

THE FEROCIOUS WARMTH

Elements



Expansive

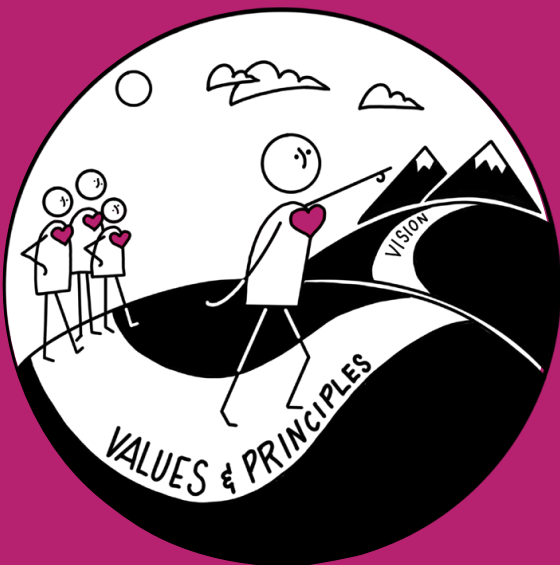
Tracey Ezard



Expansive



Connected



Courageous



Authentic

FEROCIOUS WARMTH

I want to share with you the elation I feel when I discover a Ferocious Warmth leader. I can spot them from a hundred paces. I can feel their passion through the newsletters and videos on the school websites before I even meet them. I can hear it in the language they use as we speak via email, over the phone or virtually. I experience the connection they have with their students and staff as we walk through the school. I hear the belief and love they hold for those they serve expressed in their words. I can feel the psychological safety in place for people to raise and discuss ideas, differences of opinion and share personal challenges with them. I feel the sense of trust, fun and hard work that goes on in the halls and rooms of the school. I see them reflect with deep self-awareness on their own growth. I see the transformation they are leading within their community, how they lift expectations and build momentum to achieve the results and changes required. I hear the reputation they have within their collegiate networks. I see people walk away from working with these leaders just that little bit taller, ready to make their own ripples on the world.

Let's look at the two sides of Ferocious Warmth. Great leadership never uses them in isolation. The strengths come from both sides.

FEROCIOUS

There is a fierce congruence in this side of Ferocious Warmth leaders. They are focussed on their clear purpose of providing high-quality education for their

students and courageous in making hard decisions along the way. They are strong advocates for their students, staff and their community. Most importantly, they challenge assumptions on how we 'do' education, whether it be shifting the structures, innovating practice or lifting out of complacency or mediocrity. They are fierce in their belief that education, as traditionally provided, needs to evolve. In some circumstances, these leaders are leading system revolution not just evolution.

WARMTH

Ferocious Warmth leaders work with compassion as a base for all relationships, regardless of who. From the student in the yard to the teacher in the classroom to the parent in the corridor, people feel connected to these leaders. People know they have their back in good times and in challenging circumstances. These leaders genuinely love people. I never hear them speaking anything other than constructive and positive comments about their staff, students and parents. Even those causing them stress and taking a lot of energy are treated with empathy and a real belief in the growth and positive intent of that person. Don't get me wrong, the leader still needs to debrief and sometimes gets blindsided by the behaviours of others. But the way they handle it comes from a position of compassion, not anger.

When we're at our best, ferocity and warmth, courage and vulnerability, results and relationships, head and hearts, need not be polarities, but nest inside each other. They support each other in every decision we make. If we are focussed on strategically achieving our purpose, and constantly building our emotional intelligence to understand how to best serve our people, they go together hand in glove. Our challenge is staying in balance when the going gets tough and ensuring the blend is right.

THE ELEMENTS OF FEROCIOUS WARMTH

Through both my work with Ferocious Warmth leaders and interviews during the writing of this book, four clear elements stand out from these great human beings. Though explored more deeply in the chapters beyond, through some Ferocious Warmth exemplars, the essence of these elements is:

EXPANSIVE

I am open to evolving my thinking, to disruption and innovation. I love learning with others and co-creating future pathways. I challenge my own thinking and other's. I see the world with optimism and possibility. I build collaborative learning cultures with others. I have high levels of self-awareness.

CONNECTED

I have a love for others. I believe and love the work I do and the people I work with. I approach people, no matter their circumstances, with a belief in their positive intent and inherent worth. I believe all people deserve kindness, compassion and empathy.

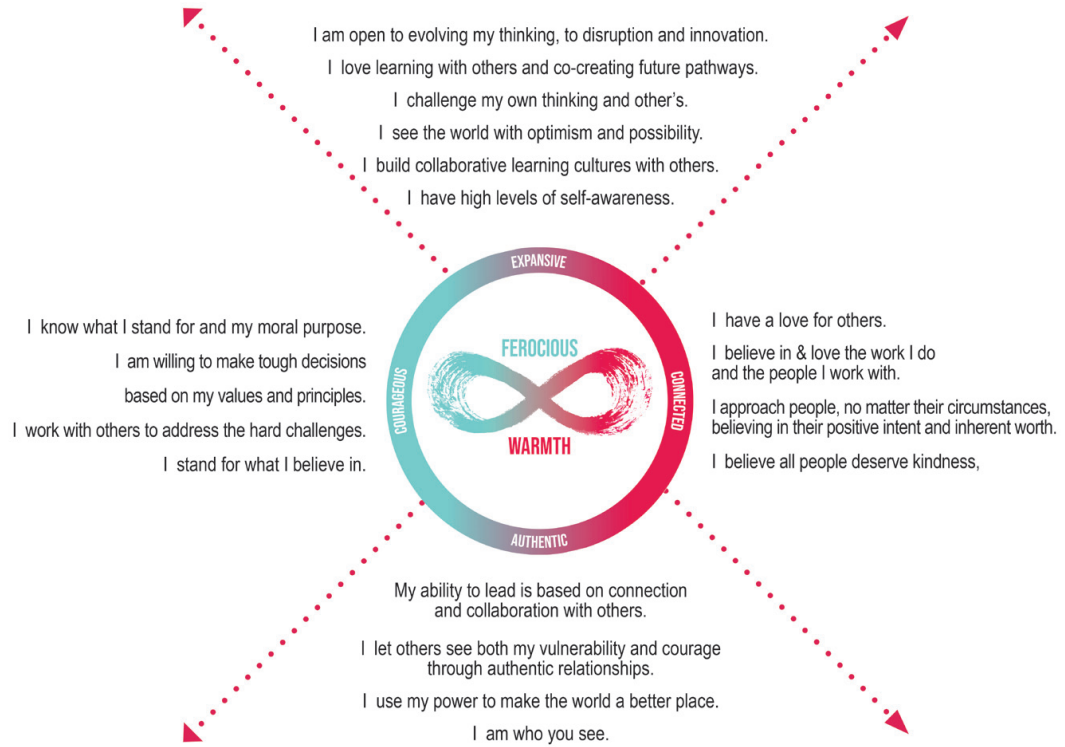
COURAGEOUS

I know what I stand for and my moral purpose. I am willing to make tough decisions based on my values and principles. I work with my people to address the hard challenges. I stand for what I believe in.

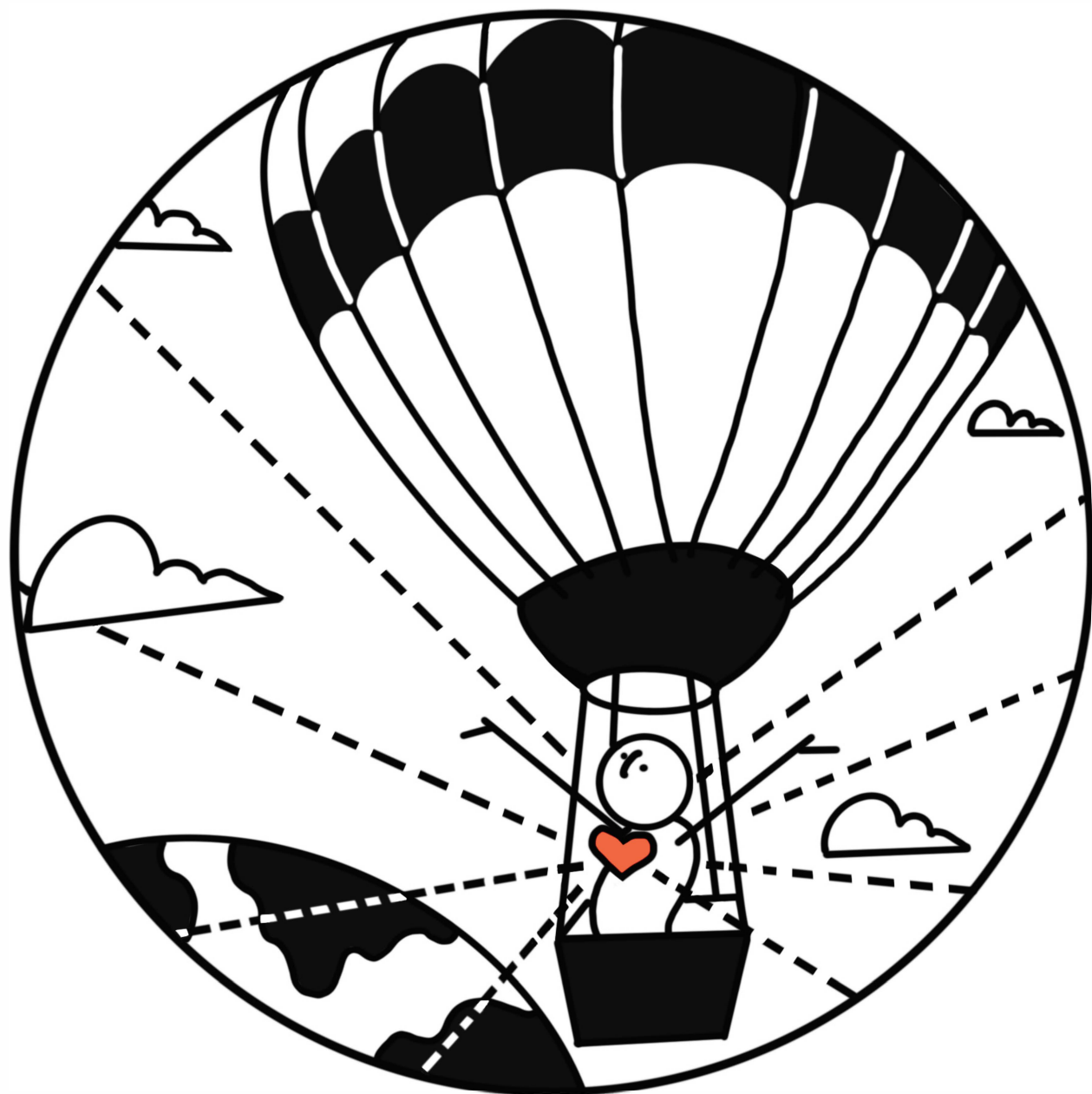
AUTHENTIC

My ability to lead is based on connection and collaboration with others. I let others see both my vulnerability and courage through authentic relationships. I use power to make the world a better place. I am who you see.

Figure 5. Ferocious Warmth Elements



expansive



chapter one

EXPANDING SELF

'We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we are curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.'

Walt Disney⁴⁷

Have you ever felt stuck in a rut with your wheels spinning in mud? Doing the same thing the same way, day in day out, not moving forward? Fortunately, humans are designed to evolve, so sooner or later we choose to step out of the rut, or the universe conspires to do it for us! The context becomes unworkable, or our environment deteriorates to a state where we say 'enough is enough'. We seek to expand the way we work in the world. Expansion is the continual growth beyond our current mental and emotional state. For many it also includes spiritual growth. Being expansive is a way of being for Ferocious Warmth leaders. It moves us from 'I' to a 'we'.

Do we ever stop learning? Sometimes we might need a few failed attempts before we learn the lessons, but we're adaptive and responsive to what works and what doesn't work. The best entrepreneurs in the world see failure as opportunity. Learning our craft expands our toolkit, our approaches and our beliefs. Whether in the classroom or leading the school, the learning never stops. When my second child was just about to be born, I was sharing with a friend that I wondered if you love the next child as much as the first? As the father of two beautiful babies, my friend said, 'Having a second child simply expands your love. Love continues to grow and expands as your family grows.' Learning is the same. There is no end.

BE EXPANSIVE IN YOUR LEARNING

What are you reading and listening to at the moment to expand your world view and your mental models? What podcasts pique your interest and help you think in different ways? There is no better time to be pushing into expansion of thinking. The podcast world is exploding with entrepreneurial thinking in business, life and education. Blogs and books abound with thinking that shakes the way we see the world, in a good way. In some schools there seems to be a famine when it comes to reading articles or books that expand thinking. It is seen as something 'extra' rather than a professional responsibility. As leaders the best way to shift this is to model it. A colleague I've worked with for many years is head of campus in a large school and runs a journal club that no one is expected to come to, yet all are invited. Jane flags the articles or chapters coming up then simply turns up and opens the space. The momentum of this 'no pressure' approach has normalised discussion and expansion. It is now an accepted item on their professional development menu.

ARE YOU CURIOUS ABOUT YOURSELF?

I run a group mentoring program for Ferocious Warmth Women in Leadership. Eight professional senior leaders come together regularly to reflect on themselves as professionals, but first and foremost as human beings. Their reasons for joining this group are varied, but the most common one is to take the time to reflect on themselves – what they believe and what they stand for. The other is the opportunity to expand (that word again!) their network and learn from people outside their orbit. All of them do a huge amount of professional development for their craft of school leadership, but this program is about the being of leadership. This work takes courage and a willingness to explore those things about yourself that might be hidden, but it is fulfilling and rewarding. This deep dive requires us to peel our layers like an onion and examine the thinking and feeling beneath. We look at the unmet needs and lack of connection that might be separating us from our purpose and our values. We explore the triggers that move us out of balance and from our strengths to our shadow. We explore these things through the four elements in this part of the book. Are you up for it? It's the journey to become the calm, balanced Ferocious Warmth leader.

