

## Contents

Introduction .....	2
The 21st Century Digital Savvy Resource Teacher of Learning & Behaviour .....	3
Developing Staff Capability in Adapting and Personalising the New Zealand Curriculum for Neurodiverse Learners.....	7
Te Manawataki o Whangaroa: Preserving Mātauranga Māori Through Collaborative Learning and Podcasting.....	12
Making Learning ME-aningful: Fostering Learner Agency through Personalised Learning ....	16
Enhancing AI Literacy through the School Library.....	20
Empowering Agency and Self-Efficacy: Enhancing Engagement for Girls in STEAM.....	25
From Rote to Ready: Personalised Learning to Cultivate 21st Century Skills. ....	30
A Resource Hub for Teacher Well-being.....	35
Building Teacher Capacity: Developing a Digital Resource Bank for Neurodiverse Learners in Secondary Education .....	41
Taku Akoranga Matihiko (My Digital Learning) .....	47
Implement Inquiry-Based Learning .....	51
Flipping the Dialogue: Assessing Flip Learning's Impact on Career Education for Samoan Students and their Aiga.....	56
Rooted in Identity: Cultivating Cultural Connection Through a Digitalised, Place-Based Education .....	61
Leading Change Through Asynchronous Learning In A NCEA Level 2 Classroom .....	65
Cultivating Critical Financial Thinkers .....	69
Developing Effective Student Self-Reflection to Develop Learner Agency in a South Auckland School.....	73
Championing digital fluency via personalised learning. ....	77
The Dialogic Highway.....	81
Enhancing Interactive Learning: Fostering a Social Language Community in Online New Zealand Sign Language Classes .....	87
Using the Talanoa method to support immigrant students in building digital capabilities, navigating culturally grounded learning experiences, and linking to their prior learning and knowledge.....	92
Journal Yourself Well .....	96
Developing an Implementation Framework and Guidelines for the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Teaching, Learning, and Assessment.....	101

# Introduction

This volume contains the executive summaries of the practice-based projects of those students of the Master of Contemporary Education (MCE) at academyEX and presented their work at the January 2025 symposium.



## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# The 21st Century Digital Savvy Resource Teacher of Learning & Behaviour

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This project emerged from the COVID-19 Pandemic lockdowns which resulted in schools in Aotearoa-New Zealand and world-wide having to move into an online environment to continue their education. The pandemic affected all areas of the education system from pre-schools, primary, secondary through to universities and tertiary institutions. The Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), itinerant specialist teachers were also affected, requiring them to move online and continue to work with ākongā (students), kaiako (teachers), whānau and other agencies.

During the lockdowns It was apparent that there was minimal engagement between RTLB, ākongā and their kaiako . This was not due to lack of effort but It transpired that not all RTLB were confident in using technology i.e., digital devices, or working on a Google platform.

The project was driven by a desire to ensure that RTLB were prepared to transition into an online environment if another pandemic were to occur. This project aims to build their confidence and competence to utilise digital technology to engage with those whom they

support. This initiative has been two years in the making and is more relevant now than it was during the lockdowns.

The overall aim of this project is to design and implement a professional development program for a group of RTLB using a collaborative approach that would enhance their ability to use Google tools effectively when working with colleagues, ākongā, kaiako, and whānau. I aimed to achieve this by:

1. Developing a strategic action plan to upskill RTLB using technological devices and tools, including digital support tailored to the specific needs of each RTLB.
2. Designing professional development workshops specifically tailored to utilise the Google platform and the available applications on a Laptop and an iPad.
3. Facilitating an andragogical digital shift by empowering RTLB to confidently and effectively integrate laptops and iPads into their professional practice.

The RTLB who participated were all experienced classroom teachers, they have been with this service from between 1 to 20 years respectively. A crucial element of this project was ensuring that it was RTLB- driven, that their lived experiences with digital technology would support the formulation of the strategic action plan. The information needed to design this was gathered by interviewing each RTLB, gathering their voice and also identifying what their goals were by participating in this project both professionally and personally.

Working with the RTLB to understand why we were moving away from a Microsoft platform to using the Google platform and the apps for our professional work needed to be addressed before the professional development workshops began. Creating the right conditions that would enable an andragogical shift required a lot of planning, an understanding where each RTLB was starting at in their digital technology journey and ensuring that they had the right tools and knowledge to make the shift successfully.

The content of the professional development workshops was decided collaboratively with the RTLB. The project took place over 16 weeks involving one-hour a week intensive professional development workshops and training being provided to the RTLB individually focused on building their capability to utilise the tools that a Google platform offers on a

laptop and an iPad. Weekly goal setting in the workshops was an important feature of this project. It encouraged the RTLB to reflect on how much time they were committing to upskilling themselves outside of the workshops, while also building their self-efficacy and problem-solving skills.

While challenges and barriers were identified at each session, the successes were celebrated regardless of how big or how small these were, building confidence was a priority. Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010) share different approaches that can be used to build teacher confidence with digital technology through providing hands-on activities where they feel successful which has been huge part of the project.

This project is significant as it highlights the importance of ensuring that teachers who are no longer in classrooms but are working within other educational agencies need to continue to upskill themselves in digital technology. There were a number of assumptions made throughout this project about the digital capabilities of RTLB that were incorrect based on the length of their teaching careers.

The findings I have drawn from this project are:

- While I already had a working relationship with the RTLB involved, whanaungatanga (relationship-building) continued to play an important role, building and maintaining trust and respect with work colleagues can never be taken for granted. It is an ongoing process.
- RTLB need to stay abreast of the rapid changes that occur in the digital landscape in education or, they will be left behind.
- Professional development workshops need to be a part of the RTLB practice. Unless RTLB are “intrinsically motivated” there is less chance that they will seek to upskill themselves on their own.
- That I need to be digitally fluent, my knowledge needs to be current but with one eye focused on the future.

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## About the Author

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Ko Matawhaura te maunga

Ko Te Rotoiti-i-kitea-e Ihenga te moana

Ko Ngāti Rongomai te iwi

Ko Tapuaekura-a-Hatupatu te marae

Ko Te Pikikōtuku te hapū

Ko Lisa Akaroa tōkū ingoa



## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# **Developing Staff Capability in Adapting and Personalising the New Zealand Curriculum for Neurodiverse Learners**

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My action research project aimed to create a professional learning framework underpinned by Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to develop staff capability in adapting and personalising the New Zealand Curriculum in order to meet the needs of our neurodiverse learners.

The inspiration for this project came from the conversations and observations I have had with teaching staff when they are working alongside neurodiverse students. School staff had voiced to me the need for help in meeting the learning challenges faced by the increasing number of neurodiverse students within our school context.

I wanted to understand the challenges our educators face when working with neurodiverse students and to assist them in developing the skills and knowledge necessary to customise and adapt the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) using the Universal Design framework in ways that will enable these students to learn in mainstream classes.

The primary goal of the project was to answer the six overarching research questions I had developed as part of the project scope:

- What systems need to be developed to collect information to identify the needs of these learners?
- To what extent do staff understand the challenges for our neurodiverse learners?
- What specific challenges are staff facing in meeting the needs of neurodiverse learners? What support and information do staff need to change their practice?
- How can the UDL approach support staff in the adaptation and personalisation of the New Zealand Curriculum for learners?
- What barriers to learning for our neurodiverse learners can be identified, minimised, or removed?
- How will we know that building staff capability will support our diverse learners' needs? What does the evidence say?

To begin to answer these questions I conducted a literature review to deepen my understanding of UDL and its application to staff development. The search for relevant literature was guided by my research questions and school context. I chose to use the UDL principles as the basis for my professional learning framework as it has been described by the Ministry of Education (2022) as a culturally responsive framework using an approach to curriculum design and implementation that minimises barriers and maximises learning for all students.

To help me understand the specific challenges for teachers and how many learners needed more individualised support I undertook a whole school audit with the help of the school leadership team. After discussion with the team and mutual agreement on the terminology to be used to identify learners, I provided the leader of each learning team with a descriptor of three categories of neurodiversity as described by Skelling (2019). They were then asked to complete a shared Google Sheets spreadsheet collaboratively with the teachers in their team. The completion of this audit meant I had a much clearer picture of the number of

students and types of neurodiverse behaviours that teachers had within their learning spaces.

Using an action research methodology I implemented two iterative cycles with my participant group over a period over two school terms using the Ministry of Education's He Pikorua in action (2023) a framework that supports an inquiry approach through cultural responsiveness and collaboration. The structured professional learning journey with this group of educators included four face to face workshops, collaborative discussions, and self-directed learning facilitated by resources within a Google Classroom.

Each scheduled workshop was recorded and a transcript was created of the discussion. Other data collection tools, including surveys, interviews, and a reflective journal, were utilised to document progress. Using both the qualitative and quantitative data gathered I was able to assess the shifts in staff confidence, knowledge, and skills over the term of the project.

At the conclusion of the project I could see a marked increase in teacher confidence and ability to use UDL principles to create inclusive learning environments. Teachers reported an improved understanding of neurodiverse learners' challenges and a greater ability to adapt the curriculum effectively.

Using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis research method to analyse the qualitative data five key themes emerged and linked strongly to providing answers the research questions:

**Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Teachers emphasised the need to collect and maintain additional data on neurodiverse students to create a comprehensive learner profile that would inform tailored support strategies.

**Collaborative Practice:** The importance of relationships between educators, families, and external agencies was highlighted to foster understanding and trust.

**Sustained Professional Development:** Participants identified ongoing training as vital for maintaining and extending their capability.

**Framework Development:** Teachers advocated for systematic approaches, including tiered support models, to address diverse learning needs.

**UDL Integration:** Participants recognised UDL as a transformative framework for planning and delivering accessible education.

The project underscored the significance of collaborative, culturally responsive leadership in driving sustainable educational change. Using a transformational leadership approach participants were inspired to collective action, empowering them to view challenges as opportunities for growth. The iterative approach ensured that professional learning was both practical and responsive to real-world classroom dynamics.

The project's deliverables, including the Google Classroom resource and professional learning notes, have provided replicable resources for other educators. These resources facilitate ongoing development of inclusive teaching methods and encourage the adaptability of UDL implementation.

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## About the Author

Liz Beattie is currently a Deputy Principal and SENCO in Christchurch. Holding this position for over six years she has specialised in inclusive education and leadership. She holds a Master of Contemporary Education and is passionate about fostering equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Liz's educational experience has developed over a number of years in many different roles; working as a New Entrant teacher, School Cluster Leader and Management Unit holder across a wide range of curriculum areas. As a Kahui Ako Across Schools

Teacher her primary focus was on child health, development & wellbeing, this included working as the lead on a Teacher Led Innovation Fund project published in 2021.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# **Te Manawataki o Whangaroa: Preserving Mātauranga Māori Through Collaborative Learning and Podcasting**

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This project addressed the pressing need to preserve local mātauranga Māori and enhance collaboration skills among taura at Hato Hōhepa Te Kāmura, a small rural Māori Catholic school in Whangaroa. The initiative aimed to design a podcast plan, produce bilingual podcasts exploring local hītori, implement wānanga-style learning cycles, and assess the impact of podcasting on student collaboration. As Penetito (2010) emphasises, "Māori education must be grounded in Māori cultural values and practices." This project sought to embody this principle by centring Māori worldviews, values, and practices in the learning process.

The project's primary goals were to preserve mātauranga Māori, enhance student collaboration skills, and strengthen communication in a culturally responsive learning environment. By achieving these goals, we aimed to contribute to the revitalisation of te reo Māori and pūrākau, while also equipping taura with essential skills for success in the 21st century.

To achieve these goals, we implemented wānanga learning opportunities that emphasised collective knowledge sharing and collaborative problem-solving. Wānanga, as Ka'ai-Mahuta (2012) notes, "provide a culturally appropriate framework for learning and knowledge sharing." By adopting this approach, taura developed a deeper connection to their whakapapa and a richer understanding of the nuances of pūrākau between hapū. This approach not only preserved mātauranga Māori but also equipped taura with essential 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, communication, and collaboration.

The integration of Kaupapa Māori theory and methodology was crucial to the project's success, creating a culturally responsive and meaningful learning environment. As Hikuroa (2017) explains, "Mātauranga Māori is a knowledge system that reflects Māori worldviews and lived experiences." By centring Māori worldviews and values, we created a learning environment that not only preserved indigenous knowledge but also fostered the development of essential skills for the 21st century.

The use of podcasting as a medium for knowledge sharing and storytelling proved highly effective. As Leonard (2007) notes, "oral traditions are a vital part of indigenous knowledge systems." Podcasting allowed taura to engage with and communicate local hītori and pūrākau in a culturally responsive and innovative way. The process encouraged taura to engage deeply with the material, as they had to research, script, and present information coherently and engagingly.

Throughout the project, we observed significant growth in taura communication and collaboration skills. The wānanga model embodied the concept of ako, recognising the importance of collective learning and knowledge sharing. As Ka'ai-Mahuta (2012) highlights, "ako is a reciprocal process of learning and teaching." By adopting this approach, we created a learning environment that valued the contributions of all taura and fostered a sense of community and collaboration.

The project also highlighted the importance of culturally responsive assessment practices. We adopted the Tairongo approach, which considers not just the cognitive aspects of learning but also the emotional, spiritual, and physical dimensions. As Hikuroa (2017) notes, "Tairongo provides a holistic framework for understanding and assessing student learning."

This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of student progress and tailored teaching approaches accordingly.

In conclusion, this project demonstrates the potential of innovative, culturally grounded educational approaches to address the dual challenges of preserving indigenous knowledge and developing essential skills for the 21st century. By blending traditional knowledge systems with modern technology, we empowered taura to take ownership of their learning while preserving mātauranga Māori. The insights gained from this project highlight the importance of culturally responsive education, emphasising the need for New Zealand educators to prioritise Māori worldviews, values, and practices.

