

Voice! from Alumni member

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Vol.16 Dr Alison Lloyd Williams



Alison with Prof Goto and FMU students

I was working as a post-doctoral researcher at Lancaster University when I heard about the JSPS fellowship programme. The project I was involved in at that time was researching children's experiences of flooding in the UK, using creative methods to support them to articulate those experiences and communicate their ideas for change. I had never worked in or even visited Japan but I had worked extensively in sub-Saharan Africa on socially engaged theatre projects and knew the value of bringing together different cultural perspectives as a way to stimulate new learning. I wondered what different ideas children affected by the Fukushima 3.11 disaster might have about how to rebuild their community and, given the lack of any mandatory flood education in the UK, I was interested to learn from the context of Japan, which has a much stronger history of preparing people for emergencies.

I drew on my existing networks to look for a host in Japan and eventually approached Aya Goto, Professor of Health Information and Epidemiology at Fukushima Medical University (FMU), to see if she would be interested to work with me. I was delighted when she agreed to be my host for a two-month period in 2016. Prof Goto had worked extensively in maternal health following the disaster but never with children. She was open, however, to projects involving this new group and already had an interest in participatory approaches to research.

During our project, we worked with a class of children from an elementary school in Date City, Fukushima, and a group of nursing and medical students from FMU, using theatre methods to investigate how children and young people can contribute to the building of more resilient communities in the wake of 3.11. I also

Alison Lloyd Williams is a Senior Research Associate in the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University.

Alison's professional background is in education, arts and community engagement. She gained an MA in Theatre and Development Studies from the University of Leeds (2007) and, following the completion of her PhD in Theatre Studies at Lancaster University (2013), she began work as a researcher at Lancaster in 2014. In this role, Alison has been involved in several projects that have worked with children to promote their voice in disaster management.

interviewed FMU staff and members of local government involved in response and recovery work following the disaster.

As requested by the school, the work with the children in Date focused mainly on the future, rather than the past. During the workshops the children discussed and presented their ideas about their community: what they liked about it, what had changed during their last six years at school (they started in Class 1 one month after the 3.11 disaster) and what improvements they would like to see. They created actions on their own and in groups, developing these into short scenes which they showed to each other and discussed. Some expressed their ideas in song, poetry or letters. We then gathered all their work together into a performance piece that presented a vision of the local community from the children's perspective, highlighting its strengths and its challenges and the children's ideas as to how to



Date City students perform their theatre piece, 2016

address some of the challenges. This piece was performed as part of the school's annual presentation day event for parents and members of the local community.

Working with the staff and students at FMU encouraged me to think about community development and disaster recovery in terms of community 'health' and it was useful to connect the methods I was using on this project with my host's work in the area of health literacy. This approach to public health, with its

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focus on dialogue and a sharing of knowledge, can be mapped onto some of the theory that underpins my approach to theatre and is useful in understanding how to bridge the gap between health and development/education workers and local communities that has been exposed by the disaster.

Participatory theatre is relatively unknown in Japan so the project also provided a useful opportunity to test this method there with children and young people in educational settings. The approach proved successful and both the school and the university were eager to develop our collaboration further. I therefore returned to Fukushima in 2017 for a month to run two follow-up workshops with the school students, who by then had advanced to junior high. I also ran a seminar series for staff and graduate students at FMU on social scientific approaches to disaster. Finally, we piloted a 'mini version' of our workshop programme with another group of children that in 2018 formed the basis of a training programme for teachers on participatory approaches in education. This year, the Date Board of Education has formally accredited the training workshop and from next year they have asked that we broaden its reach to all teachers across the district.

As is evident here, Prof Goto and I have continued to build our collaboration at FMU and in the local Date community. I still give

talks and workshops at the university and have contributed to a conference organised there. Prof Goto has been invited to run health workshops in schools in Date and we have both spoken (sometimes together!) and written about our collaboration at international conferences and in books and journals. We are now working on a new health literacy project that explores how children learn to take ownership of their health and we are also members of an ESRC funded UK-Japan research network on health, risk and disaster, which has helped to strengthen and expand our partnership. We are currently developing several new project bids that further investigate how communities in Japan and other countries live with disaster and how children can contribute to community development. I never imagined when I was awarded the JSPS fellowship in 2016 that the project would develop in the ways that it has but am so pleased, excited and grateful that it has!



Teacher training programme pilot, 2018

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*The detailed support is subject to change.

1

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2

Costs for hiring a venue, printing materials, advertising and so on*

3

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