Photovoice Connecting Kumamoto and Hawai'i: A Culturally Responsive Approach for the Well-Being of Diverse Students

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Abstract

It is of overriding importance on a global scale today that students' well-being is cultivated through education. Looking at the United States of America, culturally responsive education has been playing a key role in it. Although some attention has been paid to its contributions to promoting intercultural understanding, nurturing the well-being of American students with diverse backgrounds, and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in class, such educational practices are limited and incidental in Japan. What would be an ideal culturally responsive approach to develop "the Japanese way of well-being" among university students? This paper proposes carrying out photovoice concentrating on international migration as an educational approach to enrich the well-being of university students in Japan. From May 2023 to July 2023, a group of university students and the researcher were engaged in photovoice investigating the emigration of people from Kumamoto to Hawai'i in the Meiji era. Employing the concept of transnationality helps understand and acknowledge the diversity and identity (trans)formation of transnational migrants shifting physically and mentally beyond the borders. The findings from the Kumamoto-Hawai'i project show that the student photographers benefit from practicing photovoice on the theme of international migration as a culturally responsive approach.

Keywords: Hawai'i, Kumamoto, migration, photovoice, well-being

Introduction

It is urgently needed to foster students' well-being through education on a global scale. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2022) expresses the worldwide educational demand thus:

Perhaps more than in any other area, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted children and young people's unmet need for support around their mental health and

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well-being. Even before the pandemic, there was an increasing awareness of the importance of investing in the mental health and well-being of all learners (p. 8)

The United States of America and Canada are the leading nations advocating the significance of well-being as a core component in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in schools, in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and ability (Lindsay et al., 2022; Office for Civil Rights, 2021). Both consist of a large population of immigrants and their descendants with various backgrounds, and culinary metaphors are often used: U.S.A. as a melting pot and Canada as a salad bowl. Watson (2000) compares the two major models of immigration policies by calling the former assimilation and the latter integration:

[T]his comparison of the melting-pot and the salad-bowl helps us both to imagine the difference between assimilation and integration and, by extending the analogy, to appreciate the positive advantages which contemporary governments hope to gain from celebrating rather than suppressing diversity. (p. 4)

Here, Watson suggests that even though these two are slightly different approaches aiming for social cohesion, both of them show a tendency to respect diversity among the people.

Focusing on the context of America, some attention has been paid to the contributions of culturally responsive education to encouraging intercultural understanding, nurturing the well-being of students with diverse backgrounds, and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in class (Gay, 2018; Goforth & Pham, 2023; Muñiz, 2019a). Gay (2018) delineates the backdrop of the need to import cultural responsiveness into education: "Students of color from ethnic, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds different from the dominant Eurocentric, middle-class group still are not receiving proportional, equitable, high-quality educational opportunities and performance outcomes" (p. xxix). Teachers should take an active part in the implementation of culturally responsive education, as Goforth and Pham (2023) indicate:

Culturally responsive practices require us to engage in lifelong learning. Every student in the classroom is unique, and we need to adapt our ways of thinking and interaction to each student's strengths and needs. Culture is a fluid and dynamic

construct. ... We must learn about their intersecting identities, their histories, and their experiences, and the sociopolitical-economic contexts from which they reside. (pp. 7-8)

To accommodate such diverse students, Muñiz (2019a) remarks: "The need for culturally responsive teaching is more pressing than ever before" (p. 6).

Japan is not an exceptional case of this educational trend. In 2023, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) released the "Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education" and stated the need to "improve the Japanese way of well-being through education" (p. 12). To achieve this, according to MEXT (2023), it is essential to not only "enhance active learning through issue-based learning (PBL)" (p. 16) but also "cultivate the qualities and competencies needed to understand Japanese and foreign languages and cultures, to have attachment to and pride in Japan, and to be active from a global perspective" (p. 17) in higher education. Contrary to the urgent call announced by the education sector, such pedagogical practices are limited and incidental in Japan. Because of this reason, a question arises: What would be an ideal culturally responsive approach to develop "the Japanese way of well-being" among university students? This paper introduces a photovoice method concentrating on international migration as an educational approach to cultivate the well-being of university students in Japan.

Transnationality

To conceptualize this study, I apply the concept of transnationality. It is inseparable from the notions of the nation and nationality. They have been discussed and theorized by scholars in various academic disciplines. Among them, what Benedict Anderson proposed has had a great impact on theorizations of the nation and nationality. Referring to the nation as "an imagined political community" (p. 6), Anderson (1983) suggests that "nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind" (p. 4). Interrogating the roots and mechanisms of the nation and nationality, Anderson (1983) illustrated three crucial points to be taken into consideration: 1) "how they have come into historical being" (p. 4); 2) "in what ways their meanings have changed over time" (p. 4); and 3) "why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy" (p. 4).

