

Walk the Talk Award Winner:
Frances Valentine - The Mind Lab by Unitec



Video Link <https://vimeo.com/178545431/591f4eab93>

Frances Valentine is a champion of diversity and the empowerment of women and minority groups.

Throughout her career she has supported her staff and external groups to encourage and build confidence in those around her, and when she launched The Mind Lab by Unitec, she provided a commitment to support real diversity in the workplace.

Frances set up The Mind Lab, in 2013. As she watched new digital technologies infiltrating every aspect of our lives, she realised education was on the cusp of a fundamental reshape. She wanted to ensure children and educators were not left behind.

The Mind Lab was to offer digital and creative learning for students as well as a postgraduate programme in digital and collaborative learning for educators. To date the organisation has taught more than 40,000 students and 1,400 educators.

Frances' initial team of five staff comprised of two Brits, one German, one French and a Kiwi. Including herself, 50 per cent of staff were female and there was no hierarchy of role or responsibility. Today the team includes staff from 15 different countries including the UK, South Africa, Serbia, Vietnam, Finland, Ireland and China to name just a few.

The make-up of these teams is deliberate and contributes to a working culture that is dynamic, open and diverse. Frances is known to take on staff who on-paper do not hold the experience or qualifications, but where she has identified passion, capability and potential.

Frances is hands on, supporting teachers, students and parents and plays a very personal role in equipping children. She also teaches on the postgraduate programme and gives her time to speak, almost weekly, at industry and education events.

She also holds a range of governance roles and sits on the boards of Callaghan Innovation, Education New Zealand, NZ Tech, New Zealand Game Developers Association, Auckland Screen and Digital Content, Santa Fe University of Art & Design and Talentnomics, Washington DC. She is also a member of the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment's Small Business Development Group and Global Women.

Within Frances' role on the NZTech board she leads the Women in Tech initiative which includes hosting regular events in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch for females in the tech sector. Wherever possible Frances uses The Mind Lab facility for these events to reduce the cost of access for younger tech females.

In this role she has led the need for visibility of successful female leaders and role models for the next generation. Frances is a regular contributor to Emerging Global Women and Global Women.

Frances has a strong list of accolades to her name including: Westpac Woman of Influence – Innovation, 2015; NEXT Woman of the Year – Education, 2015; winner of NZ Innovation Awards (Social Innovation), Sept 2014 and winner of the New Zealand CIO Awards – Engaging Youth in ICT, 2014 & 2016. This is by no means an exhaustive list!

The Mind Lab is already transforming the classroom experience for a whole generation of Kiwi kids. That will be one of Frances' legacies, but equally she will have inspired a huge education community to continue to drive educational changes.