

## Special Feature: The March 2014 Tohoku Outreach Weekend: A Collaborative Report

### 特集：2014年3月・週末東北訪問支援会

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2014年3月の週末訪問支援は、7日から9日にかけて行われました。3月7日金曜日の午後、私たちは、気仙沼市面瀬にある仮設住宅集会所を訪れた後、大島の小学校で先生方にお会いし、本の寄贈について話し合いました。また、大島では、地元で牡蠣漁師をされている親子と共に過ごし、さらに住民の方々に、彼ら自身や地域のお話を伺いながら、島を案内していただきました。翌日、私たちは陸前高田市に移動し、観光案内所の代表者にお会いした後、地元の観光案内の専門の方に、英語と日本語で陸前高田市の案内をしていただきました。また、陸前高田市の中学生に向けたLD SIGの翻訳プロジェクトについてもお話ししました。最終日には、陸前高田市立図書館の代表者にお会いし、本の寄贈についてお話した後、地域の代表の方と中学生2人とともに、陸前高田と地元地域を案内していただきました。その後、私たちはこれらの体験を1つの地図にまとめ、今回の訪問を皆で振り返りました。このような数々の心揺さぶる出会いやエピソード、対話から、3.11が地域と個人にもたらした影響を、深く、かつ詳細に学び、東北大震災と津波災害から3年経った今、人々が直面している困難な現状について知りました。この報告書では、今回の訪問支援について私たちそれぞれが感じたことを共有し、将来的にこのような訪問支援が向かう様々な方向性について紹介します

#### INTRODUCTION

The March 2014 Outreach weekend took place March 7-9 with five members of the Learner Development SIG (Andy Barfield, Mayumi Takizawa, Rob Moreau, Sayuri Hasegawa, and Ted O'Neill) going to Tohoku to develop Learner Development SIG Outreach projects and ideas that have come into focus over the last year. We travelled up from Tokyo on the Friday morning and in the afternoon of March 7 we visited a Temporary Housing Community Centre in Omoze, Kesennuma, to interview the director of the centre about her work, and an elementary school on Oshima island to meet teachers and explore a book donation. We also spent time with two local father-and-son oyster fishermen on Oshima, and were guided around the island by local residents as they re-told their own stories and those of their community. The next day we moved to Rikuzentakata and met representatives of the Tourist Information Office before we were guided around Rikuzentakata in English and Japanese by a local professional tourist guide. Later, we also discussed the LD SIG's translation project for children at a local junior high school in Rikuzentakata. On the last day we met representatives of Rikuzentakata City Library to discuss another book donation and then had a further guided tour of Rikuzentakata and local sights with a local community leader and two junior high school children. Later we mapped these experiences together, and then travelled back down to Tokyo arriving Sunday evening. From these many different moving

*encounters, episodes and conversations, we learnt in greater depth and finer detail the impact of 3/11 on communities and individuals, and got to know intractable challenges they face three years after the Great Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster. In this report we share with you our individual reflections on this Outreach Weekend and present briefly the different directions that such Outreach is moving in for the future.*

### **Background (Andy)**

*The March 2014 Outreach Weekend built on ideas and contacts developed over the course of the last year. Contacts were first established between the LD SIG and Tohoku communities in March 2013 when the first Tohoku Outreach visit by LD SIG members took place. (See [here](#) for a full report on the 2013 visit.) These links were further strengthened at the Learner Development 20th Anniversary Conference in November 2013 (details [here](#)), with the participation of invited guest speakers from Tohoku. These deepening contacts and exchanges of ideas were followed up at a subsequent meeting of LD SIG members with a multi-university Tohoku Research Group at Hosei University in Tokyo in early December, and [at a presentation forum](#) in Tokyo in late December 2014 involving students from that research group, as well as LD SIG members and Musashi-san, the local community leader in Rikuzentakata who came to LD20 with his daughter Runa. (Click here for [a summary of the December 2013 forum](#).) Since then, members of the LD SIG Outreach group (together with some of their students) have been working on translating into English about 90 Junior High School children's accounts of their 3/11 experiences that they wrote in March 2012 one year after the Great Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster (Runa Musashi is one of those JHS children).*

## **FRIDAY**

### **Oofunato-sen (Sayuri)**

*We had taken a local train from Ichinoseki this year, giving us the opportunity to sit in a one-car train of the Oofunato line with local people. We had about an hour and a half before reaching Kesennuma station. I happened to sit next to a woman who I started talking to about half way through our train ride. She was from Rikuzentakata, but was living in Chiba with her husband (from Chiba) and a fourth grade son. Her father was affected by the disaster, and now lived in a temporary house, and her brother had lost family. I did not ask about her mother. She expressed gratitude when she heard the purpose of our trip including the meeting to discuss an on-going translation project, and was even apologetic that she was preoccupied with only her own family. In the course of our talk, which at times brought tears to her eyes, she told me that just coming to the area would be appreciated and that listening to people would be enough. She learned that at the temporary housing unit where her father's neighbour had lost a grandchild about the age of her son. The man would watch her son play when they made their visits, and one day had asked quietly, perhaps wondering more to himself, if this was how his grandchild would've grown up to be like. Ever since, she said she made sure that she visited the man to just listen to what he needed to say.*

### **Community ties (Rob)**

*After arriving in Kesennuma at midday, three of us (Mayumi, Rob and Andy) went first to the Omoze Community Centre at the Temporary Housing Project in the grounds of the local junior high school. We were greeted by the manager of the community center, Fujita-san, and had to do some initial decision making about where to have our chat as there*

was a previous booking for the large room. In the end we decided to have our chat in the corner of this main room of the community center as the group that had booked practiced their Hawaiian dance. The practice, taking place in the background, actually provided the right atmosphere to our discussion as it reminded us of what the center was for and the important place it holds as a central meeting point for the housing project. We were not in a cold, empty meeting room but in a vibrant, open space that brings a community of people together. It was this idea of community that became the focus of our conversation.



