

Educational leaders become crisis managers: Facing disasters in the Asia-Pacific

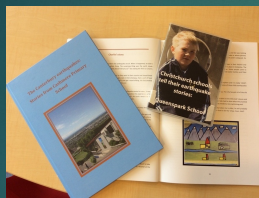


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After the Canterbury earthquakes I became a disaster researcher

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Visiting other disaster settings

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Meeting principals, teachers, children and young people

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Investigating the role of schools in disaster response and recovery

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Research details

- ▶ Research conducted across 15 schools from 2012-2018
- ▶ Six countries: New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Nepal, Samoa, Vanuatu
- ▶ Four disaster types: Earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones, bushfires
- ▶ Participatory, sensitive, qualitative, emergent design
- ▶ Data gathered through audio and video interviews, observations, arts-based methods, school documents, visuals, media reports
- ▶ Analysed *vertically* (within type/country) & *horizontally* (across countries)
- ▶ Four cross-country themes:
 - ▶ schools as community hubs
 - ▶ **principals as crisis managers**
 - ▶ Teachers as first responders (and on-going psycho-social support facilitators)
 - ▶ Children as participatory citizens

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In this presentation, I share the stories of principals



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Vertical analysis:
four vignettes

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2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami: A principal's story (School J1)

I was not in a school but in another building that was five stories high. The water came right into the building. We were trapped for five days. We couldn't use the electricity. It was too risky so we used candles. Dinner was only one piece of sugar from the dining room. We had to share the water from the tank and other fetch other water for the restroom. We had no information. There were people who were getting sick and we had to take care of them.

Five days later we were rescued by helicopter. After that I went to visit the school. The windows were blown out, doors ripped off, ceilings down, walls collapsed, the gym was damaged. The students got the information that the tsunami was coming so they ran up to the shrine on the mountainside and were saved.

I tried to encourage the teachers. The students already had training for evacuation many times but they couldn't deal with this disaster. It was not until after nine days that I knew how many people were safe or not. My wife was at another school but that school was safe at the time.

Houses were ripped away and the countryside looked like a huge lake, completely under water. The flooding overlooked the river banks. The bridges were ripped away. The ways to move around were so limited. The roads were damaged. I had to use a bicycle. I was tough work. I lost 20 kilos after the earthquake and tsunami – it was such a hard time.

The government decided that school would start on April 21. Some teachers were going to other schools but they stayed as long as possible to help with the recovery. Some children were still living in shelters. Teachers visited the shelters to encourage the children to come back to school. Even in May some children wouldn't come back to school so some of the other students went to visit them. When school started, school lunch was only bread and milk. After that volunteers came and made lunch for the children. It proves that many people cared and helped.

With so many facilities destroyed teaching has become so difficult. Teachers have to deal with their own home situations as well as school difficulties. They have complex feelings. I tried to make them express their concerns – to share their troubles and worries with each other. And many parents cannot communicate with their children now so children do not feel good at home. Teachers did their very best in every situation. They helped the children's recovery; they helped to move the children's hearts forward.

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2010/2011 New Zealand earthquakes: A principal's story (School NZ4)

From September 2010 the first things we had to consider were: Is our building safe? Are the children going to be safe? Are the staff going to be safe? That earthquake happened overnight and there wasn't anyone on site but there was a lot of damage in our community. We were set up as a Civil Defence base, so for the first week and a half there were families not only from our community but from other schools as well. There was an overnight area in the school where people stayed so we were getting a good picture of the needs of our community.

The February quake was a bit different because it happened here during the day. I was just walking out to go into the playground and BANG! The response from me was: "Right, what do we need to do now? We need to make sure the children know where to go." We set off the alarm and the children were assembled in the assembly area and within five minutes I had assurances from every teacher that everyone was safe and well. We had a Twitter message that we could send out to families – "The children are all safe, assembled and accounted for."

We didn't really know the extent of the damage or chaos that was happening in Christchurch until a parent who was there arrived at our school in about half an hour and told us what they had experienced. About two hours after the event, I managed to make sure that my family were safe.

