

Special Feature 特集

Tohoku Outreach Project: A Collaborative Report

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The Learner Development Outreach Project to Tohoku, from March 1 to March 3 2013, focused on engaging with local communities in Tohoku and exploring possible sustainable partnerships for collaboration. Over the weekend we visited many different organisations and groups, listening to the stories of a great range of local people in the Kesennuma and Rikuzentakata areas. We learnt about their lives and challenges, as well as about how they are working to rejuvenate and develop their communities. We were all profoundly moved by these experiences and had many discussions among ourselves about how the Learner Development SIG might be able to help over the longer term. Although at first this project was known as the 'Tohoku Retreat', we decided that 'Tohoku Outreach' fitted much better what we had all experienced. We had gone to reach out to people in Tohoku and consider how we might develop and extend that outreach into the future.

The weekend started on Friday March 1, when we met at Tokyo Station to catch the 7:56 Shinkansen from Tokyo to Ichinoseki. We were joined by Nakazawa-sensei, a colleague of Andy's and Mike's at the Faculty of Law, Chuo University. Nakazawa-sensei, a specialist in Political Sociology and Regional Sociology, has been regularly visiting the Tohoku area for the last two years and has a wealth of knowledge about the local communities in Kesennuma and Rikuzentakata. He has coordinated the Chuo University Tohoku Volunteer Network and been doing research into how local communities can rebuild in sustainable ways. After we left Kesennuma on the Saturday, Nakazawa-sensei stayed on another week to have further meetings with students, local community groups, community leaders and business people to explore the human rejuvenation of the area. For the LD SIG, Nakazawa-sensei was instrumental in helping to arrange several of the visits that we made. He also helped us understand many aspects of the local communities that we met, and very kindly acted as our minibuss driver on the Friday and Saturday. Having just started the journey on the shinkansen from Tokyo, we got an unexpected phone call from Stacey Vye, who was to join us at Omiya. Stacey explained that she had been knocked off her bicycle by a car and wouldn't be able to make it. (Now in early April, Stacey is fully recovered, but at the time it was very unsettling to get this news. We missed you, Stacey!)

Once we got to Ichinoseki we were joined by Satomi Hasegawa, a student of Andy's and Mike's at Chuo. Satomi is from the Tohoku area and had been volunteering since 3/11 for different local communities affected by the disaster. Eight of us then went by minibus with Nakazawa-sensei from Ichinoseki to Kesennuma port, while Mike and Fumiko took the local bus.

When we had all arrived at Kesennuma, we split up into two groups. One group stayed on the mainland for the Friday afternoon and early evening, and the other group took the ferry to Oshima Island. What follows is a collaborative write-up and recounting of what we experienced and learnt over the rest of the Tohoku Outreach Weekend.

Friday March 1, Oshima Island

Alison, Bill, Fumiko, Mike, Satomi



Kesennuma Port consists of a large muddy construction site. At the entrance is Fukko Yatai Mura, a small entertainment district consisting of restaurants in prefabricated huts on one side, where those of us who arrived from Ichinoseki by van enjoyed a lunch of hamaranyaki, the local version of okonomiyaki. The original pier now tilts at an impossible angle, half-submerged, so we boarded the ferry from the harbor-side, clutching at omiyage bags that were remembered at the very last minute. The ferry plied its

course between rows of oyster beds and frames for growing wakame, toward Oshima, an island of 3,000 inhabitants, known as the Green Pearl.

We were met by Mr Kikuta, head of the island's elementary school and Mrs Reiko Kikuta (no relation). They showed us where their houses had been in the once busy port-side shopping street before the tsunami, an area now empty, with only a few concrete stumps where the foundations had been. All that remains of the houses now is the well, which used to supply fresh water and where a goldfish used to live, but which is now full of clear, salt water. Reiko showed us photos of her son, Wataru, then only eight years old, digging through the debris where their house had been alongside US marines. Later, at the house where she and her husband run their fish business, she showed us more photos. The Marines commander had invited the family to Okinawa when he was recalled to the Pentagon. The tsunami had come up to the road just in front of their business. They lost three vehicles to the sea. When the parents told Wataru that they wanted to sell their remaining

car in order to buy a new van, he refused to let them. The car was a place where he could feel safe and which belonged to the time before the tsunami. We asked Reiko and her husband what the hardest thing was for them since the disaster, and they replied that it was the lack of work. Despite that, Reiko said that there was an opportunity now for Oshima to redevelop in a new way, not simply return to what it had been in the past.

From the Kikuta's business, we drove across the island and over the crossroads where the wave, which surged up both sides of the island met in a huge whirlpool, and along the hilly, forested coastline to the house of Kumiko Komatsu. Perched above the sea, the large window in the living room frames a picture perfect view of the beautiful coastline and the sea. Mrs Komatsu had been in the house with her two-year old daughter when the wave came. The water came up into the house, and she waded through it up to her neck to reach the stairs and up to safety. After the tsunami, oil tankers were destroyed and spilled their load into the sea. When the oil ignited, fire covered the sea and spread to Oshima, setting the woods alight. We had noticed on the drive to the house that all the trees had been scorched. Mrs Komatsu's husband is a relief fireman and he was one of the island's heroes for battling with the fires to save homes and lives. As the fires approached her own house, Mrs Komatsu had escaped with her 95 year-old mother-in-law by climbing over the fence at the back of the house and clambering up the mountain to safety. The fire trucks were parading round the island with their sirens blaring throughout the afternoon we were there; we came across them as we were driving towards the school and heard the sirens again as we listened to the junior high school students.