Fujita-san's comments on how community dynamics change, develop, and even break down through the process of families coming to and leaving the temporary housing complex was very poignant and showed us a human side to an issue that in many cases we see as mere statistics in a news article.

In March of this year five families left the complex. The new start that leaving can provide is encouraging indeed, but it is not that easy. Fujita-san explained the sense of loss and uncertainty that those who are left behind feel each time another unit becomes vacant. This is matched by a sense of guilt generated amongst those who do leave. In such situations a barrier can be formed and community ties may be severed. People rarely, if ever, come back to visit, Fujita-san told us.



When asked what she wanted to achieve in the next year at the center, Fujita-san commented that she wanted to foster a sense of independence among the tenants. I hope that this can happen and that people can find the strength to maintain the bonds created by the shared experience of supporting each other through hard times. Our discussion at Omose was a powerful reminder of both the importance of people's sense of belonging to a group that can support them and the fragility of a person's ties to their community in the face of disaster, loss and relocation.

### **Temporary shopping/restaurant units: Minami Machi Ichiba & Kesennuma Yokochō (Sayuri)**

After parting with Andy, Mayumi, and Rob at Kesennuma station, Ted and I made our way to the restaurant area, Kesennuma Yokochō, by foot. We first visited Murasaki Ichiba, a temporary unit of many stores including some restaurants. As we walked through and out to make our way towards Kesennuma Yokochō, a couple greeted us. We explained the purpose of our visit and they seemed happy to see us, as visitors they said had continued to drop even as we approached the third anniversary of 3.11. In our short meeting, the man expressed his frustration for the height of the sea wall, a controversial issue that was repeatedly mentioned throughout our trip. After parting politely, we went off



to the other temporary unit, Fukko Yatai Mura Kesennuma Yokochō. There, we thought of revisiting Hamaran-ya for their hamaran-yaki, but the lady owner who we met last year told us that the cooking machine had unfortunately broken down. So we decided to enter Maguro-ya, a different tuna fish and rice restaurant as a lady was beckoning us to come.

Coincidentally, we had entered a restaurant owned by Kameya-san, the tuna ship owner who we visited last year. He hadn't mentioned that he owned a restaurant, not even when he dropped us off at the same place last year, so it was a huge but pleasant surprise. We were later given extra pieces of tuna, toro at that, most probably because of the connection with Kameya-san.

### **Oshima Island (Sayuri)**

We met up again by the ferry to make the 20-minute crossing to Oshima.

One of the staff at Kameyamasou Inn met us at Oshima port and drove us up the hill to Oshima Elementary School, where Reiko Fuijta, a local lady who LD SIG members had met last year, greeted us and introduced us to different children as they left the school.

The children had huge smiles on their faces, with some being more shy and others being more bold, but they all looked happy. We were later told by Reiko-san that some were just about beginning to manage the dark, and others were still feeling anxious when parents were out of sight, but children at Oshima Elementary were lucky, she told us, as they were not witnesses to people being washed away. The screams for help still echoed in the ears of some children over in the southern part of Kesennuma, she has heard.

At the entrance of the school building we were met by Ishimori-sensei, the deputy head of Oshima Elementary School, and ushered into the headmaster's room where Sato-sensei welcomed us. Kikuta-sensei, the headmaster LD members met last year, had retired. After self-introductions with cards, Sato-sensei told us of his experience of 3.11 as the head of another school over on mainland Kesennuma. He was in a position to make decisions for the survival of all the children and teachers as the water continued to change their circumstances. Knowing that not all schools in Tohoku managed to save their children, we were reminded again of the weight of a principal's decisions, especially on that day.

### **Pierre, ALT (Ted)**

Part of our visit to Oshima Elementary school was to show some samples of graded readers and children's books that the SIG can gather and donate. We spread out a few titles and were joined by the school's ALT, Pierre. He was a very enthusiastic and friendly teacher. We all enjoyed a bit of banter in French since he was from Quebec, but then got down to the matter at hand. As a former JET in a rural town in the previous century, talking with Pierre really took me back and reminded me just how much fun elementary school can be. I was impressed by his excitement at teaching, but even more by his interaction with the headmaster. Pierre seemed very much part of the school and a trusted teacher.