In discussing the nation and nationality, the notion of citizenship is one of the key sub-

jects. Feminist scholars have explored the meanings of citizenship in relation to the experience of women migrants. Yuval-Davis (1997), for example, delves into how the notion of citizenship has changed under the influence of the national discourse and the transnational flow of people, and asserts the necessity of importing a new approach to conceptualizing citizenship:

Citizenship needs to be examined, not just in terms of the state, but often in relation to multiple formal and informal citizenships in more than one country. Most importantly, these citizenships need to be viewed from a perspective which would include different positioning of the different states as well as the different positionings of individuals and groupings within states. (p. 75)

Yuval-Davis thus proclaims the importance of investigating the notion of citizenship from various perspectives, and emphasizes the inclusion of women in the examination of the national discourse and citizenship. In this way, it is clear that along with the increasing transnational movement of people, the structure of the nation as well as the national borders come to be destabilized, and the notions of the nation and nationality start to be re-examined.

The concept of transnationality supports the need to acknowledge a wide diversity of migrants, as Willis et al. (2004) state: "Individuals with different levels of social and economic capital navigate the world in flexible ways, negotiating the borders that carve out nation-states, some with transnational ease and finesse and others with considerable hard-ship and distress" (p. 12). In addition, as Yeoh et al. (2003) point out, putting the concept of transnationality into practice can possibly "reconfigure the way we think of key concepts underpinning contemporary social life, from notions which serve to 'ground' social life such as 'identity', 'family', 'community', 'place' and 'nation', to those which 'transgress' and 'unmoor', including 'migration' and 'mobility'" (p. 208). Hence, this study positions itself within transnationality in that it lays great emphasis on the dynamics brought by the movement of migrants beyond the conventional borders and boundaries.

Transnational Migrants

A photovoice method employed in this study concentrates on the emigration from Japan to Hawai'i, which started in 1868. As discussed elsewhere (see Hara, 2024), the twelve

university students studying intercultural communication in Kumamoto (Table 1) and the researcher inquired into the migratory movement of people from Kumamoto to Hawai'i in the Meiji era through archival research, took photographs on migration, and released a visual work connecting all the photographs together (Figure 1). This study considers those people as transnational migrants shifting physically and mentally between Kumamoto and Hawai'i. As Trinh (1994) remarks: "Nothing remains unmoved" (p. 16), everything—her/ his-story, memory, home, food, and language—shifts in conjunction with the migrant's transnational movement.

Names as pseudonyms
Cheese
Daifuku
Gothic
Ken
Lil
Mimi
Mina
Omochi
Sakana
Sana
Tiger
Ui

Table 1. List of Student Photographers

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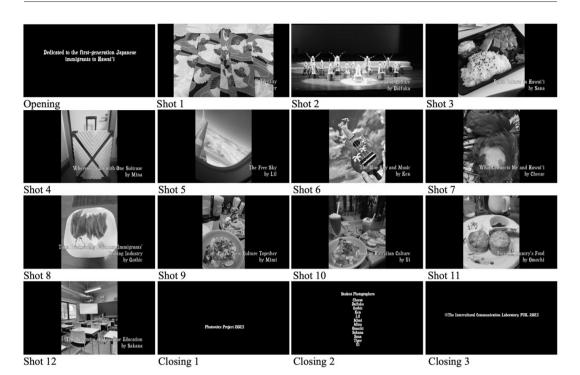


Figure 1. Photovoice Project 2023. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.

One of the archival materials we studied was a folk song called "Hole Hole Bushi," and some students who were engaged in photovoice mentioned the impact of its message on their learning attitudes and behaviors (Hara, 2024). The origin of "Hole Hole Bushi" is explained in detail thus:

This is the only folk song created by Japanese people in Hawai'i. It is believed that it originated in various folk songs sung in local areas of Japan, including a boatman's song in the Seto Inland Sea, a farmer's song in Kumamoto, and a spinning song in Yamaguchi and Hiroshima. Therefore, there are many different versions of lyrics. (Haruyama, 2009, p. 87, translated from Japanese by author)

It is obvious that they carried the cultural artifacts cultivated in their hometowns with themselves and integrated them into their new way of life in Hawai'i.