SELF-AWARENESS

The first skill of emotional intelligence is emotional self-awareness. The first step in the Ferocious Warmth journey is understanding what we feel. We hold so much of our past history in our current behaviours. As we have explored previously, many of our behaviours are unconscious. They are responses not so much to the situation in front of us, but the trigger it sets off and attaches to a situation from the past. How many times have you responded to a small situation with a large over-reaction? Emotional literacy is the first step in this journey. Did I stop to acknowledge how I was feeling and what might have triggered this reaction? What pushed me out of being firmly balanced in the moment? Was it the call of the past or the fear of the future? What can I learn about myself from what just happened? The difference between this last question and one around what the other person should have done can be life-changing. Reflecting on our strengths and shadows and re-calibrating when we're out of balance is self-expansion at work.

NOTICE WHEN YOU SQUIRM

I always know when I'm in for a big dose of learning, something that really expands my thinking and will push me further. I get uncomfortable. It makes me squirm a bit as I see how it fits my own thinking and feeling about the world, my own mental models. Sometimes it's a simple question from a coach or colleague that stops me in my tracks and I sit there with my brain exploding. I'm a bit of a sucker for this type of learning now as I know this is where expansion happens.

Some reading this book may squirm or push away as we discuss the emotional side of leadership. Perhaps they don't see much value in this as getting things done. 'Seriously, life would be easier if everyone just drank a cup of concrete and got on with things. I don't have time for this stuff'.

My experience is that leaders drawn more to 'warm' seek out leadership development that helps them build more conviction and 'ferocity' because they are already very reflective and seek to build their less-developed side. They tend to have high levels of self-awareness and understand the impact they're having in the negative. They recognise their tendency to go too far to the relationship side and want to learn how to stay steady when the need for hard decisions or a stronger stance is in front of them. I find people with very developed ferocious or results-

oriented sides and not so developed in emotional intelligence skills resist this type of work for longer. It gets labelled ‘fluffy’ and not as important. I was surprised when I first started doing leadership work in corporate settings to find that they labelled professional learning in skills such as leading difficult conversations, emotional intelligence and culture as ‘soft’ skills. Yet they are the hardest to do.

This paradox tells us something about the bias set up in the world of work about emotions and leadership. The concepts of belonging, love, compassion and self-care can scare some people off and be seen as non-essential. Yet these are the essence of leadership. This is not a judgement on people drawn more naturally to the logical lens. This is my reflection on observations over many years working in this space. I find people drawn to connection and emotions step towards it and are passionate about it, those drawn to task, measurement, structure and certainty find it more of a challenge.

Of course, the shift to the balance of Ferocious Warmth is learnable from both preferences. We can learn emotional intelligence and the ability to build more logically based thinking. Ferocious Warmth is also not about leaving behind our essence. This work brings them together. It’s important to build our skills in managing the emotional side of ourselves and the people we lead, whether students, staff or community. So is stepping into the tough decisions required to lift education to a new level.

BE THE LEADER — THE OPEN EXPANSION OF SELF

Professor Michael Fullan, global educational leader in collaborative cultures for deep learning, found in his team’s research that leaders who also lead the team learning get better results. In his words, ‘We have found that leaders must lead and learn in equal measure.’⁴⁸ He coined the term ‘lead learner’, which is another one of his ‘sticky messages’, built on from the findings of Professor Viviane Robinson that effective school leadership not only promotes, but directly participates with teachers in formal or informal professional learning.⁴⁹

Leaders in learning institutions have a responsibility to be the lead learner. A leader who doesn’t sit back when people are investigating the why and how of their work. One that doesn’t ride in on a white horse to save the day with the answer to everyone’s problems. A lead learner steps into the learning arena with

their team and pulls the issue apart as a partner. Curiosity and wonderings fuel the conversations, rather than judgement and black-and-white thinking, right or wrong. They create systems and structures for the learning to occur. Teams who learn from each other as part of the way they work shift the fear of ‘stuffing up’ into an opportunity for collaborative inquiry and exploration. Leaders who model this approach help to cultivate a culture of trust, collaboration and support, rather than one of competition and judgement.

BE A LEADER THAT IS LEARNING, NOT ONE THAT HAS LEARNT

Do you know people who see themselves as an expert and are closed to thinking differently? They have learnt, but are not learning. In this dynamic environment of change and revolution, an expert who has mastered their area and then stopped learning quickly ceases to be relevant. Slowly, we’re breaking down the old, hierarchical thinking that leaders must know the answers to be good at their jobs. Great leaders help their teams find even better solutions. Leaders who let their teams innovate with a reasonable amount of autonomy through the ‘COVID-19 experiment of 2020’ made the shift far more quickly. Leaders who learn with their teams not only create a culture of learning, but say to their teams: I am open to learning, too. One of my favourite photos of a workshop is one of three schools together learning about the ‘HITS’ initiative of the Victorian Department of Education⁵⁰, a useful document guiding teachers in high impact teaching strategies. We designed a thorough dive into all ten of the strategies and there was deep learning and sharing throughout the day. Not once could you see or hear dominant voices from the leaders nor did you see the leaders standing at the back watching everyone else learn. They were in there up to their elbows, learning deeply with their teams at the tables. How many workshops related to critical paths the school is taking have you taken without the senior leadership present? To be honest, I just don’t get that. Symbolically, it doesn’t look the best, and strategically it’s gravely flawed to miss the opportunity of vital learning with our teams.

“ THE EXPERTS OF THE 21ST CENTURY ARE THOSE THAT ARE LEARNING, NOT THOSE WHO HAVE LEARNT. ”

ARE YOU AN EXPERT WHO HAS LEARNT OR ARE YOU STILL LEARNING?

Dr Victor Ottati of Loyola University, Chicago has researched what he coined 'Earned Dogmatism Effect'.⁵¹ Ottati's hypothesis states that social norms dictate that experts often adopt a 'dogmatic closed-minded orientation'. When experts feel like experts, they are less likely to admit they're wrong or say they don't know something. Across six different experiments, they found that experts will act like experts even if they are wrong, because they feel they're expected to have dogmatic opinions. This pulls us back to the concept of duality and paradox. Being a learner should not mean you leave your knowledge and expertise behind. It does mean, however, that we're open to not knowing, and that others can bring things to the table that we may not have seen or known before. Knee deep in the information explosion how can we expect to know it all?

STEP INTO CURIOSITY, NOT JUDGEMENT

A Ferocious Warmth response when our assumptions are challenged is to pause and reflect. It may be about recoding responses. Defensiveness, judgement and discomfort are significant signs that there is some juicy learning to step into. Asking questions rather than defending our position creates an inquiry mindset.

The need for shift in education challenges us to rethink the way we have always done things. If we increase curiosity about our own and other's thinking when faced with a new challenge, our learning turns on. Arming ourselves with questions that seek to understand, rather than invalidate another's position, is a powerful skill to develop. A useful mental model for this is the Ladder of Inference by Chris Argyris.⁵² The Ladder of Inference highlights that we leap up the ladder of inference via our bias and assumptions made on a sliver of data. If we can accept that many of our beliefs are based on erroneous assumptions, then we are more able to test and challenge our thinking. We seek more information, knowledge and data to base our beliefs on. I expand on this model in my first book *The Buzz* as a way for teams to unpack their beliefs and misunderstandings. Viviane Robinson of Auckland University uses this model and Argyris' double loop learning model as the critical part of the Open to Learning™ methodology.⁵³ This methodology provides a rigorous framework for discussions that promote understanding and learning.

KEYS TO GROWTH — MISTAKES AND FAILURES

Own your 'stuff ups'. Nothing drops more trust points than when we don't admit when we've experienced failure. It creates a sense that mistakes are not tolerated. Our default is that we brush them under the carpet. Impressed into our psyche is that making mistakes is a weakness. Yet a learning culture creates space for learning from mistakes. I left an organisation because the leader not only failed to take responsibility for a serious issue that was definitely his doing, but also pinned it onto two of his senior team. Our trust for him as a leader went down the drain as we saw him bluff and bluster, spraying excuses and accusations at everyone else. All that was needed was for him to say, 'Wow, sorry, I made the wrong decision there, team. Let's look at what we need to do to fix it.' We could have approached the issue as a group, discovering how we might mitigate the problem and make different decisions in the future. Breaking this habit of not owning failures and mistakes occurs when we're willing to wrestle with the muckiness of learning and become aware of the musings of that unhelpful little voice in our heads.

DROP THE NEED TO BE RIGHT

The need to be right drives distrust in teams. When people feel we're not open to influence, the chance for collaboration and exploring options dives. Our brains get a dopamine hit when we're right, but if we continually seek to be right over others, we increase their cortisol and their resistance increases. For some of us, the need for that dopamine hit drives us to make others wrong and ourselves right. Believing ourselves to be 'right' shuts down our thinking's 'peripheral vision'. We fail to see what falls outside our view of the world. Peripheral vision has been found to decrease significantly when we're highly stressed, causing tunnel vision. The same can be said when we feel the driving need to right. Our focus becomes myopic, based on what we think, rather than what others think. What if we weren't right? Even holding that thought as we walk into any conversation will hold us in the centred Ferocious Warmth position.

As we expand ourselves, our outward attention focusses on creating a culture that supports our students, teachers and support staff to expand their own capacity and capability. One links to the other. Without growth in self, it's difficult to encourage growth in others. Yet growing and expanding others is the essence of a leader's job.

chapter two

BUILDING COLLECTIVE CAPACITY

'Most maddening or exciting for Musk's employees, depending on which one you ask, is the time scale on which he often expects work to be done. For example, one Friday when I was visiting, a few SpaceX staff members were frantically rushing back and forth from the office to the parking lot across the street. It turns out that during a meeting, he asked them how long it would take to remove staff cars from the lot and start digging the first hole for the Boring Company tunnel. The answer: two weeks. Musk asked why, and when he gathered the necessary information, he concluded, "Let's get started today and see what's the biggest hole we can dig between now and Sunday afternoon, running 24 hours a day." Within three hours, the cars were gone and there was a hole in the ground.'

Elon Musk: 'The Architect of Tomorrow', *Rolling Stone*⁵⁴

March 2020 was education's SpaceX hole in the ground. Schools and their communities moved whole systems to an online learning model in a matter of days!

Before COVID-19, when working with people on thriving in the learning zone and not getting stuck in the comfort zone, I shared stories from Christchurch not long after the earthquakes in 2010/2011. I was working with community and health

agencies to create technology strategies that linked authentically to their purpose and organisational goals. One of my major insights was our adaptability in a crisis. Christchurch leaders told of aged care nurses and others, historically labelled as 'hard to shift' around technology, moving to case notes recorded on tablets and held in cloud storage in a remarkably short time. Their original case notes? Buried in sludge and debris in the centre of town. The motivation for change couldn't be ignored – care for their patients.

Now we've experienced our own version of this throughout the world. As a profession, educators have been at the front of the 'pivot' to a new way of working. (I wanted to land that word at least once, just to make a few readers wince at the sound of the most used word in Australia during the pandemic!) In working with many hundreds of leaders and teachers during lockdown and remote learning, I found that schools already firmly in a learning culture, with high collective efficacy, sustained their energy with a 'we can do it' approach. Their forward momentum through continued focus on growth stood them in great stead. Collaboration, trialling and a culture of learning from successes and failures were critical to success. For those whose default is the comfort zone of 'same' and certainty, the energy and stress around shifting was undoubtedly higher. Many of us crave certainty, reliability and lack of ambiguity, and the pressure of not having them to fall back onto took its toll on many.

Within a culture of 'we never arrive', during COVID-19 we experienced an opportunity for transformation and renewal. To go back to Nassim Taleb's antifragile approach: 'The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better.'

This shift out of our comfort zone expands us – our thinking, our skills, our attitudes and beliefs. Our role as Ferocious Warmth leaders is to create the culture for expansion to thrive.

CREATING A CULTURE OF 'WE NEVER ARRIVE'

Several years ago, as I searched for Ferocious Warmth leaders outside my orbit, I was introduced (via the global next-door chat that is Twitter) to a wonderful exemplar of the whole Ferocious Warmth concept. Sarah Martin, Principal of Stonefields Primary School in Auckland, portrays all the attributes of Ferocious Warmth. She is warm, yet ferocious about her students, her team and her

community, and consistently contributes to the New Zealand dialogue on education. She speaks internationally at conferences and is committed to increasing excellence in education through leadership and capacity building. Sarah fulfils every Ferocious Warmth characteristic and brings to her leadership entrepreneurial thinking that guides Stonefields through a constant cycle of learning, improvement and innovation.

I met Sarah one afternoon in the Stonefields' staff room, a welcoming and homely retreat. She was elbow-deep in marinade. With a parent information evening that night, Sarah was cooking the lamb for the shared staff meal before the evening's business. This symbolic element of Sarah's leadership screams of connection and humility in one action. Food is one of the great connectors. When it has the authentic hand of a leader involved in its creation, there is a humility of service and appreciation that is unsaid, yet felt in the act.

