



Students in the field at the site of the Great East Japan Earthquake 東日本大震災被災地での大学生現場活動

Dawn Grimes-MacLellan

Students in the field at the site of the Great East Japan Earthquake

Dawn Grimes-MacLellan

In September 2011, a week shy of the six-month anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, and shortly after our arrival in Japan, eight Earlham College students and I boarded a van for the three-hour trip from Morioka to the devastated east coast of Iwate Prefecture. We had come to Morioka, as a cohort of Earlham students and a faculty leader do every August, to participate in the SICE program,¹ an annual fall semester abroad. After several weeks of orientation and settling in with host families, we left the comforts and growing familiarity of Morioka to offer what we could to the continuing relief efforts. Our destination was the mountainous and rugged Tanohata-mura², a village of about 4,000 people known for its impressive Kitayamazaki Cliffs stretching along eight kilometers of coastline. At Tanohata, we would participate in the first of three relief work activities in which we would take part during the semester. While the contribution of nine visiting Americans paled in comparison to the enormity of the devastation and human loss of the Great East Japan earthquake, the experience was powerfully instructive in calling our attention to universal human and environmental issues while also raising my own awareness of new possibilities for meaningfully connecting undergraduate students with Japan in an age when most students come to their interest in Japan not through homestays or other human interaction but through anime and pop culture icons.

Tanohata, Iwate Prefecture

The organizing effort to amend our fall semester plans to include relief work in Tanohata began almost as soon as news of the disaster reached the Earlham community. Our close and long-standing relationship with the village, initiated in 1972 by Jackson Bailey, meant that our faculty and alumni, particularly those who had visited, spent time, and made friends with the people of Tanohata, felt the impact of the disaster in deeply personal ways. SICE 2011 students, looking ahead to their upcoming fall semester in Morioka, voiced concern about whether the trip would go ahead and were eager to help in some way though at the time it was impossible to conceive of the specific kind of assistance that we might be able to offer. In the months following the disaster, this remained unclear as local attention focused on meeting basic needs and re-establishing services. As Japanese Studies faculty decided to go forward with the fall semester, we discussed ways in which to incorporate relief work into the program and, through the work of our local program associate during the summer months prior to our departure, we were able to join in on-going local activities that minimized the burden of our visit and made the greatest contribution, small though it was.

In Tanohata, Earlham students initially joined Waseda University students for a few days at their local camp that had originally been established in the early 1960s to assist forest recovery efforts following a devastating forest fire in 1956. Since then, the work of this Waseda student club, *Shiinomorinokai*, has developed into a continuing forest management program that takes place three times a year. In September 2011, SICE students joined Waseda students at their camp, as they had formerly done each August until 2003, to work side-by-side with their Japanese peers in friendship and forest management. This time, coastal cleanup was also included in the work activities at the camp.



Forest management with Waseda University students

For three days and two nights, we stayed at Waseda's dormitory, cooked meals together, joined in forest management and coastal cleanup, bathed in sex-segregated communal baths, and cleaned the entire dormitory upon departure. Though the activities greatly challenged SICE students to put aside personal tastes (and distastes) for the benefit of the group, by the end of the experience most indicated that they would have liked the visit to last a few more days as they felt they were only beginning to become accustomed to the rhythm of camp activities and forging friendships with Japanese university students. Embracing the challenge of communicating entirely in Japanese, SICE students, each with 1-2 years of Japanese language study, became aware of their linguistic limitations but quickly learned to compensate by learning to listen with care, to observe closely, and to follow their peers. As faculty leader, I supported the students primarily by participating side-by-side with them and encouraging or prodding them as needed. Despite the hard work and few comforts, the experience gave the SICE students first-hand experience with the organization, seemingly endless energy, and commitment that their Japanese counterparts applied toward the tasks at hand. Moreover, the motivation to find their place among new friends and gradually become full-participants in the group life of camp overrode the aches and pains of the work, their hesitation to speak in broken Japanese, and the personal discomfort of bugs, unfamiliar foods, and bathing with others.