As the Tohoku Outreach project continues, building connections with teachers such as Pierre will be key. Not only is he in the elementary school on Oshima, but he also teaches at the junior high school in Kesennuma. He's very aware of the advantages this continuity offers as he moves along with his sixth graders when they graduate. Visiting the school and providing donations is a positive learning experience for us and I hope a benefit to the school, but establishing supportive connections with even one person can achieve a lot if they are someone like Pierre who can build and multiply that through his continuous work with students.

As we left and headed to the ferry, I could only think how difficult his position must be and had even more respect for his cheerful and energetic approach to the children and schools. He arrived in Oshima after the tsunami and after reconstruction had started. As a JET in a rural area, I know it can sometimes be hard to become part of the community (but also how friendly people can be, too). But, I thought it must be even harder coming in after such a life and community-changing event. Not sharing such a critical experience with everyone else around you could be isolating. But, in this case, it seems the school has welcomed him and he expressed a lot of commitment to the community there.

Konno-sensei, a Year Five teacher had quietly joined to listen in on the exchanges made over the graded readers. He seemed happy to agree with their enthusiastic ALT who already had ideas on how to use them with the children. Mayumi introduced the idea of children introducing their hometown in English for a video-letter exchange with another overseas school. Soon it was time for Sato-sensei's next appointment, and we all stood up to say our thanks and made our way out of the school.

### **From the elementary school to Yamayo Suisan's oyster-farm (Mayumi)**

Reiko-san came back to Oshima Elementary School to pick us up and drove across the island to the workplace of Yamayo Suisan's oyster-farm (ヤマヨ水産). The business is run by the Komatsu

Family and we met the father, Masayuki-san and his son the fourth generation of the family business, Takeshi-san. Since he is also Reiko-san's son's martial arts teacher, their relationship made it easy for us to be connected with the Komatsu Family, and we thank her again. We were invited into the workplace and found some water tanks for growing oysters there. Takeshi-san began to talk about how he had decided to restart their oyster business after they had lost almost everything, their house, workplace, and fishery on 3.11. It actually took him one year to make up his mind especially due to the huge debt--more than 100 million yen. Also, he was honest and mentioned that he had been anxious about the damage of the Fukushima Daiichi in the nearby sea in those days. However, it later turned out not to be serious in the area and furthermore, his missing fishing boat, which he had totally given up on after 3.11, was found on top of a seafood factory in Kesennuma City with almost





no damage. When he talked about it, we were on the very boat at the pier. We could not imagine immediately what had happened to the boat which was just before our eyes. He said that he had thought of the event as his destiny, and at last he moved ahead. Recently, he has been promoting a customer system to ask for not only donation but also an investment. The customers pay 10,000 yen a year for 20 oysters to be sent when Yamayo Suisan is able to provide them in the next five years. Also, they keep sending the customers their reports on how their business and oysters have recovered. They really appreciated a closer relationship with their customers. Masayuki-san very kindly treated us with some steamed oysters and Japanese sake. Needless to say, they were great in the coldest weather, or the greatest we had ever had before, flavoured with their passion and endeavor.

### Reiko's home (Sayuri)

Later, Reiko drove us around the island taking us up to the top of the island as the light faded into dusk, then through different coastal areas explaining what had happened as we went. Reiko then invited us into her home. Her husband was sitting silently at the corner by a working desk, while we all settled around the table in the centre of the room. We all relaxed and chatted about how to pour English tea, a topic offered by Reiko-san whilst she prepared tea for us. It was a welcome warm break, removing us momentarily from the thoughts of 3.11. As the conversation drifted back to the events of 3.11 and thereafter, I began a conversation with Reiko-san's husband.

He told me that it was the *sensoh-keikensha*, those who had experienced the last war, who had supported him through the serious days immediately following 3.11. Oshima was completely cut off from the mainland and the islanders sarcastically joked, apparently, that the city mayor had chosen 60,000 over 3,000, referring arbitrarily to the population of mainland Kesennuma city as compared to that of the island. He, like others, had been stunned and immobilized, but it was those old *jiichan*, *baachan* who'd rallied the 'adults' by providing practical advice on how to survive. One such advice was for rice, he told me. Apparently, the islanders buy unmilled rice in scores of kilos and mill them as need arises. Because they had lost electricity after 3.11, they were unable to have milled rice to eat. It hadn't occurred to him that they could use their *mochi* mortars to pound and hence mill the rice, but the wisdom had been passed on from the wartime generation, and despite the experience being tedious and difficult, it had been successful. He had been feeling low, but the older generation would come and scold him and lift him out of depression, he said. He also told me that the spirit of inventiveness caught on, and got to a point where people would be boasting to each other about their creativeness to get various things done.

Many were eating extremely well, too, he told me as he chuckled and explained that the cut off islanders all began to defrost the best catches of the year, stored in their huge freezers for very special occasions, such as New Year's.

Reiko-san's husband had impressed me as a quiet and reserved man, but he had openly and unreservedly shared a part--perhaps just the part that he could talk about with humour--of his mesmerizing experience. I took them in as another dimension to the 3.11 knowledge that was accumulating within me.

We said our goodbyes and then Reiko dropped us off at Kameyamasou Inn. Although the LD SIG visited the same elementary school last year, it was the first time for all five



members, and the headmaster had changed. Clearly it helped that we entered with Reiko-san, a parent of a child attending the school, but also someone who seemed to know almost everyone on the island. I think we had an extra special time at the oyster farm, too, because of Reiko-san. At the same time, she mentioned names of people she had met on our previous trip (Mike –sensei and Bill-sensei), and I became more conscious of the role we each had and will have of building on the impressions and connections made by previous LD SIG Tohoku Outreach members.

