CHAPTER

THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN IN TIMES OF DISASTER

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Abstract

Nowhere is the role of pastoral care in educational settings more important than in post-disaster contexts. For over a decade, the author has been researching the role of schools in disaster and crisis contexts. In this chapter, she argues that role of schools in supporting children, their families and communities post-disaster has been under-recognised and under-acknowledged. For this chapter, she elaborates on how schools support children[1] through the response and recovery phases of disasters. The chapter is structured around three main themes: (a) schools supporting individual children and their families in the response phase; (b) supporting children in the classroom and at school once schooling recommences; and (c) schools supporting children and families in the longer term through wider community engagement. Examples are drawn from six countries in the Asia-Pacific region (New Zealand, Australia, Samoa, Vanuatu, Japan and Nepal) and five disaster types (earthquakes, tsunami, wildfires, cyclones and COVID-19). The purpose of the chapter is to draw together the common threads of these experiences in order that we can be better prepared for such eventualities through improved policies and practices.

Cite as: Mutch, C. (2023). The role of schools in supporting children in times of disaster. S. Tucker & D. Trotman (Eds). Pastoral care in Education: Time for a change. Cambridge Scholars Press.

[Pre-print copy]

[1] I am using a broad definition of children and include young people up to the end of compulsory schooling (approximately 18 years old).

Introduction

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR 2020) released a report outlining the human cost of disasters since the turn of the century. The report notes, "We are twenty years into this new century, and disaster risk is taking on new shapes and sizes with every passing year" (3). While the report focuses only on natural hazard-related disasters, i.e., not biological or technological disasters, they discuss 7,348 disasters that claimed 1.23 million lives, and affected 4 billion people, some multiple times. The economic cost of the disasters between 2000 and 2019 was put at US$ 2.97 trillion. The report notes, in particular, "the staggering rise in climate-related disasters over the last twenty years" (3) and comments that, "it is baffling that we willingly and knowingly continue to sow the seeds of our own destruction, despite the science and evidence that we are turning our only home into an uninhabitable hell for millions of people" (3).

It is in this context that I have been advocating for us to learn from one institution that is overlooked in disaster response and recovery policy, despite it often finding itself at the centre of such events. I am referring to the local school. As schools exist in most communities, even very small ones, they become inextricably involved in disaster events in their locality. The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED)'s emergency events database (EM-DAT) describes a disaster as killing ten or more people, affecting one hundred or more, and possibly requiring the declaration of a state of emergency or the need to call for international assistance (UNDRR 2020). Given this definition, whether it is a school shooting, a major community industrial accident, a natural-hazard-related disaster, such as a flood or an earthquake, or the COVID-19 pandemic, schools, through their wide family and community links, are often at the forefront of providing support in the immediate and long-term aftermath of such events.

Dyregrov et al. (2018) state that natural disasters, including climate change, are impacting almost 200 million children each year. For this chapter, I wish to put the child at the centre of the discussion and answer three questions from my research findings: (a) how do schools support children and their families through immediate and short-term response; (b) what do schools do to support the students in their care when school resumes post-disaster; and (c) how do schools engage with the wider community to support children's longer-term recovery? First, I briefly summarise the relevant literature before outlining the wider study from which the findings discussed in this chapter are drawn. I also describe a conceptual framework that structures the main body of the chapter before sharing the voices of principals, teachers, parents and children. I conclude with a set of recommendations to support schools with the important post-disaster work that they are expected to undertake.

Literature review

To contexualise the findings from the wider study, I highlight two aspects of the literature related to children in disaster contexts. First, I discuss the varying impacts that disasters can have on children and, second, share examples of ways in which children have been supported to overcome the trauma of their experiences and to come to terms with their altered reality.

