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Myths from seven world cultures



To discuss with designer/NZ is missing from map

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Hélène van Oudheusden

Towards (or without towards?)

The Compassionate School

Change through indigenous wisdom and universal values

Or? Personal development for educational professionals

Apollo Books

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About the cover image
A dreamcatcher is a traditional symbol of the Ojibwe, an Indigenous people from the US and Canada, intended to protect sleeping children. According to their tradition, the web catches negative dreams and lets positive dreams through.

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Names and events have been altered where necessary to protect the privacy of those involved.

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> *Indigenous peoples have for centuries been visited by people who wish to change them. But we have been exploring the world for 20,000 years. What if you let us inspire you?*
> To Siaja, an Inuit woman in *the North of the North*

As the African saying goes: *It takes a village to raise a child.*
This book is an invitation to shape that village together.

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Introduction

I can still see myself sitting there as a ten-year-old in Mr. Carpenter's classroom. My small desk was pushed right against his, with Sofia sitting next to me. For the whole year, I had been mesmerized by the ring binder on the teacher's desk. Beautiful white, lined pages with two flaps on either side, featuring the names of my classmates. In it, he meticulously kept track of our grades. That was what I wanted, too.

At home, I crafted an identical binder and secretly gave my classmates grades during reading aloud. At school, I slid my binder as far under his desk as possible; back then, I felt a little ashamed of my big dream. Being a teacher. Now, nearly fifty years later, I am still a teacher. A deep sigh escapes me as I write this down. My body senses the profound truth of these words.

Since those primary school days, I have led a life full of adventure: discovering, letting go, grieving, and starting anew. Time and again, I have discovered new versions of myself, with one constant remaining: my deep passion for guiding children to trust themselves and find their way in life. The scent of a school is one of the most beautiful I know.

Transformation as a Guiding Thread

Transformation and change have become the guiding threads of my life. After twelve years in the corporate world, a burnout did not pass me by. An intensive education in psycho-spiritual healing methods helped me feel what I truly wished for and needed for my soul. This required an intense process of letting go of what no longer fit and what I had outgrown. Saying goodbye, enduring the uncertainty of liminal periods, and continuing to trust that the new is on its way — I know it, I live it, and I now gladly guide others through it.

What has helped me deeply in times of personal change is the knowledge that we are not pioneering alone. Many have gone before us and captured change processes in clear models. The classic *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell has been my favourite guiding light for 30 years. Campbell shows that behind all stories and cultures lies the same human quest: the path to inner growth. Alongside his wisdom, I have been fascinated by Indigenous peoples since I was a child. The natural wisdom of Native Americans and Aboriginals feels so familiar to me that I sometimes wonder if I spent past lives there.

In the thirty years I have worked in education, I have seen how universal laws (name them?) provide direction. Especially now that society is polarising, this wisdom helps us stay on course toward a world where connection, positivity, and everyone's unique talents take centre stage.

The Call for Soulful Education

People standing in front of the classroom and are leading a school are very passionate for their profession and for pedagogy. Yet, in the hustle and bustle of daily life, their own needs and inner development are easily overlooked. Of course, there is

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professional training in methodologies and effective communication. And yet, something rubs the wrong way:

- I see teachers struggling with fear of parent-teacher meetings - fear that cannot be resolved with a standard training programme.
- I talk with educators who no longer wanted to suppress their intuition just because the protocol dictates another way.
- I hear school leaders who engage in family constellations privately and wish the same insights for their entire team.
- I notice teachers becoming curious about how the power of mythology van support them look at themselves with more compassion and patience.

In short: I see a deep longing among educational professionals to look at pedagogy in a new, soulful way. Driven by inner development, to then model that for the new generation.

Universal Inclusion and Seven Generations

Since inclusive education means that all pupils from all kinds of backgrounds attend school together, I sincerely hope that this will become *universally* inclusive education. Not just a suitable place for every child, but also a connection to the visible and invisible world around us. A world in which we look deeper than first impressions and become genuinely curious about the soul behind the teacher, the pupil, and the parent.

We know by now that what we carry with us can be shaped by as many as seven generations before us. Family stories and generational pain continue to flow until someone stands up and says: *"It stops with me."* What we heal within ourselves, we heal retroactively for the generations before us, and for the seven generations to come.

The Journey Ahead

Transforming these long-standing cycles and choosing inner growth requires immense courage, but you do not have to walk this path alone. To bring this meaningful healing into the daily reality of the classroom, we need a map. We need a way to translate ancestral wisdom and soulful intuition into practical, sustainable steps for our schools.

That is why a wrote this book. *The Compassionate School* is a practical guide for the personal development of educational professionals. Drawing on academic change management, Indigenous wisdom, and universal values, you will discover how to bring the compassionate school to life from within. We need your unique energy to transform schools into communities that prepare pupils for their own *Hero's Journey*.

The foundation of the compassionate school that we will build in this book consists of:

- **Understanding the three universal stages of change** that show how inner growth occurs.

- **Embodying one core principle of Indigenous peoples** that helps us stay on course.
- **Applying five core values** that bring practical wisdom to life within the school.

A Note Before You Begin

The theory and exercises in this book may seem simple. However, lasting change toward a compassionate school lies in healing the personal undercurrents of teachers, leaders, and the team: each individually and all together. Only when you dare to embark on the entire journey of change, and everyone feels seen and heard, can you truly ensure that your work is rooted in genuine compassion. Never forget that self-reflection, perseverance, and humour will always support you on this journey.

I wish you every inspiration to use your unique energy to create a school where you, your team, and your pupils can feel respected, seen, and at home - especially in these dynamic times. Your energy and contribution make more of a difference than you might realise.

Kalo taxidi x

Hélène van Oudheusden
The Hague, the Netherlands

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PART I

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Part I: **Laying the foundations**

> *I am, because we are.*
> African proverb

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What is a compassionate school culture?

A compassionate school culture is a community in which pupils learn to be and become themselves. Educational professionals feel they have the space to experiment with emotions, feelings and behaviour. It is a warm, welcoming community where personal growth and the desire to contribute to a harmonious society come together.

Scientific basis and pedagogical impact

Research by Radboudumc, the University of Humanistic Studies and the Centre for Mindfulness shows that compassion in education leads to resilience, connectedness and psychological safety. Programmes such as *Mindful SelfCompassion* and *MBCL* are effective with young people and professionals, because compassion strengthens the human dimension in the classroom: it promotes self-reflection, emotional regulation and respectful communication between pupils, teachers and parents.

Compassion guides moral choices and reduces pressure to perform, stress and exclusion. In this way, it fosters a culture of care, attention and connectedness.

From module to mindset

The compassionate school is not an extra lesson, but a pedagogical approach that underpins the whole of school life. It links inner development with a positive mindset, so that everyone at school feels, thinks and acts from a place of humanity.

The vision

Imagine a school where everyone wants to be. It is a beautiful building with space for relaxation, learning and discovery. A place where pupils feel safe to explore their talents and where teachers work with joy and dedication. Personal growth and professional development are welcomed and reinforce one another.

Such a school comes into being when people are willing to ground themselves and engage in self-reflection, are open to change, remain curious about wisdom from different traditions, work with universal values and make room for evaluation and adjustment. This attitude transforms the school into a community that prepares pupils and

teachers for the rapidly changing world. So that, drawing on their own uniqueness, they can contribute to a better world. Because only when you know your talents can you share them.

The power of living together

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The Burkinabe writer, teacher and expert on rituals, Malidoma Patrice Somé (1956– 2021), saw his life's mission as building a bridge between indigenous African wisdom and the Western world. In **The Healing Wisdom of Africa**, he describes how a collective way of life fosters a healthy sense of belonging, generosity and awareness of one another's needs. In the compassionate school, this is evident in the assumption that the needs of one person are the needs of many. Just as you enjoy inspiring connections, so does a colleague. Just as you want to feel autonomous, a pupil has that same desire. Your needs transcend cultural, religious and political differences and form the foundation of genuine connection.

Whilst the universal tendency towards individualisation nowadays leads to isolation within one's own bubble, the compassionate school demonstrates that individuality and community are not mutually exclusive. It is precisely through living together that space grows for diversity, personal freedom and connectedness.

Your unique needs shape the school

When applying the principles of a compassionate school, we first look at everyone's individual needs. Exploring your personal needs and desires is about who you truly are. What drives you? What dreams do you carry with you? Which have already come true and which are still waiting to be fulfilled?

The first step on that journey of discovery is grounding and self-reflection: taking time to reflect on yourself, feeling your roots and looking clearly at your own patterns. From this foundation, space emerges to grow and contribute compassionately to the school.

How to start a compassionate school

Grounding and self-reflection are the foundation

A professional who continues to learn is a source of inspiration for their team. The more you discover about your inner growth processes, the more adventurous your work becomes. You'll find that challenging situations at school become easier to handle, and you'll experience how colleagues and pupils can trigger that one wonderful opportunity for growth. With the in-depth tools in this book, you can guide yourself in your personal growth.

The pillars of the compassionate school are grounding and self-reflection. The more firmly you stand with both feet on the ground in the classroom, the more smoothly your lessons will run. The better you get to know your inner world through self-reflection, the more you can teach in a way that is attuned to your own needs and those of your pupils.

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1. Grounding is inner stability

Grounding the organisation

Is your school's foundation solid, and how do you know? The answer is: when everyone knows, embraces and lives out the mission.