At the elementary school, we took our leave of Reiko and her son Wataru, who was just finishing school for the day, and went into Mr Kikuta's office. Here we met Paul, the school's JET ALT, who had arrived in Oshima just six weeks before 3/11 and who told us of his experience of that day. Mr Kikuta showed us to the junior high school next door and introduced us to its Vice Principal Katsunori Kanno. Mr Kanno is a blaze of positive energy and he took us upstairs to the hall to watch a presentation given by six students. The six read out parts of a speech against a backdrop of slides showing images of the island's beauty and the devastation wreaked by the tsunami, as well as pictures of the student groups from America, ASEAN countries and some Pacific islands, that have visited since then. They also described their work cleaning up beaches in Oshima, and helping older people in the community by giving them massages (an experience that had made the obaachan cry), as well as performing traditional Oshima dances to bring a smile to people's faces. They said at the end of their presentation that rather than being receivers of support they wanted to become people who support others, a sentiment that was expressed in different ways by many

of the people we met during our time on Oshima. After the presentation, we talked informally to the students, who then took us on a tour of their school. Oshima Chuugakko is a UNESCO associated school, and in the main corridor, the walls are covered with dozens of scrolls, letters, chains of colored paper cranes donated from schools around Japan and elsewhere. The students are carrying out a project to raise scallops that is related to UNESCO's focus on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), but they said they hadn't used the UNESCO connection to share their experiences from the tsunami internationally. Mr Kanno said he felt that it was more important for his students to have direct contact with people from other countries, and to get used to using English with them, than to share information and stories online or in written form, and he really hoped that we could return and meet the students again some time in the future.

As it went dark, Alison and Fumiko headed to the ferry to go back to Kesennuma where they were staying. Bill, Mike and Satomi returned to the elementary school where Mr Kikuta gave us a presentation about the school and his experiences since the earthquake and tsunami, which Reiko joined part-way through. On 3/11, he had been Principal at a school in mainland Kesennuma and had been stranded there, unable to return to Oshima, for two weeks. He explained that, with the ferry link down and many boats destroyed, transportation between Oshima and the mainland was very difficult for a few days. Only one ship, the Himawarigou, had escaped the tsunami and was too small to carry many people so was just used by the people who were fighting the fires. At the elementary school, which had been an evacuation centre, they had filtered water from its swimming pool for people to drink.

He showed us some of the many gifts and donations of materials goods that the school had received and was still receiving, especially from schools in Hyogo, which suffered an earthquake in 1996. But he and Reiko also made the point that the need now was not for material support but for them to be able to learn from their experiences as they reconstruct Oshima, and for others to be able to learn from them. One story he told was about how he had very nearly been carried away in the much smaller tsunami, just 1m 20cm high, that had hit Oshima in Showa 33, when he was a second-year elementary school student. This experience seemed to have left him with a very strong belief in the importance of evacuating properly and preparing well for tsunami. It chimed with a point that Reiko had made earlier that most of the 30 people who died on Oshima on 3/11 did so because they stayed too long in their houses or tried to return to them to get something, and most would have survived if they had followed the evacuation procedures. The feeling that people on Oshima now have a wisdom based on their experiences that they can give to others was captured by the winner of a competition amongst the junior high school students to write thank you

messages: she said she wanted to move from being a person who said 'arigatou' to others to a person who other people said 'arigatou' to.

Just before we left, we mentioned that one way we thought we might be able to work with people on Oshima to share their experiences and what they had learnt from them would be to use their stories and knowledge to make English language learning materials. Both Mr Kikuta and Reiko-san thought this was a good idea and we agreed to talk about it more at a later date. They also made very clear that they feel the most important thing that people can do to help them is to visit Oshima, see the beauty of the island, and hear what Oshima people themselves have to say about their experiences.

Friday March 1, Kesennuma,

Minami-Kesennuma, Omoso and Matsuzaki-Osaki

Andy, James, Mayumi, Nakazawa-sensei, Sayuri

After enjoying a tasty lunch of hamaranyaki at Kesennuma-Yokocho, the Fukko Yatai Mura at the end of Kesennuma Port, we split up at the ferry side and saw the other group off, watching their ferry leave for Oshima Island. Nakazawa-sensei mentioned he would take us to the Minami-Kesennuma and Matsuzaki-Osaki, two of the worst-hit areas, on our way to Omoso Junior High School. The tsunami had gathered force and power as it came up the inlet from the sea, and within a few hundred metres of setting off, we had entered a huge area behind the port, where just a very few buildings are now standing, isolated against an eerily empty landscape.

In silence, we drove through the spaces towards a bridge which Nakazawa-sensei referred to as 'the deadly bridge'. He explained how it had been the only bridge by which people could have escaped to higher ground. Traffic had got congested on the day with cars trying to escape, and many people had died at that spot because their vehicles had been caught in a jam.



We passed over the bridge and drove on, rejoining the main road, before turning off at a sharp left angle into what seemed to be a dirt track. It wasn't until we had gone a little further that we realized that this had been the road entering a large estate of houses and small businesses - all of which had been reduced to nothing by the tsunami. We drove slowly down this track towards the bayside where we got out to take in the landscape further. For 360 degrees around us it seemed at

first there was nothing but flat, empty land, practically at sea level. No buildings left anywhere. In front of us the sea widened out, and further behind us was the devastated port area we had just driven through. Matsuzaki-Osaki community was there with 103 households, before the 3/11 tsunami washed everything away.