The significance of this project for educational practice lies in its demonstration of the effectiveness of culturally responsive and innovative approaches to learning. The project's findings have significant implications for educational policy and practice. By demonstrating the effectiveness of culturally responsive and innovative approaches to learning, this project highlights the need for educators and policymakers to place greater importance in the development of culturally responsive educational frameworks. This, in turn, can help to address the longstanding disparities in educational outcomes for taura Māori, promoting more equitable and inclusive learning environments.

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## About the Author

Laela Carmichael is a passionate and dedicated kaiako with a remarkable background in Māori education and leadership. With a Bachelor's degree in Teaching specialising in Huarahi Māori, Laela has consistently demonstrated her expertise in te reo Māori, achieving advanced proficiency with her Diploma in Te Pinakitanga ki te Reo Kairangi. Her postgraduate qualifications in Educational Leadership and Management, as well as Digital and Collaborative Learning, showcase her ongoing professional development and passion for innovative teaching practices. As Deputy Principal and a full-time kaiako, Laela plays a vital role in shaping the educational experience at her school, and her influence extends beyond her immediate school community as the Across School Leader (ASL) for her district's Kāhui Ako. With a career exclusively focused on Māori educational pathways, Laela's passion for teaching tamariki in te reo Māori remains unwavering, making her a respected and influential voice in Māori education.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# **Making Learning ME-aningful: Fostering Learner Agency through Personalised Learning**

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The purpose of this project was to implement personalised learning in a class of Year 5 and 6 students, focusing on goal-setting and self-awareness to develop learner agency. Key deliverables included a weekly programme promoting learner agency and a Graduate Profile to enable students to track their personal learning journeys across their two years in our team.

Using an action research methodology, this project progressed through three iterative cycles, each refining personalised learning strategies. Breakspear's Agile Change Process (2017) guided collaboration within the teaching team to prioritise, test, and amplify effective approaches. Action research allowed me to focus on my teaching practice while examining how personalisation impacts student achievement and motivation. As Burns (2010) explains, action research invites educators to critically and systematically reflect on their practice, fostering both self-improvement and tangible change. Central to the project

were tools that were created, like a self-awareness survey, SMARTR Goal Tracker, and bead ceremonies, which celebrated students' progress and engagement as confident, connected, capable learners.

I began this journey unsure of how to personalise a classroom but deeply motivated to learn. The research became my guide. Leadbeater's (2005) perspective inspired the foundation of this work, "Learning comes through interaction in which the learner discovers for themselves, reflects on what they have learned and how. Effective learning has to be co-created between learner and teacher, in which both invest effort and imagination" (p.7). This highlighted the collaborative nature of personalised learning, positioning it as a partnership between students and teachers.

Bloom's (1968) seminal work in his paper titled, *Mastery of Learning*, further directed this project. Bloom argued that over 90% of students could master educational content with the right support, urging educators to "improve the quality of instruction in relation to the ability of each student to understand the instruction" (p.6). I believe his vision anticipated principles such as collaborative learning and assessment for learning. His work formed the foundation for my project.

Goal-setting emerged as a powerful strategy, supported by research from Locke and Latham (1990), Bandura (1977), and Schunk (1990), which demonstrated goal-setting's capacity to foster motivation, self-efficacy, and academic success. As Schunk (1990) observed, when students understand the principles of effective goal setting, they gain valuable tools to direct their efforts, monitor their progress, and strive for continuous improvement. In New Zealand schools, Hastie (2013) emphasised the gap in understanding goal-setting strategies and their impact on academic achievement, reinforcing the relevance of this approach in my project.

Self-awareness became another cornerstone of the project, inspired by Benson's (2022) assertion, "It is important for students to unleash and create an awareness of their potential" (p.45). Peel (2021) further emphasised that "being an effective self-regulated learner starts with being self-aware and learning new skills and how to apply these skills in different life contexts." These insights led to the creation of a student survey to assess self-awareness and track

personal growth, helping students evaluate their strengths, set goals, and identify resources.

The project findings demonstrated the transformative potential of learner agency within a personalised learning framework. Students became co-investors in their education, actively shaping their learning experiences and aligning efforts with personal academic goals and graduate profile indicators. Data from surveys, PaCT and PAT assessments, and graduate profiles indicated accelerated progress in reading, writing, and mathematics for 19 of the 21 student participants.

This project also highlighted the evolving role of educators. Teacher participants acted as facilitators, creating supportive, learner-centered environments. Collaboration within the teaching team enabled culturally responsive and innovative approaches that enriched both teaching practice and student outcomes.

Ultimately, this project highlights how personalised learning, grounded in goal-setting and self-awareness, empowers students to become lifelong learners. By fostering reflection, consistency, and connection, it offers a framework for creating meaningful, learner-focused classrooms that amplify every student's potential.

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## About the Author

Lauren Florence is the team leader of Years 5 and 6 at a Full Primary School in the Waikato. She is a dedicated educator and mother of four children, living in rural Waikato. Passionate about fostering meaningful learning experiences, Lauren is inspired by a vision of education that nurtures every learner's potential and values the journey of learning as much as the destination. She is committed to lifelong learning and continually seeks to challenge herself professionally and personally. Outside the classroom, Lauren enjoys spending quality time with her family, gardening, and exploring new places through travel.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# Enhancing AI Literacy through the School Library

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This research project addressed the development of artificial intelligence (AI) literacy knowledge and competencies among Year 10 Social Studies students by integrating AI literacy lessons into their investigating and research process as part of an inquiry-based learning (IBL) unit of study. Recognising the disruptive and transformative impact of generative AI (gen AI) tools such as ChatGPT, the project aimed to introduce students to AI literacy to build the necessary knowledge and skills to engage with AI critically and ethically in the classroom.

The project goals involved the exploration of gen AI as a tool for IBL within students' research process, the examination of cross-over links between information literacy skills taught by the school librarian and AI literacy competencies, and an understanding of how AI literacy knowledge impacts student use of gen AI. The study focused on utilising

Ng et al.'s (2021, p.505) four aspects of AI literacy as they strongly align with concepts of information literacy typically taught by school librarians. Ng et al.'s four aspects are:

1. Know and understand AI
2. Apply AI
3. Evaluate and create with AI
4. AI ethics.

This practice-based change project employed action based research and consisted of a series of six lessons with student participants. After each lesson, future lessons were revised based on insights gained. These lessons incorporated both AI literacy concept learning and the utilisation of gen AI platforms into the students' "Environmental Warriors" inquiry unit which centred around the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The activities included:

- Introducing the fundamentals of AI and discussing ethical considerations, such as bias and data privacy.
- Guiding students in the use of gen AI tools like ChatGPT and Perplexity AI for research purposes. This included an introduction to prompt craft.
- Evaluating the reliability and relevance of AI and its generated outputs.
- Using AI to provide feedback on students' draft essays, promoting critical revision and refinement.

Data collection included pre- and post-surveys, questionnaires, audio recordings of lesson conversations, focus group interviews, lesson artefacts, and researcher observations to analyse students' engagement and learning outcomes.

The research project provided a snapshot of students' perceptions of using gen AI for learning. Students valued the specificity and efficiency of AI-generated information, as it enhanced their ability to quickly gather relevant data. However, reliance on these tools highlights the risks of cognitive offloading, potentially undermining critical thinking and

synthesis skills (UNESCO, 2024). Addressing this requires embedding deliberate scaffolding to develop competencies alongside AI use.

The evaluation of gen AI output highlighted the importance of pre-teaching and knowledge-building on topic areas before encouraging students to utilise AI for research. All participants felt confident evaluating the AI output on their specific environmental warrior as they arrived at the AI research sessions with prior knowledge. The selection of the AI tool was important in the evaluation process. Students failed to apply critical thinking to responses from ChatGPT, emphasising a need to focus on self-reflective capabilities as an AI competency (Chiu et al.'s, 2024).

Students demonstrated limited understanding of AI's underlying mechanisms, including how outputs are generated and potential biases. This gap underscored the need for iterative exposure to foundational AI concepts, reinforced through practical applications and consistent engagement. Effective integration could address misconceptions and bolster technical and evaluative skills.

Ethical discussions focused predominantly on personal and academic integrity rather than systemic or societal implications. This was unsurprising given the school's current ban on student AI use. There was limited knowledge about AI ethical issues.

The iterative approach highlighted how specific tools like ChatGPT can support the research and inquiry process. Students valued its ability to simplify and organise information, its specificity, availability, and its ability to provide feedback and guidance on their work, yet a need remains for frameworks that enhance deeper engagement, ensuring outputs are critically evaluated rather than passively accepted.

The project highlights the need to integrate relevant case studies and real-world examples to deepen students' understanding of the ethical ramifications of AI. Ethical considerations must underpin AI education, linking technical understanding with societal impact and human-centred values. Engaging students with ethical dilemmas and community-based projects can promote reflective and responsible AI use.

Limited collaboration with teaching staff restricted opportunities for integrated lesson planning and cross-disciplinary applications. Enhanced partnerships could foster richer, more cohesive learning experiences, emphasising the complementary roles of educators and librarians in developing AI literacy. AI literacy should be scaffolded across multiple disciplines to provide continuous and cumulative learning experiences.

This project underscores the potential of school librarians in advancing AI literacy. Librarians' expertise in information literacy positions them as critical facilitators in bridging information literacy skills with emerging AI literacy competencies. The school library is a welcoming environment that supports all facets of students' lives and is a space where students can experiment and ask questions free of judgement. It is the ideal space to explore AI learning tools.

The knowledge that this project has created is a real-time snapshot of rapid technological growth and development. Furthermore, it provides teenage insights into AI usage within education, building student voice into a topic dominated by adult voices.

Moreover, this project illustrates the need for deeper collaborative relationships between librarians and educators. By working together, they can design cohesive, interdisciplinary approaches that ensure students develop both foundational and advanced competencies in AI literacy.

Note: this executive summary was written with the assistance of ChatGPT.

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## About the Author

Jody Gayton has 30 years of experience in school and public libraries (in services to children and teens) and is passionate about libraries as a community space that supports the provision of an equitable society. She is interested in the ethical issues surrounding gen AI and how knowledge and understanding of these issues can be integrated into classroom. Jody’s work explores innovative approaches to AI literacy, bridging gaps between technological advancements and student learning needs.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# Empowering Agency and Self-Efficacy: Enhancing Engagement for Girls in STEAM

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This practice-based change project explored the potential of project-based learning (PBL) to build agency and self-efficacy among girls in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) education. Conducted at an intermediate school in the Bay of Plenty, Aotearoa New Zealand, the project was established in light of local and global underrepresentation of females, particularly Māori and Pasifika girls, in STEAM fields (The Government Communications Security Bureau, 2024, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2021, World Economic Forum, 2023). The project sought to create an effective and culturally responsive STEAM programme that fosters engagement, addresses barriers for females, and supports diverse learners to thrive in these disciplines.

The project aimed to design, implement, and evaluate a STEAM programme that would empower girls to develop agency and self-efficacy. Grounded in culturally responsive pedagogy and the principles of PBL, it sought to address barriers that limit girls'

participation and success in STEAM, with an attention to cultural dynamics. By fostering students' confidence and ownership of their learning, the initiative emphasised real-world problem-solving and interdisciplinary learning tailored to the interests and lived experiences of girls. Additionally, the project explored the role of digital tools in enhancing engagement. The dual focus of empowerment and practical application aimed to generate actionable insights for educators, contribute to a deeper understanding of culturally responsive teaching practices, and support efforts to create more equitable and inclusive STEAM education systems.

The project unfolded in four key stages, guided by action research methodology (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992) and informed by Kaupapa Māori principles (Bishop, 1996, Smith, 1999). First, a STEAM coalition of educators with diverse expertise was convened to co-develop the programme's framework. Initial discussions defined key terms, identified challenges, and set outcomes. Second, girls from targeted classes participated in focus groups to provide input on engaging contexts, content, and approaches. While recruitment of Māori and Pasifika participants was lower than hoped for, Māori and Pasifika perspectives shaped aspects of the programme's design. Third, the STEAM programme was implemented over eight one-and-a-half-hour sessions, integrating PBL principles such as sustained inquiry, collaboration, and the creation of authentic products. Finally, data was gathered through pre- and post-surveys, recorded focus group discussions, reflective rubrics, artefact collection, and teacher observations and reflections (recorded using the Day One app and the Notability app). These were analysed with a focus on changes in students' perceived self-efficacy and agency, as well as feedback on the programme's design and delivery.

The analysis of barriers faced by girls in STEM highlighted the positive impact of peer relationships and collaborative problem-solving within the implemented STEAM programme. Leveraging traditionally perceived "female" strengths, such as communal and interpersonal dynamics, seemed to foster traditionally perceived "male" strengths, including agentic learning and problem-solving. Participant testimonials underscored the enhanced confidence and support derived from collaborative work with female peers. Furthermore, this analysis identified fixed versus growth mindsets (Dweck, 2007), revealing a shift among participants toward embracing challenges as integral to the learning

process, thus cultivating a growth mindset in STEAM contexts.

The project-based STEAM learning approach demonstrated a positive impact on participants' self-efficacy, particularly in what they produced. This was evidenced by a shift in students' self-perceptions as learners, indicating a developing growth mindset (Dweck, 2007). Analysis of focus group discussions and reflective activities revealed that students' sense of self-efficacy was fostered through several key factors, aligning with Bandura's (1977) sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences (successful task completion and skill development), positive social interactions and feedback from peers and teachers (social modeling and persuasion), and improved psychological responses to challenges (increased confidence, resilience, and willingness to take risks).