We've always had a really strong positive school culture but once we got through the initial emotions of the earthquake we've galvanised that a lot more. Teachers are more aware that some children are in very difficult situations – living in torn apart homes; some don't know where they are going to be living; some have been living in a caravan – and some children don't always tell you those things.

It's certainly changed the basic job description that principals have. We've always got in the back of our minds now how the children are feeling emotionally. We are supporting families a lot more than we had.

I've been just so amazed with some teachers in particular whose homes were badly damaged in town and they were offered discretionary leave to sort out their own lives but all of them wanted to be here for the children. I've just had so much admiration for the teachers through throughout that whole process.

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2015 Vanuatu cyclone: A principal's story (School V2)

I remember a cyclone from when I was a child with my mother and father. But these children – they didn't know about cyclones. It is a topic in their English lessons but if they haven't experienced it, they don't understand it.

Now, I'm a father. I have been a teacher for 19 years. Cyclone Pam was during the weekend. I was home with my kids. I had to stop the wind blowing open the door – two or three of us were standing against the door. We couldn't sleep the whole night. Things were breaking. Water was coming in the louvres. I was trying to keep my family calm til daybreak

At the school, the Jmain building – the roof was blown off. The school hall snapped, the kindy and the school stage were blown over – big damage. I had to make a report but we don't have the money to fix it – but we don't give up, we go slowly, slowly.

We have a Disaster Management Office but when it comes to the level of the school community, it is in my hands. Within two weeks we started our classes. We try our best. I really appreciate the teachers' effort. We call for parent assistance to clean up the school but very few turn up – less than ten parents. But the teachers have two homes to care for – their homes in which they reside and the school. They have to clean their homes and they have to clean the school.

We got help from the Australian government and USAR. UNICEF brought supplies, and visitors donated books to get the children motivated. We got some sports equipment and stationery.

When the children come back to school they are still traumatised. At first, they are in shock. It takes time for them to do anything. The teachers can't teach. Children just sit there. First day only about three or four per class come. It took a month before they all came back. I told the teachers to go by the Ministry of Education advice – just go little by little. Ask them to tell the stories of their experiences, then go slowly, slowly, little by little. Soon you can get back into the normal programme. It took about a month or so. They told stories to their friends, they drew pictures but it took time.

We don't give up; we go slowly, slowly.

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2009 Samoan earthquake and tsunami: A principal's story (School S1)

The earthquake hit just after 7 in the morning. I was walking to school. I was about halfway there when I felt it. I started to run so I could get to school before anything happened. At the gate I saw the wave. Many children were already in the classrooms with their teachers. They saw me and started running towards me. I tried to signal for them to go the other way. So, I turned away from the school and started running up the hill and they started to follow me. Some were screaming. Some were crying. The tsunami caught the latecomers. It was very sad. We sat under a shaded tree and said a prayer. I told no-one to go until their parents came. We waited most of the morning until someone came to get the children.

After the children went home, it was different. It was very quiet. Only locals were allowed in. Or doctors and first-aiders and search and rescue. They needed to clear the road for access. I couldn't find my husband. It was a very hard time. So devastating.

We didn't know what to do. We didn't have any training. We didn't expect this to happen in Samoa. For a long time, children were nervous and afraid. They wouldn't go back to the beach. When they came back to school, we let them do what they liked. They could come to school or they could stay home. Their homes and their clothes were all gone and they still had trauma.

Lots of people came to help – the Red Cross, UNICEF, Caritas. They brought supplies and activities for the children. Schools from overseas sent things to us. Counsellors came and did art work with the children. It helped a lot.

The schools started working together to help each other. It was good for sharing and support. The children were playing together. The bigger students were looking after the younger ones. Bit by bit, they got back to normal.

Many of the houses were gone. Many families have land up the hill and they live there now. They used to live in a small fale but they were washed away. Now they have a European-style house with a water tank. We've got a new school up the hill with a nice building and a big playground.

