Where Belonging Matters

An Inclusion Resource for Schools



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Welcome

Nau mai, haere mai and thank you for joining us on this journey toward more inclusive classrooms in Aotearoa.

This resource has been created to equip teachers and their ākonga with understanding, empathy, and practical strategies for embracing diversity through a lens of Takiwātanga “in their own time and space.” Drawing on a Māori worldview and grounded in Universal Design for Learning principles, these lessons and podcasts invite you to shift thinking, celebrate difference, and design learning that works for all.

The bats and unicorns analogy, introduced by Shelley Moore, runs through this resource as a playful but powerful reminder:

Bats represent the real learners in our classrooms who may be misunderstood or excluded because they see, think, or do things differently.

Unicorns represent the mythical “perfect” student we sometimes plan for who doesn’t actually exist.

By designing for the bats, we create spaces where every learner thrives including the unicorns.

We hope you enjoy exploring these lessons and podcasts, and that they inspire you to foster manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and a true sense of tūrangawaewae for every learner who enters your classroom.

Ngā mihi nui,
Kelly, Kirstie and Rebekah

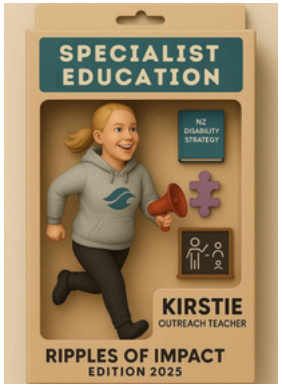
Who are we?



I trained as a teacher in the UK and gained international experience working in the USA before moving into a range of roles, including classroom teacher, senior leadership, and SENCO. I am now working in a special school, where I am deeply committed to creating inclusive and meaningful learning opportunities. My focus is on making a difference in everyday practice for learners with additional needs, ensuring they are supported, valued, and empowered to thrive.

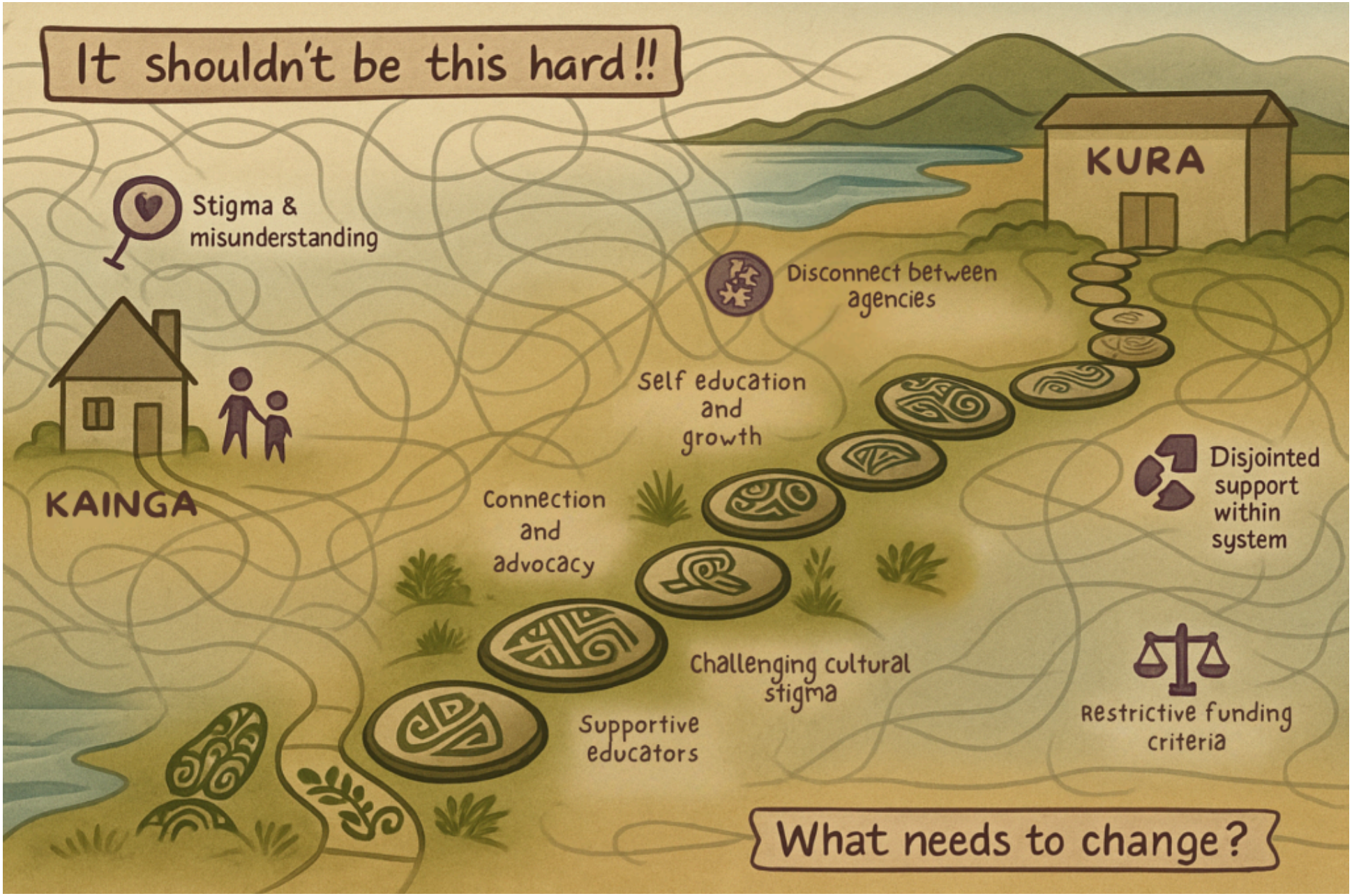


I am Rebekah Gage and I am a New Zealand trained teacher with 20 years’ experience in both international and Aotearoa schools, teaching across almost all primary and intermediate year levels, as well as Food Technology. I now work as an RTLB in the Papakura and Franklin area, supporting educators, ākonga, and whānau to strengthen and drive inclusion. I am passionate about celebrating diversity and embedding culturally responsive, practical strategies that help all learners reach their potential.



Kia ora, I’m Kirstie Day, a former Primary School and now Outreach Teacher. In my role, I work alongside educators, ākonga, and whānau to build inclusive, well-supported mainstream classrooms for diverse learners. I have taught in Years 3–8 classrooms across South Auckland and Franklin, and I am currently completing postgraduate study in Specialist Teaching. I am passionate about celebrating diversity and supporting others with practical, culturally responsive strategies that make a real difference in everyday practice.

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Our Why - Where It All Began

This resource grew from a single, powerful story.

