

The Flood Suitcase Project
St. Michael's on Wyre C. E. Primary School

Dr Alison Lloyd Williams, Lancaster University, November 2017 www.lancaster.ac.uk/floodrecovery

During Storm Desmond in December 2015 St. Michael's on Wyre C. E. Primary School was flooded and the building closed for four months. The school temporarily relocated to a series of places, including local churches and nearby Myerscough College (Further and Higher Education). A number of children were also flooded in their homes and forced to move out. These children thus faced a double displacement – from home and school. They talked of the difficulty of this situation, describing being forced from home as 'really complicated' and the recovery as long and slow. Children also commented on how much they missed the familiarity of their own school environment. Some expressed fear about the possibility of further flooding.

The [Flood Suitcase](#) project took place during the summer term of 2017, involving 21 children and two staff from the school, along with the Chair of St. Michael's Flood Action Group. The project comprised two creative workshops, based on methods developed from Lancaster University and Save the Children's [Children, Young People and Flooding](#) research project. These methods included walking and taking photographs around the area that had been flooded, sandplay and model-making, drama games and discussion. These activities are designed to help children tell their stories of the floods, share their ideas and experiences and begin to engage in community dialogue about resilience building. Reasons the children gave for joining the project included: the hope to learn more about flooding and how warning systems work; the fact that the floods were an important event in their local community and therefore it was important to talk about them; the belief that talking about the floods would help them to 'feel better'; and the desire 'to have fun'. Some children who hadn't been flooded at home also said they wanted to better understand what had happened to those who had.

All the children reported that they had enjoyed the project and said that the activities provided a good way to learn about how people were affected by the flooding. Those children who were also flooded at home commented that the project provided an opportunity to 'tell people what it's like' and 'help others to understand'. The children said that going on the walk to see the river and find evidence of steps taken locally to protect against flooding was very interesting and new. They also said that taking photos on the walk provided a way of 'talking and relating them to what happened'. They felt that these activities helped them to 'learn more about our village'; indeed, they appreciated the fact that the project was about the community, not just their school, and said this helped them to learn about other people's points of view. The children also enjoyed the sandplay and model-making activity, commenting that it 'helps show people what we felt'. They reported that the 'creative' aspect of this work allowed them to 'choose what you wanted to do' and they liked how it was 'half-imagined and half what really happened'. Finally, the children enjoyed playing games during the workshops, in particular a game that allowed them to explore how water 'can also help' us, rather than just being seen as a problem.

Following the workshops, the school created a 'memory book', which was taken around different classes and children were invited to write their recollections of the flood (Figure 1). Some of the children who took part also gave an assembly about the work they'd done during the Flood Suitcase project. The group said that now the 'floods seem like the past' but they emphasised that it remains important to 'remember what happened and what we did'. They recognise that 'we had past floods' so it's 'important for new children to learn'. As one child put it, 'It doesn't do it [flood] that often, but you need to be prepared'.



Figure 1: St. Michael's School Flood Suitcase and Flood Memory Book

On the issue of preparedness, one of the children's suggestions during the Flood Suitcase workshops was to hold a school 'flood drill'. The school's Headteacher told us that, in response to this idea, she is planning to run such a drill. She has also prepared a school emergency 'grab bag', which she plans to introduce and explain to the children during the flood drill. The children also proposed setting up a school 'flood club'. They thought this could provide a focus to learn more about flooding, to run some of the Flood Suitcase activities with other children who didn't take part and to talk about what more the school could do to prepare for flooding. They also suggested it could be a focus for fundraising for people affected by future flooding and providing support.