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Community and Citizenship in Post-Disaster Japan: The Roles of Schools and Students

In March 2011, a triple earthquake-tsunami-nuclear disaster rocked north-eastern Japan. In this article, the impact of these three disasters on schools, teachers and children will be analysed, with a particular focus on the role of teachers in saving lives and leading communities, and the role of schools as sites and agents of community and citizenship in the disaster situation. The article is structured around four themes, namely, the role of school leaders and teachers, the role of schools as sites of community, changing media representations of children and communities in the wider national context, and the birth of global citizenship as a meaningful concept. Primary data from visits to schools in Miyagi Prefecture and Fukushima Prefecture in Japan in July 2011 and December 2011 are combined with analysis of secondary sources written in Japanese to paint a clear picture of the different roles served by teachers and schools at different points in time during and after the disasters. This provides insights not only into post-disaster communities, but also into the role of teachers and function of schools as agents and sites of community and citizenship in Japanese society.

Keywords
Japan, earthquake, tsunami, nuclear disaster, school leadership, post-disaster, community, local citizenship, global citizenship

1 Introduction

On 11 March 2011, the north-eastern region of Japan was rocked by a triple earthquake-tsunami-nuclear disaster. Damage to children's schools, their families and their lives was immense. The aim of this article is to examine the multiple ways in which teachers acted and schools functioned as agents of community and sites of citizenship in the year after the disasters.

2 Setting the Scene

At 2.46pm on Friday 11th March in Japan, most children were still in school. Some of the younger children, the 6 to 8 year olds, were just setting off home in their walking groups. That was the moment that one of the strongest earthquakes ever recorded, measuring 9.0 on the Richter Scale,

struck off the north-east coast of Japan. Earthquakes are not unusual in Japan, and children and their teachers hold regular drills and know what to do. Children across a wide area of Japan from south of Tokyo to the northernmost island of Hokkaido ducked under their desks to protect themselves from falling objects and flying debris. Teachers reassured them, although the length and strength of the earthquake, off the scale in terms of previous experience for most children, scared everyone. As the shaking stopped, children followed the standard procedure of filing outside to the school grounds. Many of the groups of younger children that had just started heading home returned to school.

For most, the worst was over. For some, it was still to come. Within 3 minutes, a major tsunami warning was issued for most of the east coast of Japan north of Tokyo. Some schools in the danger zone were still connected to news sources, while others were warned by town broadcast systems, fire and police officers or by word of mouth. Parents and grandparents started arriving at schools to collect their children. School principals and teachers up and down the eastern coast of Japan were faced with the most critical decision of their careers, namely, what action to take to save the lives of the hundreds of children in their care. No school had a contingency plan for a tsunami as big as the one that struck the coast that Friday afternoon, taking the lives of over 19,000 people and destroying or seriously damaging over 350,000 homes (National Police Agency 2011).

Thousands of children saw the tsunami with their own eyes, and many saw their families, friends and homes torn away in the tidal wave of debris, cars, electricity pylons and water. Furthermore, the tsunami was recorded on live TV by helicopter cameras, watched not only by adults, but by hundreds of thousands of children and young people throughout Japan. Most of the footage shown as it happened has never been shown on television since, as it is too horrifying. The effects of experiencing disasters indirectly are significant and long-term (Houston et al. 2008), and will continue to be felt by many people for many years.

As the tsunami receded and the sheer scale of destruction started to sink in, another disaster was unfolding. Like schools, nuclear power plants did not have a contingency plan for a tsunami of this size. As the back-up generators failed and radiation started to leak, residents within 3km of Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Reactor were ordered to evacuate, and this order was soon extended to residents within 10km and then 20km. By Saturday morning, residents were sat in traffic queues for hours, heading to the other side of the invisible safety line, exposed to unknown amounts of radiation, escaping from their homes with a few belongings and nowhere to go. One year later, in March 2012, tens of thousands of people had still not been able to go home.

