

As the Whakatauki describes Ka mua, ka muri (Looking back in order to move forward). As professionals we transform through experiencing our own lives, reflecting upon our experiences, and the experiences of others. In this article, Mawera Karetai describes her own journey. We invite the reader to reflect both upon what is unique to the transformation described, but also explore commonalities of our own personal and professional journeys.

## LET YOUR LIFE PROCEED BY YOUR OWN DESIGN

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There is a line from a song by the Grateful Dead that goes: "Fare thee well now – let your life proceed by its own design." Not by anyone else's design. Not by the prophecies or hopes and dreams of others. But your design. Your life by your design. The following work is a submission for my Doctorate of Professional Practice with Otago Polytechnic. It outlines a life lived by that principle.

*"Can you remember who you were, before the world told you who you should be?"*

Charles Bukowski, 2018

Who was I? Who could I have been? How did I get to this place in my life? Where am I going from here? These questions have plagued me for the whole of my adult life. In what has been a life well-lived, there have been many changes of direction – some by my own choosing, but some that were not – and each of them a source of new learning.

I-am-a-child, I-am-a-musician, I-am-going-to-be-a-scientist, I-am-a-mother, I-am-going-to-be-a-librarian, I-am-a-wife, I-am-a-cook, I-am-going-to-be-a-chef, I-am-a-race-engine-builder, I-am-going-to-be-a-teacher, I-am-divorced, I-don't-know-what-I-am, I-am-lost ... I-am-lonely ... I-am-broken ... I-am-going-to-be-a-teacher, I-am-a-mum-and-wife, I-am-going-to-be-a-mediator, I-fish, I-am-a-fisher-of-men, I-am-a-business-owner, I-am-a-community-advocate, I-am-going-to-be-a-scientist, I-am-a-teacher, I-am-a-student, I-am-the-sum-total-of-every-experience-I-have-had-and-everything-I-have-learned.

With each new learning opportunity has always come the need to redefine and recreate my identity, as a new and improved version of myself – more to offer, more to give and more to learn inevitable change, spiralling onwards, repeating itself over and again. In going through this process, I am not alone.

From my life's work, and especially lately, in my work as facilitator for Capable New Zealand, I have learned that these same questions, in some form or another, wrap themselves around the thoughts of most people at some stage in their lives. We are compelled to reflect by changes in our lives, or by a willingness for change to occur. Reflection helps us to have clarity in our thinking. It helps us to learn more about the essence of ourselves, to determine our strengths and our weaknesses, to set and break patterns, and to understand more about the true nature of ourselves. It is the process which strikes a match, the light pushing away the darkness in our minds.

The light has gone out  
and I have been sitting here in the dark  
thinking:  
Is the power off or is the bulb no good?  
Very nice to wander in aimless anonymity  
among the metaphysics of astrological signs,  
but if I can't see where I am, how can I see where I don't want to be?

I asked Someone in the room:  
did you notice that the light is out?  
*and Someone said: I cannot see my Self in others  
until I can see my own Self.*

*Then I asked Another: did you notice?*  
*and Another answered: I have to get my head straight first.*

*Finally I asked Everybody:*  
**DID YOU NOTICE THAT THE LIGHT IS OUT?**  
*but Everybody was too busy  
trying to find space in the dark.*

*Never mind.*

*I will strike a match and see my*  
*("The Light Has Gone Out,") ("My," 1977)*

Reflection is not always pleasant, and not always something we choose consciously to do. But the need for introspection and self-examination are human needs, the results of which enable us to create our ever-changing stories. Through this process of reflection, we have the opportunity to break free from how we are taught to view OUR existence, and from who WE are through the lens of others – to see the truth of ourselves. We begin a process that Sousanis describes as seeing “what possibilities emerge when we author our own paths, as uniquely our own as our feet themselves, in shoe sizes determined by the wearer” (Sousanis, 2015).

