

Northern Regional Hub-funded project

Summary Report



A training program for New Zealand Sign Language tutors that teaches about Deaf identity, culture and language

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Executive Summary

The project aimed to develop a training programme to teach about Deaf identity, culture and language. While it was anticipated that initial interest would come from Deaf/hard of hearing people, it was intended that the programme would eventually reach out to teachers and students in the education community, so that a greater understanding will come about and access to tertiary education will be greatly enhanced for Deaf/hard of hearing people.

The objectives were:

- to understand plural identities in relation to Deaf communities of affiliation such as Maori-Deaf, Pasifika Deaf, Deaf migrants/refugees, Deaf Youth, Deaf-blind and DeafPlus (Deaf with other disabilities).
- to celebrate the commonalities of Deaf experience that engender a sense of affiliation across boundaries of race, ethnicity, nationality, and class
- to further an understanding of Deaf-world diversity
- to understand the interrelation between Deaf culture and language
- to understand difference between English and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) such as grammatical features, teaching NZSL resources available, what required to become trained/qualified NZSL tutors/teachers.

The project developed a Deaf Cultural Awareness and NZSL teaching training programme that teaches about Deaf identity, culture and language with the goal of overcoming at least three most common barriers: access to accommodations, attitudinal barriers, level of social integration, and ease of communication (including NZSL). The programme was developed by the co-directors of Merge NZ with support from [NZSLTA](#) (New Zealand Sign Language Teachers Association) whose end goal is to “normalise” NZSL. It is their intention to apply for funding for a much larger project in partnership with Victoria University in Wellington and AUT University in Auckland, both of which have programmes for Deaf/NZSL, and to establish a system where Deaf Culture and basic NZSL are taught in mainstream university courses like social work, nursing/clinical audiology, education as a compulsory component.

The project identified that the recruitment of experienced trainers, communication strategy with trainers and frequency of training delivery will be crucial factors in the future growth of NZSL trainers and that to avoid burn-out of volunteers, it will be important for organisations to include a budget to enable these trainers to be paid.

Areas recommended for future improvement include having clear expectations of what is involved in training for NZSL trainers at the outset, the development of basic information about the NZSL Adult Community Education Curriculum, and providing a single platform for advice and support materials for tutors.



Introduction

Survey results at the time of the 2001 census show that the prevalence of hearing loss varies from 10.3%, or just under 400,000 people (for people reporting hearing loss) to 0.05%, or 2,100 people over 15 years who cannot hear 1 person talking. An estimated 24,090 people use NZ Sign Language (NZSL).

With the passing of the NZSL Act 2006 in April 2006, NZSL became an official language with Te Reo Māori and English. NZSL is now gradually becoming more well-known and more respected as a language. The public show more interest in studying and discovering NZSL in schools, universities, workplaces, hospitals, government services and online through social media. This new legislation (NZSL Act 2006) goes some way to meeting the goals of the Deaf community for equal rights and access to government services and recognition of NZSL as a community language. However, the NZSL Act review fails to respond to the overwhelming call from the Deaf community to broaden the scope of the Act beyond justice to include sectors like education and health. Deaf experience barriers such as equal access to health, education, employment and information in their daily life that can significantly reduce quality of life in comparison to their hearing peers.

In New Zealand, the education system for the Deaf followed the 'oralism' teaching methodology from the 1880s until the early 1990's. Today, there is still ongoing debate whether to use NZSL or spoken English in teaching environment. In tertiary education, a very few education institutions provide specialist services for Deaf students, which includes NZSL training. There is, however, a dearth of research on the effectiveness of such support services as interpreting, note taking, real-time captioning, and NZSL tutoring, particularly with regard to their impact on academic achievement of Deaf and hard of hearing people.

With the advent of increased inclusion for Deaf students in local schools in New Zealand, the expectation of these students is that they will be able to access tertiary education in the same way as their hearing peers. Findings of research into barriers for Deaf tertiary students indicated that access to accommodation, attitudinal barriers, level of social integration, and ease of communication (including NZSL) were influential to their learning and participation experiences.