In this article, the impact of these three disasters on schools, teachers and children will be analysed, with a particular focus on the role of teachers and the role of schools as sites and agents of community and citizenship in the disaster situation. The article is structured around four themes, namely, the role of school leaders and teachers, the role of schools as sites of community, changing media representations of children and young people in the wider national community, and the birth of global citizenship as a meaningful concept. Primary data were collected during two periods of

visits to schools in Miyagi Prefecture and Fukushima Prefecture in Japan in July 2011 and December 2011. These visits involved observations, 7 semi-structured interviews with school leaders and teachers who had experienced the disasters directly, 5 focus group interviews with small groups of 3-8 children, and collection of documents such as student work and class, school and town newsletters. These primary data were supplemented by analysis of secondary sources written in Japanese, including newspapers, collections of experiences, collections of student essays and other documents. Analysis of these diverse sources of evidence using principles of grounded theory to elicit categories paints a clear picture of the different roles served by schools at different points in time during and after the disasters, providing insights not only into post-disaster communities, but also into the role of teachers and function of schools as agents and sites of community and citizenship in Japanese society.

3 The Role of School Leaders and Teachers

To a greater extent than most other countries prone to natural disasters, Japan has a high level of disaster readiness in terms of technology, infrastructure and public awareness. Schools in particular are considered to be safe places in a disaster, both because of their structure and because they serve a dual role as evacuation shelters in the case of disasters, a role that is central to the discussion in this article. School furniture is designed in such a way as to provide protection in the case of an earthquake, in the form of individual desks with space underneath for the whole body, and school classrooms almost always have two exits so that people do not become trapped if doors or windows warp in the earthquake. Children and teachers in schools engage in regular earthquake drills, and are accustomed to experiencing earthquakes. Still, the force and length of this particular earthquake frightened everyone, as this 6-year old from Fukushima Prefecture describes, jumping off his chair onto the floor to demonstrate his words as he spoke:

> "We were under the desks but the desks were moving across the floor and I couldn't hold on, and it didn't stop, and my friends were crying and I banged my head one, two, three times like this. It hurt…. It was scary."

Although the Great East Japan Earthquake was the most powerful earthquake ever to strike Japan, there were no reported fatalities of children in schools directly attributable to the earthquake. This is a tribute to the disaster-preparedness and calm reaction of school leaders, teachers and children in Japan. Schools remained standing, and teachers stayed calm, reassured children, and made sure they stayed safe.

As far as preparedness for a tsunami is concerned, most schools near the coast are built on higher ground, and are at least two storeys high. Most schools close to the coast also have a tsunami evacuation plan. Apart from

this, schools rely on their city or town's coastal defences. Much of the Japanese coastline is protected by huge concrete walls and blocks to break the force of a tsunami. These reinforcements are especially strong near the nuclear power stations. What nobody predicted in this case was the size and reach of the tsunami. Many buildings designated as tsunami evacuation shelters, some of them schools, were hit by the tsunami (Asahi Shimbun 22 March 2011).

Knowing they had less than 30 minutes to act, reliant on unstable communications and conflicting information, and unaware of the size of the approaching tsunami, school principals and teachers along the coast faced the critical decision of whether to attempt to move hundreds of children in their care to higher ground or to take the risk of staying where they were. The situation was further complicated by the arrival of many parents and local residents, fleeing their homes to the schools, which were their local evacuation centres. Throughout the affected area, regardless of their own personal circumstances, teachers stayed in school to look after their pupils rather than leaving to ensure the safety of themselves or their own families. This was true beyond the worst affected area too, as communications and transport networks were disrupted over a wide area of Japan. Many children in Tokyo and across eastern Japan stayed in schools overnight, looked after by teachers until the situation normalised and their parents could collect them safely. Throughout the area, schools and universities also opened their buildings to anyone who could not get home. This in itself is a reflection of the degree of pastoral responsibility of schools, and of teachers as key citizens of the local community in Japan. In a number of cases, most not recorded, teachers did indeed lose family members in the tsunami as they took care of children in schools, and are left not knowing whether there is anything they could have done to prevent this (Shibui et al. 2011, 24).

In the vast majority of cases, school leaders made the right decisions to save the lives of children in schools. For example, at a large elementary school several hundred metres from the sea in Ishinomaki, one of the cities hardest hit by the tsunami, the principal decided to risk staying in school and moving all children and teachers to the roof. The tsunami hit the school, but did not reach the third floor, and all children in school care were safe. In the next town, school leaders decided to flee with the children, and an 8-year old girl in a school in Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, describes what happened in an essay that captures the urgency of the situation as well as the sense of school as a community.

