

# Wellbeing and resilience in Aotearoa - act now!

## Dr Lucy Hone - uLearn20

Dr Lucy Hone's keynote at #ulearn20, *What do we need to learn for lifelong success?* was all about reimagining success, learning and tomorrow.

*In this blog I share some insights from Lucy's kōrero. As director of [New Zealand Institute of Wellbeing & Resilience](#) Lucy cited evidence of the high levels of distress among our tamariki and rangatahi, and urged us to consider success more broadly. She shared that allowing ākonga to identify, use and develop their strengths requires us to think and act differently. We learnt how an appreciative inquiry approach can build lifelong confidence, engagement, resilience and wellbeing.*

What is the purpose of education in the 21st century? Lucy began by making reference to the four pillars of 21st century education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together (Delors, 1996).

Lucy's knowledge, research, and lived experiences combined in a powerful and practical way that connected with each of us at #ulearn20 in our different learning contexts. She referred to her presentation as lessons from science and living. Lucy was brave and inspiring as she shared how her studies into the science of resilience and her own personal story of tragedy and loss motivates her each day to educate and inspire others about the concept of flourishing. Learning to be and learning to

live together are two of the UN's key objectives for education that Lucy feels we now urgently need to turn our attention to.

## Question and provocations

Lucy posed several reflective questions and provocations throughout the keynote, which are helpful for us to contemplate in our own contexts.

- What do we need to live productive, contributing, satisfying lives?
- What does it mean to live a flourishing life?
- What skills, capacities, friendships and cultural connections enable us to flourish?
- How do we live a life worth living and help others do the same?
- We are not serving our ākonga well, how can we claim to be?
- How can we help – in ways that matter to them?
- What questions are you asking your akonga?

Lucy's challenge to us all to act now and with urgency to make a change to support our young people in Aotearoa comes off the back of some alarming stats about the staggering increase in rates of depression in our youth. The levels of psychological distress, and most common issues that young people report experiencing, include: stress, anxiety, a lack of energy or motivation, depression, and feelings of hopelessness/worthlessness. The NZ Union of Student Associations conducted a study using the Kessler 10 scale to measure and evaluate our current state across 1762 university students in Aotearoa. Lucy's response is that we need to change what we are doing.

*"We need to better equip our young people better to cope with today's volatile, ambiguous uncertain times"*

# Useful models and approaches to support practice and systems level change

*“Human systems move in the direction of their inquiry, so watch what it is you focus on” (David Cooperrider)*

Lucy recommends taking an appreciative and strengths-based inquiry approach to the exploration and teaching of resilience and wellbeing. She referenced Jackie Kelm’s (2005) model describing it as simple yet powerful.

## **Appreciate**

Find what's best (notice what's good)

Feeling good

## **Inquire**

Think about what could be (hope and dream)

Getting clear

## **Act**

Take small steps forward

Taking action

Jackie Kelm (2005) @appreciativeliving.com

*Appreciative inquiry does not ask us to ignore the reality of what is going on, nor wait until tomorrow gets better. It invites us to appreciate and inquire even in times of darkness. The underlying principles of AI provide us with a pathway forward, inviting us to build upon strengths, imagine what could be, and take small steps to make that happen. (Lucy Hone)*

We can each relate this to our own learning contexts when reviewing our practices, identifying challenges, determining our priorities, developing goals and seeking feedback from others. To inquire ‘even in times of darkness’ stood out to me – this is what it means to be bold and brave. It’s a call to action that challenges educators to step into the arena, to seek to know more and to deeply understand the current

context. This inquiry approach is an immediate action we can take and is a great place to start.

## Strategies and implementation

We heard a range of useful and relevant everyday strategies from Lucy that we can implement into our practices to build resilience and support wellbeing. These ideas are based on applying the five principles of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). They too can also be implemented instantly. Take a moment to consider the practical strategies and ideas to introduce into your practice and leadership. They are applicable for an individual and as a process model for creating sustained positive systems change across your team/s and community.

## Underlying principles of appreciative inquiry

### Principles of AI

Constructionist

Simultaneity

Poetic

Anticipatory

### Strategies and ideas

Words make worlds

Questions create change

Focus on strengths

Foster hopes

Positive

Value positive emotions

## A strengths-based approach - characteristics and emotions

*Positive affect (emotions) and inquiry are the most effective way to generate and sustain positive change. (Lucy Hone)*



A strengths-based approach focuses on amplifying strengths rather than reducing weaknesses. This is an important consideration when developing and implementing learning tools for assessment. One of Lucy's suggestions is to invite learners to undertake a character strengths survey such as the free scientific, free [VIA survey](#) or you could develop your own linked to your local curriculum to highlight the values, hope and aspirations at your place of learning. What a great way to get to know our ākonga and for them to get to know themselves – remember, what we focus on grows and builds active awareness.

