Facilitating Independent Learning in Tertiary Education

– new pathways to achievement

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> "Going forward, post-COVID, adaptability may be our greatest asset." (Washington Post, May 2020)

> "Even with the most innovative policies in place and the mobilization of huge public resources, the success of any skills strategy depends heavily on the motivation of individuals and their decisions to take a step forward."

Producing a graduate equipped for change

Mature graduates of work-based learning programmes may be any age and at any stage of their career; the qualities they must share are those that equip them for the environment they face, including the desire to keep learning. This book has so far revealed and highlighted a range of outcomes for the learner beyond the primary goal – the acquisition of a degree or postgraduate qualification. In their feedback, learners themselves note the development of reflective skills and practice, and the transformation of their capabilities and potential.

These are experienced learners at the end of a successful journey, 'turned on' to learning, empowered and confident and, by their own reports (Ker, 2017), motivated lifelong learners.

They are well positioned for the challenges of the post-COVID present and future – learners who will take the necessary steps forward to meet the upskilling demands of new, future-oriented workplaces. This chapter addresses the strengthening of self, of the professional identity and the 21st century career attributes gained through this process.

However, first it must also be noted that these are graduates of a future-focussed educational approach.

Future-focussed educational delivery

Educationists agree (Bolstad et al., 2012; Trilling & Fadel, 2009) that educational methods best suited for our future world must be:

- learner-centred rather than teacher-directed
- personalized rather than 'one size fits all'
- based on interactive exchange rather than direct instruction
- delivered on demand rather than time-slotted
- collaborative rather than competitive
- directed to learning for life rather than learning for 'school'

The work-based learning pathways outlined in this book follow these principles, and seek to uphold them despite operating within a more traditional tertiary environment. Bolstad et al. (2012) prioritise and clarify the key concepts of future-oriented educational practice, concepts that align with those at the heart of the Capable NZ provision:

▷ learners and learning are at the core of educational practice … it is a learner-first approach

– the model of effective facilitation that guides the educational delivery practice of work-based learning programmes demands a learner-first approach

▷ personalised learning

– the pathways described in this book are predicated on a personalised experience of independent learning for self-managing, self-directed learners; they have moved away from the 'one size fits all' model to meeting the different needs of different learners.

▷ engagement with real-world learning

This is a critical factor. Bolstad et al. (2012) propose three significant arguments for putting learners' "transformative engagement with the world" (p. 40) at the centre of future-oriented educational thinking and practice:

1. the idea that the learner ought to be transformed through their learning.
2. the idea that the world can be transformed by the learner.
3. the idea that the principles or concepts that are applied through the learner's engagement with the world can themselves be expanded and transformed through the learning process.

Bolstad et al. (2012) propose that 21st century learners need to do more than just reproduce knowledge, "they must be able to actively interact with it, to understand, critique, manipulate and create and transform it" (p. 37). These authors are not dismissive of disciplinary knowledge – they recognise that learners need to know how old knowledge systems work, and how scientists and historians go about creating new knowledge in their disciplines. They describe the skills of mediating and translating and moving between the disciplines as "a kind of systems or metalevel knowledge" (p. 36), something more important than just knowing the detail of those disciplines.

The learning pathways models outlined in this book address these ideas:

- there is considerable evidence of the transformation of self and the ability to build capability,
- contribution to practice and real-world projects allow the learner to have an impact on some aspect of their world in the process of their learning. Learners are engaged in **real time** in knowledge-generating learning opportunities that facilitate such contributions (rather than undertaking contrived learning activities that have been designed to help them learn and store knowledge for future use).
- the models and frameworks of practice generated in the learning pathways demonstrate the innovative approaches and capacity of learners to work with knowledge and expand and transform it in learning processes. A transdisciplinary methodology resonates with this approach.

As concepts of knowledge are expanded and transformed, valued learning is extended.

"Life wide" learning (OECD & ILO, 2018, p. 14) is a holistic approach which accepts all learning that has occurred for an individual, without prescription of location or processes. Vaill's (1996) "learning as a way of being" endorses this idea; it is described as connected to the whole person, as something that goes on the whole time and extends into all aspects of a person's life. It reflects the approach utilised within the Independent Learning Pathway and Professional Practice degrees.

