

The Bilingual Illustrated Book Project in Hamamatsu: A means to connect Brazilian families with university students of Brazilian origin as role models

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Keywords: Brazilian residents, Hamamatsu, Japanese educational system, universal design, second generation migrants, educational attainment

It has been more than two decades since the reform of the Japanese immigration law in 1990. Following this reform, the number of Brazilian residents living in Japan continued growing until it reached its peak in 2008. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis that hit Japan, more than 100,000 Brazilians left the country. However, many of those who decided to stay in Japan possess permanent visas, which may reflect their long-term intention to reside in the country. In recent years, there has also been an increase in the number of young Brazilians, who were brought to Japan by their parents or who were born in Japan, achieving higher education in Japan. This trend can be seen at some universities and particularly at the Shizuoka University of Art and Culture (SUAC), which is a prefectural public university located in Hamamatsu city. Until 2011, only three students of Brazilian origin had graduated from SUAC. However, since then, two to four such students who were educated in Japan have been entering SUAC every year.

In 2013 the presenters carried out a research project titled ‘Research on Assistance Measures for the Educational Accomplishment of Children who live in a Multicultural Environment’. It is shortly called ‘The Bilingual Illustrated Book Project’, in reference to the school guidance book ‘Japanese School in Hamamatsu’ written and designed by former student Gisele Kanashiro as part of her graduation work. The author was one of the first Brazilian students who graduated from SUAC and the book is largely based on her own experience studying in Japanese schools. This book served as the initial tool to contact the relevant external partners, such as the Hamamatsu City Board of Education and local elementary schools. Another innovative feature of the project was to rely on the bilingual abilities of current Brazilian university students to act as both interviewers and role models during the home visits to the Brazilian families.

As for the research methods, 1,000 copies of the bilingual illustrated book were printed in August 2013. In the following month, in cooperation with the Hamamatsu City Board of Education, the books were distributed to all Brazilian children enrolled at one of the 19 elementary schools with the highest concentration of Brazilian pupils in the city. Each book

was accompanied by a letter asking for the cooperation of parents to receive SUAC Brazilian students in their homes allowing them to carry out interviews. The parents who agreed to take part in the research provided their contact details, which was forwarded to SUAC by each elementary school by the end of October 2013. The books were also distributed during an explanatory meeting held by the Hamamatsu Board of Education for foreign families whose children would start public elementary schools at the upcoming school year. In the end, the books reached 363 families and of these 43 families (11% of the total) agreed to cooperate with the research.

However, due to some difficulties and the tight schedule, in the end SUAC students were only able to visit the homes of 22 Brazilian families during the period of mid-November to mid-December. They visited each family in pairs and interviewed the parents according to a previously elaborated questionnaire. The content of the interview included topics such as family configuration, life in Brazil, condition of work, relation with the children, impressions about the bilingual illustrated book, and thoughts about the children's education. Due to limited space here, the interview results with the Brazilian families and the exchange of ideas between the parents and SUAC students will be presented in a later opportunity.

In this short summary, we would like to report that one of the main achievements of this research was the interaction and exchange of ideas and experiences between different generations of Brazilian residents in Hamamatsu city. The fact that SUAC students have experienced many of the difficulties that the current parents face in the school life of their children made it easier for the parents to feel comfortable to ask questions related to education in Japan. Some parents, for instance, shared concerns about bullying, seeking advice from the students. Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that the research may contain some bias, as most families who agreed to participate in the research are more engaged and interested in discussing educational issues in Japan than the average.

References

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