The Pedagogical Possibilities of Online Collaborative Filmmaking in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Hiroko Hara

The COVID-19 outbreak has affected numerous university students in Japan academically, financially, and socially. For this severe situation, arts-based education and research can be a gleam of hope. This study focuses on collaborative filmmaking as an arts-based approach. What is it like to pursue online collaborative filmmaking in the university classroom under the new normal? What possibilities can be raised by practicing it? To explore these questions, I draw on the notion of living "in the beyond" presented by Bhabha (1994). In collaboration with twelve university students, an online filmmaking project commenced in September 2020, and consequently, a film *A New Normal for Our Future* was completed in January 2021. Verbally, using English and Japanese, the film shows the interconnection of time, ranging from the longing past and the suffering present to the hopeful future. At the same time, through their created emoticons, it indicates a shift from the pessimistic to the optimistic state nonverbally. In the cyberspace, the film production members become agents "in the beyond" transcending the physical space, assembling, and sharing opinions online. I conclude that online collaborative filmmaking serves as an alternative that brings students together in the cyberspace and activates their learning and interaction during the pandemic crisis.

Keywords: arts-based education and research; collaborative filmmaking; higher education; online classroom

Introduction

We are still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The unnatural physical separation resulting from the new normal puts our daily communication, both verbal and nonverbal, at risk. It also challenges the conventional style of teaching and learning in higher education in many places around the world (e.g., Kawamura, 2021; Office for Civil Rights, 2021; Petitions Committee of the House of Commons, 2020). For instance, looking at the United Kingdom, the new normal, particularly social distancing is inevitable in

university education:

> While it is right that the health and wellbeing of students and staff should be the priority of the Government and universities, social distancing measures have unavoidably resulted in huge changes to the way in which universities have delivered courses, and the experiences of students on these courses. (Petitions Committee of the House of Commons, 2020, p. 11)

The COVID-19 outbreak has affected university students in many aspects of their lives academically, financially, and socially. The Office for Civil Rights (2021) makes a concise statement of the situation in the United States: "At the start of the 2020-21 academic year, many of America's students were leaving higher education (or not entering at all), losing jobs, taking fewer classes, juggling caregiving responsibilities, and concerned about their financial well-being and work opportunities" (p. 31). Similarly, a large number of university students in Japan are enduring the difficult situation. They are confined to their own space and separated from friends, classmates, and teachers, while taking online classes, internship programs, and job interviews. The pandemic crisis overshadows not only their academic performance but seeking employment. Kawamura (2021) elaborates on the reality they are facing:

> Recruiting activities in Japan have transformed due to the coronavirus pandemic, and many university students are apparently struggling to cope. Company information sessions for prospective new hires including university students in Japan who will graduate next spring began on March 1, but recruiting activities and internships have mostly been conducted online due to the virus pandemic. As the so-called "workers' market," where students gain employment relatively easily, has vanished, they are entering the job market with uncertainty. (paras. 1-2)

It is thus obvious that numerous university students in Japan are having difficulties handling a drastic shift in daily life, education, and the labor market due to the pandemic.

For this severe situation, arts-based education and research can be a gleam of hope. According to previous studies, employing various artistic practices in education contributes to the development of alternative teaching and learning models for confronting mul-

tifarious issues (e.g., Eisner, 2008; Leavy, 2020; McNiff, 2013; Rolling, 2018). The arts to be used vary as Leavy (2020) points out: "Arts-based practices draw on literary writing, music, dance, performance, visual art, film, and other mediums" (p. 4). Utilizing the arts in education is significant in that:

> Educators aim for meaningful, long-lasting learning. In order to make a deep impression, people must be engaged in their learning process. The arts can be highly engaging in part because they tap into emotions and may jar us into seeing and thinking differently .... (Leavy, 2020, pp. 12-13)

Arts-based education is of great value for both teachers and learners as Rolling (2018) states that "... arts-based learning outcomes are ways in which we interpret and more tangibly understand the qualities of our experience within the natural world, and our identities as they are formed, informed, and transformed by that experience" (p. 509). These artistic approaches are applied in research in various academic disciplines. Eisner (2008) indicates that arts-based research is distinctive since:

> The concepts and processes that we have employed in arts-based research are much more likely to work at the edge of possibility and address questions of meaning and experience that are not likely to be as salient in traditional research. (p. 25)

In addition to its potential described above, arts-based research has other unique features. McNiff (2013) sums them up: "I am especially intrigued by studies that take risks, transform difficult situations, and attract attention and commendation for their vision. ... These transformative studies have almost exclusively been art-based" (p. 113). Encouraged by these scholars, this study focuses on collaborative filmmaking as an arts-based approach. What is it like to pursue online collaborative filmmaking in the university classroom under the new normal? What possibilities can be raised by practicing it?