My name is Mawera Karetai. I am a 46-year-old mother; wife, daughter; educator; facilitator; mediator; mentor; learner; community warrior; outspoken non-activist, rule-maker; rule-breaker; lover of all, hater of some, cook, writer; waffler; researcher; doer of mostly-good-deeds and maker of mischief. For the last month or so I have battled with myself to write this. It was not a case of an inability, or unwillingness to reflect – it has been more about there being so much going on in my mind, as I prepare for this doctorate journey, that I had no natural starting place. And then Stephen Hawking died, and I lost a hero in this world. What better place to start than an ending?

Stephen Hawking wrote: "I have noticed that even people who claim everything is predestined, and that we can do nothing to change it, look before they cross the road" (Hawking, 1993). I am not a particularly spiritual person and so I don't have a working concept of karma, or pre-destiny, or a higher power, or of a book written in blood from the wounds of every deed we do unto ourselves or others. Having a faith in an afterlife seems like a tragic way to journey through life – always focused on something so incredible in an unseen world that you don't see all that is incredible in this one. Nope, an afterlife is not for me and so I look before I cross the road. I believe in the here and now. This moment. This actual instant in time, with each tap on my keyboard being the only thing I have control over. But with that I also have hope for the future – so much hope that it is like an aquifer providing unlimited quantities of the purest water; ready at any time to quench the thirst of all who need it. My aquifer of hope does not run dry, ever: It has persisted in the most difficult of times. But why?

Why do I have this way of thinking and some others in my life don't? What has shaped my thinking to make me like this? In the same way that it has happened, could it unhappen? What is the source, and could it dry up? And die? Can my mind become an arid desert where hope cannot live – where all that remains is dust in the shape of the memories of a past that was so real and so wonderfully useful? Hope eternally extinguished, and the end of that one thing that I know myself as and others define me as. It terrifies me. That fear has been a theme throughout my life and it has at times had the power to stop me in my tracks. However, as well as that there have been other themes that have kept me on track, and that are fundamental to who I am as a human.

My insatiable curiosity, my pursuit of fairness, and my life-long participation in transformative learning processes. These three are the focus of this work. While my fear is significant, and my battle with it constant, I have found that the better my understanding of the other three, and the role they play, the less power fear has to impact on my life.

"Curiosity killed the cat," say some. Others say, "satisfaction brought it back." Oh, the satisfaction of new knowledge – there is nothing else like it in my world. That moment of understanding, that rush of dopamine, the connecting of neurons, the growing myelin, and the sense of having achieved something that matters. Learning is beautiful. From my own childhood, through to this day, the pursuit of knowledge has been a driving force, keeping me moving forward. It has not been knowledge for its own sake – it has been an intentional accumulation of knowledge for the purpose of sharing, rooted firmly in a need to make my life matter.

Does everyone have a conscious need for their life to "matter"? If so, is that another human condition? There are hundreds of self-help books that indicate that yes, we do and yes, it is. My own need to matter has a clearly defined starting point – the death of my younger sister, Melissa May Maarea Karetai.



Figure 1. Melissa Karetai.

She was three years old and I was four. A car accident robbed the world of a lovely little girl and robbed me of the only happiness in my life at that time. As I got older, I felt a responsibility to live my life for both of us – for my life to matter; otherwise hers could not, for I lived, and she did not. And so I consciously set out to be all things to all people. I wanted to know everything. I needed to know everything. High school did not meet that need for me, except in music, English and science. The rest of it was suffering I had to endure to escape from a life that was not conducive to success.

At school, music and English were about communication, and science made the world make sense to me. It was through learning to play the cornet, and playing it well, that I first had a real feeling of adding value – of mattering. The better I got at it, the better we, as a school orchestra, collectively sounded. With music there is nowhere to hide when things go wrong. Music taught me to take responsibility for my mistakes and to work harder to know more; to be better; to share with others; to be part of something greater than myself; to feel, in a way that only music can help you feel. As I grew as a musician, my curiosity drove me to explore other instruments and genres. My playlist now honours a lifetime of wanting to know more and experience more in music; Ozzy Osborne resides next to Vivaldi, who is next to The Grateful Dead, who are next to Holly Arrowsmith, who is next to Burning Spear, who is next to Bob Dylan ... and so it goes. It is my addiction of choice.