Merge NZ contributes to the development of New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) training programmes and teaching curriculum/resources to support the team of current NZSL tutors or potential NZSL tutors nationwide. We research and develop course materials and deliver NZSL classes and presentations.

The philosophy of Merge NZ ensures that any projects would be led, created and developed by Deaf professionals with support from other professionals. The Deaf people's participation where possible is important due to their extensive knowledge of NZSL grammatical structure (which is separate from English).

Merge NZ currently aims to market and promote NZSL within educational institutions (universities, polytechnics), education sector (schools, Early Childhood centres), and other public/private organisations in New Zealand. Our service will then expand throughout New Zealand thus ensuring the promotion and preservation of our unique language. Therefore, it is important to have a highly skilled and qualified team of Deaf Cultural presenters and NZSL tutors to be able to deliver NZSL services.

The organisation champions the promotion of NZSL through events, conferences, conferences, workshops and community involvement to ensure the preservation and growth of our beautiful official language. Merge works in NZSL video production, basic research, and the development of teaching and learning resources. It offers a range of services for schools,



community, business and entertainment, providing high quality workshops and training programmes (both face to face and online via MySign) for people teaching and using NZSL. MySign is a new way to learn NZSL online. Because it is available anywhere, at any time it is ideal for anyone wanting to have a casual NZSL practice session or NZSL lessons with NZSL qualified tutor/s.

A quick snapshot of NZSL Tutors in New Zealand

In 2014, [TeachSign](#), an online collection of information, training dates and resources for everything to do with NZSL teaching, was developed. This site offers a New Zealand-based Level One curriculum with teaching and learning materials, which would cover one year of NZSL (New Zealand Sign Language) teaching at Adult Community Education Centres.

Merge NZ and New Zealand Sign Language Teachers Association (NZSLTA) recognises the importance of having NZSL tutors being supported and trained to deliver high quality NZSL teaching to adults, such as families/whanau of Deaf children and professionals working with Deaf children and adults such as Teachers of the Deaf, Resource Teachers, NZSL interpreters, etc.

There is a serious shortage of NZSL tutors with only 130 being members of NZSLTA and approximately 60 active tutors in New Zealand. Currently, there is no formal planning or system for NZSL tutors to receive professional training, no peer-to-peer or mentoring system related to their NZSL teaching. Merge NZ has supported NZSLTA and organised professional development training for NZSL tutors for the past 3 years.

Benefits of the NZSL Tutors Training programme

Developing a nationwide training programme to support NZSL tutors across New Zealand is the next step towards strengthening and growing a national professional teaching system as part of the NZSLTA's planning priorities. Providing comprehensive training to NZSL tutors in a culturally appropriate way (face to face workshops in NZSL as well online support using video conferencing) will ensure they fully understand NZSL teaching techniques and will be able to incorporate these skills in their own NZSL classes. The purpose of these workshops was an introduction to NZSL teaching for new and potential NZSL tutors. It also provided tutors with insight into the use of the TeachSign Resources – mainly at Level 1 (NZSL Beginners Level). TeachSign Level 1 curriculum and resources were covered – in preparation for their new NZSL classes. We also covered some teaching methods, basic NZSL grammatical features and activity sheets.

With Ako Aotearoa's support, Merge NZ set up training in four (4) locations, with each workshop being 6 hours long during weekends in early 2019 as well three (3) online training sessions. The locations which were covered are:

- Auckland – Auckland Deaf Society, Balmoral
- New Plymouth – One Burgess Hill
- Christchurch – Deaf Society of Canterbury
- Auckland – Auckland Deaf Society, Balmoral
- x3 online sessions – from home



Merge NZ aimed for **60 NZSL tutors** (from diverse tutoring backgrounds) attending all workshops. It was pleasing to see that we over-achieved with **67 tutors** attending all of our workshops.