Near to where we parked we looked at the remains of one house in particular. There was a slight incline for a car to be parked, and someone had put back the name plate of the house on a low foundation that came to the edge of the dirt track. We stood trying to imagine what still seemed unimaginable. The railway track had also run near here and we saw its line disappear across the empty ground.

No human beings would ever live here again, Nakazawa-sensei explained. There were plans for a memorial park to be created, but how high the seawall would be was not yet clear. (We would hear more about the seawall issue at Shanti later in the afternoon.)

And then just 50 metres away from here our attention moved to a large mound, perhaps rising to 10 metres high, covered in trees, with broken steps and a twisted, contorted handrail leading up into the trees. Nakazawa-sensei mentioned the path led to a small shrine at the top. We followed the broken steps up and came upon Ozaki Shrine.



Thirty-one people had come here for sanctuary on 3/11 and somehow survived the tsunami, staying there the night to be rescued the next day. They would have probably seen Kesennuma Port burning through the darkness. We stopped at the shrine and talked quietly, each silent in our own way. We noticed how a small harbour was being built on the other side of the shrine from where we had parked, and some small boats were moving in the inlet, perhaps harvesting wakame in the sea further away towards Oshima in the distance.

Omose Junior High School

At Omose Junior High School, another UNESCO associated school, we were welcomed by the Vice Principal, Sato-sensei, and shown into a meeting room. Unfortunately, the children were in the

middle of exams and we were unable to meet them. The Vice Principal started off by giving us an overview of the damage caused by the tsunami in the area, and how this had impacted on the running of the school. One of the consequences was that the school had had to provide temporary housing on its sports ground, and as a result of this, the students had to commute to another school to play outdoor sports. Among the children at the school were some who lived in temporary housing, and others who come from a different catchment area outside of Omoso and who had had problems fitting into their new school. Another consequence was the emotional toll the tsunami had taken on the students. In the case of about 20% of the children, their homes had been completely or partially destroyed or flooded, and 40% had been economically affected as parents lost jobs or their family incomes were substantially reduced. In April 2011, not all new students had standard uniforms (presumably prepared for entrance but then washed away) and they were unable to line up or listen because they were so distracted by what they had been through. The Vice Principal felt the character of those students who entered in 2012 to be perceptibly different (i.e., more positive) than those who entered in 2011, but he continues to wonder if the children have flashbacks or are holding back emotions. It seems as if the children are more settled now, but Sato-sensei is simply not sure.

The English teacher, Endo-sensei, joined us and gave a short overview of how the tsunami had affected the teaching of English, with one of the main consequences now being the lack of ALTs in the area. With only three ALTs in Kesennuma, only one could go to the school once a week, which meant that only one English class out of seven could have contact with the ALT. We continued talking, and again Sato-sensei mentioned what huge encouragement the school had received from across Japan and the world. He explained that, although we would not be able to meet children in the school because of the tests, the fact that we had all come today would be a positive learning experience for them when they got to hear about it. He also explained that he was not from Omoso but had transferred to the school after 3/11 from Sendai. Sato-sensei sometimes felt like an outsider and commented how strong the local people are in dealing with adversity.



We then left the meeting room and went into a hall where all sides were covered with decorated posters of supportive messages from both inside and outside Japan. The Vice Principal said that 3/11 has been damaging, but these words and deeds of encouragement provided important learning opportunities learning for the children. Nakazawa-sensei's contact with the school and the visit by Chuo University

students to teach table tennis for three days appeared to have had a hugely positive impact, with the children subsequently winning a place in the competition at the prefectural level. In the hall, we took some photos together, expressed our gratitude to Sato-sensei for taking time to speak with us, and then we walked to the side of the school and down some steps towards the Temporary Housing located within the school's sports ground.

Omose JHS Temporary Housing Community Centre



Opening a wire-mesh gate, we entered the sports ground and walked between the neat straight lines of the temporary housing, noticing how each household had a small outside entrance made of corrugated plastic that acted as a 'genkan' to the home.

At the community centre we were greeted and shown in by Fujita-san, the local Japan Hospice Association staff member, and Doe-san, a volunteer from Hyogo Prefecture, for an informal meeting. The community space featured a large indoor area, with a small library in one corner, and an electronic piano in another. Some tea was being brewed on the side, with chairs and tables folded away, and two sets of tables in the middle.



Three elderly women were having a cup of tea and talking with each other at one table. Fujita-san and Doe-san spent some time with them, then came over to join us at the other table. At first, the community leader spoke and gave us a short overview of the demographics of the temporary housing estate. After the tsunami, 153 households were relocated to the temporary housing, and now there are 133 households remaining, with a current population of 330 people. Of these 330 people, 30% are 65 years old and over, with the youngest member of the population being only 5 months old. All told, 160 people in the temporary housing have part-time jobs. Each temporary house, housing one household, is the same size and has one 4.5 tatami room and a 6 tatami room, which are separated by a sliding curtain. In addition to the two rooms, there is a small toilet bathroom.

