

## **Preparing Teachers and Principals to Play a Significant Role Community Disaster Preparedness and Resilience**

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### **Abstract:**

This presentation draws on four years of research with school communities following the 2010/2011 Canterbury earthquakes in New Zealand. I argue that we need to re-think the place of schools in disaster planning and preparedness. Literature reviews (Mutch, 2014; Tatebe & Mutch, 2015) reveal that schools are not acknowledged for the considerable role they play in all phases of the disaster cycle. Schools are expected to cover emergency preparedness through practical activities such as hazard mapping or evacuation drills. It is also understood that some aspects of disasters will be covered in the curriculum in subjects, such as science or geography. Yet the comprehensive role they could play, and evidence shows they have played, is little understood. What my research found was that schools were vital resources for their communities throughout the response, recovery and revitalisation periods. Schools became evacuation centres. Principals became crisis managers. Teachers became first responders. Schools continued as relief and social centres. Principals needed to deal with the multiple needs of their families and communities. Teachers needed to support children's psychosocial recovery. School personnel did this with goodwill, little training and minimal resources. I will argue that an effective and efficient way to support communities to prepare for and cope with unexpected crises and disasters is to (a) better train school personnel through teacher pre-service and in-service disaster education and (b) crisis management training for principals and school leadership teams. I will also recommend that (c) schools and communities engage in joint disaster preparation and that (d) the education sector is invited to the disaster planning table at the highest levels.