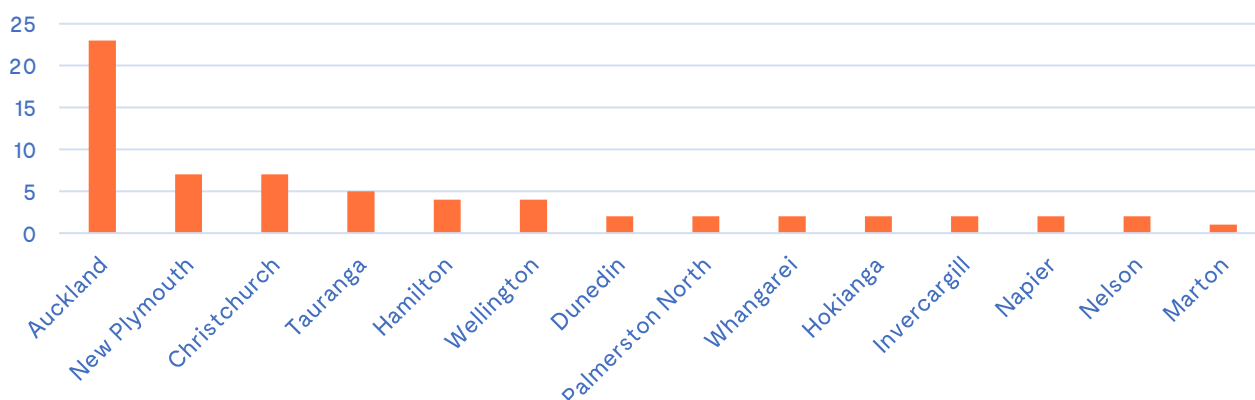
In total **30 new tutors** attended the NZSL Tutors trainings and of this 14 were Māori NZSL tutors.

Location	Dates	#
Christchurch	Saturday, 16 th February 2019	10 tutors
Auckland	Saturday, 9 th March 2019	12 tutors
New Plymouth	Saturday, 30 th March 2019	8 tutors
Online	Wednesday, 22 nd May 2019	8 tutors
Online	Wednesday, 5 th June 2019	8 tutors
Online	Wednesday, 24 th July 2019	10 tutors
Auckland	Saturday, 19 th October 2019	11 tutors

Total: 67 tutors

Full day training sessions gave potential NZSL tutors an opportunity to come to the training within their local areas. For example NZSL tutor training had never been hosted in New Plymouth in the past. In addition, only rarely had tutor training been organised and delivered in Christchurch. It was an eye-opening experience for the majority of NZSL tutors from smaller parts of NZ, for example, Napier/ Waimarama and Palmerston North.

Tutors Residence



The training proved more successful due to the high number of tutors attending from various parts of New Zealand.

Merge NZ offered NZSL Online Tutor training for the first-time ever in history within the Deaf community. It proved to be very successful, attracting more tutors from other parts of New Zealand such as Hamilton, Tauranga and Hokitika/West Coast. It was understandable that it was important to consider cultural awareness for Merge NZ to communicate with all tutors with different backgrounds such as education experience, signing skills/communication style and their ethnicity.



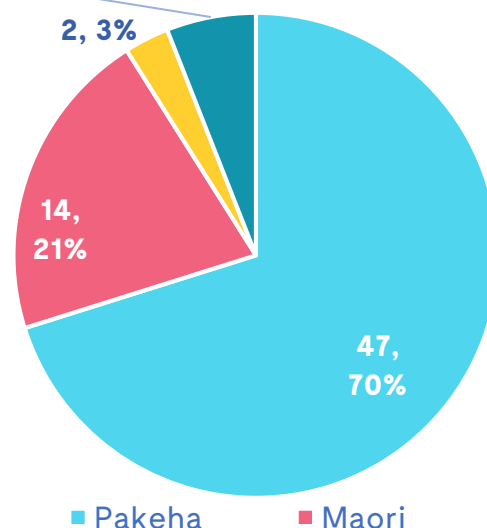
Tutors of different ethnicities attended the tutor training. The majority of tutors were Pakeha (70%) and about one-third were Maori Deaf tutors.

Merge NZ communicated with NZSL tutors through video messaging (Skype, FaceTime, Glide messages, Facebook Live videos, etc), most of whom have lower literacy in English and NZSL is their preferred method of communication. Extra time was put into creating easy-to access and clear NZSL videos for all tutors to get the information they needed to know prior to training.

