

**Final report by Ivan Botev, tenured professor at Toita Women’s College,
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“And you who wish to represent by words the form of man and all the aspects of his membrification, relinquish that idea. For the more minutely you describe the more you will confine the mind of the reader, and the more you will keep him from the knowledge of the thing described. And so it is necessary to draw and to describe.”—Leonardo Da Vinci

(In David Bland, *The Illustration of Books*, London: Faber and Faber, 1958, p. 15)

The idea for this international research project was born in discussions with my PhD advisor, Dr. Toshinobu Fujii (also later a core member of the project research team) as I was working on my doctoral research at the Graduate School of Regional Development Studies, Toyo University. At the time I was working on researching picturebooks as a community educational tool and the ways this type of literature can help nurture stronger sense of belonging in people in local communities. Since I was (and still am) based in Japan, Dr. Fujii recommended that I contact Dr. Yasuhiro Endoh—an authority on picturebooks used as a motivational tool to empower people and trigger positive change in local communities in a “bottom-up” style in Japan and abroad. Not much later after contacting and beginning to work with Dr. Endoh as an outside and unofficial PhD advisor of mine, that he told me about the Toyota Foundation and the opportunities it gives to young researchers like myself in Japan and abroad. My very first project proposal was rejected but a year later, after deepening my own research and understanding of picturebooks, community development, and how these two can be linked effectively, I was able to produce a much more solid project proposal which was accepted by the Foundation this time. I even had the opportunity, given to me by Dr. Ryuta Oba, to give a presentation at an official Toyota Foundation workshop held at the University of Tokyo about my research project that was about to begin a month later. In short, this is how I began my very first international, collaborative research project in Japan and Bulgaria.

During my first visit to Bulgaria, my PhD advisor, Dr. Toshinobu Fujii and his wife, Prof. Kazuko Fujii visited Bulgaria to lay the foundations for our work on the project and to begin establishing the very important network that is crucial when working with people from local communities anywhere in the world. Meeting with key people, presenting your vision and goals in order to get them on board, and their collaboration and active involvement are extremely important conditions that need to be cleared in the beginning of such a project. This is what we worked on during our first visit to the capital city of Sofia and Plovdiv, the

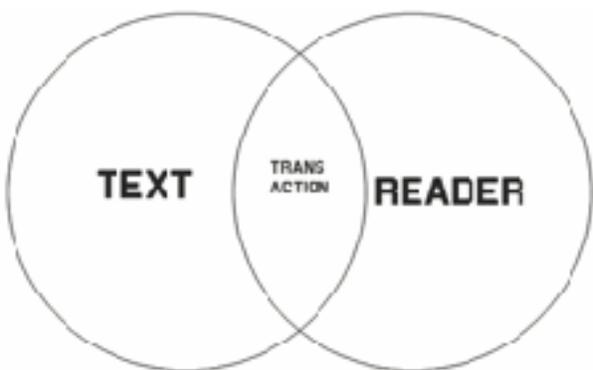
second largest city in Bulgaria and the terrain of our field work. In Sofia we were able to meet with professors, researchers, and students from Sofia University, as well as other top educational and research institutions in the country. Other people we spoke with about our project, while gathering information about local problems and issues that would help us better understand the local conditions, were representatives from the Ministry of Education in Bulgaria, journalists covering the local educational system, people working with refugees in a different capacities, and others. I was even able to make an appointment to meet with the then Vice President of Bulgaria, Ms. Margarita Popova, who met with us at the Presidential Palace and spoke with us about educational, refugee, and other current problems, while we were able to let her know about our research in Bulgaria with the Toyota Foundation. All the people we met during this first visit of ours were very cooperative and promised future assistance with whatever we would need, no matter what their field of expertise was. This was the first important step we made in establishing the necessary network in the country.

The city of Plovdiv and our model research area is where we visited next. There we met and spoke with representatives of the local government, visited elementary schools in the area and spoke with teachers and principals there, discussed the local situation with university professors and media journalists, and walked around town as our preliminary gathering of data to better construct the plan for our two-year project at hand. Here again, all the people whom we met with provided us with information and data vital for your project. Everyone was extremely happy to hear about the Toyota Foundation and that a group of specialists from Japan would be working with local experts in communities empowering people in a bottom-up style and motivating local residents to bring a positive change to their surroundings.

Dr. Fujii, who is an architect and town planner by education, said that he understand very well why I had selected the city of Plovdiv as a model furor research. Plovdiv is said to be the most ancient living city in Europe and the sixth such in the world. There, one can easily see ancient Thracian mosaics, Roman stadium, amphitheater, odeon, and forum remains, as well as still functioning mosques, remaining since the Ottoman rule of these lands. All this, while seeing the modern Bulgarian people walking about running errands and living their 21st century lives in this part of Europe and the world. Dr. Fujii shared his immediate understanding of the city: because of the hilly area (Plovdiv is also called the City of the Seven Hills) and also one of the biggest rivers in the country flowing through it, it was an ideal place for the first settlers some 6 - 8,000 years ago, providing them with fresh water and the natural defense needed: it is easy to see an enemy approaching in the distance also because Plovdiv is located in the Thracian Valley, a vast area of flatlands. Bulgaria being at the southeastern tip of Europe (it borders Greece and Turkey to the south) has always been a

crossroad for different cultures: from Europe, Asia, and even Africa. Bulgaria’s geography and history can help explain the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity found in the country. In its capital city, Sofia, we can find a unique feature perhaps not found anywhere else in the world—the Triangle of Religions. There is an Eastern Orthodox church, an Ottoman mosque, and a synagogue all visible from one another’s locations. Perhaps this could explain the fact that while in neighboring former Yugoslavia religious tensions escalated to wars and later led to the split of Yugoslavia into smaller countries, tensions between such ethnic groups in Bulgaria have never been too serious or unmanageable. In other words, Armenians, Russians, Greeks, Turks, Roma (Gypsy), the Bulgarians and even the new ethnic minority of the newcomer Syrians have always found ways to live in peace and harmony with one another. For this reason, Bulgaria has been pointed out as a model of religious and ethnic understanding to countries around the world. While our research team worked in Bulgaria to bring new knowledge, know-how, and tools, and motivate people in local communities to start movements and work toward improving their local living environments, we also learned as much from the people we worked with and met in the country.

