

Series: Alleviating the Educational Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences:
School-University-Community Collaboration

“River of emotions”: Reflecting on a university-school-community partnership to support children’s emotional processing in a post-disaster context [Pre-print copy]

Authors:

Carol Mutch, Associate Professor, The University of Auckland

Jason Miles, School Principal, Kaiapoi North School

Sarah Yates, Project Leader and Freelance Artist

Abstract

This chapter reports on a partnership that developed between a university, a school and the school’s local community as the three parties collaborated to help the school’s students process the traumatic events they had endured during the 2010/2011 Canterbury earthquake sequence. The approach taken to support the students was based on the concept of “emotional processing” where children and young people come to make sense of what they have experienced through a range of carefully sequenced strategies designed to enable them to express their emotions safely through activities such as storying, art or drama. Research on helping children and young people adjust after traumatic events suggests that emotional processing can be an important post-trauma activity. Without appropriate opportunities to

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process the events and put them into perspective, children and young people's social, emotional and educational functioning can be adversely affected.

This chapter describes how Mutch (the lead co-author) and her university built a relationship with a school and its community in order to assist the students to create a large circular mosaic that would record the town's earthquake story. The mosaic panels visually portrayed the town prior to the earthquakes, the community's experiences during the earthquakes, and the students' hopes for the future. The mosaic took over 18 months to complete and involved every child in the school and dozens of community volunteers. For the purposes of this chapter, the school principal (the second co-author) and the project manager (the third co-author) came together with Mutch five years later to reflect on the process. Mutch was curious as to whether the process had any long-lasting impacts on the school and its community. It was heartening to find that the positive effects of participation in the project were sustained well beyond its completion.

Introduction

Television, digital devices and social media keep us informed of world events – and one of the most common that we encounter on our screens is the latest natural disaster. Indeed, in this year alone, we have seen cyclones, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tropical storms, polar vortices, extreme heat, drought, cyclones, mudslides, and volcanic activity.¹ Each of these events takes a huge toll on the people affected – physically, economically, socially, emotionally and psychologically. Among the injured and traumatised will be children and young people, who equate to about one quarter of any country's population.

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While they can be incredibly resilient they are also very vulnerable, often depending on adults around them for guidance and comfort (Cahill, Beadle, Mitch, Coffey, & Crofts, 2010; Tatebe & Mutch, 2015). Children and young people could face death, injury, psychological distress, abuse and exploitation (Bonanno et al. 2010; Gibbs et al., 2017; Tatebe & Mutch, 2015). They will experience educational disruption, family stress, dislocation and bewilderment (Bonanno et al., 2010; Norris et al., 2002; Prinstein et al., 1996; Tatebe & Mutch, 2015). The impacts of the event will continue long after the community has moved into its recovery and reconstruction phase (Gibbs et al., 2017; Gordon, 2004; Smawfield, 2013; Mutch, 2014a; Tatebe & Mutch, 2015). This chapter reports on how one university, one school, and its community worked in partnership to help the children in that school express their emotions in a way that would enable them to begin to absorb their experiences of a destructive earthquake into their personal and collective histories.

In September 2010, a major earthquake struck the Canterbury region of New Zealand. The project described in this chapter took place in a small town located north of the region's major city, Christchurch. In the September earthquake, the town of Kaiapoi suffered major structural damage from the severe shaking and liquefaction.² Kaiapoi lost over 800 homes – one third of the town's residences. Many historic buildings in the town centre were destroyed and roads and rail links were severed. The September earthquake was only the first of a sequence of over 12,000 aftershocks that lasted many years, further disrupting recovery and reconstruction in Canterbury (Aydun, Ulusay, Hamada & Beetham, 2012; Potter, Becker, Johnston, & Rossiter, 2015).

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At the time of the earthquakes, Mutch was working in Christchurch and saw first-hand the toll that the earthquakes took on schools and their communities. From 2012, with funding from the New Zealand National Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the university at which Mutch was newly employed, she worked with five different schools on participatory post-earthquake projects. This chapter outlines one of those projects – the Kaiapoi community memorial mosaic. The mosaic project would not have succeeded without the school principal, and the respect that he was held in by his community, or the artist who managed the complex logistics of the project – and they are the co-authors of this chapter.