> "When the earthquake struck, I was having fun doing my homework with my friends at school. Our teacher was in the classroom. He was standing on a chair taking drawing pins out of the wall. It was just like any other day after classes finish, but then the earthquake came. Everyone in the classroom got under the desks straight away. Teacher was calling out to us, "Whatever you do, don't put your heads out from under the desk." I thought the earthquake would stop but it just kept going, and then I thought the school was going to collapse and I was scared that we weren't going to survive. [When it stopped] the Assistant Head came running to the classroom and shouted, "Get out quickly!" I ran outside without putting my coat on. Then the people in the playground said a

> tsunami was coming, so we ran to the community hall on higher ground. I didn't have a coat, so I borrowed a blanket from the community hall and huddled under it with my friend. Then there was this huge, crashing, roaring noise and when we looked behind, the tsunami was already up to the front of the community hall. We ran to even higher ground, and the tsunami didn't come that far, so we stayed there, but I was so scared. The teacher said, "Get into your year groups, and if your parents are here, stay with your parents," so I looked for people in my class and we got together. Some of my friends already had their mums and dads there, and I wondered when my mum would come. She didn't come for ages, and I was very scared that she had drowned in the tsunami. Then at last she came, and I felt safe..." (Mori 2011).

Many children were not reunited with their parents for several days, as communications and transport systems were not operational, and bridges and roads were broken or impassable. Teachers looked after cold, hungry, frightened children in schools where there was no food, no electricity, no heating and no water until family members could get to them. Parents believed that their children would be safe in the care of the school and, in the vast majority of cases, school leaders and teachers were able to live up to this trust. The tragic exception was Okawa Elementary School, a small school located several kilometres inland in Ishinomaki City, where indecision followed by wrong decision led to 74 of the 108 children and 10 of 13 teachers dying or going missing in the tsunami.

The total number of children between the ages of 6 and 18 killed or missing in the disaster was 536 (Japan Times 29 April 2011). Most of these were children who had already left school before or just after the earthquake, and the number of children killed or missing whilst in school care was actually very low. The Iwate Board of Education, among others, has speculated that the death toll among children could have been much higher if the earthquake and tsunami had occurred an hour later, when children were not in school (Japan Times 29 April 2011). The responses and actions of teachers along a coastline the distance of London to Edinburgh undoubtedly saved the lives of tens of thousands of children that afternoon. The sense of school as a community, evident in the well-practised earthquake response, the crisis decision-making of principals and teachers, the willingness of children to trust their teachers and the commitment of teachers to protecting the children, all contributed to minimization of the loss of life in schools on 11th March.

With the scale of devastation so huge, it took several days for relief efforts to start to take effect. During this period, teachers were often managing the evacuation shelters in extremely difficult conditions. Accounts written by children of these first days tend to highlight the intense cold and hunger most of them experienced, probably for the first time in their lives. Teachers themselves went without food, as this elementary school teacher describes:

> "A little bit of food came, but not enough. Everyone shared, but of course we teachers did not receive any, because we were in charge."

The role of teachers in managing evacuation shelters meant that some teachers near the nuclear power stations in Fukushima Prefecture did not have chance to return home before being evacuated. One elementary school teacher described in an interview how she stayed in school until all the children had been collected by their parents, which was 11pm on 11th March. By this time, residents from the tsunami-affected area of the town were filling the school, and the teachers switched to community leader role, taking on the task of clearing fallen objects and broken glass from classrooms to accommodate evacuees, and of trying to obtain and share out blankets and food. Early the next morning, everyone in the school was told to evacuate immediately because of the nuclear danger, and teachers were in charge of organising transport and making sure everyone left the school safely, before leaving together themselves two hours later, sharing cars. This teacher did not have chance to go home between the earthquake and evacuation, but had to flee the town with nothing more than her purse, mobile phone and the clothes she was wearing.