The researcher refers to the following lyrics and performs in *Photovoice Project 2023*:

Yuko ka Meriken yo kaero ka Nihon Should I go to America or return to Japan?

Koko ga shian no Hawaii koku Here in Hawai'i I am absorbed in my thoughts.

Hawaii Hawaii to yo yume mite kita ga I dreamed of coming to Hawai'i.

Nagasu namida mo kibi no naka I shed tears in the cane fields.

Yokohama deru tokya yo namida de deta ga I was in tears when I left Yokohama.

Ima jya ko mo aru mago mo aru I have children and grandchildren now.

Ame wa furidasu yo sentakumon wa nureru It starts raining and the washing gets wet.

Sena no ko wa naku mama kogeru My baby on my back cries and the rice gets burned. (Haruyama, 2009, p. 87, lyrics translated from Japanese by author)

This particular version was sung by those who worked in sugar cane plantations (Haruyama, 2009). The lyrics reflect the migrant's memory of the homeland and the life experience in the new land. From a combination of these arises her/his unsettling sense of belonging. According to Trinh (1994), home plays a significant role for the migrant since it "can hardly be more than a transnational or circumstantial place, since the 'original' home cannot be recaptured, nor can its presence/absence be entirely banished in the 'remade' home" (pp. 14-15). The song features Japan as the migrant's "original" home where she/he was born and grew up. Now, she/he does not physically live there anymore, so the "original" home cannot be regained. At the same time, it does not disappear since the migrant sings about Japan—the place where she/he used to live. Language is part of the identity of the migrant, as Anzaldúa (1987) indicates: "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language" (p. 81). "Hole Hole Bushi" is sung in Japanese, the migrant's native tongue. Hence, it is reasonable to suppose that the migrant preserves her/his true home in the lyrics; by singing this song, she/he crosses the boundaries of the nation-states and reaches the true home.

Photovoice Project on International Migration

As the procedures were discussed in detail previously (Hara, 2024), the twelve students and the researcher launched the Kumamoto-Hawai'i photovoice project in May 2023 and completed the visual work in July 2023. The following images of Hawai'i were shared among the project members in the initiation phase:

Cheese: There are a lot of beautiful beaches. Hula originated in Hawai'i.

Daifuku: The beautiful ocean, beach, hamburgers, coconuts, and 'ohana.

Gothic: It has the beautiful blue sea where a lot of tourists enjoy themselves. Some people in Hawai'i can speak different languages for tourism business.

Ken: The beautiful sea, sky, volcanoes, Hawaiian *hula* dance, warm climate, and rich people's favorite place.

Lil: It's very hot there. The sea in Hawai'i is beautiful, and it's a good place for sightseeing.

Mimi: Tropical islands, delicious food, cultures, and the beautiful sea.

Mina: I have an image of Hawai'i being very hot and having the beautiful ocean. It is also a popular tourist destination for its delicious food, shopping, and marine sports. Omochi: There are a lot of places which are popular for sightseeing. Some people in Hawai'i speak Japanese.

Sakana: The beautiful sea and palm trees. It's a destination for relaxing and honeymoon. Many Japanese live there.

Sana: People in Hawai'i play in the beautiful blue ocean on a hot day. There are a lot of hot days in Hawai'i.

Tiger: It has the beautiful sea. Food in Hawai'i such as *loco moco* and coconut juice is delicious. People are warm. It is popular with tourists.

Ui: Beautiful beaches, hibiscus flowers, hula dance, and poke.

Then the student photographers explored the history of the emigration from Kumamoto to Hawai'i through archival research. To understand the identity (trans)formation of migrants, they analyzed the lyrics of "Hole Hole Bushi" by using the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) proposed by Bennett (1986). Bennett introduced the six stages (i.e., denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration) to assess "the level of sensitivity of individuals and groups" (1986, p. 179) towards cultural differences. Vincent (2017) outlines the features of each stage as follows:

Denial: People at this stage are not interested in other cultures or want to avoid contact with them.

Defense: People in defense are uncomfortable with cultural differences.

Minimization: This may sound good at first. But it means that cultural differences are not really understood, which can lead to misunderstanding and communication problems.

Acceptance: People at this stage understand the reality of cultural differences and are often interested in other cultures.

Adaptation: At this stage, people can change their way of seeing, thinking, and acting (behavior) when in another culture so that they become effective at intercultural communication.