You work together within an invisible force field where everyone's wishes, desires, intentions, emotions, thought patterns, individual traits and character structures converge. The more people are on the same wavelength, the more the field lights up. Then, as a team, you are fundamentally aligned, for example because you want to create a better society for pupils together, or because you want to help one another grow. You don't all have to be the same to achieve this – quite the opposite. Your talents differ and complement one another. Alongside the organised leader stands the organisational clown, who brings light and light-heartedness. The serious administrator keeps the disorganised mentor in check.

A strong school mission only works if every member of staff lives by it. For this, you need to be grounded yourself, have both feet firmly on the ground, and consciously try to be present in the here and now.

The quick scan at the end of this chapter shows the extent to which compassion is present in the school and what the state of the organisation's grounding – its inner stability – is.

Grounding for the educational professional

With both feet on the ground, being grounded, connecting with your body: it is essential to stand firmly in life and in your work. If you do not, you easily lose your way, trip over your own feet, struggle to manage your class and forget your commitments: these are all signs of a lack of grounding in the present moment.

As a child, you naturally lived in the moment. We don't need to give toddlers mindfulness training; they're already fully absorbed in the play they're engaged in. A solid foundation provides clarity and direction, whilst keeping in mind where you came from, where you are now, and where you want to go. In this chapter, you'll find the tools to stay grounded in your work. This is the foundation for the inspiring journey of change that you're embarking on for yourself and with your colleagues.

With the ROOTS Quick scan at the end of this chapter, you can carry out a baseline assessment of your personal development and discover how grounded your work is.

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On the following worksheet, you'll find three grounding exercises for yourself and for your team. They're based on mindfulness, a form of attention training with Buddhist roots that helps to strengthen presence and body awareness.

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Worksheet

WORKSHEET Grounding Exercises

Throughout the day, you're surrounded by distractions and temptations – from app messages to a last-minute meeting or a situation at home that demands your attention. If you're used to reacting immediately to external triggers, it can be difficult to maintain your focus.

With these three grounding exercises, you create space for yourself and stand firmly. You strengthen your boundaries, are less susceptible to external impulses and respond authentically, rather than on autopilot.

1. Body check

With the body check, you observe your body and try to focus on your breathing. You do not follow any thoughts or emotions.

- Sit quietly and feel your body against the chair.
- Breathe in gently through your nose and out through your mouth. 3 seconds of silence
- Imagine you're standing under a shower that's washing away all your thoughts, emotions and stress. Let them flow away down the drain. 3 seconds of silence
- Imagine you're in a pleasant place. Perhaps on a beach, at home or somewhere in the woods. 3 seconds of silence
- Feel your feet on the ground and move your attention upwards through your body: from your toes, toenails, the top and bottom of your foot to your heel and ankle. Through your lower leg, knee and thigh to your pelvic area. 3 seconds of silence
- Continue to your abdomen, stomach, heart area and shoulders. 3 seconds of silence

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- Focus your attention on your arms: upper arm, elbow, forearm, wrist, hand, fingers and the tips of your fingernails. 3 seconds of silence
- Now feel your neck and nape, and mentally move your attention to your head (front, sides and back) right up to the crown of your head. 3 seconds of silence
- From the crown of your head, work your way back down in the same way, until your attention is once again on the soles of your feet. 3 seconds of silence
- Stretch out and gently open your eyes. Stay focused on yourself for a moment longer.

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2. Listening to Sounds

In the sound exercise, you bring your attention step by step from the outside in.

Sit or lie down comfortably.

▶ Breathe in and out a few times. Close your eyes or focus on a point on the table or on the floor.

▶

Listen to the sounds *outside the room* you're in. What can you hear? 30 seconds

▶

Turn your attention to the sounds in the room. What sounds can you hear? 30 seconds

▶

Finally, listen to the sounds *within your body*. Cup your hands over your ears to hear them more clearly. ▶ 30 seconds

Put your hands down again and open your eyes.

▶

Workshee

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3. Standing firm like a tree

This exercise helps you feel the strength of your body in front of the class or during a meeting.

t

- Plant your feet firmly on the floor (as if they were glued to the
- floor). Bend your knees slightly.
- Place your hand on your stomach.
- Breathe in a few times through your nose and out through your
- mouth. Imagine: your legs are the tree trunk, your arms the
- branches.

Let it rain, let the wind blow, let the sun shine (or visualise the seasons).

- Place your feet firmly on the floor again.
- Bend your knees slightly.
- Rub your arms and legs. Shake your
- arms and legs to loosen them up.
- Feel how steady you are.

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2. Self-awareness is pedagogical leadership

From a grounded foundation, you create space to deepen your self-awareness, the second pillar of a compassionate school culture.

To create an atmosphere of safety, openness and transparency together, it is essential to gain insight into your own motivations, feelings and thoughts. '*Know* thyself' has been inscribed above the gate of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi since Ancient Greece. If you understand yourself, recognise the importance of self-reflection and know how the power of intention can foster an empathetic educational environment, you are another step closer to a compassionate school. By cultivating curiosity about your personal growth, your thoughts and feelings become clearer and you strengthen your educational leadership.

When you make self-reflection a regular feature of staff meetings, a sense of care for one another emerges. By bringing the day to a close together – taking a moment to look back and reflect on what happened, even if nothing went wrong – you build genuine team spirit. This provides a safe foundation for those moments when someone makes a mistake or a 'blunder'. This is what learning becomes: growing through experiences and supporting one another.

Reflection question

How can we create space in our meetings to share successes and explore mistakes as a source of collective growth?

The fear of being transparent

Genuine self-reflection involves deeply examining your choices and intentions. In life, being transparent is often nerve-wracking. It can feel vulnerable, because you run the risk of being judged. This can prevent you from opening up completely.

However, in a school environment characterised by gentleness and empathy, space is created for you to realise that, at our core, we are all the same. A space in which none of the parties is right or wrong. Each of us navigates through feelings, recurring narratives, changes and external influences, whilst constantly experiencing the dynamics between our inner world and the outside world. If you also try to

, you can get more out of each other and your curiosity about what drives the other person will grow.

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Your 'professional coat'

Deep down, we all want to be able to be ourselves at work. Yet I'm struck by how often people arrive at work and then put on their 'professional coat'. As if they were someone else at school. This can create a disconnect between who you are and what you do, and that can become an energy drain. Especially if you've trained yourself to no longer listen to your body's signals. Think, for example, of those days at school when you forget to drink, suppress your worries about a parents' evening, hold back in a meeting because you think your ideas don't matter, or wonder whether teaching is still the right fit for you, without exploring this further.

There is an inspiring, and often overlooked, term for the feelings you experience at work: *'inner work life*'. Taking the time to notice how all the stimuli at school affect you creates space to respond authentically to work situations**. INSERT IMAGE INNER WORK LIFE**

- How does it feel when a meeting runs late?
- What is it about a particular colleague that gives you a knot in your stomach?
- Why do you delete your e-mail app from your phone, only to end up reading them on the couch in the evening via your browser anyway?

When you understand where your feelings come from, you can choose how you want to respond. In this way, you train yourself not only to enjoy your work, but also to grow as a person. And then your inner compass becomes just as important as your timetable.

Soul, personality and the power of meaning

Our soul, our inner core, is by nature wise, gentle and forgiving. It transcends our daily roles and patterns. Our personality is, as it were, the coat we chose in this life to gain experiences that help us work through our soul's processes. It can support us, but the coat can also limit us, especially at times when we act too much from ego-driven impulses.

When we try to view our life experiences – including our connections with others – from the perspective of our soul, space is created for meaning and a sense of compassion and empathy.

The more you practise balancing ego and soul, the more your personality and soul come into *alignment*. This invites a peaceful, calm aura that is palpable to those around you. You can see this in people such as Jane Goodall, Nelson Mandela and Beyoncé: their inner *alignment* radiates outwards in the form of serenity, confidence and a natural authority.

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Exercise: soul - personality

You learn to observe where your own part in situations lies and what you are learning. That does not mean you should let people walk all over you or that you are not allowed to set boundaries. It is precisely because you view situations from your core that you become more stable on the inside and allow yourself to be less emotionally influenced by what is happening in the outside world.

Suppose a colleague says or does something hurtful:
Your personality wants to react, hit back with a hurtful remark or harbour thoughts of revenge.
Your soul wonders what lesson you need to learn. Do you need to stand up for yourself better? Did you hurt someone yourself earlier, and are you now experiencing the other side of the coin? Can you learn to express your feelings?

Psychological research shows that personality traits such as openness, altruism and emotional stability are linked to the capacity for empathy.
Humanistic and existential psychologists, such as Carl Rogers and Viktor Frankl, emphasise that people have an innate tendency towards growth, finding meaning and connection.

In the fields of education and care, we see that professionals who make space for inner reflection through dialogue, rituals or silence are more likely to act with compassion. They are better able to view the behaviour of pupils or colleagues as an expression of a story, rather than as a problem.

Reflection question
How does your perspective on yourself and others change when you look from the perspective of your soul rather than your personality?

Self-knowledge in practice – trauma and triggers
We have all accumulated triggers and fragments of traumatic memories throughout our lives. After all, we are human beings first and only then educational professionals. These triggers influence us every day. They form the lens through which we view pupils, parents and colleagues, the glasses through which we perceive the world.

As the writer Anaïs Nin said:
"We do not see the world as it is, but as we are."