The experience set a positive tone for the semester in that we learned that we could accomplish tasks together under tough circumstances, and come to enjoy being a part of such experiences. The axiom of cross-cultural education – that learning about another culture helps us to better understand our own culture and our own place within it – was evident in the work of Earlham students and their subsequent reflections on their experience:

"[One] thing I learned from the *Shiinomori* trip was that I have spent way too much

time in my life asking others what and how I need to do things. At *Shiinomori*, we were given a task, and we had to come up with a way to complete it without much aid from those around us. Each person just did. There wasn't really a person who sat there and explained where we got the things to do it, or even the process behind what we needed to do. We were given a task, and it was expected to be completed."

Another student reflected on the group experience:

"*Shiinomori* was an awesome experience. Right away I learned that being part of a group can be extremely helpful and productive for everyone. Once we arrived and unpacked, I realized that all of the people who had already been there before we arrived had a purpose and were helping out with something. Eventually we all kind of delved into helping with something."



Train station stairs in Tanohata, Iwate

Following the camp experience, we met with village officials who shared their experiences of the earthquake and tsunami through a slideshow and discussion of the aftermath and subsequent debris removal efforts still underway, a viewing of photographs and artifacts recovered throughout the village, and a guided walk through the many locally devastated areas. The frankness with which they spoke about the disaster, their personal hardships, and the challenges ahead for their village and the region gave us invaluable insight into disaster from a local point of view. Of course, we had all been saturated with media images of the disaster prior to our fall semester in Japan and we may have thought we knew what to expect when we arrived in the coastal areas. At Earlham, it had been the Friday before spring break and I was working in my office when the Japanese Studies program got news of the earthquake and approaching tsunami. In consternation and growing concern, we all watched live feed on our computers as the events unfolded, and a few SICE students dropped by to ask what would happen to our fall plans. At that time, there were no answers. All we could do was watch and wait. Now, touring the site of devastation six months later, students long removed from the immediacy of the earthquake and tsunami experienced the disaster anew, surprised by the intensity of the emotions that welled up inside them as they viewed the devastation. One student reflected on the difference between learning about an event and experiencing it himself:

"When we saw sites in Tanohata where the earthquake and subsequent tsunami had struck, it finally clicked in my head, that this had really happened, and I was here looking at the effects. Two locations stood out to me, the first being the steps to nowhere at the obliterated train station building. The second was the blasted apart seawall, and huge open field behind it where a forest used to be. Seeing pictures on the news of houses floating through water is one thing; seeing the outlines of concrete foundations as all that remains of those houses in person is another thing entirely."

Though Tanohata, due to its peculiar local geography of mountainous terrain and high coastal cliffs, endured few casualties and skirted the worst devastation that was felt to the immediate south, our visit with village officials brought sensitivity to the disaster from local views, as Mr. H. said plainly that "though our loss was small, our sorrow is the same." As I interpreted for the village officials, I found it difficult to hear their often heart-wrenching words, and then to quickly search my mind for an appropriate translation that conveyed not only the words but also the depth of emotion that they had expressed. The students listened carefully though – their glossy eyes and silence revealing their understanding. At times during our walk through the village, some students became overwhelmed even by the relatively "limited" extent of the disaster in Tanohata:

"With so much debris and destruction, I wonder what I would decide if I were in the position of those organizing at either a local or governmental level. I think there is a high possibility I would find myself too overwhelmed with the amount of things needed to be done. And this is six months after the tsunami.... I can't imagine the pain that those remaining must feel, and to wake up every morning to a land that is still trying to heal."