In response to the question "What is the biggest challenge that you face?" the community leader shared with us how she was finding it hard to manage the relationship between families and couples: when these people had entered the temporary housing, they had felt grateful for being alive and for getting away from the cramped conditions of the sports halls where they had been living since 3/11. But now a common anxiety among them is developing as they start to wonder when they will be able to leave the temporary housing. The residents had no private space, and while some were happy to have formed a new community, others wanted to get away. Added to this, as a result of living in such a small area, tensions that existed between family members before the earthquake were now escalating, and many of the adults were suffering from sleep deprivation. Doe-san added that the residents often came to speak out about these different tensions and organize their thoughts, so she simply focused on listening to them. She also marvelled, especially as someone who comes from Kansai and who experienced the aftermath of the Awaji Earthquake, at the strength of the people here, and their endurance under such harsh conditions. Both Fujita-san and Doe-san talked about how they coped with dealing with such stress, and how they drew strength from each other. We all felt moved by the inner calm and quiet sense of self-control that came through as they talked with us.

As we left, we said a brief hello to the three elderly ladies at the other table, and then we walked back through the housing to the gate and up the steps to the van, saying hello too to some of the kids at the school we met on the way.

NGO Nihon Boken Asobiba Zukuri Kyokai (Japan Adventure Play Area Development Association), Ooya, with Kanbayashi-san



Nakazawa-sensei drove us to our next appointment at Asobi-ba, located 8 km south of Omose Junior High just off the main Route 45. We passed by Ooya Junior High School, Ooya Elementary School, and Ooya Yochien, before arriving at a sign for Asobi-ba. It is a five-minute walk for the children from school. At the play park, we met Kanbayashi-san, the play leader, and a number of adults that included Suzuki-san, the local lady who raised over 2 million yen this January for

the running of the park, the local land owner, and other local supporters, all happily chatting around a fire with a reporter from Chunichi Shimbun. Only one child was there, a very independent girl who wouldn't disclose her name when asked—"naisho". Nevertheless, she came

with us as we walked around to take a look at the various handmade play equipments with Kanbayashi-san.

Nihon Boken Asobiba Zukuri Kyokai is an NPO that supports children's emotional care through play. They set up play areas in an outdoor natural environment where a child has the freedom to engage in any play activity that he/she so desires, and the play leader is an adult who supports children's desires, manages emergencies and occasionally sets up the play activity. Asobiba Zukuri Kyokai had experience working with Shanti Volunteer Association, who we would be visiting later that day, in the aftermath of Hanshin Awaji Earthquake, and again chose to act with them in Kesennuma after 3/11. It is the children who named this asobiba play area, “あそびーばー” and they hope that the parents' group that formed naturally at the park will help run the play park from April this year, when their term ends.

Shanti Volunteer Association, Kesennuma Office, Ooya

It was snowing a little as we left the Adventure Play Area and drove further along the coast road to the Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA) Kesennuma Office. Passing by several small sandy coves and beaches, we noticed the remains of the railway that had hugged the shoreline and whose traces we had seen in Matsuzaki-Osaki earlier in the afternoon.

The SVA office is located further back from the coast on a hillside next to a Buddhist cemetery, and as soon as we arrived, we were invited to sit on the floor around a table with Shanti staff members, Miura-san and Azuma-san, who had helped set up the meeting. Miura-san took us through a whole catalogue of information about Shanti's work and the problems that local people are dealing with.



Thirty local groups and other NGOs were operating in Kesennuma area, and around 20 universities had some kind of long-term commitment (although many universities had made one visit and then not come back). Shanti, Azuma-san explained, doesn't in itself do educational activities; rather it tries to provide physical and informational spaces for communities and members of communities to make use of.

An important issue for SVA, Miura-san continued, is helping locals navigate housing issues and the changing rules that different official bodies apply. Here, he talked of the conditions for 'shudan

itten' (group relocation), which a minimum of five households must apply for, and 'takadai itten' (individual relocation), or relocation to higher ground. Partial funding is offered by the national government for both types of rehousing, but the national government needs to obtain several quotes ('nyusatsu') to allow for competitive bidding by construction companies. However, construction companies themselves are not interested, it appears, in building for just five households, so applicants are forced to wait until a critical mass has made their applications. The cut-off point for this kind of funding is at the end of March, 2016, but few local people know about this and many don't realise that they need to be applying now (by March) for such funding to be available before the end of March 2016. According to Miura-san, the resettlement requirements keep changing, and although the relevant administrative bodies are trying hard to inform local people, the information is often not getting through. Shanti is therefore making efforts to make the necessary information accessible to local people.

Another issue that SVA is dealing with is depression and suicide, not just among old people, but among parents who have lost children, and working people who have no employment. The use of sleeping pills is higher than before the disaster happened. On the employment front, there are temporary one-year contracts available, often in construction or retail, but males may be reluctant to take such jobs in case the opportunity for longer-term employment comes along within that one-year period. Women have more problems in employment. Both males and females have age-limits and the need for certain qualifications create other obstacles. People were facing these kinds of problems even before the disaster happened.

Shanti has also been working to keep people informed of the plans to build a sea barrier in different areas. The 'bochotei wo benkyo suru kai' has met 13 times, with 2000 people in total at different public meetings in Kesennuma, and two communities have opted out (i.e., the sea barrier will not be constructed). As for providing care and support for children affected by 3/11 and its aftermath, Shanti has, in collaboration with Tsurumi Daigaku, produced a book with children's drawings: it features a story that Azuma-san wrote, read, and allowed children to draw what the story triggered for them. The purpose of this programme is for children to express their feelings freely, and to provide care for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Children cannot express their feelings in words like adults, so Azuma-san chose a process of drawing to give expression to their feelings and help relieve their stress. For the first book, Pun Pun Dani, she wrote a story from their drawings. For the second book, Mu-sha no Minato, she created a story first and then read it to children and allowed them to draw what the story suggested to them. These two children's books are different in the way each was created and each has its own message. Shanti has also been trying

to create safe places for children to meet and play freely (like the Adventure Play Area) - these are all ways of overcoming isolation and creating some renewed sense of sanctuary and community.