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These unconscious distortions lead to assumptions about what someone means, or to doubt and fear because the other person unconsciously reminds you of, for example, your father, whom you used to be afraid of. If you do not heal your traumas and triggers, those distortions will persist. In doing so, you are doing yourself a disservice; after all, they constantly demand attention in the emotional undercurrent.

However difficult and painful it may be, you deserve to heal your emotional wounds in order to lead a fulfilling, rich life. And more importantly, pupils deserve to be taught by professionals who are working on their own personal growth.

Because, quite apart from the fact that it can be confusing for children to sense our pain – which we ourselves do not recognise or acknowledge, or which we try to hide – it is also fairer this way: if we expect children to grow emotionally, then they are entitled to expect the same from us.

Self-reflection: the first step towards healing and compassionate teaching

Self-reflection helps you to look back on situations, gather insights and learn from them for your professional growth. Reflection is an ongoing journey in which you continually discover new aspects and talents within yourself.

I encourage you to set aside 30 minutes each week to evaluate your interactions with a pupil or parent. When you regularly examine your thoughts, feelings and patterns, you get closer to your true self and, over time, you'll see where you've grown. This helps you to teach or lead with greater empathy and understanding.

You can actively integrate the process of self-reflection into school life. Here are a few methods for compassionate exploration:

- **Dialogue circles in which you share experiences**
  Start with a few like-minded colleagues and choose a shared theme to discuss your feelings and thoughts about. Try to listen without judgement within this safe space.

- **Rituals that help you consciously reflect on your intentions**
  Taking a moment to pause with a small ritual, such as a breathing exercise, a moment of silence or stating an intention, creates space for awareness and gives direction to your actions.

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- **Peer review sessions where colleagues support one another in their growth**
  Start your peer support session with a grounding exercise and you'll find that you get to the heart of what needs to be discussed more quickly. In this way, your vulnerability and professional strength will grow.

Principles for self-reflection

1. Be honest and open with yourself

Worksheet

Reflection only works if you dare to look at your own feelings and actions with gentleness.

2. Frame your reflection

Focus on a specific topic, such as a lesson or a parent-teacher meeting.

3. Be patient with yourself

It can be challenging to recognise certain patterns or traits in yourself. Give yourself time to come to terms with this.

4. Share your insights

Discuss your reflections with a colleague or your line manager. This will provide you with valuable feedback and new perspectives.

With the two pillars **of grounding** and **self-reflection,** a compassionate school becomes a place where not only knowledge is shared, but where people learn, grow and dare to be themselves together. The following worksheets on self-reflection will give you deeper insight into where you can grow personally.

> *Through self-reflection, I have learnt to look at things from two angles: first at my own feelings, and only then at my relationship with the pupil. This helps me connect better with pupils.*
> Kim Heskamp, primary school teacher (add country?)

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WORKSHEET Self-reflection
How am I really getting doing at school?

Aim: to become aware of triggers in my work and thoughts, and to discover what steps can help me.

Method

- Step 1 (5 minutes): individually tick off what you recognise.
- Step 2 (5 minutes): for one or two items, choose a helpful suggestion.
- Step 3 (10 minutes): discuss in pairs what you've discovered and which step you'd like to try out.

Tick the boxes for what you recognise and choose what can help you:

At school

Trigger	This helps
☐ You stay in your classroom to avoid a difficult conversation. You are putting off a meeting with your manager.	☐ Look inside yourself what the trigger is about. Discuss with a friend and plan (!) to have the conversation.
☐ You reread an e-mail many times before sending it to make sure the tone is right.	☐ Allow yourself to accept that 'good enough' really is good enough
☐ You're trying hard to be busy, but actually you feel tired.	☐ Take a short break to catch your breath; recovery time is productive too.

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Worksheet

☐ You say “I’ll think about it”, even though you already know you don’t want to say “yes”.	☐ Practise saying ‘no’ in a friendly and clear way.
☐ You feel uncomfortable seeing your face in video calls.	☐ Switch off your camera or practise looking at yourself with kindness.
☐ You’ve got an idea, but you’re hesitant to share it with the group.	☐ Write it down and share it later, or ask a colleague for support.
☐ You feel uncomfortable when jokes are made at colleagues’ expense.	☐ Calmly say that it upsets you, or seek support from someone you trust.
☐ You’re wondering whether your working environment still suits who you are now.	☐ Reflect on what gives you energy and discuss this with a mentor or coach.

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In your mind

Trigger	This helps
☐ You sometimes wonder why you do this job.	☐ Remind yourself of moments when you do feel a sense of fulfilment.
☐ You think: if I were honest about how I feel, too much would change.	☐ Share a little bit of honesty with someone you trust.

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Worksheet

Trigger	This helps
☐ You read a message from your manager and wonder if there's more to it than meets the eye.	☐ Check your interpretation by simply asking her/him.
☐ You're preparing what to say in your head for a meeting.	☐ Write down your key points and trust your spontaneity.
☐ You're daydreaming about a sabbatical, but you're not sure what that would look like.	☐ Explore what you'd like to learn or experience during such a period.
☐ You're looking at job vacancies without knowing exactly what ☐ you're looking for.	☐ Note down what is important to you in terms of work and your working environment.
☐ You dread having a meeting with a domineering colleague.	☐ Find an ally or formulate one clear message in advance.
☐ You feel uncertain about expectations or career opportunities.	☐ Ask for clarification or feedback; this often ☐ brings peace of mind.
☐ You're worrying about a pupil parent, but you're not asking for help.	☐ Share your concerns with a or a colleague; together, you'll see things more clearly.

What these signs tell you

Every thought, every issue on these lists deserves your attention. Otherwise, those thoughts become a recurring narrative, a circular line of reasoning in which you get stuck. Issues that keep cropping up call for a different perspective on what needs attention and resolution within your inner world.

Talk about it with a colleague and try to find a solution together. What you resolve will give you an immediate boost of energy, enabling you to stand in front of the class with

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greater positivity and resilience. A teacher who faces up to their personal challenges is the most inspiring role model for pupils.

Personal issues at school, school matters at home

I see educational professionals struggling, persevering and sometimes even burning out because recurring issues remain unresolved. This could apply to you too, even if you think you keep your work and private life well separated. After all, deep down, you're always the same person.

You take your personal 'backpack' full of life experiences with you to school, and your professional 'suitcase' home with you. Don't try to plough on when things aren't going well in your private life, or demand of yourself that you stop thinking about what happened at school once the evening comes. You need peace and space to recharge and face the next school day with renewed energy. Close the open tabs of school chores in your mind before going home.

Reflection question

For seven days, spend fifteen minutes each day freely jotting down your thoughts and see how your work and private life overlap. At the end of the week, read through what you've written and compare your notes. What stands out to you? What can you sort out today, and who will you turn to for help?

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Worksheet

WORKSHEET: Self-reflection – How do I feel in my job?

Intention: to become aware of my attitude, beliefs and motivation.

1. Reflecting on society
    1. What feelings and thoughts do I have about today's society?
    2. How do I see society reflected in the classroom?

2. Working with diverse backgrounds
    1. What are my ideas and expectations regarding working with pupils from a wide range of cultures?
    2. What are my views on inclusivity, understanding cultural differences and providing equal opportunities?
    3. Am I aware of any preconceptions I may have? How do they influence my work?

3. My perception of others and their perception of me
    1. What are my views on my pupils, colleagues, line manager and parents in terms of the level of trust, cooperation and mutual expectations?
    2. How do they perceive me in terms of approachability, reliability and inspiration?
    3. In what ways do I, perhaps unconsciously, reveal my thoughts or assumptions through my body language, the way I respond and my choice of words?

4. Critical reflecting on my assumptions
    1. What questions do I ask to check whether a thought or idea is accurate?
    2. Am I really listening, do I ask for clarification, and am I open to new perspectives?

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Worksheet

5. Motivation and future
    1. What is the greatest reward for me in my work?
    2. Where would I be working if I weren't in my current role?
    3. What are my reasons for wanting to work specifically in this organisation?
    4. How do I feel about the introduction of inclusive education?

6. Taking cultural differences into account
    1. Am I prepared to take other cultural customs into account, such as language barriers and customs relating to different public holidays?
    2. How can I ensure that every child feels heard and involved?

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Worksheet

WORKSHEET: Self-reflection
How to identify your intention

Intention: to gain insight into my conscious and unconscious intentions, so that I can teach or lead more effectively.

1. Visualisation and activation
    1. Sit down and relax.
    2. Be kind to yourself. Taking a moment to rest, when you're used to constantly carrying on, may take some getting used to.
    3. Give yourself space to experience the stillness in your mind and body.
    4. Choose a lesson or conversation to reflect on.

2. Conscious intentions
    1. Write down your hopes for the lesson or conversation: *I wish that…*
    2. Feel what your notes evoke in you.

3. Unconscious intentions

Try to go a little deeper and see if there's anything you wished for that you might now feel judgemental about, such as 'I tend to become anxious when I want to get home on time.' This insight offers you peace of mind and supports to prioritize your task list.

4. Personal experience and growth
    1. Reflect on previous situations where your intention influenced the conversation.
    2. How did these interactions go?
    3. How can you align your intentions with harmonious interactions?

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Reminder: your non-verbal communication reflects your (conscious or) unconscious intentions.

WORKSHEET: Self-reflection – Reflecting on a parent-teacher meeting

Intention: to gain insight into the meeting and identify areas for improvement.