### Kameyamasou (Sayuri)

We stayed at [Kameyamasou](#) on our last Tohoku Outreach visit, and it felt good to return to a familiar place with familiar faces. The hallway was cold, just like last year, and other than construction workers, we were the only visitors. Bedrooms and dining rooms, however, were heated up and the full traditional Japanese dinner presented carefully and beautifully was, again, very impressive. As we were leaving the following morning, the owner of the inn told us that there were fewer visitors compared to last year, a worrying situation and such a shame, I thought, as I remembered how pleased the owner's wife looked when she told me about the oysters on the dinner table being from their recovering oyster farm.

## SATURDAY

### A view from Oshima (Andy)

It was still early when we left Kameyamasou, so the son of the owners drove us to the top of Oshima where we could see Kesennuma and the whole geography of the island, landward and seaward. We stood looking out to sea as the son told us his story of 3.11, reliving what had happened that day and in the days afterwards. As with the school director the day before, there were words that were shared, but scenes that only the storyteller could see, as they re-told and re-lived their story. We then drove down to the ferry port, where Reiko and her son met us so that we could take some group photos together. As we arrived in Kesennuma by ferry, it was already snowing.



### Sharing loss and building community (Andy)

Staff at the [Rikuzentakata Tourist Information Office](#) had helped us make contact with Konno-san, the English-speaking guide, back in December, as well as offering other information for useful contacts, so on the Saturday morning we took the opportunity to visit them to say thank you. The Tourist Information Office is at the top of a hill, just a few metres across a small car park from the re-located City Hall. These new buildings are all made of prefab units, and the bus stop for Ichinoseki is just in front of the Tourist Information Office.

Asanuma-san welcomed us and quietly prepared small packets of local information for us, including maps of the Rikuzentakata area and places to see. In a quiet voice, she showed us 'before and after' pairs of photos of what had happened at Rikuzentakata on 3/11. A photograph of a beautiful small city in one photo, with the city washed away in the next. There was one pair of photos that Asanuma-san was holding back, and that she seemed hesitant to show us. These two photos showed the City Hall before and after. Asanuma-san explained how this was where she used to work, and how on 3/11 people had evacuated to the roof. How they had stood there and watched their city being washed away. There was a long silence before she continued and pointed to a three-storey building in front of the old City Hall. This

was where her son had worked. They had said goodbye that morning in the adjacent car park, and she had last seen him helping people evacuate. He was 25 years old, and she never saw him alive again.

The seconds went by, and the silence filled with deepening respect for how she had shared her loss with us. Within ourselves, we each gathered our thoughts, before we slowly started to talk quietly again. Asanuma-san, it turned out, had co-written a book of reflections on 3/11 called ハナミズキのみち / 黒井健絵; 浅沼ミキ子文 (Hanamizuki no michi), and she talked for a few minutes with us about this, as Sayuri explained our interest in helping give children and other people a voice about their experiences. By chance we had found a common interest between us - and a renewed sense of hope for the future.

A few days later, after we had returned to Tokyo, Asanuma-san spoke at the National Memorial Service at the National Theatre on the third anniversary of 3/11. She was one of the three speakers for relatives in the local communities.

Remembering her son and cherishing his memory in her everyday life, Asanuma-san spoke on behalf of the people in Iwate.



## Local tour with Konno-san

### *Bleak times (Andy)*

Our English-speaking guide, Konno-san, said he had never been more depressed about the future than he was at present. His words hung in the air as the snow continued to drift down from the thick grey clouds above. We were coming to the end of a three-hour tour with him, and he had been talking about how the authorities had not listened to the concerns of local residents. All those meetings that Konno-san had attended, all those discussions about how Rikuzentakata might be re-established according to citizen's wishes, they had all come to nothing. The 30 metre high sea protection wall was going to be built, and whole areas of the city would be buried metres deep under earth and rock brought down on a conveyor belt from a nearby mountain that was being leveled off. The conveyor belt dwarfed everything in the sea front area, including the Ipponmatsu, which we would visit on the Sunday. We had met Konno-





san late Saturday morning at the Rikuzentakata Tourist Information Office, a small prefab unit at the top of a hill where a bulldozer was parked for the weekend. It had been moving some soil on the other side of the road. Stationary, it stood like a construction industry guard on what Rikuzentakata has become: a vast flattened area, with building foundations here and there, and huge, neatly laid out piles of soil, gravel, and stone heralding the physical reconstruction now gathering pace.