The project-based STEAM learning approach positively influenced participants' sense of agency, defined as ownership, making responsible choices, and taking meaningful action in their learning (Benson, 2022). Initial survey data indicated some existing levels of autonomy and agency within students' regular classroom settings. However, the PBL STEAM approach enhanced these feelings, providing greater opportunities for choice in learning and fostering a stronger sense of control. Focus group discussions further emphasised this impact, with students articulating a clear understanding of agency and its importance in learning, recognising the need to be active participants rather than passive recipients of instruction (Hannon & Peterson, 2021). While students generally valued the increased independence and choice afforded by the programme, some expressed a need for additional support in managing this responsibility. Additionally, while collaboration was a key component, it was observed that in some instances, it fostered dependency rather than individual agency.

This project highlights the critical role of student-centered approaches in STEAM education. By addressing structural barriers and fostering a sense of ownership and confidence, educators can create more inclusive and equitable learning environments. The project's findings contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting PBL and offer practical tools and strategies for replication and adaptation in diverse educational contexts.

Note: this executive summary was written with the assistance of ChatGPT and Gemini.

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## About the Author

Andy Groom is an educator with 17 years experience and is passionate about creating inclusive learning environments that empower all learners in STEAM, digital technologies and hands-on learning. He has experience in project-based learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and he is committed to fostering agency and self-efficacy among diverse students. Andy has dabbled with podcast creation through the podcast Risky Business: Exploring Innovative Teaching Practices. His experience with this research is being added as a new season if you would like to follow along.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# **From Rote to Ready: Personalised Learning to Cultivate 21st Century Skills.**

Lynley Hall

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In this project, I implemented personalised learning strategies to cultivate 21st Century Skills, particularly collaboration and communication skills, with my Year 12 Biology class at a low-decile school in Gisborne. By tailoring learning experiences to individual needs and strengths, I aimed to foster deeper engagement, critical thinking, and real-world problem-solving abilities ensuring students were prepared for success in the ever-evolving world.

The primary purpose of my project was to develop and implement personalised learning strategies that would enhance students' engagement and achievement.

Specifically, I aimed to:

- Implement a personalised learning module with my Year 12 Biology class over Terms 2 and 3, involving four 60-minute lessons per week;
- Conduct three iterative action research cycles, each approximately five weeks

long, gradually scaffolding students' autonomy and adapting based on data from observations, surveys, and recordings;

- Assess the impact of personalised learning on student communication and collaboration through class observations and surveys.

I adopted a phased approach over three terms to shift from a traditional, teacher-led model to a student-centred approach informed by individual interests, career goals, and learning preferences. Each term built on the previous one, integrating feedback and data to refine strategies:

- Term 1: Prepared for the project by collecting consent forms and establishing a baseline through traditional teaching methods. Students reflected on their learning through Google Forms.
- Term 2: Introduced personalised contexts for an internal standard, allowing students to align learning with their interests and career aspirations (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Individual learning plans (ILPs) were introduced to support self-management.
- Term 3: Enhanced resources by developing a dedicated website with structured weekly tasks, multimedia resources, and templates for planning. Conducted one-on-one check-ins to provide guidance and used surveys and recordings to gather data on collaboration and communication.

Survey data revealed that while 77% of students preferred teacher-led lessons, engagement and achievement improved when learning was aligned with personal interests. Students who chose personalised contexts achieved higher grades, underscoring the role of intrinsic motivation. Students who connected learning tasks to their goals and aspirations reported feeling more confident and enthusiastic about their work.

The introduction of Individual Learning Plans revealed gaps in students' self-regulation skills. Many struggled to integrate goal setting and reflection into their routines, highlighting the need for explicit instruction and consistent reinforcement (Zimmerman, 2002). Observations suggested that students benefited from additional scaffolding, such as checklists and visual aids, to stay on track. Feedback also highlighted

the importance of a classroom culture that encourages persistence and resilience in tackling challenges.

Self-assessment surveys indicated high confidence in collaboration skills, but observations revealed inconsistencies (Phielix, 2012). Structured tasks fostered better teamwork, while unstructured activities saw decreased collaboration, reflecting the need for clear roles and accountability. Targeted interventions, such as peer evaluations and guided discussions, fostered stronger communication skills. Students noted that collaborative activities helped them learn from diverse perspectives and build interpersonal skills.

Through recordings and reflective discussions, it became evident that engagement fluctuated depending on task structure. Students thrived in clearly defined activities but struggled with open-ended projects. This underscored the need for balancing autonomy with guidance.

Integrating multimedia resources and a dedicated website enhanced access to learning materials, further engaging students who preferred self-paced exploration.

The personalised learning approach increased motivation and engagement for some students but posed challenges for others, particularly in developing self-regulation and adapting to autonomy. Feedback emphasised the need for a gradual transition and structured support (Althena, 2017).

Overall, the project demonstrated the potential of personalised learning to bridge the gap between traditional and student-centred teaching methods, focusing on 21st-century skills development.

The insights from this project have implications for educators, school leaders, and policymakers:

- For Educators: The project highlights the importance of scaffolding foundational skills, such as time management and goal setting, to support personalised learning. Incremental changes and consistent reinforcement are key to success. Moreover, integrating reflective practices can enhance students' awareness of their progress and areas for improvement. Creating a culture that values diversity in learning approaches ensures all students feel supported.

- For School Leaders: Structural changes, such as dedicated mentoring time and cross-curricular collaboration, are essential to sustain personalised learning. Advisory periods and integrated planning can enhance student support. Professional development programs focused on personalised learning strategies can also build teacher confidence and competence in implementing these approaches effectively. Building a shared vision among staff fosters collective responsibility for personalised learning outcomes.
- For Policymakers: Scaling personalised learning requires aligning resources, training, and systemic support to build capacity among educators. Policymakers must consider funding technology and resources that facilitate individualised instruction and tracking of student progress, as well as fostering community partnerships to enrich learning experiences. Initiatives to standardise personalised learning frameworks across schools could support consistent implementation.

I plan to mentor colleagues in adopting personalised learning, leveraging my experiences to build confidence and capacity within a collaborative environment. Sharing practical strategies and fostering dialogue can inspire others to embrace this transformative approach, ensuring students develop the skills needed for future success. Additionally, by embedding personalised learning into the school's broader vision, we can create a sustainable model that prioritises student engagement and achievement.

Note: this executive summary was written with the assistance of ChatGPT.

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## **About the Author**

Lynley is a passionate and experienced science educator with nearly 20 years of teaching and leadership under her belt. Throughout her career, she has worked to transform traditional curricula into engaging, hands-on, and learner-centred programmes that focus on real-world connections.

Lynley believes that young people learn best through doing, being, and seeing, and she is a strong advocate for holistic, cross-curricular approaches to education.

Known for her innovative teaching style and collaborative spirit, Lynley enjoys creating opportunities that spark curiosity and inspire a love of learning. Her dedication to lifelong learning is reflected in her Master's study and her commitment to empowering students to think critically and explore new ideas. Lynley thrives on igniting those "lightbulb moments" in her students and is passionate about driving meaningful change in education to ensure every learner has the chance to succeed.



## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# A Resource Hub for Teacher Well-being

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This research sought to understand New Zealand educators' perspectives on well-being and their actions to support it. The project aimed to create a practical resource to enhance teacher well-being using these insights. The proposed resource is a website built around Mason Durie's Te Whare Tapa Whā model, a holistic framework that emphasises balance across physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions (Durie, 1984). The goal was to empower teachers to prioritise their health, enhance their professional effectiveness, and foster a positive impact on the teaching profession in New Zealand.

The research's first objective was to better understand teacher well-being by reviewing literature on various factors such as workload, job satisfaction, organisational culture, and professional support systems. Research has shown that teacher well-being significantly impacts engagement, effectiveness, retention, and student outcomes (Giorgi et al., 2017; Collie et al., 2015). By exploring evidence-based interventions and leadership practices, the project aimed to identify strategies that promote teacher well-being (Day, 2018).

A second goal involved engaging stakeholders, including teachers and senior leadership, in co-designing an intervention tailored to their needs. This was critical to ensuring these interventions' relevance, acceptance, and long-term sustainability.

The project utilised an Action Research framework, which consists of iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). In the initial cycle, teacher well-being was defined, baseline data were collected using the WHO-5 Well-being Index (Psychiatric Center North Zealand, 2024), and initial interventions were developed. Subsequent cycles focused on implementing, evaluating, and refining these interventions based on feedback and observed outcomes.

Evaluation was a core focus, and teacher feedback guided the assessment of the interventions. The WHO-5 Well-being Index was used to measure changes in well-being and inform necessary adjustments. This emphasis on teacher input ensured that the project aligned with their needs and expectations (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2023).

The final objective was to create a website based on the Te Whare Tapu Whā model. This centralised resource platform offers teachers tools, tips, and links to support their well-being across multiple dimensions.

The project began with a literature review synthesising findings on teachers' challenges, such as heavy workloads, long hours, and limited resources (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Surveys and interviews with teachers and school leadership provided insights into their experiences and needs. These data informed the design of interventions aimed at improving well-being.

Using the Action Research methodology, interventions were implemented and refined through iterative cycles. The first cycle involved defining teacher well-being and developing initial strategies based on the Te Whare Tapu Whā model. Later cycles focused on implementation, evaluation, and adjustment, with teacher feedback shaping each stage.

To complement these efforts, a website offering user-friendly tools and resources aligned with the Te Whare Tapa Whā framework was created. This resource provides teachers with accessible support for managing their well-being, ensuring the interventions have a lasting and practical impact.

This research emphasises teacher well-being through a holistic approach, offering insights and tools to support educators in New Zealand. Managing student behaviour and teaching responsibilities creates significant stress. This reflects challenges noted by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011), underscoring the need for strategies that reduce stress while maintaining effective classrooms. Teachers should prioritise their physical, emotional, and mental health through exercise, mindfulness, and strong support networks with colleagues and family. Klusmann et al. (2008) highlight the effectiveness of self-care and external support in enhancing resilience and reducing stress.

This research highlights the critical role of school leadership in teacher well-being. Supportive practices characterised by transparency, effective communication, and active engagement help manage stress and foster trust. Conversely, inconsistent or negative leadership exacerbates stress, as Day and Gu (2010) noted. Leadership's impact is underscored by its ability to create environments prioritising well-being, enabling staff to thrive.

Cultural responsiveness was central to the project approach, incorporating the Te Whare Tapa Whā framework (Durie, 1984). This holistic model aligns with the Te Ao Māori worldview and ensures the relevance and inclusivity of well-being initiatives. Participants valued this approach, aligning with New Zealand's broader efforts to integrate culturally responsive practices into education.

A notable finding is the need for well-being initiatives to extend beyond teachers and encompass all school staff. By fostering a collective culture of care, schools can reduce burnout, improve morale, and enhance workplace satisfaction. This expanded perspective inspired the development of a "Well-Being in the Workplace" website, which provides resources to support all educational roles.

The research also draws global comparisons, highlighting disparities between New Zealand and England. While England's Education Staff Wellbeing Charter provides a structured framework for promoting staff well-being, New Zealand's non-mandatory recommendations for school well-being plans leave gaps that put teachers at risk of burnout (UK Government, 2024). These findings underscore the need for systemic changes in New Zealand to prioritise teacher and staff well-being.

The study advocates for moving from short-term interventions to long-term cultural changes to support the well-being of all staff members working in education.

Transformational and relationship-oriented leadership styles foster trust, empathy, and collaboration and are pivotal in sustaining well-being initiatives. This aligns with Bass and Riggio's (2006) research on the effectiveness of these leadership approaches in creating supportive environments.

Through this research, the author's leadership practices have evolved, adopting a more inclusive and holistic approach to well-being within the school environment. This shift from a teacher-focused model to one that addresses all staff has enhanced workplace culture. By leading by example and fostering open communication, the research has laid the groundwork for lasting change that supports staff at all levels.

This research contributes to the growing discourse on teacher and workplace well-being by advocating for inclusive programs that extend support to all educational staff. It emphasises the importance of culturally responsive practices, transformational leadership, and normalising discussions around mental health. These insights provide a sustainable framework for improving workplace culture and mental health in educational settings.

The findings have broad implications. Policymakers can draw on this research to develop an inclusive well-being policy like those in England's Education Staff Wellbeing Charter (UK Government, 2024). Educational leaders can implement strategies to foster trust and open communication, enhancing morale and collaboration. Educators can adopt self-care practices and leverage support networks to build resilience.

This research addresses well-being holistically and inclusively, offering a pathway for systemic improvements in teacher and staff support and promoting a positive and sustainable work environment across the educational sector.

### [Well-Being in the Workplace](#)

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## About the Author

Nicki Hennessy is an accomplished educator and dedicated leader with an extensive career spanning over 15 years. Since beginning her teaching journey in 2006, she has passionately shaped young minds and fostered a love for learning. In 2018, Nicki took a significant step in her career by stepping into leadership as Deputy Principal at an Intermediate School in Whanganui. With a rich background in teaching, she has been instrumental in fostering a supportive and inspiring environment for students and staff while shaping their academic and social development.



Beyond her professional life, Nicki is a proud mother of two grown daughters, who continue to inspire her with their journeys as they carve their pathways in the world. Her role as a doting Nanny to two energetic grandsons brings joy and laughter into her life, as she affectionately refers to them as her "tiny tornadoes." Nicki's family life is further enriched by her husband, who serves in the NZDF. This military connection not only shapes their daily routines but also instils a sense of resilience and adaptability in their family values. With a deep commitment to education and a strong family foundation, Nicki embodies the values of leadership, nurturing, and community, inspiring those around her at school and home.



## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# **Building Teacher Capacity: Developing a Digital Resource Bank for Neurodiverse Learners in Secondary Education**

M M Himona

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Tihei Mauri Ora!

The practice-based change project aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a digital resource bank in enhancing teachers' capacity to support Year 9 neurodiverse students at my school. My school caters to students from Year 9 to Year 13, except for our High Needs Specialist Unit, which extends support to Year 15. Students in this unit typically have the opportunity to complete their high school education by age 21. The initiative focused on providing targeted support, interventions, and strategies to address the increasing demand for resources and assistance to support students with neurodivergent characteristics. The idea originated from a significant rise in referrals from teachers and learning assistants to me, in my dual roles as one of two Learning Support Coordinators (LSCs) and my school's Special Educational Needs

Coordinator (SENCo), seeking strategies to better support these students within and outside of classroom settings.

Guided by the Ministry of Education's (n.d.) One key Learning Support Delivery Model (LSDM) component is developing and maintaining a Learning Support Register (LSR). Our Kāhui Ako or Communities of Learning uses this register to collect and analyse vital information and data, enabling planning for potential professional learning and development opportunities for staff. Students are identified on the LSR based on academic, pastoral, learning, and health needs. At the end of 2024, 27% of our school population was listed on the register, highlighting its significant role in effectively supporting our students.

The overall goal of the practice-based change project was to improve positive outcomes for all ākonga who present with neurodivergent characteristics and may require extra learning support. Therefore, I aim to achieve this by developing my knowledge and understanding and implementing culturally responsive research practices to help navigate the project and guide methodology processes. (Rodriguez, Schwartz, Lahman, Geist, 2011).

Schultmann, Jordaan, Bachtis, Lindsay, and Sing (2019) highlight the importance of thorough documentation and testing during the initiation phase for efficient project planning, while Williams (2008) emphasises that clear communication is essential for success. Guided by these principles, I invested time in stakeholder needs analysis and developing a feasible digital solution, leveraging the school's Google Suite applications. Employing a mixed-methods approach within a Māori cultural framework, as Barnes (2001) advocated, ensured the project was both flexible and culturally responsive. In addition, I incorporated Heifitz and Linsky's (2017) Adaptive Leadership framework. They view this leadership style as a process rather than a set of skills, which supports the iterative processes. This framework blended well with my project as I navigated problems and made adjustments when required.

The project plan followed Cohen, Manion, and Morrison's (2018) planning, acting, observing, and reflecting cycle. In alignment with McNiff's (2010) recommendation to act with the intent to improve, pre and post-survey questionnaires were used to capture feedback, perceptions, and confidence levels. Twelve responses were collected in the pre-survey and 11 in the post-survey, providing valuable insights for evaluating the project's impact.

The responses provided valuable insights into the significance of practice in the project's impact, recommendations, and areas for improvement:

### **Understanding Neurodiversity**

- Staff awareness exists, but confidence and clarity require improvement.
- Professional development on neurodiversity is encouraged to build a shared understanding.

### **Teaching Strategies and Resource Utilisation**

- Practical teaching tools are familiar, but evidence-based strategies are underutilised.
- The resource bank has low current usage but significant interest among participants.
- Teachers value strategies that emphasise students' strengths and boost self-esteem.

### **Professional Development Needs**

- Hands-on support is needed to implement student-centered accommodations. For example, modeling strategies can be done as requested by staff.
- ICT training on Google Apps and digital tools is critical for improving staff competency.
- Free courses on neurodiversity and practical strategies should be promoted.

### **Collaboration with Whānau and Students**

- Engaging whānau and incorporating students' experiences are crucial.
- Strengths-based approaches foster confidence and engagement.

### **Resource Bank Development**

- Include co-constructed, ready-to-use strategies tailored for various year levels.
- Enable teacher contributions and peer feedback through collaborative features.
- Focus on user-friendly and accessible design to ensure equitable use.

### **Sustainability and Expansion**

- Regular updates and a long-term review process are necessary to maintain relevance.

- Leverage the school management system for easy access to resources like Kamar.
- Develop a roadmap for continuous growth informed by surveys, focus groups, and reflections.
- Continue to build and grow relationships with existing and potentially new external agencies to gather and access resources and expertise.

The project can grow yearly by addressing these areas, building staff confidence, enhancing teaching strategies, and fostering inclusive practices that effectively support neurodiverse ākonga.

## Conclusion

The digital resource bank demonstrated strong potential to enhance support for neurodiverse students by providing actionable strategies and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. The initiative ensured inclusivity and relevance, advocating for professional development for all staff, teacher input, and collaboration with external agencies, for example, Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) services, Health New Zealand agencies, Specialist Teachers, and whānau engagement. Enhancing digital competencies among staff and maintaining a sustainable approach will heighten the project’s impact on teaching practices and student outcomes. The findings underscore the importance of a shared vision, continuous improvement, and community involvement in addressing the diverse needs of all ākonga.

“He waka eke noa” (We are all in this together).

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## Related Links

Autism New Zealand

<https://autismnz.org.nz/programmes/>

EMDR Training New Zealand. Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing therapy

<https://www.emdr.nz/>

Health New Zealand. Pumau Health.

<https://www.pumau.health.nz/>

Ministry of Education. Learning Support Network.

<https://www.lsn.nz/>

The Education Hub

<https://theeducationhub.org.nz/neurodiversity-in-secondary-schools-course/>

## About the Author

Maryann (Mereana) Himona is a Special Educational Needs (SENCo) and Learning Support Coordinator (LSC) in a Secondary School setting, passionate about fostering inclusive education through collaborative leadership. With experience in action research and stakeholder engagement, Mereana works to bridge the gap between theory and practice in educational settings.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# Taku Akoranga Matihiko (My Digital Learning)

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*“Ko te ahurei o te tamaiti arahia o tatou mahi – Let the uniqueness of the child guide our work”*

The purpose of this project was to explore innovative ways to foster learner independence, agency and cultural responsiveness in a senior multi-level digital technologies media class. Specifically, the project sought to implement and evaluate online learning systems that would enable personalised learning experiences while providing consistent feedback and support. The increasing individualised nature of senior student learning, along with lack of previous experience in this subject area has provided challenges in motivating the students to complete project work.

The main aim was to implement an online learning system, and test the effectiveness of this system with student surveys, interviews and observations. After analysing the final feedback and data, I would have information to refine and expand the system to other classes and

eventually other areas of the school. The main intent of the online learning system was to develop the students' skills in resilience, independence and agency, and to prepare them for life outside of school. The framework used for the project was the SAMR model (Best, 2020), mainly focussing on the Augmentation and Modification parts.

The project was completed as an action research, enabling me to be involved and reflective.

The project included the following key activities:

- Literature reviews on personalised learning, cultural responsiveness and the role of technology in education.
- Prototypes were developed for online learning systems using Canvas LMS for the Level 2 class, and a Google site with an embedded chatbot for the Level 3 class.
- The above prototypes were offered to the students, with resourcing, scaffolding and interactive tools supporting student projects.
- Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered through student achievement data, surveys, interviews and teacher observations to evaluate the impact of the platforms on student motivation, resilience and independence.
- The analysis of the student feedback and assessment outcomes to identify what were strengths and where there are areas for improvement.

The insights gained from this project include that online learning platforms can significantly enhance student organisation and reduce anxiety by providing clear structure and progress tracking. Students' resilience is influenced by workload, stress, and external pressures, but could be improved through structured and flexible learning systems. However, while students appreciated the innovative approach, they were unfamiliar with the tools and needed to be encouraged to use the online system, rather than taking the initiative themselves. The reason I chose the senior class was to give them skills for their near future in the adult world, but the students tended to wait for instruction rather than working independently. Cultural responsiveness was implemented in that the students had choice in their project work and could create a project using their own interests.

Online platforms like Canvas and Google sites show potential in enhancing student agency, provided they are introduced incrementally and with adequate training. One of the areas

that worked well was the peer feedback – the students liked and used the online chat systems to liaise with their peers more than they would face to face. Peer feedback is one of the integral parts of their project work, and it is one of the harder areas to get some students to do.

My leadership for this blended class needed to expand from previous ways of teaching to utilising personalised technology and helping scaffold students to improve their independent skills. Agile Leadership as described by Breakspear (2017) describes the agile mindsets teachers and students need to develop to change flexibly. The research demanded a lot of agile leadership as finding a suitable LMS platform that would suit the subject area and age of the students was a challenge and took a considerable amount of time.

I concluded that bringing the LMS systems into the class needed to happen in earlier years so the students were used to the online process and could develop the digital skills needed for learning in this way. This project has laid some groundwork for integrating innovative teaching methods in a digital technologies class. The next phase will focus on expanding the approach to junior classes and fostering collaboration with colleagues to refine the initiative

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## About the Author

Nicola King is HOD of Digital Technologies and DVC at Palmerston North Girls' High School. She is passionate about students achieving their best utilising their own interests, and helping them be confident for their future. Nicola has taught for 24 years in both tertiary and secondary education, after a career as a Personal Assistant/Office Manager. She has also been a Kahui Ako Across School Leader and Dean.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# Implement Inquiry-Based Learning

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In this project, I have implemented inquiry-based learning with the Year 4 students at a school in South Auckland to develop their critical thinking skills using the Enviro School Programme.

The purpose of this project aimed to implement inquiry-based learning with Year 4 students in South Auckland to develop critical thinking skills using the Enviro School Programme. It addresses urbanisation challenges by engaging students in sustainable practices, fostering collaboration, and problem-solving. The initiative empowers learners to create healthy lifestyles, value diverse perspectives, and tackle real-world environmental issues. It integrates questioning techniques, role-playing, and hands-on activities to enhance student engagement and community change. The project promotes free-choice learning, self-directed inquiry, and community connections through active participation. It includes managing a school composting cycle, personal gardens, and sustainable practices, with comprehensive evaluation through questionnaires and teacher observations.

This project goals aimed inquiry-based learning by emphasising questioning techniques to foster critical thinking. It integrates the Enviro School Programme, collaborating with local governments to enhance student engagement, promote sustainability, and drive community change. Over six months, it engaged students and parents through flyers and posters, leveraging the Inquiry Cycle to solve real-world problems with role-playing, questioning, and hands-on activities. The project includes managing a school composting cycle and addressing challenges, helping students develop lifelong skills and promote sustainability. It uses technology for data monitoring and questionnaires to evaluate participant progress and engagement, empowering educators with tools and strategies while encouraging personal gardens, composting, and sustainable practices.

I Integrated inquiry-based learning with the Enviro School Programme that fosters critical thinking and environmental awareness among students. In the innovative approach of Education PLUS, schools, colleges, families, and communities serve as dynamic environments for learning, transformation, and research through hands-on activities and reflection. As Spohn (2003) points out, adopting new ways of thinking is more effective through action rather than mere contemplation. The research analyses student learning with statistical methods for mixed data, ensuring ethics. Over three phases, it aims to enhance engagement, critical thinking, and community involvement.

Through questioning, research, and collaboration with local governments and organisations that play a vital role such as Live Theatre Shows in schools for recycling, students address local environmental issues, develop actionable solutions, enhance sustainability practices through their actions, and strengthen community engagement. Promoting free-choice learning empowers students to explore their interests while fostering collaboration and critical thinking. Engaging families and communities through flyers, posters, and events strengthens connections, encourages curiosity, and cultivates lifelong learning, emphasizing diverse perspectives and meaningful educational experiences such as being part of the Matariki celebration by harvesting kumara. Managing a school composting system helps students develop critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, fostering sustainability by extending learning to the community and promoting composting, home

gardening, and lifelong environmental practices. The students created a video through role play, which was shared with the whole school encouraging classes to use compost bins available in their classrooms. Using the Inquiry Cycle, students engage in research, data analysis, and reflection, integrating technology for tracking progress and teacher observations for qualitative insights.

This project used inquiry-based learning and the 5E Model to boost student engagement, critical thinking, and real-world problem-solving. It follows Bybee and Landes'(1990) 5E Instructional Model: Engagement (assessing prior knowledge and sparking curiosity), Exploration (collaboration, observation, questioning, and discovery), Explanation (articulating understanding and refining ideas), Elaboration (applying knowledge to new contexts), and Evaluation (formative and summative assessments). Activities include composting, gardening, cultural discussions, and technology integration with tools like Microsoft Forms and Canva. Surveys and teacher observations show students' enthusiasm for outdoor learning, teamwork, and sustainability, highlighting the Enviro School Programme's success in promoting environmental education and practical skills. The survey showed strong interest in outdoor learning, gardening, teamwork, and technology, affirming the Enviro School Programme's alignment with students' aspirations for environmental education and active participation.

Research indicates that collaborative learning enhances social skills, deepens content comprehension, and improves problem-solving abilities (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). In environmental education, collaboration fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility for addressing real-world challenges. Creating and sharing educational resources extends learning beyond the classroom and boosts community engagement, students created a shared garden space which was used by the whole school by booking their slots. When students created materials such as posters or videos, they reinforce their own learning and actively participate in educating others, it helped them to guide others and be great leaders. This approach helps communities adopt sustainable practices as students share their knowledge with family and local groups (Vygotsky, 1978). Through

collaborative, outward-facing learning, students empower themselves and their communities.

The new pedagogies for inquiry learning plans emphasise real-world problem-solving and are enhanced by advancements in interactive technology. They share human experiences and define core learning outcomes as the 'Six Cs of Deep Learning.' These pedagogies have the potential to drive a fundamental transformation in education, though they may require more practice within schools.