During our initial storying assignment, we sat with the voice of a parent who shared the deep pain of seeing her autistic child excluded, not because of ability, but because of a lack of understanding from both teachers and peers. Her words stayed with us.

We realised that while many educators care deeply, there are still gaps in empathy, knowledge, and practical strategies for truly including neurodiverse learners in everyday classroom life. We also heard hope that with the right tools, perspectives, and values, school can be a place where every child feels they belong.

From that moment, our purpose became clear: to create something that would help bridge that gap. We wanted a resource that would:

- Spark empathy in neurotypical students
- Equip teachers with culturally responsive, inclusive strategies
- Honour Te Ao Māori perspectives, ensuring all learners see themselves reflected in the classroom
- Shift the focus from “fitting in” to belonging

The bats and unicorns metaphor of Dr. Shelley Moore gave us a language to talk about inclusion in a way that is simple, relatable, and memorable. Our goal is to help classrooms move away from designing for the mythical “perfect” learner, and instead embrace the real, diverse learners we have in their own time and space.

This is where our journey began, and it continues with you.

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Lesson 1: What is Takiwātanga?

Takiwātanga Ngahere - Celebrating Differences

Focus

Introducing the concept of Takiwātanga ("in his or her own space and time") through a Māori worldview, using the metaphor of a forest where every tree is unique and contributes to the whole ecosystem.

Learning Objective

Students will understand that everyone's brain works differently and that these differences bring strengths and variety to the classroom community.

Why Teach This Lesson

Many students grow up with a limited understanding of difference, often defaulting to seeing diversity in learning and thinking as "less than" or "wrong." By starting with a strengths-based metaphor rooted in nature, a familiar and valued concept in te ao Māori, we help students see that diversity is natural, valuable, and necessary.

This lesson sets the foundation for an inclusive classroom culture, where manaakitanga (care for others), whanaungatanga (connection), and tūrangawaewae (belonging) are actively practised.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify their own strengths, learning needs, and unique qualities.
2. Explain that diversity in how people think, feel, and learn is normal and valuable.
3. Create a visual representation (tree) of their own uniqueness.
4. Contribute to a collective classroom display representing the diversity of the class community.

Resources Needed

- Storybook or script for *Takiwātanga Ngahere* (can be adapted or read aloud from prepared text)
- Large display board or wall space ("The Forest/Te Ngahere")
- Paper cut-outs of tree templates (varied shapes/sizes) OR blank A4 paper for freehand drawing
- Art materials: coloured pencils, crayons, felts, paint, collage scraps
- Labels or small cards for students to write their names and/or a "strength word"
- Māori kupu display (e.g., kaha = strength, ako = learning, manawanui = perseverance)

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Lesson 1: What is Takiwātanga?

Takiwātanga Ngahere - Celebrating Differences

Lesson Sequence

1. Whakawhanaungatanga: Connection (5 mins)

- Begin with a whakataukī: He waka eke noa (We are all in this together).
- Briefly discuss what it means to be in a shared journey but with different skills and roles.

2. Story: Takiwātanga Ngahere (10 mins)

- Read aloud the story 'Takiwātanga Ngahere' (provided).
- *Use the Teacher Read Aloud Guide on page 8 for prompts, questions, and support while reading.*
- Highlight that just like trees need different amounts of sun, water, and soil types, people's brains have different needs and ways they grow.

3. Discussion (5 mins)

Prompt with questions:

- "What makes the trees in the story special?"
- "How is this like people's brains?"
- "Why would a forest be weaker if it only had one kind of tree?"

4. Art Project: My Brain Tree (20–25 mins)

Students draw or decorate their own tree.

- On the branches/leaves: write or illustrate strengths, learning preferences, and things that make them unique.
- On the trunk/roots: add learning needs or supports that help them grow.
- *See exemplars on page 9.*

5. Building the Forest (10 mins)

- Students place their trees together on the wall to create "Our Takiwātanga Ngahere - Brain Forest."
- Discuss how the forest looks stronger, richer, and more interesting when everyone's tree is included.
- Finish with a short "gallery walk," encouraging students to notice and celebrate the diversity in their class forest.

6. Reflection Questions for Students (5 mins)

- "One thing I learned about myself is…"
- "One thing I learned about someone else is…"
- "Our forest is stronger because…"

Extension Ideas

- Link to local ecology: invite a kaumātua, environmental educator, or DOC ranger to talk about the biodiversity of NZ forests.
- Create bilingual labels for strengths and needs in te reo Māori.
- Revisit the forest throughout the term to add new "branches" when students discover new strengths.

Teacher Tip

Revisit the forest throughout the term. Add new "branches" when students discover new strengths or skills, reinforcing the idea that growth is ongoing and unique for everyone.

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Lesson 1: What is Takiwātanga?

Takiwātanga Ngahere - Celebrating Differences

Teacher Read-Aloud Guide



Purpose of This Lesson

To introduce the concept of Takiwātanga ("in his or her own space and time") through a Māori lens, using a forest metaphor to help students see difference as natural, valuable, and essential to a thriving community.

Pronunciation Guide for Key Māori Kupu

- **Takiwātanga** – tah-kee-WAA-tah-ngah (in their own time and space)
- **Ngahere** – NGAH-heh-reh (forest)
- **Rimu** – REE-moo
- **Pōhutukawa** – por-hoo-too-KAA-wah
- **Kōwhai** – KOR-fai
- **Mānuka** – MAA-noo-kah
- **Pīwakawaka** – PEE-wah-kah-wah-kah (fantail)
- **Whānau** – FAA-no (family/community)
- **Kia ora** – kee OR-ah (hello, thank you, be well)

Before Reading

1. Activate Prior Knowledge
    - Ask: "What makes each of us different?" (Invite strengths, hobbies, learning styles, and needs.)
    - Introduce the term Takiwātanga and its meaning.
    - Show pictures of different native trees and explain that, like people, they each have their own ways of growing and helping the forest.

2. Set a Purpose for Listening
    - "As I read, think about how each tree is special and what would happen if they were all the same."

During Reading

- Use expression and pauses to emphasise the whispers of the wind vs. the wisdom of Pīwakawaka.
- After the wind says, "Be the same", pause and ask: "How do you think the trees are feeling now?"
- When Pīwakawaka lists each tree's role, point to visuals or gestures for clarity.