Earlier that day, in the snow, we had driven along the old roads of Rikuzentakata still crisscrossing the city area, first to the remains of the train station, and then to those of the Sports Centre and Citizens Hall, Kesen Junior High School, and back along the Kesen River to low-lying communities that Konno-san had known all his life, and where his family had lived for generations. "You need to understand the geography before we go to other places", Konno-san explained as we got out at the train station. "The geography first - and the time." We walked through where the entrance area of the station had been, to stand on the platform. Konno-san showed us photos of before. "2:46", he explained, going through timed shots of what had happened in this area over 28, 29 and 30 minutes later. The Sports Centre and Citizens Hall were reinforced structures, at roughly the same distance back from the coast as the train station, and local residents, as instructed, had evacuated to them expecting a half-metre inundation at most. The buildings were at sea level. "3:15, and still no warning of the size of the tsunami that would be coming." At each stop on the tour, Konno-san kept re-connecting the dots on the empty landscape we had been moving through, and with each new timing, the narrative of the impending disaster grew clearer in our minds.



### A powerful connection (Rob)

Our first stop with our English guide, Konno-san, was the site of the former Japan Rail (JR) station at Rikuzentakata. To someone living in Japan, there is probably no other building as central to a town's life than a local train station. It was a location that we could all relate to. We walked along the remnants of the platform with its tattered yellow safety line. We walked along the bare, foundation under the grey sky and stopped at a point where, Konno-san informed us, the tickets had been sold.

These were simple yet powerful reminders that in Rikuzentakata, like all over Japan, people were carrying on with their normal lives when the earthquake occurred and that such a devastating event could indeed happen to anyone of us. How many people were on a train when this disaster struck? How many were working at this station or just walking by this ticket area?

As we left I looked out from the parking lot past the red metal foundation that once held up the JR Rikuzentakata sign



and gazed at the empty field beyond remembering the photograph of the vibrant town that Konno-san had showed us, a town that was now completely gone.

### **Kesen Chugaku (Sayuri)**

Konno-san's tour had taken us to the remains of Kesen Chugaku. Having read the school's children's accounts reflecting on the year since 3.11, the deserted windowless building took on added meaning.



The geographical connection had been made between the 'voices' of the children that spoke of the path, the escape route to higher grounds, and the area just across the waters where the pine trees were being devoured. Some things in the children's accounts became clear to me then, but I also wondered about how much more I did not know or understand about the background of those accounts.

### **A view from high ground (Rob)**

In the latter half of our tour, Konno-san took us to a couple of areas on higher ground where people had both escaped and had witnessed the destruction of their town below. He used pictures of the area taken from the places showing the view before, during and after the disaster giving us an idea of what the people who were there might have seen. Even after visiting these sites in person and seeing exactly where the water had risen up to, it was still difficult to picture the enormity of the tsunami that devastated this area.

One of the most profound moments in the Outreach Weekend came when Konno-san took us to the small hilltop temple, located just behind where his house had stood, and shared his own personal experience of fleeing the destruction below. At the top of the hill Konno-san set up a laptop on the very spot he was standing when the tsunami struck and played back the video footage he had taken at that time. For a brief moment we were seeing what the people who had escaped the tsunami had witnessed. Konno-san's moving stories of that first night of survival along with the images played in front of the still-barren landscape of Rikuzentakata below was a very powerful moment for all of us. He emphasized again how little time





there was for decision making. People on the hill that night had no food, no water, and only the clothes they were wearing. Konno-san also reminded us of the fear they felt as powerful aftershocks continued throughout the night and the survivors wondered if even this location would be safe or not. We stood around Konno-san as he spoke, as light snowflakes fell around us from a cold grey sky. This, Konno-san had said, were the very weather conditions the people had had on March 11th 2011.

Later after we had returned to Tokyo, we found this video on YouTube that Konno-san had made in March 2012:

[Survivor of Rikuzentakata recalls 'nightmare' tsunami](#)



### **Discussing the Kesen Chugaku Translation Project with Musashi-san (Sayuri)**

Later that afternoon we got to the Ofune-ryokan and sat with Musashi-san to discuss the LD SIG's project of translating the accounts of children at Kesen Chugaku, written a year after the 3.11 disaster. At the time of our meeting, Musashi-san was the PTA chair at the junior high school where his daughter, Runa was to graduate this spring. He had asked us to translate the accounts whose original Japanese version had been put together as a bunshu collection to be distributed to the families of the children, Rikuzentakata City Hall, and the local library.

We explained that there were 57 translators involved in this project, both from the LD SIG Tohoku Outreach group and two externally linked groups--ESTEEM and Nagoya International School, and that we had varied in how we worked on the translations--some working with their students, some working on their own, and some working together on each other's translations. We also showed him the confidentiality agreement that we used to ensure children's anonymity. Musashi-san expressed his deep gratitude for all involved and was also interested in looking at the list of names, and reacting to the names of people he knew on the list ("Ah, Alison-sensei! Mike-sensei!").

We also explained that we had gone through the first stage of translating and that we would now need to begin editing, which would involve attending to various details. He expressed an understanding for the work. We also showed him samples of the translation, prepared by the Translation Editors, Mathew Porter and Caroline Ross, and discussed the key issue of where and how the English translations would appear and whether a bilingual presentation would be possible. Musashi-san spent a little time reading through the English translation. He also confirmed that the school had already approved internet exposure of the English translations so they were expecting the translation to be uploaded on the LD SIG Outreach website. However, the idea of having a bilingual version and possibly also in print was new, so he expressed the need to discuss it with the school.