Theoretical Framework

To explore the above questions, I draw on the notion of living "in the beyond" presented by Bhabha (1994). Bhabha elucidates it as follows:

Being in the 'beyond', then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*. (1994, p. 10, emphasis in original)

There is a suggestion here that living "in the beyond" represents the idea of not staying in a fixed space and time but moving between and across. Employing the concept as such is useful for this study in three ways. First, it allows student filmmakers and myself, the researcher/project facilitator/film editor to go beyond the habit of being physically together and work collaboratively online. Being situated in the cyberspace is precisely "… to dwell 'in the beyond'" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 10); even if we are constrained to stay at home, we become agents "in the beyond" transcending the physical space, getting together, and sharing opinions online. Secondly, utilizing the notion of living "in the beyond" for filmmaking enables us to visualize the interconnection of time, extending from the longing past and the suffering present to the hopeful future after the pandemic. Thirdly, the application of Bhabha's notion in this research project makes it possible to recognize a connection between the filmmakers and the audiences. Practicing online filmmaking in collaboration with my seminar students resulted in the production of a short film bilingual in English and Japanese. I consider that an online film screening appeals to the viewers in the cyberspace, and the act of watching itself symbolizes going beyond the physical borders. The cyberspace turns to a place "in the beyond" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 10) where the student filmmakers convey their message, and the audiences receive and interpret it. Therefore, Bhabha's notion of living "in the beyond" is indispensable for conceptualizing this study as well as pursuing online collaborative filmmaking in the global pandemic.

Methodology

Some scholars have suggested that applying participatory visual methods is beneficial to researchers and educators (e.g., Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2017; Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2020). Mitchell et al. (2017) advocate the significance of participatory filmmaking with a cellphone, which they call "cellphilming." They point out that it prompts active participation in its entire process: "This approach allows participants to engage with an issue/topic through collaboratively planning, filming, and,

sometimes, showing the video" (2017, p. 28). Participatory visual methods including collaborative filmmaking are ideal for the digital youth as demonstrated by Gubrium and Harper (2013): "Working with photography, video, and technology is especially attractive to youth participants, and given the opportunity, they can make powerful contributions ..." (p. 39). Hence, the expansion of visual culture and its strong connection with youngsters need to be taken into account in the realm of education. Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2020) assert the necessity as follows:

> Since images are not neutral and are influenced by the broader sociocultural contexts in which they appear, we consider this a compelling reason to develop and adopt a pedagogy of the visual where students are equipped to understand and critically analyze a rich multimodal world. (p. 75)

Collaborative filmmaking in this study sets store by the advancement of "a pedagogy of the visual" (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2020, p. 75). I argue that practicing filmmaking in cooperation with university students in the cyberspace promotes their active and critical thinking in the online classroom.

Due to the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, my seminar students (twelve in total, aged from 20 to 21) majoring in intercultural communication at a university in Kumamoto had no choice but to shift from face-to-face to distant learning in April 2020. Some of them gave up studying abroad completely, and some had to return to Japan halfway through their program. As I continued online individual consultations with them until July, I noticed their sorrow, anxiety, pain, and suffering. Convinced of the strength of arts-based education and research, an online collaborative filmmaking project commenced in September 2020, when their school life was still filled with uncertainties. In my seminar, a film project is usually carried out face-to-face. It was the first time for the students and myself to work and collaborate together entirely online. Table 1 lists the twelve students who participated in the film project. Many students had concerns at the early stage. This is evident in one of the student filmmakers Churi's words: "Before starting this project, I had worries about whether we could do or not."