The impact of disasters on children

In two earlier literature reviews (Mutch, 2014; Tatebe & Mutch ,2015), we noted at the time that the strongest theme on the impacts of disasters on children in research literature viewed children through a psychological lens (see, for example, La Greca and Silverman 2009). There was some reference to the economic and physical impacts, such as ensuing poverty, especially in the grey literature from disaster relief NGOs (see for example, Save the Children 2006). There was also emerging literature on social and emotional impacts (see, for example, O'Connor 2013). Some researchers took a more child-focused approach (for example, Cahill et al. 2011), seeing the child as part of a family, community, society or culture (see also, Gibbs et al. 2017). This conceptualisation is echoed by Peek et al. (2018) who describe the literature on children and disasters as going through six chronological waves of focus: (1) children's psychological and behavioural outcomes; (2) exposure and physical outcomes; (3) social vulnerability; (4) the broader socio-ecological context; (5) children's resilience, strengths and capabilities; and, most recently, (6) centring children's voices, perspectives, actions and rights.

Using these varied lenses on the child in disaster contexts, I summarise the most commonly discussed impacts. Firstly, children can suffer physical harm in the disaster event, such as crush injuries. As the aftermath proceeds, they might face further harm through neglect, abuse, malnutrition or infection (Kar 2009; Kousky 2016). Psychologically, children can suffer from anxiety, grief, stress and depression (Alisic et al. 2018; Bonanno et al. 2010; La Greca and Silverman 2009) and some will go on to develop chronic symptoms that become post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Alisic et al. 2018; Dyregrov et al. 2018). Children might exhibit behavioural changes, such as bedwetting, withdrawal, clinginess, irritability, poor impulse control or heightened aggression (Peek et al. 2018; Prinstein et al. 1996). Emotionally, they might experience loss of security, safety and predictability and feel guilty, helpless, vulnerable or without hope (Betancourt and Kahn 2008; Orr 2007). Socially, they might face loss of, or separation from, family, friends and community, become displaced or

relocated, or face heightened violence and crime (Bertho et al. 2012; Kar 2009; Kaur and Kang 2021; Kousky 2016; Leon 2004). Materially, they might face loss of their home and belongings, disrupted community services, financial hardship or poverty (Bertho et al. 2012; Kar 2009; Kousky 2016; Leon 2004). Educationally, their learning might suffer from disruption or lack of access, leading to poor motivation and limited progress (Peek et al. 2018; Smawfield 2013). In some situations they may not be able to continue their education as they leave school for work, are forced to marry, or become victims of child trafficking (Bertho et al. 2012; Kaur and Kang 2021).

Impacts, however, vary for individuals according to the proximity of the event, the losses endured, the length of the disruption or dislocation, and pre-existing factors such as prior trauma or mental health issues (Bonanno et al. 2010; La Greca and Silverman 2009). Most children will display some emotional or behavioural issues for the first few months but less than one third will display on-going issues and most will recover within a year or two (Bonanno et al. 2010; La Greca and Silverman, 2009; Visser and du Plessis 2015).

Supporting children post-disaster

Once immediate safety and survival needs are attended to, the literature highlights the importance of social support (Bertho et al. 2012). From a review of the literature, Kaur and Kang (2021) found that the most successful post-disaster interventions were (a) held in social settings, such as schools, (b) using group therapy interventions; (c) with social support from families and peers, and (d) included key partnerships between psychological services and schools. Similarly, Peek et al. (2018, 243) note, “Socially, children are embedded in a number of caretaking relationships—within families, peer groups, schools, and many other organizations and institutions in their lives—that may either buffer or exacerbate the effects of disaster.” Social relationships are important predictors of coping and resilience (Bonanno et al. 2010; Cahill et al. 2011; Tarazona and Gallegos 2011). For this reason, reuniting children with their parents or family members is a priority (Bertho et al. 2012), as is reinstituting family and community support systems (Kausky 2016; Leon 2004), and providing opportunities for community reconnection (Gordon 2004).

Kar (2009) details four common effective psycho-social interventions—supportive counselling, cognitive behaviour therapy, trauma or grief therapy, and play therapy—but these are best undertaken by trained counsellors or therapists. Advice for parents and teachers is more generic, such as, distraction from rumination, re-establishing pre-disaster routines, roles and activities (where possible), encouraging socialising with peers, and engaging in

community disaster recovery, as age or context appropriate (Bokszczanin 2012; Cahill et al. 2011; Gibbs et al. 2015; Kausky 2016; Prinstein et al. 1996).

