



Waikato Journal of Education

ISSN 2382-0373

Website: <https://wje.org.nz>



Volume 26, Issue 2, 2021

Look back to learn, look forward for hope: Look closely—and act now
Kerry Earl Rinehart and David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae

Editors: Kerry Earl & David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae

To cite this article: Earl Rinehart, K., & Fa'avae, D. (2021). Look back to learn, look forward for hope: Look closely—and act now! *Waikato Journal of Education*, 26(2), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v26i2.911>

To link to this volume: <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v26i2>

Copyright of articles

Authors retain copyright of their publications.

Articles are subject to the Creative commons license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/legalcode>

Summary of the Creative Commons license.

Author and users are free to

Share—copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Adapt—remix, transform, and build upon the material

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms

Attribution—You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use

Non-Commercial—You may not use the material for commercial purposes

ShareAlike—If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original

No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

Open Access Policy

This journal provides immediate open access to its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge.



Look back to learn, look forward for hope: Look closely—and act now!

Kerry Earl Rinehart and David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae

The University of Waikato
New Zealand

Acting now, in the present, draws on retrospective meaning-making. When considering the future during uncertain times, the Māori psychiatrist and author Hinemoa Elder (2020) turns to Māori whakataukī for aroha—love, compassion and respect. She suggests,

As we witness change beyond our control, and experience uncertainty, stress, anxiety and fear for our futures, we are also on a continuous quest for calm, happiness and peace ... our climate is rapidly changing, our lands are being washed away ... we face border closures, pandemics. (pp. 7–8)

What, then, does it mean for us to stay safe, to take care of ourselves and our families in the present when the future is filled with risk and uncertainties? How do we seek and sustain calm, happiness and peace? What does all this mean for education in these times?

The late professor, leader and teacher of Te Reo Māori, Te Wharehuia Milroy said: “*E kore tātau, e mōhio ki te waitohu nui o te wai kia mimiti rawa te puna*” (interpreted as ‘We never know the worth of water until the well runs dry’). This whakataukī, as alluded to by Elder (2020), is a reminder of humanity’s intimate connection with the environment and that our challenges today—in the *now*—are inextricably linked to our whenua and environment. Education, including research, should not be separated and removed from its relevance and applicability to the existing challenges in our places, contexts and spaces. Education should have renewed currency, relevancy as times change. Moreover, if we focus primarily on the future and ignore the learnings from the past, we inevitably risk running the water in the well dry.

To be ‘future-focused’ and ‘moving forward’ arises frequently in the rhetoric of policy, strategic plans and meetings in educational institutions. To be future-focused suggests ‘eyes on the prize’: that a better situation lies ahead. However, the future is a vague concept, unknown, unforeseen and unpredictable. The phrase ‘future-focused’ also may suggest a blinkered view of the present and one’s back turned to the past. Connotations of ‘moving forward’ are of perpetual movement—do not settle, do not rest—a sense of leaving the past behind and continuing forward. Forward, in this sensibility, is good. As educators and researchers, we can reinforce our sense of moving forward through goal setting.

There are, however, problems with goal setting. Where do goals come from and how fixed or flexible are they? What are the perceived and actual consequences (personally, professionally) of not meeting set goals? Goals can become constraints. Check out Alan Watts’ (2011) book *The wisdom of insecurity: A message for an age of anxiety* or Oliver Burkeman’s (2018) book *Addicted to busy: Why*



life has got so hectic (Other sources, Klein, et al., 1999; Locke & Latham, 2006). Burkeman (2012), in *The antidote: Happiness for people who can't stand positive thinking*, spoke of a difficulty in our attempts to focus on 'some aspect':

Formulating a vision of the future requires, by definition, that you isolate some aspect or aspects of your life, or your organisation, or your society, and focus on those at the expense of others. But problems arise thanks to the law of unintended consequences, sometimes expressed using the phrase, 'you can never change just one thing'. In any even slightly complex system, it's extremely hard to predict how altering one variable will affect the others. 'When we try to pick out anything by itself,' the naturalist and philosopher John Muir observed, 'we find it hitched to everything else in the universe'. (pp. 92–93)

In 2016, Lesley Rameka reminded us of the significance of time and how the past-present-future are intricately intertwined. The whakatauki "Kia whakatōmuri haere whakamua", defined by Rameka as "I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past" is an appreciation of one's many learnings as an array of experiences that continue to shape our sense of becoming in the world. In light of the global and local challenges we are facing, such sensibilities carry troublesome moments and experiences that, if unattended, unnoticed, or not mediated, can result in ill feelings towards others and damage to our own wellbeing.