1. Conscious and unconscious intentions
    1. What were my conscious intentions in having this meeting?
    2. What were my unconscious intentions?

2. Circumstances of the conversation
    1. How did I prepare for this conversation? Did I have enough or too little time, did I sleep well or not, did I go through the file thoroughly or not?
    2. What factors came into play during the conversation? Were the parents on time or not? Had time been set aside for evaluation or not?
    3. What external factors influenced how the conversation went?

3. Areas for improvement
    1. What didn't go to plan?
    2. What can I learn from this?

4. Opportunity to rectify the situation or revisit the meeting
    1. Is it worth trying to rectify anything?
    2. If so, how could I do that tomorrow?

5. Ensuring parent-teacher meetings run smoothly
    1. What went well and do I want to carry on doing it that way?
    2. What will I change next time?

Reminder: every conversation is an opportunity to grow. Self-reflection helps you to communicate more effectively and with greater awareness.

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Worksheet

WORKSHEET: Self-reflection
How do I set and maintain my boundaries?

Intention: to gain insight into how I maintain my boundaries and identify areas for improvement.

1. Current situation
    1. At what points today did I successfully maintain my boundaries?
    2. How did I feel at those times?
    3. When did I let someone cross my boundaries?
    4. How did that feel?

2. Signs that my boundaries have been crossed
    1. What are the signs that I'm feeling overwhelmed?
    2. How do I react when someone asks me to do something that's actually too much?
    3. What emotions do I feel when I struggle to set boundaries?

3. Patterns and beliefs
    1. What habits help me to maintain my boundaries?
    2. Which limiting beliefs influence my behaviour?
    3. How can I turn these beliefs into positive ones?

4. Setting boundaries more effectively
    1. What can I do to better protect my boundaries?
    2. How can I communicate my needs clearly?
    3. What small steps can I take today to better respect my boundaries?

Reminder: setting boundaries is a form of healthy self-care. Only by managing your energy well can you truly be there for others.

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Quick scans school

The path to a compassionate school begins with an understanding of what is happening within the school culture and within yourself. That is why the Compassionate School Programme starts with two baseline assessments:

- **CANOPY QUICK SCAN** = the canopy of a tree where light is filtered, creating space for new life and growth. It is the crown that represents the current level of compassion within the school.

-ROOTS QUICK SCAN = the roots represent where you stand as an educational professional. This helps you discover your next step in personal development.

Together, they form an organic whole. The stronger the roots, the more robust the canopy. And the stronger the canopy, the more scope there is for the growth of pupils and professionals. **ADD: ONLINE QUICK SCANS AVAILABLE VIA…**

CANOPY – Where does our school stand in terms of compassionate collaboration and teaching?

Instructions

Answer each question with:

Yes **Sometimes** **No**

For each section, write down a brief reflection and count the number of times you have answered *'Sometimes'* and *'No*'. That's where your growth lies.

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Quick scan

1. Laying the foundations

Statement	Yes	Sometimes	No
Our school culture is visibly focused on compassion.	☐	☐	☐
Attention is paid to the individual needs of pupils and staff.	☐	☐	☐
We set aside time for physical and emotional grounding in our day-to-day work.	☐	☐	☐
Self-reflection is an integral part of our professional practice.	☐	☐	☐

Number of times *'Sometimes'* and *'No'*:

Reflection:

2. **Dealing with change**

Statement	Yes	Sometimes	No
We are open to letting go of old patterns and habits.	☐	☐	☐
We use rituals or symbolic moments to mark times of change.	☐	☐	☐
We recognise that there may be periods of 'not knowing'.	☐	☐	☐
Change is seen as a process that comes from within, not just as something that 'has to' take place.	☐	☐	☐

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Number of times *'Sometimes'* and *'No'*: _____

Reflection:

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Quick

3. Indigenous wisdom and stories

Statement	Yes	Sometimes	No
We actively incorporate nature and the environment into our teaching.	☐	☐	☐
Reciprocity and care for the whole are guiding principles.	☐	☐	☐
Knowledge is shared in a way that resonates with people.	☐	☐	☐
We think and act in connection with past and future generations.	☐	☐	☐

Number of *'Sometimes'* and *'No'* responses: _____

Reflection: _____

4. In classroom practice

Statement	Yes	Sometimes	No
Values such as compassion, connection and integrity are evident in the classroom.	☐	☐	☐
We actively practise these values in our interactions.	☐	☐	☐
Pupils and parents are involved in shaping these values.	☐	☐	☐
There are behavioural guidelines that support these values.	☐	☐	☐

Number of *'Sometimes'* and *'No'* responses: _____

Reflection: _____

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5. Towards a compassionate school

Statement	Yes	Sometimes	No
Personal development is a structural part of our policy.	☐	☐	☐
Social-emotional development is an integral part of the curriculum.	☐	☐	☐
Staff are trained in change management skills and inner leadership.	☐	☐	☐
We use a model (such as the ROOTS QUICK SCAN) to guide personal growth.	☐	☐	☐

Number of *'Sometimes'* and *'No'* responses:

Reflection:

scan

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Quick

Summary: in which areas can we strengthen compassion?

Theme	Number of *'Sometimes'* and *'No'* responses	Corresponding chapter in the book	Action point: what are we going to strengthen?
Laying the foundations		Part I – Laying the foundations	
The path to transformation		Part II – The path of change	
Indigenous wisdom		Part III – Indigenous Wisdom	
Classroom practice		Part IV – Towards Classroom Practice	
Action Plan		Part V – Action plan towards a compassionate school	

Next steps

The ROOTS QUICK SCAN is your starting point for personal and professional development. The answers *'Sometimes'* and *'No'* indicate where improvement is needed.

- Go to the relevant chapter in the book to explore that aspect in more depth.
- For each aspect, formulate a specific action that you will take as an individual or as a team this week.
- Schedule a time next week to reflect together on what the action has achieved.

Tip for school leaders: Ask each team member to choose one aspect that appeals to them and work in pairs or small groups to explore it further.

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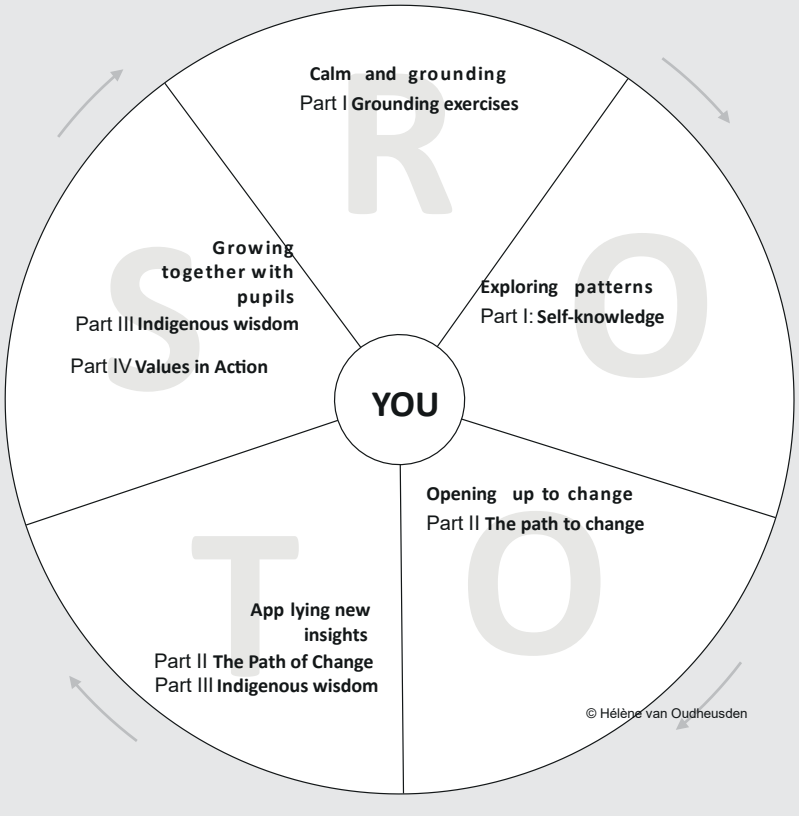
Quick scan for educational professionals

The ROOTS Compass is a diagnostic tool for your personal development. It helps you to approach your work with a sense of stability and compassion. The deeper and healthier the roots, the stronger and more resilient the tree.

scan

This compass is circular: you can always return to *Calm and grounding* as your foundation. It offers guidance and a practical path for your personal growth.

R – Calm and grounding = grounding
O – Exploring patterns = self-reflection
O – Opening up to change = principles of change
T – Applying new insights = together with indigenous wisdom
S – Growing together with pupils = values in the compassionate school



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Quick

You can always ask yourself where you are on this compass. What will your next step be? Should you take a step back, or move on to the next phase?

R – Rest and grounding

- Learn to be present in the here and now.
- Release tension through breathing, body awareness and small rituals.
- Effect: being less reactive, feeling more inner stability.

O – Exploring patterns

- Reflect on your own triggers, beliefs and past pain.
- Examine where your reaction to this pupil comes from.
- Effect: becoming aware of projections and recurring patterns.

O – Opening up to change

- Be prepared to let go of old feelings and behaviours.
- Practise new behaviours and different perspectives.
- Effect: experience greater flexibility and resilience in your role.

T – Applying new insights

- Put this into practice in concrete terms: how can I respond differently in the classroom?
- Take small, achievable steps guided by your inner wisdom.
- Effect: pupils experience greater safety and connection.