### **Ofune-ryokan (Mayumi)**

There were a few photo books on the counter at the front desk, and the owner of Ofune-ryokan picked up one of them and opened it. Showing the inn itself in a panoramic view of the city center of Rikuzentakata washed away by muddy waters of the tsunami on 3.11, he quietly began to talk about the day. The inn had been previously located five minutes' walk from the Takada-no Matsubara along the beach before 3.11. He soon noticed the possible danger of a tsunami and led his guests away to be evacuated, before also driving up to a town center with his family. Soon after, the tsunami hit the city with a furious force beyond imagination, and the inn was swept away with other buildings and houses. Because of their



*quick decision, it was a small consolation for the owner that no one in his family had died. This episode reminded me of what Musashi-san had told us as a crucial lesson from the tsunami. Many of those who lived near the sea promptly escaped before the tsunami came, whereas some of those who were at some distance back could not see the sea and failed to escape in an unguarded moment. The latter never thought that the tsunami would get over the seawall and reach what seemed to be their distant area.*

*Only three out of the seven inns and hotels remained in Rikuzentakata after 3.11. The owner of Ofune-ryokan was afraid that the number of visitors to Rikuzentakata would drop more and more with such a limited capacity for accommodation. Living in a temporary housing unit, he began to consider restarting his business, and in spite of being in his seventies and suffering from a chronic illness, he decided to reconstruct a new inn. In August 2013, the new Ofune-ryokan was reopened on a different higher area a few kilometres back along the coast road to Kesennuma. Since the inn was very popular among participants in a bicycle road race that had been held for years in Rikuzentakata before 3.11, many messages of congratulation for their reopening can be seen on the Internet, too. Speaking falteringly in an Iwate dialect, the old owner had a calm dignity in overcoming hardships after 3.11.*

## SUNDAY

### *A symbol of hope (Rob)*

*On the Sunday morning we left the Ofune Ryokan to get to our next appointment at the city library. As our taxi rounded a coastal hill and Rikuzentakata began to drift into view, Mayumi turned to me and said, “Look there it is, the Ippon Matsu”. Instantly recognizable, the Ippon Matsu, or, in English, Miracle Pine, was a tree that somehow survived the Tsunami as the sea-side pine grove of nearly 70,000 trees that stood around it was washed away. The city government has preserved the tree as a symbol of hope for the town.*

*There can, of course, be some controversy in spending money on preserving such a tree. The tree did eventually die due to the excessive salt water it was exposed to after the tsunami and now exists as a facsimile. However, looking at the branding that the city has done with this image, and the fact that it is an easily recognizable image of survival and hope can make it an essential image for people outside of the area that work still needs to be done. Even the retelling of the story can generate interest. Hopefully, when used properly to promote the town and remind people that Rikuzentakata is indeed working to recover from the effects of the Tsunami, the symbol of the Ippon Matsu can be used to heighten awareness, garner support, and raise funds for the area.*



### Creating communities of readers (Andy)

In our thank you letter to the people at [Rikuzentakata City Library](#), we made a point of mentioning how as teachers we valued the work of librarians in creating communities, especially communities of readers. Although we spent only a short time at the library (it's the log cabin building at the back in the group photo), we were all impressed by the welcoming atmosphere inside the library, and the beautiful way in which the library was organised. Over a year before several Learner Development SIG members had donated a few hundred story books and textbooks for Rikuzentakata communities. We had given six boxes of textbooks to the SEELS school in Sendai in March 2013, but had been unsure of who to make the donation of the remaining 140 or so storybooks to, so the Sunday morning meeting with Kanno-san and Hasegawa-san offered a welcome opportunity to see what would be appropriate.



We sat down around a large reading table together and looked at different books that we had brought along - some small graded readers, and other larger storybooks. Musashi-san, Runa and Yui joined us a little later, and for several minutes, we were all just sitting there, leafing through, and talking in two's and three's, about books and reading experiences.

The next week, a few days after we returned to Tokyo, we heard that Rikuzentakata City Library would like to have hard-backed books only as these would be robust enough for repeated lending, so we put a box of 12 books together and sent them off. Kanno-san was particularly interested in bilingual storybooks, and we were able to include a story by Kenji Miyazawa. Later we started wondering if a future LD Outreach project might involve creating bilingual storybooks of local people's experiences and lives.

### Local tour with Musashi-san and children

#### Kesen Elementary School (Mayumi)

From the library, we joined Musashi-san, Runa and Yui in a minibus to become familiar with other places in Rikuzentakata. We first visited a reclaimed area where Kesen Elementary School and Yui's house had once stood. Yui had been in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade when the earthquake happened. The teachers had made a quick and prompt decision for all the children to be evacuated to a mountain behind the school. They had run up through a mountain path, not a regular route on the seaside, and thanks to this decision, they all could escape safely from the tsunami. Musashi-san mentioned that they might have been carried away by the water if they had used the more regular route to get away from the school. The school and Yui's house had been washed away. When Runa asked Yui in a low voice if she had seen people being washed away at that time, she seemed to make a small nod. Runa didn't say anything about that... It was hard to imagine how tough such an experience had been for children. I felt guilty



somehow for being there with them, but also wished that our time with them could be of some help in releasing their negative feelings three years after the disaster. I realized that it was extremely important but equally difficult for us adults or visitors from outside to consider deeply children's feelings and their growth process when we directly communicate with them about 3.11.