As we were guided around the tiny seaside hamlet, we paused at the harbor to view the five or six fishing boats in port on that day – all that remained of a fleet that used to amount to some 300 vessels. According to Mr. H., most of the fishing boats had already returned to port to bring in their morning catch by the time the earthquake and tsunami arrived in mid-afternoon. The few undulating before us had been out at sea during the unfolding of the events of March 11th and, rather than returning to port, turned out to higher water – and safety. Continuing along the harbor, we walked through the huge tsunami gates, where Mr. H. stopped to tell us that we should not become complacent that gates such as those could keep us safe. He continued by teaching us about *tendenko*, the old folk saying that in the event of a tsunami, everyone must drop everything and immediately go to higher ground, not thinking of material belongings or even of other family members until everyone meets together later, high and safe on the mountainside. "It might sound cold-hearted, but it's the only way you can survive," he told us. We later learned the personal angle from which he proffered this advice, as described by an Earlham student:

"Another devastating part was when Mr. H told us the *tendenko* saying: 'If there's a tsunami coming, just run. Forget family, forget friends. Save yourself. It's when you go back that you lose more lives.' To hear that, it makes logical sense and is cold. I think, yeah, that makes sense, but I would never do that. And then we learn that he lost five family members ranging from cousins to his grandma because they went back and he is still saying that and telling us to follow it... All I had to do was put myself in his shoes or think about it with me in that place and I became really unstable."

On an earlier drive through the village with a Waseda university student, we were similarly pressed to think about what it must have been like on that day six months earlier. As we passed through a tunnel, Ms. Y said "This tunnel was under water during the tsunami. Can you imagine it?" All of us resisted the thought, as the dark tunnel, now dry but still without lights because the



Beach debris cleanup in Tanohata, Iwate

power had been damaged, was already suffocating. Later, as we went to work at the beach, we would find the debris of so many lives – a doll, a mailbox, a notebook – among twisted metal, broken glass, and plastic. Most difficult to bear were items that were completely intact. One SICE student found a teacup without even a chip, and we paused to think about the lives that were once connected to the various objects we found.

Back at the village office, Mr. H. showed us the faces of many of these lives in photographs that had been recovered after the disaster, cleaned and mounted on large wooden boards, waiting to be retrieved by loved ones. As one Earlham student related:

“To see all those smiling faces in the photos, wedding dresses, pictures of couples smiling and pictures of children playing with parents, new bikes... To see all these lives and to know that some of them might be dead, or couples that are split up, that happiness has turned sour, most of them don't have homes... It really, really hits home. You SEE the lives that were torn apart by this disaster.”

While the events of March 11th brought our group to Tanohata with an aim of making a contribution to on-going relief work, we left the village with much more – a deeper appreciation of the disaster through the stories told to us by local people, and a greater self-awareness that emerged from entering an

uncomfortable place (literally and figuratively) and working together toward a common goal.

Rikuzen Takata, Iwate Prefecture

From Tanohata, we traveled south along the Iwate coastline to our next destination, the operation center of the Tono City Disaster Relief Work Network (*Tono Magokoronet*), a volunteer organization set up by local residents at the town's social welfare center to receive relief workers to aid in the recovery work in Iwate. On the way, traveling through some of the hardest-hit areas in the prefecture, including Taro, Miyako, Yamada, and Otsuchi, we witnessed scenes of catastrophic devastation that were difficult to absorb. Mangled steel framing that once supported a gas station, an upside-down vehicle in the middle of a rice field, a concrete seawall destroyed by tsunami waves, and a collapsed home now located far from its original foundation – these were just a handful of the scenes repeated over and over in every direction on each kilometer of our journey. As we moved along the two-lane highway, colossal mountains of debris stood as testament to the phenomenal challenge ahead to reclaim the landscape and re-establish communities. The town of Otsuchi, in particular, drew our attention as it struggled to cope with the disaster after losing its mayor and many town officials in the tsunami, a saga played out daily in the local media. It was an unbelievable site of destruction, with debris scattered everywhere, a lingering smell of smoke hanging in the air from fires that burned so many buildings, and red 'X's spray painted on houses still standing that we learned marked sites where bodies had been discovered. It was very quiet inside our vehicle as we drove through the area. One student later recalled, “It was bad. I have no other way to really describe it. The sheer immense proportion of the whole thing really boggles one's mind and is hard to comprehend.”