S – Growing together with pupils

- Put the relationship at the centre: teacher and pupil learn from one another.
- Make universal values (compassion, connection, reliability) visible in daily interactions.
- Effect: seeing how personal and cognitive development go hand in hand.

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ROOTS – How confident and compassionate are you as an education professional in your work?

Instructions

Answer each question with:

Yes **Sometimes** **No**

For each section, write down a brief reflection and count the number of times you answered *'Sometimes'* and *'No'*. That's where your growth lies.

R – Calm and

Statement	Yes	Sometimes	No
I take time every day to ground myself in my body and my breathing.	☐	☐	☐
I feel physically and emotionally present in my work.	☐	☐	☐
I recognise when I'm out of balance and know what I need in those moments.	☐	☐	☐

Number of *'Sometimes'* and *'No'* responses: _____

Reflection: _____

Action point: _____

O – Examining patterns

Statement	Yes	Sometimes	No
I regularly set aside time for self-reflection.	☐	☐	☐
I recognise my patterns and triggers when interacting with others.	☐	☐	☐
I dare to take an honest look at my intentions and behaviour.	☐	☐	☐

Number of *'Sometimes'* and *'No'* responses: _____

Reflection: _____

Action point: _____

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Quick

O – Being open to change

Statement	Yes	Sometimes	No
I am open to letting go of old habits.	☐	☐	☐
I see change as an opportunity for growth.	☐	☐	☐
I know that there can be room for 'not knowing' in processes of transition.	☐	☐	☐

Number of *'Sometimes'* and *'No'* responses: _____

Reflection: _____

Action point: _____

T – Applying new insights

Statement	Yes	Sometimes	No
I apply new insights in my professional practice.	☐	☐	☐
I draw inspiration from natural rhythms and indigenous wisdom.	☐	☐	☐
I feel connected to something greater than just the education system.	☐	☐	☐

Number of *'Sometimes'* and *'No'* responses: _____

Reflection: _____

Action point: _____

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S – Growing together with pupils

Statement	Yes	Sometimes	No
I work on the basis of values such as compassion, connection and integrity.	☐	☐	☐
I see personal development as part of my teaching approach.	☐	☐	☐
I create a safe space in which pupils can develop as people.	☐	☐	☐

Number of *'Sometimes'* and *'No'* responses : _____

Reflection : _____

Action point : _____

Summary: Your ROOTS profile

ROOTS element	Number of *'Sometimes'* and *'No' responses*	What requires attention?
Calm and grounding		

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ROOTS theme	Where in the book
Calm and grounding	Part I: Grounding exercises
Exploring patterns	Part I Self-knowledge
Opening Up to Change	Part II The Path of Change
Applying New Insights	Part II The Path of Change Part III Indigenous Wisdom
Growing together with pupils	Part III Indigenous Wisdom Part IV Values in Action

Exploring patterns		
Opening up to change		
Applying new insights		
Growing together with pupils		

- Formulate a specific action you will take in the coming week.

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Next step

This assessment is a starting point for your personal development. The answers *'Sometimes'* and *'No'* highlight where you need to strengthen your skills.

- Go to the relevant chapter in the book to explore that ROOTS element in more depth.

- Set aside some time for reflection: what has this brought you?

Tip: Repeat this worksheet every quarter to track your growth and deepen your roots.

PART II

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Part II **The Path of Change**

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Guiding from within: transformation for the educational professional

When you work with pupils, you are a role model. A living example of what it means to be human, with all your strengths and challenges. Pupils have an unerring sense of whether it is safe to grow alongside you. And that sense of safety begins within ourselves. The more facets of ourselves we know, the more at home we feel within our own inner self. That requires courage, honesty and, above all, transformation.

Let's explore the profound difference between changing and transforming. Changing is superficial: you adjust your behaviour, learn a new routine or perhaps choose your words more carefully. Transformation, however, goes deeper. It is an inner shift from your very core. You move from 'that's just the way I am' to 'who am I really, regardless of what I've been brought up with?' Because sometimes, without realising it, we're still loyal to an old (family) narrative. A narrative that once felt 'like your own', but which today holds you back in life. Perhaps you stand in front of your class convinced that you must always be strong. Or that vulnerability isn't professional.

But who taught you that?

I know I can be impatient in the classroom. When I started exploring the family roots of this issue, it turned out this feeling didn't come out of nowhere. I discovered that I was unconsciously identifying with my role as a child: being responsible for the atmosphere within a group. That causes stress and a short temper. Not nice for the pupils and not pleasant for me either. Truly feeling how heavy that responsibility was proved cathartic and immediately gave me freedom of choice. I felt that I no longer wanted to remain true to that role. By stepping out of that position, my old attitude of 'impatience in front of the class' transformed into 'calmness in teaching'. I now see myself as a guardian of space: *a teacher who offers a sense of security by being firm yet relaxed in my presence.*

Pupils sense when you're allowed to be 'you' – just as you are – then they dare to be themselves too.

Transformation never stops. Thank goodness, because that's how we keep discovering new stories that fit much better with who we've become. Our pupils and colleagues grow from that too.

Reflection question

Which old voices from your family still resound when you're guiding pupils?

“In every decision, we must consider the impact on the seventh generation.”

Haudenosaunee

The Haudenosaunee, ‘people who build the longhouse’, organised their society and decision-making within an elongated residential and deliberative structure in which several families lived together. Their confederacy is regarded as one of the oldest participatory democracies in the world, focused on peace and cooperation (Grey, 2008).

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Transformation: how to go about it?

It all begins with a story. Every school organisation is shaped by shared narratives: about how we work together, what our mission is and how we shape the educational journey. Just as important are the stories that you, as an educational professional, carry within yourself - about who you are, what you have experienced and how you approach your work.

There comes a time when a story has run its course and growth is needed. You notice this through recurring situations, tension in your body or a loss of energy. If you're aware of this, you'll move on to a new narrative. If you fail to recognise a signal for change, you may get stuck in a repetitive pattern at work or in your mind. This drains your energy, and that is precisely the signal to begin a personal transformation journey: changing form because the old way no longer fits.

In this section, you'll explore three pillars that help you understand and guide transformation:

1. the natural workings of the three universal phases of change: how movement and growth arise.
2. the wisdom of Indigenous communities: providing guidance during moments of transition.
3. the power of rituals: to consciously navigate phases of change and welcome the new.

1. How transformation works

In every myth, there comes a moment when the hero - just like you in your own life story - is invited to leave the old behind and step into a new world.

Mythologist Joseph Campbell describes this movement as *the Hero's Journey*: an inner journey in which we receive signals for change, set out on our path, discover the treasure and return with new insights.

Transformation is not a one-off event, but a cyclical process: every time a new signal presents itself, we are invited to grow further towards a version of ourselves that aligns with who we are now - and with what the world demands of us.

The signals for change

There comes a moment when you realise that the status quo no longer suffices. Perhaps you feel less energy in conversations with pupils, notice that colleagues are less enthusiastic, or the Ministry of Education has issued a critical assessment.

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It can also be more subtle: you once started your job full of enthusiasm, but you've noticed that your passion is slowly waning. Perhaps you haven't realised it yourself yet, but colleagues notice that you seem distracted.

Our natural reaction to simmering feelings of unease or uncertainty is often to work harder. In the same way as before, because it used to work well, didn't it? But change isn't a matter of working harder. It's a natural flow that's constantly unfolding, where you can step back from a situation and realise: this isn't working anymore. It's time to take stock: where am I now and where am I heading?

Don't force it: the lesson from the butterfly

Change cannot be forced; every phase has its own time and rhythm. When we try to speed up change, we lose something essential. This is beautifully illustrated by the story of the two women who each see a cocoon hanging from a tree.

> One woman sits beneath the tree and waits for the caterpillar to struggle out of the cocoon and slowly be reborn as a butterfly. She trusts in the natural process. Whether it's raining or sunny, the butterfly will find its way.
>
> The other woman sees the butterfly struggling to emerge from the cocoon and wants to help her. She carefully tears the cocoon open so that the butterfly can get out.
>
> But the moment the cocoon is open, the butterfly is still unable to fly. To become strong enough to fly, she needed the struggle to break free. Now she falls out of the cocoon onto the ground and dies.
>
> Later that day, the other butterfly frees itself from the cocoon and flies away radiantly, drawing on the strength it built up during its struggle for freedom. *Source: unknown*

Revealing the undercurrent

What applies to the butterfly also applies to people and organisations. Growth requires the struggle itself: the process in which you experience tension, uncertainty and resistance. Formulating a new goal is not enough. True change takes place in the undercurrent: in the feelings, thoughts and emotions of everyone involved in the process.

By taking the undercurrent seriously, the power to truly transform emerges. Selfreflection and conversations - around a campfire or in any other safe setting - reveal what often remains hidden: our doubts, vulnerabilities and desires. By bringing to light what lies beneath the surface, you create the fertile ground for a compassionate learning environment in which renewal can begin.

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Campfire conversation

Standard meetings tend to focus primarily on allocating tasks and making decisions. A 'campfire conversation' is a gathering that takes place outside those fixed frameworks. It offers space for emotional processing, deepening relationships and shared reflection. These conversations do not have to take place around a campfire, but are called this to emphasise a relaxed, safe atmosphere.

