learning
lab

Podcast series 01

Leading in a time
of crises

Supporting your school community during
major disruption

furnware

What can school leaders learn from the Christchurch earthquakes and Hong Kong protests? Neill O'Reilly shares his experiences of leading schools through major adversity.

Neill is currently the principal of an ESF school in Hong Kong, Kowloon Junior and former principal Waitakere School, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Supporting our Teachers

Teachers are motivated by relationships and will go above and beyond during difficult times. The current context of online learning is challenging to them as the physical connection with the student is broken. That said, they are well placed for a crisis – they are passionate about making sure our children are not only learning, but that they are well, coping emotionally, spiritually and physically. But they need your strong leadership.

On supporting teachers to help their students

Make children feel safe - this means teachers need to bring positive energy and front up with a smile.

Commit to help and support your teachers – so that when they go up in front of children, they can be that safe place, that relationship they can rely on and to help them feel okay.

Help teachers separate who they are as an adult from what the children see – so they are focussed on ensuring the children are safe.

Manage parent expectations and requests - support your staff and advocate on their behalf.

On distance learning

Train up on new tech - ensure your staff have enough time to train on new platforms and plan how to teach to a classroom of students remotely.

Share your knowledge – if you are leading the pack on distance learning, think how you can help teachers just starting out.

Collaborate with your peers and others who have gone before you (local and global), understand their learnings to help make your implementation of distance learning easier.

Avoid technology overload and choose the learning platforms that are right for your school...and stick with them!

On communicating effectively

It's not about you - any communications to staff or parents should meet the needs of the receiver, not your own. What information do they need to hear?

Use the 'seven norms of collaboration' when holding online meetings. Stop and listen!

Use a mindful minute at the start of each meeting.

→ Effective leaders will listen to their people, listen to their community, hold fast to their vision for teaching and learning. They will find a way to navigate through this tricky time with different platforms and different methods to get what we want for our children, which is wellbeing, self-regulation and learning.

On reaching out

Have multiple layers of checking in with your staff:
1:1 catch ups over the phone - reinforce it's okay, and encourage them to reach out if they need help.
Don't conduct a staff survey – they're too clinical and you don't get a feel for what's going on with your team(s).
Full staff meetings.
Create a tree so others in your leadership team are also checking in.

Reach out to one another with full staff meetings - think about including some mindfulness techniques for people to share honestly.

Share your responsibilities. Team up with your peers and work together to avoid too much stress.

Practice mindfulness – encourage your team to share their feelings and show your support for their health and well-being.

🔗 **Seven norms of collaboration**
https://www.thinkingcollaborative.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Norms-Full-Toolkit-TC-20171.pdf

Yerkes-Dodson human performance and stress curve
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/inverted-u.htm

Neill O'Reilly

In Leading During Times of Crisis episode 2, Neill O'Reilly discusses **how to remain connected with students** via distance learning, keeping on top of their mental health and wellbeing. He also has some thoughts on how to communicate with parents during all of this.

Neill finds whole brain thinking – the Hermann Brain Dominance Index – useful for framing up how he relates and communicates with parents:

- **Relational** We will do all we can to care for your children and make them feel safe. We will communicate and listen to you.
- **Big Picture** Here is where we are hoping to be. We want your children safe; we want them learning.
- **Systems** This is how we are going to get the children there.
- **Facts** Here's what we know from a factual point of view - and don't fudge the facts.

First steps

'Fake it till you make it' – be that safe place for your students, be positive, smile!

Ensure students have the right tools and tech to be able to learn remotely.

Parents

Schools need to partner with parents to be successful, so when communicating, leaders need to:

Be transparent.

Allow feedback.

Respond rather than react.

Listen.

Talk about what is going well, what isn't.

Filter expectations, mindful of impact on teaching staff.

Be clear about what systems and processes you have in place to support distance learning – what the school can and can't do.

Furnware Learning Lab Podcast Series 1 Episode 2

furnware.com

Students

Schools must keep on top of student health and wellbeing.

Be respectful, to want the children to succeed. Children won't learn if they are anxious.

Have regular health and well-being check-ins with your students. Give them a platform to voice their worries and concerns.

Hold an AWE (Accessing Well-Being in Education) survey to capture anxiety and stress levels in your students so you can work with parents to help.

Try to maintain the essence and integrity of the learning, particularly PYP or inquiry constructivist learning – keep it enjoyable and as transdisciplinary as possible.