The reconstruction of school communities is discussed in more detail in the next section, but one long-term role that teachers in the affected area have now taken on is responsibility for monitoring the mental health of children who experienced the disasters. Most Japanese schools do not have school counsellors or specific guidelines for mental health care, and there has not yet been any systematic form of post-disaster educational intervention as sometimes occurs in other countries (Wolmer et al. 2005). As teachers are the only providers of mental health care available to the majority of children, this extension to the already significant pastoral role assumed by teachers as class teachers adds to their responsibility as key figures in the school community and also in the wider local community.

Traditionally in Japan, the teacher is a respected figure in the community, with high status and significant moral and social responsibility, although recent years have seen a wave of blaming schools and teachers for a variety of social problems among young people (Okano, Tsuchiya 1999, 157). As in most of East Asia, there is no need to justify the linking of moral and civic/citizenship education as happens in other parts of the world (e.g. Beck 1998), as the two are assumed to be inseparable and teachers are supposed to act as the personification of the end result. The assumption of the moral and civic responsibility of saving lives, protecting children and other community members and then serving as leaders in community relief efforts was not even questioned by the majority of teachers after these disasters and, indeed, from 1947 to 2006, was enshrined in Article 6 of the Basic Act on Education as key to their identity:

> "Teachers of the schools prescribed by law shall be servants of the whole community. They shall be conscious of their mission and endeavor to discharge their duties. For this purpose, the status of teachers shall be respected and their fair and appropriate treatment shall be guaranteed." (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology undated).

While the reference to teachers being servants of the community was removed in the 2006 revision of the 1947 Basic Act on Education and the

roles that many teachers fulfilled after the disaster were not part of their official job description, such roles clearly still constitute part of what it means to be a teacher and key member of the community in Japan. Ishida (2011) explains the role played by teachers during and after the disaster.

> "If teachers had not worked so hard, it is hard to imagine how much greater the scale of the disaster would have been. In spite of the "teacher bashing" and negative publicity about schools that has gone on for a long time, teachers put everything they had into the education and care of children, and also took care of residents in the evacuation shelters. The number who have died of overwork is not insignificant." (Ishida 2011, 97).

In this way, the impact of the disaster has been to reinforce the traditional role of teachers as key community figures ready to take the lead when normal local administration structures break down. Simultaneously, the traditionally valued traits of the teacher in society have also been highlighted, both by teachers themselves and by the wider community and media. Dedication to the role appears in the way teachers protected children's lives and subsequently gave everything to serving the community and their schools, in spite of losing their own homes and often family members, friends and acquaintances. Self-sacrifice is seen in the accounts of teachers distributing food and blankets without taking any for themselves. Although these traits are not generally discussed or highlighted under normal circumstances, it is these traits that are identified by individuals as being part of their teacher role and by the media and wider community as being evident after the disaster. In various ways, then, the disaster has served to underline the traditional view of the teacher that had been eroded to a certain degree in recent years, that is, the teacher as a dedicated, upstanding member of the local community, both as a form of self-identification among teachers themselves and as a professional identity in the wider community.

4 The Roles of Schools as Communities and Sites of Citizenship

The role played by schools as focal sites of community was already apparent immediately after the disaster, as local residents fled to schools for refuge. This role really came to the fore from the day after the disaster. As mentioned above, most public schools in Japan serve a function as evacuation shelters in the case of emergencies. The scale of this disaster meant that schools throughout the area were soon overflowing with people who had lost their homes. For the first few days, there was very little food, no electricity and no water in schools in the worst-affected areas. This account, written by a 12-year old girl who had seen the tsunami flood the school playground from a 2nd floor classroom in her school, describes the situation in the first few days.

> "A few hours after the tsunami, the teachers came and gave out crème brulee desserts and drinks. It tasted so good. From the next day, there was hardly any food, so we would get quarter of a slice of bread, and we were always hungry. That lasted for a few days, but gradually people left and there were less people at school. We had been sleeping in the corridor, but then we could move into a classroom. The classroom was warmer than the corridor, and we could sleep much better. But there was no electricity or water, and so we went to sleep at 6pm because it was pitch black by then." (Mori 2011).

Children, like adults, were shocked and traumatised by their experience. Notably, however, it was children in the evacuation shelters who started to recover first in many cases, displaying incredible resilience, and this is an aspect of post-disaster community in Japan that was prominent in media representation in the weeks and months after the earthquake. Part of the reason that children were able to take this lead in the recovery could be the fact that they were in familiar surroundings, despite being in a very unfamiliar situation, as many of them were living in their own schools. The following two examples exemplify the important role played by young people in their school and wider communities as initiators of recovery.