Like music, English also took me on a journey of feeling. It enabled me. The Dewey Decimal System was my friend and together we explored the universe. It was in the Darfield High School library that I learned to independently find information from books. I also learned to write about what I was reading, and that is when I began to understand the power of individuals who could research, to make change happen. Knowledge became power. I was learning things other people did not know and teaching what I learned. I was able to take knowledge of complex ideas and reframe them in a way other learners could understand. Plato said, "Human behaviour flows from three main sources: desire, emotion and knowledge" (Majdi, 2012). As I reflect on that time in my life, I know it is the foundation for this work today. The more I learned, the more useful I was and the better I felt about myself. That pattern has repeated itself over and again, throughout my life.

After school finished for me I began to explore tertiary study, and there I found the same difficulty I had in high school – I just did not fit and could not adapt to the way knowledge was delivered. I bounced from degree to degree, from provider to provider, always looking for something, but never finding it. In the meantime I amassed an excellent skill set in business, social sciences and education. I became more and more useful, while at the same time beating myself up for not being able to stick to a course of study. My values system was wrong, but I did not understand that at the time.

A major breakthrough came when I met my second husband and began helping him with a custody dispute. I became curious about the law and landed in a Graduate Diploma in Dispute Resolution at Massey. The delivery was the same as every other provider and nothing else was different, except I was different. I was trying to learn something I needed to know to help someone else. And so, success came. I completed the papers I needed and kept going to complete a bunch of papers that interested me. I began to understand what it is to be an intentional learner and the lifelong relationship between myself and learning started to make some sense (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1989). I could not learn in a formal setting unless the topic either really interested me, or I had an application for it. It was not enough that I wanted to be a sponge, soaking up information. I first had to be curious and the learning needed to satisfy that curiosity.

As I have come to understand who I am as an intentional learner, I have had to think a lot about what has motivated that intention. Reflecting through my life and the learning gained from it, another pattern emerges – natural justice, the application of it and how I respond to the absence of it. While it is unclear to me exactly where this drive to see natural justice done has come from, I suspect its foundation is in feeling quite powerless in the early years of my life. Things that were unfair happened that I had no control over. When I was in a position to have control, I used that to make good things happen. I recall learning about the Magna Carta quite early in my high school years, while my friends were reading *The Diary of Adrian Mole*, etc ... (that might have been better for me). The Magna Carta, first written in 1215 during the reign of King John, was an attempt to bring peace and natural justice to the relationship between ruler and servant, a relationship that until then was about the power and control of the ruler:

John was a tyrant king who took land and assets from people who did not comply with his demands, or simply disposed of the person concerned. There was an uprising which resulted in King John having to agree to a new framework for the relationship between him and his subjects; one that was fair. The original Magna Carta document evolved over time, and also became the foundation document for many others, including the United States Bill of Rights (1791), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and even our own Treaty of Waitangi (1840). Although almost all the original statutes have long since been repealed (Worcester, 2010), there are several clauses from the original 63 that remain in statute and, of them, there is one that has always meant something to me:

No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land. To no one will we sell, to no one deny or delay right or justice.  
(British Library, 2018)

This simple clause granted the right to a fair process for people to defend themselves. It protected people from unjust and biased processes. It provided in the law for natural justice, in that the procedures implemented are morally right and fair within our cultural norms.

While I continue to admire the inclusion of this clause and the continued use of it in law, at some point along my journey I stopped to consider what it means to be “free,” and with that came a major shift in my thinking. I realised that being “free” in 1215 meant that you were still in the higher echelons of British society. The vast majority of people were living in some form of servitude, and education remained the domain of the wealthy; the clause did

not include them. In 1354 the wording of the statute was changed (Levy, 2008) from "no free man," to "no man of what estate or condition that he be," and so it was more inclusive, at least on paper. But now let's consider history since then and also the current situation.