John Dewey (1859–1952) talked of individual experience as social and active *interaction* between people in situations (1938). He advocated the importance of the history of a situation and examining the present with foresight and consideration for the future as key to refining our activity in the present for 'better' human experiences (2006 [1916]). Experience occurs in situations of the present but draws on past experience and influences future experience(s). For Dewey, experience was individual but always in relation to a social context (interaction): "All human experience is ultimately social; that it involves contact and communication ... Every genuine experience has an active side which changes to some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had" (1938, pp. 38–39).

Interaction 'intercepts' and 'unites' with *continuity*, making up the two aspects of experience: "The principle of continuity in its educational application means, nevertheless, that the future has to be taken into account at every stage of the educational process" (Dewey, 1938, p. 47). Dewey saw social processes as 'always in the making', and, therefore, always needing to be 'orientated' and 'directed' through 'intelligence' or inquiry (Frega, 2017). Dewey was clear that we cannot change the future but we can change the present in order to positively influence the future.

Foucault was not confident of a better future but he was optimistic that things do change. He said,

My optimism consists in saying that so many things can be changed, fragile as they are, bound up more with circumstances than with necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constraints. (1988, p. 156)

Foucault understood the future would be different and that our current discourses, actions, institutions and belief systems are not fixed, absolute or essential.

In the years 2020 and 2021 (by the Gregorian calendar), people do not need to be reminded that things change, and that interpretations, experiences and their impacts may vary considerably. At this particular point in time, educators and schooling have been troubled by the impacts of the *global* pandemic on top of existing challenges that were present in our societies prior. COVID-19 and its variants will continue to make even more visible the things that are not working for certain groups in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ)—as well as throughout the world.

This compels us to ask, are there things and practices that are working well? What aspects of education in New Zealand are hopeful? What is hopeful about education and research in Pasifika? And,

how have educators and researchers mediated their navigation of schooling, research and higher education, stemming from past experiences, present situations and future prospects?

Our own views are partial, local and historical and particular to our time and place (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Research in itself is partial, of a particular moment in a particular context.

Researchers' interests may change over time. Each person moves on their own journey. We can use the metaphor of travelling through a landscape. The landscape changes, the weather changes, the details change. Losses are faced and new knowledge, skills and relationships are gained. Insights are achieved, self-knowledge is grown and meanings developed. Along the way, paths are not taken, opportunities are accepted or declined, insights are found with insights come. Those on a journey cannot always see where they are going or even where they are. As the serenity prayer (written by Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr, 1892–1971) suggests, researchers come to learn about what can be controlled, what cannot be controlled and gain wisdom to discern the difference.

When we walk towards a scheduled meeting we stride at pace, resisting distractions, and our observations of the environment around us are likely to be limited. Such walks are towards a destination, getting to where we are going is the purpose. Other walks are the purpose in themselves. A walk to walk the dog, for example. A scheduled walk with family or friends for the purpose of enjoying each other's company. We can 'go for a walk' to get out of the house or office and into the outdoors. Daniel Kahneman (2011) wrote that he found walking at a pace of 17 minutes per miles (a stroll) suited him for thinking and working. In his experience, walking faster requires greater concentration on the act of walking itself. He described "the mild physical arousal of the walk may spill over into greater mental alertness" (p. 39).

Other walks are about the collective. Arguably, the most significant hīkoi (march) in New Zealand's history is the one led by Te Rarawa leader Whina Cooper in 1975. Early that year at Māngere Marae, Dame Whina Cooper (then aged 79) convened a hui (meeting). Her concern: the past sale and continuing loss of Māori land. At that hui Te Rōpū Matakite o Aotearoa ('Those with Foresight') was launched (NZ History, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/whina-cooper-led-land-march-te-ropu-o-te-matakite-reaches-parliament>). Only 50 marchers, led by Dame Whina Cooper, set off from Te Hāpua in the far north on the 14th September. Each night they stayed at local marae sharing their concerns and making clear the purpose of the march. When the hīkoi arrived at Parliament in Wellington on the 13 October after 1000 kilometres, the number of marchers was estimated at 5,000, and 60,000 people had signed the petition (New Zealand History, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/people/dame-whina-cooper>). The hīkoi led by Dame Whina Cooper and others of Te Rōpū Matakite o Aotearoa ('Those with Foresight') gained national attention for their protest against the continued loss of Māori land.