The first example was reported in a local newspaper, the Kahoku Shinpou, on 15 March, just 4 days after the disaster. The headline reads "High school victims fight on: Cheerful voices support local residents" (Kahoku Shinpousha 2011, 35). The photo shows a line of high school students serving portions of food to younger children and elderly residents at their high school in Iwate prefecture, which was being used as an evacuation shelter for 900 people. The article describes how students of the school, aged 15 to 18, immediately took a lead role in organising daily life in the evacuation shelter after the administrative function of the town was completely destroyed, with the town office swallowed up in the tsunami, and the mayor and many of the town office workers missing. Students autonomously organised themselves into teams to make and serve food, get water, clean and so on. A student whose father was still missing describes how it is easier to forget when she is being useful and working with her friends. One of the teachers, who was also living at the school evacuation shelter, is quoted as saying, "The students think for themselves and take action before the teachers ask them to do anything. I am so proud of them." Obviously, students had never had any experience of managing an evacuation shelter, or any training for this role, and the way that students in this school and in other school evacuation shelters took on such responsibilities and organised themselves and the work that needed doing so efficiently can be attributed in part at least to their years of experience as active citizens in their school communities. Children in Japanese schools take considerable responsibility for the smooth functioning of the school as a community in normal times, working in teams and committees to manage classroom duties, clean the school, serve lunch, look after school grounds, broadcast announcements and music to the school, promote health among students and so on (Parmenter, Mizutani, Taniguchi 2006). The vast majority of Japanese schools do not employ auxiliary staff such as cleaners, gardeners or lunch attendants, as teachers and students do all this work as

part of school life, through an efficient system of rotas and collaboration. For many teachers and older students, classes were replaced by the work of managing an emergency community service and facility in the days and weeks following the disaster. While this was not a role they had ever prepared for, the routines of ordinary school life, which are shared across Japan and were therefore familiar to every single person staying in the shelter who had attended school in Japan, were transposed and adapted to create routines of evacuation shelter life very quickly and efficiently. In this respect, the role of school as a community and the role of school in the community merged to produce evacuation shelters as sites where the familiar routines and rhythms of school citizenship education were effectively practiced to ensure maximum wellbeing under difficult circumstances for all concerned.

The second example comes from an evacuation shelter in a school in Kesennuma, a city badly affected by the tsunami and fires after the earthquake. Risa, a 7-year old girl in the evacuation shelter, decided to start a newspaper, called "Fight Newspaper," for the evacuation shelter, explaining in her own words,

> "I love writing and drawing pictures, and mummy and daddy are happy when I write for them. I wanted to write letters to everyone in the evacuation shelter, but there was no pretty paper. I don't know anyone here, and nobody is happy. There were some big sheets of white paper so I decided to make a newspaper to make everyone feel better. When people read it, they praised me and they smiled and they talked to me, and I felt happy too." (Fight Shimbunsha 2011, 10).

Other children of all ages soon joined Risa, subscribing to the newspaper policy of being "cheerful", and they formed a team to produce "Fight Newspaper" in the form of a large sheet of paper posted on the school wall every day from 18th March, just one week after the earthquake and tsunami. On 18th March, Risa's contribution was, "Everyone here at Kesennuma Elementary School has suffered a lot over the past few days, but let's not give up! We are going to try our hardest" (Fight Shimbunsha 2011, 13). In the weeks that followed, the young reporters recorded their excitement as electricity and water were restored, they received sweets from the Self Defence Forces, new food supplies arrived, stationary and toys were sent by wellwishers from other parts of Japan, school resumed and famous people came to visit their school evacuation shelter. In this way, it was the children in the evacuation centre who made the first move to actively seek and find a way of creating a community out of the hundreds of homeless people thrown together in cramped conditions in the school, and then worked to encourage this community to start looking forwards beyond the shock and loss they had suffered. This was not only effective, but also very much appreciated by adults, and it has become a symbol of the agency of young people as active citizens in the post-disaster months, with copies of the daily newspaper compiled into a book that has been sold nationwide (Fight Shimbunsha 2011). In November 2011, three copies of the original handwritten newspapers were preserved in permanent form by Seiko Epson Japan, with one copy to be kept in the children's hometown, one copy to be

circulated around schools throughout Japan, and one copy to be displayed at UNESCO headquarters in Paris (Asahi Shimbun 25 November 2011). This powerful example of the way in which an active citizenship initiative by one child can create and impact a community at both the local and national levels is now part of the national memory of the 3/11 disaster.