Integration: People at this stage have changed in major ways due to their experience with foreign cultures. They are no longer just "Japanese" or "American," but have become bicultural. (p. 91)

Based on the DMIS scale, the project members present their interpretation of the lyrics and make mention of changes in stage. For instance, Lil observes that the migrants' intercultural sensitivity level has shifted from defense to adaptation:

I think the stage of DMIS of Japanese migrants has changed over time. For the first migrants called "*gannenmono*," who worked over-time in sugarcane, it is considered to be the defense stage. After some time, I think they are now in the stage of adaptation. There are a lot of Japanese cultural elements in Hawai'i such as temples, drums, and cocopan with the motif of *anpan*.

Omochi interprets that the migrants' positioning has changed from defense to integration:

When Japanese people immigrated to Hawai'i, they were in the defense period according to the "Hole Hole Bushi." It seems that they suffered from the gap between the reality and their image of Hawai'i. In the present time, Hawai'i has mixed cultures which include Hawaiian and Japanese cultures. Therefore, people who have Japanese migrants as their ancestors accept the culture and regard it as their identity.

In this way, through the photovoice project connecting Kumamoto and Hawai'i, the students engaged themselves in active learning and deepened their understanding of international migration before actual photographing.

Discussion

This section illustrates the effects of carrying out photovoice as a culturally responsive approach on learners. There is a need to pay more attention to the voices of students in the culturally responsive classroom, as Muñiz (2019b) points out: "Indeed, today's body of evidence mainly consists of small-scale studies, few of which investigate the impact of culturally responsive practices on student outcomes" (para. 8). The survey results from this study show that practicing photovoice on the theme of international migration is favorably reviewed by the project members. Taking account of the following five advantages of culturally responsive education elucidated by Muñiz (2019b) is useful for making an investigation here:

- Facilitating brain processing (para. 3)
- Motivating and engaging students (para. 4)
- Cultivating critical thinking and problem-solving skills (para. 5)
- Strengthening students' racial and ethnic identities (para. 6)
- Promoting a sense of safety and belonging (para. 7)

Regarding the first advantage, making use of "repetition, rhythm, movement, and visuals during instruction" leads to "strengthening neural pathways for comprehension" (Muñiz, 2019b, para. 3). The photovoice project encourages the students to express ideas visually through photography and supports their comprehension of the migratory movement of people beyond the borders. The comments of the student photographers below suggest that it also cultivates their imagination and creative thinking skills:

Sakana: It helped me imagine what concept should be taken as a photograph.

Sana: Before I participated in the Hawai'i photo project, I thought it would be difficult to reflect my ideas and opinions in a single photograph. However, through the project, I have learned how to express my opinion with a single photo.

In addition, sharing and discussing the created visuals increases the awareness of diverse views among the project members, as Mina indicates: "Everyone took photos with different interpretations. That's when I learned that there are other ways of thinking and feeling."

Secondly, linking "academic concepts to the everyday lives" (Muñiz, 2019b, para. 4) gives rise to "motivating and engaging students" (Muñiz, 2019b, para. 4). It becomes clear from the Kumamoto-Hawai'i photovoice project that the motivated and engaged students are able to connect their learning to the real-life settings. Some students apply their own framework gained from participating in the project to the case of Kumamoto:

Gothic: The fishing industry in Kumamoto and Hawai'i is very connected. I was impressed, especially with the fishing industry by Japanese immigrants. Their skills of fishing had no rival. They were able to establish their identity as Japanese, which means people in Hawai'i accepted and admitted their skills and culture. I found that integration into a country happens by forming new cultures and having people in that country accept and practice them.

Tiger: I have learned the importance of cultural exchange and communication. I think it is important to respect other cultures. More and more foreign people will come to Kumamoto for TSMC [Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company], so we should respect their cultures. I hope that new cultures will be created by a fusion of Japanese and other cultures.

For the third advantage, "engaging students in investigations of meaningful, open-ended problems is an ideal way to get students to analyze, formulate questions, and generate solutions to challenging authentic problems" (Muñiz, 2019b, para. 5). "Hole Hole Bushi" is considered as one of the powerful teaching materials to enhance students' critical thinking and analytical skills, as Daifuku mentions:

I found that Japanese culture such as *taiko* and *futon* is part of people's life in Hawai'i. In the same way, some cultures of foreign countries such as Christmas and Halloween are part of Japanese people's life. I think immigration is one of the factors which produce these exchanging cultures. "Hole Hole Bushi" is a Japanese song but created in Hawai'i, so this is one of the examples of exchanging cultures. Even after people immigrate to a foreign country, their original culture will not disappear.

