
シンポジウム報告

'Creating Connections: Empowerment for Diverse Japan'. A Report on the 2019 Symposium

Andrea Carlson[†]**Abstract**

The Creating Connections symposium was conceived as a way to work together to consider ways to support children, young people, and adults who are in some way diverse and are experiencing challenges to their wellbeing and mental health. The primary aim for the event is that it be a platform for people from a variety of backgrounds to make connections and build alliances, share expertise and experience, and exchange information and resources about the types of topics which impact all of our lives. This year, the symposium was held on June 8 and 9, 2019, and was made possible thanks to financial support from Aichi Prefectural University's Cultural Symbiosis Research Institute and Regional Liaison Center, and from the university's President's Special Faculty Research Grant. Content at the event was related to professional practice, research, advocacy and activism, personal narrative, or a combination of these. A total of 36 presentations, workshops, panel discussions, and guided discussions took place, organized according to the following themes:

- Wellbeing & Mental Health
- Safety (Bullying, domestic violence, sexual violence)
- Cyber-Bullying & Online Awareness
- LGBTQ+ Related Topics
- Organizing for Disability Empowerment
- Autism Spectrum Disorder & Learning Differences
- Multicultural Identity

Keywords

Mental health; Wellbeing; Multicultural; Support; Diversity

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'Akemi' is 15 years old, and she lives in a rural area near Toyama City. Akemi's mother is South African and her father is Japanese, and she lived in the U.S. from when she was five to 13 years old. Akemi speaks Japanese and English, but she is much more comfortable and confident expressing herself in English. Recently, Akemi's parents have become concerned about her emotional wellbeing and mental health as she has become withdrawn and anxious and has started refusing to go to school. Akemi will not talk about what is troubling her and refuses to meet with the school counselor.

We can speculate that Akemi is for some reason or reasons experiencing emotional or psychological distress which could be due to one or more factors, such as being bullied or having an undiagnosed learning difference, the stress of which could lead to anxiety and/or depression, which might manifest itself in various ways, such as disordered eating or self-harm.

Like Akemi's parents, we do not know the source or sources of what is troubling her. We can imagine, however, that she almost certainly feels isolated to some degree. It is also possible that, like most of us, she does not have an adequate understanding of issues related to

mental health, and that this combined with isolation may escalate her fears about her own wellbeing. Young people, like Akemi, often delay their first visit to a mental health professional, and stigma and lack of knowledge about mental health issues are thought to contribute to this.

Akemi's parents may themselves feel unsure about how to support their daughter, and a range of issues may contribute to difficulty in finding appropriate support for Akemi, including possible:

- stigma associated with seeking mental health support
- language and cultural barriers
- lack of mental health literacy in schools and the wider community
- lack of easily accessible information about mental health support
- lack of diversity-sensitive mental health support, particularly in rural areas

And, as Akemi's ethnic and cultural background is most likely different from that of most of her peers, a lack of awareness and acceptance of diversity in schools and the wider community may contribute to the challenges she is facing.

Although I have used the example of Akemi's mental health as an example, issues with respect to isolation and the need for information and support must surely be similar when people have concerns or questions about a range of issues or challenges.

The Creating Connections symposium was conceived as a way to work together to consider ways to support children, young people, and adults who are in some way diverse and are experiencing challenges to their wellbeing and mental health.

The 2019 Symposium

'Creating Connections 2019: Empowerment for Diverse Japan' was held on June 8 and 9, 2019. The symposium was made possible thanks to financial support from Aichi Prefectural University's Cultural Symbiosis Research Institute and Regional Liaison Center, and from the university's President's Special Faculty Research Grant. This was the third time the event has been held and, as in the previous two years, the venue was Nagoya International School, which provided use of their facilities free of charge. The symposium was attended by a range of people, including high school and university

students, researchers, mental health professionals, school psychologists, community organizers, parents, and teachers. 176 participants attended on the first day of the symposium and 83 people participated on the second day. Although the majority of participants were from Aichi Prefecture, there were 16 participants from the Greater Tokyo area and an equal number from Kansai and Kobe. A third of the participants were Japanese or culturally-diverse Japanese, and two thirds were culturally-diverse residents of Japan.

We were very keen this year to welcome participants and presenters with language backgrounds other than Japanese and English. To ensure that the symposium would be multi-directional and would include people from as many backgrounds as possible, all written material was provided in Portuguese, Japanese, and English, and interpreting was available for all presentations, workshops, and panel discussions in these languages as well. We also hoped to have opportunities to learn from and build alliances with young people, and high school and university students were members of the conference organizing committee and a number of young people, including 13 students from Aichi Prefectural University, came and helped at the event. Young people also participated as members of a panel discussion about LGBTQ+ related topics, and a group of Nagoya International School students, Nagoya Action Heroes, gave a presentation entitled 'A Sex Positive Approach to Sexuality Education'. Admission to the symposium was free to young people under the age of 25, and was ¥1,000 for one day or ¥1,500 for both days for all others.