For children without high levels of trauma, research suggests that emotional processing (Caruana 2010; Prinstein et al. 1996) is an important post-trauma activity. Without appropriate opportunities to put events into perspective, reminders of the event can interfere with normal functioning. Carefully managed and repeated exposures through calm rehearsals, safe conversations, narratives or arts-based activities can contribute to appropriate absorption (Cahill et al. 2011; Gibbs et al. 2017; Prinstein et al. 1996; Visser and du Plessis 2015).

Using the arts as a form of post-disaster processing helps children make sense of their experiences and begin to restore emotional equilibrium, especially when verbal expression is difficult (Gibbs et al. 2017; Latai and McDonald 2017; Orr 2007; Visser and du Plessis 2015). Murphy (2014) found that participants in post-disaster group arts therapy increased in feelings of hope, safety, psycho-social wellbeing and confidence.

At the time of beginning my research on the role of schools in disaster response and recovery, I was unable to find a systematic exploration of the role of schools in supporting children's post-disaster needs, beyond occasional individual accounts or case studies (see, for example, Smawfield 2013). The decade of research that is the focus of this chapter was my attempt to redress this absence in the literature.

Study context

In 2012, I began researching the role of schools through the 2010/2011 Canterbury earthquakes in my home country, New Zealand.[2] I followed five schools over several years through their recovery journeys, with the focus on enabling schools to record their earthquake stories in a manner of their choosing. The results were an illustrated book, a website, two video documentaries and a community art project (see, Mutch & Gawith, 2014). The raw data were later used to conduct various cross-case analyses of themes across the different schools' experiences (see, Mutch, 2018). As little had been written about schools in disaster contexts, I soon received invitations to share my research and conduct further research in other disaster contexts. Over the following decade, I visited bushfire communities in Australia, earthquake-damaged villages in Nepal, tsunami survivors in Japan and Samoa and cyclone-ravaged schools in Vanuatu (see, Mutch, 2022). All the while, New Zealand communities faced further earthquakes, a volcanic eruption, a terrorist attack, floods, fires, tornadoes and, along with the rest of the

[2] The project was approved by [removed for review purposes].

world, the COVID-19 pandemic. With my research team, I continued to record experiences, listen to stories, provide comfort, and offer hope as we built a huge bank of audio recordings, video footage, documents, photographs, art and other creative works. Working in different disaster zones and cultural contexts required acting in particularly sensitive, ethical, participatory and culturally appropriate ways (see, Mutch & Weir, 2016). The research could not have proceeded without the generous support of funders,[3] my Te Whakatere au Pāpori[4] research team, colleagues in the education sector, schools, communities and individuals, all of whom helped with gaining access, managing projects, providing translation, acting as cultural mentors, conducting interviews or sharing stories but, most importantly, ensuring that our research was a reciprocal venture that was designed to share important insights for all.

As the research proceeded and we undertook analysis, four common post-disaster themes emerged: (a) schools as community hubs; (b) principals as crisis managers; (c) teachers as first responders and on-going trauma workers; and (d) children as active citizens in disaster recovery (see, Mutch, 2015a, b; 2016). I will draw on aspects of all these themes as I share the wider role of schools supporting children, their families and communities and they rebuild their lives in post-disaster contexts.

Conceptual framework

A frequent way that researchers discuss the support or services that are available to children is by drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological theory, in which the child is nested inside a series of systems from micro-level to macro-level. This theory is often used in social research on disasters (Peek et al. 2018; Powell & Leytham, 2014). Bronfenbrenner's theory is described by referencing the metaphor of Russian Babushka dolls, with the child as the tiniest doll in the centre surrounded by layers of outer dolls. I have drawn on this metaphor for this chapter, but I wanted to delineate three levels of support that schools have been shown to provide for children, their families and the wider communities throughout my post-disaster research. Rather than a hierarchical diagram, I see the three levels as occurring in a somewhat chronological order but overlapping manner (see Figure 1). Supporting children and their families with their immediate needs is often the first priority in the response phase. As schooling recommences, more support is available through classroom and school interventions and programmes. Finally, it is possible to look outward to what support children can receive from wider

[3] In particular, UNESCO New Zealand and my university [removed for review purposes].
[4] Loosely translated as "navigating social currents."

community services—and in return what they can contribute to wider community recovery. This framework will structure the following section.