During the next fieldwork in Bulgaria I was able to make a selection of children’s literature based on Dr. Yasuhiro Endoh’s lifelong collection of picturebooks and bring it to Bulgaria where I used it in elementary schools and book cafes and did read-alouds with Bulgarian and Syrian elementary school children. I used the Reader Response Theory, one of the methods from my own doctoral research, to find out exactly how and to what extent do picturebooks foster stronger sense of belonging in young readers to their community and hometown, and how such literature can help Syrian refugee children make Bulgaria their new home country and Plovdiv, their new hometown. For this purpose, after read-aloud activities with the children, their parents, and some elementary school teachers, I asked them to fill out a table (also based on my doctoral research findings) in word form (using key words, instead of full sentences; I had found out full sentences are too difficult for young readers when they try to express their feelings and emotions) and in illustration form (since picturebooks themselves are a fusion of words and text, research has shown that young readers are better in expressing themselves in picture form when expressing a more complex thought). The data collected this way was the base for our next steps in the project.



Thanks to results from this research project and my work with Dr. Yasuhiro Endoh (who unfortunately passed away in the beginning of 2018) along with my findings during my PhD research, I was able to write a research paper entitled “Taking Reader Response Theory to a New Level: Yasuhiro Endoh’s Picturebook Read-alouds (yomigatari)” on the subject of the use of picturebooks for the graduate school journal of the school of Regional Development Studies at Toyo University. Some of the relative text there follows:

“Reader Response to Multimodal Texts (Picturebooks)

Recent studies are also considering response of readers to multimodal texts, in contrast to previous studies that have focused on written texts only. When reading multimodal texts, the reader generally relies on a blend of modes (images and text) to be able to make meaning. Sipe (2008) analyzed previous research data of elementary school students’ responses to picturebook readings to find out that students constructed meaning through words and illustrations and that a significant amount (23%) of the responses were analyses of books’ images. Categories that emerged in his study included: analysis of illustrations (analysis); stories related to other stories and media (intertextual); connections to students’ own lives (personal); merging of real world and story world (transparent); and usage of book as a springboard for creative play (performative). This shows that the emergence of literature in multimodal format — not only picturebooks but also comic books and graphic novels — creates a need to look at the reader response theory from a different angle, thus devising the necessary additional categories.

Other studies (Kiefer 1993, 1995) have also focused on elementary school students’ responses to picturebooks and have detected developmental differences in how students responded. Students seemed familiar with visual elements such as line, color, and shape, while at the same time lacked the correct vocabulary to express their responses (young learners are better equipped to respond in an illustrative form). It seemed they noticed details first and used critical thinking later. The types of responses that emerged in Kiefer’s research are as follows: informative — content of illustrations, storyline, text to life observations, comparisons to other literature; heuristic — problem solving, inferences, hypothetical language; imaginative — entering into life of the book and using figurative language; and personal — expressing feelings on opinions, relating to characters, and evaluating illustrations.” This is one reason why my team members and I had selected the picturebook format as the tool for community education and as an educational material for foster a stronger sense of belonging in community members in this project.

About the *power of picturebooks* I wrote: “The power of picturebooks lies in their instantaneous surprise, the uniqueness of the story, the poetic expression of words, the

aesthetic power of the pictures, and the amusement and relaxation from the humor found in this genre (Endoh 2015). Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) stated that picturebooks are considered “educational vehicles [that] includ[e] aspects such as socialization” (p. 2), that “picturebooks are examined in connection with developmental psychology” and that they belong to a genre “containing pedagogical applications” (p. 3). Picturebooks are regarded as a type of literature and cultural genre that prepares young learners for other communication media.

Picturebooks are usually placed in the Children’s Literature category in most libraries and are thought of as a stepping stone for young learners to develop the necessary skills needed to understand “regular books”. At the same time it is erroneous to think that picturebooks are only for children and Endoh (2015) looks at it in detail:

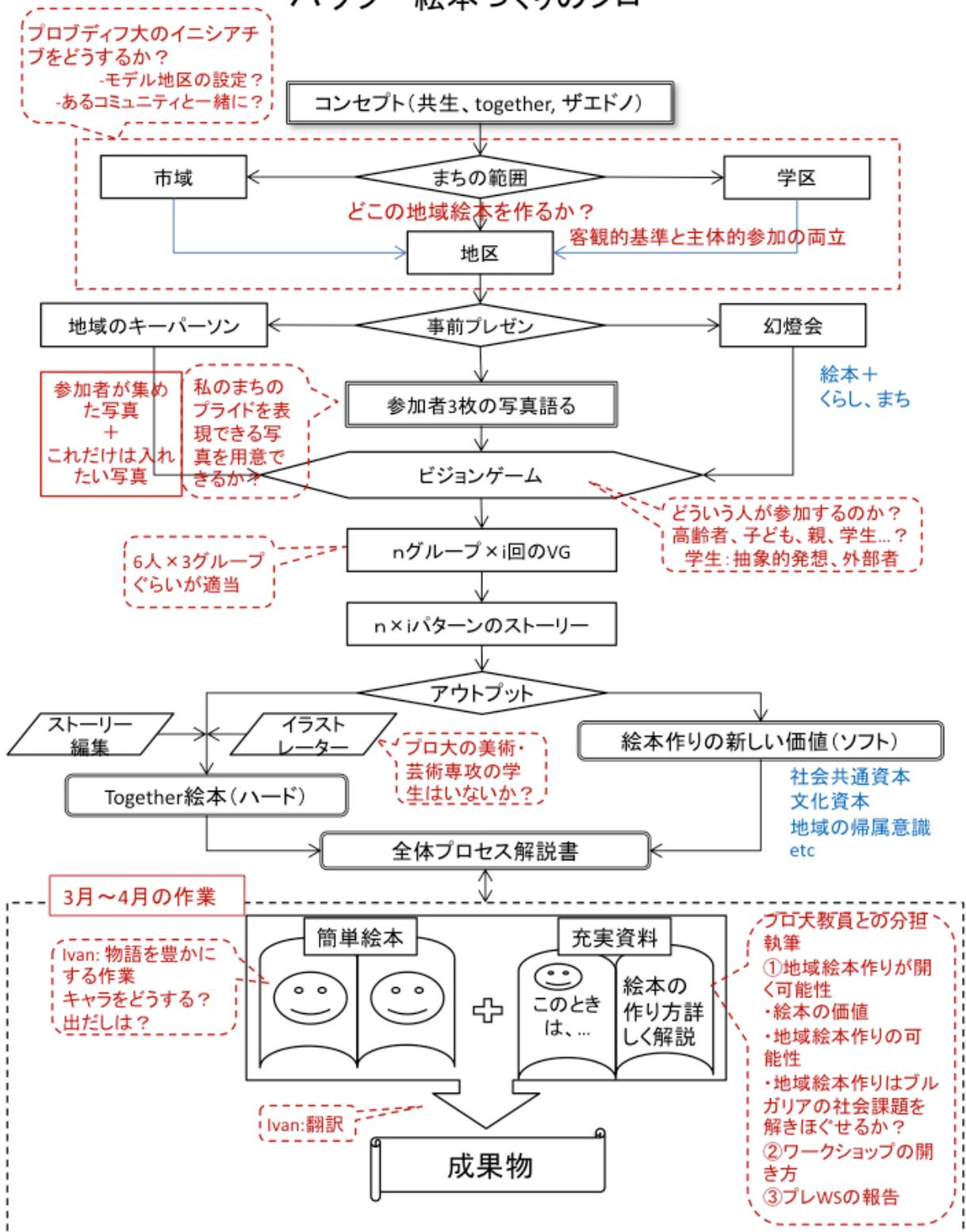
The busy and exhausted adult of today can be revived through the power of picturebooks to find their own content way of existence in their local living environment. Why would the free flow of ideas help the modern adult think more about an improved local living environment? Well, it is an adult’s duty to love and to work. What gently embraces these two is the place we live in. To love more and to work better, inevitably the place we live in comes into play (p. 9).

Although any book that combines narrative format with pictures might be categorized as a picturebook, Kiefer (2010) clarifies that “In the best picturebooks, the illustrations are as much a part of the experience with the book as the written text” (p. 156). “[A picturebook is] defined by its narrative framework of sequential imagery and minimalist text to convey meaning or tell a story and [is] different from the illustrated book in which pictures play a secondary narrative part, enhancing and decorating the narrative (Popova 2014). In the words of semiotic terminology Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) further add that images in picturebooks “are complex iconic signs, and words in picturebooks are complex conventional signs; however the basic relationship between the two levels is the same” (p. 1). In short, the fusion of art and text exceeds what each form can accomplish separately.” The above helps explain the reasoning behind our decision to produce our final product, the “how-to book” in a picturebook format—simply put, it’s an easily accessible tool for use by people no matter their age, educational level, etc.

Back in Japan, the part of the team based here (in the Tokyo and Nagoya areas) was meeting monthly either at Toyo University or at Dr. Endoh’s NPO, “Engawa” to brainstorm ideas, talk about how each of us sees the project develop and evolve, and to plan our next visits to Bulgaria and the fieldwork and activities there. Since there was an increasing interest in this research project of ours with the Toyota Foundation among our students (where we

「わたしたちのまち」絵本をつくらう ハウツー絵本づくりのフロー

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showed presentations and talked about our findings, and where Dr. Endoh even did one of his famous *gentokai* slideshow presentations together with selected picturebooks *yomigatari* read-alouds), we saw an increasing number of Toyo University students coming to our project meetings and activity participating there. We even had graduate school students (from Tokyo University among others) contact and visit us in order to gather information about similar projects involving visual tools they were working on. We invited the students mentioned above to also come with us to the fieldwork in Bulgaria and some of them found the experience there so valuable that they repeated their visits and came to Plovdiv more than once. One of these Japanese students' reports is included below. Another report also included here is by a Bulgarian student from the city of Plovdiv, currently studying in Tokyo, Japan. This was done in order to display the activities and findings, as well as the educational value of this project to university students through their own eyes. Another contributor to this report was a core member of the current project and without whom it would have been almost impossible to complete things successfully within two years and with the limited funding we had.

Prof. Dr. Maria Schnitter, a specialist in ethnic minorities and a ethnologist, founder of the Ethnology Department at Plovdiv University, who also actively involved students and colleagues of hers in our project, worked selflessly to open doors for us to local communities, schools, churches, etc., as well as offered the facilities at the university where she teaches every time we needed them to gather community members, to organize workshops, give presentations, and illustrate pages of the picturebook. This is to say that along the way we were able to establish the necessary network and trust on the ground in Plovdiv, Bulgaria not only for the current project of “Exploring the Art of Living Together in 21st Century Ethnically Diverse Europe: Fostering Strong Sense of Belonging, Living in Harmony with One Another, and Integrating Refugees” but also for our future work and projects with the Toyota Foundation of Japan. The support I personally received as a leader of the project and as the person responsible for the success of the project at the end but also for its effective implementation during the two-year period given to us by the Foundation was enormous.

In the abstract of the project proposal I wrote, “Waves of people (one million by 2015, UN) are trying to escape the wars and persecution in the Middle East and Africa by making Europe their new home and the tendency is for this to continue. European countries are unprepared in accommodating these refugees—the biggest humanitarian catastrophe in the past decades. Bulgaria, due to its geopolitical location, is the first safe European territory reachable by land. Bulgaria though, has the lowest economy rate in the EU, low birthrate, high mortality rate, aging population and “muscle” and “brain” drains, i.e. the country suffers an enormous demographic crisis. The main aim of our project is to contribute to the integration of refugees, who remain in Bulgaria and to recognize them as a resource, which in

long-term will also help solve the existing demographic crisis in the country. The specific goals are increased inclusion and implementation of existing literature and creation of new, specific such in the elementary school curriculum as well as in non-formal educational settings, which fosters a sense of belonging and acceptance of others. The model of this project—once it proves successful—will be applicable in other multicultural and multiethnic countries, where similar conditions exist.”