All training was done in NZSL using experienced NZSL trainers with a background in linguistics and teaching. A large group of 30 tutors, who were new to NZSL teaching, was encouraged to observe other tutors' teaching work in local areas as well to become registered with New Zealand Sign Language Teachers' Association. Three (3) tutors have been accepted to enrol in the Certificate in Deaf Studies and NZSL Teaching at Victoria University of Wellington. To date, 15 out of 30 new tutors have started their NZSL teaching career with Merge NZ, which is a very positive step forward.

Topics were covered at the training such as: Deaf Culture, NZSL teaching curriculum, information about further training and education opportunities/qualifications and the NZSLTA Registry advisory Panel¹.

NZSL Tutors Ethnicity



Feedback received from NZSL Tutors attending tutors training:

The content of the training

- Happy with training programme, but wished to have more time i.e. full weekend.
- Information was well structured, received various tips/ideas how to teach.
- Happy with resources incl. PowerPoint slides, materials and activities.
- Four steps of teaching was valuable: 1) Intro; 2) Roleplay/show; 3) Practice/interact; 4) Review.

The delivery of the training

- Positive feedback received about NZSL trainers (professional and responsive).
- Pair work and group work were effective.
- Hands-on activities and teaching demonstrations were excellent.
- Few suggested that trainers check all resources beforehand to save time.
- Worth it, felt relaxed and comfortable as it's rare to see fluent NZSL trainers.

¹ NZSLTA has a Registration Advisory Panel (RAP). This panel has three members appointed by NZSLTA. They review applications and recommend the registry of members to specially appointed NZSLTA Executive Committee members



The tutor's confidence to deliver NZSL tutoring

- Some felt overwhelmed with new TeachSign resources.
- Want to have these workshops more often (especially focus on Units 1 – 9).
- Wish I was able to talk with someone who uses my language (NZSL) about teaching ideas.
- More training is needed on how to use PowerPoint slides and access to TeachSign website.
- More training to get a better understanding about Registry Advisory Panel and its Registration process to become registered.

A tailored approach to support the growth of NZSL tutors

Merge NZ has developed a strategy to grow a skilled and engaged team. Based on tutors' feedback, tutors have asked for pair work and group work, which means there is a need to consider offering a more flexible approach for NZSL tutors to upskill their teaching profession. Currently, one model/approach is to have a group of tutors travelling from long distance (a few of them caught plane, train or bus to attend tutor training). An option of offering one-to-one discussion or small group work within local areas with a tutor leader could be successfully organised. A trainer could become a supervisor supporting local tutor team leaders to have ongoing communication and support for local tutors, who are in need of their support, especially for tutors from rural areas.

It is also important to note that Level 1 Curriculum training was delivered by Merge NZ and Level 2 Curriculum is currently being developed and planned to be released in August 2020. There is a greatest need for tutors to move up from Level 1 onto Level 2 or 3 from next year. Some tutors have been teaching for over 20 years at the same level and there is high demand from NZSL students and schools asking for Level 2 classes. Training programmes could be adapted to suit tutors who do not necessarily attend face-to-face tutor training (during a weekend) but could complete online block modules to complete their tasks at appropriate levels. This will allow tutors lots of flexibility and opportunity to step up with their teaching career.

Boosting NZSL tutors support through NZSL Mentoring programme

Merge NZ regularly receives requests from tutors (via a training feedback form as well other communication i.e. face to face conversations, emails, text/video messages) asking for assistance with NZSL teaching. Requests relate to the following areas:

- seek for an experienced tutor/mentor to have conversation in NZSL about their teaching career and/or teaching experience
- provide explanation and examples how to use NZSL teaching resources (Level 1) (curriculum/materials such as tutors guide/activity sheets)
- organise someone to come and observe their NZSL teaching work
- practical tips how to find/use linguistic or teaching-related readings/resources and training/conference for their extra learning.



