



# Ending the summer slump

It's called the "summer slump". Some children return to school having lost up to a year of learning in a mere six weeks. It's particularly noticeable in lower decile communities where access to resources like computers, books, qualified educators and parental support is limited.

It's a global problem, but the University of Auckland's Woolf Fisher Research Centre has come up with an online solution thanks to support from NEXT Foundation and the MSA Charitable Trust.

"We developed the Summer Learning Journey (SLJ) Project to see if pupils reduced their risk of the slump by blogging over summer, beginning with a small group of low-decile schools in the Manaiakalani cluster in East Tāmaki that are taking a digital approach to teaching and learning," says programme leader Dr Rachel Williamson.

"We wanted these children to continue learning across the whole year to maintain their skills in reading, writing and researching, and we also wanted to reinforce positive digital habits outside school."

Every year has a theme which the children explore, investigate and write about, using curriculum-linked modules and feedback from Dr Williamson and her team. We asked Aaliyah from Year 7 and Katelyn from Year 8 what they got from summer learning. "It's a fun way to keep learning. It helps us with reading and challenges us for writing," says Aaliyah. After one maths activity, she blogged: My best learning from this week has to be learning about equivalent fractions. I learnt to show how some fractions are the same as others.

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Katelyn likes the research part of the daily activities and says the programme "really helped me with my writing skills". She blogged: "We have been focusing on the story *Butterflies* by Patricia Grace. We have also been studying one main character in the story, analysing the information and recording it."

Feedback from teachers is very positive and Dr Williamson says, when compared with those who didn't participate, the SLJ children had significantly higher writing and reading scores.

"We compared our Summer Learning Project students against those who didn't participate. In writing, our students lost significantly fewer months of learning, and in reading they gained a month of learning compared with non-participants," says Dr Williamson.

There are now 50 schools in six clusters around New Zealand taking part and Dr Williamson hopes to expand the programme.

