

Professional Learning and Development Accreditation

Your Personal Profile

First name and Surname	Shannon Hennig, PhD
Your iwi (optional)	
Personal statement	<p>I have dedicated my career to supporting children with learning differences. I believe in the neurodiversity movement and the responsibility that comes with it to ensure that educators and the wider community are prepared to meet our diverse learners where they stand.</p> <p>I believe all children are learners and learn best when they have a means to communicate within a linguistic and cultural context that resonates with them. We need to be confident in our abilities to build relationships, communicate with, and educate students with communication challenges. These students need us to accommodate their motor, cognitive, linguistic, and sensory differences by embracing sign language, written/visual supports, assistive technology, and Braille. We must work hard to create meaningful learning and social connection for students with disabilities and learning differences.</p> <p>These beliefs have driven my career in learning how to support literacy and communication in our schools.</p> <p>Literacy, language, social thinking, and communication skills are core competencies that underpin all activities in our schools, kura, and Kāhui Ako.</p> <p>I see my role as working to ensure that motivated educators are well equipped to support the 7-15% of students with learning support needs, language disorders, and other forms of neurodiversity (such as autism) so that our inclusive school system can be a vibrant, dynamic place of joy, learning, and meaningful connections.</p>

Your Professional Learning and Development Practice

<p>New Zealand's commitment to inclusive education is internationally recognised, however there are known challenges in accessing assistive technology and specialist knowledge in the right place at the right time.</p> <p>Our ability to ensure that all students are learning and thriving within their school community is strongly correlated to the knowledge and skills of teachers, teaching assistants, school leadership, support staff, and fellow students. I believe that the best time for PLD is just-in-time PLD. Teachers want to know how to support their current students and those they anticipate arriving next year.</p> <p>I specialise in providing hands-on, practical professional learning and development to help school communities to feel confident and capable in supporting and educating these students from the day they start school to when they graduate.</p> <p>My background is in communication sciences and disorders and I have over twenty years' experience working in inclusive school settings. I specialise in autism, assistive technology for communication and writing, and language disorders. My area of expertise is how to include students with social communication, language, reading, writing, or speaking challenges so that they feel a part of the social and learning fabric of a school.</p>
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I am dedicated to walking along side schools who want to deepen their capacity in the following areas:

- **Inclusive education practice** including knowledge of how to adapt curriculum for students with language difficulties, manage challenging behaviours, and adapting instruction for students with sensory, physical, and/or cognitive impairments.
- **Literacy and language instruction for students who are at level 0-3 on the curriculum, including during the secondary school years.** These students are at risk of not progressing at the same rate as their peers or are already behind their age matched peers. There is a growing evidence base regarding best practice for teaching emergent and conventional literacy for students at all ages. Fortunately, what is good practice for children without disabilities also works for students with disabilities – teachers don't have to learn a new way of teaching, just a few adjustments. There is also strong evidence that these students can make real gains in their literacy skills with proper supports and instruction. It is never too late. Increasingly we also know that access to AAC (see below) is essential for literacy achievement for many students.
- **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)** is comprised of the techniques, tools, and strategies that allow students who can't reliably express themselves through speech (or understand spoken language) to effectively communicate to reach their potential. In the past the term *nonverbal* was often used to describe these students. Binger and Light (2006) conservatively estimate that 12% of young children who access special education services require AAC supports. Gross (2010) estimates that 0.05% of young people require high tech AAC support and Blackstone (1990) estimated that 0.2-0.6% of the school population in the UK need either low or high tech AAC supports. Based on last year's published school rolls for the Wellington region, most schools would have 15-61 students who benefit from some type of AAC provision (based on an average roll = 306 students, Educationcounts.govt.nz, and the estimates that 0.05-0.2% of students need such support)
- **Neurodiversity training** – 1 in 68 students are estimated to have autism spectrum disorders (ASD). These students often arrive at school with social communication and language challenges. Proper accommodations and well-trained teachers are essential to ensuring that these students can access the curriculum, avoid developing mental health conditions, develop their social understandings and contribute to the school community. Educators need to develop the ability to understand this different, unique way of thinking while juggling the learning demands of the entire class. Many students will not have been diagnosed, but as the demands of school increase each year, many students can no longer mask their difficulties.
- **Challenging behaviour** is often due to under supported language disorders and unmet communication and language needs. Rarely can behaviour issues be resolved without addressing underlying communication and language needs.