Shanti is currently planning to continue its work in Kesennuma until the end of 2015. Drawing things to a close, we briefly discussed possible collaborations between Shanti and the Learner Development SIG, all of which would need to be discussed on both sides further into the future.

With night having fallen, we left to return to Kesennuma Port to catch the 18.20 ferry to Oshima to meet up with the members of the other group and stay the night at the Kameyama-sou Ryokan.



Saturday March 2, Tour of a tuna fishing boat with Kameya-san

Alison, Bill, James, Sayuri

Kesennuma Port is one of 13 fishing ports in all of Japan (over 2,900) that is designated as Tokutei Daisanshu Gyoko - by Cabinet Order as especially important for the promotion of fishing (MAFF). We were able to contact a local owner of a tuna vessel and meet him for a tour of his boat and to listen to what he could tell us about 3/11.



Kameya-san, president of Fukutoku Gyogyo, greeted us by his new tuna vessel, Dai 88 Fukutokumaru, docked at Kesennuma Port. It was a 10-minute walk from where we had got off the ferry coming back from Oshima Island. The tuna vessel is Kameya-san's third and was preparing to set sail on its maiden voyage in two days' time bound for the Indian Ocean). It is also the first new fishing vessel for Kesennuma since 3/11. Kameya-san showed us around his 398-ton fishing boat that had the capacity to deep-freeze (to minus 60°C) and carry up to 300 tons of tuna over the next 11 months.

It was equipped with what looked to be an impressive collection of the latest technology, including OASIS, a water-distilling tank. The 23-man crew included an Indonesian cook, and more Indonesians were to board the vessel in Bali, the port to which they would return once every three months or so to refuel (300kl) and restock. From the top of the vessel, Kameya-san explained about the nearby large freezer factory, about the shipyard that both repairs and manufactures boats, and

about a ship that ended up beside a signboard, “Kamei”, situated at a level equivalent of perhaps the fourth floor of a building, on 3/11.

On that day, Kameyasan was at his office. When the office shook, he immediately thought of Hanshin Awaji Dai Shinsai, so he and his staff escaped, while the building was still shaking. Once out on the streets, they heard the public announcement warning citizens of a 6m high tsunami. Kameya-san was doubtful, and decided to run up to the roof of his office building to look out to sea. There, he saw it, the tsunami, and was convinced enough to take the car for even higher ground, only to encounter a congestion. He took another route and safely reached the Kesennuma Plaza Hotel that stood high on a hill overlooking the port. From there he watched for the next few hours what followed, until he realized that the hill was slowly becoming isolated by surrounding water, and decided to leave the scene and escape further inland.



Kameyama-san recounted two events in particular that shocked him. One was that owners of some of the docked smaller boats rushed to take them out to sea--with the hope that they would catch the giant tide further out at sea and ride over it. “Demo, damedeshita,” but it didn't work, he said. The other memory is of the oil tank tipping over and subsequently leaking oil that spread, ignited, and turned the bay into, literally, a sea of fire. He simply nodded when asked if he had lost friends. He told us that five to six big vessels, ten Pacific saury sanma boats, and five smaller boats had been destroyed; his two, at the time, were out at sea. The shipyard, also, was devastated, but it was restored within six to twelve months.

At the end of our tour and talk, we said our thanks and were about to leave when Kameya-san realized that we had some spare time. He offered to drive us to see an area slightly south of the port. It was a large stretch of bare land where there used to be marine product factories, residential housing, and possibly stores. It will be restored with industrial buildings, it is thought, but there were no signs of activity.

In the car, we learned that Kameya-san's home, his wife and his two aged parents were safe, as was his daughter living in Sendai. When asked about the biggest challenge now, he responded, “Jobs and housing.” Regarding housing, he said, “Half are for and half are against”, referring most

probably to the complex situation of the various decisions that communities needed to make, and the difficulties they are having in reaching agreement.

After the spontaneous car tour, Kameya-san dropped us off at Kesennuma-Yokocho where we had time for coffee, another local lunch, and a visit to a bookstore, before meeting up with the others who had been to Rikuzentakata.

(The Kesennuma-Yokocho website is available here: <www.fukko-yatai.com/>)

Rikuzentakata, Yahagi Community Center

Andy, Fumiko, Mayumi, Mike, Nakazawa-sensei & Satomi

Rikuzentakata is the municipality north of Kesennuma, and to get there we drove about 20 minutes up the coast road, passing through areas where whole communities has been swept away and nothing now remained in the land between the sea and the edge of the hills and mountains. At one point, we drove past Kesen Junior High School, now just a battered three-story concrete shell, sitting between the sea and the road.



Nakazawa-sensei explained that it had been completely engulfed by the tsunami, but the whole school had successfully evacuated up the hill across the road and no one from the school had died. Soon afterwards we passed the famous 'ippon matsu', a single pine tree that had somehow remained standing and that has become a symbol of the resilience of the people in the area. But it had finally died, and its core had been replaced with resin, after a debate about whether it was appropriate to spend ichioku en on its preservation when there are so many other priorities for reconstruction.

