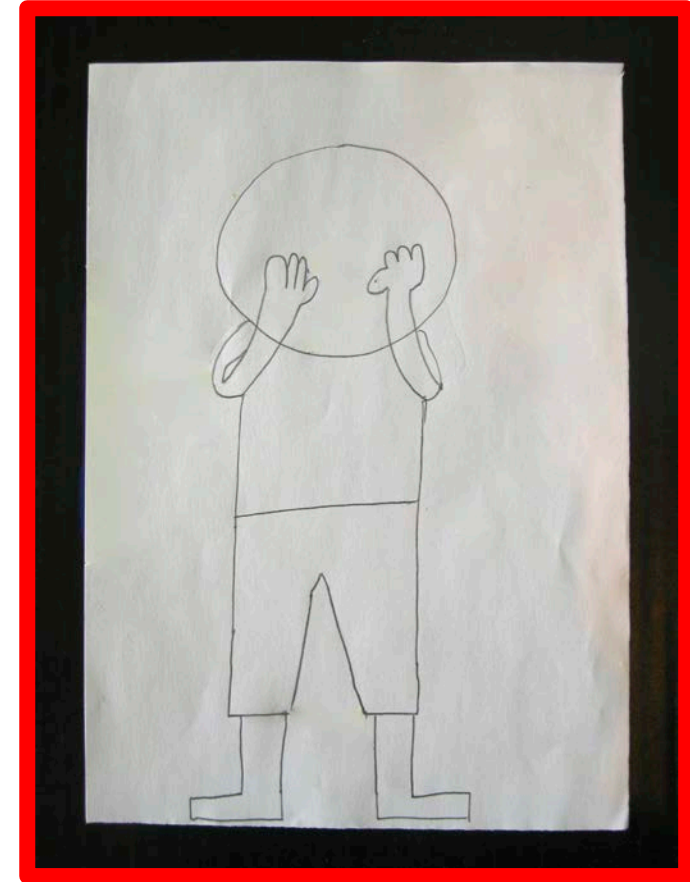


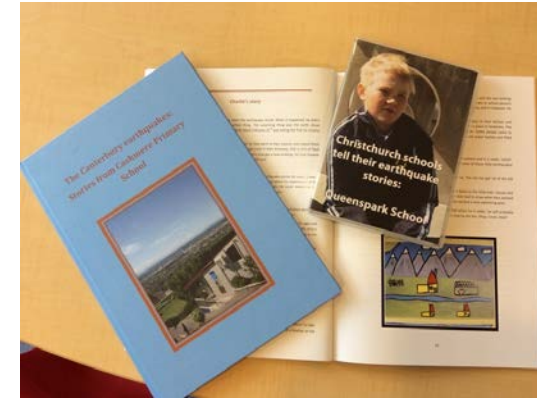
What can we learn
from the role schools
played as social
anchors?



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Research outline

- From 2012 -2016, I spent time assisting schools in Canterbury to undertake disaster-related projects in order to record their school earthquake stories and help children safely process their experiences.
- The schools covered a wide range of locations, earthquake experiences (both 2010 and 2011), decile ratings and included a closing school.
- In total, I interviewed 120 participants – principals, teachers, students and parents, some of them multiple times over several years.
- I have triangulated my findings with eight other studies involving post-earthquake schools
- Most recently, I have done similar work in five other disaster settings.



1. Schools as the hubs of their communities

- Even small communities have schools so they become engaged in all phases of disaster events
- They have long been part of the history and fabric of local communities
- They play an important role in building identity, connectedness and cohesion
- They play a role in disaster risk education, through the curriculum, drills and hazard mapping
- When disasters hit, they can be used as rescue bases, evacuation centres, relief hubs and the location place for support agencies
- When schooling recommences they provide a place of calm and safety for children and continue to support families and communities for many years afterwards

2. School leaders as crisis managers

- Principals have some limited training in managing emergencies, but have little understanding of the complexity of a major disaster
- Disaster management is not covered in principal preparation courses
- Schools are expected to have emergency management plans but once these are filed away in a folder, they are often forgotten
- Schools do conduct drills and risk assessments with staff and students
- In some communities, schools engage families and communities in hazard mapping and/or emergency planning
- When disasters hit while school is in session, principals must make multiple instant life-saving decisions (dispositional, relational and contextual)
- Post-disaster, principals are also expected to manage the physical state of their school, the school's educational function, the welfare of their students, staff, families and wider communities, despite the fact that they might also be victims themselves

3. Teachers as first & on-going responders

- Rarely, do schools have major disaster plans, unless they have a history of these occurrences
- Teacher education programmes do not prepare new teachers for unexpected events, such as disasters
- Teachers rely on their instincts and do their best to stay calm
- They put children's safety and security before their own
- They keep children calm and occupied while waiting for parents to come for them
- They return to school when asked, despite the difficulties in their own lives
- They continue in the nurturing and supporting role when students return to school and for the many years that follow
- They are put under high stress as they manage multiple expectations and often face burnout

4. Children as active participants

- While it is important to protect children's safety and security, children also have a right to have a say in decisions made about them
- Most often adults make decisions from a protective standpoint, treating children as passive and vulnerable
- While some children will develop severe and long-term problems, many will recover within a reasonable time frame, given strategies and support
- Children need safe opportunities to process their experiences and absorb these into their personal histories without being retraumatized
- Returning to familiar routines, distraction from unhelpful thoughts and strategies to move through recovery stages and build resilience are important
- Children also need opportunities to participate in response and recovery activities appropriate to their capability
- It takes longer to recover than we expect and problems can manifest themselves years later in mental health, behavioural or learning issues

The role of schools as social anchors...

	Preparedness	Response	Recovery
Community	Schools as part of the disaster planning and preparedness process	Schools as relief centres and community response and communication hubs	Schools as community drop-in and social centres; commemorative sites
Schools	Schools as sites and facilitators of preparedness learning and activities	Schools as first responders or post-event response centres	Schools as pastoral care and agency hubs for staff, students and families
Children and young people	Schools as sites of integrated disaster learning inside and outside the curriculum	Schools as first responders and places of calm and security	Schools as screeners of severe responses and facilitators of appropriate recovery activities

Recommendations

- **Pre-disaster**

- Location and design of schools and the provision of facilities to enable schools to function as social anchors
- Engagement of school representatives at different levels of disaster planning
- Provision of appropriate training for principals and teachers
- Provide support for schools to engage families and communities in community connectedness-building and disaster preparation

- **Post-disaster**

- Manage what is expected of principals and teachers, especially, if they are also victims
- Provide timely, accessible and on-going support for principals and teachers to manage the multiple roles expected of them
- Provide counselling, debriefing and forward planning support for all school staff
- Understand the impact of secondary stressors and the length of time recovery takes
- Avoid policy decisions that contribute to further distress (such as school closures)

And, isn't it time for us all to say "Thank you" to the multiple roles played by our schools throughout the earthquakes?