The chapter is set out in three parts. The first part introduces the disaster event that precipitated the project, followed by summaries of the relevant literature on children in disasters, emotional processing, and school-university-community partnerships, before concluding with a brief description of the project approach. The second part details the partnership as it developed and the strategies used for engaging the community. This part includes a discussion of the mosaic-making process and relevant photographs³ to illustrate the process and the final product. The third part of the chapter brings the partnership story up-to-date as we reflect on the project overall, why the partnership succeeded, and how and why the project had a long-lasting impact on school-community relations. The chapter concludes with some lessons learned when creating successful university-school-community partnerships.

Part 1: Getting started

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“I always thought your life flashed before your eyes before you died and I was waiting for that to happen” [Student, aged 10, 2012].

The Canterbury Earthquake Sequence

On September 4, 2010, an earthquake measuring 7.1 on the Richter scale, centred near the town of Darfield, struck the Canterbury region of New Zealand. It caused widespread damage to land, homes, businesses, transport links, and infrastructure (Aydun, Ulusay, Hamada & Beetham, 2012; Bannister & Gledhill, 2012). It was followed by a series of aftershocks, including several that registered over 6 on the Richter scale. The most devastating aftershock was on February 22, 2011. This 6.3 magnitude earthquake, located much closer to the centre of the city of Christchurch, brought down many already fragile buildings, further disrupted transport links and infrastructure functions and led to the loss of 185 lives. Damages amounted to over \$40 billion, 1200 inner city buildings needed demolition, and more than 130,000 houses were declared unliveable (Canterbury, Earthquakes Royal Commission, 2012; Potter, Becker, Johnston, & Rossiter, 2015). The city is still rebuilding much of the central business district and trying to attract people back to live and work in the inner city.

After each of the major earthquakes, schools were closed until they could be assessed, repaired, relocated or alternative accommodation could be found and it was safe for them to reopen (Education Review Office, 2013; Mutch, 2014b). The school that is the focus of this chapter, Kaiapoi North School, a primary [elementary] school for students aged 5-12 years,

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was not seriously damaged after the September earthquake and was used as a shelter for homeless and frightened community members. Miles recalls:

We were set up as a Civil Defence base, so for the first week-and-a-half there were families from not only our community but the other schools as well coming here to receive support from Civil Defence. There was an overnight area in our hall where people stayed so we were getting a good picture of the needs of our community with their homes—how much damage they did or didn't have and how frightened the children were.

After the February 2011 earthquake, the residents of Kaiapoi found themselves returning the kindnesses shown to them by the many outsiders who had helped them in September the previous year. They hosted many people from Christchurch who had lost their homes and the school took in an extra 50 students relocated from other parts of the region.

We've got some really strong values and beliefs but now the children are thinking about living them a lot more than they had before the quakes – particularly *arohanui*, which is caring for people, being there for others and making sure that people are feeling okay or if they need someone to be with. They are really resilient and want to help.

While the Ministry of Education had trauma response teams in place after the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes, it had never had to deal with a disaster of the size, complexity, and longevity of the Canterbury earthquake sequence and resources were stretched thin. Other local initiatives, such as the “All right?” social media campaign tried to fill the void (Calder, et al., 2019; Carlton & Vallance, 2013) but the on-going physical, social, emotional, and psychological repercussions persisted.

It was in the early post-earthquake recovery phase that the Mutch began her series of collaborative post-earthquake projects. From 2012, she worked closely with five schools to support student-led post-disaster emotional processing activities. Each school chose different a different creative process, for example, creating an illustrated book or a video documentary (see Author 1, 2013; Author 1 & Colleague, 2014). In the case of Kaiapoi North School, they chose to make a community mosaic.

Children and Disasters

Disasters are characterised by the suddenness or lack of preparedness, the unexpectedness of the size of the event and ensuing damage, and the inability of existing systems to cope. There can be a lack of immediate access to food, water, shelter and medical aid and large-scale death or dislocation (Cahill et al. 2010; Ferris & Petz 2012; Ferris, Petz & Stark 2013; Mutch, 2014a; Smawfield 2013; UNISDR, 2015; 2017; Winkworth 2007).