Registration at Tono City Disaster Relief Network (Tono Magokoronet), Iwate

In the late afternoon, we arrived at the Tono City Disaster Relief Work Network. Here we would spend two nights in communal living with hundreds of other volunteers from all over Japan and smaller numbers from other countries as well. Tono, well-known for its rich folklore and made famous by Yanagita Kunio's work *Tono Monogatari*, translated into English as the *Legends of Tono* by Ronald Morse, provided a quite different vantage point on Japanese relief work than our earlier experience in Tanohata. The Tono center was extremely well organized and ably equipped to allocate the recovery work among volunteers of all ages who arrived both individually and in groups of mostly university or company contingents. Our SICE group registered to take part in relief work in *Rikuzen Takata* the following day, an area that could accommodate our group size. Again, our purpose was to offer help in the recovery of devastated areas and as we mingled with volunteers from all over Japan and other countries as well, SICE students were impressed to be a part of this enormous collective effort.

Shortly after arrival, we attended an orientation where we learned about the following day's schedule, meeting location, clothing and items necessary to bring with us to the site, as well as lunch arrangements. Attention was drawn to a few important points: we should bring enough water with us to stay hydrated; we should be respectful of the disaster site while we work; and we should not take photographs since our purpose was relief work, not tourism. That evening, we headed to nearby restaurants and the supermarket for dinner and breakfast supplies. During free time back at the center, SICE students chatted with fellow volunteers and lined up for showers taken in 15-

minute intervals in temporary individual shower stalls. Just prior to 10 p.m. lights out, men and women made their way to separate sleeping quarters – the men on hard tatami mats on the gymnasium floor, and the women in a Japanese-style tatami room with sliding doors. Exhausted from our previous work in Tanohata, we all fell asleep quickly.

After a night's rest, morning chimes awoke us at 6 a.m. We met outside the center for morning exercises at 7:15, followed by the morning assembly that announced our work for the day and the location of the bus that would take us to our work site. We boarded a bus for the hour and a half long trip to Rikuzen Takata where we spent the day removing mud and debris from a long irrigation canal in a large open field of rice paddies. From the work site, we could see straight to the sea a couple of kilometers away, a view obscured by thousands of pine trees prior to the tsunami. Around the site were a handful of homes, some habitable, but for the most part, in every direction, we saw only foundations where homes used to be.



Clearing mud and debris from an irrigation canal in Rikuzen Takata, Iwate (I mention above that volunteers were prohibited from photography. This photograph was taken by Mori-san, a long-time SICE host family member and supporter. He came to photograph our work for the SICE host family newsletter and to encourage our efforts.)

The work was hard, the sun was hot on our faces and backs, and we were soon filthy with sweat and mud. No one complained. Sometimes we chatted with the person nearby; other times we worked quietly side-by-side. We watched one another and helped when needed, offered encouraging words or stepped in when someone needed a short break. Once when the mud and debris seemed impossible to remove, I said to the nearby students that we needed to “dig deeper” and though at that moment I had meant it literally, those words later became a metaphor during the semester to which the students understood that I was asking them to reflect more deeply on a situation and find the answer or resolution within themselves. They always laughed at me when I told them to “dig deeper,” but their accomplishments in the physical work of digging deeper in Rikuzen Takata seemed to support the introspective work as well. At times, when we cleared enough mud and debris so that the water in the canal started to rush through, we felt a collective sense of happiness and achievement. At the same time, we also knew that the scale of our accomplishment was so small in relation to the vastness of the devastation surrounding us in that town and so many others. Yet, the experiences during this work had far-reaching impact as it brought us together as a group, demonstrating that we could work hard toward a common purpose, and laying an important foundation for the remainder of the semester in Japan. As one student wrote:

“As I was in the rice field shoveling out the remains of houses, clothes, and other forms of debris, all I could think about is what the people who suffered loss due to the tsunami were feeling. I knew that what I was doing wasn’t much, but I knew that if I could do just a little bit, I could make it easier on someone else. It was this sense of accomplishment that kept me going when I thought I was spent.”