As we went along and thought the things we finding at the scene of action, our project continued developing and evolved into something a bit different then what we envisioned more than two years ago. One way Dr. Ryuta Oba of the Toyota Foundation was by assuring me that this is perfectly normal—something I needed as a leader of this research but also as something who was doing this for the first time. Dr. Oba made sure to meet with me and other team members at regular intervals to speak with us and give us advice on ways we could continue our work. At the same time, he never applied any pressure on us to follow any of his ideas—he only gave us examples from his point of view and based on his experience. I personally am ready to continue working with the Toyota Foundation in the future as well exactly because of this vital support we have been receiving and to which I owe my professional growth as a researcher as well.

Originally, the project implementation and methods were supposed to be: “Year 1: The project implementation will include visits, meetings, discussions, questionnaires, and interviews with Ministry of Education representatives, professors, teachers, students, publishers, ethnic minorities’ representatives and refugees to research the needs of lessons and materials for young learners’ hometown and local community, which nurture sense of belonging, acceptance, and living in peace and harmony with others. This will help us design and create new literature and also redesign the existing one, to be used with young learners. Year 2: Our team will select and prepare materials, and create literature, to be used in formal and non-formal educational settings to foster a strong sense of belonging and acceptance of others in children. The methods we will use are icebreakers, educational games, brainstorming, categorizing, mapping, numbering and methods of evaluation and self-evaluation. Other methods will be surveys and questionnaires, structured and unstructured interviews and open discussions with the various participants.” As we worked on the project we were able not only to do the stated above but also to focus on adults, along with the above-mentioned target age group and our project grew in scale to also include educational aspects, as we involved elementary school, high school, and university students and their teachers and professors to work with us.

The expected results and effects as written in the accepted project proposal were, “The results will be increased quality of lessons and materials, and new literature, which will nurture a sense of belonging and acceptance of others in young learners. The effects will be an improved integration of refugees in Bulgaria, identification of refugees as a resource, and the recognition of Bulgaria as a new home by refugees. Prejudice on racial, religious etc. bases will decrease, and a more harmonious environment will be created. A long-term effect will be to prevent future religious or ethnic conflicts and will aid Bulgarians to accept refugees as equals.” The first reaction everywhere we went and talked about our project was interest but also a bit of skepticism as to the tool of choice we had: picturebooks. But as we went along with our workshops, presentations, read-alouds, etc., people participating there started realizing how such a simple but underestimated tool can actually be used in variety of ways to pass knowledge to people, to motivate them to begin thinking about making positive changes in their own neighborhoods, communities, and hometown and to also preserve the wisdom, traditions, and history of the people in a given area on the pages of such picturebooks, produced by members of the community themselves. I personally was approached by elementary school students asking me to find ways to translate and publish the books we used in our activities into Bulgarian because they saw a variety of ways of applying them in their classes, the school curriculum, and the lesson plans. I found out that in elementary school in Bulgaria, lessons about the students’ hometown and local living area don’t exist. Also, lessons allocated to cover such knowledge were only one or two per school year and that that was decided by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and that changes to that were not encouraged. Still, there were teachers who found ways to “bend the rules” and ask the students to research their hometowns by cutting photographs from the local media, pasting them on paper and adding text—a process very similar to producing simple picturebooks.

The expanded version for the proposed results and effects was, “The results of this project, based on the needs and desires of young learners in elementary schools and refugee camps, are increased quality and quantity of lessons and educational materials, and new educational literature, which nurtures stronger sense of belonging and acceptance of others in young learners. The effects of this project will be an improved integration of refugees in Bulgaria, the recognition of refugees as a resource, and the recognition of Bulgaria as a new home by refugees. Also, prejudices on racial, religious and other bases will be removed, and a better environment will be created, where people live in peace in harmony with one another. A long-term effect will be to contribute to resolving the problem with the demographic crisis in Bulgaria and also will help Bulgarian society accept refugees as equals in the country. Also, this project will help refugees integrate in local communities, and remove social isolation, separation and marginalization. It will assist refugees to more easily identify themselves with their new place of residence, increase their feeling of safety, boost young refugees’ interest in

the country they now live in, support young learners, and aid refugees with their Bulgarian language studies. This project will educate in the “art” of living together, regardless of social, ethnic, religious or other differences. The model of this research project will be applicable in other multicultural and multiethnic countries, where similar conditions exist. Another long-term effect will be to prevent future religious or ethnic conflicts and will aid Bulgarians to accept refugees as equals. This is of utter importance in the dynamics of today in Europe and other parts of the world.” Since the final product of this project, the how-to book in a picturebook format, hasn’t been published and distributed in the relevant places yet, our team still has work to do in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, and in other parts of the world facing similar issues. As Dr. Endoh said at the end of his last visit to Bulgaria, this project will continue beyond the two years allotted to us by the Toyota Foundation. According to him, to be truly successful this project will need to continue for five-ten years altogether. As mentioned earlier, although our team consisted of people, experts in different fields, we didn’t go to Plovdiv as “preachers” to tell “how things are done” but to work together with local communities in recognizing the problems they are facing and work together toward finding ways to improve their lives. In other words, there was as much for us to learn throughout the project as we had to offer to local residents. It was truly a great learning experience for all sides.