This project used agile and authentic leadership to promote student-centered learning through flexibility, collaboration, and continuous feedback. Authentic leadership leverages individual and collective strengths to enhance team skills and knowledge, fostering innovation for future leaders. It helped in student needs, fostering critical thinking and teamwork, students collaborated with others during workshops. Authentic leadership aligns values with actions, driving innovation and empowering students, the students experienced these through the Enviro School Trip at a reserve which was held by the council. Time was a significant challenge for this project, as it primarily took place during lunch breaks due to other school activities impacting the learning schedule.

Stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and community members, support sustainability initiatives like gardening and composting, creating meaningful educational experiences and fostering lifelong environmental responsibility. Future practice should involve more deliberately identifying and incorporating student interests into the curriculum as well as allocating time for this learning to take place. By aligning learning objectives with what excites students, educators can foster a deeper connection to the subject matter and enhance the inquiry process.

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## About the Author

Deepti Kumar is the Lead for the Enviro School Programme at Hillpark School, Auckland. In addition to her role as a classroom teacher for Year 5 and 6 students, she is passionate about gardening and environmental education. During this project, she voluntarily took on a role at the Manurewa Recycling Centre to deepen her understanding of recycling and the environment. This knowledge benefited not only her students but also the wider community. It fostered a partnership between the school and the local council, encouraging future community gardening initiatives and promoting healthy eating and a balanced lifestyle.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# **Flipping the Dialogue: Assessing Flip Learning's Impact on Career Education for Samoan Students and their Aiga.**

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This action research project explored how flipped learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2012), when integrated with culturally responsive teaching approaches (Gay, 2010), can improve communication between teachers, Samoan students, their aiga (families), and employers around career education; The project responded to challenges observed in secondary schools, where career education is limited by curriculum overload, disengagement, and lack of culturally inclusive practices (Education Review Office, 2015). The project sought to collaboratively design a more holistic and effective approach that line up with the experiences of Pacific learners (Anae, 2010).

The aim of the project was to implement and assess a flipped learning model that would empower students and their aiga to engage more actively in career education conversations, planning, and exploration (Ministry of Education, 2011). The project also

aimed to create accessible, relevant, and practical resources that families could use to support their children's career development in a culturally appropriate way (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). Central to this was the use of the Talanoa research methodology, which allowed for open, relational conversations that privileged Pacific voices and ways of knowing (Vaiotei, 2006; Prescott, 2008).

Over a five-week period, a group of ten Year 11 Samoan language students and their families participated in a blended learning programme consisting of online and in-class activities. Weekly Google Classroom modules were developed to guide students and families through tasks such as CareerQuest profiles, CV building, job exploration, and goal setting. These tasks were followed by classroom sessions that broadened the learning, encouraged discussion, and provided practical support. Aiga members played a vital role by assisting in completing tasks, sharing their work experiences, and engaging in Talanoa sessions to reflect on their children's goals and educational experiences (Vaiotei, 2006) 2010).

Students and their families participated in pre and post surveys and Talanoa interviews that gathered perceptions about their experiences, needs, and feedback. The flipped learning approach proved particularly useful in enabling families to access resources at their own pace (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). This also helped increase aiga's understanding of career pathways, and enabled confidence to be built in supporting their children (Ministry of Education, 2011). Aiga members stated more awareness of digital tools, educational requirements, and the importance of early career planning (Education Review Office, 2015).

The responses from students and aiga showed important themes. Students indicated job interests in a variety of sectors, including health, public service, the arts and trades. However, many lacked a clear understanding of the pathways they needed to follow. Parents also expressed a need for more help and communication from schools. Aiga recommended more translated resources, regular updates and more culturally relevant information to be shared with them (Chu et. al, 2013). Both groups stressed the importance of working together with schools, and more involvement in workshops and mentoring programmes (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006).

The information taken from this research support the value of combining flipped learning with culturally responsive practices. Flipped learning moved instructional content out of the classroom, allowing valuable class time to be used for deeper engagement, clarification, and more opportunity for students to work together (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). A culturally safe and respectful environment, grounded in Talanoa, provides a more relevant learning experience that becomes more relevant, inclusive, and empowering for Pacific students and their aiga (Vaiioleti, 2006). Talanoa proved vital in building trust, ensuring participant voices were accurately portrayed, and created a collaborative space for shared ownership of the learning journey (Prescott, 2008).

Another significant insight was the transformative power of culturally sustaining pedagogies. When families and students saw their language, values, and identities reflected in learning experiences, they responded with greater engagement and confidence (Gay, 2010; Bishop et al., 2009). For many Pacific families, career conversations are deeply relational and shaped by collective aspirations rather than individual ambition (Anae, 2010). The flipped learning model provided the flexibility for these intergenerational dialogues to occur within the home, at a pace and in a language that suited each family's context (Chu et al., 2013). As a result, the project reinforced the idea that effective career education is not a one-size-fits-all model but must be adaptable and culturally rooted.

Importantly, the findings suggest that schools should reframe their approach to career education as not merely an academic add-on but as a core part of student wellbeing and long-term success. This aligns with current educational thinking in Aotearoa New Zealand, which encourages a strengths-based, whānau-centred approach to student futures (Ministry of Education, 2011; Airini et al., 2010). A key takeaway was that aiga want to be engaged but need tools and invitations to participate meaningfully. When provided with resources in accessible formats, such as translated digital guides and clear pathway maps, parents felt more equipped to advocate for and support their children's aspirations (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006; Education Review Office, 2015).

This project presents opportunities to be used more widely and essentially lead to an enduring impact for career education, students and families. Schools can adopt a similar blended approach, embedding culturally responsive pedagogies and flipped learning principles into broader curriculum areas, not just career education. Additionally, educators must be supported with professional development to understand Talanoa and other indigenous methodologies—not just as research tools but as teaching strategies that centre relationship, respect, and reciprocity (Vaioleti, 2006).

Understandings gained from this project have important implications for educators and schools. First, career education must be repositioned as a collaborative and culturally responsive practice, designed with families, grounded in relationship, and inclusive of diverse worldviews (Education Review Office, 2015). Second, flipped learning offers a practical method for bridging the gap between school and home by providing resources that families can engage with on their own terms (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Finally, Talanoa must be incorporated not just as a research tool but as an approach that deepens relationships, maintains cultural integrity, and focuses on student aspirations (Vaioleti, 2006)

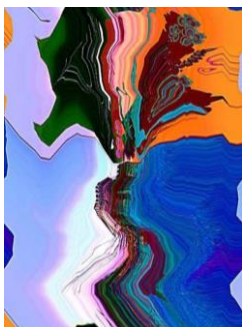
This project highlights that meaningful and lasting career education happens when families are empowered, students are at the centre, and learning is grounded in cultural context (Chu et al., 2013). Future recommendations include extending this example across other year levels and involving more networking with community and industry. This will also lead to more extensive professional development and support for staff to develop flipped learning and culturally responsive teaching capabilities (Gay, 2010; Airini et al., 2010).

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## About the Author





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C14F Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# **Rooted in Identity: Cultivating Cultural Connection Through a Digitalised, Place-Based Education**

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This project aimed to implement a digitalised, place-based learning approach to enhance the cultural identity of senior students at Waitara East School, focusing on empowering Māori learners. Grounded in Kaupapa Māori Research and Place-Based Education (PBE) methodologies, this initiative sought to bridge the disconnect between traditional educational experiences and the cultural heritage of ākonga Māori. By combining marae-based learning, digital tools, and experiential engagement, the project aimed to foster a deeper connection to whakapapa, tūrangawaewae, and local histories while equipping students with skills for the digital age.

The goals of the project were twofold: to enhance students' cultural identity and to equip educators with resources for implementing culturally immersive, place-based learning

experiences. Students participated in immersive learning activities that deepened their mātauranga Māori, including pūrākau, field trips to sites of significance, Marae wānanga and an overnight noho at Mouna Taranaki. These experiences were carefully designed to reconnect students with their heritage and empower them to see themselves reflected in their education. For educators, the project provided a framework and tools to design and deliver culturally responsive, place-based teaching practices, promoting long-term change in the classroom to better meet the needs of ākonga Māori.

This initiative addressed a pressing issue highlighted by researchers like Durie (2005) and Bishop et al. (2007): the failure of mainstream education systems to accommodate the cultural nuances of Māori learners. Gruenewald et al. (2007) emphasise that globalised education often alienates students from their local environments and cultural identities, while Miles (2008) notes the neglect of local significance in favour of broader global issues. By embedding learning in culturally significant spaces and contexts, this project sought to challenge these paradigms and provide an educational model that centres Māori perspectives.

Over the course of the project, two classes from Waitara East School—a Māori medium senior class and an English medium senior class—participated in a series of activities designed to authentically engage them with their culture. These included marae wānanga, museum visits, field trips, and the use of digital tools like digital storytelling, Minecraft, Kahoots, blogging, Google Maps and more to share their learning. Students explored their whakapapa and tūpuna through the use of pūrākau, culminating in an overnight experience that provided a deeper understanding of their connection to whenua and their cultural identity. Initial surveys captured a snapshot of students' sense of cultural identity, with ongoing feedback collected through wānanga and korero sessions to track their growth and insights.

The findings revealed significant positive impacts, particularly for Māori learners. Place-based and marae-based learning proved effective in fostering cultural connections, offering students experiential engagement with tikanga, pūrākau, and whakapapa. Digital tools complemented these methods by providing creative avenues for students to visualise cultural sites and stories, share their learning, and engage with traditions in innovative ways. This

blend of conventional and modern methods aligns with Smith's (1999) principles of Kaupapa Māori, emphasising adaptability and cultural continuity.

The data demonstrated increased engagement and appreciation for Te Reo Māori, tikanga, and mātauranga Māori. Students reported heightened cultural pride, with statements like "I feel proud of my cultural background" consistently rating highly throughout the project. Growth in understanding and engagement with Te Ao Māori was also evident, with an increase in responses to "I like learning and using Māori words." These findings affirm the effectiveness of culturally tailored interventions in strengthening cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging.

The project also addressed initial gaps in students' cultural knowledge, making learning accessible and relevant through digital and place-based methods. These approaches supported cognitive and emotional development, reinforcing the idea that culturally responsive education benefits all learners. As Kiingi Tuheitia (2024) stated, being Māori is about "being who we are, living our values, speaking our reo," and this project demonstrated how those principles could be realised in practice.

The broader significance of this project lies in its potential to serve as a model for other schools and communities. Integrating traditional narratives and contexts with modern educational tools strengthened cultural identity and provided educators with practical strategies for implementing culturally responsive practices. This approach addresses educational disparities between Māori and non-Māori learners, promoting equity and inclusion while honouring the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Key references that informed this project include Durie's (2005) work on Māori identity and well-being, Bishop et al.'s (2007) exploration of culturally responsive pedagogy, and Smith's (1999) foundational text on Kaupapa Māori research. Gruenewald et al. (2007) and Miles (2008) provided critical insights into the importance of place-based education in counteracting the alienation caused by globalised learning systems. These works collectively highlight the urgency of creating educational models that centre on Indigenous perspectives and values.

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## About the Author

Luke is the Deputy Principal at Waitara East School, where he leads and teaches in the Māori Immersion Unit. With a strong focus on integrating Te Ao Māori and digital education, Luke is passionate about providing ākonga with authentic, culturally rich learning experiences that empower them to connect deeply with their heritage. His dedication to fostering cultural identity and enhancing engagement through innovative pedagogy drives his work as an educator and leader.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium January 2025

# Leading Change Through Asynchronous Learning In A NCEA Level 2 Classroom

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Empowering Learning through Asynchronous Classrooms: A Practice-Based Change Project in a New Zealand Secondary School

The change-based project explores the design, implementation, and outcomes of an asynchronous blended learning environment developed for a Year 12 NCEA Level 2 Tourism class at Verdon College in Invercargill, New Zealand. It responds directly to the growing challenge of student absenteeism in secondary schools, particularly in a post-pandemic educational landscape. It reflects a transformational approach to teaching practice. Through three iterative action research cycles, the project sought to enhance student self-management, engagement and assessment completion via a Google Classroom-based online learning platform enriched with multimodal learning tools and student voice (Ministry of Education, n.d.; Zimmerman, 2000).

The project was grounded in the belief that education should meet students where they are, both literally and pedagogically. The purpose was to reduce barriers to learning caused by

absences due to illness, whānau commitments, school productions, sports, and cultural events, and to support all students in engaging meaningfully and independently in their coursework. The asynchronous model offered students the flexibility to access and revisit course content and assessment tasks at a time and place that suited their circumstances, fostering autonomy, confidence, and ownership of their learning (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008; Picciano, 2008).

While the initial goal was to maintain engagement for absent students, the project evolved to encompass broader ambitions, including increasing assessment completion rates, promoting digital self-management capabilities, and building a scalable model for blended learning across the college and beyond. These goals later evolved into a set of SMART-aligned objectives: improving completion rates by almost 20%, ensuring weekly engagement with content, and capturing shifts in student confidence and capability through survey data and achievement tracking.

To achieve this, I developed and maintained a fully resourced Google Classroom platform across Terms 2 and 3 of 2024. The asynchronous classroom integrates tools such as teacher-recorded videos, Padlet collaboration boards, Quizlet decks, Google Forms, rubrics, and scaffolded task checklists. Students were invited to engage with the platform both during class and crucially whenever they were absent or needed additional time and support. Each unit included success criteria, checkpoints and formative feedback opportunities with voice feedback added by MOTE in later iterative cycles. Students provided input through pre- and post-unit surveys, informal discussions, and structured interviews. At the same time, Google Classroom analytics and assessment data provided quantitative evidence of progress. The project followed an action research methodology, incorporating three iterative cycles that aligned with three tourism unit standards. After each iterative cycle, I analysed survey data, usage analytics, rubric, outcomes and student feedback to refine the learning environment. In cycle one, students reported difficulty navigating the platform, which led to the reorganisation of folders, weekly video summaries, and visual task checklists. In Cycle 2, feedback revealed a need for peer interactions, resulting in the inclusion of embedded Padlet prompts and discussion threads. In Cycle 3, I addressed feedback gaps by incorporating voice feedback and creating differentiated Quizlet sets to address common

misunderstandings.