Aims and objectives for the symposium

The aim for 'Creating Connections 2019: Empowerment for Diverse Japan' was that it be a platform for people from a variety of backgrounds to make connections and build alliances, share expertise and experience, and exchange information and resources about the types of topics which impact all of our lives. To this end, we planned the event with two objectives in mind. First, we sought to provide an opportunity for young people, parents, teachers, mental health professionals and others from a variety of cultural and language backgrounds to meet to talk about a range of topics related to social and emotional support for children, youth, and adults with diverse backgrounds in Japan. Second, we wanted the event to be an opportunity for people with knowledge and experience about a particular topic or field (such as learning differences or mental health) to meet and

share information, ideas, knowledge, and resources.

Content at the symposium was related to professional practice, research, advocacy and activism, personal narrative, or a combination of these. The choice of specific themes for the event was informed by research I have been carrying out investigating the mental health needs of multicultural and international youth in Japan:

- Wellbeing & Mental Health
- Safety (Bullying, domestic violence, sexual violence)
- Cyber-Bullying & Online Awareness
- LGBTQ+ Related Topics
- Organizing for Disability Empowerment
- Autism Spectrum Disorder & Learning Differences
- Multicultural Identity

Format for the symposium

We decided to hold the event over two days as it had grown in size and scope over the previous two years, with more people attending from outside Aichi Prefecture as presenters and participants. We scheduled the opening speech, keynote presentation, panel discussion, and parallel presentation sessions for Saturday, June 8th, and decided to have only workshops on Sunday, June 9th.

Saturday, June 8th

We were extremely honored that Dr. Osamu Takahashi, Chairperson of the Board of the Toyota Municipal Social Welfare Association, agreed to give the opening address at this year's symposium. Dr. Takahashi, a child psychiatrist, is a pioneer and highly-respected expert for his work with children who are on the Autistic Spectrum, and has extensive experience working with the multicultural community in Aichi Prefecture. We were also very privileged to have had Ms. Kanako Makino, the Director of DiVE-tv Association, give the keynote presentation, which was titled 'Lets DiVE into Diversity'. This year's panel discussion, chaired by Dr. Yoshi Grote of Kyoto Sangyo University, was 'Empowerment for the LGBTQIA Community'. Panelists included a university student, a young working adult, an elementary school teacher, and a junior high school teacher. The panelists shared their perspectives about a range of topics as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, 28 parallel presentation sessions, all 50 minutes each, took place over four hours. The presentations were grouped by the conference themes and held in high school classrooms and the school library.

Saturday's sessions ended at 5:00 pm, and were

followed by a catered dinner in the school's main hall. The dinner was attended by 144 people.

Sunday, June 9th

We decided to devote Sunday morning to workshops related to self-care, followed by a topic-based guided lunchtime discussion. Workshops were each one-hour long, and as was the case on Saturday, interpreting was provided in three languages.

The first workshop was 'Mindfulness for Mental Health', led by Tetsuji Ietsugu, a professor at Nagoya University of Economics and the Director of the Meikei Mindfulness Center. In this session, Professor Ietsugu first described how he has been using Mindfulness Cognitive Therapy as a treatment for depression. He then led the participants through a series of meditation exercises, and shared practical advice regarding how to incorporate mindfulness into our daily lives.

This session was followed by 'Self-Empowerment in Japan', led by Avril Haye Matsui, an instructor at Nagoya City University and founder of the 'Black Women in Japan' group. This session focused on creating small, manageable steps to achieve changes in major life areas.

Participants then had a choice of participating in a hands-on, art therapy workshop, 'How Stories Empower Us', given by Cheryl Okubo, an art therapist based in Tsukuba, or attending a workshop about interpersonal communication, 'Empathy: The Forgotten Cornerstone Skill in Communications', given by Jon Dujmovich of Keio University.

The final session of the event was a lunchtime discussion, 'Cross-Cultural Conversations: A Discussion about Shame and How to Support Each Other', moderated by Sarah Pearlz, who is the Student Services Coordinator at Nagoya International School. In this discussion, participants first discussed in small groups how shame regarding seeking help or support for mental health issues or learning differences is manifested in our own cultures. The points raised in the smaller groups were then shared with the large group.

