

# AUTHENTIC LEARNING TRUMPS FEAR TACTICS



Innovative secondary teachers are using road safety as an authentic context for young people to apply curriculum learning, writes MARY CHAMBERLAIN.

is showing great promise, and leading educators are supporting NZ Transport Agency to achieve it.

Innovative primary and secondary teachers are using curriculum resources provided by NZ Transport Agency to challenge young people's mental models about road safety. They are using road safety as an authentic real life context to help students deepen and apply their curriculum learning and to encourage them to become active citizens with positive, socially connected, road user identities.

Despite this, some teachers and students still see road safety as a boring topic. I suspect this is at least partly because road safety was traditionally taught as either a frightening experience designed to scare students into changing their behaviour or as a set of rules to learn and follow.

## Scare tactics and rote learning rules doesn't work

Neither of these approaches is effective. Research indicates that while fear tactics grab attention, they are almost always ineffective in changing long-term behaviour.

Students need to learn the rules they need to follow to travel to school safely but this is not sufficient to keep our young people safe, or ensure they become active participants in creating safe roads. Students need to understand the evidence and principles that sit behind the rules because it is not possible to teach rules for every situation that young people might find themselves in.

## Actively contributing to a safe network

Students who use resources published by the NZ Transport Agency are expected to build explicit

subject content knowledge, and learn about and solve local problems related to safe travel at the same time. This approach is relevant to students because it deliberately engages with young people's everyday concerns and emotions in the context of the larger road use issues.

Teachers report that students are happy to invest time and effort in learning at a deeper level because they know from the outset they will be able to use their learning to make a difference for themselves and others.

Secondary art teachers used NZ Transport Agency material to develop a unit that improved students' safe pedestrian behaviour. Teachers challenged students to use creative and playful advertising strategies to create messages aimed at peers. Students reported that they changed their own pedestrian behaviour, and learnt about the design process and the relationship of text and images in creating an idea at the same time.

In a maths unit using statistical inquiry to investigate stopping distances, teachers found that most students were not surprised about stopping distances, but they were surprised about the extent of the difference a small amount of extra speed can make.

In a science unit about how to use forces to make crashes survivable, teachers found students deepened the knowledge needed to make well-informed choices. Students felt better placed to make decisions based on science and logic, rather than rules alone and teachers found that more students understood force and motion when it was taught using road safety as a context.



## A lesson in sneezing (safely)

This May will mark the tenth year of Kleenex Tissues SneezeSafe, a lesson in flu-hygiene for primary and intermediate school kids throughout New Zealand. Using glitter, bubbles, and water spray, children learn how far and fast untrapped sneeze droplets travel through the air for others to breathe.

The lesson, while designed to be fun, also aims to encourage good hygiene and stop bad habits before they start. It responds to the 'Personal Health and Physical Development' and 'Healthy Communities and Environments' strands of the national health curriculum.

Initiatives like SneezeSafe appear to be working. After one of New Zealand's lighter flu seasons on record last winter, virologist Dr Lance Jennings says the combined strategy of government-funded flu vaccinations for the elderly, other people who are at increased risk, and vulnerable areas like Christchurch, along with health education in schools, is working.

"Last year levels stayed below the baseline and we saw fewer hospitalisations from respiratory complications affecting children and the elderly. I believe the cumulative effect of the SneezeSafe lesson in schools is playing a part in helping keep the incidence of flu in check."

Public health nurse leader, Jetty Grant from Waikato DHB, has been involved in the programme and says it has been "really well received by kids and by teachers".

Grant says she would like to see more programmes of this variety used to address other health concerns at school, like child obesity, for example. She says that while there are programmes out there, it would appear that more needs to be done to educate children about healthy eating.

25 schools who register early at [www.sneezesafe.co.nz](http://www.sneezesafe.co.nz) will be selected to receive a special teaching kit.

## Road safety and citizenship

NZ Transport Agency materials are also informed by a vision about the kinds of citizens we want our young people to become. It is founded on the belief that to be truly educated, students need to apply learning and take practical steps to make a difference for themselves and others. This is in line with the vision of *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

Achieving this vision involves teachers supporting students to develop empathy and understanding for multiple societal roles. In a road safety context, it means helping students to consider the needs and hear the voices of pedestrians, cyclists, passengers and drivers who all use the roading network.

It also involves supporting students to become actively engaged citizens. Educators Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne provide a useful way to think about actively engaged citizens at personally responsible, participatory and justice oriented levels:

1. Personally responsible: Focus on self, rules and duties. For example, making way for a neighbouring primary school's walking bus.
2. Participatory: Focus on others, using strategies to contribute to collective tasks. For example, helping organise a walking bus for a neighbouring primary school.
3. Justice orientated: Focus on society, issues, causes and change. For example, exploring why primary school walking buses are needed and take some action to help solve root causes.

Teachers and students can make a difference that matters. I invite teachers to think about our roads as a valuable resource that we all own and share, and to engage students in using their learning to make a positive difference to their peers and their communities.

Mary Chamberlain is an independent education consultant with extensive leadership experience in curriculum development.

Curriculum resources: [education.nzta.govt.nz](http://education.nzta.govt.nz)

Longer, referenced version of this article: [education.nzta.govt.nz/guidelines](http://education.nzta.govt.nz/guidelines) (see "resources and research links" tab)

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