Disasters can have serious long-term effects on children and young people's physical and psychological wellbeing (Australian Psychological Society 2013; Bonanno et al. 2010; Brock & Jimerson 2013; Gibbs et al., 2017; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IRFRC), 2012; Norris et al. 2002), but the severity of their reactions often depend on risk factors or prior experiences, such as previous trauma or mental illness, or the level of exposure to the event, injuries, loss or dislocation (Bonanno et al. 2010; Brock & Jimerson 2013).

Many children and young people experience symptoms of distress or anxiety post-disaster but, for most, these usually reduce over time (Australian Psychological Society 2013;

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Bonanno et al. 2010; La Greca & Silverman 2009). Their sense of safety and security, their ongoing development and their social relationships could be compromised (Gordon 2004; McDermott et al. 2005). Young disaster survivors report that the loss of loved ones and places can impair their sense of a purposeful future (Betancourt & Kahn 2008). They might become irritable or aggressive, not want to go to school, display sleeping or eating disturbances, bed wetting, learning problems, poor concentration, passivity, or loss of interest in friends (Author 1 and colleague, 2019; Australian Psychological Society 2013; Bonnano et al. 2010; Cahill et al. 2010; National Association of School Psychologists 2008; Prinstein et al. 1996). Children and young people with severe trauma will need on-going specialist support (Australian Psychological Society 2013; National Association of School Psychologists 2008).

Emotional Processing

The approach used to support students across Mutch's different post-earthquake projects was based on the concept of "emotional processing" (Mutch, 2013; Mutch & Gawith, 2014; Mutch & Latai, 2019; O'Connor & Takahashi, 2014; Prinstein et al., 1996). Research on emotional processing (Mutch & Latai, 2019; Caruana, 2010; Gordon 2007; Prinstein et al., 1996) concludes that it is a helpful post-trauma activity for children with mild to moderate symptoms. Emotional processing is defined as "a diverse set of physical, cognitive and affective actions that lead to absorption of emotional disturbances" (Prinstein et al., 1996, p. 464). Without appropriate absorption or opportunities to put events into perspective, reminders of the event can interfere with normal functioning, resulting in

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nightmares, distress, anxiety or listlessness at home or school (Caruana, 2010; Prinstein et al., 1996).

Emotional processing can help children and young people make sense of their experiences through a range of strategies that are carefully constructed and monitored. Children and young people can safely tell their stories and express their emotions in a guided manner. The aim is to help them put the events into a broader context, to accept that the events have happened and cannot be undone but that they, the children and young people, can choose how they will respond to and remember them (Mutch & Latai, 2019; Gibbs et al, 2013). Care is taken to ensure that children and young people are not retraumatised by assisting them to articulate their emotions through metaphor, analogy or other creative and expressive modes. Strategies include structured conversations, narrative and storying, arts-based activities, dance, drama and collaborative games (Cahill et al., 2010; Gibbs et al, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2017; Mutch, 2013; Mutch & Latai, 2019; O'Connor, 2013; O'Connor & Takahashi, 2014; Peek et al., 2016).

University-School-Community Partnerships

The literature on school-university partnerships highlights that institutions, such as universities, engaged in the social and educational development of children and young people need to build positive relationships with schools. If site visits are involved then supportive relationships are even more important to smooth access, foster communication and reduce difficulties (Chorzempa, Isabelle, & de Groot 2010; Patton 2012). Unfortunately, these relationships have sometimes had a history of tension and uneven power relations. Patton

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(2012) reported that lack of mutual trust and respect between the partners, poor communication about the purpose of the relationship and reliance on one-time or infrequent interactions have damaged these relationships. In university-school relationships the power differential often favours the university (Clavier et al. 2012; Hooper & Britnell 2012; Trent & Lim 2010). Universities generally hold the funding, expert knowledge, and resources and, despite using the school to achieve their goals, do not always act in a respectful or reciprocal manner.