- It is *self-directed* learning: the learner sets the goals; the learner may be the only person who knows the specific need, and who decides the content and the pace of learning
- it is *creative* learning: the learner may be exploring without knowing the outcomes
- it is learning that happens simultaneously with other processes, and is continually occurring in the midst of working and living
- it includes *learning about yourself*, becoming a more conscious or reflective learner, and noticing *how* we learn (Vaill, 1996, p. 32).

A future-focussed approach generates the skills and attributes required for the future. They include the strengthened professional identity described in the previous chapter, the developing of attributes and competencies for 21st century work, learning and career, and equipping the graduate learner with skills for the future of work.

Strengthened 21st century career attributes

New Zealand and governments worldwide are faced with transforming workplaces and workforce skills to face the challenges of a post-COVID future and rapid technological change. Many strategies and initiatives have been developed (OECD & ILO, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2018; Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2019) to meet the challenge of empowering individuals to develop new skills to meet current and future workplace demands. There is general agreement on what is required of the workforce to meet the demands of future work; in a world of rapidly changing job roles, the ability to upskill not only requires the opportunity to do so, but the willingness, motivation and confidence to understand and act on what is required. The necessary skills typically include adaptability, self-management and the aptitude for lifelong learning (World Economic Forum, 2018).

Adaptability

The ideal worker who is ready to change and adapt (Carpenter, 2005)

- can proactively seek out opportunities and
- is fully aware of their own skillsets and is able to confidently choose the areas in which they are most likely to thrive
- has confidence in their ability to undertake ongoing learning for new tasks and roles, and strong identity awareness.

Adaptability is a key meta-competency in this environment (Savickas, 2005; Hall, 2002) and encompasses many attributes. Implied in the development of adaptability are those outlined above: knowledge of self and one's own skills (including transferable skills) as a foundation for making changes, and the motivation and willingness to explore and learn in order to undertake changed roles. Self-management, self-awareness, identity awareness, career confidence and continuous learning (Carpenter, 2005, 2018) are foundation skills for these attributes and are discussed further below.

Self-management

Self-management skills are a prerequisite for undertaking independent learning pathways, and for the 21st century career. Mature learners travelling independent pathways are self-managing, self-directed learners undertaking personal journeys that require enormous perseverance and commitment. Self-management is the ability to take personal ownership of one's learning and career development; today's careers, like learning, are highly personalised requiring individual proactive pathways which lead to personalised rather than traditional views of success (Carpenter, 2010; Hall & Mirvis, 2014). Increased levels of self-management and self-direction are needed, at least in management and supervisory roles, as people are asked to take more individual responsibility, both in their workplaces and for their careers (Lester & Costley, 2010). Programmes which support people as self-managing practitioners and self-directed learners are particularly relevant for this environment. A front-loaded educational system focussed on early career pathway learning and traditional expectations no longer serves diverse working populations, who may expect to upskill at many stages of their working life.

Self-awareness

> Critical to managing one's career and integrating work with the other parts of one's life is a clear self-awareness, or a sense of identity – knowing who we truly are. There are many different ways, structured and unstructured, for coming to know oneself ... [F]or the purpose of career development work, let's assume that the best, or at least the most teachable, means for achieving this self-awareness is through a self-assessment process.
> (Harrington & Hall, 2007)

Mature graduates of an experiential and work-based learning pathway have developed strong workplace and transferable skills; what they gain in the reflective learning processes is *knowledge* of these. In the processes of self-assessment, career review and reflection, they are able to identify and articulate the skills that they have successfully carried through a range of workplaces. These go beyond the basic skills and abilities of communication, information processing, critical thinking and problem-solving to incorporate transferable skills of sustainable practice and cultural understandings. These graduates also develop a growing understanding of the transferability of skills such as management, co-ordination, project management and research. Learner portfolios and projects both explore and demonstrate curiosity, persistence and leadership skills – all defined as desirable 21st-century workplace skills (World Economic Forum, 2018).

An advanced range of proficiencies for the digital age is listed in Table 19. These add skills such as self-direction, interactive communication and higher-order thinking to what might be considered a basic list for graduates of work-based programmes.

Table 19: What does it mean to be literate and educated in today's knowledge-based digital age?