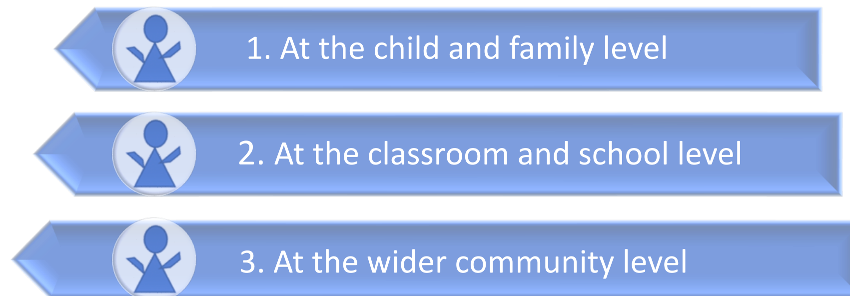

Figure 1: Three ways in which schools support children post-disaster

The role of schools in supporting children in disaster settings

The participant quotes in this section are drawn from over 120 interviews from the different disaster settings. In order that the locations and participants can be distinguished, I use the following key and highlight the specific disaster within the text—Country: New Zealand (NZ); Australia (A); Samoa (S); Nepal (N), Vanuatu (V) and Japan (J); thus (Teacher 1, NZ1) is Teacher 1 from School 1 in New Zealand.

1. At the individual and family level

As noted earlier, I focus in this section on what schools do to support children and their families in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and in the time that follows before schools fully reopen. With some disasters, such as storms, floods or tsunami, there might be some warning of the event. This Samoan principal recounts her story of the 2009 tsunami:

> 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. 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. (Principal, S1)

As schools were put into COVID-19 lockdowns around the world in 2020, schools often focused on their most needy families and how they could quickly get supplies to them. Here is a New Zealand example of a school in a disadvantaged neighbourhood:

> Before we went into full lockdown, Level Four lockdown, we actually got as much food together as we possibly could and got that out to families, however we could really, and we did that throughout the lockdown as much as we could. (Teacher 1, NZ15)

If a disaster happens while school is in session, teachers become first responders. A Japanese teacher reacts to the 2011 Tohoku earthquake: "I was in the gym and I was worried about the lights falling down so I led the students to a safe place and was trying to calm them down" (Teacher 2, J3). A New Zealand teacher recalls rescuing children caught at a swimming complex on the day of the February 2011 earthquake:

> My thoughts then were never, "We aren't going to get out" or that it would collapse, but my thoughts now when I look back is that the whole place could have fallen in. We were so jolted that we stood up, then we were jolted back down the force was so great…the lights went out, and the children were screaming. All I remember is the siren noise, and I went and grabbed a few of the Year 4 children out of the pool, and I just huddled with them. (Teacher 2, NZ5)

When the disaster happens out of school time, children and their families are still at the forefront of principals' minds:

> Within that first week and a half, we were working out the safety of our school first. We were checking in with our staff to make sure that they were emotionally ready to support children, and also how our families were coping and what they [students] might need when we got them back. (Principal, NZ4)

Often a school's immediate priority is to find ways to provide the basic needs for their students and their families, as after the 2015 cyclone in Vanuatu:

> Another challenge was supporting families. Their first priority was shelter, food and water. Many lost their homes and their jobs. To feed the children, people donated local food and the school paid for meat. The teachers would take the food home and prepare it or show the children how to cook it. Then they ate together. (Principal, V1)

In Nepal, a principal called on international colleagues to support his community after the 2015 Gorkha earthquake:

> Through my Rotary friends we supported a thousand people. For 15 days we fed them – breakfast, lunch and dinner because they didn't have anything and they have to live outside. We built some temporary shelters out of bamboo and gave them some blankets. (Principal, N1)