More successful relationships between universities and schools use participatory approaches such as action research, reflective practice, communities of practice, appreciative inquiry or culturally responsive practices (Martin, Snow and Franklin Torrez, 2011; Nugent & Faucette 2013). In these participatory approaches, the emphasis is on mutual benefit. As Martin, Snow and Franklin Torrez (2011) explain, they require cultivating multiple interactions, negotiating webs of relationships, navigating the school-university contexts and understanding the venture as fluid and dynamic. Successful partnerships work best in an “ethic of care” (Nugent & Faucette 2013, p. 569), with thoughtful design and mutual respect. It is important to be aware that partnerships will be more complex than they might first appear and will require nurturing over time (Martin, Snow & Franklin Torrez 2011; Nugent & Faucette 2013).

When university personnel engage with wider communities, a similarly respectful approach and ethic of care is required. When it is in a post-disaster setting where a community is traumatised, dislocated and focused on survival and recovery, it is important that the question is asked as to whether the engagement is necessary, appropriate and will

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provide direct benefits to the participants (references). It is then important to ensure that the community understands the purpose of the engagement, the roles they are being asked to play and how much they are to be involved in decision making. Author 1 has described university-community collaboration as ranging along a continuum from projects *about, for, with* or *by* the community – and each of these approaches needs to be clearly defined, negotiated and agreed upon (Mutch, 2018).

Across each school setting in which Mutch has worked, she and her university colleagues approached the schools and their communities “gently, gently” (Mutch, Yates & Hu, 2015) using a co-designed approach that would focus on mutual respect, shared decision making and creative problem solving (Mutch, Yates & Hu, 2015; Mutch, 2018). Once the schools and communities came to understand that their involvement would benefit their children and young people, and indirectly, them as adults as well, and that they trusted the lead author to deliver what she had promised, they participated wholeheartedly.

Part 2: Setting up and maintaining the partnership

“Sailing on a river of emotions ... getting to calmer seas” [Student, aged 12, 2012]

Building Relationships

Mutch began her approach to the wider project by first discussing her ideas with the with the Canterbury Primary Principals’ Association. As the city was still reeling from the disaster and struggling with ongoing aftershocks and post-disaster recovery, it was important to move

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cautiously and establish credibility with the community. Being known in the city's education circles assisted in gaining their approval. It also helped that she had experienced the earthquakes herself and was able to empathize with their situations. It still took five months from the initial approach to the first school before the project got underway. This involved attending school staff meetings, community meetings and talking with teachers and parents individually. UNESCO provided seed funding to trial the approach in the first school. Without UNESCO New Zealand's belief in the project, it might never have got off the ground. Once the benefits could be seen, other schools approached the lead author and the project grew from there. The university and other donors provided funds to extend the project to other schools, one of which was Kaiapoi North School.

The partnership with Kaiapoi North School was able to get off to a smooth start because of a prior connection. Miles had been a student teacher when the Mutch was a teacher educator. When the Mutch explained how other schools had chosen to engage in the project, Miles' first reaction was that he felt the children had done enough talking and writing about the earthquake. He wanted the children to do something to give back to the community. His idea was to create memorial seat where people could sit and contemplate what they had been through, however, he was happy for the students to drive the project.

Because of the nature of the undertaking, a sensitive, contextual and ethical approach was imperative (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007; Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005). Ethical considerations included the common requirements of informed consent, the right to withdraw, school and parental permission for children to participate, and children's assent that they understood what was asked of them. As the project was also intended to be an

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archival record for the community of real events with real people's stories, anonymity was negotiated to suit. In this project, the principal's and school's full names were used but children were only referred to by their first names. Finally, it was important to have support mechanisms, such as a teacher or counsellor available, in case the activities caused any students distress.

Creating the Mosaic

The first step was to bring together a cross-section of students from the school to give shape to the project. Mutch and a university colleague used a carefully structured process that enabled the students to focus on the bigger messages they wanted the project to portray. The students said they wanted "to remind people in the future of what had happened"; "of what was there in the past and what has been lost"; "we want to remind them of what we went through"; of "how we stayed together and worked it out" and to remember "the people who died." When asked how they might do this, one student said, "to make something out of the broken bits of our homes." From this image, the idea of a mosaic arose.