Table 1. List of student filmmakers

Name in Pseudonym	Gender
Arisia	Female
Ayaly	Female
Churi	Female
Eley	Female
Hugo	Male
Jamie	Female
Jasmine	Female
Jean	Female
Lily	Female
Lucy	Female
Olivia	Female
Rachel	Female

Every week, we gathered online using Microsoft Teams. After reading some major works in intercultural communication studies, the film production members started brainstorming. Engaging themselves in active discussion, they set "the impact of the pandemic" as a theme for the film and attempted to depict verbal and nonverbal communication in the difficult times through text and visual components. As the first step, the students made emoticons in order to show how they were feeling about the situation nonverbally. Then using a mobile phone, they recorded images and narratives to utter their feelings respectively. In our online seminar, we watched all the recorded clips and formed a shot sequence (see Figures 1-12).
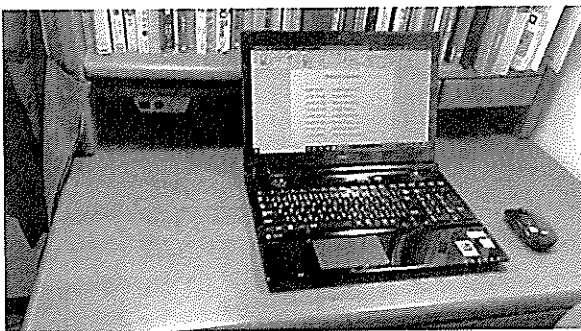
Figure 1. Hugo: "I'm fed up with sitting in front of the computer all day!" Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future*. 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

Figure 2. Eley: "I'm upset. I'm worried about the new-style job hunting." Still extracted
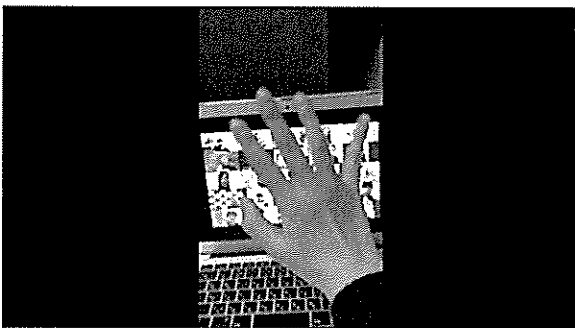from *A New Normal for Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Com-
pany, 2021.

Figure 3. Jasmine: "I miss my friends. I wanna meet them in person." Still extracted from
A New Normal for Our Future. 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company,
2021.

Figure 4. Jamie: "What will happen in the future?" Still extracted from *A New Normal for
Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

Figure 5. Arisia: "I'm troubled." Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future*. 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.
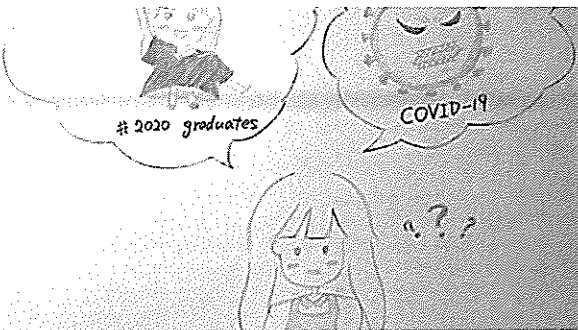

Figure 6. Jean: "We are still so confused about COVID-19." Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future*. 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.
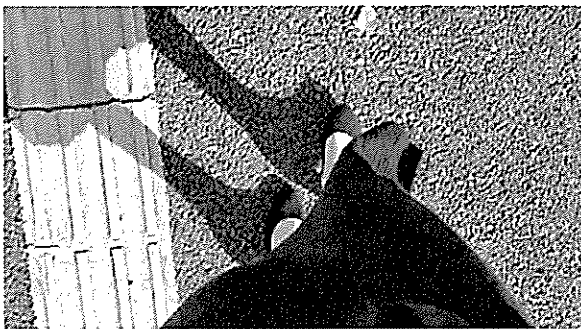

Figure 7. Churi: "My mind went blank!" Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future*. 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.
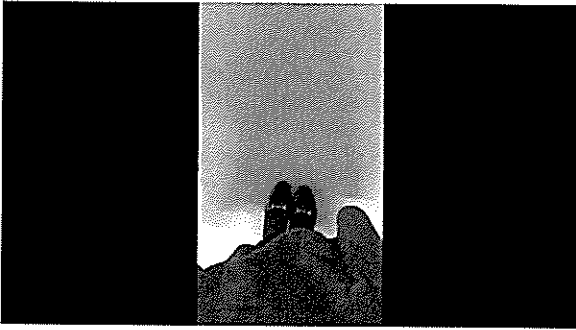
Figure 8. Lily: "I feel left behind in the changing world." Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

Figure 9. Olivia: "I don't know how I can get over job hunting." Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