Limit screen time - social media and access to too much news can heighten worry and cause stress to rise.

Mind what your children hear. Keep concerning conversations out of earshot of children to support their anxiety levels.

Don't be afraid to change and pivot - refine and enhance the learning via feedback from parents and students within the confines of what's possible.

→ "For us the initial impetus was around creating learning experiences via videos, and ways that children could look at learning, and later we have been coming into using Zoom and live learning. I was quite comfortable with this evolution."

🔗 **AWE survey (Positive Education and Wellbeing Measurement survey)**
https://www.awesomeschools.com/positive-education.php

Dr David Parsons has been educating educators in the ways of digital learning and collaboration since 2015 at The Mind Lab in New Zealand. Dave has some practical solutions for teachers to connect with every student regardless if they have access to a device and the internet.

How do we support teachers in their transition to delivering distance learning effectively, especially when faced with the challenge of a substantial number of students with limited or no access to the internet, or a digital device?

Thinking about teachers

First things first – use the tools that are already there. If you have a learning management system in place, use this – now is not the time to introduce new tech.

Teaching is leadership. What skills and competencies do your teachers need, to cope with change and to understand their own leadership?

Be research-informed and reflective practitioners. These skills help teachers to embrace change and to move forward with confidence and conviction.

This is the time to reach out. Tap into Twitter and Facebook teacher groups that are a few steps ahead. They can help guide your practise and you can learn from their mistakes and successes.

20% Synchronous Learning. Synchronous face-to-face learning (online or the alternative 1:1 teacher/student interaction) should be limited and purposeful. This time could be used to emotionally connect with students and monitor health and well-being.

80% Asyncronous Learning. This is where the majority of the learning should take place - student-led learning with clear direction and expectations following teacher instruction.

Thinking about students

Collaboration is an important skill. It's not just about the technology, it's about the skills and competencies that students will need in the future.

Don't make tech hard. Think about ease of use for both parent and student - simple tech still has the capacity to support your teaching and learning.

Right tools for the right task. Think about the tools that can help students be productive in learning about tech and in fact learning about anything.

Applying the classroom to online. Think about using a digital platform that enables 'break-out' virtual environments or smaller group work using digital tools.

Equality for all. Not every child has access to the internet or a device. Think how you can deliver the same experience online and offline? Use workbooks and phone calls to connect in different ways.

Encourage learner agency. Give students the opportunity to build their own knowledge through activities. Constructivism and constructionism create understanding either via a hands on 'makerspace' activity, or a digital project.

Dave's top three tips

Don't overdo it - when it comes to distance learning, think quality rather than quantity.

Be organised and focused. Focus on what really matters, relationships vs. learning content.

Don't stress or panic. We'll all learn a great deal during this process. Teachers will gain a new skillset with a whole new perspective on what teaching and learning can be like. There are positives amongst the negatives.

The Mind Lab
https://themindlab.com

Remember what's important about face-to-face school and how you can remotely re-create:

- A sense of community
- Membership
- Camaraderie
- A sense of audience - there is no constructivist model of learning that doesn't have an audience.

Stephen's top tips on where to start

Divide and conquer. You don't need to talk to the whole class to get that sense of membership and camaraderie – think about who are your sub-groups? How do they work? What's the equivalent of the primary school table or the workgroup or project team at secondary school?

Keep the learning fun. Do things like dress-up days - play with the tools available to you like zoom backgrounds.

It's the same but different. The new-world of online learning is still a world of learning, of collaborating and sharing and celebrating like in a regular classroom.

Don't try to copy the classroom. It's extremely difficult and ineffective to try to replicate synchronous learning for an entire classroom of students in an online environment.

Don't be afraid to try something new. Use platforms like Flipgrid to give learners asynchronous learning-challenges.

Think about having touchpoints where everyone gets together to check in how on how they are going.

Accentuate the positive - the best bits of learning can just be serendipitous – think about learning outside, and activities they couldn't do in the classroom but have the capacity to do now.

Carpe Diem. Rather than thinking about 'what do we keep, what do we throw out' to implement distance learning – think about 'what can we do now that we could never do before'.

Keep students engaged. Ask kids to create their own activity board and be agents of their own learning. A good model is to give students 10 things to do a day – challenge them to commit to doing eight of them.

Some calm during the storm. It's important for students to have some order in their lives. Protocols and expectations of behaviour are important to maintain a sense of routine in a student's day and help with self-discipline.