1. Today's Basics
Read critically, *write* persuasively, *think and reason* logically *Solve* complex problems Use *visual imagery* to communicate ideas *Access information* efficiently, *evaluate* it critically, *use it* competently Know, understand and appreciate other *cultures* Practice *sustainably*
2. Inventive Thinking – Intellectual Capital
Show *self-direction*, be able to chart your own course through change Be *adaptable*, able to accept the challenges of change *Manage the complexity* of globalisation and the Web by identifying the new skills required to deal with it Be *curious* about the world and how it works Undertake *ongoing learning* to contribute to your quality of life Imagine the new through *creativity* and make discoveries, inventions and learning happen through *risk taking* Demonstrate *higher-order thinking* – in creativity, decision-making, problem solving and *reasoning* – the ability to plan, design and evaluate solutions, often using technological tools
3. Interactive Communication – Social and Personal Skills
Teaming and collaboration describes the ability of specialists to accomplish complex tasks together, and use information technology for joint projects Have a grasp of *ethics* and *social responsibility* to understand the dilemmas produced by emerging complex technologies Undertake *high-quality interactive communications* through a variety of media, while mastering the new dimensions that arise through the use of information technology.
4. Quality – State-of-the-art Results
Using careful *planning*, manage and anticipate contingencies, and have the flexibility and creativity to deal with unexpected outcomes.

Adapted from a Report of the 21st Century Workforce Commission National Alliance of Business, USA, developed by the Metiri Group in partnership with NCREL, enGauge.

Lists such as these become useful self-assessment and discussion tools for learners to heighten their awareness of areas of strengths and those needing development. They invariably represent useful skill mixes, such as creativity, problem solving and critical thinking, and managing stress and change. Such skill mixes are of growing importance in the transition to a digital world of work (OECD, 2017).

In the learning pathways they undertake, learners must examine their own career assets. The positive effects of self-assessment and active reflection on skills and attributes are well attested in a range of literature, including the area of career management:

> The way you see yourself and perceive your work experiences makes a huge difference to your self-belief, which impacts on your career confidence, which impacts on your career progress. ... there is a positive cycle at work – the ability to articulate your skills gives feedback to yourself that you have those skills; career confident people know exactly what they have to offer because they identify what they are learning as they learn it. The process of self-assessment and reflection brings clarity and self-knowledge about your real assets and abilities, and ongoing career confidence (Carpenter, 2010, p. 106).

Identity Awareness

Longer working lifespans and an accelerating rate of change makes an understanding of self even more critical. As Harari (2018) notes, a person's career or work identity is influenced by many roles and relationships. "'Who am I?' will be a more urgent and complicated question than before." While a stable career identity in the 21st century is not possible, the self that has a strong inner compass (Hall, 2002) *is* able to withstand and navigate change, including changes of career, without losing balance. The individual's awareness of self is the key currency in navigating complexity and ambiguity (Hall & Mirvis, 2014), and constant pressure to adapt and changing work expectations. A strengthened sense of self is apparent in learners' reports (Ker, 2017); these learners have examined their career identity and appreciate the personal change and growth that has occurred.

In contrast to a career identity that is able to expand and grow, a fixed identity (Carpenter, 2010), particularly in older workers, is a danger, as it rejects the constant re-invention which is necessary, even though this is sometimes demanding and difficult. The tools for personal re-invention include opportunity knowledge and self-knowledge to make the best choices. Other tools such as reflection and self-assessment, learned later in life through newly earned and confidence-building qualifications, are invigorating for older learners and may provide a fresh view of their future prospects. Another tool is learning; according to Ibarra (2004), we "rethink ourselves by gradually exposing ourselves to new worlds, new relationships, new roles." Exposing oneself to a world of new learning is a powerful tool for identity growth.

Independent Learning Pathway learners confidently integrate 'the new me' into their understanding of self – they can identify very clearly the development of this process. The 'old me' and 'new me' constructs are helpful in examining the building of a career identity – they make explicit the capacity to change with new knowledge and skills.

Becoming a learner for life

Lifelong learning asks individuals to learn continuously over their life span (OECD, 2018) in a world where the nature of work is changing rapidly and continuously. As a concept, it has evolved from consistent learning for workplace demands to include the concepts of

'life wide' – involving learning in institutions, communities, workplaces and families, and

'life deep' – which assumes an active assimilation and mobilisation of knowledge (Bélanger, 2016, as cited in OECD and ILO 2018, p. 14). Becoming a lifelong learner is an essential attribute in contemporary careers. If workers are going to adopt new patterns of working, *continuous* learning is a behaviour which must underpin that path. Continuous learners demonstrate "strong and ongoing awareness of the need for and the value of learning" (London & Mone, 1999, p. 119); they "search for new information about themselves and emerging workplace requirements so that they are ready to fill learning gaps" (p. 120). The learner for life must be a self-managing learner, able and motivated to search for the learning that fits their current needs. Those who undertake the Capable NZ pathways have learned how to learn from experience and from a

variety of daily activities; they have a heightened awareness of the need for and value of lifelong learning, and have learned through personalised, independent learning how to manage this themselves.

