

Building Potential Educational Reforms for Forced Migrant Children

Kyoko Ichikawa

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses potential educational reforms for children in the aftermath of natural disasters, such as forced migrant children fleeing from the massive tsunami and subsequent nuclear accident at the Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant, and how education can engage and empower children in their recovery.

In recent years, countries throughout the world, including Japan, have faced VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) situations. Japan faced the largest tsunami disaster ever recorded in Japanese history in 2011 and the nuclear power plant accident caused by the tsunami. Furthermore, the Kumamoto Great Earthquake struck in 2016, and earthquakes continue to strike in Ishikawa as of June 2022.

A major theme in Japanese society concerns both how to prepare for disasters and how to recreate the educational reforms after disasters.

THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE

The Great East Japan Earthquake struck on 11 March 2011 on the coast of Miyagi Prefecture in north-eastern Japan (Chart 1). The magnitude was 9.0 and the maximum height of the tsunami caused by the earthquake was 30 meters. Ten schools in the northeast were affected by the earthquake, the tsunami, and subsequent fires. More than 900 students, 10 teachers, and a mayor lost their lives in the Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent tsunami. Moreover, one of the Educational Board chairpersons survived being swept away by the tsunami waves and was submerged up to their neck in water.

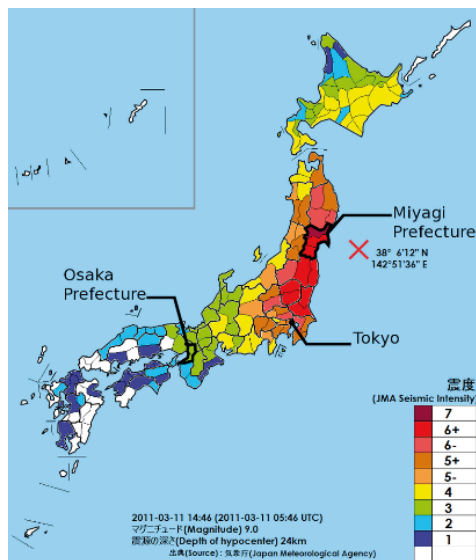
The Great East Japan Earthquake has left behind many orphans. The number of these orphans who lost one of their parents was 1,323 and the number who lost both of their parents was 240.

The areas most affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake were three prefectures: Miyagi Prefecture near the epicentre, Fukushima Prefecture near the Fukushima nuclear No. 1 power plant and Iwate Prefecture, north of Miyagi. Nearly 40,000 children in these three prefectures had to move to other prefectures due to the disaster.

In addition, 37 primary and secondary schools have been closed or suspended in these three prefectures. In Fukushima Prefecture, nine municipalities were forced to evacuate due to the nuclear power plant accident.

There are three phases that need to be considered when thinking about the relationship between disasters and quality education. Pre-disaster education is the first phase. Enabling a devastated society and education to recover from the disaster is the second phase. The third phase is the creation of reconstruction education.

Chart 1: The intensity of the Great East Japan Earthquake.



Source: Japan Meteorological Agency

DISASTER PREVENTION EDUCATION IS KEY FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES

The miracle of the Great East Japan Earthquake is that in Kamaishi City, Iwate Prefecture, students were able to evacuate and survive on their own. This was a result of the disaster-prevention education that they had received prior to the disaster, which proved to be essential.

The 20-metre-high tsunami hit the Unosumai area of Kamaishi, which faces the coast, and it caused the loss of 1,500 residents. In Kamaishi, a 63-metre-tall super dyke, the world's tallest, had been built in 2008; however, the tsunami overcame this dyke.

Primary and junior high school students, drawing on their experience of disaster-evacuation training, immediately fled to higher ground. These students not only saved their own lives but also took the initiative to guide residents to evacuate from the tsunami. The city was in an area that had been struck by tsunamis several times in the past. The community and local schools were able to learn from the lessons of these past experiences.

They were deeply aware that this means that education, especially education on disaster preparedness, will ensure that people's lives are saved.

In contrast, at Ookawa Primary School in Miyagi Prefecture, students evacuated to a low hill close to the school grounds and then failed to evacuate subsequently to higher ground. In total, 74 students, 70 per cent of the total student population at the school, lost their lives. Moreover, in Otsuchi Town in Iwate Prefecture, the disaster headquarters was established at a lower elevation than that stipulated in the disaster management plan. And Otsuchi Town suffered severe damage, with the mayor and cadres of town officials losing their lives and the chairperson of the board of education survived being swept away.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY-ENGAGED CURRICULA FOR 21ST-CENTURY EDUCATION

The Reconstruction Design Council of the Japanese cabinet secretariat, in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, submitted the report *Towards Reconstruction: "Hope beyond the Disaster"* to the prime minister in June 2011. This report mentioned rebuilding schools in devastated areas as core centres of the local community.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) enhances "community schools" as engaged schools. Community schools are encouraged to build a reciprocal relationship between the schools and the communities.