Yes, in New Zealand we all have access to the same rights in law and the law is underpinned by natural justice. But there are barriers – like a lack of resources, networks and education – which prevent people from exercising their rights now, as there were in 1215, and they impact on the same kinds of people – the vulnerable, the hardest working but lowest paid, the unemployed/infirm/unsupported, and the least educated in Aotearoa, who have not made it to the blue-collar class in our country, let alone the white-collar class. These people are the least likely to be able to get the law to work for them. Natural justice is not part of their reality. Unless you have resources, or a support network, or an understanding of the law, you have limited ability to navigate those barriers.

It is the difference between equity, equality and justice (Maguire, 2018). Everyone has the same rights in theory, but not everyone has the privilege of being able to exercise those rights. The only fair response, is to address the issues in our society that prevent people from being able to take control of their lives – we must remove the barriers and bring about social change. Martin Luther King Jr said: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects us directly, affects all indirectly" (King, 1963). I am with King on this. We live in a society where people regard themselves as free and where there is a widely held belief that our society is democratic and just. If you, my reader, are nodding your head in agreement with this, then you are indeed privileged.

Your privilege comes from confidence that the law is there to protect you. In your mind, you believe that you have choices and that you have been empowered by a system that has rules to keep you safe. In my professional practice, I have devoted most of my adult life to working with people who don't know those rules, who don't have choices and who feel disempowered by a system of legislation that they can't understand or apply. They need help, and I have been that help for many years.

My interest in natural justice has seen me involved in problem-solving for others in both formal and informal roles. This has naturally evolved into a professional practice in ADR (alternative dispute resolution) and, of course, my first successful completion of a tertiary qualification. My formal practice started when I was an atheist minister of a non-denominational church, supporting members of my congregation in issues they could not resolve by themselves. I realised I had a knack for that, and so from there I established an ADR practice, specialising in family and employment disputes. After undertaking mediation training with what is now the Resolution Institute, I began volunteering as a McKenzie friend, assisting dads in the Family Court for the Union of Fathers.

This changed to problem-solving outside of the court, to try and prevent the parties from entering aggressively litigious Family Court processes, where the only winners were the lawyers. I found I was good at facilitating conversations and helping people to move past their fixed positions and work with the other party for solutions. Throughout all of that, I was often asked to support people in all sorts of courts and legal processes. As a McKenzie friend you can't speak in the court, which can be frustrating. One of my favourite memories was turning to my client, who was struggling to articulate his position, and in a voice loud enough for the court to hear, telling him what he should say. That generated laughter from around the court, with Justice Venning stating, with a smile on his face, "Miss Karetai, that was a very loud stage whisper!" My client won.

From Family Court, to the High Court, to social services, health, education, employment and commercial matters. I have taken the knowledge gained from a lifetime of curiosity and applied it to solving problems for others where there is an absence of natural justice. Sitting in front of a judge as a layperson and reminding them of their responsibility to the person I support has generated mixed responses. Battling with lawyers who have specialist degrees in law, with my knowledge of the basics, but driven by my need to see natural justice done, has been challenging. Holding people to account for not being fair, or just, or unbiased has been rewarding. The amazing Dr

King also issued us, as human beings, a challenge: "Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism, or in the darkness of destructive selfishness" (King, 2016).

I have chosen to walk in the light of altruism, and with that light also comes the responsibility to pass the torch to others. From helping myself through to helping others, I understand the power of transformative processes. It was not until recently, when I began my learning journey with Capable New Zealand, that I came to understand this in an educational context – something that has come naturally to me through my life was given a name. As I have reflected on how I best learn and on my teaching practice in formal and informal teaching, I have found a pattern in my life best described as transformative education.

Transformative learning theory is where "learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience to guide future action" (Ker, 2017, p. 21).

"You become," said the Skin Horse. "It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand" (Williams, 1922).