The students were encouraged to capture their ideas on paper, in words and pictures. They wrote the words, "courage", "stay strong", "community", "band together" and "kia kaha" [stand tall]. They drew pictures of important icons – the cathedral in the centre of Christchurch that was badly damaged, a local historical building that was destroyed, and a bridge that was twisted with the earthquake's force. One boy drew a picture of a sailing ship. When asked why he chose that image, he said it was the Tuhoë, a ship moored in the nearby river, and when asked why he chose that symbol, he said it was "sailing through a river of

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emotions”. And where was it going? “To calmer seas.” We agreed that “River of Emotions” would make a perfect title for our project.

From these initial ideas we put the students into groups and drafted a set of mosaic panels that would tell the community’s story from the early Māori (indigenous people) and the first European settlers, to life before the earthquakes, to what it was like during the earthquakes and, finally, what the students hoped for the future. As discussions proceeded, it was agreed that the four panels would sit in a circular shape with a seat in the middle. It would be located in a quiet corner of the school playground where a garden had been planted with trees and shrubs rescued from gardens of homes that had to be demolished.

Miles wanted every child to be part of the project – all five hundred of them. This required the consent of teachers and parents to agree to the disruption to regular school routines. Mutch visited the school as often as possible, sometimes working with classes or groups of children or just coming in for informal conversations at morning tea time in the staff room. Yates, an artist with links to both the university and the local community agreed to manage the logistics of the project on site. The school allocated a spare classroom to be the mosaic making studio. Careful organisation was required so that the students could be cycled through the various stages from initial sketches to paper mosaics and to panel designs, from cutting tiles to cleaning and laying bricks and finally, placing, gluing and grouting tiles onto the mosaic panels.

Outside, the site had to be prepared – bulldozed, drained, filled with gravel, rolled, concreted and bricks laid. The project was so huge and time consuming that it went far

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beyond the resources that either the school or the university had budgeted for. Yates and the school worked together to engage the wider community. They contacted local organisations and community newspapers. The community responded willingly with goods, services, time and labour. A local men's organisation built the seat to go in the centre of the four mosaic panels.

Other community members volunteered to clean and lay bricks from demolished town buildings or to cut and place mosaic pieces alongside the children. To ensure that every child participated, even the newest children to the school were given a tile to place in the mosaic. The mosaic pieces included the literally "broken bits" of their homes as they brought pieces of crockery or garden tiles to incorporate into the panels.

In 2014, a community unveiling was arranged. The students, their teachers and parents, and 72 community volunteers whose names we had remembered to record, were invited to view the mosaic, to recognise all who had contributed and to share a morning tea. The final piece of the mosaic was laid by a local Member of Parliament and one of the students.

River of emotions

The four panels give vivid insights into the children's experiences of the earthquakes and their processing of the events. As adults, such as Yates, Mutch and the community volunteers, worked alongside groups of students in the classroom or outside at the mosaic site, the informal conversations ranged from specific memories of the events to broader

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understandings of how such events impact communities – interspersed with comments about everyday events. In this way, the students could safely express their recollections and emotions in a non-judgemental setting that enabled them to assimilate the events into their own personal histories. They came to see beyond their personal experiences to understand the human story of disaster response and recovery. As Mutch notes elsewhere (Gibbs, et al., 2013, p. 135):

The experience enabled the children to begin gaining different perspectives and allowed them to discuss their experiences more objectively. They were moving from the particular (“my story”) through the more general (“our story”) to the conceptual (“What does this story tell us about who we are?”).

In the historical panel, the children portrayed the ideas that represented their natural environment – the mountains, forests, plains and rivers of Canterbury. They added local flora and fauna, such as tree ferns and kiwi. They portrayed the history of Ngai Tahu, the indigenous tribe in the region, with a *whareniui* (meeting house). They represented the coming of the European with buildings such as the Kaiapoi Woollen Mills – and many of the bricks surrounding the mosaic have come from that site. One of the key features of this panels is that the students were keen to distinguish between “happy” colours and “unhappy” colours. The historical mosaic was deemed a happy panel, which meant that the colours they chose were predominantly happy colours – yellow, blue and green.