When I wrote about the targeted social issues and project objectives in 2015, they sounded this way, “Since March 2011, when the long and bloody civil war in Syria began, 130,000 people have died and hundred thousands have fled the country in order to save their lives. In only one-year time span Syrian refugees have increased eight times (UNHCR). In Europe, Greece has closed its borders and there is an increased military presence in its territorial waters. Many of the refugees from Syria are Palestinians (not wanted in Jordan) and Kurds (not wanted in Turkey) and therefore they find their way towards a farther, safer country—in this case, Bulgaria. The distance between Sofia and Damask is only 2,300 km. Syrian refugees are biggest in numbers and therefore the most visible. There are also “less visible” groups of refugees entering Europe—from Iraq, Cote D’Ivoire, Algeria, Afghanistan, to mention a few. Bulgaria naturally becomes the nearest safe country and entrance into the European Union, which funnels the refugee influx towards it. Bulgaria is not ready for this unprecedented refugee flow and this leaves it unprepared in three directions: refugee camps, the way the media treats the refugees, and integration. The refugee camps are in a bad state and are repaired “on the go.” The media are not creating a tone that is understanding and tolerating. As a result, the refugees here are mostly seen as a threat—for the loss of jobs, for the social welfare system, and for the safety of national identity. The refugees are not being integrated. After they arrive in Bulgaria, they stay in refugee camps until they receive new documents—a process that can continue several months or several years. In Bulgaria a National Strategy for the Migration, Protection and Integration (2011-2020) exists but it is too

generic, it is not funded well and as a result remains only on paper and as wishful thinking. The most serious problem with the integration of refugees is the children—the biggest and the most vulnerable group. They are practically not receiving any education whatsoever while they are within refugee camps, and later those who remain in Bulgaria enter regular schools without going through any special integration programs. The many difficulties refugees encounter—finding a place to live, a job, qualification, and the anxiety about their future prevent them from helping their children integrate. In Bulgaria, there is a lack of educational materials for non-Bulgarians. Education and integration of refugee children is practically left in the hands of NPOs and volunteers, without any structure and continuity. At the same time Bulgaria is experiencing a demographic crisis—negative population increase, low birthrate, high mortality rate, aging population, deserted areas and more. Will Bulgaria recognize the refugees as a resource and integrate them in its society, or will it allow their marginalization and turn them into a problem? Through this project we aim to fill up part of the enormous gap that exists when it comes to the process of socialization of the refugee children. Our project's objectives are inclusion and implementation of existing literature and creation of new, specific such in the elementary school curriculum, as well as in non-formal educational settings, which fosters a sense of belonging, acceptance of others, and living in peace and harmony with one another. Such literature will teach equality and equal rights and opportunities. This project will teach Bulgarian children how to accept others, as well as foster sense of belonging in refugee children, thus helping them integrate in Bulgarian society. Our team will use social anthropology theory and methods to research the problem, in contrast with existing researches—international law, political science, sociology, etc.” The refugee problem now, in 2018, has not been solved. The opposite is happening, countries such as Hungary, Poland, Italy and Malta among others are closing their borders and have elected nationalist parties to govern their countries. Germany, the country that was most welcoming refugees, specifically Syrians, is currently experiencing a divide in its society in how its citizens and politicians think of what needs to be done about the issue. The European Union is far from being united in its vision on this human tragedy and what needs to be done and how the refugees issue should be tackled in general. Turkey has offered safe refuge to a large number of Syrians crossing its border and has build refugee camps for this purpose. At the same time it is using this as a bargaining chip and has received large amounts of funding from the European Union to take care of the Syrian refugees there and not to “release” them into Europe.

The extended project implementation and methods I proposed were, “The goals of this project will be reached through the following activities. Year 1: Research of existing educational materials in the elementary school, which is related to instilling a sense of belonging and acceptance of others (immigrants, refugees, people with different religious,

ethnic or social background, etc.). This will be done through meetings, discussions, questionnaires, surveys and interviews with Ministry of Education representatives, university professors, teachers, students, textbook publishers, local government representatives, journalists covering education and refugee problems, ethnic minorities' representatives, refugees in camps and those who have recently made Bulgaria their new home. Also, our team will research and analyze the already existing literature in Bulgarian and other languages that nurtures sense of belonging, acceptance of others, and living in peace and harmony with one another. This literature will focus on common values and the things that bring Bulgarian and refugee children together and nurture tolerance and intercultural understanding. We will research the similarities and differences between Bulgarian youth and refugee children on an economic, cultural, ethnic, religious basis, as well as their peculiarities and habits, and sets of values. Our team will visit refugee camps and interview and survey refugees and their children, will discuss the current situation with the leaders of refugee communities (Syrian, Afghan, African, and others), and will hold talks with journalists covering the refugee crisis. This will help us design and create new literature and also redesign existing world and Bulgarian literature, to be used with young learners. Prof. Dr. Y. Endoh and his assistant M. Nabata, MS, both members in our team, will share their experience, knowledge and skills with the research, design and creation of books for young learners, based on previous such projects that they have successfully undergone and later published articles about, as well as their extensive collection (over 2,000) of hometown- and local community-theme books. Prof. Dr. M. Schnitter and S. Stoeva, M.A. and a Ph.D. candidate, will contribute by sharing their expertise and personal experience in working with people with diverse social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds (ethnic minorities, immigrants, refugees), which are vital for the success of this project. E. Yankova, M.Ed., a Head Teacher and principal of an elementary school, will share her extensive knowledge on existing educational materials, young learners' specific needs and desires, and best practices in working with children. Prof. Dr. T. Fujii and I. Botev, M.Ed. and a Ph.D. candidate, will contribute to the team and the project with their research skills in fieldwork and observation methods of data collection on hometown- and local community-themed books.

Year 2: Our team will work on the preparation, selection and collection of materials, and creation of new educational literature, to be used in formal and non-formal educational settings in order to foster a stronger sense of belonging and acceptance of others in young learners. The methods we will use are icebreakers, educational games, brainstorming, categorizing, mapping, numbering, methods of evaluation and self-evaluation and more. Other methods will be surveys and questionnaires, structured and unstructured interviews and discussions with participants. Based on findings from our fieldwork, interviews, surveys, etc. we will begin trials of using translated educational literature and materials, which have