Professional Information

- Masters of Communication Sciences and Disorders (Emerson College, Boston, MA, USA) with emphasis in Autism Spectrum Disorders, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, and Child Language Development and Disorders. Bachelors' of Communication Sciences and Disorders (Northwestern University, Chicago, IL, USA)
- PhD awarded from the University of Genoa (Italy) – thesis investigating the role of tone of voice in assistive technology
- Certified speech language therapist (NZ Speech Language Therapy Association, American Association of Speech-Language-Hearing)

- Current research areas include use of tone of voice on AAC devices, teacher education, and implementation science regarding AAC, autism, and language intervention within schools
- Taught master level students in the department of Special Education at Fitchburg State University in their AAC course

I have sought out opportunities to learn from international leaders in my fields where I studied both the content and their delivery techniques:

- Emily Rubin and Barry Prizant of the SCERTS project – I have attended Emily Rubin’s 3 day SCERTS, completed clinical internships with this team, and attended Dr Prizant’s annual autism conference several times.
- Caroline Musselwhite’s workshops on AAC implementation in the school setting
- Sally Clendon, Jane Farrall, Dave Koppenhaver, and Karen Eriksen’s workshops on Intensive Literacy Instruction for students with Complex Communication Needs
- Cathy Binger’s workshop on Communication Partners Training (AGOSCI 2017)

I have dedicated my career to developing my ability to shift mindsets, support innovative practice, and encourage people to find joy and success in teaching students with disabilities.

I strongly believe that by honing our collective ability to teach the students with learning challenges, we enhance our ability to teach all students. I strive to create a successful learning pathway for every teaching professional in a non-threatening way. My goal is challenge people to think in new ways, but never for people to feel overwhelmed or personally threatened. I never ask a teacher to try something new without offering to demonstrate it first.

Local schools frequently invite me to deliver workshops and provide professional development in the area of inclusive education. I am known in my region of New Zealand for my knowledge of autism, AAC, and effective Inclusive Education.

Schools have anonymously described my PLD as follows:

- *We have seen student and staff attitudes and behaviour shift as a result of her interventions. Her reflective, non-judgemental but evidence grounded approach has been instrumental in the up-skilling of staff and shifting of behaviour.*
- *I cannot emphasize enough the positive impact her professional support and invaluable advice has had on our staff and department. I have found her to be a crucial resource for a range of students with learning needs. We have used her this year as part of an action reflection professional development process. She is able to develop an excellent rapport with Akonga and Whānau as well as staff. She simultaneously was able to engage and challenge all parties involved in a positive, respectful and supportive manner to best meet the needs of students.*
- *Shannon models how to engage nonverbal students in the class’s everyday programme. She uses a co-construction model of sharing learning with peers.*
- *Very professional with a great depth of knowledge*
- *Certainly, Shannon has provided the best/most useful PD sessions so far and we would love to have many more opportunities to work with her again.*
- *Shannon has helped students develop emergent literacy skills. Others she has helped to initiate verbal communication when previously they had not been speaking. For other students with social communication difficulties she has facilitated the communication and understanding between the teacher and the student so that the student can access the learning in the classroom. For some, this has meant NCEA levels 1, 2 and 3 have become achievable targets.*

Membership:

- New Zealand Speech Language Therapy Association
- International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication
- Assistive Technology Alliance New Zealand
- AGOSCI which is an inclusive group dedicated to enhancing the participation of all people with complex communication needs

Selected Workshops and Presentations:

- Teaching Your Child to be a Word Explorer – 2016 Autism NZ conference <http://www.autismnz.org.nz/conference-2016/programme/teaching-your-child-to-be-a-word-explorer>
- Autism: Support for Success Workshop - A Rainbow in My Head - Early Childhood Workshop (October 2016) <http://www.maharris.co.nz/RainbowDay/home.html>
- Regional Educator for Autism New Zealand including delivering Tilting the Seesaw course for teachers and numerous workshops to local schools and ECEs
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication for school teams workshop, Forest Group School District, Oregon, USA
- Easter Seals of Massachusetts – numerous workshops regarding AAC and assistive technology

Publications:

- Wilkinson, K. M., & Hennig, S. (2009). Consideration of cognitive, attentional, and motivational demands in the construction of aided AAC systems. In G. Soto & C. Zangari (Eds.), *Practically Speaking: Language, Literacy, and Academic Development for Students with Special Needs* (pp. 313-334). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Wilkinson, K. M. and Hennig, S. (2007), The state of research and practice in augmentative and alternative communication for children with developmental/intellectual disabilities. *Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews*, 13: 58–69. doi: 10.1002/mrdd.20133
- Hennig, S., Székely, E., Carson-Berndsen, J., & Chellali, R. (2012). Listener evaluation of an expressiveness scale in speech synthesis for conversational phrases: implications for AAC. *Proc. of ISAAC*, Pittsburgh.
- Pullin, G., & Hennig, S. (2015). 17 Ways to Say Yes: Toward Nuanced Tone of Voice in AAC and Speech Technology. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 31(2), 170-180.
- Székely, É., Ahmed, Z., Hennig, S., Cabral, J. P., & Carson-Berndsen, J. (2014). Predicting synthetic voice style from facial expressions. An application for augmented conversations. *Speech Communication*, 57, 63-75.
- Milner, B., Wilkinson, K., & Hennig, S. (2003) "Word Learning in Children with Cochlear Implants: Longitudinal Pilot Data." Poster Presentation. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Conference. Chicago.
- Wilkinson, K., Hennig, S., & Milner, B. (2003) "Longitudinal Study of Vocabulary Learning: Preliminary Data from Children with Cochlear Implants." Poster Presentation. Symposium on Research in Child Language Disorders. Madison.

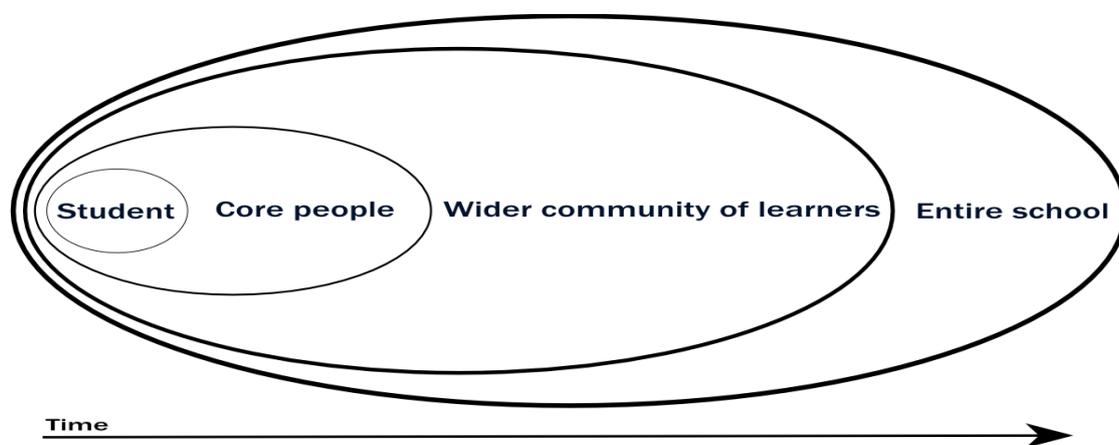
Examples of Practice (Summary)

For over 20 years, I have been supporting educational professionals develop their skills and confidence teaching and supporting neuro-diverse learners. I pride myself on taking a hands-on, walk-the-talk, interactive approach to professional development.