In the immediate phase, food and shelter provided by schools as evacuation centres were the main priorities, but ensuring that schools could start functioning as school communities again was a widespread concern from a very early stage. In many cases where schools were being used as evacuation shelters, and where electricity and water had not been fully restored, there was no option but to postpone the start of the new school year, which usually begins in the first week of April. The opening ceremonies of schools in the worst-affected areas, widely reported in the press and on television, were hailed as first steps in recovery, and boosted morale throughout the region. They also made a huge difference to children, with an elementary school principal in Ishinomaki City describing the "total transformation in children" the day school resumed in temporary classrooms borrowed from another school. The principal said that he had never understood the power of education as acutely as at that time, when children stopped looking at debris and could return to the routine of school. The important role of education in emergency situations has been analysed in detail in literature on conflict and post-conflict situations, and the argument made by Cahill (2010, 3) applies equally to post-disaster situations:

> "Education is a manifestation of society's belief that somehow, someday, somewhere there will be a life after the near death that children experience in conflict and post-conflict situations."

The security of returning to school study in a suddenly insecure world, even if that means a return to dreaded tests and homework, is evident in many of the children's accounts, too, such as this comment by a 13-year old girl in the Fight Newspaper on 24th April, just after schools finally reopened in Kesennuma:

> "We've got tests tomorrow! I am no good at science and English, so I'll be really happy if I get 80%. Then we'll get our Japanese test back and we've got all 6 classes and club activities. I am so, so, so looking forward to it!" (Fight Shimbunsha 2011, 99).

By June, the number of schools being used as evacuation shelters was down to 124 schools (Omori 2011, 57), and plans for rebuilding schools affected by the tsunami were well underway. In Fukushima prefecture, however, many of the children displaced out of the nuclear exclusion zone still had no place to live, and no community to belong to. In focus group discussions conducted in December 2011 with children from Namie town who had had to leave their homes within the exclusion zone the morning after the earthquake and had not been back since, children compared notes on how many times they had moved from shelter to shelter. Most had moved three or four times between March and September, and some had moved five or six times. Because people living near the nuclear power plant had to leave their homes so quickly, most went wherever they could, and a year later are

scattered throughout Japan, living with relatives, renting accommodation, or living in temporary housing. At the time of the focus group interviews, the majority of the children who participated were living in temporary housing erected on a sports ground in a town just outside the nuclear exclusion zone. In this situation, one of the priorities for the town's elementary school, which reopened in a disused, borrowed school just outside the exclusion zone in August 2011, was to recreate a sense of community security within the school, as the principal explains:

> "The children have had various experiences and there are issues in the temporary housing with parents having lost their jobs and so on, but when they come to school, it's important that life goes on as normal, that they know we are all together, and that we look to the future positively."

While the emphasis within the school is on creating the school as a community and keeping school life as normal as possible for the children, in spite of circumstances, the existence per se of this school is critical to maintenance of the town as a community, as it is the only accessible, living, physical representation of the town post-3/11, apart from the displaced town office, which works out of borrowed premises nearby. Articles about the school feature largely in the town newsletter, which is produced monthly by the town office and posted to every former resident of the town, in an effort to maintain a sense of community. While the sense of community and attachment to the town was still strong a year after the disaster, town office staff and teachers are understandably concerned about how long this can be maintained in such uncertain circumstances, with no prediction of how long it will be before they can return to their town and their homes.

The discussion above has emphasised the role of schools as communities and the role of schools in their communities during and after the disaster. While the focus in normal times tends to be more on school as a community, the designation of so many schools as evacuation shelters has highlighted their function in the community in post-disaster Japan. For many children, schools became home for weeks or months, as they lived, ate and slept with their families in the school gymnasium or classrooms until temporary housing became available. The fact that the two roles of school as community and school in community converged so smoothly after the disasters is due largely to the citizenship education practised on a daily basis in schools throughout Japan.