- how to deal with some challenges within/outside the classroom (students, homework, venue/facility, work-life balance, etc.)
- explain to them about RAP process/system

Several tutors also needed to know how to establish NZSL classes in their local areas, needed support with uploading and saving resources and using computer or laptop, how to do invoicing and IRD information for tax purposes. They need more explicit information about teaching registration (possibly something like an infographic would be a useful tool for this information).

TeachSign/NZSLTA website currently have NZSL teaching resources and information on teaching NZSL and using the resources. There is a need to build an additional platform/mechanism with all information related to tutor training, mentoring (both one-to-one and group support).

Together with NZSLTA, Merge NZ want to build on this by having a mentoring/training system with a team of knowledgeable NZSL mentors (they must be fully qualified teachers) that can assist NZSL tutors via online live and face-to-face visits. This would provide a way for tutors to ask questions and have responses that support them. Culturally Deaf people need to have the opportunity to ask, share and clarify – at the moment there is no provision for this.

It will also help NZSLTA/Merge NZ become a stronger more professional organisation/social enterprise for tutors and encourage NZSL tutors to join NZSLTA as members to gain access to these benefits and support. Merge NZ has all necessary human resources, experience to provide support to our team of NZSL tutors, and a good track-record of recruiting and delivering national NZSL tutors training programmes.

Boosting NZSL Trainers support through clear planning

It was a positive experience having all NZSL trainers, who are Deaf and fluent in NZSL delivering high quality NZSL tutors training programmes (as per NZSL tutors/participants feedback). Nearly all tutors said that NZSL trainers were easy to understand when activities/presentation were at a complex level as they used NZSL to communicate in depth without having a middle-person i.e. NZSL interpreters.

Recruitment of experienced trainers, a communication strategy with trainers and the frequency of training delivery were identified as important for the growth of NZSL trainers. Currently, there are approximately up to 8 to 10 NZSL trainers who are highly suitable to deliver training programmes in New Zealand. All of these trainers are fully registered teachers under NZSLTA's RAP system.

There is a relatively small pool of experienced NZSL tutors who can become professional trainers or mentors. Historically this has always been a volunteer role and these volunteer positions are not sustainable and cause this small team of NZSL teachers/trainers to feel burnout, in addition, they already have other commitments. Having a budget to pay them will help.

Also, as the mentoring/training programme continues with successful funding, more NZSL tutors will start to gain confidence and experience and they themselves can become NZSL trainers/mentors which will finally solve the problem of having only a small pool of confident experienced NZSL tutors.



Important to improve NZSL Tutor Training for Online Programmes

The printed and teaching resources were reported as positively received and helpful in training by these tutors, however there are some areas for improvements. Tutors found training materials somewhat overwhelming as they have English content and are heavily based on deep knowledge and understanding how the curriculum works. Many of the tutors at the training sessions asked repeatedly for information to fill the big knowledge gap and trainers have been working hard to make things visual as much as possible. It would appear there are some areas which could be improved:

1. Create a training video for NZSL trainers to have a clear expectation and understand what they are responsible for covering at all training sessions at different levels.
2. Develop information in NZSL for NZSL tutors to get a basic understanding about the concept of NZSL Adult Community Education Curriculums (Level 1 & 2 and Level 3 when it becomes available in the future).
3. Build a platform with all educational and training materials in NZSL/English and put into one platform for all NZSL tutors to get professional advice and support to help their learning.

In addition, online training sessions are a great way to empower and upskill NZSL tutors who are unable to come to face-to-face NZSL tutor training throughout the year. Online training could split into smaller online meetings for up to 1-2 hours per month or 4 times a year (quarterly).