The project's outcomes were significant. Assessment completion rates rose from 61% in 2023 to 88% in 2024, and students' average confidence in managing their assessments improved from 3.1 to 4.4 on a Likert scale. The asynchronous model primarily benefited students who were frequently absent, anxious, or balancing other responsibilities. They reported feeling less pressured, more in control and better able to keep up with the coursework. These findings support the notion that asynchronous environments, when carefully designed and grounded in student voice, can be transformational for both engagement and achievement (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

Several key insights emerged through this work. First, asynchronous learning is not merely a temporary solution for crises like COVID-19; it is a long-term, equitable strategy for addressing persistent challenges such as disengagement and chronic absenteeism (Garrison and Vaughan, 2000). Secondly, student agency flourishes in a digital environment that is structured, supportive and co-constructed with learners. And thirdly, asynchronous learning offers a culturally responsive framework when it incorporates family and whānau voice, flexible timing, and multimodal access options, such as offline resources and cell phone accessibility, which are vital for equity in diverse school communities (Picciano, 2018).

The project also catalysed significant shifts in my teaching practice. I moved from a traditional teacher-led model to a responsive, student-centred approach grounded in transformational and distributed leadership. Students were no longer passive recipients of content but now active co-designers of their learning environment. Through regular feedback loops and iterative design, I learned to embed culturally relevant examples and respond to those with caregiving responsibilities, low literacy or learning anxiety.

The work contributes valuable, classroom-based evidence to the emerging field of asynchronous learning in secondary education, particularly with the under-researched area of NCEA Level Two tourism. While many studies focus on asynchronous learning in tertiary content, this change-based project offers a teacher-led model informed by data, collaboration and local context. The pamphlet, infographic and reflective blog created during the project provide ready-to-use professional learning resources for other teachers

seeking to implement similar approaches to their teaching.

Moving forward, the model developed in this project is scalable across departments and schools and will be shared with Verdon College and our Kahui Ako network. It lays the groundwork for wider professional development, policy conversations and further action research in digital inclusion, student voice and equity-based practice. Above all, it affirms that secondary education in New Zealand can and must evolve to meet the needs of all learners, not just those who can be physically present in the classroom.

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## About the Author

Charlotte Perniskie is a qualified early childhood and primary teacher working at a secondary school, Verdon College in Invercargill, New Zealand. She specialises in teaching Year 9-12 students. Her work centres around equitable, flexible learning environments that empower student agency and reduce barriers to learning. Her master's research project, which explores the implementation of asynchronous classrooms as a solution to absenteeism and disengagement in NCEA contexts, is based on change.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# Cultivating Critical Financial Thinkers

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This report, titled "Cultivating Critical Financial Thinkers," presents a comprehensive analysis of project-based learning (PBL) in financial education. The primary objective of this project is to evaluate the effectiveness of PBL as a pedagogical approach to developing critical thinking skills among students in financial disciplines. The report synthesises existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and empirical evidence to provide insights into the implementation and outcomes of PBL in educational settings.

In recent years, the demand for critical thinking skills in the workforce has increased significantly, particularly in fields such as finance, where decision-making and problem-solving are paramount. Traditional educational methods often fall short of equipping students with these essential skills. Bell (2010) emphasizes that project-based learning (PBL) is a crucial strategy for equipping students for the demands of the workforce in the twenty-first century since it encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork. As a response, educators should look into project-based learning, which emphasises active engagement, collaboration, and

real-world application of knowledge. This report explores the theoretical underpinnings of PBL, its implementation in financial education, and the resulting impact on students' critical thinking abilities.

The project identifies several key learning frameworks that underpin project-based learning, including constructivist learning theory, experiential learning, and the 21st Century Learning Framework. These frameworks highlight the importance of active participation, reflection, and the development of higher-order thinking skills. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is a social process in which students engage in guided instruction, discussion, and interaction to acquire higher-order thinking skills. This is consistent with PBL's collaborative approach, in which students gain information through peer interaction and teacher guidance.

Additionally, leadership theories such as transformational and servant leadership are discussed, emphasising the role of educators in facilitating a supportive and collaborative learning environment.

The evaluation of project-based learning in this report is based on a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. Surveys, interviews, and case studies from various lessons were analysed to assess the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing critical thinking skills among students. The project also examines the challenges faced by educators in implementing PBL and the strategies employed to overcome these obstacles.

The project findings indicate that project-based learning significantly enhances students' critical thinking skills in financial education. Students engaged in PBL demonstrated improved problem-solving abilities, greater creativity, and a deeper understanding of financial concepts. The collaborative nature of PBL fosters teamwork and communication skills, which are essential in the finance industry. Furthermore, the project highlights the importance of real-world relevance in the classroom, as students are more motivated and engaged when they can see the practical application of their learning.

The project also identifies several challenges associated with implementing PBL. These include time constraints, the need for adequate resources, and the necessity for professional development for educators. Prior research highlights that institutional support and organised professional development are crucial to fully benefit from PBL and guarantee its successful implementation (Bani-Hamad & Abdullah, 2019). To address these challenges, the report recommends the

establishment of supportive institutional frameworks, ongoing training for educators, and the integration of technology to facilitate collaboration and project management.

The research suggests that educators and institutions adopt a diversified strategy in light of the findings. To begin, curriculum integration is critical for ensuring that PBL matches existing learning objectives. Subsequently, to acquire the requisite knowledge and abilities in PBL approaches and efficient assessment techniques, educators must engage in extensive professional development. Additionally, encouraging partnerships with financial institutions can offer students insightful industry knowledge and worthwhile practical experiences. Last but not least, creating thorough evaluation frameworks that analyse the output of the project as well as the process of cooperation, critical thinking, and problem-solving is essential for PBL's success.

In financial education, this study also emphasises the value of project-based learning as an effective teaching method for developing critical thinking skills. Teachers can help students grasp financial ideas more deeply and get ready for the complexity of the modern workforce by including them in real-world initiatives. The suggestions are meant to help PBL be implemented successfully, which will ultimately improve the learning process and results for students studying financial subjects. As the landscape of education continues to evolve, embracing innovative teaching methods like PBL will be essential in cultivating the next generation of critical thinkers and problem solvers in finance.

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## About the Author

Vikashni Ram is an experienced educator with over 20 years of dedicated service in the Commerce field. As Head of the Commerce Department at a South Auckland school, she is passionate about fostering financial literacy, particularly among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. She believes that equipping young people with strong financial knowledge and skills is crucial for their future success and financial stability. Throughout her career, she has consistently focused on creating engaging and inclusive learning environments that cater to diverse student needs.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# **Developing Effective Student Self-Reflection to Develop Learner Agency in a South Auckland School**

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This study aims to explore the potential for reflective practices to enhance learner agency among primary school students from a low socioeconomic background.

The purpose of this practice-based change project was to explore how structured reflective practices could foster learner agency among primary school students in a low socioeconomic area. This research aimed to understand how reflection could support students' self-regulation, goal-setting, and accountability in their learning processes, particularly within a challenging educational environment characterised by transient populations, staffing shortages, and diverse linguistic and cultural needs.

The overarching goals of the project were threefold: to introduce and scaffold reflective practices, to empower students to take greater ownership of their learning, and to identify sustainable strategies for fostering learner agency that could be integrated into the school's curriculum and pedagogical approaches. By addressing these goals, the project sought to create a foundation for long-term, meaningful changes in student learning behaviours and outcomes.

Initially, students were provided with structured reflection sheets where the student could have supported partner discussions and record their reflections by hand, moving on to recording their reflections digitally. Scaffolding strategies, such as sentence stems and buddy systems, were used to introduce new vocabulary tailored to accommodate the diverse needs of the student population, including English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Students were encouraged to evaluate both successful and unsuccessful learning experiences. In week 7, students were encouraged to propose solutions, and set goals for improvement. Regular feedback from student focus groups and collaboration with school colleagues and the ESL team further informed iterative improvements to these reflective practices.

Key findings revealed that while many students initially engaged in surface-level reflections—often limited to descriptive observations or task-focused insights—there was a gradual shift towards deeper, more analytical reflections over time. Higher-ability students demonstrated greater capacity to connect their reflections to learning goals, while LAPS and ESL learners required differentiated support to achieve similar progress. Challenges included cognitive and emotional barriers to reflection, such as discomfort in acknowledging failures and difficulties recalling specific learning experiences. Additionally, fostering independent learning behaviours remained a significant obstacle, as many students struggled with distractions and relied heavily on teacher facilitation.

The conclusions drawn from this project underscore the transformative potential of reflection as a tool for fostering learner agency, particularly when supported by a structured and adaptive framework. Reflection allowed students to identify their strengths, challenges, and actionable steps for improvement, contributing to a growing sense of self-awareness

and motivation. However, the reliance on teacher guidance highlighted the need for strategies that promote long-term autonomy, such as peer feedback, differentiated prompts, and revisiting reflections periodically.

Insights gained from the project emphasise the importance of tailoring reflective practices to meet the diverse needs of students. The project revealed the value of scaffolding language development through modelled sentence structures, which enhanced students' ability to articulate their reflections. Moreover, the iterative changes made to the reflective framework, informed by continuous feedback, demonstrated the necessity of flexibility and adaptability in educational interventions.

The project's broader significance lies in its implications for educational practice. By embedding reflective practices into the curriculum, educators can cultivate intrinsic motivation and self-determined learning, essential for fostering lifelong learners. The findings align with established theories on reflection and learner agency, including Boud et al.'s (1985) emphasis on reflection as a process for guiding future actions and Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, which highlights the roles of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in promoting intrinsic motivation. Additionally, the project underscores the potential of leveraging AI tools to enhance reflective practices, offering personalised prompts and opportunities for peer collaboration, provided these technologies are integrated ethically and safely.

Collaboration played a pivotal role in shaping the project's design and outcomes. Input from academic advisors, school colleagues, and focus groups provided diverse perspectives that enriched the research process and ensured alignment with the school's strategic goals.

Despite the positive outcomes, the project also highlighted significant challenges and limitations. Time constraints, staffing shortages, and the complexities of working within a hard-to-staff school required small, sustainable changes to be prioritised. The findings suggest that fostering learner agency in similar contexts necessitates ongoing commitment to iterative improvements and the integration of reflective practices into broader school initiatives.

In summary, this project demonstrated that structured reflective practices can serve as a powerful mechanism for developing learner agency, particularly when supported by transformational leadership and a commitment to ethical, student-centred methodologies. The gradual improvements in students' reflective capacities and their emerging sense of ownership over their learning underscore the potential for reflection to transform educational experiences, even within challenging contexts.

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## About the Author

After qualifying in 2010 from the University of Cumbria and teaching in Leeds (UK) and internationally I am currently the Year 5/6 team leader at Takaanini School NZ.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# Championing digital fluency via personalised learning.

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This project focused on enhancing digital fluency among Year 5 learners at a decile one school in Auckland through the implementation of personalised learning strategies. By applying the T3 framework (Magana, 2020), the initiative aimed to assess and develop the essential skills and knowledge needed for students to become digitally fluent. Personalised learning empowers students to engage in meaningful discussions and make informed choices about their educational pathways, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and involvement in their learning experiences (Duckett & Jones, 2006).

The primary goals of the project included increasing digital fluency skills over Terms 2 and 3 by following an iterative process that facilitated observation, data collection, reflection, and assessment of learning outcomes (Stringer, 2007). Specific objectives included understanding students' strengths, weaknesses, learning styles, and interests; collaborating with whānau to gather insights into their children's learning backgrounds; and creating a teaching program to help learners identify areas for improvement. Moreover, a self-

assessment rubric was developed to evaluate engagement and digital fluency levels via the T3 framework.

Despite students' familiarity with digital tools, such as iPads and Chromebooks, there existed a gap between their functional digital skills and the ability to use technology for deeper learning and creative tasks (Miller & Bartlett, 2012). This highlighted the need to cultivate digital fluency that transcends basic literacy, allowing students to critically explore, analyze, and create independently. A significant challenge faced by the project was student engagement, as some learners struggle with completing assigned work due to distractions like non-educational websites and social media.

Personalised learning was chosen as it accommodates individual learning styles and paces, enabling students to flourish in technology-driven environments. The project was, therefore, positioned to not only enhance academic skills but also to ensure students could navigate the rapidly evolving digital landscape effectively.

A personalised learning approach was embedded in the project's framework, which prioritises the unique needs of each student, reflecting Leadbeater's vision of empowering learners and their families to contribute to their education actively. Through deeper personalisation, learners can engage with meaningful content and co-construct their learning experiences.

The data collection for this project employed both qualitative and quantitative methods, including running records, PAT data, surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. Early analysis of survey results indicated that students expressed diverse aspirations, personal interests, and learning preferences. However, challenges such as writing difficulties and the need for additional support emerged, underscoring the necessity for tailored instructional strategies.

The Talanoa framework, designed around Pacific values of respect, warmth, and open dialogue, played an essential role in fostering relationships with parents and enhancing data collection efforts. By establishing high-trust relationships, the framework allowed parents to

provide insights regarding their children's needs and learning experiences within an appropriate cultural context.