The panel representing life before the earthquakes is the most stylised, perhaps because the younger classes contributed to this one. There are rainbows, children playing, brightly coloured houses and the Christchurch cathedral still intact. A smiling figure can be

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seen in the bottom centre. It is a child's mother standing outside her hairdressing salon. A feature of all the panels is the Kaiapoi river that winds through the town. The river was made from broken mirror tiles because the children said the colour of the river was always changing and the mirror tiles would reflect the sky and the clouds and make their river come alive.

The colours change dramatically in the earthquake panel. The children wanted black and red to be the predominant colours, as those colours represented fear, danger and death. The images are of broken buildings, children crying, cars falling into chasms in the road, the ruined cathedral, and ambulances and fire engines racing to the rescue. One dramatic feature is very obvious. The seismic reading for the February 22 earthquake, as recorded in their town, is the centre piece of this panel. Another feature is that the river changes for a time to solid grey to represent the liquefaction that bubbled up from underneath the ground and spread inches thick throughout the town, discolouring the river and causing damage to homes and properties. The emotions on the faces of the people portrayed represent shock and fear.

In the final panel, the colours return to blue and yellow and green. There are butterflies and animals, hearts and suns, children playing rugby, repaired houses and roads. The words from the original discussions, such as community and *kia kaha* have found their way into this panel. People are happy with outstretched arms and the river runs clear. In the top right, the Tuhoe, having sailed on a river of emotions is finally reaching calmer seas.



Figure 1: The Tuhoe sailing on a river of emotions as portrayed in the completed mosaic

Part 3: Looking back

“How’s that mosaic doing?” [Former student, 2018]

2014 and beyond

After the unveiling of the mosaic, Mutch and Miles maintained their relationship. Further funding was provided by Mutch’s university to support a summer intern to create a website that would tell the story of the development of the mosaic. The website is currently being transferred into book form so the school and community can have a permanent hard copy

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record. At different times Mutch brought international visitors interested in post-disaster recovery to the school to meet the students and hear what they had to say about the mosaic process. The New Zealand Association for Educational Research funded a symposium panel consisting of Mutch, one of her doctoral students, Miles and a teacher to share their experiences at the British Educational Research Association's conference in the UK in 2015.

Sadly, the school and the region was to face further trauma. In 2016, an unrelated 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit the town of Kaikōura in the northern region of Canterbury.⁴ It caused severe damage and disruption and re-ignited the fear and anxiety that the people of Canterbury had thought had begun to dissipate. Many children in the region reverted to post-trauma behaviours. Yet it took two more years for the government to acknowledge the scale of unmet social, emotional and psychological needs in wider Canterbury from both the 2010/2011 earthquakes and the more recent Kaikoura earthquake. In 2018, the Mana Ake/Stronger for Tomorrow early intervention mental health programme was launched as an initiative between health, education and other community agencies. Schools are now grouped into clusters and Mana Ake support workers are available to help schools, classes, groups or individual students and their families recover from trauma (Canterbury District Health Board, 2018).

In November 2018, a suspicious fire destroyed two classrooms at Kaiapoi North School. The two classrooms had been refurbished at the end of the previous year as part of a wider school rebuilding programme. Teachers and students lost many of their personal belongings and school-related materials. At the time, the principal said:

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We're devastated, absolutely devastated, for the children in there, the teachers and the community. ... Our community is devastated, but we're a proud community here and we've got a lot of support from our families. We'll work through it and try our best to support the children when they come back.⁵

In March 2019, the city of Christchurch again made international headlines as a lone gunman carried out a pre-meditated terror attack on two mosques, killing 51 people and injuring many more.⁶ The grandfather of three students at Kaiapoi North School was among the victims. The school and community again had to turn their attention to coping with a trauma that they could never have imagined.

Reflecting on the project

In 2018, Miles met Morgan, the student who, six years earlier, had come up with the idea of the “river of emotions”. Now a young man, he asked, “How’s that mosaic doing?” and then went on to talk about how his involvement in the mosaic project had had a profound impact on him. In April 2019, when the three authors met to talk about the project, Miles noted that this was not unusual. For up to five years afterwards, he said children would walk down to the corner where the mosaic was situated and would spend time some quiet time viewing the pictures in the mosaic panels. He added:

There were a number of children who benefitted a lot from the mosaic. They all spent time there at different times of the day. Some of them might not have visited it for months but then you’d see them down there, walking around, reflecting on things...