been proven successful in similar cases in other parts of the world, with young learners. Through meetings, discussions, questionnaires, surveys and interviews with Ministry of Education representatives, university professors, teachers, students, textbook publishers, local government representatives, journalists covering education and refugee problems, ethnic minorities' representatives, refugees in camps and those who have recently made Bulgaria their new home in order to find out what impact do the literature and educational materials we would have prepared have as far as nurturing a sense of belonging, acceptance, and living in peace and harmony with one another have. After positive results, we will propose these materials to be included in different school subjects in the elementary school, especially where there (need to be) are lessons on hometown and local community, fostering a sense of belonging. Such materials will also need to be included and implemented into the school curriculum for refugee children and those, whose native language is not Bulgarian. This will be an important step towards creating and using educational literature in a multicultural school curriculum and extracurricular activities, to be used in parallel with language learning, as supplement—a tool for integration. In the second year of the research project, our team will also begin designing and creating new literature and educational materials, based on the specific needs of young learners of diverse backgrounds in Bulgaria. In cooperation with local authors, painters and publishers and the Ministry of Education we will start the local production of educational literature for children, which unfortunately does not exist in the country yet. Through workshops, symposia and publications we will share our best practices with others in the same field.” I personally was able to successfully defend my doctoral research and receive the title of Doctor of Philosophy during the period of the project. As mentioned earlier, I was able to implement theory and findings from my research at Toyo University's graduate school in the current project but also was able to use data from it when writing my dissertation, presenting findings, and at the end defending all of it. A change in the project's research team members also took place as I asked Prof. Chino Yabunaga, who showed interest in the project, to replace Svoboda Stoeva, a PhD candidate at Plovdiv University Graduate School of Ethnology, who was too busy with her doctoral research and couldn't offer active contribution. Emiliya Yankova was very enthusiastic in the first year of the project and offered everything she could as an elementary school teacher, including her classroom full of smart students, her experience and knowledge in working with variety of students, and her precious time, of course. Unfortunately for us, she was offered a job as a principal of an elementary school and that kept her too busy in the second year of the project. Dr. Endoh's unexpected passing away occurred right before the final and most important stage of our project in February, 2018. Ms. Megumi Nabata, his assistant at their NPO also couldn't join our final activities in Bulgaria because of that reason. So not only were we two people short-staffed but we were missing an important part of the “brain” and “muscles” necessary to bring the project to a successful end.

On the other hand, we were able to attract different people to our project in Plovdiv, including university students from Japan and Bulgaria, local government authorities, elementary and high school students, kindergarten students and their teachers, and many more. We were able to do activities such as picturebook read-alouds in kindergartens and junior high schools where there were students from ethnic minorities, such as the Syrian one, and discussed educational and social issues with their teachers there. In other workshops we had the pleasure to work with representatives from the Armenian, Turkish, Roma (Gypsy), Syrian and other ethnic groups, along with Bulgarian participants while students from Japan offered necessary assistance during the activities. It goes without saying that this brought an invaluable learning opportunity to all the participants. Many of them have said that they can't wait to participate again.

Our presence in Plovdiv didn't go unnoticed by the local media and during each of our fieldworks there our work was featured in newspapers and internet media, and I was interviewed by the local branch of the national radio. In such instances, we were always presented in a bright light, especially because our work with ethnic minorities was a positive one, which was in contrast with the more typical media coverage of refugees in the country and on the continent that was a more negative one. As the "experts from Japan" we were happy to be part of the learning process in the "cultural lab" that Plovdiv is, to rekindle pride in their roots, and to be able to offer some advice to the local people in how they can solve some of the problems they were facing.

As far as the final product itself, perhaps it would be best to include here the explanation on how to use this "how-to book", or manual with instructions in a picturebook format to gather people from local communities and create a picturebook of their own. "This manual in a picturebook format proposes the "making of a regional picturebook" as a way for people to acknowledge each other and increase the sense of belonging to their local area in a contemporary society that is experiencing diverse ethnic and refugee problems, conflicts, and lack of openness within regions. Following this format, similar picturebooks can be created by locals working together in any area. This way, they will be able to see the unique character of their city. The following are the four stages for rediscovering one's town.

Step 1 Invite and work with diverse groups of people.

Step 2 Discover both the problems and the treasures in the area (by walking around town).

Step 3 Everyone creates a story together.

Step 4 Based on the above create a picturebook, so that the rediscovery of your town can be shared with others.

Creating a book along with others may seem somewhat troublesome in the beginning. But the important thing here is the process of members rediscovering the treasures in the city. For example one may think, "That old man seemed scary at first but talking with him was actually fun!", "I learned so much talking with that old woman!", "From the picture that person took I noticed the place there provided such a beautiful view!" Yes, one of the most important rediscoveries of one's hometown is, "What a unique and diverse group of people makes our town."

Here, it is important to discover the unique appearance of your local area together with the members of a diverse group. To do so, this picturebook-manual proposes a way for everyone to visually express themselves by taking photos that will later be used in an activity called Vision Game where everyone cooperates to create a story. You might be worried whether it is possible for group members to create a story this way. Invite 3 - 8 friends and give it a try — choose several photos taken by members and combine them to make a story together. You will find out that it is surprisingly fun and easy to do. How about trying this as a project team, inviting a larger group of people? Different questions would come to mind: what would actually happen when many people gather this way; how to choose a good venue; who will draw the illustrations when compiling them into a picturebook, etc. A variety of tasks will appear depending on the unique situation in each region. Think of this as a great opportunity to share wisdom with one another.

Finally, the important thing is to have fun working together. A *story* is based on **intuition** and accompanied by **sympathy**, as opposed to *planning*, which is done in an **analytical** way. Also, you will be able to share the flow of time from the past to the future, and not a point would be missed in sharing the sense of direction in turning your local area into the one you really want it to be. Sharing such a fun experience, you will feel like wanting to do it again. So give it a try! This way you will increase the number of people involved—your new friends—and begin a movement on a local scale." It is important to emphasize the importance of the *process of making the picturebook*, which brings people from different backgrounds together to work toward a common goal, thus increasing the sense of belonging to their community. Of course, the *final product*, which will be the picturebook produced locally, is as important because it will later be used as a document of what the local community members have done and their thoughts and ideas to young and adult readers in that community.