We turned inland and followed a river through a gentle valley, which the tsunami had surged up, continuing its devastation for miles inland. We saw the half-destroyed rail bridge across the river for the train line to Ichinoseki and heard that a bus service now runs instead. As we drove up the valley, it felt like we were moving into a rural community, with more traditional Japanese houses clustered here and there. We finally passed the highest point that the tsunami had reached. Satomi pointed out a ryokan that had been just above the water level, whose owner was still struggling to

deal with the fact that his property had survived whilst those of close neighbours, not far down the valley, had been destroyed.

At the small community centre of Yahagi District in Rikuzentakata, we were greeted by Musashi-san, a local community leader, and three female junior high school students, Mayu (1st grade), Runa (2nd grade – Musashi-san's daughter) and Miyu (3rd grade), who he had brought to meet us. Mayu's father had come along too. Miyu, we later realized, was one of the students who had successfully evacuated from Kesen Junior High school on 3/11.



Nakazawa-sensei has been working with Musashi-san on reconstruction issues, and Musashi-san had visited Chuo University and met Andy a couple of weeks previously. Knowing that we hoped to develop some long-term projects to help local people, Musashi-san suggested at the start of the meeting two ways that we could use our expertise as language educators to help children in Rikuzentakata.

One was to support them in their use of English for international exchange activities. He explained that children at the junior high school were exchanging letters with children in schools in Alaska. They had begun the exchange after a basketball from Kesen Junior High School had been found washed up in Alaska. Musashi-san particularly wanted the children to be able to use their own knowledge and experience to help explain to people in other parts of the world affected by earthquakes how to evacuate and protect their lives. His other suggestion was for us to help local children become able to guide foreign visitors to Rikuzentakata in English. He emphasized the need to find sustainable employment to keep young people in the area and the importance that he saw for international tourism as part of reconstruction and rejuvenation.

We then heard from the junior high school students about various international exchange activities and visits they had been involved in. Runa had been on a school volleyball trip to Germany, but talked mainly about her exchange of letters in English with Alicia, a penpal in Alaska. She showed us some of the letters they had exchanged, and we noticed how much they liked being penpals with each other. For Runa, the best thing was their shared interest in looking at pictures of Justin Bieber, but there was also a letter from Alicia in which she reported how scared she had been when

a 7.7 magnitude earthquake hit Alaska this January, and she had wanted to know from Runa what she should do to protect herself. All of Runa's letters to Alicia were handwritten. As we had thought before the visit that we might be able to help children use the Internet for sharing their experiences, we asked her and the others if they also used email or Facebook for their penpal exchanges. Runa explained that she felt she could express her own feelings much better in English in her own handwriting than by using a computer, which could translate automatically from Japanese. We also told them about the possibilities of using Skype for video exchanges, and they seemed much more interested in this than in using email or Facebook. Miyu explained to us that she would be starting to go to a high school in Morioka from April, and then be going to a high school in Adelaide, Australia, for one year from next winter. Although Mayu was very quiet, she told us she was also exchanging letters with a boy in Alaska called Colin.

At Musashi-san's request, Miyu stood up and delivered an English speech to us. Miyu had been the school's representative in a regional English speech contest, and in her speech she talked about an exchange visit to the Czech Republic she had been on. (See [page 49](#) for the full text of Miyu's speech.)

She and the daughter in her Czech homestay family had been too nervous to talk together until the daughter made Miyu a chocolate Easter egg. This expressed without words the Czech girl's desire to become friends and had made Miyu very happy. From that point on, the two girls were able to communicate using the English they knew. Reflecting on this experience, Miyu's speech explained that she had learnt that communicating in English is a matter of using the words you know to try and say what you want to, without worrying about mistakes or trying to speak perfect textbook English. "It wasn't perfect English but we could understand each other," she said. In the future Miyu wanted to become a flight attendant and be a person who could support and help others, just as she had been helped and supported by many people in Japan and from around the world. Her speech was given with an engaging ease and sense of clarity, making many moving points about making connections, developing friendships and building community, and in turn we each expressed what her speech had meant for us.

In the final part of the meeting, we talked about the possibilities for a project in which LD SIG members might work with the children in Rikuzentakata. One project might focus on making their stories into English educational materials that students in other parts of Japan and the world could use to learn through English about the experiences of people in Rikuzentakata. Musashi-san felt that saving the children's experiences from 3-11 was very important. They have already written

about those in Japanese and we thought we could work with the children to translate them together into English as a starting point. We also raised the idea of learning from the experiences of older people in the community who have experienced other major earthquakes and tsunami prior to 3/11. Musashi-san said that the local obaachan are very good talkers who would be very happy to tell their stories! We thought we could perhaps help local children interview and translate the stories of their grandparents, although Runa said she hadn't really talked much with her grandparents about these issues. Musashi-san also suggested there were other aspects of the experiences the community had been through that would be good to tell others, including the idea of 'girisubi' (giri wo musubu) that had developed in the evacuation centres to express the importance of a reciprocal support and interdependence between people. We left Rikuzentakata feeling very inspired both by Musashi-san's vision and commitment as a community leader and by the warmth, enthusiasm and intelligence of Runa, Miyu and Mayu, hoping we can develop a project together with them and others in Rikuzentakata that will be of benefit to the local community.