A few more things stand out for me as the 'beyond leadership 101' behaviours of any leader into real expansion:

- Sarah is fiercely committed to building the capacity of all her team.
- The whole school has a relentless focus on creating learning for their students and each other with a stated purpose to 'cause learning'.
- Sarah has a beautiful connection to her students. The day I visited was sunny. Rather than getting on the speaker and telling the kids 'no hat, no play', she was singing a song to remind them. Smiling, the kids scampered off to get their hats.
- In Sarah's classroom wanders, she is deeply connected with the students in their learning and the teachers in their pedagogy.
- Sarah is savvy about sticky messages. Using a graphic designer, Sarah had the mascots and the school values made into relevant little 'stone people', who are recognised by every student and family.
- Anyone can download the school's approach to teaching and learning. It outlines their values and acknowledges the evidence base underpinning their approach.
- Sarah draws from beyond education to test and expand her thinking. She is what Jim Knight, educational coach expert, would call a 'radical' learner.⁵⁵

- With her community, Sarah revisits the essence and purpose of the school to ensure it reflects their diverse and changing population.
- Sarah shares an office with her leadership team, where they often work at a round table in the middle of the room, symbolically shouting ‘we collaborate!’.
- Stonefields has developed many of their own methodologies and frameworks, and regularly share these with others.
- Sarah and her team constantly check in with their teachers, aiming to balance collaborative work and cognitive load.
- Sarah encourages her staff, students and parents to talk openly when things are tough.
- Whenever Sarah is questioned, she comes at her answers like a learner, curious and seeking to understand more, rather than an expert.

Sarah’s expansion approach extends further, but you get the idea! Ferocious Warmth!

Sarah and her team fiercely commit to the concept of ‘we never arrive’. They have carefully curated this culture since the school opened. It is overt and discussed often. They recruit provocative leaders and educators. This advertisement for a Deputy Principal at Stonefields a few years ago clearly articulates the hunt for a change agent and learner:

*Are you comfortable being uncomfortable?
Do you enjoy being challenged and imagining
possibilities to best serve learners?
Are you a learner and able to be a mindset provocateur
to grow capacity in oneself and colleagues?*

Continuously iterating our teaching practice can challenge educators who haven’t experienced an overt learning culture within the staff. For Ferocious Warmth leaders, it’s an embedded part of the discussions. Recruiting for mindset leads to growing collective capacity in our teams, which sets the environment for learning and growth. The work is creating a thriving learning culture that says ‘we never arrive’.

CULTURE AND STRATEGY

After a decade of working with teams on how to work better together, it was clear to me that schools making the most difference to their students were those blending strategy and culture, collaborating together to create change in teaching and learning. At the same time, the evidence base was mounting that collective efficacy dramatically affects student outcomes. In 2015 I created a model for collaborative learning cultures and published *The Buzz*.

In 2016, Professor John Hattie and the Visible Learning Research ranked collective efficacy as having the greatest effect size affecting student achievement.⁵⁶ Jenni Donohoo's book *Collective Efficacy* is a thorough and brilliant exploration of this approach. Her definition is worth noting as part of the Expansive skills of a Ferocious Warmth leader.

*Collective efficacy is evident when teachers see themselves as part of a team working for their students. When educators believe in their collective ability to lead the improvement of student outcomes, higher levels of achievement result.*⁵⁷

This work in professional learning culture is now well underway in most schools across Australia and New Zealand, led by global experts such as Michael Fullan, Viviane Robinson, Mary Jean Gallagher, Dr Lyn Sharratt, Beate Planche and others. For some schools it is a profound shift. Over 7800 educators and 270 schools have taken part in my Buzz diagnostic. This data provides me and the schools insight into the building of The Buzz collaborative culture: growth and learning mindset, a compelling environment for learning and authentic dialogue. Learning cultures require the draw from ferocity to lift standards and the warmth to create an environment of safety to learn.

A strong expanding learning culture draws from another duality: culture and strategy. Of course, this is most effective when the strategy is created by and for the whole school community. Examples like the Northern Territory of Australia lead the way in student-voice involvement with strategy. Student Learning Ambassadors discuss, dissect and address data and pose solutions to the department for future strategic direction. With the important issues of engagement, wellbeing and motivation of both students and teachers impacting on organisational success, culture is the critical component that brings strategy to life. It builds the social

capital that enables people to do great things together. If we work on cocreating the strategy of the organisation we can affect culture, because we tap into a vital way to strengthen people's engagement and sense of purpose: increased voice and recognition of their value.

If we insist on strategy only being developed and shaped by leaders, or the 'school improvement team', with no input from the people doing the work, we end up with words on a page that no one pays any attention to. Strategy created by a few people in a closed room won't create the momentum we need for success. But collaboration builds professional trust. Trust builds as we engage in greater discussion. Schools that made big leaps in creating professional learning cultures now never create a strategy without rigorous exploration of the current state. All of the voices at the table must explore scan, then focus on the priority areas of need. This is emotional and strategic intelligence in concert together.

At a very basic level, collaboration avoids people whinging about edicts from above and changes for no good reason. In this environment, everyone should feel heard and have the opportunity to share ideas in robust discussion. The evidence base is clear that the effect on students is far greater when education staff work together as collective change agents, rather than as individuals.

BRINGING STRATEGY AND CULTURE TOGETHER IS ABOUT CULTIVATING CONVERSATIONS THAT CONNECT PEOPLE TO PURPOSE AND PEOPLE TO PEOPLE.

COLLABORATION IS LEARNING OUT LOUD

Collaboration is all about learning deeply together. When we come together as professionals seeking to improve our impact, we share our thinking and approaches, challenges and strengths. It's about building our leadership and teaching toolkits to shape teaching and learning. The dialogue is critical, as is the trust and purpose behind working together.

LEADING THE LEARNING

While some schools are only just starting to get out of classroom silos, many have been on the path of collaborative professional learning for a number of years. In 2006, Michael Fullan wrote:

‘Collaborative cultures are ones that focus on building the capacity for continuous improvement and are intended to be a new way of working and learning. They are meant to be enduring capacities, not just another program innovation.’⁵⁸

Schools with these capacities cannot imagine going back to an individualistic approach to the classroom. Whole school improvement, innovative practice, transformation of teaching and learning, inter-disciplinary approaches – none of these can be achieved without collaboration at their foundation.

Collaboration encourages deep dialogue about our own beliefs, our teaching and learning strategies and, for leaders, our leadership strategies. Unfortunately, my findings in The Buzz diagnostic of over 7800 educators indicates we have a way to go. The statements that trend downward, no matter the level of collaborative culture, are:

1. ‘I am confident to speak up when I see behaviour eroding our school’s professional culture.’
2. ‘I trust my colleagues’ intentions.’
3. ‘As a school we actively seek to challenge each other’s teaching and learning strategies using evidence to inform our dialogue.’

The lowest response across all respondents?

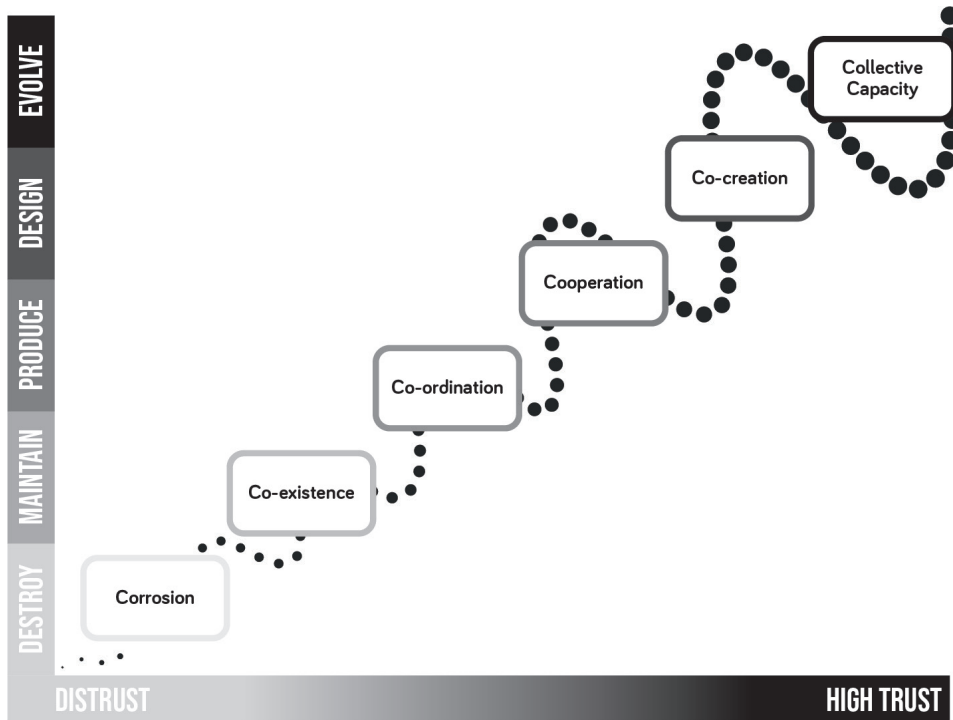
4. ‘We actively encourage pedagogical debate in our meetings.’

Collaboration is about transforming and expanding teaching and learning, yet many schools’ teams simply cooperate. They have trouble lifting beyond sharing resources and getting to the space of ‘learning out loud’ with each other.

BEYOND COOPERATION

The Collaboration Continuum is useful to reflect on where the work in any particular school or system is needed. We’re aiming for the top two levels: co-creation and collective capacity.

Figure 10. Collaboration Continuum, Tracey Ezard, 2015



Here’s an overview of the levels, starting at the dreaded bottom.

CORROSION

It’s a pity we need this level at all, but unfortunately corrosive environments exist. When this happens at a leadership level, the whole school is in intense pain with powerplays and egos running rampant, creating havoc on any plans to work together – too much ferocity and not enough warmth. Opportunities to collaborate are derailed by lack of trust and poor behaviour.

My niece was on the receiving end of this corrosion. A Year 12 English internal assessment, set by one English teacher, was on completely different topics to that which the other English class had been studying for. The reason: lack of any sort of professional communication or relationship between the teachers. In the words of a furious 17-year-old, ‘We know they hate each other.’ How’s that for an example of toxic interpersonal relationships affecting student futures?

CO-EXISTENCE

At this level there's little or no interaction between colleagues beyond being part of a group that co-exist in the same space or content. Co-existence still happens in many schools. The Year 8 science teacher sits next to another Year 8 science teacher in a staff room, yet they never discuss how they teach concepts and differentiate, or share strategies that help students engage. The reasons? Some of it is simply historical – 'we don't do that around here'. Or perhaps their relationship doesn't extend beyond civility. They don't know each other and don't seek to find out. At the other end of the spectrum, but with the same impact, they're good friends and don't go near the teaching and learning discussion. So, they simply bob along in their comfort zone, not realising that gold is uncovered when we can learn from each other.

COOPERATION AND CO-ORDINATION

When organisations say they're collaborating, cooperation and co-ordination is what they're up to. While these two levels are important, they're only an immature version of collaboration. Transactional rather than transformative, knowledge and information is shared and discussed. Work tasks, such as planning, are divided between members to use time more effectively and build consistency. Duplication of thinking and delivery moves toward collective and integrated approaches. Information is disseminated and discussed for co-ordination and management purposes. Interaction is about smooth processes and organisational issues.

CO-CREATION — TOGETHER YOU AND I CREATE BETTER

Discussion and activity are centred on working and learning together to create more effective and targeted ways of working, resulting in more effective outcomes. This is collaboration. Teaching teams dive into pedagogical discussions to improve student learning, using evidence to guide the conversation. Psychological safety is critical for all members to have a voice.

COLLECTIVE CAPACITY — LEARNING FROM OUR COLLECTIVE WISDOM

At this top level, we build our own and each other's capacity. We actively seek to learn from each other and test our thinking and judgement. We test new ways of

working and support each other to try new ways of teaching, assessing impact on learning. We are actively modelling a collective growth mindset. The work evolves and transforms. This is the true nature of a collaborative culture – we're all seeking continuous improvement and growth, together.



Reflection pause ...

Where does your team sit? Your whole school? Where is co-creation critical? How could you lead this work by modelling growth in your sphere of influence?

chapter three

WHAT STOPS US LEARNING TOGETHER?

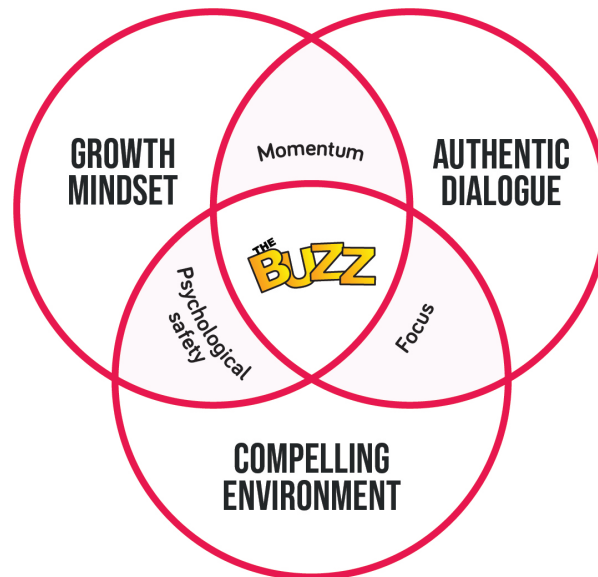
In my work with schools and systems, I have found that the biggest barrier to us working more collaboratively is our mindset and the environment. As educators, we pride ourselves on knowing our ‘stuff’ and work hard at providing the best possible learning for our students. Yet when we first start learning more deeply as a collective, we can experience interesting internal dialogue. Using stronger evidence as a basis for discussion and action can be confronting. ‘Is what I’m doing good enough?’ ‘Is what I’ve been doing all these years right?’ ‘I feel very uncomfortable with this level of discussion on my professional judgement.’

Professor Dylan Wiliam, Emeritus Professor of Educational Assessment, University College London, puts this into a powerful statement that emphasises key cultural and leadership work:

‘If we create a culture where every teacher believes they need to improve, not because they are not good enough but because they can be even better, there is no limit to what we can achieve.’⁵⁹

From talking with thousands of educators I know there is truth in this statement. Collaborative cultures are born here. And it’s where the learning intelligence of Ferocious Warmth leaders comes into sharp focus. This is The Buzz.

Figure 11. Elements of a Thriving Learning Culture, Tracey Ezard, 2015



WHERE SHOULD WE FOCUS?