Capable NZ adds further requirements to the essential repertoire of the 21st century learner. All programme curricula encourage learners to increase their understanding of both sustainable practice and their obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Preparing learners to be sustainable practitioners has been the goal of a journey which began for Otago Polytechnic in 2011 with a map and a set of guiding principles designed and detailed in *The Green Graduate* (Mann, 2011). For work-based learners in Capable NZ, the guidelines are set out in curricula and graduate profiles, challenging all learners to reflect, research and understand the skills, values and behaviours that would make a difference to their personal practice and workplaces, and assist them to contribute to a sustainable future (Mann, 2011).

Similarly with their understanding of their obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi: all learners are expected to consider Māori knowledge, practice and cultural perspectives as they relate to their chosen qualification, and to reflect on both their own practice and that of their workplace in relation to these perspectives.

What else should learners learn?

Brodie and Irving (2007) propose a stronger range of expectations of learners and facilitators – including that in relation to work-based learning, learners should *know* what they are learning.

Table 20: What learners should know and their learning advisors facilitate:

- What learning is (how learning implies change) – *learning theory*
- How to do it best (style, approach, fitness for purpose) – *learning theory*
- When they have learnt (description of and reflection on the learning) – *critical reflection*
- By what is their learning informed (its validity, how it stands up to scrutiny against outside evidence)? – *critical reflection*
- What they need to learn (future learning) – *critical reflection*
- What they have learnt, know more about, become more able at doing (analysis and evaluation of the learning) – *capability.*

(Brodie & Irving, 2007, p. 14)

Much of the awareness and meta-learning described above takes place in these pathways programmes, and is particularly emphasised in the professional practice programmes. Learners write their own personal learning outcomes in the learning agreements associated with these qualifications and evaluate their capability at the completion of the process.

Making transparent the relationship between the learning processes and career management skills or attributes *would* be an innovative process: it may also provide clarity and understanding for the learner. It may help answer questions such as, *What are the benefits of doing it this way? What is the purpose of this process?* and provide a link to and a framework for career thinking.

Table 21: Career attributes and how they are discovered and developed in the learning processes

Career attributes	Defined as	Developed or discovered in the learning process
Adaptability Savickas (1997) Hall (1996, 2002)	The ability to change to fit new and changed circumstances; readiness to cope with new roles or tasks; resources to cope with change and trauma The ability to develop or update behaviours to effectively respond to changing environments A metacompetency which involves • Ability and willingness to change • Learning how to learn • Continuous learning • Self-knowledge	Reviews of learning in professional practice qualifications and career reviews in learning tasks (ILP) identify examples of previous adaptability Self-assessment processes bring resources utilised in coping with change to the surface Evidenced in reviews of learning, self- assessment processes, graduate reports Confidence reported and desire shown for more ambitious next steps
Self-management Arthur (2017) Hall & Mirvis, (2014)	Flexibility Seeking opportunities for progress	Undertaking independent self-managed learning
Self-awareness Harrington and Hall (2007)	Ability to reflect on assets and skills required, gain self-knowledge through self-assessment	Reflection, reviews of skills, knowledge and learning, self-assessment and evaluation of skills
Identity Awareness Carpenter (2005), Hall and Mirvis (2014)	Knowledge of the goals and values that have meaning for the individual Clear sense of self 'The internal compass'	The 'new me' and the 'old me' Strengthened professional identity Revised models of practice New professional practice, leadership aspirations and practice
Career Confidence Savickas (2005)	Anticipation of success in executing career actions, solving problems Feelings of self-efficacy	Awareness of knowledge, skills and competencies, transferable skills, graduate competencies, successful completion Supportive relationship through personalised facilitation practice