My own journey into transformative education started early in my life. My childhood was a difficult time, with the loss of my sister and 28 house changes in my first ten years. I attended more schools than I can count and did not have a great foundation for learning. My home life was tragic, violent and character-building. There are lots of good things that came from my early years, though, and one of those was from a dad who was a disrupter. My dad taught me to question everyone and everything. He also taught me that even though we had very little in the world, we had choices and our choices came from knowledge. He was determined that his struggles in life should not become our struggles.

My dad taught me to think about what I was learning and how what I learned was making me feel. He encouraged introspection as a habitual process. I recall when I was nine years old that we were watching the Billy T. James show on TV. The audience was laughing, and so I laughed. My dad turned off the TV and asked me why I was laughing. I said I laughed because they did. He said to me then that he never wanted to hear me do it again. I was not ever to let someone define for me those things that I should only define for myself, and that if I don't understand then I should look for understanding and not just go along with the crowd. I tend to take that attitude to an extreme in life, but I am at least conscious of it. That early learning from my dad was the beginning of transformative learning for me, which has driven a life-long, relentless search for applicable, useful knowledge and a deep understanding who I am as a person.

Having grown up in Te Ao Māori for the first part of my life, I learned that reflection comes naturally to Māori. When we are culturally connected we look back, constantly analysing the present in the context of the past. From a young age we are made aware that we are part of something so much greater than ourselves. We are representative of everyone who has come before us and everyone who will come after us. We are reminded of our ancestors by references and comparisons. "You have inherited your humour from poua Hiki," or "you have inherited your love of music from taua Maaki," "your ability in science comes from aunty Marama," "your love of history is just like cousin Tahu," etc ... We grow up reflecting a lot on why we do things a certain way and why others don't. I don't think this is something that only happens in Te Ao Māori, but I have not experienced it with my non-Māori family. Reflection on tikanga and kawa and how they apply to life eventually becomes reflection on all aspects of life. Why do I get so frustrated or mad about things that others don't care about? Why is it so hard for me to say no to things at times, when I know I am overcommitted? Why? Just why? That self-analysis keeps us moving forward, mindful of those who will come after us and making sure that what we do matters.

In my formal education, prior to beginning my journey with Capable NZ, it was only that habitual reflection instilled by my dad that kept things on track for me. To be honest, I don't know how I survived school; it was really only music that got me through. Paul Mayhew and Judy Bellingham were fundamental to my success at high school and if you asked them about their teaching practice, you would find two constructivist teachers who practiced transformational teaching. They promoted positive change in students' lives through challenging and encouraging, through engaging mentally and emotionally, through creating lessons that worked with the way we best learned and, most importantly, through involving us in the teaching plans. It was our plan that we decided on – we were in this together. They were ahead of their time and I am so thankful for that. I can pinpoint my time with them in my later high school years as being a huge part of the reason I am writing this now. They have been my role models for my own teaching practice, some 30+ years later. It was not until I was in my early 40s and starting as a learner with Capable that I had a name for what they did. It is my honour to write about them today.

As my practice evolved over time, and my accumulated knowledge added up to something of value, I was presented with an opportunity to teach in a tertiary environment. I took a role as a lecturer at a PTE (private training establishment), where I was delivering face-to-face lectures on business strategy and leadership. My learners were Punjabi Indian and Nepalese young adults who had come to New Zealand to start a new life, leaving their families and all that was familiar behind them. The students had all come to my classroom from failed PTEs, had low levels of literacy and no real understanding of what was required of them to pass their desired qualification. They had been exploited. They were broken. Alone. Afraid. Terrified. On that first day I had one shot at building our relationship. This really mattered. So, I went back to my own learning, to some years before when I had tried becoming an early childhood teacher.