Meeting with Filipino teachers at Akiu Onsen Grand Hotel, Sendai, on Saturday afternoon

LD SIG participants: Andy, Alison, Bill, Caroline, Ian, Fumiko, James, Mayumi, Sayuri

Filipino participants: Cesar, Mak, Josephine, Kaye

Alison: Having deposited our bags in our rooms, the nine LD SIG members who were staying in Sendai gathered together with the Filipino teachers in a function room that Cory had arranged for us, although he wasn't able to stay for the meeting. After a brief round of self-introductions, we immediately broke into groups of three or four to talk, and especially, to listen to the Filipino teachers talk about the challenges facing them in Tohoku.

The first person I sat with was Kaye, a teacher from Fukushima. She told me that the situation regarding radiation is still bad, and her family has been directly affected. Her daughter had had cesium detected in her blood and so has been sent to live with relatives in Osaka. Kaye also has two young boys who still live with her in Fukushima City. It is difficult for families to move away from the area, however, away from homes, jobs, family and friends. There are about 300 Filipinos living in Fukushima and Kaye has become a kind of representative of the Filipino community, which has become more close-knit since the disaster. She is responsible for gathering and disseminating information particularly regarding health and safety issues.

The second person I sat with was Cesar, who I knew from a few years back when he was secretary of the Filipinos Teachers in Japan organization and was based in Tokyo as a lay missionary. At that time, he was running CHOBET, an organization that aimed at helping Filipina women to move from low-status factory jobs or working in bars to English teaching. He then started SEELS, an organization specializing in “micro-franchising”, a kind of venture capital scheme for starting new English language schools and after-school child care. After 3/11, he moved his base up to Sendai and focused his attention on teachers in the Tohoku region, where up to 4,000 Filipinos are living. Teachers can become eligible to obtain funds for their own school after attending a teacher training workshop for a weekend and then teaching a certain number of hours to gain experience. The Montessori English school that we would be helping to promote the next day is one such SEELS venture. Cesar told Andy and me that it is much harder for Filipinos to become established as teachers than it is in Kanto, where Filipinos are now widely employed to work in schools as ALTs. They have approached the local government boards of education but to no avail so far. He suspects that a new school, such as the Montessori school, may take up to three years to become established, if it is to succeed at all. Employment is not the only problem facing Filipinos in Tohoku; some Filipinos who lost their homes in the disaster also lost documents, including passports. The Philippines embassy has not issued new passports to these people. The embassy has said that these people can return to the Philippines on temporary travel permits, but they are reluctant to do so, nervous that they will then not be able to return to Japan.

The third person I talked to was Mak. Mak has been living in Japan for only a couple of years, having moved here as an already qualified teacher. He is now working in a language school and also trains new teachers in the SEELS workshops. Mak was one of the organizers of the promotional event in the Montessori school, and after the small group sessions, it was Mak together with Bill who took the lead in discussing the scheduling of activities for that event.

Caroline: During the meeting with Filipino teachers, I didn’t write any notes as I was keen to be open, to listen, and to try to build an understanding in the short time available. Consequently, I’m sure that my memory has significantly clouded, blended, and altered the three conversations I had.

After successfully breaking the ice by knotting ourselves into a human snake, I first sat down to speak with Mak, a qualified educator. We discussed our working histories, and the difficulties faced by Filipino teachers in becoming accepted as ALTs in Japan - particularly in the Tohoku area. I believe Mak came to Japan to work at a number of schools as an ALT with Interac, and later became involved with SEELS via the Filipino community. We discussed our understanding of the

Montessori philosophy, and how it enjoys widespread popularity in the Philippines, while in Japan it is still relatively unknown. He explained that around 80 people were expected to attend Sunday's event, including a number of SEELS teachers traveling from other branches in the Tohoku region, who were keen to meet with us to share teaching experiences and ideas.

Next I formed a group with Fumiko and Josephine who was concerned about her English level. Equally worried about my poor Japanese skills, I tried to reassure her that a mixture of Japanese and English would be just fine. (Later we discussed just how many languages she understands and speaks, and I believe she surpasses quadrilingual.) We discussed the education system of Japan, and again, the peculiarly entrenched ideal that native speakers make the best teachers. Furthermore, the social prestige of Filipino teachers within Japanese communities remains poor.

Finally, I spoke with Cesar, Sayuri, and Ian. We took the opportunity to really try to understand Cesar's mission to improve the lives of Filipinos in Japan, a master plan which we discovered is made up of a highly dynamic and complex web of goals and philosophies! The event on Sunday was to promote the launch of a new SEELS school, providing Montessori education for children as well as English classes for all ages. There are already a number of SEELS schools in the Tohoku area, and Cesar introduced us to the concept of 'micro-franchise', an idea which was entirely new to me and immediately grabbed my attention. Whereas micro-finance provides financial support to new businesses, micro-franchise provides training. Completion of training allows teachers or schools to use the school's name—in this case, SEELS. This model can assist members of the Filipino community to find meaningful employment in the region by setting up their own school. One problem is that there are a number of companies whose sole intention is to con people out of money; offering services or training, they then take the money and run, never to be seen or heard of again. Fighting against this current, the SEELS brand has to build its reputation in order to gain trust—even among the Filipino community. Having Sunday's event effectively 'endorsed' by the JALT's Learner Development SIG was one step on this road.

Sunday March 3rd

Sendai SEELS Montessori School

LD SIG participants: *Alison, Andy, Bill, Caroline, Fumiko, Ian, James, Mayumi, Sayuri*

After a refreshing rest at the Aiku Grand Onsen Hotel, where we sampled the delicious local dishes, shared our experiences of Saturday, and enjoyed relaxing in the onsen, we woke up early Sunday, somewhat refreshed and ready to continue the rest of our journey. Led by Bill, we took the

bus from the hotel to Sendai Station, said our goodbyes to Mike, and then took the short train ride to the SEELS Montessori School.