Figure 10. Lucy: "What should I do for my job hunting?" Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.
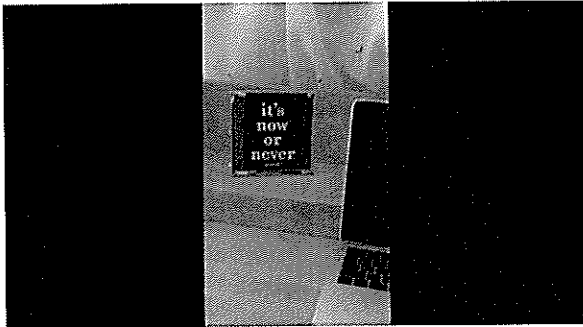
Figure 11. Rachel: "I have to move forward because time doesn't come back." Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future*. 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.
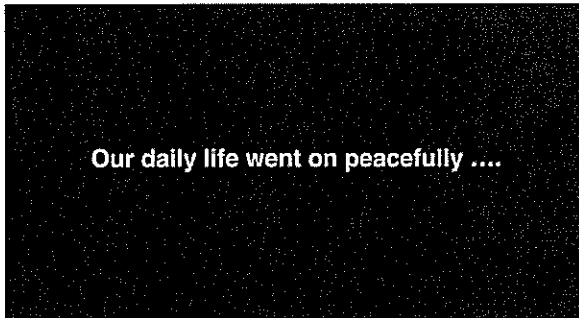

Figure 12. Ayaly: "Life has its ups and downs." Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future*. 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

The student filmmakers also created a script to be included in the beginning, middle, and ending of the film. As an editor, I placed the image clips in order as determined by the film production team, inserted their voices in the movie, put music in sync with the images, and made end credits. After all the audio and visual clips were organized into one film, the team members gathered online, watched it, and exchanged ideas for its title. Eventually, they reached a decision to entitle it *A New Normal for Our Future*.
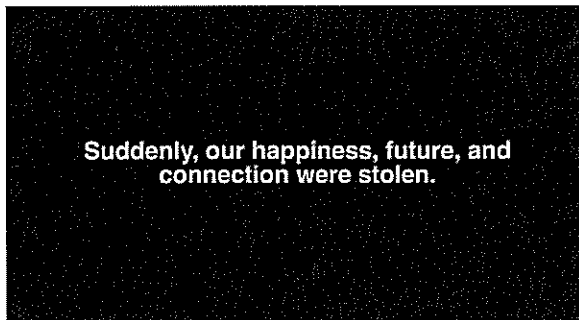
Film *A New Normal for Our Future*

As a result of collaborating online, a film *A New Normal for Our Future*, bilingual in English and Japanese, was completed in January 2021. It values both verbal and nonverbal communication during the pandemic when social distancing restrictions are embedded in our daily life. Verbally, using English and Japanese, the film expresses the interconnec-

tion of time, ranging from the longing past and the suffering present to the hopeful future. The student filmmakers' message as such is laid out clearly in the beginning, middle, and ending. The film starts with these shots (Figures 13-15):

Figure 13. Shot #1 in the beginning. Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

Figure 14. Shot #2 in the beginning. Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.
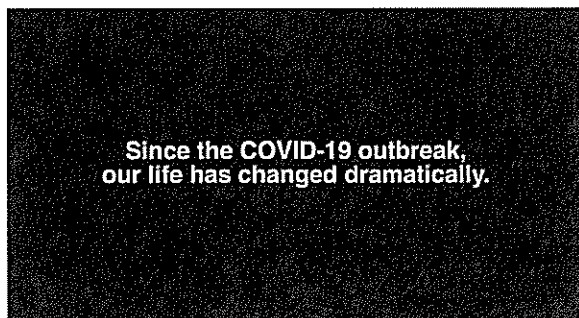
Figure 15. Shot #3 in the beginning. Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

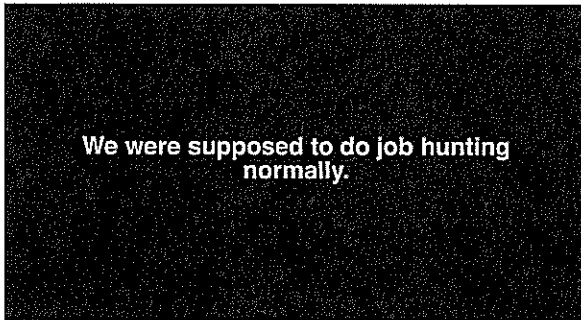The following words are in the middle of the film (Figures 16-18):

Figure 16. Shot #1 in the middle. Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