During my fifteen years of observing this work in action plus data from The Buzz diagnostic and other evidence-based research, I discovered three pillars are the foundation for a thriving collaborative culture:

1. A collective growth mindset that expands our thinking individually and collectively.
2. A compelling environment in which we are drawn to learning together, due to the processes, protocols and energy we bring to the table.
3. Authentic dialogue where we focus on discussing the things that help us expand our impact on student learning.

When these three come together, we create psychological safety for learning, focus on the right things and build forward momentum.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

At the intersection of a growth mindset and a compelling environment sits psychological safety. Any dialogue is influenced by the mindset with which we enter it. Our mindset can be affected by the environment we are a part of.

Have you ever been engaged in an interesting, open discussion with a group

of people, only for the environment to totally change when one person walked in the room? When we make it safe to contribute and create processes for learning, psychological safety begins and cultures of toxicity, avoidance and blame weaken.

Fortunately, the psychological safety is now coming into consciousness.

Ample media, articles and references from Google's Project Aristotle research on high-performing teams and Professor Amy Edmondson's research and writing on psychological safety prove what we know intuitively as classroom educators. We feel safe to speak and make mistakes when we're able to bring our authentic self to the table. Professor Amy Edmondson, Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at Harvard Business School, is a leading researcher and expert in psychological safety, high performance teams and learning cultures. Her definition of psychological safety is: 'A climate where people feel safe enough to take interpersonal risks by speaking up and sharing concerns, questions, or ideas.'⁶⁰

Easy to say, perhaps harder to do.

EXPANDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

The whole leadership team needs to be able to create safety for deep discussion. Team leaders are the shapers of this environment, yet many are not sure how to facilitate conversations that are open and robust. Professional learning cultures end up looking like one person telling people what to do with others either nodding compliantly or silently resisting. True collaborative cultures provide opportunity for voice and input, query and exploration.

Robust ideological debate stems directly from psychological safety and helps us develop antifragility. Yet The Buzz diagnostic shows that the statements, 'As a school we actively seek to challenge each other's teaching and learning strategies using evidence to inform our dialogue' and 'as a school we encourage pedagogical debate' receive the lowest overall scores. If these shape and shift classroom practice, then our ability to create this challenge space is crucial.

Timothy R. Clark's book, *The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety*⁶¹, outlines the levels we move through as a culture of safety matures. As you read Clark's levels and my link to collaborative work, you might like to consider three circles of culture. Your school culture (focussed on student/student and student/ teacher relationships), your staff learning culture (collegiate culture) and your community culture.

STAGE 1: INCLUSIVE SAFETY

‘The need to feel accepted precedes the need to be heard.’

When people feel they cannot get approval from others, they seek attention, even through destructive means. This correlates to the corrosion level at the very bottom end of the Collaboration Continuum.

STAGE 2: LEARNER SAFETY

‘When the environment belittles, demeans or harshly corrects people in the learning process, learner safety is destroyed.’

When school staff start working with The Buzz, we collectively investigate and identify the safety nets that need to be in place for learner safety. One of the biggest shifts is the quality of the conversations people undertake. Is there personal responsibility, accountability and engagement? Or is the environment full of the DBJs – denials, blames and justifications? Here, the work for most schools is to enable the safety of every learner – student and adult. Tragically, there are far too many students who do not feel learner safety, fearing being made to look stupid, thus not engaging in learning.

STAGE 3: CONTRIBUTOR SAFETY

‘As the individual demonstrates competence, the organisation normally grants more autonomy to contribute.’

This is an interesting space for schools. In my experience, it’s dependent on two main factors:

1. How strongly a school is tied to a hierarchy. For example, a head of faculty’s contribution to a discussion may be more valued than a classroom teacher.
2. The cultural hierarchy, such as the cool kids in the staff room, the more ‘academic’ subject experts, the vocal, having more influence.

By the time we’ve developed the first two stages of inclusive and learner safety, we can assume that cultural hierarchy has flattened such that collaborative discourse, shared learning and exploration start to fly.

Without contributor safety, our inner voice of ‘not good enough’ can run rampant. I asked the teachers at a school with a strong professional learning

culture to open up their inner voice to each other in a visual process. They generously shared the voices in their heads that stopped them from contributing:

- What if I look stupid?
- What if I'm wrong?
- My ideas aren't good enough.
- Is anyone even listening?
- Everyone else is much more of an expert.

The list goes on. Not only do we need to change the voices in our heads about our worth, but also the way we treat others.



Reflection pause ...

Do you treat everyone as 'competent to contribute'? Who misses out? Who doesn't have a voice?
No judgement, just exploration.

Authentic student voice and agency approaches also challenge the long-held beliefs about who is 'competent' to contribute. Schools are changing their conversations with students, valuing their input authentically and openly.

STAGE 4: CHALLENGER SAFETY

'Permission to challenge the status quo.'

I call this the ability to have 'robust ideological debate'⁶² that challenges thinking and beliefs. Clark says this stage is best built in at the beginning of a team's formation. My own research concurs. The lack of these behaviours reflect the two lowest scores of over 270 schools in the diagnostic: 'As a school we actively seek to challenge each other's teaching and learning strategies using evidence to inform our dialogue' and 'as a school we encourage pedagogical debate'.

CHALLENGING THINKING

When we've achieved psychological safety we authentically step into co-creation as a team. Real collaboration that challenges current paradigms intentionally looks to evolve the current situation. It comes to life in a rich learning environment, where failure and mistakes are critical parts of the journey. Challenging our assumptions, beliefs, frameworks and processes is important in a robust learning culture.

How do we stop the habitual dynamics?

Here we are, wanting to challenge status quo thinking that's outdated or could do with a good 'looking at'. But we're wary – we don't want to create World War III or have people think we're 'having a go' at them. We need good robust debate without the baggage! If we've already created safety for people's voices then shifting our habits requires just two tweaks:

TAKE AN EXPLICIT GROUP CHALLENGER STANCE

As a group, articulate that you're creating a challenge space, where challenging the norm is invited. Ensure the group decides the most effective way to act and react in this space. Make sure everyone has said what they need to safely voice their thoughts and feelings.

DROP ONE LITTLE LETTER

This is the big shortcut to getting everyone involved. When you're tossing things around and want to increase the group's perspective, unearth assumptions or pull things apart, just drop one little letter. Too often we challenge thinking by coming from an 'I' position, saying: 'I'd like to challenge your thinking.' There's a pesky 'y'. Unless you've worked hard at setting up psychological safety for challenge, often division, expectation of criticism and fear of judgement raise their ugly heads.

Change the statement to: 'I'd like to challenge our thinking' and the world shifts from judgement to wondering and curiosity. Our willingness to challenge our own thinking models the debate and deep-dialogue space we often desperately seek from our teams. Be prepared for the microscope to turn on ourselves along with everyone else. It creates partnership and exploration, not conflict and defensiveness.

Shifting language from you to our, I to we, me to we, changes culture and enables collaboration. Ferocious Warmth leaders continually challenge their own thinking first, not other people's.

Surely it can't be that simple?

Often it is. Sometimes it's the simplest things that make the biggest impact.

I have found that Ferocious Warmth leaders create this psychological safety and a culture of The Buzz through the lens of mindset, environment and dialogue. More than behaviours, it's a vibration. They're able to discuss with their teams what does and doesn't create safety for people, and ferociously protect it when it's threatened. Warmth encourages everyone to voice their ideas without fear of retribution or ridicule. Ferocity steps in when people fall below that line. It does not step over or ignore behaviour that should be dealt with. General Morrison's famous quote of 'The standard you walk past is the standard you accept' is a mantra that holds Ferocious Warmth leaders steady in the face of difficult conversations. Similarly, Brené Brown's 'What stands in the way becomes the way'⁶³ encourages us to stand by the behaviours we want as the norm. Ferocious Warmth leaders lift the bar and support people to reach for it.

NORMS THAT STICK

One of my favourite Ferocious Warmth leaders, Anthony Simone at Harvest Home Primary School in Epping, Victoria, co-created professional learning principles and protocols with his team when the school was set up four years ago. Harvest Home's five values of achievement, cooperation, acceptance, responsibility and integrity were created with the community, and represent the foundations of a thriving and dynamic school. The principles and protocols are based on their five values and, as a Ferocious Warmth teaching and leadership team, they speak these values regularly. The results from Harvest Home in The Buzz diagnostic puts them on the highest rung of the culture ladder – Committed Collaboration – one of only a handful of many schools surveyed. The staff see evidence of high results in all three areas of The Buzz: a collective growth mindset, a compelling environment for learning, and authentic and student-focussed dialogue.

Sometimes I see teams use protocols and norms in a way that makes me feel a bit cynical, mainly because I see many struggling to speak up in meetings. They're

information downloads, not collaboration. The statements become not worth the paper they're printed on. No one looks at them beyond checking off the list of 'things good teams do at the start of the year'. But the Harvest Home statements have a lot of heart, are discussed regularly, visually accessible all around the school, and used to assess and keep themselves accountable. Importantly, they continue to sharpen review and are tweaked to respond to the needs of the staff and the students. Through collaborative reviews, the statements morph every year using surveys to keep tabs on how the Professional Learning Communities are meeting these.

Harvest Home teams live their 'way we work' statements. You can feel it, hear it, see it as they work together.



Reflection pause ...

Do your 'norms' or 'team agreements' mean anything?

When you participate in a meeting of these teams, do you see them in action?

If not, how will you tackle this? What ferocity or warmth will you bring in to help your teams live their norms and pursue them, not just write it down?

I see teams make huge breakthroughs when they concentrate on the quality of their team culture. When we explore what's happening in our brains, when we are in a state of learning and openness compared to fear and shut down, we discover how we should do the what of our work.

It's about trust, connection and lifting expectations with one another. It's about honest reflections and candour. It expands us as a collective.

The extraordinary work of creating amazing results follows.

EXPANDING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY IN OTHERS

Ferocious Warmth leaders build capacity in leadership. They also inspire people to want to become leaders. In some schools, people see leadership as a burden, something so hard and challenging that only a sadist would do it. In some places there is also a level of competition between the leaders, which creates a lack of trust and openness.

“ FEROCIOUS WARMTH LEADERS BUILD MORE LEADERS. ”

Some wise words from Piet Langstraat, Former Superintendent of Red Deer, Alberta and Victoria, British Columbia:

‘Every time I’ve entered a position, my primary responsibility is to grow the people around me, so that I have 25 people who can replace me. So the first piece is that my job is to grow people around me. The second piece is that unless you are modelling it, living it, it simply doesn’t work. There’s a phrase I use to set the scene for us to learn together, “I’m not interested in sitting around in a senior leadership meeting and have everybody look at their feet. If we’re going to do that, then you are all redundant and I don’t need you.” We all come from different backgrounds, we have diverse thoughts, and we are far stronger as a whole than as individuals. Thirdly, people have professional responsibility for personal growth. I’ve never asked people to do things I wouldn’t do for myself. I explicitly stand up and say: here are the things I’m struggling with, here are the things I need to get better at, here are some areas I know I’m weak in, and here is what I’m doing about that as a professional. My expectation is that you are also growing as a professional, whatever that means for you.’

Piet goes on to tell the story of staff members entering his office with their heads down, saying, ‘I really screwed up.’ And all Piet would ask was: Were any children hurt? Did you learn something? Do you think you’ll do it again? If the answers were: no, yes, no, in order, he left it at that.

Leaders are not perfect. Showing vulnerability by sharing what we are learning shows that we are willing to expand the way we lead.

Piet again: ‘Safety comes from the culture of contribution. How do you get

people to contribute? By showing vulnerability, allowing people to make mistakes, by valuing different perspectives, by supporting growth. And you have to model it.'

HOW DO YOU BUILD YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM'S CAPACITY?

Anthony Simone and Sarah Martin also seek to build other leaders, as well as teacher capacity. One of the leaders in Anthony's school, Stacey Lawler, has worked with Anthony in two schools. Stacey is an insightful and skilled leader herself. She is also a continual learner. She observes leadership patterns that make positive impacts in others, and supports her colleagues to build their skills. She offers this insight into how she interprets Anthony's focus on building leadership capability.

He:

- leads to empower and grow leaders
- captures and articulates leader strengths
- optimises their craft at the school, network and community level
- challenges areas for improvement through thought-provoking reflection questions and conversations in safe environments
- provides opportunities to improve
- models continuous learning through leadership meetings
- models and references the importance of trust in a team as this underpins true authentic growth
- is strategic and innovative in his planning and the opportunities he provides to align with the bigger picture
- shows compassion, connects personally with each staff member, recalls details about a person and their personal and professional interests
- provides opportunities to celebrate successes while maintaining high expectations of all staff.

Anthony also provides vital opportunities for growth. He highlights his belief in people's capability, but still requires the leader's willingness to take those opportunities. Supportively, he provokes to connect how this builds the individual's craft, behaviour and responses with student learning.

Do you expect the same rigour of learning in your leadership team that you do in teacher's examining their pedagogical practices? Sometimes we don't, because this means we need to examine our own, and that might be scary.

When I ask this question in leadership programs, the schools that reply in the affirmative are generally led by a Ferocious Warmth leader. The duality of high challenge, high support is evident. Why would we expect our teachers to uncover how to transform their teaching for more impact, if we don't do this ourselves in our area of responsibility – leadership?



Reflection pause ...

One of my mentors, Linda Hutchings, a leadership consultant in New Zealand refers to leadership for education and health professions as our 'second profession'. To my mind this is a perfect way to look at it. If leadership is our second profession, how much time does your team invest in expanding your skills as a collegiate group?

chapter four

OWNING OUR IGNORANT TRUTH

'Ignorance is something cannot change as long as I am blind to it.'

Byron Katie⁶⁴

'The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubt.'