The students with the strongest involvement have since moved on to high school but other children still go there – not because of their personal memories but because it looks interesting and they know it is important to the school. They understand why it is there and they have heard what their parents and other members of their family have been through.

Miles continues:

They know the significance of the earthquakes and they can see the things being rebuilt in the town and they know that the mosaic in the corner of our school is representative of that time and the struggles that our families went through.

Each year, the school appoints ambassadors, students who know the story of the mosaic and can take visitors to the site. Miles said that this arose because of the interest shown by the international visitors that Mutch brought to the school. He explained:

You brought a number of people into the school and that made me reflect on why we were doing what we were doing. That was really helpful for me and the children. If someone was coming from Japan to talk about our mosaic, it must be really important.

The impact on school-community relations

Our reflective conversation turned to the university-school-community partnership and Miles noted:

When the project happened there was a lot of coming together from the community, the parents and the staff. At the time it was a really healing process. But without the

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partnership, I don't think we would have ended up with something so significant. It would have been a nice-looking seat and a few students might have been involved. The fact that it took a year and half to make – that was important.

While the size of the project and the length of time it took seemed daunting at the time, the fact that every child contributed something to the mosaic, whether they made drawings, cut tiles, laid mosaic pieces or cleaned bricks – it gave them a sense of belonging. It also gave the community a focal point for their wish to help and their need to process the events for themselves:

It was healing for them and healing for us. For the children to see other people from the community, and parents, people from the bank, and the people Sarah [Yates] got to scrape bricks – it broke down barriers. After the earthquakes, people wanted to help and good things can come out of adversity. That was one of the positive things about our community, that people looked beyond themselves and the children got to see this.

Miles reiterated that two of the values of the school were *manakitanga* (reciprocal and caring hospitality) and *arohanui* (love for each other and those around us). Through the earthquakes and the events that followed the children were able to see these values operating in the school and their community:

With the fire, the community was saddened again and it did bring back a lot of memories from the earthquakes. Our community and people outside our community wanted to help in some way. The healing part of what we needed to do with the children who were in the classes affected took us back to how we had handled the

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grief process after the earthquakes. We let them [the children] know that how they were feeling was natural, that it's good to talk about it, that your feelings might be different to other people's feelings and that sort of thing.

While the school and community were there to help the students – about half of whom had spent a year, at different times, in the destroyed classrooms – they struggled to explain to the children why it had happened. An earthquake was a natural phenomenon but arson left the children with feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. Similarly, with the mosque shootings the following year:

Again, you couldn't give them answers as to why – those sorts of questions – we just had to say it happened and it was sad but that we had a family that we had to focus on. The community raised over \$2000 in four days. As part of the healing, some of the school staff and students went to visit the family to say a *karakia* (prayer). We were welcomed with open arms. We were representing the love of the wider community for them.

Miles also commented that the school had become the “second home” for children and parents as they coped with the different grief processes:

A sense of community is gold – not only in good times but in bad times because you've built up that trust. When things go wrong they look to you for support and advice. That would be my main piece of advice – to have strong values, to live those values, to talk about them and use them to bring your community into your school.

Lesson learned

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In reflecting on the process and the partnership overall, we made the following observations:

- The partnership enabled a deeper and longer-lasting healing process.
- There were multiple benefits for student support and recovery, community engagement and staff reflection.
- The process allowed for the safe expression of emotions and the absorption of the events into personal and collective histories.
- Allowing children to partner in the design and implementation produced a richer, more authentic product.
- The experience of coming together as a community after the earthquakes prepared the ground for coping with further adverse events – the school fire and the mosque shootings.
- The mosaic took on a significance well beyond its physical manifestation and original purpose to become a personal touchstone and site of historical significance.

Conclusion

Acknowledgement

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Notes

1. See <https://reliefweb.int/disasters>.
2. Liquefaction is where liquefied matter from under the ground's surface following an earthquake erupts and causes slumping of land and buildings.
3. The photograph was taken by Mutch.
4. <https://www.eqc.govt.nz/recent-events/kaikoura-earthquake>
5. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/108438513/suspicious-fire-at-canterbury-school-destroys-classroom-block>
6. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/chch-terror>

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