### **The Musashi's house (Mayumi)**

Musashi-san drove up to a hill through a relatively narrow and long affected area from the sea. He and Runa pointed to an empty site and said that their house had once been there... Since he had newly built it three years before the earthquake, some parts of the original structure had survived the tsunami. However, the height of the land above sea level was too low for a new building to be deemed disaster-proof and the remains had been completely torn down as a result. Even though his new house is now being built on a higher area of ground, there has been a huge ongoing administrative issue about relocating houses or facilities in Rikuzentakata as well as in other affected areas. The regulations and restrictions seemed in some ways too complicated to promote reconstruction, let alone 'living safely from natural disasters'.

### **Osabe Elementary School (Mayumi)**

We drove further up the hill and parked the minibus near Osabe Elementary School, where Runa had been in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade when the earthquake occurred. When a foreshock had happened (although nobody knew at the time that it was sign of a greater earthquake to come) two days before the earthquake, the school announced to parents that they should come to school to pick up their children in such an emergency. That's why, on 3.11, Runa's grandmother went to the school instead of her parents, who were working at different places, and they tried to get back home going 'down' the hill from the school. On their way right near their house they found the tsunami coming up towards them. Runa said that she had screamed in a terrible panic and turned back with her grandmother. They escaped and were later evacuated to a town center further away, without knowing where Musashi-san and his wife were. Three days later they at last met up with Runa's mother, and a week later with her father. Musashi-san pointed out that the children should have stayed at the school 'up on the hill'. A crucial lesson about tremendous earthquakes should be always to provide and secure a safe evacuation route, as well as to escape immediately from the sea to higher ground. Three years on, the lesson may be obvious, but I couldn't help wondering how many people would be able to prepare properly and actually act that way the next time.

### **Looking again at the Ipponmatsu (Mayumi)**

"The tree is artificial now", Runa observed, "so it is totally different from the beautiful pine trees in the Takada-no Matsubara", which, apart from a few odd stumps here and there, had been completely wiped away by the tsunami. We were standing by the tree, in front of the ruined youth hostel, the sun shining, with people coming and going around us all the time, taking photos of the symbolic tree. There were pros and cons, Musashi-san commented, to the tree's preservation for local people in Rikuzentakata. Costs had already come to more than 150 million yen. "The pine tree is already dead whilst we are still alive," he said. The replica itself appeared to be the only overwhelmingly memorial image in Rikuzentakata. It





served to remind outsiders of the 70,000 lost pine trees that had previously lined the beautiful white sandy beach. Yet, at the same time, I felt that the sea, the vast devastated area, and the monstrously large construction works offered a sad and stark contrast to this monument to what had been lost.

### Kesen Daiku Sakan Denshoukan 気仙大工左官伝承館 (Andy)

From here we drove back inland and uphill to an area, where some temporary restaurants had been constructed. Many people coming into the restaurant were dressed in mourning clothes, as third anniversary ceremonies were taking place that Sunday. We had a ramen lunch together, and then Musashi-san drove us up to the top of Hakone Mountain where we visited a straw-thatched house that was being restored.

The guide to the house, a woman by the name of Musashi-san, welcomed us and explained the history of this impressive building. It had provided shelter and warmth on 3.11 and in the days afterwards for those people living and working on the mountain. We sat in a circle in one of tatami rooms, and Musashi-san explained to us in detail her own story. Again, we listened and noticed how such sharing of stories was part of the recurrent community building that we were witness to. At a later time we hope to come back to Musashi-san's story and others that we recorded as part of LD's continuing Tohoku Outreach projects.

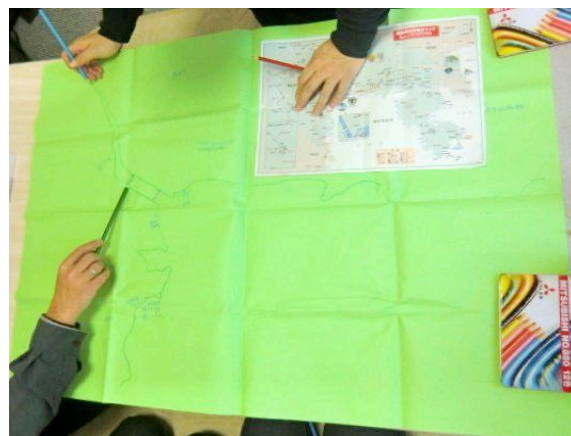
Having said our thank yous and goodbyes, we drove back down to sea level and then along through the valley behind Rikuzentakata to Musashi-san's temporary housing unit.

### Mapping (Ted)

I sometimes find a blank page a bit daunting, but usually it's just A4. At the end of our visit, in the Sunday afternoon, we all sat around a gigantic sheet of paper in Musashi-san's house to begin creating a map--not just of the places we saw--but of experiences and memories. At first, I wasn't sure how this would work. Luckily, we had one person with some design experience with us. Rob sketched in the basic outline of the harbor and river and gave us just enough structure to begin.