English Camp at the foot of Iwate-san

Our third “relief work” activity was a weekend English Camp that took place in November at the National Iwatesan Youth Friendship Center on the outskirts of Morioka City. There, in the natural environment at the foot of Mt. Iwate, students from Iwate University and Earlham College collaborated in a communicative English program for 22 junior high school students from Tanohata, Miyako and Kamaishi. Organized by an Iwate University professor, the major aim of the program was “to provide junior high school students from

the coastal areas with an opportunity to communicate in English and to motivate them to study English even more...” At the same time, the program was intentionally developed and understood as a type of relief work that focused specifically on providing young adolescents with a chance to leave the site of the disaster for a brief time, meet new people, and enjoy various activities together related to the theme of communicative English.

The camp was also viewed as an opportunity for a short respite for parents and caretakers of these young adolescents, some of whom came from schools that had been destroyed in the disaster. Others were coping with the loss of family members or friends, and still others were even now living in temporary housing because their own homes had been washed away by the tsunami. Thus, a chief motivation for the program on the part of organizers was to bring these young adolescents to a place where they could put aside their daily hardships for a short while and enjoy themselves as young adolescents.

The two-day program was centered on holiday themes (American Thanksgiving and Christmas) and was collaboratively planned by Iwate University and SICE students for several weeks leading up to the camp. The university students led seven sessions that focused on task-based language development through activities that included singing, creating holiday decorations, storytelling, role-playing and games. In addition to these work sessions, the camp also included recreational activities such as kickball, basketball and soccer. It was during these latter times that the university and junior high school students became fast friends, as could be observed in the smiling faces and laughter as the two groups of students engaged with one another.

The camp was structured with junior high school students in small groups, each with one American and Japanese university student leader, and this arrangement was the foundation upon which all the varied activities built toward their success. In these small groups, participants ate together buffet-style in the large dining room and shared small dormitory rooms together where group members played cards and chatted during free time. The responsibility of the Japanese and American university student team leaders was to work at building community among their respective groups in English, and in every case groups bonded quickly and lent support to one another throughout the program activities.



SICE student talking with English camp students

While the formal program was successful in its aim to create an encouraging and supportive environment whereby these young adolescents could grow in their confidence to communicate using English, the informal goal of offering a brief respite both to the adolescents and their families from devastated coastal areas was also evident. While none of the organizers of the weekend events were naïve enough to think that a brief weekend camp would overcome the experiences of the previous eight months, the devastation was neither a focus nor a backdrop to the events. Without television or other media to distract, finding ways to communicate with one another became the focus of our activities. For the junior high school attendees, the camp provided an outlet for them to simply have fun. On a survey completed at the end of the camp, junior high school students wrote enthusiastically of the experience: “I was really able to speak English a lot!”, “I loved the whole camp! Iwate University students and the American students were so kind to us. I had a great time!” and “I was really worried about speaking only in English, but I gradually understood things over two days.”

For the Iwate University and SICE students, the leadership role they found

themselves in challenged them to collaborate in two languages to build a program of activities and also, perhaps more significantly, asked them to reach deep into themselves to work to put others first. Though one of the goals of the SICE program is to encourage American students to better understand Japan by experiencing and 'living in' such Japanese cultural ideals as placing the needs of the group above one's own interests, this, of course, can be a difficult concept for American students to appreciate. While an appreciation for situations in which students might suspend their individual priorities in favor of the priorities of those around them is, I feel, gained by SICE students over time during their sojourn abroad, perhaps the circumstances expedited this transition for the 2011 cohort. While the 2011 SICE students struggled with this initially, at Tanohata and Rikuzen Takata they were able to appreciate the need for 'action for the greater good' and they were also able to thrive in creating meaningful experiences for others during the English camp at Mt. Iwate.