Sometimes, schools that were undamaged were requisitioned as relief centres, as in this New Zealand school after the 2010 earthquake:

> 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. (Principal, School NZ4)

Even before governments officially opened schools again, many teachers found creative ways to run temporary classes in tents, undamaged homes or out in the open. In Nepal this school supported their students by visiting their neighbourhoods:

> 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, N1)

Many governments prioritise getting some form of schooling up and running. It means that children can be cared for while adults attend to the myriad of issues that confront them and it is a small step in the return to normality. First, schools needed to be inspected, repaired or relocated. A New Zealand principal was frustrated by having to wait for a formal inspection, so she took matters into her own hands:

> I had a dilemma, if I couldn't get into the school then we couldn't get it ready. So, the caretaker and I bought hard hats and wore sensible shoes and organised electricians, plumbers and builders to re-open the school. (Principal, NZ1)

Education agencies often provided advice for the return of the children, as in Vanuatu:

> 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 what to do if there is another cyclone. (Principal, V1)

Gradually, children return to school and teachers and principals work tirelessly to create an environment and programmes where children can feel safe, cared for and can begin to unburden themselves and refocus on continuing their education.

2. At the classroom and school level

Before schools officially commence there is much work to do behind the scenes, as in Vanuatu:

> 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, V1)

If schools are badly damaged, alternative accommodation needs to be found:

> When I got to my school, I found the roof of my classroom had gone. UNICEF provided tents but the school needed to decide who would use them. They decided on a younger class who wouldn't need desks and an experienced teacher—like me. (Teacher 1, V2)

Reassuring parents that it was safe for their children to return was a common theme: "Slowly, I started coming to school myself and visiting the parents. I invited them to inspect the school buildings." (Principal, N1). Similarly, in New Zealand:

> We had a coffee morning straight away for the parents. We had lots of notices around the school saying, "Kia kaha [stand tall], we're strong, we can work through this together." And we kept referring to this as we welcomed the kids back. Half of them didn't come back, of course, because some of them had shifted away. Some of them were too scared to come back. Some parents were too scared to let their children come back. (Principal, NZ2)

Some education systems had trauma teams to provide advice to teachers on how to help children recover from their experiences:

> We received support from the Ministry of Education—had a support team come in and meet with the staff about two days before we opened, and we talked about the kind of things we could do to support the children. To say: "It's okay to tell your story about what happened …," and that every story was important. (Principal, NZ4)

In other settings, schools took this responsibility: "I invited the children to come back, we did different things to remove the trauma—drama and singing and dancing. Slowly, we started to teach the classes" (Principal, N1).

Many children were still dazed by their experiences and their families were struggling, as in this disadvantaged Canterbury community:

> 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 at the back of the room for them to sleep. (Principal, NZ2)

Besides providing children with the basics, schools used many strategies to keep children engaged. In Vanuatu, one principal was grateful for the help of NGOs, "In less than a month, UNICEF came and gave us some activities and sports equipment. That was good to keep the children coming to school" (Principal, V1). In Ishinomaki, Japan, after the 2011 tsunami, schools received support from inside and outside their country, "Many principals from other schools came to help out. Many famous persons came to the school to visit students. Students participated in taiko (drumming), field trips and other activities" (Principal, J1).

Teachers were stoic, despite what was going on in their own lives:

> We have to be strong. We have to have patience. We give what we can give to the best of our ability to help children so that they feel there is still someone there for them. We must be good role models—be strong instead of complaining. (Teacher, V2).

Principals uniformly praised the response of their teachers and the efforts they put in to support children and reintegrate them into school, “My teachers co-operated a lot. They understand that for six months we could not provide the proper salary. Some of my teachers had a lot of problems—their house collapsed and they lost everything” (Principal, N1). Similarly, a New Zealand principal said:

> Teachers are great. I can’t say enough about how much strength, how much integrity, how much they would go the extra mile to drop kids off, to look after kids in their classrooms after school, to buy them special treats … to find clothes for them, to find a pram for a mother who didn’t have a pram. (Principal, NZ2)

The efforts of schools did not go unnoticed by parents, as in this New Zealand school:

> All these teachers are quiet heroes. I know there are teachers here that have lost their homes and some of them are living in the same situation as we are and they come to work and they get on with it. They do their job as best they can and they never ever show their frustration to the kids. (Parent, NZ5)

While a return to routines is suggested in the literature, these routines needed to be flexible to begin with. Principal V1, talked about going, “slowly, slowly”. What seemed to be more important was familiarity—being with their teachers and peers and doing things that felt like school but did not place too much stress on them. Arts-based programmes were commonly used to help children explore their experiences and begin to look forward with hope. A university art lecturer running an arts-therapy programme in several Samoan villages after the 2009 tsunami said:

> To begin with the artwork had horrific and vivid images and the colours were muddy and dirty. As the project kept going, the children started to focus on lighter themes—trucks, bulldozers, Red Cross, the Army and gifts from donors. Later, they started drawing trees and plants growing back and birds and fish returning.

I became involved in several arts-related projects. One following the Canterbury earthquakes, where the community came together to help children at the local school create a mosaic, named “Sailing on a River of Emotions” (see, [Author]). Another was the Banksia Initiative[5] following the 2019-2020 bushfires in New South Wales, Australia, where disaster experts and arts educators created a website and ran workshops for teachers prior to their return to school. The third was Te Rito Toi[6], containing research-based advice and activities for schools in New Zealand during and after the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Over time, children begin to articulate and reflect on their experiences and to absorb them into their own personal histories. One young child described his own coping strategy: “I was pretty proud of myself because I wasn’t a scaredy cat when I went back to school. On the first day when I came back, I was deep breathing and

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[5] https://creativerecovery.net.au/project/the-banksia-initiative/
[6] https://www.teritotoi.org/

trying to relax, to make sure I was okay" (Child 8, NZ1). An older child responded to a question several years after the Canterbury earthquakes about how she felt she had changed:

> I'm just more, I guess, responsible and caring for others who have been through a lot. I still have, like, remembered everything. But when we have [an aftershock], I cope with it because I've been through worse, so I just help others. It's just the beauty of it. Going, telling a story, and letting other people know, like inside them, they feel what we've been through, so I think they know they're not the only ones who have been through tragedies like the earthquake, and tsunamis, and bushfires, and tornadoes, and things like that. (Child 2, NZ4)

As traumatic as the disasters in my research were, I found that schools had a positive effect on enabling children and young people to move forward. Here, a New Zealand parent, who attended the end-of-year speeches at her daughter's school, echoes my findings:

> From a parent's perspective, it was an extraordinary privilege to listen to these girls talk about what had actually been a harrowing and very, very difficult year in such a positive light…It made people realise that, as devastating as the earthquake had been, and for two of them in the class it couldn't have been more devastating, life is bigger than that. Even though it was difficult and there were all these unbelievably difficult things that had occurred, life was continuing and the positivity and the joy that the girls had got out of the year, despite the earthquake, was evident. (Parent 4, NZ1)

3. At the wider-community level

The school as the hub of the community after disasters was a common theme across the different settings. My research showed that this relationship provided reciprocal benefits. As one New Zealand principal said, "A sense of community is gold" (Principal, NZ4).

Schools were often the places that communities turned to for advice and information as in this example from the 2009 Australian "Black Saturday" bushfires:

> The fires were on the Saturday and I found out that the school was gone on that afternoon. Families started contacting me straight away—school families, wondering what to do, asking advice in some cases, which was an interesting lead-in to what was going to happen after. School was seen as a place for safety and sensible advice, directions and structure, and a whole lot of things. (Principal 1, A1)[7]

Schools, post-disaster, were also often relief centres or collection points, as in this example from the Canterbury earthquakes:

[7] Although I did visit these bushfire communities in 2012, this excerpt is taken from a later interview the principal recorded for the Banksia website: https://vimeo.com/324123374/7055b2bb8c

> The school closed and the Army came in to clean up. They brought water tanks and set up community showers and washing facilities. It became a community hub. There was so much support here…Children and parents felt safe here. (Parent, NZ5)