Runa and her father were a great team. She did most of the drawing and writing and bounced ideas off her Dad. He pitched in too and Runa was careful to direct him to use the correct colors. Slowly, the many places we visited started to fill the poster.

And, as the map emerged, I realized I had more questions about where we had been and where we hadn't. Where was the Musashi's home? How far above sea level? How far from the coast? All of the details started to emerge and with them some understanding of how people live in Rikuzentakata. Detailed knowledge of the geography and specifics of elevation and distance are just part of life.



*Time was short, and we couldn't add everything we wanted. Comments and feelings take time to form and write down. So, with the contributions from Runa and Musashi-san, we folded the paper and went to the bus station. Over the next two weeks, we sent the poster around to each member of the group to add our own memories of the trip. Getting it down in purple or brown colored pencil was very different from the black and white of word processing screen. The map allowed us a little more freedom and less need to connect each feeling or memory as in writing. Spread all over the map, each one different from the others, the reflections were each in perfect geographical context.*

*Which, reminds me of one of the lessons from our guide Konno-san. He was always so careful to establish where we were at each stop of our tour. Understanding the geography of the city was key to understanding the terrible past events and the developing future of the community. Geography was destiny for so many in Rikuzentakata, dictating who would survive. And, in the next stage the utterly changed geography of the city will dictate how people's lives change.*

## CLOSING REFLECTIONS

### *Impressions from a second visit (Sayuri)*

*There was clearly a different impression this year for me, perhaps because it was a return visit, perhaps because it was one year on, but much had to do with meeting many local people who had experienced the disaster directly. Last year, I had met many NGO staff (Asobi-ba, Shanti, Community Centre) and a non-local school deputy principal (Omoso Chugaku), who all gave us an abundance of knowledge and objective views that only third parties could at the time provide, and one survivor who gave us a distressing account of his experience. This time, almost all the people we met were directly affected and the continuous awareness and sensitivity whilst being engaged with them was an emotionally strenuous experience. It may have been three years on, but when they spoke about the day and the days that followed, they were living in the present, and perhaps will continue to do so when referring to 3.11. To add to this, that the decisions for reconstruction were a source of frustration for some and causing them anguish was hard to bear, and I was just the listener. However, the words of the lady I met on the local Oofunato line rang true, as I noticed how willing people were to speak about their experiences. Perhaps I can think of myself, the listener, as part of a chain of memories being transmitted that in the end spreads proof of the events and lives of people affected by 3.11.*

*On a more tangible level, another aspect that contributed to a different experience was that we had begun a specific project in support for a local school, the Kesen Chugaku translation project. Whereas last year we were visitors there to "learn about how different individuals and organisations in Tohoku wish to develop their communities in the future - and how Learner Development SIG members may be able to contribute over the longer term" (<http://ld-sig.org/Outreach/#tohoku>), this year the project and the connections we nurtured over the year made it easier for the people we met for the first time to understand the purpose of our visit and commitment.*

## Narratives of human recovery (Andy)

*Through the weekend, we struggled at times to comprehend what we were seeing and hearing. We were confronted time and again with stories of the disaster. We heard of multiple dislocations that have re-occurred in people's lives and in their shifting communities as they have moved from being homeless to living in evacuation shelters, from shelters to temporary housing, and then from temporary housing to new homes (... or not). As we came to grasp how communities had been swept away and dispersed, we were struck how the reconstruction effort is in different places going to wall off the sea or bury under metres of earth the land where people lived for generations so that the ground level can be raised to create safety for future communities. But how will community itself be saved? Through listening and bearing witness, we started to realise that the sharing of stories is, in some small way, a fragile but resilient part of a much deeper and complex process of grieving, honouring memories, making sense of the powerful disorientations of the present - and of creating shared hope for the future.*



## Acknowledgment

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### NGO OUTREACH NGOアウトリーチ

NGO Outreach aims to facilitate collaboration among students, NGOs, and teachers. At the Learner Development SIG's 20th Anniversary Conference the first year of the NGO Outreach programme culminated in an NGO Forum, Learning through social engagement - Pathways to collaboration with NGOs, involving representatives and student volunteers from the following NGOs: Shanti Volunteer Association, Free the Children Japan, Japan Tent, and Shine On! Kids. Student volunteers from ACE NGO also took part in the NGO display at the conference. We hope to expand the programme as more SIG members become involved, more contacts are made with NGOs, and our ideas about NGO Outreach develop further.

NGOアウトリーチの支援活動は、生徒、NGO団体と教師たちのコラボレーション活動を促進することを目標とします。学習者ディベロプメント研究部会の創設20周年記念大会では、NGOアウトリーチプログラムの一年目の成果として多くのNGO団体代表や学生ボランティアの参加のもと、NGOフォーラム「社会参加活動を通しての学び—NGO団体とのコラボレーション活動への道筋」が発表されました。参加NGO団体は、シャンティ国際ボランティア会、フリー・ザ・チルドレン・ジャパン、ジャパン・テント、シャイン・オン！キッズでした。NGOのACE（エース）からも学生ボランティアがNGOディスプレイで参加しました。今後研究部会メンバーの参加が増え、NGO団体とのつながりが深まり、私たちのNGOアウトリーチ支援活動の考えが発展していくように、この活動プログラムを展開していきたいと思っています。