Figure 17. Shot #2 in the middle. Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.
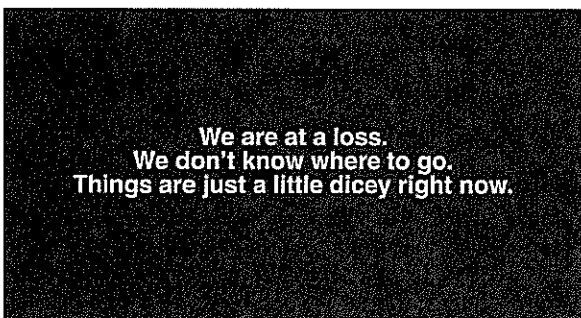

Figure 18. Shot #3 in the middle. Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

The words beneath are placed near the closing of the film (Figures 19-21):

Figure 19. Shot #1 in the ending. Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.*
2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

Figure 20. Shot #2 in the ending. Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.*
2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

Figure 21. Shot #3 in the ending. Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.*
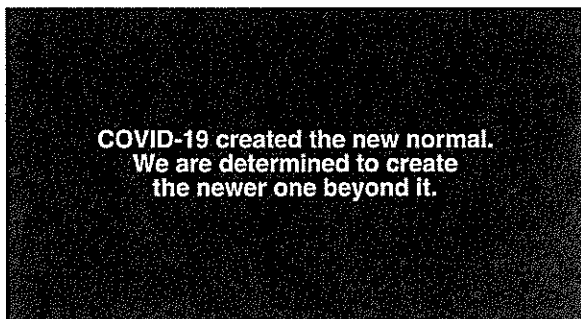2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

Jamie, one of the student filmmakers, clarifies the intention behind making the above

script:

> I want to convey a message that we will get through this difficult time together. As Japanese students are trying to overcome the situation and think positively in the movie, I want the viewers overseas to have the same attitude towards the situation. By doing so, I think that they can live with hope and they can feel that they are facing this hardship with people all around the world.

What becomes clear here is that the production team looks steadily at the future and strives to appeal to the audiences worldwide, using English as a global language.

The film also attaches importance to nonverbal elements. As briefly explained by Lucy: "I gave priority to express my feelings when I made emoticons and took a movie," the twelve student filmmakers created emoticons showing their feelings towards the present and future respectively. According to Sönmez (2019), emoticons are significant since they "… have had an important place in our lives as a means of communication …" (p. 473). The production team considers that emoticons are equivalent to facial expressions, therefore practicing nonverbal communication. This paper takes three film production team members for example. First, Jasmine describes her emoticon representing the present (Figure 22):

> This shows that a student feels lonely in front of PC. When we had interviews, we were able to meet interviewers and other students in person before. However, we cannot meet now because of COVID-19. That's why we feel lonely.

「 (´･･`) 」

Figure 22. Emoticon for present created by Jasmine.

She states that the next emoticon (Figure 23) signifies the future:

> It means that we enjoy communicating with many people without masks. It's because I believe COVID-19 will end and we can live normally.

╲(' ▽ ')╱

Figure 23. Emoticon for future created by Jasmine.

Secondly, Arisia's emoticon (Figure 24) embodies the present as follows:

> I made an emoticon showing a condition of being troubled. We have some troubles
> in the situation we are in such as difficulties in getting a job and having a new-nor-
> mal daily life. Question marks on the face stand for our anxieties or having a hard
> time. I used [as a mouth because I thought it would show more confusion than (
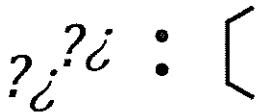> that we usually use.

?¿?¿ :[

Figure 24. Emoticon for present created by Arisia.

Arisia symbolizes the future by making the following emoticon (Figure 25) and remarks:

> This emoticon stands for a person longing for the bright future. A star is our future
> that each of us wants. In this emoticon, a person is trying to catch up a star. I hope
> for the peaceful future that everyone doesn't have to be worried so much.

ε = (' ～ ') ／ *☆*

Figure 25. Emoticon for future created by Arisia.

Thirdly, Ayaly gives an account of her emoticon denoting the present (Figure 26):

> The reason why I choose this emoticon is I want to cry about the situation these
> days but I have to look forward, so I want to laugh though it is difficult to get a job.
> Honestly, I have a lot of anxiety about job-hunting. I want to cry. But I think it is

good for us to cry if we feel anxiety. However, we must not throw away our potential with tears! So, we should cry and laugh!

(` T▽T ´)/

Figure 26. Emoticon for present created by Ayaly.