During the camp we did, from time to time, gain a glimpse into the lives of the young adolescents among us. At lunch on the second day of camp as we sat in a large group asking one another questions, we gained some insight into the disruptions experienced in the life of one girl. As we chatted about which students knew each other, she said that she knew one of the girls at another table, but when asked if they attended the same school, she said no. Seeing puzzled faces and receiving further questions, the girl eventually found the words in English to explain that the two girls went to the same school building but not the same school. In fact, her own school in Kamaishi had been destroyed by the tsunami and so she and her classmates now attended school in another building. Two schools now shared one school building, and as her story unfolded, the SICE students and I looked understandingly at one another, regaining our focus for the camp and the 'relief work' that we were accomplishing. As we later prepared to depart the camp, many hugs and even tears were shared between the university and junior high school students, indicating that while the program had been short, an intense feeling of togetherness and shared humanity had been achieved.



Saying goodbye on the last day of English camp

Though one might not think of an English camp as 'relief work' (and indeed, some SICE students, having already cleaned irrigation ditches and cleared debris prior to arriving at the English camp, initially wondered why the Iwate University professor had used such a term when she described initial plans for the camp), such an approach broadens the possibilities for continued engagement with Tohoku after the debris has been cleared and new construction begins. The focus becomes the ongoing connections between people rather than a task undertaken once and completed. One SICE student's view of the camp was as follows: "I think it was a great experience! I saw the students grow a lot and gain a lot of confidence in English and opening up to others. I would love to do this again!" Moreover, all of the SICE students have told me that we should work hard to maintain the connections to the coastal areas in subsequent years.

Concluding thoughts

Earlham's SICE program, like many study abroad programs, aims to provide its students with an understanding of Japan drawn from personal experience to complement the language skills and cultural knowledge gained from classes on the home campus. In recent years, students are as likely to come to an interest in Japan through anime and pop culture as through an encounter with Japanese people, so the tangible extended opportunities for cross-cultural understanding from homestays with Japanese families and English teaching experiences in local junior high schools cause students each year to return to their home campus feeling more connected to Japan and a global community. The 2011 cohort, however, was deeply affected by the evidence of human suffering witnessed during its tours of the devastation and subsequent relief work in the area. The intensity of the experience caused students to process the experience on an emotional level that lay heavy on their hearts but yet was comforting in that they could feel that they could do something, however small, to help the people of Tanohata and Rikuzen Takata. As they worked amidst the devastation, emotions welling up with the discovery of symbols of family and previously happy lives, students were often surprised by the emotional intensity of this devastating event

which they had previously encountered only from a distance via the 'cold hard facts' reported on a TV or computer screen.

Though the encounters were brief, the semester spent in Morioka meant that we were never far from news and personal accounts of the disaster. Local media, host families and colleagues at local junior high schools where SICE students taught English during their fall semester abroad all brought local experiences reminding us daily of the continuing impact of the disaster. Many of the SICE students also were asked by their schools to talk about their experiences in the coastal areas, and the re-telling of the events brought further reflection on the global, local and personal impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake. The irony of the juxtaposition of beauty and devastation was not lost on the Earlham students. As one student recounted,

"I keep remembering back to the beautiful view from the top of the mountain (Kitayamazaki in Tanohata), and at the same time there is the view of Otsuchi-cho still stuck in my mind. I have learned that this world can be both beautiful and horrible, and that sharing those experiences with others takes away some of the pain and shares some of the joy."

In preparing SICE students for relief work in Japan, I had drawn on what being an anthropologist has meant to me over the two-decade-long engagement I have had with Japan. Most importantly, I emphasized my connections to people – people from whom I have received so many kindnesses, of memories shared, of debts incurred – debts that all of us who engage with a local community know we can never truly repay. Yet, in the aftermath of the disaster and the realization that the recovery of the Tohoku region – in whatever forms it takes – will be decades or more in the making, it seems that engagement and commitment in relief work in all its various forms could be one way of repaying debts in the form of paying forward. In so doing, we have the opportunity to re-imagine what Japanese studies can be not only for our students but also subsequent generations of students and researchers.