After Reading: Discussion Prompts

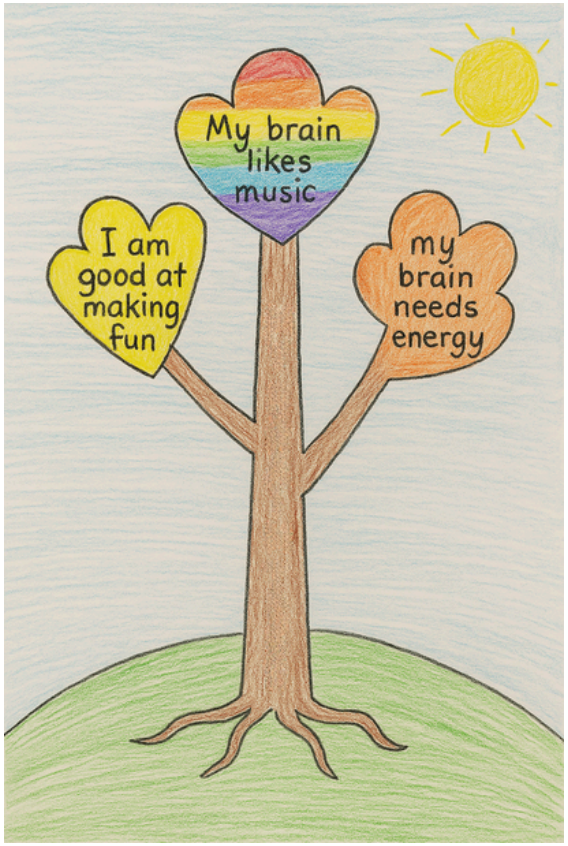
- "What was the main message of the story?"
- "Why is it good that the trees are different?"
- "How is our class like Takiwātanga Ngahere?"
- "What strengths do you bring to our 'forest'?"

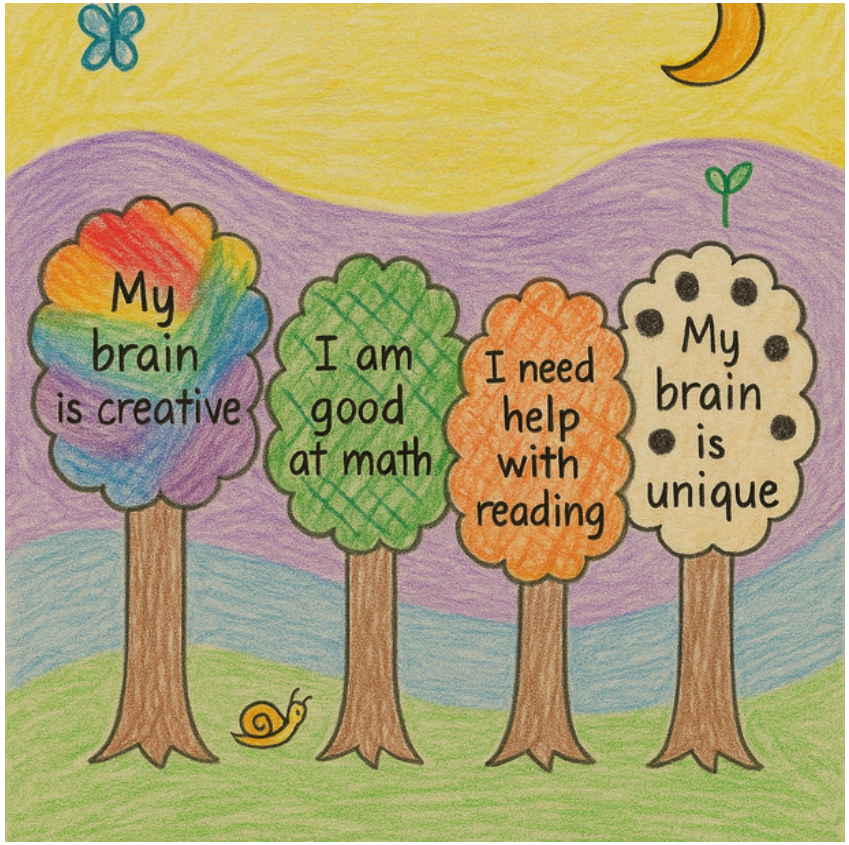
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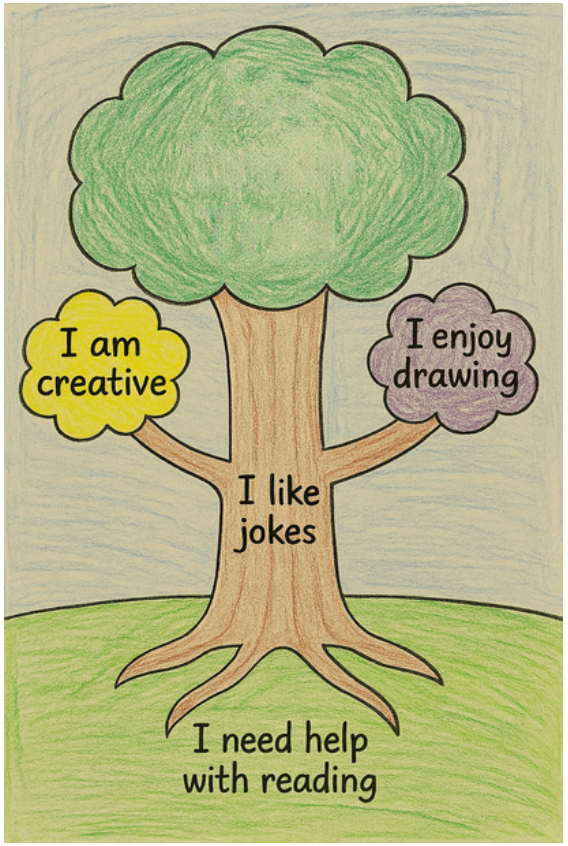
Lesson 1: What is Takiwātanga?

Takiwātanga Ngahere - Celebrating Differences

Exemplars / Ideas







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Lesson 2: Understanding Difference

Communication and Acceptance

Focus

Deepen students' understanding of neurodiversity by exploring different ways people communicate, process emotions, and experience the world. This lesson uses visual storytelling and experiential learning to build empathy and foster inclusion.

Learning Objective

Students will gain an appreciation of the diversity of communication styles and emotional experiences among people, particularly those who are neurodivergent.

Why Teach This Lesson

Children often assume that everyone experiences the world in the same way they do, particularly when it comes to communication, sensory input, and emotional expression. This lesson allows them to feel what it's like to face barriers to communication and reflect on how this impacts others.

The lesson builds from the idea of takiwātanga (growth in one's own time and space) and connects to values of aroha, whanaungatanga, and ngākau māhaki, creating space for difference and showing kindness toward others whose communication might look different.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify and describe different ways people communicate (verbal, non-verbal, assistive, behavioural).
2. Express empathy for someone who communicates differently or finds communication challenging.
3. Reflect on their own communication preferences and needs.
4. Begin to recognise and challenge assumptions about behaviour and difference.