5 Changing Media Representations of Children and Communities

In the past two decades, images of young people dominant in the Japanese media have been images of non-active citizens, or even non-citizens, and it has been claimed that this period has "been characterized by rampant youth-adult conflict" (Yoder 2004, 1). Widespread media attention has been given to school refusal, NEET youth and the hikikomori (social withdrawal)

problem. One positive aspect of the 2011 disaster has been widespread media recognition of young people as active citizens who care about their communities and are willing to shoulder the responsibilities of rebuilding towns and recreating communities. Not only this, but young people have been portrayed as leaders in the recovery, providing inspiration, encouragement and hope to those around them, and rekindling hope for the future in spite of all that has been destroyed and lost. The perceptual shift that seems to have occurred in the media and among the general public is pithily expressed in the following extract from part of a book that compiled Twitter entries, describing a scene in an evacuation shelter:

> "They brought out pork soup, and a senior high school boy raced straight over to be at the front of the queue. I was thinking how selfish he was as I watched him, but then he took the soup to an old lady who could not walk easily, said "Drink this while it's hot," and went to the back of the long line of people to queue again for his own." (Shibui et al. 2011, 81).

This perception shift to a general recognition of young people as active, engaged, caring citizens in their communities is long overdue, and began with coverage of graduation ceremonies in the weeks following the disasters. The earthquake and tsunami occurred just as schools throughout Japan were doing final rehearsals for one of the most important events of the school year, the graduation ceremony. School graduation ceremonies in Japan tend to be very formal, ceremonial events, attended by many of the local community dignitaries, where students are urged to reflect on their time in the school and shoulder the responsibility of being alumni of the school as they go out into the world. Graduation ceremonies are also one of the very few occasions in Japan where it is quite acceptable and very common for students, teachers and parents to cry publicly. Naturally, graduation ceremonies in many schools had to be postponed, but reports gradually appeared in the newspapers of graduation ceremonies in the affected area being held, often with photos of deceased or missing classmates being held by those in attendance, and often at evacuation shelters. An article in the Kahoku Shinpou on 22nd March, for example, has a photo of a boy acting as a conductor as other students from the school sing in a graduation ceremony conducted in the gymnasium of their school. None of this is unusual, but instead of parents in their best clothes, the audience is 500 evacuees living temporarily in the gymnasium, watching the ceremony as they sit among their few belongings in a town flattened by the tsunami. The article describes how the 15-year old conductor introduced the song to the evacuee audience, with the words "We sing this as a pledge to reconstruct the town we were born in and grew up in." The article goes on to quote a 67-year old evacuee in the audience, "It was very moving. The children give us courage, and make us think we can keep going. I want these children, who are going to be responsible for rebuilding, to be strong and live well." (Kahoku Shinpousha 2011, 83). Reports of graduation ceremonies appeared repeatedly in local and national newspapers and on television in the last week of March, and are interesting in that all the traditional elements of the graduation ceremony – its ceremonious and emotional

nature, its focus on determination to go out into the world and do good, and its sombreness and acceptability as one of the few sites of public community grieving for what is ending – are writ large to the disaster and the nation. In this way, graduation ceremonies, which would probably have been cancelled in many countries in the same situation, went ahead in spite of huge obstacles in many cases in Japan, partly because of their symbolic importance as a rite of passage in school life, but also because their function within the school coincided cathartically with the need of people in the affected region and throughout Japan at that particular point to come together as a community, remember and mark what had gone before, cry openly as a community, and start to move on to the next stage.