The Triumph of Stupidity Bertrand Russell⁶⁵

At the time of writing, the world is in a world of pain. Often the pain felt in countries less privileged than Australia is held at arms' length. Wars, famine, genocide, poverty can seem far away. Yet many Australian educators see first-hand the impact of poverty, addiction, family violence and other social disadvantage. Some schools have refugee families who've seen horrors and trauma in their countries of origin that we can never fully understand. Our First Nation children come into school holding ancestral scars of oppression and vilification. They begin the education journey from a position of severe disadvantage on all of our societal measures, despite years of 'Closing the Gap' initiatives. The COVID-19 pandemic is also currently sweeping the planet. My home town is in its second lock down with a curfew – something I have never experienced. The streets are quiet. When outside, everyone wears a mask. Countries all over the world are battling with an unseen enemy. In some countries deaths have reached the hundreds of thousands.

In among this pandemic, protests over police brutality and deaths in custody have encouraged momentum around the Black Lives Matter movement in cities globally. We're divided into clear camps. Social media algorithms skew what we see and read. The ability to vilify others with different opinions to ourselves is as easy as a tap on a smartphone. Leading in the middle of this is stressful and challenging. Keeping ourselves protected, yet open to different perspectives on the world is not easy in this context.

How do we make sure we do not fall victim to closing down our own minds to other perspectives?

OWNING OUR IGNORANT TRUTH

Our ignorant truth is what we think we know to be true. It brings together our knowledge, assumptions, values, biases; our thinking and feeling. But we only really know a sliver of anything. A miniscule portion of the whole picture. Our personal map of the world. Scientist and philosopher, Alfred Korzybski, wrote: 'The map is not the territory.'⁶⁶ Like a map, our interpretation and understanding of any situation can be outdated quickly, only have certain information present, or only show one perspective.

What we think we know is simply an abstraction or a reaction, not the thing itself. And then we take a little sliver of something – a fact, an opinion, some data – and pass it through many levels of distortion. The discussion we had with some colleagues yesterday, the article we read online, the way we were brought up, the education we received, the values we hold. These levels of distortion morph the original intent or information into something quite different, perhaps, from what was intended. Our children, as we as ourselves, are absorbing fake news all the time. We have a running joke in our home when my teenagers bring up something that seems ridiculous: 'Did you get that from Buzz Feed?'

These distortions become our model of the world. Unless we are very careful, we start to see the world through a very small window.

Our ignorant truth sits outside the way we currently see the world. It is all the things we don't know. While Ferocious Warmth leaders have conviction about their knowledge, they're also very mindful of the number of things they don't know. I was in a meeting recently where a senior leader called some of the more vocal

opponents of traditional schooling 'nut cases'. This is an example of someone not owning their ignorant truth. Instead of exploring the differing views, and provoking their own conviction about schooling, this leader simply discarded the other as 'crazy'. Ignorant truth is not about whether we agree or not, it's about whether we're willing and able to hold an intelligent, cogent discussion to explore possibilities in the realm outside of our 'knowing'. Testing our ignorant truth means we step into a conversation to learn more rather than step away. Being curious about how others see things is the first step in opening up our ignorant truth.

“ THERE IS HUMILITY IN OWNING OUR IGNORANT TRUTH. WE SEEK TO DISCOVER MORE, RATHER THAN HOLDING ON FIERCELY TO OUR BELIEFS. ”

I have a friend, David, who I've known for many years. We don't see each other often any more, but social media gives us the platform to keep in touch with our lives. Over the last couple of years, it's become apparent that David sees the world very differently to me – politically, spiritually, mentally. I am so tempted to block him as his posts make my blood boil. They are not offensive, racist or sexist (then I would block him!) but they do trigger my buttons and threaten me right out of balance.

My solution? Keep reading his posts. Keep looking at the sources and pushing myself to understand his perspective more. Own my ignorant truth, and examine the biases, beliefs and attitudes that form the way I currently see the world. I also hope he owns his, because then we could have a conversation listening deeply to each other, expanding our understanding of the world. If I blocked him, or threw shade at his comments, we would likely spiral down into a slanging match.

The world of 2020 has been a bubble of its own. Within this, one of the biggest strides forward has been the racial justice movement. In Australia, it's been heartening to hear more open discussion of the tragedy of inequity, wrongs and historical prejudice that our indigenous people have suffered for over 200 years. Even more importantly, Aboriginal voices are being heard and life experiences acknowledged, sometimes for the first time in that person's life. Generational trauma will not be undone, yet I hope with all my heart that we can move to a place where, as a society, we deeply listen to the people who've suffered the most and seek to do better in the future. Owning our ignorant truth is a start.

'Do the best you can until you know better, then when you know better, do better.'

Maya Angelou⁶⁷

I am no expert in this space whatsoever. Yet I'm hoping to be someone who owns my ignorant truth, always keen to learn more. I'm hoping to seek to understand and be humble where all I have is the sum of my own experience and learning. Our alternative is to fall prey to surrounding ourselves with the sameness of thinking that's causing division throughout the world. This approach of truth is something one of my mentors, Matt Church, has been thinking and writing about for a number of years.

Identity politics are responses to the fear that people feel in this decade of disruption and century of transformation. The generalised fear and anxiety are causing people to cluster around "like" and this, as history has shown, is a recipe for disaster. For a society to evolve, for a culture you lead to future-proof itself, you must drive a diversity and inclusiveness agenda.'

Matt Church, *Rise Up, An Evolution in Leadership*⁶⁸

Great leadership creates psychological safety where we can test our own ignorant truth and expand our world. High quality collaboration does this out loud. Owning our ignorant truth requires us to drop the need to be right. That's when we get to the great outcomes. Have you been in an organisation where there could only be a couple of people who were right and everyone else was wrong? When we're open to learning, people aren't so scared of hierarchy. We flatten the status of everyone around the table, so that everyone has a voice.

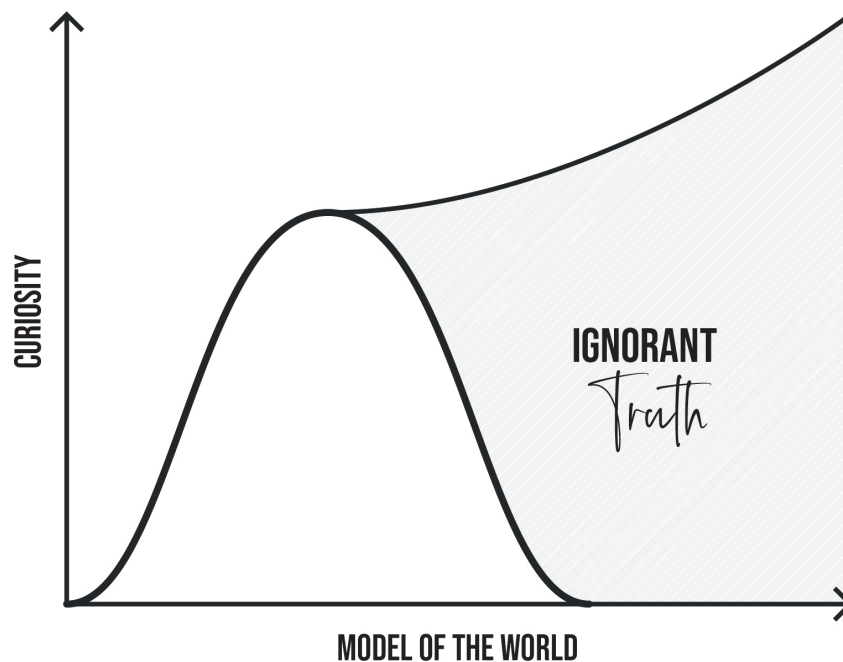
Does your presence allow for voices to be heard?



HOLD WHAT YOU KNOW LIGHTLY. LISTEN DEEPLY AND NEVER ASSUME YOU'RE RIGHT.



Figure 12. Ignorant Truth – Expanding our Model of the World, Tracey Ezard, 2019



HOW BIG IS YOUR MODEL OF THE WORLD?

One of the earliest influences on my work and thinking about leadership was Thomas Sergiovanni in his book *Strengthening the Heartbeat*. Around this time, Sergiovanni's leadership domains were used for a number of years in the Victorian education system (Australia) as the foundation for leadership development. Sergiovanni was one of the first education experts to draw our attention to the critical element of human leadership, through his cultural and symbolic domains. These stood with just as much importance as technical leadership. Like Peter Senge's mental models, Sergiovanni gave us insight into the warp our mind can have in the way we see the world.

*'Mindscapes operate a lot like maps. They shape our perceptions and we see what we expect to see. Mindscapes also have a stealth quality to them. Unnoticed, they frame the way we think and then provide us with a rationale for legitimising our thoughts and actions. They work unknowingly and are difficult to escape from. Figuring out ways to help leaders break out is an important step in bringing about change. By paying attention to mindscapes and by knowing the outside better we can free ourselves from their influence, thus seeing reality for what it really is.'*⁶⁹



Reflection pause ...

Is there a mindscape keeping you stuck? Where can you loosen the way you see the world, expand and step into the freedom of owning your ignorant truth?

TESTING OUR MODEL OF THE WORLD

I love the Balcony and Dancefloor concept of Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky from Harvard Business School.⁷⁰ It has revolutionised many a leader's approach to leading and is used in development programs all around the world. The metaphor reminds us to either get out of the reactive and focussed nature of the dancefloor to take in a broader perspective or, conversely, ensure we're not making decisions from a far off and disconnected balcony.

In complex organisations, where there's often a lack of understanding about what's happening on the floor, it's the staircase between the balcony and dancefloor that needs the work. The quality of the conversations when we come down from the balcony enables strong connection to the people dancing (doing the work). We need to meet in the middle.

Collaboration, co-creation and co-design sit firmly on the staircase. Design thinking works when the perspectives of strategic, long-range and big-picture (balcony) thinking join together with those dealing with the day-to-day delivery of the work (dancefloor), and the end user's perspective. All are important – not one more than the other. The staircase in action is those conversations that explore and ideate these perspectives and ideas, then synthesise them into solutions.

This is where the Ferocious Warmth leader thrives. They understand their responsibility to ensure the environment is safe for deeper dialogue, sharing concerns, ideas, challenges and humour – often all in the one discussion.

“ ON THE STAIRCASE WE CO-CREATE SOLUTIONS FROM BOTH PERSPECTIVES. LISTENING DEEPLY, ASKING CURIOUS QUESTIONS AND LETTING GO OF THE HIERARCHY OF WHO'S RIGHT IN ORDER TO MAKE BETTER DECISIONS. ”

The staircase discussions require skill and a new way of interacting in organisations. It's collaboration in action. It requires leaders to let go of the need to be right and creates lateral learning.

Having the students on the staircase moves student agency to a higher level. This is the real test of owning our ignorant truth. What do our students really think and feel? What are their ideas, perspectives and hopes? What can they teach us? What unknown perspective have they brought to us?

When the staircase is activated:

- **Hierarchy fades** – positional power is put to the side to enable open and transparent discussion.
- **Curiosity leads** – our questions about how we might do things differently create a space of exploration rather than judgement.
- **Listening deepens** – we seek to understand perspectives and insights at a much deeper and informed level.
- **Trust and connection emerge** – our understanding leads to seeing the situation with both empathy and a clearer lens. Relationships strengthen.
- **Possibility appears** – we can make decisions about future steps from a much richer and informed platform.

As with any workplace conversation, tone and mindset are vital. When discussing perspectives from the balcony view and those on the dancefloor, does your curiosity sound like wondering or judgement? Judging people's responses leads to shut down and low-level, transactional conversations. But when we activate deep listening and ask questions that expand our understanding, we're well on the way to a robust, insightful and useful staircase conversation. How strong is your school's staircase? Does it expand your model of the world?

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES OF THE SYSTEM STAIRCASE AT WORK

There are real and valid concerns raised by school leaders when central offices set policies from the balcony without any input from the dancefloor of schools.

This happens more often than it should, as policy people in some systems come in and out of roles in the bureaucracy with little or no education experience, their job a stepping-stone up the public-service career path. The voices of school leaders, teachers and students are not given the professional respect they deserve. In too many cases, it seems that the wisdom and experience of educators is dismissed by policy makers who see 'stakeholder engagement' as a tick box rather than a rigorous process of listening and deep dialogue. Oh, for the enlightened system that creates a process where all policy makers have to spend a certain percent of time on the ground in the places where their policies will be enacted!

Fortunately, there are signs of a shift in the silos of the balcony and the dancefloor. At the end of Term 3, 2019 I worked with all the educational system leaders in Tasmania at a conference with early learning leaders, school leaders, adult learning leaders and department leaders. A real meeting of collaboration and learning. We investigated the ways they could increase the collective mindset for deeper efficacy in their own settings and across the system. There was a definite buzz in the room with people listening and sharing to work out ways forward together.

In another state system, central leaders in policy met with a group of school leaders funded to investigate inclusive practice in schools in the US and Canada. Policy changes and initiatives in this key direction were in the planning stages. The principal associations who'd overseen the project were keen for policy to be informed by the experts on the ground – the principals and their teams. The workshop to share their findings was deliberately designed for discussion using a World Café facilitation approach. People from the central office listened deeply to the school leaders in small groups. They probed, asked questions and were curious. It turned the table on previous workshops, where conversations were didactic and one way, rather than exploratory. In the next round of discussions, the whole group explored scalability from the perspective of both the balcony of the system and dancefloor of the schools. This work then informed the development of further inclusive practice initiatives.

Three things need to be in place for this to work:

1. Open and learning mindset.
2. Compelling, well-designed collaborative environment.
3. Two-way, exploratory, authentic discussion around the findings.

Let's hope central systems continue to shift approaches to create authentic connection to the real-life, on-the-ground work. There is light at the end of the tunnel!