Appendixes

- References
- Training programme – full day
- Sample of NZSL training resource
- Success stories/photographs



Appendix 1 – References

- Lang, H.G. (2002). Higher Education for Deaf Students: Research Priorities in the New Millennium, *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, Volume 7, Issue 4, 1 October 2002, Pages 267–280, <https://doi.org/10.1093/deafed/7.4.267>
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- Brief History. www.mergenz.co.nz/nzsl-history and www.nzslsignninja.co.nz/nzsl-history/



Appendix 2 – Training Programme – Full day

NZSL Tutors Training – NZSL Teaching/Deaf Culture

Programme Outline

Saturday from 9.00am – 4.00pm

9.00am – 9.30am	Opening & Introductions (full group) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NZSL Trainer's introduction Course participants (tutors) introductions
9.15am – 9.45am	NZSL teaching pathway <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NZSL teaching curriculums (NZSL Fam, NZSL for Maori) Information about TeachSign/RAP
9.45am – 10.45am	What are NZSL Grammars & Deaf Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overview of Level 1 TeachSign Adult Community Education Curriculum Selected grammars from Units 1 – 9 Selected Deaf Culture from Units 1 - 9
10.45am – 11.20am	Morning Tea Break <i>(20 minutes break)</i>

Split into two groups of tutors (never taught NZSL before and taught some NZSL before)

11.20am – 3.30pm	(NEW GROUP)	11.20am – 3.30pm	(BEGINNERS TUTORS)
How to understand TeachSign curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TeachSign website NZSL Teaching Levels Course Outline & Lesson Planning Teaching materials (PowerPoint slides, Activity sheets, Handouts and Homework) New to NZSL teaching “10 steps” Getting support (NZSLTA membership, RAP, local branches, etc) 		NZSL teaching linguistics/Deaf Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding about language structure Teaching strategies/tips TeachSign units review and practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning goals Vocabs/phrases Grammars/culture Confidence/teaching skills activity Further training (webinars dates) 	

12.30 – 1.15pm **Lunch Break** *(45 minutes break)*

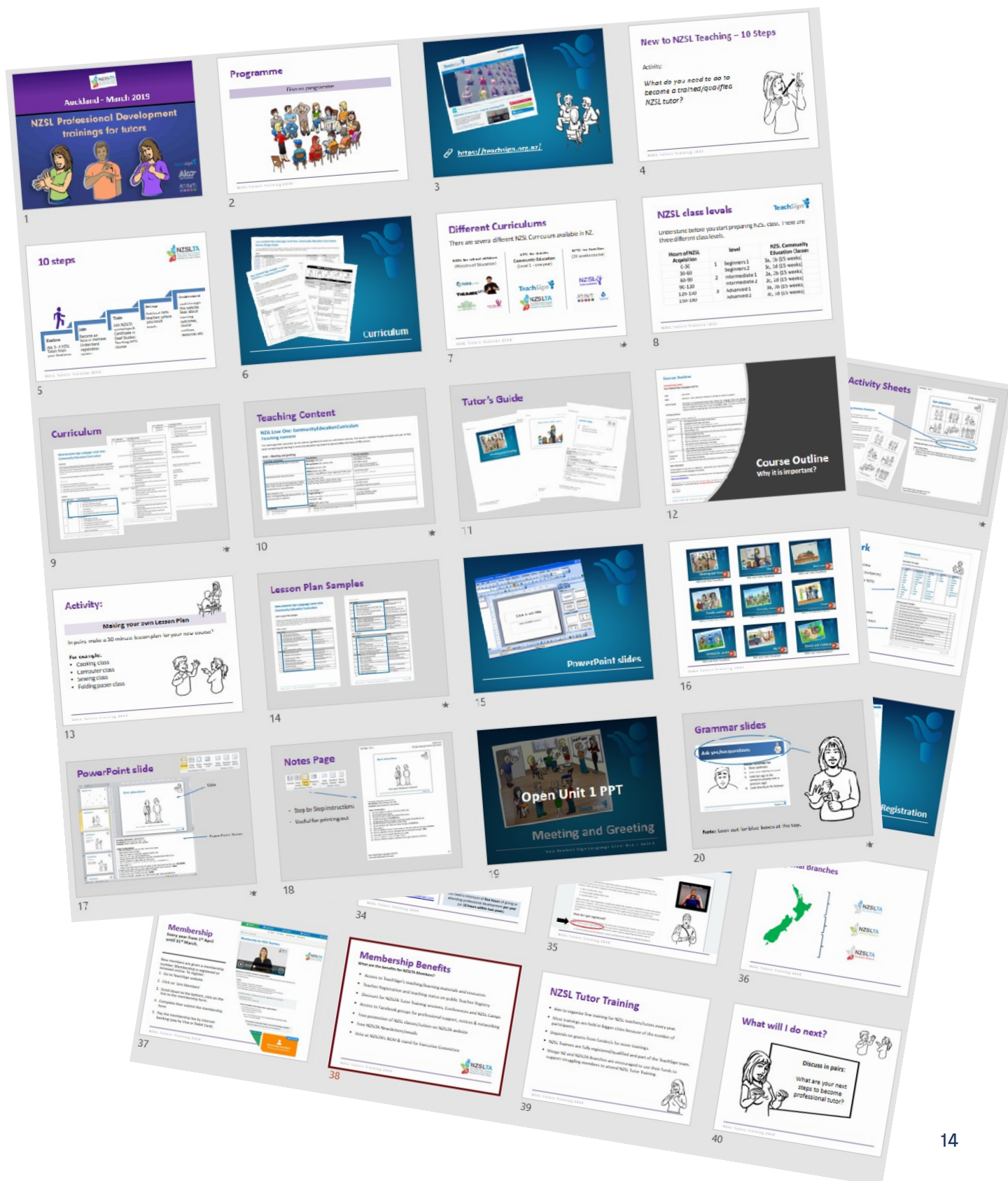
3.30pm – 4.00pm	Wrap up & questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities to review today's training (questions) Wrap up and evaluations Closing thoughts and group photo
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Training finishes at 4.00pm on Saturday.



