together.

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