'We are at our best when the table is long, all voices are valued, and we stay curious as both teachers and learners.'

Brené Brown⁷¹

DOES YOUR PRESENCE ALLOW VOICE?

For perspectives to be heard and authentic discussion had, the one thing we need is voice from all levels. I'm challenged by the number of middle leaders and team members I work with who've said that their senior leaders don't 'allow' voice.

Do you allow, invite, enable and enact voice?

Projects, initiatives, working as a team – voice is vital in all of these. We embrace contribution and co-creation when we encourage people's input. We move from a permission, compliance and control environment. We drop the mindset of 'only leadership knows what to do' or the habit of 'I know better than you so you have no say'. More voices mean better ideas, more perspectives. Discussions become partnership-focussed rather than leader-led. We test our ignorant truth.

Voice enables autonomy and wellbeing. Authentic voice creates a culture where people felt heard, seen and valued for their skills, expertise and perspectives. The more we encourage voice and contribution, the more connected we are. The less people feel a part of that, the more distance between us.

US AND THEM VERSUS WE

Power distance is a term from the research of Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist.⁷² Hofstede studies the cultures across nations. Autocratic and paternalistic power relations characterise high power distance. Participatory, consultative and democratic power relationships characterise low power distance. While Hofstede applies this term to research between nation cultures, and their interplay, it also guides us as to where we might sit in creating open environments for voice. If we seek greater involvement, collaboration and innovation in our teams, we need to lower the power gap between 'them and us' and move to a 'we'.

Are you seeking more voice from students? Teachers? Support staff?

Parents? As always, the first step when building voice in your school is to examine our own behaviours to see what needs to shift. Here is an easy framework to identify where you might sit. Are you still at the 'allowing' stage? Or have you moved beyond that and now want to develop the skills to enable effective voices? What needs to be in place to move up a stage?



Reflection pause ...

Level 1: ALLOW VOICE – Let go of having to have all the answers

Does my behaviour give the space for voice? Do people need explicit permission from me to share their thoughts, opinions, knowledge?

If so:

- drop the need to be right
- acknowledge the importance of other opinions
- assume you may not have the right answer
- talk less, listen more.

Level 2: INVITE VOICE – Open up the energy for discussion

Do my actions create an inviting environment for contribution?

To do so:

- be explicit about inviting contribution
- welcome contribution
- be present
- ask specific questions rather than broad closed questions or making statements
- listen more, seek to understand
- show genuine warmth and interest.

Level 3: ENABLE VOICE – Set up structures and prompts

Do the questions I ask and processes we use in meetings provide a framework for purposeful dialogue to grow?

To do so:

- explore the topic through curious and open questions. Use protocols for discussion when unpacking difficult topics
- sense-make the discussion. Frame the purpose and outcomes
- ask clarifying questions to deepen the dialogue
- acknowledge and synthesise contribution
- move beyond status updates to co-creating and exploring issues.

Level 4: ENACT VOICE – Co-create solutions from contribution

Are contributions authentically heard and incorporated into our work?

- If not:
- abandon meetings that simply rubber-stamp decisions already made
- validate and acknowledge contribution
- identify next steps
- explore ideas
- co-create new ways of solving problems through piloting, trialling, taking action and discussing impact.

Testing our ignorant truth expands the way we see the world and the way we think. Lead learners should continually seeking to expand. This enables and empowers transformation.

chapter five

CO-CREATING POSSIBILITY

Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world.

Joel Arthur Barker, American futurist⁷³

Like a well-oiled wheel, creating momentum for change and transformation needs the lubricant of commitment. How many initiatives have died in schools and systems because the people implementing it were not included in the planning stages, thus major obstacles not recognised until too late? Often new initiatives make compliance the only measure of success. This works for only so long, before the wheels fall off. Without creating a strong engagement in the purpose behind the transformation, we move back into our comfortable old ways. Without clear actions to create the transformation, we don't move anywhere. To avoid this, we need to meet on the staircase for robust, dynamic conversations between leaders and people on the ground. We need to co-create a vision, and a plan.

Recently retired Chief Executive of the Northern Territory Department of Education, Vicki Baylis, led a fierce strategic and collaborative approach to lifting education standards, quality and resourcing over the last five years. Vicki is one of those very senior leaders who make you feel at ease straight away, yet she's well aware of the tough job ahead, and ready and willing to buckle down and work

as a collective to do it. This, plus Vicki's passion and vision, encouraged those around her to invest in the work. She balanced the dance of being the most senior executive in education in the Northern Territory with the approachability of a kind and compassionate human being.

The Northern Territory has one of the most challenging contexts in Australian education. Schools range from large and well-resourced in the main cities and towns through to the most remote in the country. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of Northern Territory schools has an average of under 1000⁷⁴, 1000 being the average across all Australian schools. The system provides for a large indigenous population with schools ranging from 8% to 98% indigenous students. Historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have not thrived in mainstream education. Consequently, the system is charged with ensuring these students get quality access. The best outcome would of course be a system that enables the First Nations people to thrive as well as learn their culture and language, and provide an education that engages all students in a way that helps them achieve and succeed in society. A complex and difficult vision.

As an education system, the data indicated that the whole system was making incremental shift, but it was quite slow paced and not sustained across the whole of the Territory. It seemed to be dependent on the individual person and their commitment, not so much the system.

In 2018, the Territory went about building a new strategy. As a Ferocious Warmth leader, Vicki was determined to have good robust debate and input with the key stakeholders. Previously, they had a very traditional structure, with the corporate arm of the education system writing strategy and policy. But this was continuing to get the same low results. A small number of principals raised the issue of the overwhelming number of strategies they were already using and the confusion they were experiencing.

Vicki asked them to step into being influencers in the system, rather than sitting on the side lines waiting for the next strategy to come out.

In her own ferocious words: 'I need you to have the courage of your own convictions to stand in front of me and the executive board of this agency and challenge us around the system lift that you want and what you want to see.'

‘My invitation is for you to address the Executive Board that make the decisions around the way the world operates in this agency and you need to provide sufficient provocation and challenge. Are you up for that? You will have my backing. I will do the introduction and you will have my support.

‘In the unwritten conversation that was, “Will we be safe?” I said, “If we do this we’re not about to go and do something that’s going to place us in a position where we won’t be supported. You know you’ve got my backing, you know you’ll have the Deputy Chief Executive’s backing, but you need to put forward a cogent argument.” The team of principals went away and put together their ‘pitch’ to the Executive Board, after undertaking international and national research and linking it with practice based knowledge.

Vicki continues: ‘They stepped into the space with dignity and respect to the way it had been done before. They were analytical about what they were experiencing in terms of the myriad strategies and the confusion it was creating. They were quite clear that they wanted something that was simple. And they had looked internationally and nationally at improving systems, provided us with a couple of provocations and then they left.’

I reflect on the courage of those principals to take up and step into that challenge. The fourth stage of psychological safety – the challenger stage – requires both courage to step up and the trust that the executive do indeed ‘have your back’.

TRYING SOMETHING NEW

Vicki says: ‘I went to my strategic policy area and said, “Well, we’ve been challenged. How are we going to do it?” So they started to have meetings... and more meetings. “No. I’m not doing any more meetings. Meetings have got us to where we are. We have to try something else.” The policy unit became the facilitators of the work. We asked for volunteers who were not normally part of the strategic policy unit. The Deputy Chief Executive and I became part of a team of five school leaders, five corporate leaders and five people from our executive corporate team who provided support. Through plane visits, boat rides and many road trips, we hit thousands of people in every part of the Northern Territory.

'We had three questions:

- What's working now?
- What would make it better?
- If we were going to stop, what should we stop?

'It's not rocket science. They're just good common-sense questions. When you ask your parents, when you ask your students, school leaders and educators, all your stakeholder groups, they all have a view. And they all get a voice. From the gift of all of that information, the themes started to emerge. A lot related to stopping writing strategies about measures. Attendance is a measure, but it's not a strategy in itself. We need to get the kids to learn and getting them to school is a big part of that. But when you just measure kids' learning through an attendance measure, that's not sufficient.'

Vicki reported that the students were very clear: "I come to school when somebody knows and cares about me and I come to school when my learning is something that I can take home and my family is proud of me." That's now where our strategy goes. It's about engagement. It's about growth and it's about achievement. It's pretty simple.'

LISTENING TO THE STUDENTS

Increasing the student and teacher input into this strategy was pivotal to its development. As Vicki says, 'It was the children who wrote the strategy for the Northern Territory. It was their voice and their agency, but it was also amazing educators and incredibly talented leaders, both within our corporate sector and in our schools, who facilitated that agency. From the grassroots. It has to start with committed people wanting to learn and that starts with your educators and your school leaders. But, importantly, they know the primary group they work with. We've been able to connect young people into a legitimate, known and trusted process where they are scaffolded and supported to grow their capability for genuine voice. You start by giving them a voice, but you build it into agency to influence. You get them into collaboration and cocreation and they are partners in whatever the work is that you're on about. That's where you get the real momentum. It's not a top-down thing. But as a leader, you need to be open to sponsoring this, you need to create the space and the enablers to let that happen.

‘You also need the goodwill of intelligent, decent people. They don’t have to be teachers, but they need to be intelligent, decent people who value a future and see that young people are part of that. They know more about the service they want, whether it’s in a classroom or whether it’s a mental health service or whether it’s access to a sporting service. They absolutely have a deep understanding about how the world could be better and how they could contribute to that in a process that starts at the grassroots and then you create the broader opportunities to influence politically.’

The Northern Territory Department of Education’s Learning Commissioner program is a perfect example of this grassroots approach to student agency and influence. The concept started in Katherine schools. It’s now an ongoing program in the Northern Territory across sixteen schools from Katherine to Darwin, which sees students from upper primary and middle school engage in long-term analysis of school data and provides recommendations built into the school and system strategy. This work is led on the adult side for the Department of Education by John Cleary, former Casuarina PS principal and now General Manager, School and System Improvement, in conjunction with Dr Tanya Vaughan, Evidence for Learning, Summer Howarth, Founder and Learning Designer at The Eventful Learning Co., and Helen Butler, Education Services Australia.

‘The student, teacher and leader commissioners meet as part of the Learning Commission to discuss, analyse and set direction for the school year informed by whole school data sets. Based on their school data student, teacher and school leader commissioners set goals, design evidence gathering processes, sample sizes for inclusion and identify how they will measure the impact of their school-based research.’

Vaughan et al.⁷⁵

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

The combination of co-creating the initial plan and ongoing support of the Learning Commissioner’s approach demonstrates how Vicki and her team were determined to not do things the way they’d always been done. Not only did she want to provide provocation for the schools and the system, but for herself and her executive team. Their new strategy, released in 2018, was clear, actionable and resourced. Their

journey, based on three clear goals of Engage, Grow, Achieve and four strategy areas of Quality Teaching, Data and Accountability, Community Engagement, and Differentiated Support for Schools, is making major inroads. The Northern Territory was the most improved system in the 2019 school year. Shift and growth are visible. Most importantly, the system is moving as a whole. They are working together to transform education.

Vicki is a fine exemplar of Ferocious Warmth. She set the tone for raising the bar to achieve transformation and providing the safety and support for the people she led to co-create, take risks and work together.

chapter six

LEADING TRANSFORMATION

'We've got two constructs in the world. It's love and fear. Which one do you want to choose? Do you want to wake up and chase your dreams? Or do you just want to wake up and simply exist? Your choice.'

'The only risk I see in education is schools, school leaders and systems who continue to be wedded to the one-size-fits-all industrial delivery model. They are risking young people's holistic growth and achievement and perhaps even their future, in this new world environment we all find ourselves in.'

Adriano Di Prato, Entrepreneurial Educator⁷⁶

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN YOUR SCHOOL IF YOU WERE BOLDER?

I asked you to consider this at the beginning of this book. It is one of my favourite questions to ask of leaders. I think we should be pushing ourselves with this question on a regular basis. Usually fear keeps us thinking small. Fear of failure, fear of how the community will react, fear of push back from teachers and students.

Tracey Breese is the dynamic secondary school principal of Kurri Kurri High School (KKHS) in NSW. I first met Tracey when I was presenting at a NSW Secondary Principal's Conference. Talking with her immediately had my Ferocious Warmth radar tingling. I could hear her ferocity about the moral purpose as well as

her humour, love of her students and staff. Tracey is all about her team and what they have done together. It's a definite 'we' and 'innovation' culture, but it wasn't always so. The change began with her maintaining a ferocious stance on changing the status quo.

When I last spoke in depth with Tracey about the journey at Kurri Kurri, they were three years into shifting from the uncomfortable space of innovation being scary and very new towards it being embedded in the way they work. Kurri Kurri uses a hub-based approach to Year 7 schooling, with the curriculum taught through real projects. Learning pathways follow that allow for students to choose a Big Picture⁷⁷ studio school path or a more mainstream one. Both pathways have a focus on individualised and engaged learning, with an emphasis on real experiences.

Tracey speaks with conviction in videos on the school's website, clearly articulating the vision of the school: 'Our vision for teaching and learning is to produce knowledgeable, creative, collaborative students of the future, who are well balanced citizens, walking out into the world knowing their skill base.'

When Tracey came to KKHS in 2016, every person in the school was working hard, but she could see they were heading for the wrong set of goalposts. There were old mechanisms in place with a strong focus on behaviour and little on learning. Tracey's belief is that when you focus only on behaviour, you're not actually focussing on wellbeing. KKHS in an area where 85% of the students are in the lowest two quartiles of socio-economic disadvantage so wellbeing really matters.

UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCE

One of the first things Tracey did was spend a day in the life of a Year 8 student. 'I wandered around as a Year 8 student for the whole day. And it was the most boring day of my life. I think I would have rather eaten cardboard. So, that really shifted what I was thinking about. I started reflecting and asking questions "What are these kids doing all day? Six-and-a-quarter hours we've got them." And pretty much what I saw was that we were taking them away from a life outside of school, putting them in prison for six hours, putting the moat down in the afternoon and letting them go back to life. I started to reflect on the question: "Did we have the capacity to shift?"'