Another way to socialise positive emotions and focus on understanding strengths is to create games and cards. There are some great resources and ideas already out there – check out [All Right?](#) and [Sparklers](#) for Chitter Chatter cards, Downtime Dice

or Te Waioatanga – the Kapa Haka poster set. Have some fun with gamification – design your own kete of tools and use the words and meanings that resonate with your learning environment and culture.

## Wellbeing and resilience - man, rights and agency

*Kia tū rangatira ai - To stand like the chief we were born to be*

Lucy shared this whakatauki from Melinda Webber's (2019) research 'learning, succeeding and thriving in Aotearoa'. It speaks to me of three really important concepts: mana, rights and agency. How can we honour and foster each of these to support our learners to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy? Lucy's kōrero is relevant to us all across the education system and society – parents, educators, leaders alike. While listening to Lucy I made several connections to my own learning context. When Lucy talked about adopting a strengths-based mindset, the importance of holistic wellbeing and applying mana enhancing practices, these concepts resonated for me with the kaupapa of Te Whāriki; the early years curriculum and the newly released resource He Māpuna te Tamaiti. I also saw a connection to learning dispositions and the key competencies of The New Zealand Curriculum – how powerful for us to develop a shared understanding and language no matter the context. We equally have an important role across the education sector to support social and emotional development, so let's keep talking.

*We have to work together to change the dialogue*

## An exercise designed to promote hope - best possible future self

Hope is a powerful agency of change. Lucy shared a scientifically validated intervention strategy tested by psychological researcher Lyubomirsky (2004) that we

can use to promote hope and future goal setting. It is designed to foster the belief in a positive future, that you can alter the future and take steps to get where/what you want. Have a go with your learners and encourage them to write their aspirations and hopes for the future, then store them in a sealed bottle. This, says Lucy, provides them with a permanent artefact of their future hopes that they can nurture over time. Lucy says ...

Cultivating hope in this way works because it provides us with an opportunity to learn more about ourselves; it highlights what's important and therefore helps us structure our priorities, it can help you move from the realm of foggy ideas and fragmented thoughts to concrete, real possibilities. Keep asking each other about your plans and dreams, what do you want to be when you grow up? How do you want to be?

## Our collective hopes and dreams for children and young people in Aotearoa

It is exciting that we are bringing wellbeing and hauora into focus and I am hopeful for the future. When I think about flourishing I can see the synergies between Lucy's kōrero and the across-government vision of the [Child, Youth and Wellbeing Strategy](#) to make Aotearoa the best place in the world for children and young people. A key takeaway for me from Lucy's keynote is not only the need to do more, but to be deliberate and intentional – we need to prioritise this when designing curriculum. We need to intentionally focus on strengths, share positive emotions, foster hope and awe in our learning settings, ask questions as opportunities for change, and be careful with our language – 'words create worlds'. There are lots of practical ways we can do this – redesign our learning environments, do a stocktake on key words and messages displayed, create space for imagination and what if/possibility thinking, develop a series of cards with images and words of positive emotions and strengths

that provoke conversation and ask questions. We need to inquire into, and invite, discussion around strengths, values, hopes and emotions.

**Last words from Lucy:**

*What's one change you can make to redefine success for our rangatahi?*



Dr Lucy Hone is a director of the New Zealand Institute of Wellbeing and Resilience, adjunct senior fellow at the University of Canterbury, a published academic researcher, best-selling author, and blogger for Psychology Today. She has a Masters in Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania and a PhD in wellbeing science/public health from AUT. She is the conference convenor of Wellbeing in Education, he akonga aumangea, he akonga tu maia, and the only representative of the International Positive Education Network (IPEN) in Aotearoa. Her research has been published in a number of psychology and wellbeing journals within Aotearoa and worldwide. The loss of her 12-year old daughter, Abi, in a tragic road accident in 2014, resulted in the best-selling non-fiction title Resilient Grieving (Allen & Unwin, 2016).

# Resources and further reading

- VIA Character Strengths Survey
- Sparklers
- All Right?
- Child, Youth and Wellbeing Strategy

## Author

### **Kathryn O'Connell-Sutherland**

Kathryn O'Connell-Sutherland was Manager Early Years at CORE Education and was project lead supporting the implementation of the updated Te Whāriki (2017). Kathryn's strength is building leadership capability. Throughout her career she has been a strong advocate for the early years. Kathryn is committed to authentic culturally responsive practices, personalised learning pathways, and thoughtful relational leadership.

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