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

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. Second, they engage students to become citizens. 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 the extent of the difference a small amount of extra speed can make. In a science unit about how to use forces to make creatures 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.

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 road 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.

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Curriculum resources: education.nzta.govt.nz Longer, referenced version of this article: education.nzta.govt.nz/guidelines (see “resources and research links” tab)