While media representation of children and young people has taken a positive turn, this is less true for media representation of specific communities. Media coverage and representation has been a major concern for teachers and students affected by the nuclear disaster, both directly and indirectly. In direct terms, principals, teachers and children in badly affected schools have had to get used to television and newspaper reporters in their schools, and to the fact that representation of their schools in the national and international media, even if not negative, has not necessarily matched their own views of their school community. At an indirect level, several teachers and parents expressed concerns about the media coverage of radiation and its impact on children and their development in the community. Children in Fukushima Prefecture were still wearing radiation monitors around their necks in December 2011, measuring the cumulative amount of radiation in the air to which they were exposed. In focus group interviews, the most common response of children to the question of what they did not like about their life now was not being able to play outside. Some teachers in Fukishima expressed the opinion that negative media overreaction to the effects of radiation was probably more harmful to children's and parents' mental health than the radiation itself. Studies from Chernobyl support this view, with reports concluding that the most significant public health consequence of the Chernobyl accident has been mental health effects (Bromet et al. 2011).

While the psychological effects of nuclear disaster on individuals have been researched and documented, there seems to be little research on the impact of nuclear disaster and its media coverage on the psychological health of communities or regions. However, this is an issue which is of concern to many residents of Fukushima, as they express regret over their isolation and negative image as a "dangerous, unclean" place, an image which stands in stark contrast to the prefectural slogan of "Utsukushima Fukushima" (Beautiful Fukushima). At a more practical level, the regional community is being affected by many residents who would like to stay in Fukushima being forced to leave to seek employment, or moving out because of potential perceived risks to their children's health. This affects teachers directly. Because of the closing of schools in the nuclear exclusion zone and many children moving out of Fukushima Prefecture, there are too many teachers, and Fukushima Prefectural Board of Education has not employed any new teachers for elementary or junior high schools in 2012 (Fukushima Prefectural Board of Education 2011). This means that students graduating with degrees in education in 2012 and wishing to be teachers have to mark time for at least a year or move out of the prefecture, unable to contribute to

their communities as teachers even if they want to do so. This is not entirely due to media representation, of course, but media representation is doing little to contribute to the reconstruction of communities in Fukushima at present.

6 The Birth of Global Citizenship as a Meaningful Concept

While the three sections above describe ways in which the disaster has impacted schools, teachers and children by reinforcing traditional roles, extending existing roles or changing representation, there are also signs that the disaster has served to create a climate of change in schools in some ways. One interesting way in which this is apparent is the change of attitude to global engagement. Within Japan, the north-eastern region hit hardest by the tsunami and nuclear disaster has a reputation of being rather closed, even to the rest of Japan. However, the huge wave of support and media attention from all over Japan and from many other parts of the world has forced many schools and teachers to rethink their position beyond their local and regional communities and consider themselves much more as part of the national and global community. As a principal from a school in Miyagi prefecture explained:

> "We had the Self Defence Forces here, and the American forces, and volunteers and television and newspaper reporters from all over Japan and even other countries. The world came to us, and now we have realised how much we are part of the world. That is something the children need to keep learning."

Another principal from Fukushima prefecture concurs:

> "Since the disaster, we have received and received – messages of support, satchels for the children, school supplies – and we are very grateful. But now we need to give back to the rest of Japan and the world. I don't know how we're going to do that internationally yet, but I believe we can."

This recognition of self in the world, commitment to education for global consciousness and citizenship, and determination to give back in return for all the support received internationally as well as nationally is an unexpected impact of the disaster. The widening of community consciousness to the national and global community after the disasters is evident throughout the affected region. For most schools, this is new territory, and many principals and teachers are unsure of how to engage and are worried about language barriers, but the new motivation and determination to become more involved in the global community is very apparent.

7 Conclusion

The disasters of 11th March 2011 had and continue to have massive, far-reaching impact on schools, teachers and children. Families, friends, homes and stability have been lost, and the effects on physical and mental health remain to be seen. Yet this disaster has highlighted the resilience of children and young people and their willingness to engage in their communities as active, caring citizens. It has also shown the dedication of teachers to their role as key community members and to their children and schools as communities. It has proven the effectiveness of citizenship education routines in schools as preparation for coping with the unexpected. It has planted the seed of global citizenship as a meaningful element of school education. It has changed media representation of children, young people, teachers and schools in Japan, and has generated respect and admiration for them. It has scattered and destroyed communities, but also created new communities. To finish with the words of an elementary school teacher:

> "I have lost friends and my home and most of my possessions, but I cannot have regrets for ever. I am a teacher. We have to look forward, we have to recover and rebuild the community, and we need to be examples for the children to be positive and forward-looking and help them be able to contribute to that task."

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