Diversity Day Camp

Again with the aim of including young people, on both days of the symposium alongside the Creating Connections conference we held a 'Diversity Day Camp' for the children of presenters and participants. The

premise for this event is that children and teenagers, like adults, benefit from opportunities to meet and explore the issues which impact their lives. For some of our children and young people, finding friends and role models in their schools or local communities who share similar backgrounds can be difficult. This is true for LGBTQ+ children and teenagers, for students with diverse ethnic backgrounds, for children who learn differently and for those who experience challenges to their emotional wellbeing. To provide a platform for children ages 8 to 14 to explore issues related to diversity and identity, Aichi Prefectural University students and Nagoya International School teachers, students, and parents volunteered to prepare and lead a range of interesting activities, including art, dance, theater, music, sports, and board games. Some of the presenters from the Creating Connections conference visited the children's event to give short presentations or lead activities for the children.

Outcomes from the symposium

We aimed this year to put a greater emphasis on ways to create connections and build alliances for support, and to develop plans regarding what can be produced from the conference to support our diverse community. To this end, input from participants was sought regarding the types of actions needed to support diverse children and young people, and the following items point to the importance of considering strategies for ensuring that a range of help is available, including:

1. Safe ways and safe spaces for diverse children and youth to let appropriate adults know about problems they are experiencing or concerns they have, such as abuse, bullying, or their fear of disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity.
2. Integrated, collaborative, team-oriented approaches to support by school staff and professionals in the local communities.
3. Literacy programs in schools and their communities regarding a range of topics, including those included at the symposium.
4. School and community-based programs providing information, training, and practice in being allies to people of all ages.
5. Forums for sharing of information and resources regarding best practices in mental health support among Japanese, international, and other types of schools.
6. An online, easily accessible multilingual

database with information and contact details for organizations providing support for a range of topics, including suicide, physical and emotional abuse, sexual violence, bullying, diversity and inclusion, and LGBTQ+ related topics.

Regarding the need for regular topic-based discussion forums, above, we are organizing a mini-symposium which will focus primarily on the mental health of multicultural children and young people in Japan. The event is planned for February 2020. A similar mini-symposium, focusing on inclusion for LGBTQ+ students, is being planned for the early summer of 2020.

We are also beginning work on an online, multilingual database of useful resources. It is planned that this list will initially focus on information pertinent to Aichi Prefecture and will then be developed to include resources in other parts of Japan.

Finally, we have recently added a journal, 'Oasis: Bulletin of the Connections Forum', as a way to ensure that what is shared at the symposium will be potentially accessible and useful to a wider audience.

Plans for the 2020 Creating Connections Symposium

The next Creating Connections event is planned for October 2020, and content will be informed by feedback from participants who attended the 2019 event and by the results of a survey of and interviews with school support staff regarding mental health provision and psychological crisis planning in international schools in Japan. We anticipate maintaining a similar format as the 2019 symposium, but having the workshops focus on sensitive, but extremely important topics, such as gatekeeping for suicide prevention.

We also hope to create a more inclusive event, and plan to add interpreting in other languages, including sign language, Nepalese, and Chinese, and to more actively invite proposals for presentations by speakers of languages other than English and Japanese.



OPENING ADDRESS

Dr. Osamu Takahashi
高橋 脩
Chairperson of the Board,
Toyota Municipal Social
Welfare Association
豊田市福祉事業団 理事長



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Kanako Makino
牧野 佳奈子
Director, DiVE-tv Association
一般社団法人DiVE.tv 代表理事

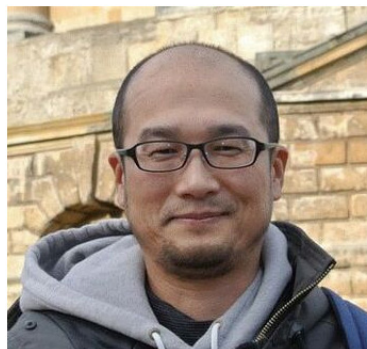
Lets DiVE into Diversity
Mergulhe na Diversidade
「多文化に飛び込もう！」



SUNDAY MORNING WORKSHOP

Avril Haye Matsui
アヴリル ヘイ 松井
Instructor, Nagoya City University
名古屋市立大学 講師

Self-Empowerment in Japan
Empoderamento Próprio para o Japão
「日本での自己エンパワーメント」



SUNDAY MORNING WORKSHOP

Tetsuji Ietsugu, Ph.D.
家接 哲次
Professor, Nagoya University of Economics
Meikei Mindfulness Center
名古屋経済大学 教授

Mindfulness for Mental Health
Consciência Plena e Saúde Mental
「メンタルヘルスのためのマインドフルネス」



SUNDAY MORNING WORKSHOP

Cheryl Okubo
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How Stories Empower Us
Como Estórias Nos Fortalecem
「語りは力なり、とそのワケ」