Resources Needed

- Internet access & screen to view Pixar Shorts (choose at least one):
  - Float (7 mins): autism metaphor, masking, parent-child relationships
  - Loop (9 mins): communication differences, sensory sensitivity, neurodivergent voice actor
- Reflection worksheets or notebooks / A4 paper and drawing supplies
- Sentence starters for group discussion
- Māori kupu posters (aroha, manawanui, ngākau māhaki, whakarongo, kōrero)
- Space for group work or silent activity

Lesson 2: Understanding Difference

Communication and Acceptance

Lesson Sequence

1. Whakawhanaungatanga – Building Connection (5 mins)

- Begin with the whakataukī: "Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou, ka ora ai te iwi" (With your food basket and my food basket, the people will thrive)
- Briefly link this to the idea that we all contribute in different ways, including how we communicate.

2. Viewing and Discussing the Film (15–20 mins)

Choose one Pixar short:

- Float (for younger or more emotionally-driven discussion)
- Loop (older students or for deeper focus on non-verbal communication and sensory needs)

Before watching:

Set the purpose:

- "As you watch, notice how the main character sees and experiences the world. What are they trying to communicate? How are they misunderstood? What helps?"

After watching:

Facilitated discussion using prompts:

- "What did you notice about how the character communicated?"
- "How did others react to them? Were they fair?"
- "Have you ever felt misunderstood? What helped?"
- "What would inclusion look like in this story?"

Link to takiwātanga: "How did this character grow in their own time and space?"

3. Silent Classroom Challenge: Experiencing Difference (15 mins)

Instructions:

- For 5–10 minutes, the classroom becomes a non-verbal space. No talking, no writing words.
- Students must complete a simple collaborative task (e.g., build a paper structure, complete a group puzzle, organise themselves into groups by birthday month) without speaking or writing letters.

Rules:

- Gestures, visuals, facial expressions, drawings, and pointing are allowed.
- Absolute silence with no whispering.

Goal: Experience what it's like to need alternative communication methods.

4. Debrief and Reflection (15 mins)

Prompts for class discussion:

- "What was easy or hard about communicating that way?"
- "How did you feel when someone didn't understand you?"
- "What did you do when you couldn't explain something?"
- "How might someone feel if they had to do that every day?"

Emphasise: Some people communicate differently every day, and it's not wrong, it's just different.

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Lesson 2: Understanding Difference

Communication and Acceptance

5. Personal Reflection – My Communication Style (10 mins)
Activity:
Students draw or write about:

- How they prefer to communicate
- What helps them understand others
- What others can do to support their communication

Optional frame:
Draw yourself as a tree (link to Lesson 1) use branches/leaves to show communication strengths and roots for things that help you communicate clearly.

6. Wrap-Up and Cultural Integration (5 mins)
Introduce or revisit Māori kupu that connect with the lesson:

- Aroha – empathy/love
- Whakarongo – to truly listen
- Ngākau māhaki – humility, open heart
- Manawanui – perseverance
- Kōrero – to speak, to share

Invite students to choose one word they want to bring into their classroom more.

Extension Ideas

- Invite a speech-language therapist or neurodivergent guest (with whānau support) to talk about communication tools.
- Introduce NZSL (New Zealand Sign Language) basics.
- Set up a “communication station” in the class with visuals, emotion cards, and other non-verbal tools.
- Watch Loop a second time and write from the character’s point of view.

Teacher Tip
When students behave in unexpected ways, ask:
"What might they be communicating?" rather than “What’s wrong with them?”

This shift, inspired by Shelley Moore, helps us move from judgement to curiosity, and builds inclusive, trauma-informed practice.

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Lesson 3: Environment as a Barrier or Bridge

Focus
Explore how the physical, social, and emotional environments of a school can act either as barriers to participation or bridges to inclusion, especially for neurodiverse students.

Learning Objective
Students will develop an understanding of how environments can include or exclude people based on their needs, and begin to suggest changes that promote greater accessibility and wellbeing.

Why Teach This Lesson
A key insight from the work of Shelley Moore and Melanie Riwai-Couch is that the *problem* is often not within the learner, but within the environment.

When we design learning spaces that work for everyone, we remove barriers and build mana-enhancing environments that affirm all identities. This lesson teaches students that inclusive spaces don't just happen, we create them together.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify features of their school/classroom that might be barriers for some students.
2. Suggest inclusive alternatives or improvements that turn those into bridges.
3. Demonstrate empathy by considering different sensory, emotional, or physical experiences.
4. Take part in collaborative problem-solving for an inclusive classroom environment.

Resources Needed

- Printed or digital photos of the classroom, playground, corridors, toilets, and assembly area
- Sticky notes or speech bubbles for annotations
- Large poster: Barriers ↔ Bridges with examples
- Chart paper and pens
- Māori kupu display (āwhina = help, taiao = environment, pāpaku = low/small, oro = sound/noise, whakamarie = calming/soothing)
- Optional: Tablets for taking photos, sound meters or sensory kits (if available)

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Lesson 3: Environment as a Barrier or Bridge

Lesson Sequence

1. Whakawhanaungatanga: Setting the Purpose (5 mins)

- Begin with a whakataukī: "Ko te kai a te rangatira he kōrero" (The food of chiefs is dialogue.)
- Briefly discuss what it means to value kōrero (conversation, dialogue) as a powerful tool for leadership, learning, and inclusion, highlighting that through open communication and shared stories, we strengthen relationships, grow understanding, and find collective solutions.

Ask:

- "Have you ever been in a space that felt uncomfortable or too noisy or hard to move around in?"
- "What helped you feel better?"

Introduce the idea that spaces can be welcoming or challenging, depending on who you are and what you need.

2. Introducing the Concept: Barriers vs Bridges (10 mins)

Teacher prompt:

"Let's think about our school. For some students, it might be hard to join in because of how the space feels, sounds, or works."

Use a simple T-chart:

Barriers	Bridges
Loud bell	Visual timers
Hard chairs	Cushions or movement breaks
Bright lights	Dimmer switches, natural light
Fast group work	Visual instructions, quiet space

Explain: We're not blaming the space, we're exploring how to adapt it to fit more people.

3. Walk-Through Audit: Barrier & Bridge Hunt (15–20 mins)

Activity:

In pairs or small groups, students walk through the classroom or wider school (if permitted) to observe and note areas that might be barriers or bridges for:

- Someone who's sensitive to noise
- Someone who uses a wheelchair or crutches
- Someone who finds crowds overwhelming
- Someone who needs clear routines or instructions
- Someone who's anxious or shy

Students use sticky notes to label:

🔴 Barrier (red)
🟢 Bridge (green)
🟡 Fix-it idea (yellow)

Example:

🔴 "The coat hooks are too high for smaller students."
🟡 "Could we add a lower row of hooks?"