In reflecting on leadership throughout the project, a combination of adaptive, authentic, and servant leadership styles proved effective in guiding the implementation of personalised learning. Adaptive leadership enabled responsiveness to changes in technology and student needs, while authentic leadership cultivated trust and engagement among stakeholders. Servant leadership centred on the needs of learners, thereby fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Collaboration was integral to the success of the project. Through effective engagement with parents, teachers, and students, the project strengthened relationships and fostered a community of support. Utilizing the Talanoa method for continuous dialogue ensured that diverse perspectives shaped the learning experience.

The project findings revealed significant relationships between personalised learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and improved literacy outcomes for students. By integrating digital technology into instructional practices, the T3 framework was successfully utilized to assess levels of digital fluency within the classroom and foster a more interactive and engaging learning environment.

Data analysis indicated that personalised learning and family involvement directly contributed to students' reading achievements, with many students showing growth of 1 to 1.5 years over the course of the project. The findings also reaffirmed literature suggesting that when students are actively engaged in their learning processes, they demonstrate higher levels of motivation and success.

Future planning for the project includes the creation of a comprehensive Google site resource for whānau, continued collaboration with the Manaiakalani Community of Learning (COL), and deeper integration of personalised and culturally responsive practices. Overall, this study emphasizes the underlying importance of effective leadership, communication, and collaboration in enhancing student engagement and learning

outcomes, particularly for Māori and Pasifika students. By fostering a culture of personalised learning, educators can empower their students and families to thrive in the modern educational landscape.

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## About the Author

Migi has been teaching since 2018, working as a primary school teacher at Pt England Primary School in Auckland.



# academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

## The Dialogic Highway

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### Project Backstory

This Action Research Change in Practice Project emerged from two separate situations: firstly, the drop in confidence and efficacy I witnessed in my own daughter, having been placed in the 'cabbage class'. Secondly, a challenge posed by my then Principal in response to the 2012 Ministry report *Supporting future-oriented learning and teaching - a New Zealand perspective* (Bolstad et al. 2012).

Inspired to innovate and make things better, I took a close look at my own pedagogy and began a process of change to prioritise my students and place them at the centre of all learning and teaching. One of the contexts for this was reading and reading comprehension. Departing from traditional ability-based reading groups, I introduced a whole class shared reading approach, fostering meaning-making through collaborative discussion that valued

students' diverse experiences and perspectives and gave mana to oral expression. Despite improving engagement and motivation, true dialogic interactions - characterised by cumulative back-and-forth discussions - remained elusive.

Fast-forward ten years.

Research indicates that students require explicit instruction and guided practice in dialogic skills to engage in the level of discussion I envisioned.

### **Awareness Alternative and Action**

The purpose of my Action Research Project became clear: replace traditional reading practices with an alternative which recognises the potential in all students.

The project goals included raising awareness of dialogic approaches as a High Expectation Teaching (HET) Aotearoa-specific pedagogy (Tokona Te Raki, 2024), which is inclusive and equitable. By removing ability grouping and providing high-level learning activities for all students, creating warm and safe spaces, using collaboration to support learning goals and giving mana to oral language, this alternative will address classroom diversity, disengagement and underachievement in reading.

This research project advocates a dialogic approach to reading comprehension, presenting an alternative pedagogy that prioritises student-driven, collaborative discussions. These discussions take place in safe spaces where co-constructed 'game rules' have been decided by students with teachers and where critical thought is encouraged through scaffolded prompts. By centring student sensemaking and rejecting the notion of right or wrong answers, this approach challenges traditional reading comprehension approaches (Berryman et al. 2018). Teachers need to shift their mindset to fully embrace this pedagogy.

Inspired by Kerslake's Playground of Ideas (2021), I designed the Dialogic Highway to resonate with young learners. The framework, influenced by gaming terminology, is a metaphorical highway, with Dialogic Talk Moves (structured prompts for both teachers and students) that

foster meaningful participation. The Talk Moves act as on and off-ramps symbolising the many directions a discussion can take.

Employing an action research methodology, the project emphasised experiential, iterative and collaborative learning (Alejandro & David, 2018). Six teachers each had a diverse group of six to eleven students who tested the Dialogic Highway Framework through three iterative cycles - instructional, goal-driven and student-led - over a period of two school terms. Artefacts such as the Dialogic Culture Overview, Principles for Implementation Frame, comprehensive lesson plans and accompanying resources supported implementation. Teachers reflected on their practice during fortnightly kanohi-ki-te-kanohi hui, in an online Community of Practice and through #Loothui (a storytelling approach to sharing successes).

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected to evaluate the framework's impact. Pre-project surveys gauged teachers' initial stance towards dialogic teaching. Qualitative insights illuminated teachers' evolving beliefs, practices and any barriers. Quantitative analysis of transcribed group discussions measured the frequency and variety of dialogic moves used by students throughout the project.

## **Key Findings**

The project aimed to implement an alternative approach to reading comprehension by fostering safe spaces for discussion, redefining teacher and student roles and utilising scaffolding tools effectively. Key findings include:

- Safe discussion spaces  
Co-constructed 'game rules', though inconsistently prioritised by some teachers, built trust among students, enhancing their confidence and collaboration. Students valued dedicated physical spaces for discussions, it showed the teacher valued the pedagogy enough to provide a dedicated space for it and this act also created a sense of ownership of what took place in the space.
- Changing roles  
Some teachers faced challenges in stepping back to enable student-driven discussions. Two main reasons were highlighted; the vulnerability faced when not in control and a

tension between process-focused learning and outcome-based assessment. Students embraced their active roles, coming to recognise the value of diverse perspectives, learning how to respectfully disagree and gaining a deeper understanding of the texts explored.

- Scaffolding tools

The Dialogic Talk Move Cards acted as prompts and supported both teachers and students, facilitating richer and more critical discussions. The scaffolding tools were also effectively used by students when teaching other students how to use them for dialogic discussions.

## **Insights Gained**

This research highlighted dialogic discussions as a culturally responsive alternative to improve student engagement in reading comprehension and foster critical literacy. Students embraced multiple perspectives, recognising cultural diversity as a strength, which acted as a catalyst for meaningful discussions. Co-constructing 'game rules' for safe discussion spaces was pivotal, though future dissemination should place more emphasis on this phase of implementation to ensure all students feel confident to share deeply.

Teachers will need to think innovatively to address the tension between process over product if they see genuine value in dialogic practices. One way is to modify the Loot section of the Dialogic Discussion Framework into a self-assessment component. Students could capture just-in-time evidence of valuable learning through self-assessment using the Loot questions and voice memo (or other online voice/video recording tool), uploading these in a digital format to their learning portfolios.

It became clear by the end of the project that the dialogic skills learnt in the context of reading comprehension are transversal. Teachers and students provided evidence of this through sharing explicit examples of students using dialogic vocabulary in a variety of other contexts such as during play, to solve social problems and in general classroom discussion.

Gamification of Dialogic Talk Moves will require more emphasis in future dissemination to ensure clearer links between the dialogic talk move name and the discourse action. Doing this will result in superior teaching and learning of the gamification aspects, which act as metaphors for types of discussion.

Future implementations should address the complexities of online dialogic discussions and focus on integrating dialogic practices within broader school systems to sustain and scale up this transformative approach.

### **Leadership of the project**

The project was guided by the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). I modelled behaviour aligned with my values, inspired a shared vision for innovative literacy practices and supported participants through unlearning and relearning. Key strategies to sustain motivation in my participants included enabling others to act by creating trusting relationships, celebrating successes, collaborative problem-solving and cultivating a sense of mutual purpose. I created a blog using Substack titled [Students At The Centre](#) to track the journey of this Master's project.

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## About the Author

Kerri describes herself as a lifelong learner. Having taught year 7-8 students for most of her 26 years as a teacher, Kerri is currently employed as a content writer. Despite not being in a classroom, Kerri's aim continues to be placing students at the centre of learning.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C14F Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# Enhancing Interactive Learning: Fostering a Social Language Community in Online New Zealand Sign Language Classes

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My change-based research project explored the effectiveness of flipped learning and technology to enhance student interaction and social presence in online New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) classes. The project arose from the urgent need to improve access to NZSL education, as it is a threatened language (McKee, 2006) with a limited number of qualified teachers. The Chief Ombudsman's (Ombudsman of New Zealand, 2024) criticism of the Ministry of Education for not doing enough to ensure equitable NZSL education for all students further highlighted the lack of access.

I aimed to improve the online teaching of NCEA Level 1 NZSL by fostering social language learning communities through a flipped learning approach. This approach sought to address the challenges of transitioning from traditional face-to-face to online teaching, ensure accessibility, and promote active participation among Deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH)

students.

The overarching goal of this project was to develop online social language learning communities using flipped learning approaches for NCEA Level 1 New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) online classes in a high school context. The first project goal was to develop and implement strategies to create effective interactions between students, teachers, and content to support language learning online. The second goal was to investigate and implement approaches to establish and sustain engaging social language learning environments. The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison et al., 1999) was used to support the analysis of social presence in this project.

This project incorporated two six-week research iterations conducted with two NCEA Level 1 online classes. I introduced flipped learning, in which students engaged in asynchronous learning of the pre-class content (vocabulary and grammar) through videos I created and interactive activities to reinforce their knowledge on platforms like Nearpod and YouTube. Synchronous class time on Zoom was dedicated to applying the pre-class learning through collaborative tasks, discussions, and interactive activities like Kahoot's. The new Learning Management System (LMS), Te Rito (also known as Edsby) was implemented to host course materials, track progress, upload and submit assessments and facilitate communication. Culturally responsive teaching practices were integrated, incorporating Deaf identity, traditions and community-based learning to align with Deaf cultural practices. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles were applied to ensure accessibility and cater to the diverse learning needs of our DHH learners (Taylor & Yuknis, 2023).

A mixed-method approach was used to analyse data. Quantitative data was gathered from the CoI Survey, polls and learner analytics, and grade comparisons between 2023 and 2024. The CoI Survey was administered three times, before Iteration 1, after Iteration 1, and after Iteration 2, to measure student perception of teaching, social and cognitive presence using a 5-point Likert scale. Analysis of this quantitative data helped track engagement and performance trends in online NZSL classes. Qualitative data was collected through discourse analysis of Zoom recordings, thematic analysis of student feedback, teacher field notes, and stakeholder survey analysis. Discourse analysis focused on specific attributes, such as the

presence of tensions, information, ideas, and opinions, which defined the quality of the interaction and inconsistencies observed during the students' interactions. Thematic analysis of the open-ended survey questions and reflections from Nearpod and semi-structured interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of student experiences with flipped learning and social presence. Thematic analysis of teacher field notes, taken after each class, provided context for interpreting the data. Lastly, stakeholder survey analysis offered insights into the effectiveness of this project and my leadership and collaboration.

I developed an E-book titled "Enhancing Online Language Learning: Fostering a Social Language Community in Online NZSL Classes." The Book was co-created with experts and includes sections on Flipped Learning, Language Learning classroom teaching strategies, Te Rito (LMS), and teaching materials used for the NCEA Level 1 NZSL class online. The dedicated NZSL Classroom YouTube channel created during this project will provide links to the interactive in-class Nearpod presentations and pre-recorded videos used for Flipped learning. This E-book will be a 'continuing work in progress' beyond the initial project.

The project provided insight that while flipped learning encourages self-regulation (Zumbrunn, 2011), some students, particularly those new to self-paced learning, require additional support to develop this skill. Therefore, it is essential to carefully select digital platforms that ensure accessibility and usability and minimise technical barriers for students. Developing student motivation for pre-class engagement with flipped learning requires further exploration and implementation of structured tracking systems in the LMS, Te Rito.

The significance of this project is that it offers valuable insights into enhancing online NZSL teaching, particularly for DHH students. The findings of this project emphasise the importance of A) Culturally responsive teaching practices that integrate Deaf cultural values and learning styles. B) A blended learning approach that combines flipped learning with interactive synchronous sessions to promote student engagement and interaction. C) Strategic use of digital platforms and tools that support UDL principles, accessibility and facilitate self-directed learning. D) Ongoing collaboration with stakeholders, including students, schools, and professionals in the education sector, as well as teachers and researchers, is needed to ensure that teaching practices are responsive and inclusive.

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This Summary was developed with the support of AI Tool – Notebook LM.

## About the Author

Ursula Becroft Thynne is the Head of the NCEA NZSL Department at Ko Taku Reo Deaf Education New Zealand (KTR). She has also been a pioneer within KTR in online teaching due to its nationwide coverage and the wide geographical spread of its Deaf and Hard-of-hearing (DHH) students. She has a passion for NCEA NZSL and providing access to this subject to all DHH students, especially those who wish to access this programme to gain the needed literacy credits to attain the NCEA programme as a tagged literacy subject until 2027. Ursula has been a critical friend to the Ministry of Education as part of the Subject Expert Group developing the new NCEA



NZSL Achievement standards for Level 1 as well as developing many resources to support other teachers in best practice and potentially picking up this subject to improve access for DHH and hearing students to this threatened language, despite its status as an official language here in New Zealand. She is motivated to continue improving her online teaching practice and transferring the learning to other curriculum areas for DHH learners.



## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C14F Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# **Using the Talanoa method to support immigrant students in building digital capabilities, navigating culturally grounded learning experiences, and linking to their prior learning and knowledge**

Hipiasa Tolovaa

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*Ki te kore ngā pūtake e mākūkūngia, e kore te rākau e tupu.  
If the roots of the tree are not watered, the tree will never grow.*

Pacific immigrant students face significant challenges, cultural differences, and new education pedagogy, challenging them to the root of their learning. They bring cultures, their identity, and the knowledge they learned in their countries of birth (Vaiioleti, 2006), but the cultures and learning pedagogies in their new places affect their motivation, confidence, experiences and learning abilities. To New Zealand schools, it is troubling and causing the clash of cultures, creating misunderstanding and questioning the whereabouts of the culturally responsive approach. The focus of this project was the impact of the Talanoa method on improving the digital capabilities of immigrant Pacific students while

attending their community-based learning support programmes. Adding to their understanding was the impact of Talanoa on their prior learning and knowledge.