The community schools encourage parents, teachers, residents, and other people to engage in dialogues and discuss the challenges in the communities and their visions.

Three disaster-affected prefectures are rebuilding the educational reform by strengthening the community school framework. These schools focus on the traditional local dialects, local festivals and livelihoods that bring people together and ensure that these are passed on to the children as a core part of their reconstruction education. In Otsuchi Town, a learning process was facilitated to enable the passing on of the local dialect and the traditional lives and culture of the local people from the community elders to the younger children. The younger children's generation and the elders' generation are connected by the intermediate generation, the university students (Chart 2). University students are mostly engaging from outside the community, and are drawing on the wisdom of the local elders and learning alongside the children. In Otsuchi Town, the university students created a dialogue *karuta* (card games) based on stories from the local elders, which became part of the learning materials for local community studies in primary schools.

These new initiatives were achieved as a result of an application by the board of education to the MEXT for the creation of a special education curriculum zone. The involvement of university students was made possible with the support of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, and the author was one of the driving forces behind this initiative.

Chart 2: Community schools create classes in collaboration with the local community.



Photo by Kyoko Ichikawa 2015

CHILD FORCED MIGRATION DUE TO DISASTERS

Nearly 40,000 children in these three prefectures have had to move to other prefectures due to the disaster (Chart 3). In addition, 37 primary and secondary schools have been closed or suspended in these three prefectures. In Fukushima Prefecture, nine municipalities were forced to evacuate due to the nuclear power plant accident. Children were forced to move and had to either study in schools established by their original municipality in the destination area, or transfer to a school in the host municipality and start studying there. For example, Tomioka Town has relocated its town hall functions to Koriyama City, 80 kilometres away, and Futaba Town has relocated to Kazo City in Saitama prefecture.

Chart 3: A map of the area around the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.



Source: International Atomic Energy Agency 2015

The Fukushima nuclear power plant accident has caused three different types of forced migration. First, there were forced migrants as a result of the nuclear power plant accident and these children were living in evacuation centres. Second, there are people who still face difficulties that have arisen with respect to returning to the areas that cannot be returned to, for example, parts of Namie Town, Futaba Town and Okuma Town. Third, there were people who self-evacuated as a result of the nuclear power plant accident and the Great East Japan Earthquake. Among those who self-evacuated were many parents and children who evacuated to western Japan to escape the effects of radiation. In metropolitan areas such as Tokyo

and Kanagawa, activities such as recreation programmes are held every summer to enable children who normally cannot play outside.

The Great East Japan Earthquake has left many children orphans. The number of orphans who have lost one of their parents was 1,323 and the number of earthquake orphans who lost both of their parents was 240.

The children of Fukushima affected by the nuclear power plant accident have often been stigmatised and discriminated in their schools and communities. High schools in their own community had to be shut down and relocated schools were established in other communities inside and outside of Fukushima.

Schools fostered change-makers. Students proposed solutions to revitalise shrinking communities and explore alternative energy sources.

Many of the children in Fukushima were deprived of their own land and many students are still unable to return to their hometowns.

THE CREATION OF RECONSTRUCTION EDUCATION FOR QUALITY EDUCATION: FUTABA MIRAI GAKUEN HIGH SCHOOL IS TRULY CHALLENGING THE FUTURE

Futaba Mirai Gakuen High School was established based on the school's philosophy of being a change agent, with the ambition of developing leaders who will be responsible for the reconstruction of Fukushima.

The coastal areas of Fukushima are not only facing serious problems such as damage caused by the earthquake and the nuclear power plant accident and dealing with radiation, but also the challenges facing every region and community in Japan.

The nuclear power plant accident following the Great East Japan Earthquake caused five prefectural high schools in the Futaba area of Fukushima (Futaba High School, Namie High School, Namie High School Tsushima, Tomioka High School and Futaba Shoyo High School) to be unable to accept students. The principals of the five high schools established a relocated high school, Futaba Mirai Gakuen High School, aimed at creating a revolution, with the aim of building a new way of life and a new society.

The earthquake and the nuclear power plant accident have brought to the fore not only serious issues such as the damage caused by the disaster and the response to radiation, but also the challenges facing every region and community in Japan, such as the declining birth rate, the aging population, the rapid depopulation, and the exhausting of industry. Futaba County and Fukushima Prefecture have, in a sense, become the world's "issue-advanced region".

At Futaba Mirai Gakuen junior and senior high schools, students explore the local problems Fukushima is facing as a resource for learning.

Students also inquire about how to address these problems in class.