Not only did communities turn to schools for their facilities or expertise, they found them to be welcoming and caring places:

> We also had the library open for parents to go in and have coffee in the morning and just to talk. There could only be four or five of them but they could all sit in there. If they wanted to cry, they could cry. You know, they could do whatever they wanted to, out of our sight. (Teacher 1, NZ2)

A New Zealand teacher (NZ1) said, "Recovery is all about the community" and a parent reflected on how the school had become a community focal point:

> It [the school] was also our community. It was where we came together as a school, and it was a safe place for us and for the kids to come every day. The thing that was the same, and regular and routine because a lot of families, including ourselves at home, are still waiting in the queue to be rebuilt, that's a lot of families here. And there was a lot of uncertainty at home. But the school was the one place where the kids could come, and it was routine… the same thing happened every day, which was really important, to keep them…feeling safe. (Parent 1, NZ5)

Schools going the extra mile for their communities was also a feature of our more recent COVID-19 research:

> We're a small community, and we have good connections with our community anyway, and it was a really good opportunity to stay in touch. I spent a lot of my time phoning the parents and just saying, "Hey, how's it going? This is just a this is just a temperature check, to see how you're going with the family. (Teacher 1, NZ14)

One Canterbury principal commented on how the community began returning the care they had received during the earthquakes:

> They started caring more. They feel cared for; they start helping others. I've got a whole lot of people who've actually come into the school offering to help other people in our community—people who they felt needed help. To me, that's the synergy of really strong relationships in a community. (Principal, NZ2)

The community also became a source of support for the school. One of the Canterbury principals, whose community supported the mosaic project, said many years later:

> 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 [the artist] got to scrape bricks—it broke down barriers. After the earthquakes, people wanted to help, and good things can come out of adversity. (Principal, NZ4)

And through these layers of support, children became more resilient:

> Changes are bad sometimes, but not all the time. They can be bad but there can be some good things come out of them.... Try to stay at the positive side of things, not to look at so much about the negative because there will be

> negatives but there also will be the positives. You will find it easier if you help others as well, because then you know that they are ok about things, and you help yourself as well. (S15, NZ5)

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight the significant role that schools play in supporting children when disaster strikes. The literature clearly sets out the multiple ways in which children can be impacted by disasters but there has been little in the way of a comprehensive review of the role that schools play in disaster settings. My research highlights that, across different social contexts and disaster types, schools take on the mantle of pastoral care willingly, often putting the needs of their students, families and wider communities before their own.

In this chapter, I have highlighted three stands of care that schools provide—at the child and family level in the immediate aftermath, through classroom and school support during the recovery phase, and over the long term through engagement with their wider communities. They do this with no training, some short-term support but little on-going resourcing—and, apart from their own communities, very little acknowledgement. They often do this at the expense of their personal physical and mental health (see also Mutch & Peung, 2021).

Scientists tell us that disasters will become more frequent as the impacts of climate change turn one-in-one-hundred-year events into regular occurrences (Foley 2022). As children are a quarter of a country's population and spend much of their time at school, surely, it is time for governments to prioritise the training and support of the very people that they expect will be available at short notice to care for some of their most at-risk citizens.

In conclusion, I have three main recommendations:

1. In international, national, regional and local emergency plans and policies, factor in the role that schools are expected to play, over the short and long term, and resource them appropriately.
2. Provide appropriate training (a) for schools to engage their communities in disaster preparedness, (b) for principals to learn about crisis management, and (c) for teachers to recognise and support children's emotional processing of their disaster experiences.
3. Recognise the physical and mental toll that this extra burden puts on schools by ensuring that their well-being is prioritised—and, when the time is right, publicly acknowledge and thank them.

This chapter has demonstrated the key role that schools in post-disaster settings play in the pastoral care of students, their families and communities, and the argument is made that, while this role is expected, it is not adequately supported or recognised. But it is not only in times of disaster and crisis that schools undertake pastoral care—it happens every day, in many ways, in schools across the globe—and this vital role also needs to be further

understood, investigated, acknowledged and resourced, in order that every child has the opportunity to thrive despite the odds they might face.

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