While this report could not cover all the work done in Japan and Bulgaria by its members and contributors in its entirety, I hope it shows part of our vision and goals, some of the difficulties we faced during our two-year work together, how it naturally grew over time, and the importance of involving various people in order to guarantee the success of the project, as well as to learn from one another in the process. Again, I would like to thank everyone who offered their time and expertise, got involved in our cause, and thus helped us to bring some positive change to the local communities in this Eastern European country. There is still more we can do together there and in other parts of the world. But for now, thank you!

Partial report by Dr. Maria Schnitter, habilitated professor at Plovdiv University, Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

This project was the first attempt of collaboration of our two research teams—the one from the Toyo University, consisting of Dr. Ivan Botev, Prof. Chino Yabunaga and their colleagues and students who joined on a voluntary basis and that of the University of Plovdiv, consisting of Prof. Dr. Maria Schnitter and PhD student Svoboda Stoeva. Additional participants joined the two teams later in the process—lecturers and students from the Department of Ethnology led by the head of the department Assoc. Prof. Dr. Meglena Zlatkova, as well as Dr. Takuhi Tavityan, Dr. Krasimir Asenov (graduate of the Department and currently Deputy Mayor of North District in the City of Plovdiv), students from the High School of Mathematics and Informatics, as well as representatives of different ethnic communities from Plovdiv.

While working on the direct research tasks listed in the project plan, we were also able to achieve substantial "added value", which at this stage can be described as **building an important academic infrastructure** and a research network facilitating future contacts and research work among the project participants.

At the end of the project, **a framework agreement** was signed between Toyo University's Faculty of Global and Regional Studies and Plovdiv University's Faculty of Philosophy and History, which will provide for future opportunities for academic exchange programs for students, faculty and administrative staff.

A particularly important result of the joint work was the possibility of organizing a **common educational and research fieldwork program between Japanese and Bulgarian students** in the middle of the multicultural and multiethnic "laboratory for a symbiotic lifestyle" the City of Plovdiv is known as.

Getting to know this symbiotic lifestyle or about living together with the *different* models, established and functioning in Plovdiv for centuries now, was just one of the undisputed benefits of the project. In addition, the joint work provided the participants with the invaluable opportunity for **mutual acquaintance**, which is hardly feasible in practice at the meeting of two so distant (both in geographic and cultural-historical aspect) cultures, such as the Japanese and Bulgarian ones.

This "meeting of civilizations" enabled both researchers and young people to look beyond what has become obvious in today's global world, where the differences between cultural and mental traditions are often neglected at the expense of the unifying impulse of total consumption of information, products, ideas and services.

Going to the scene of action in a distant and alien world or standing alongside peers growing up and educated in a different social norm, the participants—both from Japan and Bulgaria—were able to question some of the “facts” and “truths” taken for granted, to experience a sort of *cultural shock* that stimulates the innovativeness of thinking and creativity and guarantees the adequacy of their research approaches.

Along with what we have achieved through the project, we realize that it was not safe from some **imperfections and problems** that appeared along the way. While not negatively impacting the outcome, their formulation and rationalization may be beneficial in the preparation and implementation of further joint initiatives.

The loss of Professor Endo, who was the undisputed ideologue of the initiative at the crucial stage of the project implementation, undoubtedly unbalanced the work of the team and forced the implementation of changes in the program, making it a bit difficult to synchronize activities between the different groups of researchers.

Problems were also encountered in the implementation of project activities.

Firstly, we will mention the difficulty of ensuring the permanent involvement of representatives from the different urban communities of Plovdiv in the project activities. By focusing on cultural differences, and especially on the issue of migration and refugees, we underestimated the mobility factor; it turned out that a significant part of the participants who had joined the first stage of the job had left Plovdiv in the second year, and so the achievement of the results was somewhat blurred.

Moreover, planning and executing the professors' and students' research fieldwork to coincide with the "free time" of the representatives of the various urban communities proved to be more difficult than expected. Participation in the project though, was covered by the famous Balkan hospitality. This means that the research questions and research problems our project theoretically discussed and prepared in advance differed somewhat from the real problems of the city's inhabitants; they were rather our ideas about what their "problems" could be. The final product in the form of a

picturebook though, aims to provide different communities with the know-how to work towards improving their various problems in a *bottom-up* way.

Lower funding for the project did not allow for real academic exchange; this was rather due to the lack of a clear preliminary program and could possibly be corrected in subsequent joint initiatives. What I mean here first of all is the need to develop an adequate model of communication within the project management team so as to avoid things being "lost in translation", which can often lead to miscommunication and would require change of plans as we go and might lead to ad hoc operational activities.

Partial report by Veselin Donovan, currently international student at Toyo University, Tokyo, Japan.

My involvement in "The Art of Living Together" project began as early as February 2017, when I met Dr. Botev, Prof. Endo, Prof. Yabunaga and the students from Toyo University who were working on the project at that time. This was a month before I myself came to Japan and joined Toyo University. My involvement in February 2017 wasn't very big, I just got acquainted with the project's team and helped out a bit with the Japanese visitors in Plovdiv.

Even though my areas of expertise are very far from the main points of the project, I was immediately interested, especially because it was taking place in my hometown and was also a great opportunity to see first-hand what people of a completely different culture notice and think.

My involvement in the project grew the next time we visited Bulgaria in August 2017, this time I was coming from Japan too and there was much more field work to be done and also exciting workshops and activities. This time my involvement was a bit more, but I was still not feeling very confident as to how I can contribute so I once again aided with coordination, some translation and interpretation, guiding work, and also I participated in the workshops as someone born and raised in Plovdiv. The more involved I became, the more interested I began to be in the whole idea of the project. If someone had asked me two years ago if I see myself as part of a project of this kind, I would have said no. Many people in Europe (and around the world, for that matter) are skeptical about picturebooks and don't know their true meaning as a very powerful tool, not just literature for young children.

After this visit in August 2017 I was more than sure I want to take a more serious role for the last trip to Bulgaria and the actual making of the book. Thanks to Dr. Botev and the chance he gave me, I started joining project meetings in Japan and helping plan and coordinate logistics early. The last visit to Bulgaria in February 2018 was in my opinion the most important visit and I am proud to have had the chance to help make it a successful one.