Tracey ‘lurked with intent’ in corridors, looking and listening to what was happening in the classrooms. What was the teacher-talk like? How did they interact with the students? How were they framing the lessons and work? She saw patterns and habits of working that she knew needed to shift. And if she saw one more death by PowerPoint, she wanted to scream!

The second thing Tracey did was survey how many assessments the Year 7s were doing. They were doing 75 per year! She started to realise why so many students were disenfranchised by the time they reached their last year of school. It was a great example of the over-schooled and under-educated mantle that is often used when referring to Australian education.

It also highlights the piece of work that sits side by side with any transformation needed in a school – a collaborative learning culture in the staff. Strong communication and a collective approach were not in place.

At Kurri Kurri, Tracey began speaking to the staff, especially middle management, around the provocation: ‘If we’ve got these kids for all of this time, why are they not leaving with better outcomes?’

They began working on the premise of three driving principles:

1. No child in conflict can learn.
2. Maslow’s before Bloom’s.
3. Schools need to be places where students are no longer learning to work, but learning to live.

The Ferocious Warmth leader understands the need for conviction and clear statements that people can grab, those ‘sticky messages’. They hold our beliefs in ‘bumper stickers’ that become embedded in culture. These three distinct, memorable headlines gave Kurri Kurri solid direction.

Tracey is sure of her moral purpose and her ability to bring people along the way. To get the three vision statements moving, Tracey knew she needed to control the narrative and lead the change. ‘When things did start changing with their wellbeing and teaching and learning, some teachers worried that the students would not be able to do the work. People would come up to me saying, “Kids in Year 11 can’t do this.” I replied, “Well, that’s our fault. We’ve had them for four years.”’

Ferocious – yes – in a good way. It started people thinking differently to get a shift.

I also see in Tracey the paradox of yet. For change to happen she needed to be the visionary and also be on the ground helping add oxygen to the flame. Visionary yet grounded.

Kurri Kurri High School is now firmly learning and innovating, and a lighthouse school for the New South Wales system and beyond. In response to queries about introducing their project-based model in Year 7 rather than the 'traditional' Year 9, Tracey replies: 'Why would you introduce something to the most disengaged kids in your school? They're already cranky, often already indoctrinated against learning and school. Why would you start with failure? In 2016 the Year 7 data on high efficacy and high expectations was 32%. Basically, is there someone who loves me (that word again!) that I can trust and are there high expectations around my learning? In 2018, the data was up to 61%. Shifting both the work of the teachers and the work of the students.'

JOLT THINKING

We won't re-set entrenched thinking if we don't jolt it. John Kotter, the guru of large transformation change, designates creating a sense of urgency as his first step in *The 8-Step Process for Leading Change*.⁷⁸ As we know, urgency was high during COVID-19. Agility and flexibility abounded as schools wrestled with the challenge of providing quality education remotely, while maintaining strong connection and compassion for vulnerability and anxiety. Our challenge is to keep that learning, and agility into the future.

Ferocious Warmth leaders post COVID-19 are not prepared to let the status quo creep back in. They're maintaining inquiry, challenge and curiosity. They're tapping into the innovators and early adopters, and retaining their voice. To take from Tracey's view of the world: if we go back to the way it once was, we've let that happen.



Reflection pause ...

How does the teaching and learning look different in your school from two, three, ten years ago?
What does it need to look like in the years ahead?

SEIZE THE DISRUPTION

Let's seize this disruption to help us transform the way education is provided in our schools. It's expansion at work – evolving what we have into something more fit for purpose in this complex world.

Charlene Li, author of *The Disruption Mindset*⁷⁹, shares these three elements of disruptive transformation:

1. **Strategy inspired by future customers to make 'big gulp' decisions.**
Consider the unmet, unexpressed needs of people you'll serve in the future.
2. **Leadership that creates a movement of disruptors.** A special kind of leadership is needed to inspire followers to build a coalition of key people who will help make change happen.
3. **Culture that thrives with disruption.** Openness, agency and action transform cultures from 'stuck' to 'flux' – able to thrive in disruption.

All three are pertinent to education right now and support the Ferocious Warmth approaches to leadership. Here I expand Li's elements to make them even more relevant to education leaders:

1. STRATEGY THAT KEEPS EYES FIRMLY ON THE STUDENT (THE CUSTOMER)

Educators all went into the 'big gulp' of remote learning in 2020. What unmet and unexpressed needs did you discover about your students and families that this context actually fulfilled for them? How has that changed the way your school provides education? My home state of Victoria, Australia, experienced two lockdowns and remote-learning stretches. The second stretch allowed schools to apply the learning from the first. Many schools found that students who were historically disengaged in the classroom engaged in the online school environment. For an alarming percentage of students, the classroom environment simply does not work. Too noisy, too much distraction, fears of comparison and judgment, not being good enough, lack of psychological or cultural safety. All sorts of needs that, in reality, schools might not be fulfilling.

How have you interrogated your own and your team's thinking about this? Stephen Kendall Jones and the staff at Albany Junior High School in Auckland, New Zealand, went into a design-thinking cycle while they were still in lockdown. At the time of writing, they were fullsteam innovating around an opt-in online stream,

perhaps two days face to face, three days online. The aim is to fulfil the needs of students with mental health challenges or learning preferences, and to open up opportunities for geography not to be a barrier to learning at the school. This work in progress is considering partnerships with other schools, so as not to impact negatively on local school enrolments and to create a positive outcome across the whole of the system.



Reflection pause ...

How many schools have jumped on the chance to really transform via the learnings of the remote phase of COVID-19? How many have simply 'snapped back' into the way we've always done it?

Where are you on this scale?

Whether we face COVID-19, or some other future global upheaval, the premise remains the same: Ferocious Warmth leaders step into disruption and claim the opportunities rather than shutting them down.

2. A MOVEMENT OF DISRUPTORS

Tracey's team is a perfect example of creating a collective approach. To begin the transformation, Tracey knew she needed an 'A' team who were ready to innovate and lead the shift. She also made it clear to her middle leaders that they needed to be in on the innovation. In fact, leading innovation and change was a criteria for their achieving their positions. (There's the ferocity.) These leaders then ran an expression of interest within their faculties to apply for the lead role. Others were not ready to jump in. They needed to observe, to gain confidence to give it a go and be OK with failure if it didn't work straight away. When people were concerned and not ready to be a part of it, Tracey gave them the space they needed to be on the periphery and watch before they jumped in. (There's the warmth.)

3. A CULTURE THAT THRIVES WITH DISRUPTION

Ferocious Warmth education leaders know that intense learning creates disruption. Charlene calls this working in the space of 'flux'. It's also The Buzz. In a thriving collaborative learning culture, we're not surprised by change, disruption and transformation. It's the space we seek to create every day for each other and our students. The learning zone should be one of energy, innovation and excitement: Antifragile.

If we create an environment where responsive teaching is based on feedback then we should be in a constant state of minor disruption, always tweaking and shifting our approach to achieve the intended impact. However, meeting the needs of every student in this complex world requires major disruption.

GET MORE IDEAS

The global design company IDEO found that many people stop at three ideas when iterating and finding solutions to problems, yet those who go for at least five iterations or ideas are 50% more likely to launch successfully.⁸⁰

One of my mentors, Kieran Flanagan, Chief Creative Officer for The Impossible Institute and author, says, as she delivers her keynote speeches to conferences full of people eager to be more innovative, 'I'm not more creative than you – I just work harder.' Kieran and her business partner Dan Gregory create a huge number of ideas individually first around a concept or problem, before they join together on them. I'm not talking ten ideas, I mean 50 to 100! What they co-create when they bring these ideas together is quite often mind-blowing!

'Creativity is an ability to think, to solve problems in ways we haven't seen before. It is innovation, flexibility, agility, ingenuity and mental fluidity. All things that will be incredibly useful for our ongoing success, no matter what the future brings. In our experience, creativity is more discipline than talent. It is something we can practise and improve on, which makes it very much a skill, and vital one at that.'

Kieran Flanagan and Dan Gregory, *Forever Skills*⁸¹



Reflection pause ...

How do you tap into the ideation of your teams?

Is there a wonder and excitement to the environment you create?

Is there psychological safety to challenge own thinking?

IDEO's findings show that the chances of a failed launch decreased by 16.67% when team members felt comfortable to challenge the status quo. Through The Buzz diagnostic, I've also found this applicable to school teams. For example, 'I feel confident to challenge our assumptions and beliefs' sits on the bottom of the rankings of 'very like us' as a team, creating a challenge space is high performance work.

How often do we code new things as a huge change rather than simply responding to learning – what's working and what is not? What needs a nudge and what needs a rewrite? What needs revolution, what needs evolution? What just needs some new thinking?

GET OUT OF BINARY

As we've discussed, the very nature of Ferocious Warmth is the tension and duality that pulls from both sides of the concept. Yet often when we're trying to solve problems, we approach things from an 'either/or' rather than an 'and'.

Peter Hutton, former principal of Templestowe College and now convenor of the Future Schools Alliance, is a prime example of someone pushing strongly against the status quo. He questions why we've always done things this way, and ruffles feathers by fearlessly asking provocative questions to get people thinking differently.

Peter would unashamedly say he's pushing for revolution, not evolution. His twitter tag is @Edrev and his views are sought from educators all over the world. As

is often the case, the biggest push back on Peter's views can come from educators in his own back yard.

Under Peter's leadership, Templestowe College (TC) completely transformed the way it ran and grew from 286 students to over 1000 in seven years. The school has its foundations in strong student agency and subject choice, and does not run on the structure of traditional age year levels.

Peter and the TC team's work took a number of assumptions and turned them on their head, such as:

- Subject choice should be limited and follow strict rules.
- Students take six years to move through the curriculum properly.
- Students cannot make choices about their subjects except from a narrowly defined list, made up by adults.
- Students should be sorted by age.
- Individual learning plans are only for specific students, not all.

SATISFICING

Herbert Simon, an American economist, political scientist and cognitive psychologist, developed theories and undertook research about decision-making. His theory of 'bounded rationalism'⁸² explains some of our reticence to change approaches we're comfortable with. These become habits and assumptions that we no longer challenge. Simon's bounded rationality states that people are 'bounded' by the:

- information they have
- cognitive limitations of their mind
- finite amount of time they have to make a decision.

This leads to 'satisficing'. We make decisions that shortcut deep deliberation, but that 'satisfy' and will 'suffice'. Think of all the things going on schools every day that are simply 'satisficing'!

This is why we need people like Peter Hutton to prickle us. To make us examine our assumptions and decisions that are just 'satisfactory' or easier for us.

I asked Peter if he could unpack his approach to testing assumptions and challenging the 'norm'. He believes it's influenced by his dyslexia.

Peter understood by about Grade 2 that his literacy skills were not up to his

cognitive ability. He soon learnt to change the system that sought to put him into the bottom category through negative results that didn't accurately represent his ability. As a student of the seventies, his story of cheating at the reading comprehension cards had me in hysterics! Peter found that his dyslexia forged two reactions when confronted with a problem – go around it or be crushed by it.

Getting around the system was something Peter learnt early. Interestingly, dyslexia affects 10% of the population and is highly represented in both prison populations and entrepreneurs. Many teachers are never taught how to deal with dyslexia in the classroom, yet the diagnosis requires specific pedagogy to help students learn to read. Templestowe was one of the first schools to bring in dyslexia testing for all students.

When coming out of the remote-learning phase in 2020, I was fascinated to hear some school leaders concerned that nothing would change because the system would not let them, while other leaders who I knew to embed innovation in the way their school worked were excited by the huge variety of changes they'd seize from the time. Innovators and early adopters versus the late majority, perhaps? Will you go around the system or be crushed by it?

Templestowe College is in an area surrounded by high-performing state and independent schools. When the team at TC were looking at growing the school population, they found out quickly that, for the demographic around them, high academic results would be the only way people would even entertain sending their children to the school. Tricky to provide the proof of something before it's begun! At this stage, the college had 286 students and was struggling in all measures used to identify high performance.

THINKING DIFFERENTLY

So, they thought differently. Like Tracey Breese of Kurri Kurri, Peter 'jolted' thinking to test assumptions. He developed a methodology to test thinking. In any area of schooling, teachers asked:

- What if we did five times as much of it?
- What if we did a fifth of it?
- What would the costs and benefits be?

For example: take the approach to welfare in any school.

If we did it five times as much – what might the down side be? What might work better?

If we did no welfare, what would the negatives be? The positives?

What do we not know that we need to find out in order to test our assumptions rigorously?

Every time they challenged an assumption, they opened up new thinking, strategies and approaches. It also helped the staff understand that nothing is black and white.

One red flag for Peter, which is a good lesson for all of us, is polarity. As soon as only two options are put to Peter, he challenges the thinking – either internally or out loud. When polarity is questioned, it brings in the grey, the ambiguity and the uncertainty we need to purge structures and assumptions that no longer serve us. Simply asking: does it have to be either/or? Can it be and? Or flagging another option completely can create a bubble of thinking beyond the ordinary.

Peter is comfortable making others uncomfortable. He chooses deliberate language that prods and prickles, such as ‘emancipating the young’. This provocation comes from a strong conviction of a better world, through the power of a different paradigm of education.

The Future Schools Alliance that Peter convenes brings together schools from all over Australia who want to expose themselves to better thinking, innovation and shaking the norms that education has set in concert over time. Does this work make some in the establishment annoyed? Probably. Is it trying to question the status quo and create a better education for students?

Absolutely.



Reflection pause ...

What assumptions have you busted?