During such a conversation, you sit in a circle with a central object in the middle, such as a candle, flowers or a compass. Together, you create an atmosphere in which you can slow down, let your heart speak and listen to one another without judgement. Sharing emotions and experiences paves the way for connection on a deeper level.

No one knows exactly when a change is complete or what the new form will look like. The only certainty is that the old situation needs improvement or no longer works. The transformation unfolds along the way, bringing unexpected insights, encounters and collaborations.

In the next chapter, I explore the three universal phases of change that provide guidance throughout this process. As a practical example, you will get to work on the change activity that will save you the most time: effective consultation.

2. The three phases of transformation

Just as the seasons follow one another, change also follows a natural cycle. In this chapter, we explore the three phases that underpin every transformation:

1. Letting go of the old: setting off into the unknown.
2. The liminal phase: space for profound growth.
3. Embracing the new form: integrating the change.

You'll discover how wisdom from Indigenous communities can guide these phases and what they require of you as an educational professional. You'll also find a practical step-by-step plan based on a familiar team theme: making meetings leaner and more efficient. You can easily adapt this example to your own change objective or recovery task, so that it suits your situation.

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Phase 1 | Letting go of the old: setting off into the unknown

Letting go creates space for renewal

As soon as you notice that an approach, a way of working together or a feeling about a particular situation no longer feels right, it is a sign that the old way has had its day or has lost its purpose. This moment can mark the start of a change journey: a conscious process in which you say goodbye to what no longer works and make room for something new.

If you let signs of change pass you by or push them aside, the signs will keep coming back. They'll keep coming until you accept that the old way has run its course. Ignoring these signs might, for example, manifest as feeling increasing resistance to a particular meeting structure, growing headaches when meeting a colleague, or appointments that keep getting rescheduled for unclear reasons.

The letting-go phase begins by viewing the situation from a distance and sensing how it affects you. How would you function in a different meeting structure or after raising an issue with a colleague? What thoughts and emotions do you experience when you think about this? This awareness of what is going on forms the first step on your journey of transformation.

Lessons from Indigenous communities: rituals for farewell and transition

Indigenous peoples have lived in harmony with the natural flow of change for thousands of years. They know on a deep level that every farewell paves the way for a new beginning. Change is not just a decision, but a process that requires time and space.

Within these communities, every phase of transition is deeply rooted in rituals. A *rite of passage* helps people consciously let go of the old, so that the new can truly emerge and be welcomed. These ritual acts are intended to support the inner transition to the next phase, during which people prepare themselves both emotionally and mentally for the new situation.

Simply saying, 'From today, we'll do things differently' can be effective, but only if everyone in the team feels ready to embrace the change. Only when the transformation is guided with care and awareness is sustainable growth able to emerge, supported by the entire school community.

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The term 'Indigenous peoples' refers to the original inhabitants of a region and their descendants, who have often lived in deep connection with their land, nature and rituals for centuries. They can be found all over the world: from the Sámi in Northern Europe to the Māori in New Zealand and the isolated tribes in the Amazon region of South America. They are united in their understanding that every transition in nature and in life requires attention, rituals and a conscious bringing to a close of the old, so that the new can emerge.

In this chapter, insights from Indigenous peoples are incorporated as a source of inspiration. In Part III, we explore how pupils, as bearers of culture, embody this wisdom.

Why ritual is crucial

Rituals mark a transitional phase. Often, there are still old habits, unspoken emotions and deep-seated beliefs that stand in the way of change. If this baggage is not acknowledged and let go of, it continues to linger in the new phase, causing the process of change to slow down or even fail.

By performing a ritual, you acknowledge what was, let go of what no longer serves you, and make space for a new phase. This provides a sense of stability and meaning during a period of transition. Genuine change can occur when people experience the freedom from within to move with the change.

What to do when you feel tired of change?

Change fatigue often arises because previous change processes were not properly managed. Although change is a constant in life, care is needed to guide these transformations. Change that is too rapid or forced provokes resistance, whilst voluntary growth actually provides energy. Progress therefore requires empathetic listening, appreciation for everyone's contribution and offering freedom of choice, particularly when taking that step feels daunting.

Everyone started out as a teacher or manager at some point. When you were appointed, were you asked if you were willing to embrace change? Even if your answer was 'yes' at the time, personal circumstances may be completely different five years on. Perhaps you have concerns at home or feel uncertain about the future.

If a colleague is struggling with a change process, try to realise that their resistance may stem from the fact that a lot is going on in their private life.

When do you carry out a ritual?

You can incorporate rituals:

- when letting go of the old, to consciously let go and make space for the new.

- during the liminal phase, to support the process of exploration and experimentation.
- when embracing the new form, to reinforce the transition towards integration and consolidation.

You determine the intention of a ritual individually or together with others. In this way, change first becomes an inner, shared journey and then a matter of systems and agreements.

Creating rituals for your team

Would you like a bespoke ritual for your transition? Consider, for example, a ritual that helps you strengthen your sense of togetherness or communicate more authentically with one another. Please contact Hélène van Oudheusden.

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Indigenous rituals for the letting-go phase

Why we work with the elements

We use the elements in rituals because they are an ancient language we have learnt from Indigenous cultures. The elements – earth, water, fire, air, ether and community – are both forces of nature and mirrors of our inner selves and our connections. By performing rituals with the elements, we honour this wisdom and open ourselves up to support as we navigate a process of change.

Fire ceremony (originating from, amongst others, First Nations, Inuit and Blackfoot) A fire ceremony is a ritual of transformation. Fire is seen as a force that can transform old energies into new ones. By symbolically entrusting a thought, pattern or way of being to the flames, you let go of what no longer belongs to you and make space for renewal. Fire reveals what often remains invisible within us: the moment when the old disappears and space is created for something new.

School

Write down on a piece of paper what you wish to let go of: a thought, a way of working or a feeling. Gather with the team around a candle or a fire pit. (Optionally) Read aloud what you are leaving behind and offer the paper to the flames. As it burns, say to yourself: 'I am letting this go and making space for the new.'
The fire severs the energetic connection with the past and restores your energy.

Other rituals:

- **Earth**: bury a symbol of what you are leaving behind.
- **Water**: wash your hands or face as a sign of purification.
- **Air**: consciously breathe out your old thoughts or feelings.
- **Ether**: (space, the void that sustains all other elements): sit together in silence and let your thoughts dissolve into space.
- **Community**: in a circle, share one word that you wish to let go of.
- **Earth & water**: place a stone in flowing water as a symbol of embarking on change.
- **Fire & community**: sing, dance or drum together around a fire.
- **Ether & light**: a breathing circle in which everyone exhales simultaneously what is no longer needed.

This is what the 'letting go' phase requires of the headteacher

An effective leader is attuned to subtle signals and knows when change is needed.
Before you begin a change process, assess whether you have the capacity
– in terms of workload and personal life – to manage the change. Otherwise, leave this task to a colleague or an external change management professional.

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Key skills in this phase:

- Recognising signs that indicate a change is needed in your personal life or working environment.
- Prioritising the most important areas for change within the school organisation.
- Identifying issues affecting the team, pupils and parents, such as difficulty setting boundaries, dealing with peer pressure or personal experiences.
- Enlisting a mentor to provide guidance on the underlying currents, both for yourself and for your team.

This requires the teacher to enter a phase of letting go As a teacher, it is important to be alert to signs that call for change.

Key questions in this phase:

- What issues are bothering you, but which you don't speak up about?
- With which colleagues do you find communication difficult?
- What would you change if you were the headteacher?

In addition, personal skills are essential:

- Feeling the space to consciously manage your own processes of change.
- Setting your boundaries and acknowledging your limits.
- Being open about expressing your emotions.

Change activity: effective consultation Phase 1 | Letting go of the past together

What do you do in the letting-go phase?

Meetings go on for too long and it's often the same people who do all the talking. To gain a fresh perspective, switch from being an active participant to an observing spectator. By observing the dynamics of your discussions from a distance, you can draw up a plan for an effective meeting structure in which everyone feels heard and leaves the meeting feeling energised.

Preparing for the activity

What you'll need:

- Sheets of paper
- Markers in various colours
- Post-it notes in different colours

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Write by hand rather than digitally. Writing by hand slows you down, creating space for new ideas. This helps you to better understand what you really want to let go of and increases your focus. Writing by hand supports the processing process, making it easier to leave old patterns behind. Of course, you can share the results digitally, but follow-up sessions should again be carried out by hand.

1. Give your departure process a title

Come up with an inspiring and clear title that gives direction to your aspirations. The exact path doesn't need to be clear yet, but the title should energise you and boost your motivation.

Example: *Towards shorter meetings*

2. Visualise and write down together what you want to let go of

Draw up a list of what you no longer want to include in future meetings. This can be personal, but may also relate to group dynamics.

I allow myself to release:

- My frustration when people arrive late.
- The repetition of points that have already been raised three times.
- The lack of engagement from colleagues.
- The lack of a clear objective.
- The time wasted in the round-robin discussion.

Note: Consciously phrase what you desire as *'I allow myself'* rather than *'I want*'. Letting go through sheer willpower is difficult; allowing yourself something new creates space for a natural transition from desire to action.

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Phase 2 | The liminal phase: space for profound growth

At the end of the letting-go phase, you cross the threshold into the unknown. You are now in the liminal phase, the transitional period. This is the space in which you explore, experiment, fail and try again.