Connect locally and globally. Keeping it small, personal and family oriented is good but keeping it colossal and global is great too! Join in with global things to connect with people all around the world (**like Joe Wicks' daily work outs**).

And most importantly.... remember, teaching's a craft, don't give up on your craft.

Katyana Azman

Katyana Azman is the resident child psychologist at the Pantai Hospital in Kuala Lumpur. Katyana supports parents, children and educators to develop learning strategies that support a wide range of specialist individual needs.

Managing stress and anxiety

Katyana shares some 'red flags' that parents and teachers should be looking out for during this difficult time when students are feeling cut-off from their friends. She also advises how we can help children make sense of it all.

Katyana's top tips on supporting students

Start a health and well-being check-in with a fun activity – ask younger students to share their notable things of the week. Teachers can use this as a gauge to highlight anything out of character.

Communicate concerns with parents – if you notice a change in behaviour not associated with any learning session, flag it with them using your regular communication method.

Adapt the messaging to the age – kids at different ages process information differently, depending on their neurological development.

Share your own personal feelings – teenagers, who normally hide their emotions if they are struggling, will see it's 'normal' to have these feelings and be more open to communicating.

Have scheduled days for check-ins - children like routine and will respond better if they know what's expected.

Lead by example – put on a composed front and don't be alarmist - kids are looking to us to see how to respond to this pandemic – they can't regulate their emotions like adults can.

Limit social media – encourage a social media 'detox' for older students to limit the amount of negative information.

Encourage connectivity – create time in the day for students to connect with their friends, via zoom, gaming platforms, etc.

Red flags to look out for

Look for signs of changes in behaviour – an indicator of anything being wrong could be:

- A child who is normally very talkative becomes monosyllabic
- A child's personal hygiene seems to have gone downhill
- If a child starts to behave atypically, such as becoming emotionally distressed over seemingly innocuous things.
- Not participating in class or keeping up with assignments.

Katyana Azman

Maintaining a healthy mind and body

In the second part of our interview, child psychologist Katyana Azman shares why it's important for students to keep up a routine and for families of students with special learning challenges why continuity counts. Plus, some great advice around keeping a healthy mind and body during stressful times.

Katyana's top tips on supporting students

Kids respond well to routine - It helps reduce anxiety, boredom and breaks the day into manageable portions while giving them a sense of familiarity and control.

Customise days according the age of the child - Make the portions smaller for younger children as their attention span is limited (30 mins – 60 mins) with breaks in between. Allow for free time and fun activities in the afternoon.

Dedicate a zone for study - Encourage students to set up a workspace that's not their bed - your brain loves patterns and associates your bed with sleep. Ensure the zone is suitable for the learner, ergonomic and allows for movement.

Mix up the mediums - Offer students options for presenting their work. Write a story, film a video, watch a video and report back. Keep them engaged and motivated.

Use technology to collaborate - There are many different devices and platforms for students that will allow them to work together. Use them to their fullest!

Communicate expectations clearly - Parents are feeling overwhelmed and are concerned that they don't understand the curriculum. Make sure you are clear in your instructions to students and parents of what's expected and how the learning activity will be assessed.

Supporting families with students suffering learning challenges - Make sure the learning is mirrored to what would occur in physical school as much as is possible. Continuity means less opposition from the student and an easier transition back to school-life.

Feel better, get moving - When you exercise, your body releases endorphins which push up your dopamine levels (your happy hormones). This chemical reaction can reduce stress and anxiety.

You are what you eat – There is no difference between physical health and psychological health. Eating lots of fats, carbs, and sugar will make you feel unhappy and sluggish. You get out what you put in.

Practise mindfulness - It gives you an awareness of how you are responding to certain things and how your response affects the world around you.

further reading

Seven norms of collaboration
https://www.thinkingcollaborative.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Norms-Full-Toolkit-TC-20171.pdf

Yerkes-Dodson human performance and stress curve
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/inverted-u.htm

AWE survey (Positive Education and Wellbeing Measurement survey)
https://www.awesomeschools.com/positive-education.php

The Mind Lab
https://www.themindlab.com

PE at home with Joe Wicks
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyCLoPd4VxBuHn84_as427AwkVpahrqti

Subscribe to the Furnware Learning Lab Podcasts

Listen on
apple podcasts

Listen on
spotify

Subscribe
RSS feed

or click here to visit the Furnware Learning Lab page