“What shall we tell the children?”

Helping children to develop resilience in the face of extreme events

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Faculty of Education
Queensland University of Technology, Australia
**Hazards Happen** helps children to understand their vulnerability, develop resilience and promotes a safety culture.

**On the Move** considers the increased vulnerability caused by population increase in S. E. Queensland and encourages resilience of thought.

**Blazer to the Rescue** is a puppet show to help very young children to remember what to do if their house catches on fire – reducing their vulnerability and increasing their resilience.
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In the week ending 5\textsuperscript{th} December 2009, Time Magazine for the Pacific Region published this front page.

While their focus was on what a terrible decade is coming to an end for the United States, it is Significant that they used a picture of a child as the centrepiece.

For children of say, fifteen, who may have become conscious of media images around the age of five, what impressions would they have of the world in which they live?

What might be the effects of these impressions on the mental health of these young adults and their resilience?

How can we help them?
Destruction of the Twin Towers, New York
9/11/2001
Lessons learnt from 9/11

Vulnerability

Resilience
Protestant fundamentalism in the US
Jewish fundamentalism and the Zionist state
Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East and Europe
Hindu fundamentalism in India and Pakistan
Global Environmentalism = The New Religion?

“Pollution: Gateway to Hell; Ecology: Gateway to Paradise”.

Does the state of the environment justify indoctrination?
Is environmentalism just another example of “education for good causes”?

Northern Winter 2007-8

Global temperatures have been falling since 1998 – and 2007 experienced the greatest one-year drop in recorded history: 0.7º C.

Is “education about, in and for glaciation” the next “big thing”?
Our roles as parents, social workers and teachers are to enable our young people to live with confidence but not over-confidence and to develop the ability to survive and prosper in a world that includes all the hazards of the physical, social and socio-political represented by the last decade.

Helicopter parents and the bubble-wrap generation
Community education pamphlets on disaster management internationally are reassuringly similar.

Samoa, October 2009
Identity and history is asset of community:

Indonesian island of **Simeulue**, near earthquake’s epicentre, is right in line of the 2004 Asian tsunami = yet they had few casualties and f...
Stories through the generations - island’s folklore:

- Recounted a tsunami in 1907.
- Islanders fled to the hills after initial quake before tsunami struck.
- Island’s 70,000 people heeded folklore and escaped the waves.
- Five minutes' warning to evacuate to safety.

Borrowed from Professor Tan Ngoh Tiong
Monday 14 December
Of the ten events listed by Time as particularly dire, at least half might be expected to impinge upon the minds and sense of personal safety of young people around the world, and in the case of young people in Taiwan and the rest of the Pacific, Typhoon Morakot dealt yet another blow to their sense of security.

1) The “election” of George W Bush in 2000
2) 9/11/2001
3) The invasion of Afghanistan 2002
4) Invasion of Iraq 2003
5) The Indian Ocean tsunami 2004
6) Hurricane Katrina (New Orleans) 2005
7) Global Financial Crisis 2008
8) USA financial fraud 2008
9) Collapse of the USA automobile industry 2009
10) Recognition of the horrors of Guantanamo Bay prison camp (not to mention Abu Ghraib)
### Selected factors influencing response to disaster warnings

*(after UNDRO, 1986)*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Any warning messages broadcast, especially the early ones, will be accepted at face value only by a minority of the recipients. Most will engage in confirmation efforts for a time.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>The closer a person is to the target area of a warning, the higher the incidence of face-to-face communication and the larger the number of sources used in confirmation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Warnings from official sources (police, fire department etc) are more likely to be believed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Message content <em>per se</em> influences belief. The more accurate and consistent the content across several messages, the greater is the belief.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The recipient’s sense of the sender’s certainty about the message is important to belief.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Message credibility is related to what happens in the confirmation process. The response of official sources to questions which call for validation, corroboration, or refutation helps determine believability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>A person is more likely to believe a warning of impending danger to the extent that perceived changes in his physical environment support the contents of the message.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Past experience may render current warnings less credible if disaster is not part of that experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>As warning messages increase in their accuracy, and/or information about survival choices, and/or consistency with other warnings, and/or clarity about the nature of the threat, the probability of positive response increases.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Evacuation tends to be a family phenomenon. The best way to accomplish evacuation appears to be repeated authoritative messages over broadcast media which stimulate discussion within the family and lead to evacuation (if it is going to happen at all).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Regardless of the content of a warning message, people tend to define some potential impact in terms of prior experience with that specific disaster agent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary: People tend to believe and act on:

- authoritative warnings from a demonstrably reputable source …
- … that are consistent with their previous and current experiences …
- … that they can discuss in their family groups
Summary: People will generally not take defensive action

- If they have previously received warnings and had no hazard materialise
- When there is little observable evidence of danger
- When they do not have faith in the messenger (who may be parent, teacher or social worker – or government agency! )
A Taxonomy of Ignorance

- Ignorance
  - Error
  - Irrelevance
    - Untopicality
    - Taboo
    - Undecidability
  - Distortion
    - Confusion
  - Incompleteness
    - Inaccuracy
    - Uncertainty
    - Absence
      - Vagueness
      - Probability
      - Ambiguity
        - Fuzziness
        - Nonspecificity

After Smithon, 1989; Lidstone, 1992,
I acknowledge that I am making a huge assumption here that my experiences and work with young Australians is similar to your experiences with young people within the Confucian Heritage Area!
... but I wonder whether young people in Taiwan, Singapore or other Asian and/or Confucian Heritage areas have very different attitudes to authority from Australians?
### Australian students' concept of conventional citizenship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An adult who is a good citizen</th>
<th>Totally Unimportant %</th>
<th>Fairly Unimportant %</th>
<th>Fairly Important %</th>
<th>Very Important %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>votes in every election</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joins a political party</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knows about the country’s history</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>follows political issues in the newspaper, radio or TV</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shows respect for government representatives</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engages in political discussions</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Australian students' trust in Government Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Only some of the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Commonwealth Government in Canberra</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local council or government of your town or city</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courts</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The police</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National parliament</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some good news for the (Australian) disaster management community

- 80 per cent of students thought it was important for a good citizen to participate in activities to benefit people,
- 74 per cent thought the same for taking part in activities to protect the environment
- 68 per cent thought citizens should take part in activities promoting human rights.
- 57 per cent thought citizens should participate in a peaceful protest against a law believed to be unjust.
- 24 per cent would write a letter to a newspaper about a social or political issues (well below the international mean!)
What are the curriculum implications for those who wish to promote disaster mitigation through the school curriculum in times of social, physical and political uncertainty?
Two purposes for (school) education

• To prepare young people for their role as citizens
• To teach young people to acquire independence of mind and to think for themselves (to be “enlightened”)
The conditions for an educated public

- A large body of people educated for active rational debate
- Shared assent to common standards of justification
- Shared cultural heritage of texts and interpretation

Intelligent Design?
In a super-complex world, there are three strands of education for citizenship:

• social and moral responsibility,
• political literacy and
• community involvement

Morally careful education is education for conversation:
“Effective communication is the goal of good conversation – with other people but also with data, information technology and images – and good conversation is a method available to us to expose falseness and inaccuracy” (Lambert, 2001)
In a super-complex world, there are three strands of education for citizenship:
• social and moral responsibility,
• political literacy and
• community involvement

If students were never to experience uncertainties or handle the ambiguities which are part and parcel of searching for a good personal response to supercomplex … issues, then their education would fail to contribute effectively to their moral development”.
Scholarship consists in a focus on the structure, grammar and syntax of forms observed (Haggett, 1990)

Thank you