Working in an Early Learning Centre was not for me, but the learning about teaching was significant and it is not hard to see why; early childhood education is all about transformation. Young children, away from their parents and everything familiar to them, become capable, independent learners. Preschool is learner-driven. Learners build new skills from old skills. The relationship between learner and teacher/facilitator is central to the success of the learning process. Reflection becomes a natural part of the learners' experience (Nakamura, 2005), a habit which should continue beyond early learning and into the rest of their educational journey. One of many wonderful examples of this process is Te Whāriki, and that is the model that underpinned my practice in my role with the PTE.

Te Whāriki is a kaupapa Māori model of teaching/facilitation that was developed in the late 1990s as a bicultural framework for the delivery of early childhood curriculum. "It encourages all children to learn in their own ways, supported by adults who know them well and have their best interests at heart" (Ministry of Education, 2017). It acknowledges that each learner is on a unique journey and that the learner is the end product of every experience they have had and everything they have learned. They are not there to simply receive knowledge. The principles of kaupapa Māori include tino rangatiratanga (self-determination), taonga tuku iho (cultural aspiration), ako Māori (preferred pedagogy), kia piki ake i nga raruraru o te kainga (socio-economic mediation), whanau (extended family structure), kaupapa (collective philosophy), te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) and ata (growing respectful relationships) (Smith, 1992). Learners are there to grow, to build relationships, to develop and learn, to increase competency (Bruner & Weinreich-Haste, 1987) and to participate on their own terms in a co-constructing environment that is inclusive and where relationships are safe. And so were my Punjabi and Nepalese learners. And there began a journey for all of us, as we developed a whāriki to stand on.

"Toku Rangatiratanga na te mana-matauranga – knowledge and power set me free" (Reedy, 1993).

From the beginning of my time with the PTE, until the end, Te Whāriki was my guide. My approach to my practice was to really 'see' my learners, to enable them to understand themselves and where they had come from to be where they were. We reflected a lot on how we got to where we were. We delved into culture and how that shapes our thinking. We acknowledged differences as something to celebrate together instead of something to divide us. At the beginning of each session, when I called the roll, I would call a learner's name and when they acknowledge



being present I would make eye contact with them and say, "I see you, Manpreet" or "I see you, Sukhmander." My learners knew that it meant I was engaged with them and they knew it meant that I saw the whole person they are, and not just the receiver of knowledge. It was effective. Our relationships in the classroom were positive. The learners applied this same way of viewing people with others in our class and then in our school. It was a wonderful tool for minimising conflict, since we all stood as equals on our co-created whāriki. Knowledge and power released us from preconceived ideas of how a classroom should run and how our relationships should be. We were free to be who we decided we were.

Success came slowly, but it came, and I am certain it was having this wholistic kaupapa Māori-based practice that underpinned our success. That success continues today in all aspects of my professional life; those same kaupapa Māori principles continue to underpin my practice. The presence of them shapes the way I engage with people. In the absence of them I see and experience suffering.

It has been an accumulation of experiences that has become the primary motivation for my doctorate work today. I have lived my life purposefully, seeking knowledge to share. From a young age my life has been about honouring my past and planning a future that meant something. Learning has not come easily for me in formal settings. At times I have recognised in my learning experiences a lack of care from teachers and others in authority. As I have grown older and more aware, I have learned that the lack of care had sometimes come from a person's bias, sometimes from a person who has already given all they have, and sometimes because they simply could find no basis for an ongoing relationship with me. These realities have names – dysconsciousness, empathy fatigue and the absence of unconditional positive regard. The exploration of these concepts has given me a purpose in my learning journey. My focus is: The articulation of Unconditional Positive Regard as a model of professional practice.

The exploration of my question will be my focus for the next two years of my life – and likely beyond. It is not going to be easy. But what will get me through the tough times ahead is that this is me living my life by my own design, as I have always done and as I will always do.

Flight of the seabirds,  
Scattered like lost words,  
Wheel to the storm and fly.  
Fare thee well now,  
let your life proceed by its own design.  
Nothing to tell now, let the words be yours,  
'm done with mine.  
I'm done with mine.  
(Barlow & Weir, 1974)



Figure 2. Photograph by James Stanbridge (copyright James Stanbridge).

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