As she points out, the next emoticon (Figure 27) represents the future:

> The reason why I made this emoticon is I want to be happy. These days, there are many bad news about COVID-19. And we are worried about our job-hunting. I'm also worried about it and my anxiety grows. I felt everyday was painful and not fun. However, I noticed that being depressed everyday was not good for our health. We must not forget to laugh. We should smile! Therefore, we try to be bright and positive! Everything goes well! So, this emoticon is a carefree face and gives a good sign (b).

(^ ε ^)b

Figure 27. Emoticon for future created by Ayaly.

Among the student filmmakers, Jean asserts the significance of using emoticons:

> We did create our own emoticons for our movie project. It was totally a new thing for me to express our feelings about the new-normal life and the future we want. What is more, we added them to our movie we shot. I think this is the most meaningful achievement we gained.

By compiling the emoticons for the present in one scene (Figure 28) and those for the future in another (Figure 29), and adding a transition effect between the two, the film shows a shift from the pessimistic to the optimistic state. Thus, emoticons play an important role in communicating with the viewers nonverbally.
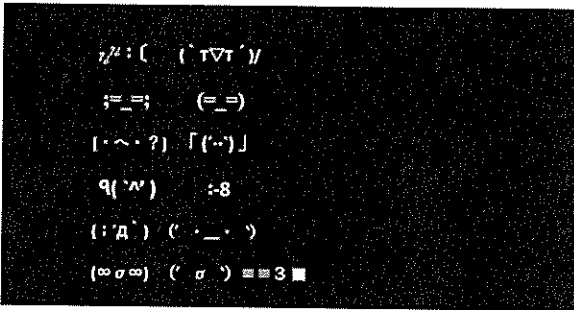
Figure 28. Emoticons for present. Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.
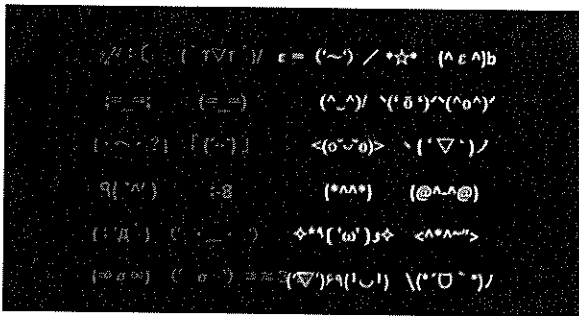

Figure 29. Emoticons for future. Still extracted from *A New Normal for Our Future.* 2021. © The Studio Hara with Amusing Company, 2021.

Audience Reception

Audience reception is inseparable from arts-based practices, for they usually involve two sets of agents—art-practitioners as encoders and audiences as decoders. Referring to Hall (1973/1999), I explored the mechanism of encoding and decoding in arts-based research, particularly the film-based one (see Hara, 2018). Barone (2008) delineates the consequences led by practicing arts-based approaches: "When an arts-based work engenders an aesthetic experience in its readers or viewers, empathy may be established, connections made, perceptions altered, emotions touched, equilibria disturbed, the status quo rendered questionable" (p. 39). In the case of *A New Normal for Our Future*, how do the viewers respond and interpret it? To investigate it, the film was screened online in July 2021. The unforeseen circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic made alterations in the original data collection plan. Accordingly, the number of people who watched the film was limited, and a total of twelve students studying intercultural communication at

the university in Kumamoto participated and answered a survey about it.

The survey results support Barone's argument above. Seven of the study participants empathize with the student filmmakers sighing over a great change in their daily and school life. For example, Mera remarks, "My new normal life is proceeding on its own. The anxiety about the future, the sadness of not seeing friends, and the difficulty of dealing with online lectures are relevant to my student life." In relation to the film, Chobi touches on her school experience: "Some classes are face-to-face and some are online. The library is closed earlier than usual because of the Coronavirus. I am not used to a new way to study at university." The other five participants express empathy for the difficulty of seeking employment. Mia, for instance, finds a connection to her life as a student and articulates:

> I was very impressed that they expressed their anxiety about the fact that there were fewer and fewer places where they could find work amidst the spread of the Coronavirus. This is because it is time to start my job hunting and I understand their feelings very well.

It is thus clear that the film evokes empathy among the viewers. Moreover, some study participants mention the usage of English in the film and its relation to empathy:

> Bekira: It is remarkable that the students speak both English and Japanese. Because I think they would like to tell the viewers their troubles clearly through their voices.

> Smith: The most impressive thing is that the students say their woes in English after saying them in Japanese. The way the students feel in the movie is common among university students worldwide. By telling their woes in English, they get their empathy in terms of suffering from COVD-19.