When we entered the school we were warmly welcomed by Cesar, Mak and Kaye and the other Filipino teachers, and had just about enough time to put all our bags down, before going into overdrive and working collaboratively to prepare for the day. As we did so, the visitors poured into the school, and soon it was time start.

To start off the event in style, we all got into a big circle with the Filipino and Japanese teachers and visitors, in the main room, and then Bill led everyone with a rendition of Ole-o, a song that could not be done justice with just words and can be seen in all its glory if you click on the link below. All being said, it worked a treat and helped to immediately break the ice, which can be seen by the smiles all around at the end <youtu.be/YMEK4p_T93A>.



Following the opener, Ian (on guitar), James and Mayumi (both singing) led everyone with a rendition of “Head Shoulders Knees and Toes” and “Old MacDonald had a Farm.” After this, Caroline took the floor and gave a short introduction and demonstration of how to dance with Poi, which, in true do-it-yourself style, were made out of socks and tennis balls. She gave the lucky children who came to the front each a Poi and proceeded to show them, step by step, how to

dance with it. When she had finished demonstrating it herself she then watched each child practicing and gave some guided practice, and the group then split up and those children who wanted to fine-tune their Poi dancing skills could continue with her in another part of the school.



Once the group had split up it was Montessori time and each child were free to try the following activities organized and run by the LD SIG members: Balloon art (Alison and Mayumi), tangerine peeling (Fumiko), Mural painting (Bill and Sayuri), Poi dancing (Caroline), and TPR drama (Andy and James). For each activity the children participated in they received a sticker to add to their stamp book.



After about an hour of small group activities the children and adults all grouped together again in the main room for another song, B-I-N-G-O, led by Ian (on guitar), Bill (on harmonica), James and Mayumi (both singing), and Sayuri (on Irish whistle). And then we split up into our small groups again and the children and parents had half an hour to do those small group activities that they hadn't yet had a chance to try. Then Bill and Sayuri came to the front of the main room and gathered up the children for some Kamishibai and story telling.

For the Kasmishibai, Bill had brought along his mini wooden Kamishibai stage, and two sets of story-telling cards.

Unfortunately, these had got mixed up somehow which called for an impromptu rendition of 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' by Sayuri (on her tin whistle). Soon, Bill was ready and along with Sayuri, read 'Bigger, Bigger, Bigger.' In this story one object in the picture got bigger as the children said or rather shouted 'Bigger, Bigger, Bigger!!.' As the story progressed the children gradually became more and more engaged, and one particular picture of a cake was met with squeals of delight and increased animation all round that was illustrated by the children jumping up and down as they said the magic words.



After two more stories it was time for one last song, 'Hokey Pokey.' Much like at the start, everyone gathered together and made a big circle, only this time, Ian (on guitar) sat in the middle of it and we all ran into to meet him during the chorus, which can be seen here: youtu.be/qnldKq_PVIE.



And then it was time for the closing events, the Piñata, the group photos, and the giving of the many presents provided by the SEELS team, followed by a quick tidy up and fond farewells. All in all, an action-packed and collaborative event that couldn't have been possible without everyone who took part, organized and helped when needed, a fitting end indeed to the Tohoku Outreach Weekend.

Voices from the Children

As mentioned in the report, at Rikuzentakata, in Yahagi Community Center on Saturday March 2, one of the Junior High school students Miyu (Yanagishita), gave a speech in English to the LD sig members present. What follows is the speech that she gave in full:



"Do you know where the Czech republic is? You may say "No." To tell the truth, I didn't exactly know where it was. I also didn't know what language they spoke before I went there. I was invited to

the Czech Republic as a part of a program there as support of the earthquake disaster last March for ten days. When I was in the Czech republic I stayed with a Czech family for one day. The host mother was Japanese. Asako was their daughter. She is one year younger than me. I cannot speak Czech, and she cannot speak Japanese, either. At first, we couldn't talk about anything because we were very nervous. So she thought and thought. After that she decided to make an Easter egg for me. Even though she didn't know me very well, she tried hard to make an Easter egg for me. It was pink and very cute. Her mother told me that she had made it to bring me good luck. I didn't know her language but I could understand how she felt. When she gave me the egg, I was very happy and smiled. That smile helped break the ice between us. Finally, little by little we started speaking to each other in English. It wasn't perfect English but we could understand each other and we became good friends after that.

From then on, I tried to speak English and smile whenever I could.

Before I went to the Czech Republic, I was really selfish. Before the trip, my future dream was just to be involved in or do some sort of international work. Through this trip, I learned two things. The first thing I learned was that smiling makes people happy. Body language is very important when communicating with others especially when they don't speak your language. The second and equally important thing is to speak English. Your English doesn't have to be perfect but you have to try to speak English to make communication possible. If you don't try, your English won't improve and you won't be able to communicate with others.

Since I returned to Japan, my way of thinking has changed and my future dream has changed as well. Since the disaster that occurred on March 11, I've been supported by a lot of people. So I want to help people in need someday. There are people in need all over the world and if everyone tried a little, we can make their lives better. Finally, I want to become a cabin attendant in the future. This way I can meet and greet many people with a big smile and hopefully make their journey a little better. If we try hard, we can change the world for the better."