An interim phase is not easy, precisely because we are used to rushing on and getting quick answers to our questions. During this period, however, you will not immediately find a new form. It is the time when you phase out old habits, let go of emotions and feelings associated with them, and patiently experiment with what truly suits you in this phase.

Lessons from Indigenous communities: dealing with chaos and uncertainty

The transitional phase is a period in which we take action whilst, at the same time, we are called upon to let go. Act where you can, and then let go of the outcome of your actions, so that a deeper change can take place.

It is human nature to hope that change will happen as quickly as possible. However, moving towards new ways of working together or new methods also means that you are dependent on others. One person is slow to reply to emails, another fails to deliver what they promised, and you have a thousand tabs open in your head, making it hard for you to make choices. What if this very friction is a sign that the process calls for gentleness, rather than acceleration?

This transitional phase deserves gentleness, space and (self-)compassion. Vague words? You're entitled to think so, but rushing things, forcing decisions and jumping to conclusions only prolong this phase. It's about learning to cope with uncertainty. About trusting that, if a process takes longer, good things are on the way – things for which the time isn't quite right yet. Think back to the story of the cocoon and the butterfly, and try, with trust, to remain open – somewhere between taking action and letting go – to what is to come.

The shaman guides the transitional phase

The transitional phase involves carefully guiding the undercurrent within the organisation. This undercurrent consists of personal learning themes for educational professionals, such as dealing with boundaries, self-confidence and authentic communication, and offers infinite potential for new ideas, perspectives and growth.

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Among Indigenous peoples, it is not the tribal leader but the shaman who guides the group. The leader safeguards security, strategy and the direction towards the goal, whilst the shaman guides the inner growth of the tribe members, ensuring the community remains close-knit and secure throughout the process of change. In this way, every member can contribute their unique talents and skills, and that is precisely what the tribe needs to be a safe community for everyone.

Indigenous rituals in the transitional phase

Vision quest (originating, amongst others, from the Lakota, Blackfoot and Apache) A *vision quest* involves taking a walk in nature, alone, with a question or theme in mind. The intention is to find answers to questions about work or life, or to gain a new perspective, whilst connecting with nature.

School

Ask pupils or colleagues to take a short silent walk in nature or in the school playground. Everyone walks alone, without speaking, with the question: 'What within me wants to be heard?' Afterwards, the group returns in silence and anyone who wishes to may share a word or an image. Nature and silence provide space for insight and new perspectives.

Other rituals:

- **Water**: listen to flowing water or rain and connect with the flow.
- **Fire**: gather round a candle and share a story or a myth.
- **Luxht**: share ancestral stories (from your family history) or myths that help participants understand their new role and feel connected to your school community.
- **Ether**: experience the silence between breaths.
- **Community**: organise a storytelling circle in which everyone shares an experience.
- **Earth**: create a mandala using natural materials.
- **Water & luxht**: sing a simple chorus together to mark the transition.
- **Ether & Community**: form a circle and experience how silence sustains you as a collective.

This is what the liminal phase demands of the headteacher

As a leader, you guide your colleagues as they navigate the unknown and create space for new ideas to emerge. You act as the stabilising force by listening actively, tolerating discomfort without immediately resorting to a quick fix, and providing a safe environment for change.

To guide this phase effectively, it is necessary to:

- exude confidence and provide direction during this phase full of possibilities, even if a solution or outcome is not yet in sight.

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- be open to difficult questions and not beat about the bush out of uncertainty about your position.
- stay in constant contact with the team, acknowledge your own uncertainties and allow room for experimentation.
- have open conversations with colleagues about the emotional undercurrent, such as feelings of uncertainty and the process of letting go.
- Organise inspirational sessions for yourself with your mentor, so that your resilience is supported and you can heal your own shadow aspects, for your own sake and for your team's. Shadow aspects are inner parts of ourselves that we either have a blind spot for, or that we would rather not see in ourselves. Think of vanity, sadness or selfishness. By bringing light to them, you transform your shadow aspects into new qualities within yourself.

This is what the teacher's liminal phase requires

In this transitional phase, you have let go of the old, but the new is not yet here. This period calls for curiosity, courage and the ability to cope with the discomfort of uncertainty. You try not to see the unknown as an obstacle, but as a space in which new ideas can emerge, so that the new form can manifest itself step by step.

Be mindful of the following aspects:

- Trust both the guidance provided and your own intuition.
- Reflect on how change is affecting you and what steps still need to be taken.

- Recognising when you need space and support.
- Communicate openly about your strengths and challenges.
- Actively share your feelings to foster a sense of safety and understanding.
- Recognise that uncertainty is a natural part of change.

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Change activity: effective consultation
Phase 2 | Make the transitional phase tangible

What do you do during the transitional phase?
During the liminal phase, you take the time to talk to one another about wishes and aspirations, have informal chats and look at how meetings are run smoothly in other organisations (including those outside the education sector). You apply tips in meetings to see how they go down.

You may experience feelings of unease, urgency and anger, because meetings aren't yet going as you'd hoped, but these feelings are part of the process. It's a matter of *trial and error*, of keeping at it to find the format that suits your team.

Preparing for the activity

- Sheets of paper
- Markers in various colours
- Post-it notes in various colours

1. Give the liminal phase/transition period a title

Make your title inspiring, clear and simple. Words attract energy, and the more specific you are, the more inspiration you'll receive.

Example: *On the way to smart meetings*

2. Sketch and note down the change you're going through

Visualise where you are now. Draw up an overview of your research and experiments, and sketch out the desired scenarios. How do you all stand in the meeting room when the meeting really works? How does everyone feel about that?
Visualisation helps to provide direction and bring you closer to your goal.

In the meantime, I'm investigating:

- how three other schools and three companies hold energetic meetings.
- how the team can grow by setting boundaries.
- in a campfire session, what we really value in our consultation culture.
- which personal issues and triggers I can address to contribute fully to the change phases.

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Phase 3 | Embracing the new form: integrating the change

Step by step or all at once, you'll discover the new way together. Then the final period begins: the return phase. In this phase, you'll integrate new insights, apply them in your daily work and remain mindful of colleagues' reactions and any resistance they may show.

Lessons from Indigenous communities: the new form is here

Among Indigenous peoples, the return phase – the moment when a transformation is integrated into daily life – plays a crucial role. In the final phase of change, you see that tradition, connection with nature and community values take centre stage.

How Indigenous communities implement phase 3:

- **Rituals and ceremonies**: rituals mark the transition and anchor the new insights within the group. The position of the sun plays an important role in this. In the return phase, the solstice symbolises the shift from darkness to light. In this way, you experience a renewed sense of direction together, take up a new position and make visible what you have learnt. Ceremonies at sunrise reinforce this movement from inner work towards a new direction.

- **Collective reflection**: space is created to identify together what has changed, what has been learnt and how this is reflected in daily practice. New agreements are made.

- **Restoring balance**: Indigenous communities actively strive for harmony with nature and balance within social structures, so that in the return phase, the new balance is celebrated.

What Indigenous communities avoid:

- **Abrupt change**: Indigenous communities implement changes gradually, with respect for tradition and natural cycles. In schools, this means that changes are introduced step by step, with attention paid to everyone's personal processes.
- **Individual isolation**: the return phase is seen as a collective journey in which everyone plays an active role. In schools, this means that the whole team is involved in integrating new insights into the school culture.

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Indigenous rituals during the return phase

Welcome ceremony (originating from the Lakota and Masai, amongst others)
Following a period of seclusion or transformation, a person's return is celebrated with a ceremony in which the community welcomes them back. This may involve singing, dancing and storytelling, through which the experiences of the transition are integrated into the collective consciousness.

School

Following a period of change, the team comes together. Everyone is symbolically welcomed into the new phase with applause, a handshake, a flower or by singing a song together. You create space to share experiences and express your gratitude. In this way, the new form is welcomed not only on a personal level, but also by the school community.

Other rituals:

- **Earth**: plant a tree or a flower together as a symbol of growth.
- **Water**: sprinkle water over one another as a sign of renewal.
- **Fire**: light a candle together to celebrate the new beginning.
- **Air**: express your gratitude out loud.
- **Ether**: form a circle and experience silence as a foundation for the future.
- **Community**: share a meal or dance together.
- **Earth & fire**: bake bread together or share food as a symbol of fertility.
- **Water & community**: create a gratitude bowl into which everyone places a note.

This calls for a shift in approach/new way of working from the headteacher

Once the transition is complete and a new form begins to take shape, it is essential to embed these new insights within the school. As a school leader, you play a key role in ensuring the change takes root, so that the team not only embraces the new direction but also feels safe and supported within it.

To guide this phase effectively, it is essential to:

1. mark the completion of the change with a ritual, so that the process is consciously brought to a close.
2. proactively address the feelings, thoughts and emotions of team members. Change involves not only movement but also the process of coming to terms with it.
3. provide space for reflection and discussion, so that everyone can actively embrace the new way of working.
4. show self-appreciation for your courage and perseverance throughout this process. Your leadership has helped make this change possible. Acknowledge that moment.

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A successful transition does not end with the change itself, but with the way in which it is embedded in the school's culture. By consciously reflecting on this phase, you give the change strength for the future.

This requires the teacher to adopt a 'return phase' or 'new form phase'

The change is complete, but the way in which you integrate it into your daily teaching practice determines how sustainable it will be. In this phase, it is essential to consciously reflect on what you have learnt, how you have grown and how you are embedding the new way of working into your routine.