We learned some important things. The children learned to be prepared if an earthquake happens again or if they hear the tsunami siren. It will happen again – if it does, I tell the children, don't run home, don't run to school, run for your lives!

I still feel sad. I lost my husband. Time heals... but it never goes away.

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Horizontal analysis: three phases

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Response

- ▶ *I put on my principal's smile. Parents arrived and were standing outside. I realized then that I had an audience and my response needed to be calm and instantaneous. I had to look like I was in control. (Principal, School NZ1)*
- ▶ *After the earthquake, I came to realise that most of the students in the affected area lost everything. Their houses were collapsed. They lost their books and their uniforms, some even lost their parents. I asked my Rotary friends in Australia to raise some funds to help the victimised families. (Principal, School N1)*
- ▶ *After the cyclone, I have to be a carpenter. I look at the classrooms and make a report. The Ministry came around to assess the damage. I ask parents to assist as I have no handyman. We still have things to be done. We have to spend school money on the roof. (Principal, School V1)*

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Recovery

- ▶ *The MoE gave us two weeks to recover then we come back to school. They tell us to go slowly with the children so that they can forget about this. After a week when some start coming back, the teachers ask them about what happened to them – to tell their stories and we have lessons about safety precautions, what to do if there is another cyclone. (Principal, School V1)*
- ▶ *We started a mobile school system. Because I saw that my students were frightened and sad. They had no food and nothing to do and their parents were busy with rescue work. I mobilise my teachers and we go to different places for one or two or three days. We let the children do drawing and painting and singing and dancing to make them happy. We feed them a small snack. We did more than 50 places. The parents appreciated what we started. (Principal, School N1)*
- ▶ *Obviously, we kept on feeding kids, we've always done that to a certain extent but that became more evident. There were kids without lunches; there were kids without breakfasts. We just fed them as the need arose. Kids were really tired, so we would put cushions in the back of the room for them to sleep. (Principal, School NZ2)*

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Repercussions

- ▶ *We were affected for the whole year. More than 100 students could not come back. They were frightened and their parents did not want them to come to school. Last year the results of the examination were not so good. Students couldn't study. They are squeezed into a small tent with no lights – very difficult. (Principal, School, N1)*
- ▶ *That starts to wear down the staff, so we knew that we had to look after each other. We really had to look out for each other – be prepared, watch for the signs: "This teacher is not going to be at school tomorrow. I can just tell, she's looking shaky." (Principal, School NZ2)*
- ▶ *We know from all the international literature that this will stay with people. I've got colleagues who've been diagnosed with cancer, with stress-related illnesses. They go to the doctor, get medical attention, but still there has been a gradual decline in teachers' well-being. Support staff here have been counsellors on the phone with crying parents. (Principal, School NZ5)*

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Conceptual framework: Principals as crisis managers

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Characteristics	Explanation
Dispositional	<i>What leaders bring to the event from their background, personal qualities, experiences, values, beliefs, personality traits, skills, areas of expertise and conceptions of leadership</i>
Relational	<i>The ways in which leaders offer a unifying vision and develop a sense of community within the organisation, engendering loyalty, enabling empowerment, building strong and trusting relationships and fostering collaboration</i>
Situational	<i>How leaders assess the situation as it unfolds, understanding the context, being aware of different responses (including cultural sensitivities), making timely decisions, adapting to changing needs, making use of resources (both material and personnel), providing direction, responding flexibly, thinking creatively and constantly re-appraising the options</i>

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Summary

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- ▶ Principals have little or no training in managing emergencies, let alone disasters, unless there is a history of such events
- ▶ Schools are expected to have emergency management plans but these are often viewed as a compliance exercise
- ▶ Schools do conduct drills and some engage families and communities in disaster planning
- ▶ When disasters hit while school is in session, principals must make multiple instant life-saving decisions
- ▶ Principals tend to put their school communities before their own welfare throughout the response and recovery phases
- ▶ Principals continue to look after the welfare of their students, families, staff and wider communities well after the disaster event
- ▶ It takes a toll on principals' health and wellbeing

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Isn't it time for someone,
somewhere, to say:
"Thank you?"



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