Moreover, the following students' words show that employing the DMIS scale to the analysis of "Hole Hole Bushi" is helpful in expanding their knowledge framework:

Cheese: The first Japanese immigrants called "gannenmono" went to Hawai'i in order to earn money. They suffered from culture shock, and they were at the denial or defense level. Now, they are at the integration level. I learned that it is difficult to communicate with foreign people, but we can also overcome difficulties. If both make efforts to understand each other, we will build up a good relationship.

Mimi: I learned the Bennett's DMIS method. By using this, it becomes easier to analyze many cases. There are many Japanese people who immigrated abroad, and they overcome many sufferings to create new cultures for the next generation.

Fourthly, culturally responsive education contributes to "strengthening students' racial and ethnic identities" (Muñiz, 2019b, para. 6). This can be regarded as a positive outcome since "students who reported experiences with culturally responsive teaching practices expressed a deeper sense of racial identity. A trove of studies favorably link racial and ethnic pride and belonging to school engagement, interest in learning, and even better grades" (Muñiz, 2019b, para. 6). It is reasonable to suppose from Ken's statement below that practicing photovoice as a culturally responsive approach helps some students to develop an affirmative attitude towards their own cultural upbringing:

I feel more connected to Japan than ever before. I learned that there were many Japanese immigrants and that their history is an important part of the connection between Japan and Hawai'i. As you can see in the "Hole Hole Bushi" lyrics, it is thought that their DMIS stage was denial or defense at first. However, they worked for Hawai'i and made a place for themselves in Hawai'i. They did not forget their love for Japan, which has been carried on by the immigrants of today.

Finally, culturally responsive education results in "promoting a sense of safety and belonging" (Muñiz, 2019b, para. 7). The last advantage is associated with the fourth one. Studying the identity (trans)formation of transnational migrants in class has an impact on the learner's belongingness, as Ui articulates:

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I learned that it is a great thing that we can say we have identities as Japanese. After I learned everything that happened to Japanese immigrants in Hawai'i, I feel that my own identity is very important. Assuming I don't know who I am and experience cultural differences, it would be very hard. The fact that we have a home country to go back to and to be closely connected with supports us to go through difficulties of cultural differences.

Thus, what becomes obvious from the case of the Kumamoto-Hawai'i project is that utilizing a photovoice method concentrating on international migration as a culturally responsive approach brings about these multiple positive results.

Conclusion

To cope with the current educational demand, this study has introduced the practice of photovoice connecting Kumamoto and Hawai'i as a culturally responsive approach. The photovoice project implemented aiming at cultivating "the Japanese way of well-being" of university students has produced the beneficial effects parallel to the five advantages of culturally responsive education discussed by Muñiz (2019b): "facilitating brain process-ing" (para. 3), "motivating and engaging students" (para. 4), "cultivating critical thinking and problem-solving skills" (para. 5), "strengthening students' racial and ethnic identities" (para. 6), and "promoting a sense of safety and belonging" (para. 7). Muñiz emphasizes that "sense of belonging, safety, and support in school is critically important for learning" (2019b, para. 7), and teachers need to take the initiative in creating and sustaining such a learning environment. More attempts should be made to import cultural responsiveness into higher education in Japan and nourish the well-being of university students with various backgrounds.

The Kumamoto-Hawai'i photovoice project has employed the concept of transnationality to deal with international migration. Applying it to the conceptualization of citizenship has the potential to acknowledge diversity—diverse voices of transnational migrants shifting physically and mentally beyond the borders. Goldring (2001) suggests that examining the notion of citizenship through the lens of transnationality can offer "information about the kinds of citizen(s) and citizenship practices being constructed and negotiated by states and transmigrants, and how these are gendered and differentiated across space and level of political authority and analysis" (pp. 63-64). Acknowledging diversity and paying attention to the issues of (in)equality and social justice surrounding transnational migrants are of great importance in culturally responsive education accommodating diverse students. Trinh (1994), challenging "the home and abroad/dwelling and travelling dichotomy" (p. 22), argues that "travelling back and forth between home and abroad becomes a mode of dwelling" (p. 15). In an attempt to tackle such a dichotomy, transnational migrants moving across boundaries play a crucial role; they can potentially destabilize the dichotomy and present a new way of dwelling. In conjunction with the border-crossing movement, her/his-story, memory, home, food, and language of the migrant shift and become (trans) formed. This is applicable to students coming from diverse backgrounds and living in to-day's globalized world. It is thus important to take account of their multifarious being and becoming in implementing culturally responsive education.

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