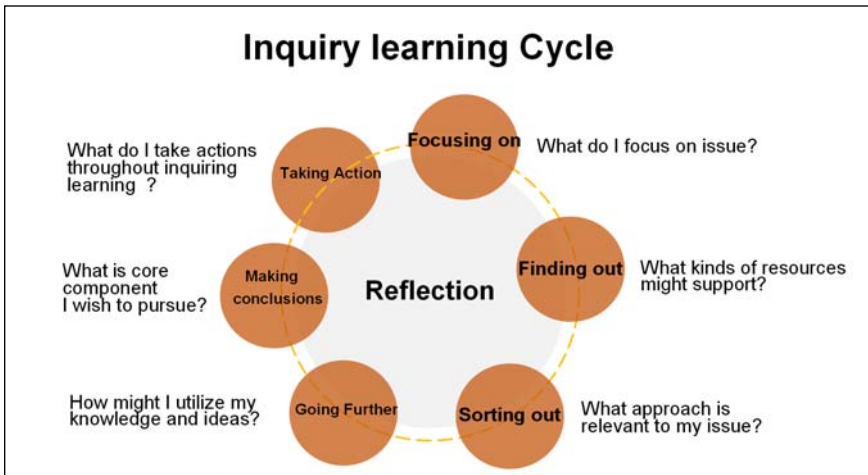
INQUIRY LEARNING CREATES A NEW HORIZON IN THE FUTURE SOCIETY

Under the inquiry learning concept, students discover for themselves the issues to be engaged in, rather than be given the issues to be engaged in by the teachers (Chart 4).

In inquiry learning classes, students identify and address issues that are integral and inseparable from oneself. At first, freshmen understand the local issues from different perspectives. Sophomores apply solutions to these issues. Juniors reflect on and conclude their practice. The school collaborates with experts from outside the school to promote the inquiry learning classes. The school accepts very famous theatre professionals as instructors. In this school, high school students are divided into six main groups to promote the inquiry learning classes, for example, nuclear disaster prevention, renewable energies, media and communications, agribusiness, sports and health, social welfare and health. Students explore how to address these challenges, supported by school teachers and specialists from the communities. For example, one of the students was able to generate wave power through repeated experimentation and unsuccessful attempts.

This practice enhances reforming the community-engaged school. Moreover, Mr. Oriza Hirata, an instructor at Futaba Mirai Gakuen High School, emphasises that inquiry is not only the exploration of new solutions to issues but also the exploration of the complexities of human beings and society. In order to build mature democratic societies, inquiry learning classes explore what kind of future we want to live in and how we can engage with society to ensure that future.

Chart 4: Inquiry Learning Cycle.



Source: Kyoko Ichikawa 2022

BUILDING YOUTH CENTRE CAPABILITIES INSIDE SCHOOLS

In Japanese society, one in six children is living in relative poverty, and schools are also expected to have facilities promoting children's inclusion. Students in Fukushima had moved multiple times, in and out of the Fukushima area, following the nuclear power plant accident. This resulted in mental stress and caused them to fall behind in their studies.

Futaba Mirai Gakuen High School established a youth centre within the school in collaboration with "Katariba", non-profit organisation.

At the youth centres, students were able to talk to youth workers about their problems such as mental health problems, and to study after school. The creation of youth centres within schools prevents students from being isolated and encourages them to continue their studies and social engagement. The creation of such support systems for preventing the isolation of students in schools would be a model for the 21st-century society. Promoting collaboration with new actors such as non-profit organisations is also essential.

CONCLUSION

Japanese society faces natural disasters such as earthquakes and torrential rains almost every year. We are facing an uncertain and complex future, with increasing inequality and a declining population. Community-based education is essential for building a sustainable society in response to uncertain and complex issues. Competency-centred educational reforms that explore, rather than knowledge-acquisition-centred education are necessary. Although these educational reforms are policies driven by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, more attention should be focused on the efforts of the schools themselves to generate new educational practices in collaboration with their local community. Educational transformations should be driven at the micro level (one school level), at the mezzo level (the local level), and at the macro level (the educational policies and administration level).

Kyoko Ichikawa is a Junior Associate Professor, at the Department of Health Management, School of Health Studies, Tokai University. She earned her Ph.D. in Philosophy from Keio University and her M.A. in Education from Sophia University. She has undertaken research on Citizenship Education and Community Development.

Ichikawa has engaged in and facilitated disaster relief and community revitalization projects in Japan and Thailand. The Great East Japan Earthquake relief projects based on the narratives of residents, initiated by Ichikawa, were supported by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan, as important in preserving the inheritance of dialects and in cultural revitalization. She is currently engaged in community rebuilding activities associated with the return of residents to Futaba town, damaged by the nuclear accident, in Fukushima prefecture.

Ichikawa is the author of the Japan chapter Konrad Adenauer Sharing Political and Civic Engagements Spaces (KASpaces) Accelerating Progress and Equity in Education 2021.

Reference

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