Having had sufficient experience in Graphics and Print Design, I knew making a book is not an easy task and illustrating it would be even harder, and in usual cases expensive. I, however, had the idea of inviting a team of very talented High School Art students to help with the illustrations of the book on the field with us for a week, gaining invaluable experience, cultural exchange—something that deserves being added to the students portfolios and a small monetary token of appreciation. I think this is a very important point for creating such picturebooks, and in that sense the how-to book in a picturebook format. What I am talking about is not just hiring professionals to create something generic, but involving regular people in the making of such books, because even though the end product might not look as highly professional as an usual illustrated book intended for sale, part of the important message a picturebook, in my opinion, sends is exactly the message that it is not about how professionally it looks, but about the message it wants to send and the effect it has on its readers. Even having children illustrate images makes the feeling empowering and personal. This is just one aspect of the design psychology that I sought in the project and my personal interpretation as a non-expert in the field of picturebooks.

During the last visit I was in charge of the illustrators and the graphics design of the how-to book, combining feedback from both project members and participants. We had very limited field work time and book-creation time, which many people would say is too little, and even that “no book can be made in such a short time”. However, in truth the point of our book wasn’t to make it a perfect book ready for print and distribution, but to filter the key points and do the best we could together with the local community members. In my opinion, we did a very good job and tackled the challenges we had during the project extremely well. Bringing foreigners from another continent to a country new to them, having them meet people of different cultures and ethnicities, looking after them and taking care of their well-being, while also working on a project of this magnitude is no easy job, but I think everyone left Bulgaria satisfied and with a bigger self consciousness, compared to when first they first came, and some of them can not wait to be involved in a similar project in the future.

Dr. Botev had an enormous role to play in ensuring the success of the project and personally put a lot of effort in seeing this project through, exploiting personal connections and contacts, and thus establishing an important network, in the city and attracting capable

people, as well as giving them the chance and trusting them with helping in the project. I think this is a very important point for inter-cultural projects of this scale and am proud to have contributed as much as I could.

By the end of the project I had met amazing new people both from Japan and from my own hometown. The experience I gained in a completely new field was also invaluable. I think there should be more projects of this kind, as this is the best way to break tons of stereotypes and teach the people of one country about other peoples from other countries. Even though I had lived in Plovdiv for 19 years, as part of this project I learned and noticed things I had missed before in my hometown. This project helped me see things through a different perspective!

I can continue telling stories from our visits to Plovdiv, but none of them would change the fact that this was an amazing project that I believe made and could make huge impact in the future. I am proud to have been part of this project and to have helped create something unique and for my hometown. I would feel very proud when the book we made is published and distributed to schools, libraries, universities, community centers, etc. in the near future. I would also love to work on similar projects and offer my expertise in graphic design in the future and am adding picturebooks to my personal interests—something I would have never imagined happening, if it wasn't for this project with the Toyota Foundation and Dr. Ivan Botev. Thank you!

Partial report by Haruna Anno, currently student at Toyo University, Tokyo, Japan.

I have been to Plovdiv, Bulgaria several times and participated in a picturebook project supported by the Toyota Foundation to contribute to the mutual understanding of people of different cultures. The first visit was in August 2017, and the second was in February 2018. During the first visit, I explored the city of Plovdiv, conducted surveys and helped organize and hold workshops. It was my first visit to this country and I was surprised to see the ancient architecture of the city and amazing area of the old town. I was able to learn about the history of Bulgaria and felt the rich cultural diversity there. During my second visit, I participated in talks and presentations about the picturebook project by professors together with local high school students, university students and students from other countries. We also visited an old Armenian church, an Armenian newspaper publisher and one of the several Roma districts in the city to learn about each culture's history and background. Throughout the project, I was responsible for

supporting the project along with local high school and university students and community representatives in helping Armenians, Roma, Turks, Syrians, Bulgarians, and others—some of which have lived in Plovdiv since a long time ago and others being newcomers—become more aware of each other. In the limited time we had we worked hard to complete the project and our team was able to prepare the picturebook for publication in Plovdiv.

During the project, there were three main things that made me think deeply about the world surrounding us. One is the importance to create opportunities to communicate with people of different backgrounds. In the case of our project, it was the creation of a picturebook that brought people together. Personally, I was born and raised in Japan, which is said to be one of the most homogenous societies in the world. I haven't experienced like diversity to live in Japan. But when I went to Bulgaria for the first time, I felt a diversity that I had never experienced before. In communicating with people from such multicultural background, I learned how to think in different ways and also accept different points of view. This also motivated me to participate in other projects in foreign countries and through the process I realized how important it is to see things from another perspective. We have to be proud of our own identities but also respect the differences in others.

The second one is “Seeing is Believing.” When I went to a Roma district with my Bulgarian friends, we met an old woman there. The moment she saw us, she spoke to us loudly while looking at us in a surprised way. I couldn't understand what she said right away but my Bulgarian friend who I was with talked to her and interpreted her words to us. The woman said, “I am Turkish. I am Muslim.” I was not sure why she said that, but I believe she wanted to express her identity. Also when my friend explained to her that we are Japanese, she smiled to us and said, “Welcome!” I was surprised to see this reaction of hers and guessed that perhaps there is a good relationship between Turkey and Japan. Before we entered the district, my friend taught me about Roma community. She said that many people think the Roma are dirty and dangerous and they steal things but she didn't think so. When I heard that, I realized there is a prejudice that exists about the Roma in Bulgaria. However, when we met that old woman in the Roma district, I felt that that prejudice was broken. I could see inside of her house, it looked very well decorated and it was beautiful with its traditional furniture. And when we were on our way back to Plovdiv University, we met a group of Roma children. They smiled to us and shook our hands. All of the Roma community members whom I met with were very friendly and kind. I didn't share the image of them being dirty, dangerous or rude to people. ***Ignorance leads to prejudice, prejudice leads to discrimination.***

I was able to communicate well with the local high school and university students in Plovdiv even after the project finished and learned that the creation of a picturebook is one of the effective tools to communicate with people from a multicultural background and influence their perceptions and attitudes towards different racial groups.