Appendix 3

Sample of NZSL training resource





Appendix 4 – Success Stories/photos

Tutors training in New Plymouth

A team of current and potential tutors had their first ever professional NZSL tutors training held in New Plymouth and some tutors from outside of New Plymouth travelled to the training. They are from Wellington, Waimarama and Hamilton. It was a great success for them all and to date, nearly all tutors who attended training are teaching NZSL in their local areas.



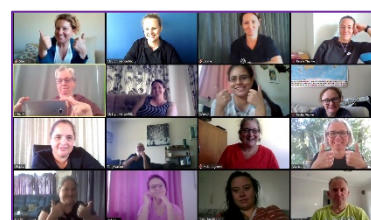
Career pathway for NZSL tutors

A group of enthusiastic 67 tutors, majority of them were Deaf, attended training in different locations. Ten tutors joined Merge NZ team and they now regularly teach NZSL classes. Two other tutors who attended training now have a full-time job teaching NZSL to young children in schools. There is a huge gap for NZSL teaching in schools and it is heart-warming to see tutors teaching both Deaf and hearing children in mainstreamed schools.



First ever NZSL tutors training online

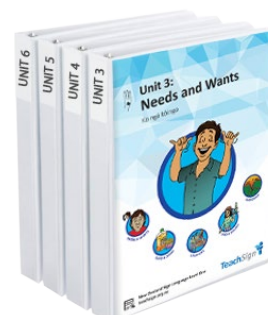
With Ako Aotearoa's financial support, Merge delivered the first ever NZSL online tutors training in May to July 2019. It was a great to see the first kind of training delivered online as it's good way to think about different ways to reach more tutors from rural areas. A total 26 tutors attended online trainings, since then Merge now offers online training whereas possible.



Further Resource development

After successful training in 2019, Merge NZ is pleased to be involved in leading a big project to re-develop TeachSign Level 1 teaching materials for 2020. Projects include:

- Create 40 NZSL Grammar videos to support NZSL teaching in classes
- Create 25 Dialogue videos (include two characters doing basic conversation in NZSL to help students to learn NZSL effectively)





- Create 20 Deaf culture videos to give learners a better understanding about cultural appropriate information/behaviours
- Film 8 weeks of NZSL classes videos to help other NZSL tutors to learn from other experienced tutors (worth 16 hours of classes)
- Develop Assessment Kits for Level 1 (Comprehension/Expression and Placement)
- Student Booklet (Units 1 – 9) for NZSL learners to do their homework after their weekly lessons.