What becomes apparent in these comments is that using English as a global language for storytelling is effective in reaching out to the broader audiences and building up empathy.

In addition to the formation of empathy, the survey results show that the film encourages the viewers to undergo the further steps of audience reception as depicted by Barone (2008). For instance, some research participants refer to the aspect of "connections made"

(Barone, 2008, p. 39):

> Ai: It is notable that many personal computers appear in the film. I think it represents our current situation. We can connect through the Internet and our computers.

> Emma: The film realistically reflects the perspective of the students who are confused by the changing situation. The spread of the Coronavirus has placed restrictions on activities and reduced the opportunities to go to school.

> Kyrie: Maybe everyone feels like the film production members do. I think they expressed their honest notions and feelings.

As indicated above, some viewers feel the contents of the film close to themselves, and relate what they see to their own real-life situations. Furthermore, the film has the potential of making audience "perceptions altered" (Barone, 2008, p. 39). Relevant to this point is Chloe's following response:

> The sentences: "It's now or never" and "Our future is up to us" are striking. Because the former teaches us that we should not use our current situation as an excuse, and that we should do what we need to do and what we want to do "now" so that we will not regret it. And the latter teaches us that it is up to us to make our current situation with lots of uncertainty into a better future or not, and that is something only we can do.

Here, it is reasonable to suppose that watching the film turns into a learning moment for some study participants, and it introduces changes in their way of seeing and thinking.

The survey results also suggest that the film generates a variety of interpretations among the viewers:

> Becky: At first, everyone couldn't adapt to the changing world due to COVID-19 and had an anxiety about job hunting. However, their feelings have changed after that. Time never goes back, so they must try their best. I was impressed with this

change.

Penpen: It is impressive to see how each video starts. Perhaps because of the dark concept of the film, many people tended to show their feet.

Ray: I was surprised by the way each member of the group shot the video separately, as I had expected everyone to gather together to shoot the video. But I felt that the way of shooting in COVID-19 made the video even more meaningful.

In this way, what is remarkable for Becky is a shift from the pessimistic to the optimistic state reflected in the film. Penpen thinks much of a metaphor of getting depressed and gloomy used in the video clips capturing the feet. Ray focuses on a new mode of film-making that adopts the new normal and its significance in expressing the reality of the pandemic. Hence, it is evident from these remarks that the ways in which the viewers respond and interpret the film are highly diversified.

Possibilities of Online Collaborative Filmmaking

This film project displays some possibilities of online collaborative filmmaking in the classroom during the pandemic period. To start with, collaboration does have a good effect and accelerates students' learning in the cyberspace. This point is apparent in Eley's words: "I've learned the importance of collaborating with other members. Through group meetings, I was able to encounter other members' amazing ideas that I couldn't think up alone. I think we can create better things by sharing our ideas with group members." To gain fine results as such, it needs some time. The drastic changes resulting from the COVID-19 crisis aroused disturbance and mental conflict among the students in the early phase of the project as indicated by Lily:

When I first knew about an online movie project, I was skeptical that we could make a work without discussing in person. At that time, I was also suffering from deciding the course after graduation because of an unexpected situation. However, while I attended the seminar with everyone and saw the process of creating a movie from scratch, I realized that I was with many supporters, seminar members.

What becomes clear from Lily's statement above is that the students take time and dare to adjust themselves to this new-normal style of education. Indeed, the transition described by their emoticons corresponds to the mental condition of the students, shifting from the project initiation stage to the completion of the film.

Next, collaboration raises new awareness among the student filmmakers. Olivia takes notice of it and explains clearly:

> Through making this movie, firstly, I learned the importance of looking at something objectively. Additionally, I learned the importance of putting people's opinions together cooperatively. I imagined that all the members in this seminar would have the same opinion about this situation and their job hunting. However, every student had his/her own opinion and their opinions were different. I felt that it's important to share many people's opinions about a theme.

Thus, collaborating online enables the students to be aware of their positionality and the diversity within their production team. Rachel's following comments confirm this point:

> I learned that everyone has different tastes and different views through what they filmed at first. And I realized that words, emoticons, voices, video, and music have each role to convey a message in different ways; for example, words embody what we want to say; the tone of voice tells the viewers our feelings more; and the video gives the viewers clear images.

As mentioned above, it is obvious that recognizing various standpoints while working together leads to a further realization of diversity.

