

## PROFILE

### Cami Sawyer



A talented mathematician, an inspiring educator and an award winning teacher! Cami's modesty would prevent her from saying such things about herself, but all those who know her are struck by her enthusiasm, work ethic, kindness and intelligence.

Cami first came to New Zealand in the late 1980's as a Rotary Scholar and took the opportunity to return permanently in the early 2000's with her husband Greg and two young children, Matthew and Addi. With a PhD in Algebraic Topology from the University of North Texas and a PG Diploma in Teaching from Texas State University, Cami's talents were already in demand. She began her working life in Palmerston North as a Secondary School Mathematics teacher and was soon snapped up by Massey University's School of Fundamental Science as a Senior Tutor. For the last 6 years Cami has worked tirelessly delivering high quality distance learning to school leavers, international students, second-chance students and those juggling families and full-time work around their study. The challenges of managing such a diverse student cohort in a distance learning environment are immense, but Cami sought innovative solutions to manage and conquer these challenges. In 2019, Cami was recognised for her work with a national Sustained Excellence in Tertiary Teaching award.

In terms of research, Cami has moved away from her PhD subject in pure mathematics to focus on educational research in the teaching of mathematics. She is an advocate for the use of technology in education and is constantly trying to incorporate the latest research in this area, always sharing her knowledge and ideas with others. Her classroom environment creates a safe space for students, many of whom suffer from maths anxiety, and she works hard to build trust between her and her students. Creating these relationships with students in a distance learning environment requires the development of multiple versions of resources to cope with different learning styles and skill levels. Cami's experiences with distance learning and proficiency with educational technology has been particularly valuable in 2020, with educators from around the country benefitting from her expertise.

Cami's knowledge and experience of secondary school teaching, combined with her work with school leavers has led her to examine the transition between learning mathematics at school and at university. Cami discovered a considerable disconnect between the various stake-holders and became motivated to instigate and promote dialogue in order to improve the transition for students. Her role as Chair of the NZMS Education Group is just part of her strategy to facilitate this dialogue; the energy she brought to this role has been amazing, fuelling much discussion amongst academics from Universities across NZ, secondary school teachers, the Ministry of Education and the NZQA.

An important aspect of Cami's teaching is relationality; making genuine and meaningful connections with students and their culture. The Pūhoro STEM academy was set up by Massey University to support young Māori

students from Year 11, on their journey through to the completion of tertiary studies. Cami recognised the value of this programme, but realised that mathematics support was lacking for the programme. Cami filled this void and has been an active member of the Pūhoro STEM academy since 2015. Experience with this programme fuelled her desire to learn more about Te Reo, Mātauranga Māori and mathematics in order to develop a deeper understanding of the needs of Māori students and their relationship with the subject of Mathematics. In January 2020, Cami brought together a number of Māori educators to explore Mātauranga Māori and Mathematics. After the January hui, Cami was able to reconsider Mātauranga Māori as a process which could be incorporated into mathematics teaching by the inclusion of group work and the development of knowledge through collaboration and group work.

In addition to her work with the Pūhoro STEM academy Cami is active in a number of other outreach activities, she runs workshops for scholarship students, organises maths competitions for Year 12 students, facilitates maths activities for Year 10 Massey Open Days, and presents at several professional development events hosted by the NZ Association of Mathematics Teachers. Cami's energy for mathematics and her students appears boundless. She is driven by the goal of improving perceptions of mathematics, attracting diverse student cohorts to the subject, enabling all students to reach their full potential. Cami shares her knowledge and expertise, bringing people together impacting other institutions, government agencies, schools and colleagues. Her work has impact across New Zealand and students will be benefitting from this work now and long into the future.

*Julia Novak and Rachel Passmore*