Lesson 3: Environment as a Barrier or Bridge

4. Debrief: Designing for Everyone (10 mins)
Come back together and group the sticky notes into themes:

- Physical space
- Sensory experience
- Social rules
- Communication access

Ask:

- "What patterns did we notice?"
- "Are most things designed for a certain kind of person?"
- "Who might we be leaving out without realising?"

Link to takiwātanga:
"Everyone grows in their own time and space. So how can we create a space that works for many ways of being?"

5. Design Challenge – Our Inclusive Classroom (15 mins)
In groups, students brainstorm and draw 1–2 ideas for how to make their classroom more inclusive.

Use the prompt:

- "How might we turn this barrier into a bridge?"

Encourage practical solutions (e.g., visual routines, beanbags, noise-cancelling headphones, extra signage, zones for different energy levels).

Groups present back and vote on one idea to trial this week.

6. Reflection – Shifting Our Thinking (5 mins)
Ask:

- "What surprised you today?"
- "How can we keep checking if our space is working for everyone?"
- "What's something you'd like to change to make our class feel safer or calmer?"

Invite students to pick one kupu Māori to represent their hope for the classroom environment e.g. whakamarie (soothing), taiao (environment), āwhina (help/support).

Extension Ideas

- Co-create classroom sensory-friendly zones with calming tools.
- Involve the caretaker or SLT in hearing student suggestions.
- Use Minecraft Education or cardboard models to redesign the classroom.
- Create a "Barriers & Bridges" wall that is updated throughout the year.

Teacher Tip
This lesson is not about blame, it's about design. If something doesn't work for someone, we don't "fix" the person, we redesign the environment.
This reflects UDL and the "social model of disability", which says that barriers aren't personal, they're systemic, and we have the power to shift them.

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Lesson 4: Manaaki in Action

Focus
Explore what inclusive behaviour looks like in daily classroom life and how small actions can either uphold or diminish the mana of others.

Learning Objective
Students will identify and practise inclusive behaviours that uphold the mana of their peers.

Why Teach This Lesson
After students understand identity (Lesson 1), empathy (Lesson 2), and systems (Lesson 3), they must now move into action. Inclusion does not happen automatically; it is practised. Students need explicit modelling of what manaakitanga looks like in real classroom moments.
This lesson helps students recognise that inclusion is relational and behavioural. It shifts inclusion from "nice idea" to "daily practice."

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Recognise behaviours that uplift or diminish others.
2. Demonstrate inclusive responses in common classroom situations.
3. Explain how small actions impact belonging.
4. Use the concept of manaakitanga to guide behaviour.

Resources Needed

- Scenario cards (joining a game, group work exclusion, sensory overwhelm, misunderstanding behaviour)
- Chart paper labelled: Mana-Diminishing / Mana-Enhancing
- Māori kupu display (manaakitanga, āwhina, mana, tautoko)
- Roleplay props (optional)

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Lesson 4: Manaaki in Action

Lesson Sequence

1. Whakawhanaungatanga – 5 mins
Begin with the whakataukī:
“Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini.”
(My strength is not mine alone, but the strength of many.)

Brief discussion: What does it mean to lift others up?
Ask:

- What does it mean that strength comes from many?
- How do we help build each other’s strength?
- What does it mean to “lift someone up”?

Guide students to understand that we are responsible for one another’s experience in the classroom. Our behaviour affects the strength of the group.

2. Introducing Manaakitanga – 10 mins
Explain that manaakitanga means actively caring for others in ways that protect and uplift their mana.
You might say:
“Mana is the dignity and worth that every person carries. Manaakitanga is how we treat that dignity.”
Ask students:

- What does it feel like when someone protects your dignity?
- What does it feel like when someone embarrasses you?
- Can small actions make a big difference?

Create a T-chart:
Mana-Diminishing | Mana-Enhancing
On chart paper, create a T-chart:

Mana-Diminishing	**Mana-Enhancing**
Interrupting	Listening fully
Laughing at mistakes	Encouraging effort
Ignoring someone	Inviting someone in
Speaking over someone	Waiting your turn

Invite students to add examples from their own experiences. Highlight that inclusion often happens in small, everyday moments.

3. Roleplay Activity – 20 minutes
Divide students into small groups. Provide each group with a scenario card.

Example scenarios:

- A student tries to join a game but is told teams are full.
- Someone in group work is ignored.
- A classmate becomes overwhelmed by noise.
- A student misunderstands instructions and is laughed at.

Each group performs the scenario twice:

First Version: Mana-Diminishing Response
Students show what exclusion or dismissive behaviour might look like.

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Lesson 4: Manaaki in Action

Lesson Sequence

After performing, ask:

- How did that feel to watch?
- How might it feel to be the person in that situation?
- What happened to that person's mana?

Second Version: Mana-Enhancing Response
Students re-enact the same scenario, this time demonstrating manaakitanga.

After performing, ask:

- What changed?
- How did the body language differ?
- What words were used differently?
- How did it affect the feeling in the room?

Guide students to notice tone, facial expressions, inclusion, choice-giving, and patience.

Emphasise that sometimes manaakitanga is not about fixing, it is about responding respectfully.

4. Whole-Class Discussion – 10 minutes
Bring students back together and ask:
"What practical behaviours help build belonging in our classroom?"

Record student suggestions. Guide them toward behaviours such as:

- Asking before helping ("Would you like help?")
- Offering choices ("Do you want to join this group or that one?")
- Including quietly without drawing attention
- Giving space when someone feels overwhelmed
- Using calm voices
- Checking in privately rather than correcting publicly
- Showing tautoko (encouragement)

Discuss how these behaviours protect mana.
You may ask:

- Why is asking before helping important?
- When might giving space be more respectful than stepping in?
- How can we support someone without embarrassing them?

Encourage students to see inclusion as thoughtful action, not just kindness.

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Lesson 4: Manaaki in Action

Lesson Sequence

Reflection – 5 minutes

Ask students to complete the sentence:
"One way I can practise manaakitanga this week is..."
Encourage specific commitments, such as:

- "I will stop and listen instead of interrupting."
- "I will check in if someone is alone."
- "I will speak respectfully even if I disagree."
- "I will notice when someone might need space."

Students may write this privately or share voluntarily.

Extension Ideas

Create a "Mana in Action" Display
Display examples of mana-enhancing behaviours students notice throughout the week.
Peer-Spotting System

Invite students to acknowledge peers who demonstrate inclusive behaviour. These recognitions should focus on actions, not popularity.

Example:
"I noticed you invited someone to join your group. That upheld their mana."