This kind of online collaborative film project needs to be carried out without haste, while giving careful consideration to a diverse student body and their various learning styles. What Hugo points out is relevant here:

> I have learned the importance of creativity. I think it is so needed in this film project. I am not good at creating something. Therefore, the film project was not easy. Making emoticons was difficult. I made those through trial and error. It is important to incorporate what I want to tell the viewers as much as possible. Creativity is

needed in society, too. I would like to apply what I have learned to the future.

Hugo's case suggests that it is essential for an educator/project facilitator to pay attention to the unique voice of each student in the process of collaborating. In this way, online collaborative filmmaking serves as an alternative that brings students together in the cyberspace and activates their learning and interaction during the pandemic crisis, while attaching importance to the dynamics of their being and becoming.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on arts-based education and research, particularly filmmaking, and presented a model of collaborating online to cope with students' difficulties in learning under the new normal. Engaging in online filmmaking allowed the production team members to transgress physically and work cooperatively in the cyberspace. While living full of uncertainties, the student filmmakers strove to accommodate themselves to this new educational style. Their efforts and collaboration resulted in the production of *A New Normal for Our Future* valuing both verbal and nonverbal communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. Verbally, using English and Japanese, the film shows the interconnection of time, ranging from the longing past and the suffering present to the hopeful future. At the same time, through the created emoticons, it indicates a shift from the pessimistic to the optimistic state nonverbally.

The implementation of the online filmmaking project shows the following possibilities: collaboration promotes students' learning in the cyberspace, and raises awareness of their positionality and the diversity among the production team members. It is important to note that this kind of practice needs to be done without haste, while taking account of a diverse student body and their various learning styles. In addition, the film project suggests that an online screening has the potential of connecting with the viewers beyond the physical borders and forming empathy. According to the survey results, the produced film invites the audiences to have various responses and interpretations of it. Encoding and decoding are inseparable from one another, therefore a further investigation into audience reception is necessary. The number of people who watched the film was limited in the difficult times. Once the restrictions are eased, it is worth screening it to the wider viewers in and outside Japan to examine how each person decodes it. Practicing online collaborative filmmaking gets students together in the cyberspace and accelerates their learning and

interaction in the pandemic crisis. As proved by the creation of *A New Normal for Our Future*, the youth have the strength to confront and surmount difficulties.

Acknowledgment

References

Barone, T. (2008). How arts-based research can change minds. In M. Cahnmann-Taylor & R. Siegesmund (Eds.), *Arts-based research in education: Foundations for practice* (pp. 28-49). Routledge.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.

Eisner, E. (2008). Persistent tensions in arts-based research. In M. Cahnmann-Taylor & R. Siegesmund (Eds.), *Arts-based research in education: Foundations for practice* (pp. 16-27). Routledge.

Gubrium, A., & Harper, K. (2013). *Participatory visual and digital methods*. Routledge.

Hall, S. (1999). Encoding, decoding. In S. During (Ed.), *The cultural studies reader* (2nd ed., pp. 507-517). Routledge. (Original work published 1973)

Hara, H. (2018). *Arts-based education to become global citizens*. Kinseido.

Hara, H. (Executive Producer). (2021). *A new normal for our future* [Film]. The Studio Hara with Amusing Company. (Available from the Studio Hara with Amusing Company at PUK, 3-1-100 Tsukide, Higashi-ku, Kumamoto 862-8502 Japan)

Kawamura, S. (2021, March 7). COVID-19 pandemic drastically changing job hunting for university students in Japan. *The Mainichi*.
https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20210305/p2a/00m/0bu/001000c

Leavy, P. (2020). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice* (3rd ed.). The Guilford Press.

McNiff, S. (2013). A critical focus on art-based research. In S. McNiff (Ed.), *Art as research: Opportunities and challenges* (pp. 109-116). Intellect.

Mitchell, C., De Lange, N., & Moletsane, R. (2017). *Participatory visual methodologies: Social change, community and policy*. Sage.

Mulvihill, T. M., & Swaminathan, R. (2020). *Arts-based educational research and qualitative inquiry: Walking the path*. Routledge.

Office for Civil Rights. (2021). *Education in a pandemic: The disparate impacts of COVID-19 on America's students*.
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/20210608-impacts-of-covid19.pdf

Petitions Committee of the House of Commons. (2020). *The impact of Covid-19 on university students*.
https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/1851/documents/18140/default/

Rolling, J. H. (2018). Arts-based research in education. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of arts-based research* (pp. 493-510). The Guilford Press.

Sönmez, H. (2019). An examination on the use of emoticon technique as a communication tool for narrative

skills. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 15*(2), 470-483.
https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1220801.pdf