

# Surviving Education's Learning Pit

## Three Practical Ways to Revitalise Your Viewpoint

Being in education has never been tougher. No matter how hard you work, it never seems to be enough. Increasing numbers of students are turning up at school with complex needs and there isn't enough money or adults to go around. There are lots of people talking about what education needs to look like in the future and we are starting to see agreement about the critical capabilities our students will need if they are to be successful post-school.

But the problem is that even though there is a growing agreement about what education in the future might look like, the world is grappling with how to get from where we are now to where we need to be. This is what I call Education's Learning Pit, and we are down in the bottom and unsure about what the rungs of the ladder look like that will help us climb out.

Meanwhile, educating our tamariki continues, and educators need strategies in order to survive and thrive as education starts to haul itself out of the pit.

Below are some ways you might do this either on your own, as a team or even as a whole staff.

### 1. Remember the Why

We all went into education for a reason. For most of us, it was to make a difference in the lives of students. When things get tough, it can be really helpful to remind yourself about why you do what you do. One way to do this is to write yourself a "Why List," and keep it handy so you can read it out loud to yourself whenever you are feeling overwhelmed.

#### For example here is my 'Why.' List:

I am an educator because...

- I believe education is the most powerful tool to change the world for the good.
- I want every child to experience success in life.
- I know that a great teacher can make a difference that lasts a lifetime. I want to be that teacher.
- I'd rather be remembered for making a difference than for making lots of money. I am addicted to that feeling you have when someone has an 'ah ha' moment as a result of something you said or did.

#### I am an education leader because:

- I want to support other educators and leaders to be the best they can be.
- I want to grow my influence beyond just one class or one school a year.
- I believe that great teachers are created through leadership that offers support and challenge and I have experience to offer in this space.
- I have the capabilities to 'stand in the gap' for those who need me to, especially those most at risk of not succeeding.
- Once you've written your list share it with others. That way you help inform and affirm each other around your 'why'.



## 2. Bringing Your 'Why' to Life

Being clear about 'why' you are an educator is a great first step toward thriving during this time of extraordinary education change. The next step is to unpack what your 'whys' look like.

A good way to do this is take the idea from Design Thinking called User Stories. But because we are writing them about ourselves, let's change their name to Me Stories.

Like a User Story, a "Me Story" will have three parts to it. These are:

As a...  
I want...  
So that...

### Some of my 'Me Stories' look like

**As an** educator

**I want** to make a difference in the lives of children

**So that** their life choices are not limited by their postal code.

**As an** educator

**I want** to make learning relevant and engaging

**So that** my students regularly have 'ah ha' moments.

**As an** education leader

**I want** to help those who find it challenging to help themselves

**So that** their lives will become more abundant and successful

**As an** education leader

**I want** other leaders to learn from my experiences.

**So that** as a profession we can learn from each other and thus make faster progress together

You team or school staff could also write 'Me Stories.'

Once you have written your 'Me Stories' put them in a place which will catch your eye. They can then serve as a constant reminder and reinforcer of what you want and why you want it.

### 3. Living Your ‘Why’

Using your ‘Me Stories’ to develop personal goals will give you momentum to live your ‘Why.’ A great way to do this is to take one or more of your ‘Me Stories’ and create a ‘To do’ list.

Remembering that age-old proverb: “If you want to go fast, travel alone. If you want to go far, travel with others.” You might want to enlist some colleagues to come on this journey with you. Schedule some regular check-ins so that you can check up on progress with the, “To Do” lists. These could be daily if the goals are quick wins or for goals that are going to take longer to achieve you might check in once or twice a week.

You will be more successful if you have a way to track your progress. Using an approach such as a kanban board can be useful. I like Trello (<https://trello.com>), an online kanban and its basic model is free. You set up columns such as ‘Me Story’ ‘To Do,’ ‘Doing’ and ‘Done’.


**Here is one I set up to help me live one of my ‘Me Stories.’**

Me Story	To Do	Doing	Done
As an educator, I want to make learning relevant and engaging, so that my students regularly have ‘ah ha’ moments.	Summarise the stars and wishes on a chart	Talk with students one-on-one and get them to give me their three stars and three wishes for learning in our classroom.	Schedule conversations with students to find out what they like and dislike about the learning in our classroom.
+Add another card	Working with groups of students summarise the stars and wishes.	+Add another card	+Add another card
	Take a wish and as a class brainstorm all the possible ways we could make the wish come true.		
	+Add another card		

A tip is to break down your ‘To Do’s’ into small, achievable tasks so you can quickly see progress as you move them from one column. You can also create a kanban on a whiteboard and write your actions on post-it notes that you move from column to column. A whiteboard kanban is a great way to achieve team goals.

I believe that education will slowly pull itself out of its current learning pit. I don’t think anyone knows exactly what its future state will look like nor how we will get there. What I do know is that if schools do not evolve then they will be disrupted from forces outside the current system.

Change is hard and we are living in a time of accelerating change. The good news is that if we make the most of the opportunities technology is providing we can all have abundant lives. There has never been a time in history when we have had greater potential to solve global challenges such as poverty and disease.

In the meantime, take time to look after yourselves and those around you. Anchor yourselves to the reason why you became an educator in the first place. Kia kaha. 

*Anchor yourselves to the reason why you became an educator in the first place.*



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