The concept of ongoing, 'long engagements' with the people of an area, and the obligation to pay forward the benefits received, is particularly salient for Earlham College given its long legacy with Japan. In some small way, I hope

that I have helped my students not only to understand this connection that I speak of, but also that through our experiences in Iwate in the fall of 2011, I have helped them to establish connections that will resonate and motivate them to continue their connections to Japan long into the future.

Acknowledgements: Special thanks to our local SICE Program Associate, Yuki Hatakeyama, whose hard work and passionate spirit made all of our activities possible; and also to SICE 2011 students who “dug deep” and embarked on their own relationships with Japan that I hope will continue to grow long into the future.

Reference:

Bailey, Jackson H. 1991. *Ordinary people, extraordinary lives: political and economic change in a Tohoku village*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

¹“SICE” is the acronym for Earlham’s Studies in Cross-cultural Education (SICE) Program, established in 1973 by Jackson Bailey as a study abroad program based in Morioka, Iwate Prefecture. Since then, each year a group of Earlham students led by a faculty advisor have traveled to Iwate for a semester abroad. Now in its 39th consecutive year, the SICE program provides for its Japanese Studies students a variety of formal and informal opportunities to learn Japanese language and culture through courses at Iwate University, home stays with local families and English teaching in local schools several days each week.

²For many Japan hands the village name Tanohata will be recognizable, made widely known by the late Earlham College historian Jackson Bailey in his book, *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives: Political and Economic Change in a Tohoku Village*. Bailey’s long engagement with Tanohata brought forth numerous collaborations beginning in the 1970s with then-mayor Hayano, including a hands-on work camp with Waseda University students (*Shiinomori*), and an assistant language teacher program in local middle schools. Bailey believed that such programs illustrated the best of international cooperation, as for Tanohata citizens, they represented a vision of international education “in broader terms than just acquiring language skill” (p. 139) and that, through the tangible presence of foreigners in the town, “Tanohata is attempting to create an environment in which contact with foreigners and learning about another culture become a part of the total educational program of the village” (p. 139). For Earlham students, meanwhile, the programs required the speaking of Japanese in order to complete tasks side-by-side with Japanese peers and colleagues, providing an authentic work setting for the communication of Japanese that cannot be duplicated in a classroom setting. While these two programs ceased in 2003 and 2006, respectively, in 2011 due to the Great East Japan Earthquake, Earlham students were once again able to re-connect with Tanohata for a brief time.

Dawn Grimes-MacLellan is Assistant Professor of Japanese Studies at Earlham College. She is author of “Kids These Days...’: Globalization and the Shifting Discourse of Childhood in Japan” in *Japan in the Age of Globalization* edited by Carin Holroyd and Ken Coates, and “Three years in three days: School excursions as a microcosm of Japanese junior high school,” in *Why Japan Matters!* edited by Joseph F. Kess and Helen Lansdowne.

Recommended Citation: Dawn Grimes-MacLellan, ‘Students in the field at the site of the Great East Japan Earthquake,’ *The Asia Pacific Journal*, Vol 10, Issue 10, No 4, March 5, 2012.

This is part of the series **One-Year After The Great East Japan Earthquake: Reports From The Field** edited by Christopher S. Thompson and Dawn Grimes-MacLellan.

The complete series is comprised of the following articles:

1. Christopher S. Thompson, [The Great East Japan Earthquake One Year On: Reports From The Field](#)
2. William W. Kelly, [Tohoku’s Futures: Predicting Outcomes or Imagining Possibilities](#)
3. Alyne Elizabeth Delaney, [A Report From One Miyagi Fishing Community](#)
4. Dawn Grimes-MacLellan, [Students in the Field at the Site of the Great East Japan Earthquake](#)
5. Christopher S. Thompson, [Local Perspectives On the Tsunami Disaster: Untold Stories From the Sanriku Coast](#)

See the complete list of APJ resources on the 3.11 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear power meltdown, and the state and societal responses to it [here](#).



Slogan from the Tono City Disaster Relief Network (Tono Magokoronet)