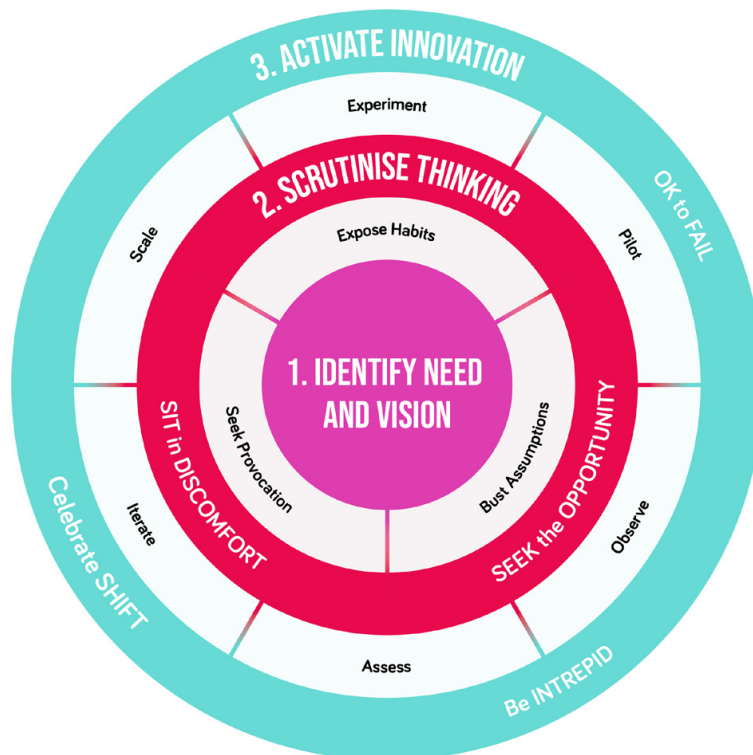
Do your questions prompt silence and internal dialogue in yourself and others?

Do you push back at polarity and binary solutions?

A FEROCIOUS WARMTH APPROACH TO INNOVATION

How do you approach innovation and transformation in your school? This framework can assist putting your strategy to work. It combines both action and mindset work.

Figure 13. Ferocious Warmth Innovation Framework



Both shaded rings in this Ferocious Warmth Innovation Framework contain a way of ‘being’ when leading or incubating an innovation culture.

As the framework suggests, we need to start with vision and evidence of the driving need for change. We continue by scrutinising thinking, sitting in discomfort and seeking the opportunities, then we activate innovation. Here’s how.

1. START WITH VISION AND EVIDENCE OF DRIVING NEED FOR CHANGE

Didn’t the whole experiment that was 2020 show us how we can be compelled to act when the need for change is critical to the ongoing wellbeing and learning of our students? Prior to this, generally the reason for change in our systems was

often limited to the very dreary, 'to improve student outcomes'. Let's not pretend that's a vision. That's an outcome. So many educators turn off every time that term was used as a reason for change. We know it's an outcome we're after, but it bureaucratizes what we're all about. Let's be more inspiring and ferocious in our visions, and use warmth and connection to bring people along with us. Link what is being done to an inspiring purpose and big why.

2. SCRUTINISE THINKING, SIT IN DISCOMFORT, SEEK THE OPPORTUNITIES CREATE A CATALYST FOR THE DISCUSSION

A few years ago I worked with a very established, high-performance school in Sydney, Australia. They were led by a Ferocious Warmth leader who, with her leadership team, wanted to help the whole staff step into a space of innovation for the future. Uncomfortable with their more traditional style of working, which they felt was not arming their students for the complexity of the world, they wanted to explore possibilities and bust some of the school's cultural assumptions around what education should provide.

We designed a day where over one hundred staff gathered in the school hall to scrutinise thinking, sit in discomfort and seek the opportunities. Diverse groupings identified the different skills students currently use and those they'll need when entering the workforce that are different to the skills we needed when we left school. This type of discussion puts a couple of key Ferocious Warmth things in place. It creates connection between people beyond their usual teams and this personal interaction connects the school. It also links each person intimately to the discussion at hand, as everyone reflects on 'the world as it was for me'. This individual connection with the inquiry is critical to buy in and 'cracking the thinking'. The discussion also creates an environment of expansion and learning. Active curiosity, listening and wondering is the premise, rather than sitting and consuming what someone is spouting out the front.

We watched the Prince Ea YouTube video 'I Just Sued the School System'.⁸³ Prince Ea is an American rapper, spoken-word artist and human rights activist. The premise of this emotive video is that education as it currently stands in most schools is a system built for the industrial era, which has caused millions of students to disengage and be judged against arbitrary measures that are not

fit for today's world. The challenging premise and delivery can cause discomfort. The discomfort is a perfect provocation for discussion. It is important to give 'permission' for people to discuss their discomfort. What they agree with, what they don't. If you're thinking of using provocations to 'jolt' thinking, whatever you may use, having empathy for those people is Ferocious Warmth in action. Be armed with questions that open up the space. For example, 'There is so much in this video. Some of it you may reject and some may be right on the mark for you. It makes me uncomfortable in places, but it also encourages me to check in on my defensiveness. In your teams, would you discuss how this video made you feel? What prickled? What hurt? What made sense? What excited you?'

After unpacking this video, provocation from closer to home was provided in the form of a video created prior to the day. This video contained vox pops from a variety of school parents in their professional roles, as well as former school students, who came from a range of industries and startup businesses. They gave insight into the skills they and their employees need to thrive in business. The former students gave insights as to the grounding the school had given them, as well as their wish for other approaches that would also have helped them further. For many in the room, this video was a useful 'conscious convincer' for both the need for this work and the opportunity before them.

SEE THE OPPORTUNITIES

Framing the mindset for a day like this is critical, so the discussions can be open and curious, rather than fearful and judging. We looked at the neuroscience foundation of the learning zone, psychological safety and curiosity (The Buzz). This allowed people to step into a place of wonder for the future and possibility. The most important feature of this discussion was the connection to 'we'. Educators in this together, not separate. Collective efficacy.

Our afternoon was spent visioning the future, using an impactful visual activity I learnt from Grove Consulting in California called Cover Story Vision.⁸⁴ The finished product is an education-magazine article curated by the 'editorial team', with headlines, stories and images are all about the school and the dynamic, rich education provided in the future. The whole school split into smaller, mixed teams of about eight people to envisage the school in ten years' time. The provocations

and discussions from the morning uppermost in their minds, they wandered through the school, discussing what could be in place by then, adding their thoughts to large visioning sheets. The groups returned to chart their imaginings on the large template provided. I've used this process in a number of schools to encourage bigger picture thinking for the future. I've also had groups deliver Ted-type talks. All create an energy of possibility and opportunity.

The ideas created during this type of activity are quite surprising, such as gallery walks and funneling processes to identify themes and 'big ideas'. The synergy between the groups astounds people. Teams identified key insights, plans for the future and next steps.

HEAD AND HEART

Can you feel the connection of head and heart? More often than not, these groups are so mixed that people are working with others they've never spoken to about hopes and fears for the future. This process provides a deeper connection than any 'stick post-it notes on the flipchart' activity. It creates a momentum and excitement about the future. The provocation for shift is accepted, acknowledged and then the whole staff look at what it means in context.

Days like these never work in isolation. Hopefully we gave up long ago the idea that a day of professional learning and discussion will fix all challenges. (Though some leaders still assume this should be the case, with no change in behaviour or thinking from themselves.) As a very high performing school, much was at stake for them, based on the system and their community's measures of success. Fortunately for this school, the leadership team guided the significant shift from a very traditional, content-driven and teacher-focussed curriculum to a more individual, exploratory approach that embedded 21st century skills and student agency. This was possible through a well-crafted strategy that contained high support and high challenge over the following years. The school continues to achieve high results and it's a lighthouse school for innovation.

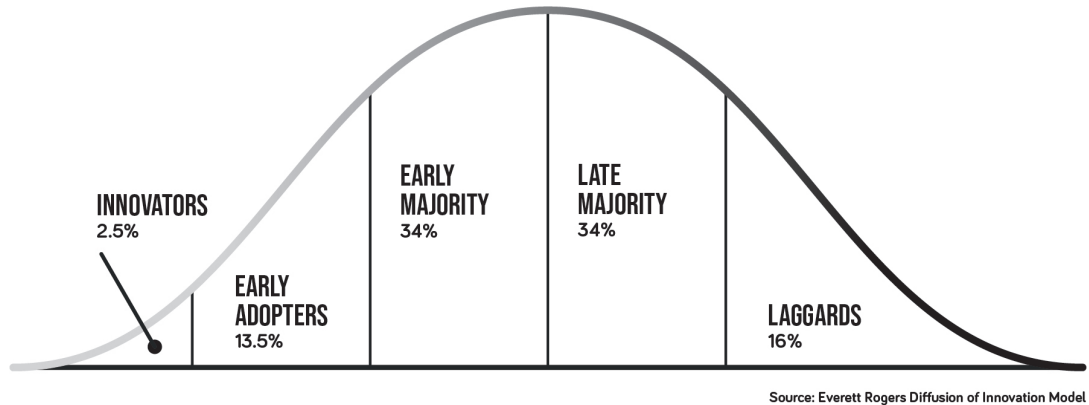
3. ACTIVATE INNOVATION

The Kurri Kurri High School innovation journey is a wonderful example of mindset activating innovation. Innovation is not about having a solution, it's about trying

things until you find the right one for the context. It's about being at ease with not knowing the answers. The leader's learning mindset sets the tone for this to work. Any learning culture will be comfortable with 'not always knowing'. It flows from our 'challenge with curiosity, not judgement' approach. For some of us, the fear of being out of control or not knowing what to do next can stifle our ability to step straight into innovation. Yet others thrive on the thrill.

Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Curve⁸⁵ is a model I find useful to reflect on people's readiness when creating a movement for innovation. The model was created to reflect the uptake of technology, but serves as an effective lens to use on any innovation. Topic and context affects interest and uptake, so Ferocious Warmth leaders plan how they connect people to the initiative. The opportunity lies in our viewing new approaches, products and ways of working through different lenses.

Figure 14. Diffusion of Innovation Curve, Everett Rogers



Here are the Innovation Curve groupings and the application within an innovation education culture:

THE INNOVATORS

People with seemingly harebrained ideas who are willing to give them a try. Experts at failing more than succeeding. These people are our entrepreneurs. We owe so much of our growth and development to them taking the risks they do. They're only a tiny percentage of any group. Be careful: to your detriment, the culture may not allow them any air time.

THE EARLY ADOPTERS

They love the bright, shiny new objects and want to play with them straight away. These people are the lynchpins of getting innovation and shift off the ground, often sitting there itching to get creative and out of the straitjacket of 'we don't do things like that around here'. They are OK to fail and thrive on experimentation. Many early adopters stepped forward during the remote learning shift of 2020 and held the light up for others to follow.

Language to use: the opportunity, excitement, coolness of an idea. Cutting edge, leading the way, making a difference.

THE EARLY MAJORITY

This crew watches the early adopters with interest and is willing to trial things that they're playing around with and support the investigation. Open to learning, they make a great support crew to pilot new approaches. They see the impact and positive outcomes of the innovation and take it up. As more people join the early majority, we climb towards the top of the bell curve and a tipping point occurs. This is a sure sign you are on the way to adopting a new way of working.

Language to use: practical, shifting outcomes, evolving practice, making a difference.

THE LATE MAJORITY

More cautious, needing more support and reassurance, this group makes up the bulk of the remainder. They want to see clear evidence that this initiative will work or make their lives easier or deliver far better than the status quo.

Language to use: well-tested, positive impact, safe, supported.

THE LAGGARDS

Only on board because there is no choice. It's now part of policy, compliance or the only way to do the work. My experience is that laggards hold a far louder voice in many schools than they should. Many leaders try to shift these people first, rather than beginning at the other end. The language of change becomes bogged down trying to shift the thinking of a few, rather than exciting those early adopters and majority, who will provide momentum and shift.

Tracey Breese's pilot approach discussed earlier is a living example of the Innovation Curve. Now it's an accepted way of working at the school. Tracey and Kurri Kurri's mantra? 'Don't hold too fast to change, because it will change again.'

BE OK TO FAIL — CREATE A STUFF-UP ZONE

As previously discussed, owning that we don't need to get it right all the time is one of the hallmarks of a strong learning culture. Our articulation and modelling of this makes a big difference in people's mindsets.

As a profession, we are generally risk averse. Our systems are built on consistency and certainty, which can create status quo. Often people are looking for permission to innovate. This seems counterintuitive, yet in education 'permission' is still something sought. This permission becomes a safety net we can give to both teachers and students. While we would hope that all good teaching allows for innovation, the strong drive for consistent, evidence-based-only approaches has taken us too far. This encourages us all to stay well within our lanes: safe.

“ FEROCIOUS WARMTH LEADERS ARE EXPLICIT ABOUT CHANGE, INNOVATION AND A WILLINGNESS TO FAIL. THEY CREATE A SAFE PLACE FOR PEOPLE TO SHARE THEIR BIGGEST STUFF-UPS AND WHAT CAME OUT OF THEM. ”

As we move further into the development of authentic student agency, project-based learning and divergent thinking skills, permitting teachers to experiment in partnership with students will help shape a new way of working in many schools. I encourage you to give people the structure, the instructional model, the frameworks, the evidence base, and the respect to innovate and create new ways of getting the outcomes you're all after. Without practice-based experimentation, no evidence base would appear. Expansion requires risk taking.



Reflection pause ...

Where are your opportunities to be expansive? Is it more self-reflection and stretch of your own self-awareness and growth? Is it expanding the leadership capability of the people you lead? Or perhaps you're ready to be bold and lead some serious transformation in your school through expanding collaborative culture.

Whichever it may be, remember the connection between Ferocity and Warmth creates a place where people feel safe to expand their thinking, their learning, their risk taking. High challenge. High support.