Educators are a passionate, hardworking, pragmatic, and caring group of people. I find they learn best by doing and by watching educators in action. They trust the expertise of those who can demonstrate quality pedagogy – both in the classroom and during PD workshops.

I use a combination of in person coaching, demonstrations, video modelling, and formal professional development as appropriate to the situation. In general, I tend to demonstrate, then coach a person, and then given them space to try the skill on their own when they are ready. Always being mindful of the numerous demands on teaching staff.

I typically use a case-study approach to professional development in which the school identifies a student (or group of students) that the school wants to better serve. I start with the student(s) who are struggling. I ensure that their voice is integrated into the plan from the very start. This is also informed by teacher assessments, observations, and the currently knowledge of their whānau. The student selects a key adult (or group of adults) they would like to join the process – this may be a teacher, teaching assistant, or family member. As trust builds, additional people surrounding this student are shown the techniques. This may happen on the same day or if the student is embarrassed, anxious, or otherwise hesitant, over a longer period. I first provide demonstration, coaching, and support; my direct involvement fades as the core support people start to integrate the new knowledge and skills into their work with other students. At this point, I shift into a role where I take an inquiry-based approach. I ask questions about what teaching staff believe is working and how we can generalise what we have learned to the wider community so that others can benefit. Whānau is brought into this conversation in ways that work for them from the very beginning and we only proceed with consent and permission to do so.



Using this model, I aim to help schools with:

- Teaching literacy, and communication skills to children with limited speech. Many of these students rely on alternative or augmentative forms of communication (AAC)
- Teaching and supporting children with social communication challenges such as autism, nonverbal learning disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and challenging behaviours
- Incorporating assistive technology into the everyday realities of a teaching classroom. The arrival of a piece of technology is only the first step. Student success depends on the competence of the teaching staff and adults in their life to appropriately model the technology use, create a learning culture that embraces (and avoids stigmatising / othering) the technology, and ensure the child knows both when and how to effectively use the tools.

- Supporting the social engagement and well-being of children with social communication differences
- Supporting children with intellectual disabilities, motor disabilities, social challenges, attention or motivational challenges, and/or neurological differences such as dyslexia, autism, and dyspraxia

Specific examples of my case-study, hands on, dynamic approach include:

- Weekly lessons demonstrating how to teach at both the emergent and conventional literacy level in a classroom of diverse learners in their special education unit attached to a mainstream high school. Students who were struggling to learn the alphabet gradually learned both the power and the joy of reading and writing by using appropriate teaching methods and materials.
- Providing instruction around how to adapt math lessons in a substantially separate classroom (high school) to ensure that the students with autism, complex communication needs, and intellectual disability were engaged, able to access the curriculum, and had a means to express their thoughts and ideas.
- Providing fortnightly learning sessions for a TA and classroom teacher regarding social thinking, literacy, and math instruction for a primary school aged student who attended a mainstream classroom. Demonstrations of how to work on social skills during the previously unsuccessful playground time led to the student being able to join peers. He was then frequently invited to play with peers at lunchtime. He also was sharing his writing proudly with his class.

Supporting the entire learning support team at a local high school who wanted to more quickly respond to their students with high functioning autism. A model was developed over time where the school identified a wide variety of students who were struggling with academics, social inclusion, and/or meeting the behaviour expectations of the school. Typically, the student would meet with me 1-3 times and draft a plan of what they needed from the school. I would then translate this information to the teaching team, leading to deeper understanding (and in some cases paradigm shifts) by the teachers. This was followed by demonstration, coaching, or explanations of evidence-based techniques to try. In some cases, teachers would join these conversations and directly observe the conversational techniques I used to support a student's expressive language skills. Over time, the entire staff's understanding of the diversity of autism dramatically increased, as did their ability to build relationships and teach other students with ASD.

Referees

Referee One

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