Teacher Tip

Inclusion is often modelled more than formally taught.
Narrate inclusive behaviours when you see them:

- "I noticed you waited until she finished speaking — that protected her mana."
- "Thank you for asking before helping — that shows respect."

When teachers explicitly name manaakitanga in action, students begin to internalise it as part of classroom identity.

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Lesson 5: What is Fair?

Focus
In this lesson you are exploring and challenging assumptions about fairness, equality, and equity.

Learning Objective
Students will understand that fairness means providing what each person needs to succeed.

Why Teach This Lesson
Students frequently interpret fairness as sameness. This can create resistance to differentiated support. Explicitly teaching equity helps shift classroom culture toward justice rather than comparison.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Differentiate between equality and equity.
2. Explain why different support is not unfair.
3. Respond constructively to “That’s not fair!”
4. Use the concept of balance to describe fairness.

Resources Needed

- Equality vs equity visuals
- Scenario cards
- Poster paper
- Māori kupu display (taurite, tika)

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Lesson 5: What is Fair?

Lesson Sequence

1. Ask: Is fair the same as equal? - – 5 mins

Begin with a simple question:
"Is fair the same as equal?"
Allow students to share initial responses. Many will likely say yes.
Follow up with prompts:

- If everyone gets the same thing, is that always fair?
- What if someone needs more help?
- What if someone already knows how to do something?
-

You might say:
"Fairness is something we talk about a lot. But sometimes we use the word 'fair' when we really mean 'equal.' Today we're going to explore whether those two words mean the same thing."
Avoid correcting immediately, allow curiosity and tension to build.

2. Visual Exploration – 10 minutes

Show an equality vs equity visual (for example, three people of different heights trying to see over a fence).

First, show the equality image (everyone standing on the same size box).

.Ask:

- Who can see?
- Who still cannot see?
- Is everyone being treated the same?
- Is everyone succeeding?

Then show the equity image (different-sized boxes given according to need).

Ask:

- Who benefits here?
- Who is now able to see?
- Is it the same for everyone?
- Is it more fair
-

Guide students to notice that equality gives the same support, while equity gives the right support.

You might explain:

"Equality is sameness. Equity is fairness. Equity looks at what someone needs and responds to that."

Connect to classroom life:

- Glasses for someone who needs them.
- Extra reading support.
- Flexible seating.
- Extra time for a task.

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Lesson 5: What is Fair?

Lesson Sequence

3. Scenario Sorting Task – 20 minutes

Divide students into small groups. Provide each group with scenario cards.

Examples:

- Everyone gets exactly 20 minutes to finish a test.
- A student who finds writing difficult gets extra time.
- Everyone reads the same book.
- Students choose from different book levels.
- One student uses noise-cancelling headphones during independent work.
- Everyone must sit still for the entire lesson.

Students sort each scenario into:

- Equality
- Equity

After sorting, discuss reasoning as a class.
Ask:

- Why did you place this here?
- Who benefits from this approach?
- Does equal always mean fair?

Encourage respectful debate. If students disagree, ask them to explain their thinking.
Introduce this guiding sentence:
"Different support is not unfair, it is fair because it meets need."

4. Whole-Class Discussion Taurite – 10 mins

Introduce the kupu taurite.
Explain:
"Taurite means balance. Fairness is not about sameness — it is about restoring balance."
You might offer this analogy:
"If two people are carrying heavy bags, and one bag is much heavier, giving them the same help does not create balance. Fairness restores balance."

Ask:

- How is fairness about balance?
- When have you seen balance restored?
- How might we create balance in our classroom?
-

Connect this to tika, doing what is right, not what looks the same.
Encourage students to think about fairness as restoring opportunity rather than protecting sameness.

Reflection – 5 minutes

Ask students to complete the sentence:
"Fair does not always mean the same because…"
Encourage full explanations, such as:

- "Fair does not always mean the same because people need different things to succeed."
- "Fair means balance, not comparison."
- "Equal can still leave someone out."

Students may write privately or share aloud.

Lesson 5: What is Fair?

Lesson Sequence

Extension Ideas

- Equity vs Equality Poster Campaign
- Students create posters explaining the difference using their own examples. Display around the classroom as reminders.
- Roleplay Responding to Fairness Complaints
- Practise responding to statements like:
- “That’s not fair, they got more time!”
- Students rehearse balanced responses such as:
- “They got what they needed to succeed. That’s equitable.”
- This builds language for real-life moments.

Teacher Tip

When a student says, “That’s not fair,” pause calmly and ask:
“Is it equal, or is it equitable?”

This question shifts the conversation from emotion to thinking. Over time, students begin to internalise the distinction and respond more thoughtfully.

Fairness conversations require patience. Avoid defensiveness. Use curiosity and clarity to guide understanding.

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Lesson 6: Building Inclusive Whanaungatanga

Focus
Strengthening friendships across differences and understanding that belonging grows through relationships.

Learning Objective
Students will value diverse ways of forming and maintaining friendships and recognise that healthy friendships are built on respect, empathy, and inclusion.

Why Teach This Lesson
Belonging is relational. Students experience inclusion not just through school policies or classroom rules, but through the way their peers treat them. Inclusion cannot exist without a positive peer culture. When students understand that friendships can look different and still be meaningful, they are more likely to welcome others whose personalities, interests, or communication styles differ from their own.
This lesson supports students to recognise, value, and intentionally practise inclusive friendship behaviours that strengthen whanaungatanga (relationships and connectedness).

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:
- Identify qualities of inclusive friendship, such as kindness, patience, trust, honesty, and respect.
- Recognise diverse friendship styles, understanding that not all friendships look the same.
- Reflect on their own friendship preferences, including how they like to connect with others.
- Demonstrate relational empathy by considering how others may experience friendship differently from themselves.

Resources Needed
- Recipe template sheets (one per student)
- Art materials (coloured pencils, markers, crayons)
- Display of Māori kupu:
- Whanaungatanga (relationships, connectedness)
- Kotahitanga (unity, togetherness)
- Aroha (care, compassion, love)

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Lesson 6: Building Inclusive Whanaungatanga

Lesson Sequence

1. Opening Discussion – 5 minutes
Begin with a whole-class discussion. Ask:
"What makes a good friend?"

Invite students to share ideas. Prompt further thinking with questions such as:

- How do good friends make you feel?
- What do good friends do when someone is upset?
- Can someone be a good friend even if they are different from you?

Record student responses on the board. Highlight qualities such as listening, sharing, kindness, fairness, loyalty, humour, and inclusion.

Introduce the concept of whanaungatanga and explain that strong friendships help everyone feel that they belong.

