

# Leading in times of crisis

## How to support your school community during major disruption



In conversation with...

**Neill O'Reilly**



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

### 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.



### 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>

## 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.



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