What I learned from the project helped me to revisit my collaborating skills with students of different ethnicities. Their cultures and identities and knowing them through their cultural backgrounds created a relationship with their parents and communities (Chu et al., 2010). Working through this action, research enabled me to become analytical, reflective and culturally adaptive to the immigrant Pacific students. Everyone involved in this project played active roles and thus gave the idea that the Pacific students wanted collaboration when their cultural backgrounds supported them (Chu et al., 2010; Luafutu, 2015). On account of that, I designed a cultural approach called the 'Talanoa teaching model'. It suits the large number of Pacific students in a class. Following is the model diagram and information on each conversation step with Pacific students. The outcomes were illustrative and reflective, and you were rewarded for what you targeted to achieve. The method improved digital capabilities and boosted the cultural motivation of the students.

Iterations improved the collaboration with ten immigrant Pacific students. Advancing in working with them was that they were Samoan students, and the church community proved to be a place that embraced their culture and identity. It thus makes it easy for the project to implement the Talanoa method, consequently allowing the qualitative research to produce less than a 1% error rate. The data was gathered through interviews, observation and assessment. The purpose was to prove that the culturally responsive approaches surrounding Pacific students' community-based support learning would consistently improve their learning in digital technology and other subjects.

The Talanoa teaching method would not apply to all students. The nature of the method was the reciprocal reaction between the teacher and the students through storytelling. It would be found amusing and annoying by other students. However, teacher discretion applies if it is suitable to execute in the first and last minutes of the class. Options to use it at the end of the class are up to the teacher. One limitation of the method is the void of sensitive information (Latu, 2009). Talanoa is unstructured storytelling and uncontrolled when stories lead the teacher to uncensored matters.

Talanoa's teaching method can be used anywhere Pacific students feel safe talking in their languages. The issue of immigrant students' language barrier and behavioural and emotional safety must be recognised. Immigrant Pacific students are sensitive to scanning suspicious behaviour from other students due to their shyness and lack of behavioural experiences (Chu et al., 2010). In schools, the Pacific Homework Centre can use the Talanoa method to assess Pacific learners' progress in their subjects. Implementing the Talanoa model's four stages of enquiry, 'talanoa mai', 'talanoa atu', 'talanoa ane', and 'talanoa ifo', advocated reciprocal dialogue between the teachers and the students, or students to students. The method recalled the students' experiences when they heard these words in their families and understood what they meant to them. The students responded simultaneously during the project, and grouping was the better way to control the situation. Talanoa's teaching method was best presented in a community location like the church. Most Pacific people, like the Samoa community, are churchgoers. Furthermore, they are keen to attend church services every Sunday. It is a fully Samoan-operated project, led and administered by the Samoan in the Samoan customs. Most of its members are immigrants with valuable experiences of challenges, which could be shared to help these immigrant Samoan students.

There were attempts to implement the Talanoa method in teaching. Latu (2009) conducted research using talanoa in Tonga Primary in New Zealand. Wellington Porirua School implemented talanoa in the spirals of learning framework to educate a large number of Pacific students in various classes. The outcomes were successful in improving engagement and collaboration. The Education Review Officer (ERO) reported the success of the culturally responsive approaches in improving Pacific NCEA results. In addition, initiatives by global organisations like UNESCO provided funds to conduct more research and the OECD for culturally responsive curriculum strategies, benefiting the Talanoa teaching model.

However, cultural responsiveness cannot be achieved if we do not use it in class. The availability of Western pedagogical tools and theories, when blended with cultural practices like Talanoa, promotes an inclusive environment, engagement and better academic results (Latu, 2009).

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## About the Author

With over 15 years of teaching experience in Samoa and one year in New Zealand, I bring a deep understanding of the diverse educational needs of Pacific learners. My professional journey has been shaped by a commitment to diversity, social justice, and the value of cultural identity in education. These principles inspired me to undertake a research thesis as part of my education studies at Massey University. My thesis explores how the Talanoa method can support the digital capability of immigrant Pacific students, aiming to promote culturally responsive teaching and equitable access to digital learning.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C14F Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

### Journal Yourself Well

Amber Wing

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*Ki te kore ngā pūtaka e mākūkūngia, e kore te rākau e tupu.  
If the roots of the tree are not watered, the tree will never grow.*

“Everything starts with the story we tell ourselves, about ourselves” (Hannon, 2018). The stories we construct about ourselves shape who we become, a critical factor when considering the future of education and wellbeing. As we prepare ākongā for an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world, it is essential to equip them with the tools and strategies needed to navigate adversity, support personal growth, and strengthen mental health.

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of expressive journaling and emotion language building on the wellbeing of Year 5-6 students. The initiative stemmed from concerns about student behaviour negatively impacting teaching and learning, with the school’s stand-down rate being significantly higher than regional and national averages. It became evident that many ākongā faced significant pastoral needs and struggled with managing their feelings, which brought about this change based project.

In New Zealand, the statistics surrounding wellbeing are concerning. According to Quinlan & Hone (2020), "More than half of Aotearoa New Zealand's population will suffer a mental disorder at some stage of their lives, and it is estimated that only 25% of the working population is psychologically flourishing" (cited in Worrall-Bader, 2023, p.1). For Māori youth, "28% report significant depressive symptoms, compared to 20% of European and Pākehā youth, with similar statistics for suicide attempts" (Fleming et al, 2020, p. 9). These statistics highlight the urgent need for wellbeing focused education in Aotearoa.

This project aimed to assess how expressive journaling and emotion language building could enhance wellbeing, focusing on emotional release, emotion comprehension, and resilience. The project involved two iterations of 16 lessons with 10-12 students per group, combining an emotion language building component (covering brain function, emotion vocabulary and comprehension) with the expressive journaling process based on Professor James Pennebaker's work (2016). Ākonga were given the option to "Save, Share, or Shred" their writing, promoting a safe space for emotional release. Optional one on one meetings with students identified common themes such as loss and grief, anxiety and anger, trauma and fear, and issues around friendships and relationships. These broad themes helped inform the development of future lessons and areas of focus.

Cultural frameworks, such as Macfarlane's Educultural Wheel (Macfarlane, 2004), Te Whare Tapa Wha (Durie, 1994), and the Fonofale Pacifica Model (Pulotu-Endemann, 2009), informed the project, and Talanoa was used to build relationships with participants, whānau and stakeholders. This was essential for ensuring that the project was culturally inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of Māori and Pacifica. It supported engagement in the project, through fostering a sense of belonging, and ensuring that the intervention was respectful of, and relevant to, the cultural contexts of the ākonga involved.

A mixed methods methodology approach was used, guided by action research. The project incorporated pre and post intervention Emotional Word Fluency Tests (EWFT), PISA Wellbeing Surveys, student and stakeholder questionnaires, field notes, and school behaviour data analysis. Findings indicated positive shifts in student emotional wellbeing, particularly in emotional expression, regulation, and self-awareness. Students reported

increased enjoyment in writing, a feeling of release and a greater sense of safety in sharing their feelings. Quantitative data revealed significant improvements in the ability to generate emotion words, especially among Pacifica students.

Participant engagement and satisfaction in the programme was positively impacted, highlighting the benefits ākongā had in participating. Participants highlighted the beneficial impact journaling and emotion language building had on their wellbeing. A high percentage of participants (27%) highlighted they were less anxious since participating in the project. Of the participants that engaged in this project, there was a 13.6% decrease in major behaviours between 2023 and 2024. None of the children who participated in this project had any major behaviours in 2024.

While the project showed positive results, some mixed outcomes emerged, particularly concerning subjective wellbeing in relation to 'school' and 'out of school' environments. The findings highlight the need for further research into the longer term impacts and broader implications of these interventions being implemented in a whole school setting. The project highlighted the importance of considering the interconnectedness of systems affecting student wellbeing, such as social relationships, mental health, and cultural influences. The balance between negative and positive experiences, along with the integration of somatic exercises and Theory of Mind activities, was also identified as crucial to maintaining student motivation and emotional growth.

This research highlights the potential of expressive journaling and emotion language building as effective strategies for supporting student wellbeing in New Zealand schools, contributing to the limited local research on this topic. This project emphasises the need for fostering a safe environment for emotion exploration, and its findings offer valuable guidance for educators who wish to implement such a project in their kura. The research highlights the benefits of embedding emotional literacy and journaling techniques into school curriculum to support ākongā mental wellbeing. The e-book of lesson plans and resources offers a practical guide for educators to integrate a similar intervention within their classroom or across the whole school, supporting a school-wide approach to wellbeing.

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## About the Author

Amber Wing is a Team Leader in the Canterbury region. As a dedicated teacher with over 18 years of experience, she is deeply passionate about fostering environments that support the wellbeing of ākonga. She believes in creating environments where learners feel valued, respected, and safe, which allows them to grow, develop resilience, and discover their potential. Amber has a passion for integrating te ao māori and digital technology into the curriculum. She loves spending time with her daughter and being outdoors, both being great for Hauora.





## academyEX Executive Summary

Master of Contemporary Education C12P Cohort  
Symposium 22 January 2025

# **Developing an Implementation Framework and Guidelines for the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Teaching, Learning, and Assessment**

Daniel Wise

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This practice-based project addressed the complex and rapidly evolving challenges posed by Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI) in educational settings. With the advent of Gen-AI tools such as ChatGPT, Co-Pilot and Gemini, tackling the potential challenges they pose to authenticity, ethical use, and meaningful integration into teaching, learning and assessment has become urgent. Conducted in a New Zealand secondary school, this project sought to develop a framework and practical guidelines to support educators and students in navigating these challenges, to ensure safe, and effective use of Gen-AI in teaching, learning, and assessment practice.

The project aimed to address a core concern: maintaining the authenticity of student submissions for high-stakes assessments for New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) standards. NZQA defines authentic as “the assurance that the evidence submitted for assessment by a learner is their own, with the evidence being free of plagiarism, and any inclusion of work from another source acknowledged and appropriately referenced”. (NZQA 2024). Gen-AI presents unique challenges in this regard, as its outputs can seamlessly mimic original student work, creating potential risks for the integrity of qualifications.

This project had key four objectives.

1. Create a series of professional learning opportunities that upskill educators in the intersection between Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST 2008), Culturally Responsive and/or Sustaining Practice (CSP) (Paris 2012), Gen-AI and the opportunities created by their intersection.
2. Develop a framework and guidelines for the use of Gen-AI with a foundation in CSP and UDL
3. Increase the confidence of educators to integrate Gen-AI into teaching learning and assessment practice.
4. Clarify the appropriate use of Gen-AI in assessment practice for educators and students.

An iterative action research methodology (Adelman 1993, McNiff and Whitehead 2006) was employed, progressing through several phases of professional development, collaborative group engagement, and iterative refinement of the deliverables. Educators participated in workshops and collaborative sessions that shaped the framework and guidelines based on feedback and emerging insights.

The project resulted in two deliverables.

1. Gen-AI Integration Model: A cyclical framework, founded in UDL and CSP, designed to guide educators in incorporating Gen-AI into teaching learning and assessment. It emphasises learner-first approaches, cultural and ethical considerations, and alignment with familiar and effective pedagogical practices.

2. Student Guidelines: A set of rules and expectations for students using Gen-AI, structured within the school's Positive Behaviour for Learning framework. These guidelines clarify appropriate use, highlight ethical considerations, and ensure alignment with authenticity expectations.

This project made several key findings of significance to educators.

- The development of the Integration Model and Guidelines, supported by professional learning sessions improved teacher confidence in incorporating Gen-AI into teaching, learning and assessment practice.
- The framework's cyclical design supports iterative learning and adaptation, enabling educators to refine their use of Gen-AI as new challenges and opportunities emerged. Participants underscored the importance of flexibility and continuous updates to the guidelines to remain aligned with evolving educational and technological contexts.
- Both students and educators must engage critically with Gen-AI. The project emphasised the importance of evaluating the validity, sources, and biases of AI-generated content (Ng et.al 2021, Eguchai et.al 2021, Evmenova 2018, Chiu 2024)
- The integration of Gen-AI must be purposeful, respect and reflect diverse learner contexts, while upholding cultural values (Munn 2023, Eguchai 2021, Yang 2022). The guidelines promote awareness of these considerations.
- The guidelines provided clarity on appropriate Gen-AI use, ensuring summative assessments reflect genuine student understanding. This included encouraging and disclosing formative uses of Gen-AI, while maintaining clear boundaries for assessment integrity.
- The project revealed disparities in educators' readiness to use Gen-AI effectively. Explicit instruction in AI literacy and purposeful use is crucial for addressing this gap, alongside tailored support for teachers with varying levels of familiarity with Gen-AI tools.

This project provides a robust, evidence-based framework for integrating Gen-AI into teaching, learning and assessment practice, emphasising ethical use, cultural

responsiveness, and inclusivity. By bridging UDL and CSP principles and emerging AI literacy frameworks, it offers educators practical tools to navigate the complex emerging challenge of safe, effective, and purposeful integration.

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## About the Author

Daniel Wise is a Deputy Principal and Principals' Nominee at a large, rural, Year 7 -13 School. An educator since 2003, Daniel is a Social Studies and Geography teacher and has taught Science and Tourism. A former Head of Social Studies and Geography, he has been a Deputy Principal for more than 15 years. He has interests in innovative and inclusive assessment practice and supporting the role of the Principals' Nominee.