Continuous learning London and Mone (1999) **Lifelong learner** OECD and ILO (2018)	Thinks about learning from daily activities and applies knowledge later Develops skills in anticipation of job or career opportunity Searches for new information about themselves and new performance requirements so they can identify gaps Self-managing Able to search for, respond to learning that fits their current needs	Previous learning activities Engagement in study Learning skills investigation, reflection Reflection and self-assessment processes Self-directed learning qualification New learning and projects work designed to fit current needs
Career Resilience Arthur, 2017 Borgen, Amundson and Reuter (2004) London, 1998	Multiple factors contribute, including sense of agency, control, flexibility and creativity, sense of purpose, sense of hope and optimism, courage and determination, perseverance	'Portfolio thinking' – undertaking a process of self-reflection focussed on attributes and strengths Supportive relationship of personalised facilitation practice

The linking of career management attributes to learning processes reinforces the connection between learning and career, a connection that has been in the forefront of our learners' minds since their first inquiry regarding a qualification. Making this connection transparent adds to their understanding of their transferable skills and how they are being developed.

There is value in meta-learning – the opportunity for learners to learn about their learning. Raising learner awareness of the implications of their pathways may lead to a broader sense of the value of what they have achieved beyond the qualification.

A seamless tapestry

Facilitation processes that provide these opportunities for learner awareness further develop the skills of learning how to learn, a tool for the continuous and lifelong learner. Here it is worth repeating an employer's comment from Chapter 6 to emphasise the connection and integration of work-based learning with work and career:

> "Finally, the huge advantage of work-based learning is that it provides much of our workforce the opportunity for second chance learning, where they may not have achieved success in secondary education. Work has become the classroom in which skills acquisition, competency development and personal and professional learning are woven together in a seamless tapestry of long-term career development."

The metaphor of a seamless tapestry of work, learning and career development is an apt one. Work and learning are the processes we have described in detail in this book; their connection with career attributes and development is explicitly stated in this chapter and noted by learners themselves in previous chapters.

The goals are the same – the development of the individual learner to discover their best learning potential and achieve their vision of their best professional self. The inclusion of skills such as critical thinking and formal writing for academic achievement encourages the mature learner, who may already have a responsible role, toward leadership thinking. The vision of achievement is the same. Even while crossing the stage and wearing the celebratory garlands of graduation, learners are making the move to leadership roles and practice. In their kete, as many tell us, is a new sense of self, newfound career confidence, learning and leadership motivation, and proven academic abilities. They take these attributes into their workplaces as future-ready graduates.

The concepts outlined here may expand the model of facilitation practice in the future. Facilitators of independent learning are privileged to work one-to-one with learners; they hear personal dreams and visions of success, as well as the difficulties and obstacles that obstruct the learner's progress. They hear the celebrations of achievement and the questions asking *What next?* Facilitation practice (and this includes all the advisory roles) for independent learning in a work-based learning programme must meet requirements for learner achievement, programme complexity and academic quality. It also serves to meet the demands of the 21st century context through fostering skills for learning to learn, self-management and adaptability.

Conclusion

Capable NZ can be proud of their achievements with the learners who have completed the pathways outlined in this book. Facilitators operate in time-bound systems, attempting to meet policy and administrative targets which do not respond to the on-demand approach and the 'messy lives' of the mature learners who juggle learning progress, families and often full-time work with all the challenges of the adult learning world. We offer a different process through the pathways described in this book; pathways which are personalised and receptive to those needs of our learners. We observe the resilience and self-management displayed by mature learners as they persevere with learning; our best practice, which we must always strive to achieve, offers learners the chance to produce their best work. This book is offered to inspire and contribute to best practice.

There is much more that could be written on our work as our experience with these pathways develops and further research becomes available. When given access to the life-wide experience of mature learners, and having participated in their reflective process, we and our colleagues have observed close-up the difference that tertiary study makes to people's lives, futures and self-belief. We have documented here the pathways and processes that provide the opportunity for entry, achievement and tertiary success.

Learner Comment

"My journey with Capable NZ started in 2017. Before the journey, I treated my experiences – both professional and personal – as unrelated and random in nature. Through a process of critical reflection undertaken in partnership with my amazing facilitator I was able to clearly see that all of my career choices reflected a commitment to Māori development and within that context I had developed and demonstrated legitimate leadership skills and frameworks. With real clarity, I now see and value the distinct nature of my contribution to Te Ao Māori. The Capable NZ journey is a commitment to understand oneself. It is one that is challenging and complex but for those willing to do the work, it is a journey of self-discovery like no another.

> Whāia te iti kahurangi, ki te tūohu koe me he maunga teitei
> Aim for the highest cloud, so that if you miss it, you will hit a lofty mountain".

Audrey Trotman (strategy, planning & projects, Māori Development)