2. Friendship Recipe Activity – 20 minutes
Explain that students will create a "recipe" for inclusive friendship. Just like cooking, strong friendships need the right ingredients and thoughtful steps.
Provide each student with a recipe template.
Their recipe should include:

Ingredients:
Students list the qualities needed for inclusive friendship.
Examples might include:

- Respect
- Patience
- Humour
- Honesty
- Encouragement
- Kindness
- Understanding
- Aroha

Encourage them to think beyond surface-level traits and include attitudes or behaviours.

Instructions:
Students write the "method" for building friendship.

Examples:

- Listen carefully when your friend is speaking.
- Invite others to join your games or conversations.
- Notice when someone is alone and check in with them.
- Be patient if someone communicates differently.
- Celebrate differences rather than judging them.

Students may decorate their recipe pages using art materials. Encourage creativity while keeping the focus on meaningful content.

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Lesson 6: Building Inclusive Whanaungatanga

Lesson Sequence

3. Discussion – 10 minutes
Bring the class back together to explore diverse friendship types. Explain that friendships do not all look the same. Some people connect through shared interests, while others bond through quiet presence or consistent routines.

Discuss examples such as:

- Shared Interests – Friends who enjoy the same hobbies, sports, books, or games.
- Quiet Companionship – Friends who feel comfortable sitting together without needing to talk constantly.
- Parallel Play – Friends who enjoy being near each other while doing separate activities.
- Support-Based Friendships – Friends who may not share many interests but provide encouragement and emotional support.

Ask:

- Is it okay if your friend doesn't like the same things as you?
- Can someone be a close friend even if they are quiet?
- How can we make space for different friendship styles?

Emphasise that diversity in friendships strengthens kotahitanga (unity).

Reflection – 5 minutes
Ask students to complete the sentence:

"One way I can strengthen whanaungatanga is..."

Students may write their response privately in their books or share verbally if comfortable.
Encourage practical, actionable commitments such as:

- "I will invite someone new to play."
- "I will listen more carefully."
- "I will be patient if someone thinks differently from me."

Close by reinforcing that small, consistent actions build strong relationships.

Extension Ideas

- Create a Class Friendship Wall
- Display students' friendship recipes or positive friendship commitments on a shared wall. This becomes a visual reminder of class values.
- Buddy System Trial
- Pair students intentionally across social groups for a short-term buddy activity. Rotate pairs over time to strengthen inclusive peer culture.
- Role-Play Scenarios
- Practise responding to situations where someone feels left out or misunderstood.

Teacher Tip
Normalise that not all friendships look the same. Some students may prefer one close friend rather than a large group. Others may connect through activity rather than conversation. Avoid presenting one model of friendship as "better."
When students understand that differences are natural, they are more likely to practise aroha and contribute positively to a culture of belonging.

Lesson 7: Stories of Strength

Focus
Reframing neurodivergence as strength and recognising that difference can develop unique abilities and perspectives.

Learning Objective
Students will identify strengths that can be developed through difference and understand that challenges can contribute to growth.

Why Teach This Lesson
Many students internalise deficit narratives about themselves or others. When difference is repeatedly framed as a problem, limitation, or weakness, students can begin to see identity through a lens of "less than." This lesson intentionally shifts the narrative from limitation to contribution.
By exploring real examples of neurodivergent individuals who have made meaningful contributions, students learn that challenges can cultivate resilience, creativity, empathy, focus, innovation, and leadership. Celebrating strengths supports mana motuhake (self-determination and identity) and affirms that diversity strengthens communities.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:
- Recognise strengths in neurodivergent individuals, including creativity, persistence, innovative thinking, empathy, and attention to detail.
- Challenge deficit thinking by reframing language that focuses only on limitations.
- Identify their own growth-through-challenge, recognising personal strengths that have developed through difficulty.
- Use mana-enhancing language that affirms dignity, capability, and identity.

Resources Needed
- Case studies of New Zealand figures (printed or digital)
- Strength analysis template
- Māori kupu display:
- Mana motuhake (identity, self-determination, personal authority)
- Kaha (strength, resilience)

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Lesson 7: Stories of Strength

Lesson Sequence

1. Introduction – 5 minutes
Begin by asking: **“What is strength?”**
Students may initially mention physical strength. Acknowledge this, then expand the definition. Explain that strength is not only physical. It can also include emotional strength, creative strength, social strength, perseverance, leadership, or problem-solving ability.

You might say:
“Sometimes the strengths we build come from things that were once seen as challenges. When we look closely, we can see that difference often develops unique abilities.”

Introduce the idea that today’s lesson will explore stories of strength in people who think, learn, or experience the world differently.

2. Case Study Exploration – 20 minutes
Provide students with a case study of a neurodivergent role model. These may include figures such as:

- Greta Thunberg
- Temple Grandin
- Michael Falk

(Select figures appropriate to your class context.)
Using a strength analysis template, students identify:

Challenges
What obstacles did this person face?
What misunderstandings or barriers existed?

Strengths
What abilities or qualities developed alongside or because of those challenges?

Examples may include deep focus, creativity, honesty, determination, visual thinking, empathy, or courage.

Contributions
How did these strengths positively impact others?
How did this person contribute to their community, field, or the wider world?

Encourage students to notice the connection between challenge and growth. Emphasise that strengths do not erase difficulty, but they coexist with it.

3. Reframing Activity – 10 minutes

Explain that language shapes perception. Deficit-based language focuses only on what someone cannot do. Strength-based language recognises ability, potential, and context.

Provide examples such as:

- “He is too sensitive.”
- “She struggles to sit still.”
- “They don’t make eye contact.”

Lesson 7: Stories of Strength

Lesson Sequence

3.Continued

In pairs or small groups, students rewrite these statements using strength-based language. For example:

- “He has strong emotional awareness.”
- “She has high energy and enthusiasm.”
- “They communicate in ways that feel comfortable for them.”

Discuss how reframing changes how we think and feel about the person described.

Connect this to mana motuhake. When we use mana-enhancing language, we protect and uplift identity.

Reflection – 5 minutes

Invite students to complete the sentence:

“One strength I see differently now is…”

They may reflect on:

- A strength in someone from the case study.
- A strength in a peer.
- A strength in themselves that developed through challenge.

Encourage thoughtful and specific responses. Reinforce that recognising strength builds kaha, resilience and confidence.

Extension Ideas

Student Research Projects
Students independently research a neurodivergent individual and present a strength-based profile to the class.

Guest Speaker
Invite a community member to share their lived experience and discuss strengths developed through difference.

Class Strength Language Charter
Co-create a classroom agreement that prioritises strength-based and mana-enhancing language.

Teacher Tip
Model identity-first and strength-based language consistently. For example:

- “Autistic person” (if aligned with individual preference)
- “ADHD learner”
- “Neurodivergent student”

Avoid framing difference as something to “overcome.” Instead, emphasise growth, adaptation, and contribution.
When teachers model this language authentically, students internalise a culture of respect and belonging.