The late Pacific activist and scholar Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa, who is of Banaban, i-Kiribati, and African American heritage, constantly fuelled, inspired and empowered the next generation of Pacific/Pasifika scholars who too actively desired change for their communities in Aotearoa New Zealand and the region. A tribute in 2017 by some of her colleagues and students was a reflection of her life and activist work. A quote by Teaiwa (2017)—"We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood" (p. 133)—is a symbol of the moana's place in indigenous Pacific peoples' understanding of the 'self' in the world. In 2021, Teresia's family and friends put together a collection of her works through the book, *Sweat and Saltwater*, which is an embodiment of their loving sister and good friend, a person whose love for the Pacific region will live on and echo across generations. The book captures Teresia's spirit, motivations, love for learning, journeys of exploration, retrospective and historical appreciation, and ambitious and forward-looking curiosities designed to fuel and inspire her students and colleagues in and across Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) and others in Moana nui a kiwa (Teaiwa, 2021). Her works will continue to fuel us and our quest to make sense of education and the relevance of its practices for Pacific peoples in NZ and the region.

Hedley Beare, in his 2001 book *Creating the future school*, shares a story about how he met a child when out walking. It was autumn and he was amongst great trees. He had a problem on his mind and was in search of a quiet place and a solution. Meeting a child unexpectedly gave each a moment of pause. Will they disturb each other? he wonders. Will they share the space? Beare speaks up and explains his purpose in being there and Angelica, the child, introduces herself, and offers that “problems aren't usually that hard really ... Just choose what is the best thing for the future” (p. 193). Considering the implications for others and potential consequences of our actions and our research over generations, is a necessary responsibility for education researchers.

In our worldview, all research is temporal and situational, because things change. The researcher's purpose is to speak up, take action and make a difference. We close with a quote from Dame Whina Cooper (1895–1994): “Take care of our children. Take care of what they hear, take care of what they see, take care of what they feel. For how the children grow, so will be the shape of Aotearoa.” In the experiences of children, the future of nations will be shaped.

References

- Beare, H. (2001). *Creating the future school*. Routledge <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203132074>
- Burkeman, O. (2012). *The antidote: Happiness for people who can't stand positive thinking*. Canongate.
- Burkeman, O. (2018). *Addicted to busy: Why life has got so hectic*. BBC Digital Audio.
- Elder, H. (2020). *Aroha: Māori wisdom for a contented life lived in harmony with our planet*. Penguin Random House New Zealand.
- Dewey, J. (1916/2006). The democratic conception in education. In H. Lauder, P. Brown, J. Dillabough, & A.H. Halsey (Eds.), *Education, globalization and social change* (pp. 91–100). Oxford University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. (Reprinted 2015). Kappa Delta Pi lecture series [no. 10]. The Macmillan Company.
- Foucault, M. (1988). “Practicing criticism”, an interview with Didier Eribon (A. Sheridan, trans). In L. Kritzman, (Ed.). *Michel Foucault: Politics, philosophy, culture* (pp. 152–158). Routledge.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Allen Lane.
- Klein, H. J., Wesson, M. J., Hollenbeck, J. R., & Alge, B. J. (1999). Goal commitment and the goal-setting process: Conceptual clarification and empirical synthesis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84(6), 885–896. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.84.6.885>
- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2006). New directions in goal-setting theory. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 15(5), 265–268. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2006.00449.x>
- Rameka, L. (2016). Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua: I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 17(4), 387–398. <http://www.doi.org/10.1177/1463949116677923>
- Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E. A. (2005). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 959–978). Sage.
- Teaiwa, T. (2017). We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 19(2), 133–136. <http://www.doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2017.1323707>
- Teaiwa, T. K. (2021). *Sweat and salt water: Selected works*. Victoria University of Wellington Press.
- Watts, A. (2011). *The wisdom of insecurity: A message for an age of anxiety*. Random House.