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Lesson 8: Our Inclusive Classroom

Focus
Co-constructing an inclusive classroom culture and committing to sustained, everyday practice.

Learning Objective
Students will take ownership of sustaining inclusive practices within their classroom community.

Why Teach This Lesson
Inclusion cannot be a one-off conversation or a short-term focus. It must be intentionally nurtured and sustained beyond a lesson series. Students are more likely to practise inclusive behaviours when they feel ownership over the classroom culture they are part of creating.

This lesson consolidates prior learning and shifts responsibility from teacher-led discussion to collective action. By co-constructing shared commitments, students move from understanding inclusion to actively practising it. This builds kaitiakitanga (guardianship and responsibility) for the classroom environment and honours the mana tangata (dignity and authority) of every learner.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this lesson, students will:
- Co-construct inclusive norms that reflect shared values.
- Articulate personal commitments to strengthening belonging.
- Demonstrate shared responsibility for classroom culture.
- Reflect on their own growth across the learning series.

Resources Needed
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Commitment cards (small slips of paper or card)
- Māori kupu display:
- Kaitiakitanga (guardianship, stewardship)
- Mana tangata (respecting the dignity and status of people)

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Lesson 8: Our Inclusive Classroom

Lesson Sequence

1. Revisiting Learning – 10 minutes
Begin by revisiting key ideas from the previous lessons. You may choose to summarise briefly or invite students to recall important themes.

Prompt discussion with questions such as:

- What did we learn about friendship and whanaungatanga?
- What did we discover about strengths and difference?
- How has our thinking changed?
- What does inclusion mean now?

Record student responses on the board. Highlight recurring themes such as empathy, strength-based language, diverse friendship styles, and shared responsibility.

Explain that today's lesson is about turning learning into long-term action.

2. Co-Constructing Strategy – 15 minutes
Explain that an inclusive classroom does not happen by accident. It is created intentionally through shared agreements and daily actions.

On chart paper, ask:

"What do we need to commit to so everyone feels they belong here?"

Guide students to develop 3–5 clear, positively worded inclusion commitments. For example:

- We speak about others using mana-enhancing language.
- We notice and include people who may feel left out.
- We respect different ways of learning and communicating.
- We listen with empathy.
- We celebrate strengths in ourselves and others.

Encourage specificity and clarity. Rephrase vague ideas into actionable commitments.

Once agreed upon, display the commitments prominently in the classroom. Emphasise that these are not rules imposed by the teacher, but agreements created by the class.

3. Ko au tēnei Commitment – 10 minutes
Explain that while class agreements are important, inclusion is also personal.

Provide each student with a commitment card. Invite them to complete the sentence:

"I commit to…"

Encourage authentic and realistic commitments, such as:

- "I commit to inviting others to join my group."
- "I commit to thinking before I speak."
- "I commit to being patient with differences."
- "I commit to using strength-based language."

Lesson 8: Our Inclusive Classroom

Lesson Sequence

Students may choose to share their commitment aloud or place it somewhere visible in the room. This step reinforces personal accountability and kaitiakitanga.

4. Celebration Circle – 10 minutes
Gather students in a circle. Explain that inclusion is strengthened when we affirm one another.

Invite students to acknowledge something positive about the class or about a peer's contribution during the lesson series. You may model this first by affirming the group's growth.

Encourage statements such as:

- "I've noticed we are better at listening."
- "I've seen people include others more."
- "I feel more confident sharing my ideas."

This celebration reinforces mana tangata and recognises collective growth.

Reflection

Close with the question:

"How will we keep this going?"

Encourage students to think beyond today. Discuss practical ideas such as:

- Revisiting commitments regularly.
- Gently reminding each other of agreements.
- Reflecting at the end of each term.
- Checking in if inclusion begins to slip.

Emphasise that inclusion is ongoing work. It requires awareness, effort, and courage.

Extension – Sustainability
At the end of the term, hold a dedicated Commitment and Celebration Time. Revisit the class inclusion commitments and invite students to reflect:

- Which commitments have we honoured well?
- Where do we need to improve?
- How have we grown as a class?

Students may update or renew their personal commitments. This reinforces that inclusion is not a completed task, but a sustained practice.

Teacher Tip
Return to these commitments regularly. Refer to them during teachable moments, conflict resolution, or class meetings.
When inclusion becomes embedded in everyday language and expectations, it shifts from being a lesson topic to becoming part of classroom identity.

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Kete of Resources

Takiwātanga Kōrero - Where Belonging Matters

Welcome to our 5-Minute Inclusion Insights podcast series! Each episode is designed to unpack the key ideas behind each lesson within our teaching resources in bite-sized, practical ways. Inspired by Dr. Shelley Moore's Five Moore Minutes, this series breaks down each lesson so teachers can fully understand not just what to teach, but why it matters.

Dr Melanie Riwai-Couch

Niho Taniwha highlights approaches to teaching that centre Māori learners' strengths, identities, and lived experiences. This aligns with your resource, which supports teachers and tamariki to understand neurodivergent ways of thinking and being. Both emphasise creating learning environments where difference is valued, learners' voices are heard, and teaching practices are shaped by genuine inclusion and cultural responsiveness. Together, they remind us that thoughtful pedagogy begins with seeing and honouring the learner in front of us.

Riwai-Couch, M. (2022). Niho Taniwha: Improving teaching and learning for ākonga Māori. Huia.

Dr Shelley Moore

Dr. Shelley Moore's Five Moore Minutes "5 P's" videos align closely with this resource that we have created and she was one of our inspirations around creating it. These videos below emphasise creativity, belonging, and inclusive learning as part of our collective narrative. Each "P"; presuming competence, peers, place, purpose, planning, and the cost of retrofitting, reminds us that inclusion is not an add-on but a way of designing learning communities where everyone can thrive. Our resource is intended to co-create meaning and identity with all learners, Moore's framework encourages us to listen to student voices, remove barriers, and celebrate diversity. Together, they strengthen our vision of schools as places where every child is valued as a full participant in shaping the shared story of learning.

Moore, S. [Five Moore Minutes]. (Feb 2, 2021). Presuming competence [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Mq8sQTEhG8

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Moore, S. [Five Moore Minutes]. (Sep 2, 2021). Show me the purpose! [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRAyjT4xALM

Moore, S. [Five Moore Minutes]. (Oct 8, 202). Removing the barriers: Planning for ALL! [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzL8yMBKM7k

Moore, S. [Five Moore Minutes]. (2025, June 4). The cost of retrofitting: The importance of designing for variability [Video] YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_J_lp_4Oto

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