To integrate this phase effectively, it is helpful to:

1. share your feelings and insights with colleagues, pupils and yourself. Reflect on the journey you have undertaken and on what you have discovered about your role as a person and as an education professional.
2. embed new ways of working by making conscious choices in your teaching approach, communication and collaboration within the school. Small, consistent steps ensure that the change becomes permanent.
3. celebrate the change by reflecting on your perseverance and growth. This process has required you to step out of your comfort zone, and that deserves a celebration.
4. Allow room for further refinement. Change does not stop with the completion of this phase. With a successful transition, you experience an inner shift, not just a change in structure. Through that shift, you will continue to gain insights that help you further strengthen the new approach.

Change activity: effective consultation
Phase 3 | Celebrate the new

What do you do in the return phase?

You'll notice that a new consultation structure has emerged. Suddenly, you've gained insights, or perhaps a meeting took place that went smoothly and was energising. You've gone through the change journey together and are now taking the time to integrate your insights. Peace and space to celebrate this success are essential. In this way, you honour the hard work you've accomplished together.

Preparing for the activity

- Sheets of paper
- Markers in various colours
- Camera

1. Give your debriefing session a title

Use your title to mark the final phase of the change process, so that the new insights can be properly embedded within the organisation.

Example: *Smart meetings boost energy*

2. Visualise where you are now

Write down your meeting agreements and illustrate what an effective meeting looks like. Make a short video of your new meeting structure as an invitation and source of inspiration for the team. This will help embed the change in the school culture.

This is how we hold meetings:

- We hold standing meetings lasting no more than 30 minutes.
- There is one team meeting a year; the rest of the meetings take place in working groups.
- We train working group chairs in clear communication.

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PART III

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Part III Indigenous wisdom

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Everything is connected

The wisdom of Indigenous peoples is over 30,000 years old and, at the same time, highly relevant today. Their stories and life lessons show that everything is one and interconnected. With this in mind, we can also take a fresh look at education and discover how a school can be a place where connection forms the foundation.

In this section, you will explore what we can learn from Indigenous communities about connection and change when creating a compassionate school environment. To connect with cultural wisdom in the classroom, you will find seven myths from world cultures to inspire community building with the pupils in your classroom.

What are Indigenous peoples?

Indigenous peoples are the original inhabitants of areas that were later colonised by Western countries. Examples include the Amazigh in North Africa, the Aboriginal people in Australia and the Native Americans in the United States. Their cultures are based on a deep relationship with the earth and with the community in which they live.

Indigenous peoples who follow their traditional way of life are familiar with the natural cycle of life, the natural flow of change, and they live within a clear community structure in which everything is interconnected and the common good takes precedence.

> Many Moroccan children living in Europe have an Amazigh background, with family originating from the Rif or the Atlas Mountains. The term 'Berber' is a derogatory term, meaning 'barbarian'.

Holistic education lives within people

The common thread running through community life is the natural connection with the earth, in which everything is imbued with spirit – from the stones, rivers and volcanoes to the star systems.

A special role is reserved for the *elders*: they tell stories passed down through oral tradition, lead rituals and, through *mentoring,*

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guide young people through daily life. The younger generation learns life lessons, crafts and skills by *experiencing* them through a combination of listening, observing and active participation. Through this holistic education, they discover their talents for the community. In this way, young people learn to care for themselves and their environment in a natural way.

The power of your name

Among various Native American tribes, such as the Lakota and Navajo, the unique talent of each community member is reflected in the way children are given their names.

A baby is first given a temporary name. Only when the community or the elders have observed the talent that the child possesses do they receive a name that reflects it. The name is a recognition of the child's unique gift and the role they can fulfil within the community. Every time you hear your name, you are reminded of that quality, as if your talent is being reactivated time and again.

Reflection: what is the meaning of your first name and what does it evoke in you?

The educational professional as *an elder*

Within a school community, too, we help pupils discover their unique talents. By observing attentively and giving them space, you act as *a* modern *elder*: someone who recognises what a child naturally brings to the table, identifies it and nurtures it. This creates an educational culture in which every child feels they belong and contribute something valuable.

A word of reflection

The Indigenous form of inner education has been pushed into the background due to the lack of recognition of Indigenous traditions in mainstream education. In the past, children from Indigenous communities were taken away and forced to attend boarding schools where they were subjected to a Western education. Today, we see how deforestation and the loss of habitat are once again threatening the lives and knowledge of Indigenous communities. Nevertheless, Indigenous communities continue to protect their heritage and

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pass it on, based on the perspective that everything is connected. This knowledge deserves a place in our education, because it shows how, together – here on Earth – we can build caring, resilient communities.

For the Aboriginal people, everything is one – from Uluru to the classroom

During my visit to Uluru in Australia (the huge, red rock in the middle of the desert), the guide explained that this rock is a sacred site for the Aboriginal people, the indigenous inhabitants. Uluru plays a central role in their Dreamtime mythology. That is why the

Aboriginal people ask that their rock not be climbed. Yet I saw people climbing to the top, aided by a steel chain riveted into the rock. The guide explained that accidents sometimes happen and that the Aboriginal people then feel sorrow for the grief of the tourists' families. Their non-judgemental attitude of compassion struck me as a powerful example of their principle that everything is one and interconnected.

Connectedness as a common thread in indigenous traditions

This interconnectedness between people, nature, community and the past forms a common thread running through many indigenous traditions. This relational and caring way of seeing the world also lives on in other cultural communities. In schools, we recognise this wisdom through pupils and colleagues who carry multiple worlds within them.

Indigenous wisdom in the classroom

The seven stories that follow show how Indigenous insights can also inspire us to create education that does justice to our interconnectedness and in which all cultures come together.

Myths from seven world cultures? in schools

The lessons drawn from indigenous wisdom – such as that of the Xhosa, Aboriginal Australians or Native Americans – can still be found today in teams and classrooms. Educational professionals and pupils with multiple cultural backgrounds live in multiple worlds and are bearers of indigenous wisdom. Their migration histories, rituals and community codes are linked to this ancient knowledge, and through their personal stories they bring a contemporary form of indigenous wisdom into schools.

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Space for a compassionate community

When schools recognise the richness of cultures, space is created for a journey of change towards a compassionate community. Traditional insights and different worlds come together in this process. That connection is essential for successful transitions. For pupils and professionals from non-Western backgrounds, contact with their cultural roots strengthens their sense of identity and self-confidence.

Seven myths as a source of inspiration

Here you will find seven myths from world cultures. They will help you to connect with the cultural wisdom within your school.

Myths as inner guides

Myths are more than just stories: they reflect our inner processes and support change. Jungian psychoanalyst and storyteller Clarissa Pinkola Estés emphasises that ancient myths and fairy tales act as beacons of light on our path. According to her, they remind us of forgotten wisdom and strength, thereby opening doors to our inner nature, where we discover what the next step in our growth might be.

Through seven myths, you will experience how different cultures portray their values. You will discover how to translate these stories into practical methods for creating a caring school environment.

A shared starting point

The first story is set in Europe, the place where I live and work, and where pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds meet each other every day at school. They all bring their stories, rituals and values with them.

Per continent/cultural area? You will find a story connected to the land…..

Europe

Afrika

Asia

Australia

North America

South America

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1. European culture - The Ant and the Grasshopper

Based on the transformed European fable of the ant and grasshopper, blending individual responsibility with collective care.

Myth

All summer long, the ant works tirelessly under the hot sun. He gathers grains and builds a sturdy, warm home. Meanwhile, the grasshopper sits in the grass, playing his violin, singing songs and enjoying his freedom. He laughs at the ant: "Why are you working so hard? Surely there's plenty to eat right now?"

The ant replies sternly: "Those who do not look after themselves now will have nothing later."

When the bleak European winter sets in and snow covers the fields, the ant is sitting indoors, warm and well-fed. Then there is a soft knock at his door. It is the cricket, shivering with cold and starving. 'I've got no food,' whispers the cricket. 'May I have a few grains from you?'

The ant hesitates. His reason tells him: You should have worked harder yourself. But when he sees the cricket suffering, he remembers how the cricket's song had given him courage all summer long whilst he was doing his hard work. The ant opens the door, shares his food and says: "I provided the grain, you provided the joy. Together we'll get through the winter."

Meaning and wisdom

This story reflects the tension between planning ahead and being human. Europe places great value on individual achievement, planning, autonomy and personal responsibility (the ant). But the deeper wisdom of the story lies in the encounter of ant and grasshopper in winter: a healthy society cannot do without compassion, solidarity and the recognition that emotion and 'invisible' contributions (the grasshopper) are equally essential to survival as a group.

Work with the myth

Themes

- Personal responsibility: Learning to plan and do your best for your own growth.
- Solidarity & compassion: Helping someone who is struggling, without immediately judging them.
- The value of diversity: Realising that the 'doer' and the 'thinker/creative mind' need each other.

Creative tools

1. *The Winter Store*: Ask pupils to draw a large larder. On the left-hand side, they write 'Material Grains' (things you have to work hard for, such as

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maths or language). On the right-hand side, they write 'Joy Grains' (things that make the classroom cosy, such as a joke or music).

2. *The Dialogue at the Door*: Pupils write a dialogue between the ant and the grasshopper when there is a knock at the door in winter. How does the grasshopper convince the ant with compassion, and how does the ant overcome its initial hesitance?
3. *Reflection circle*: Question: "When do you find yourself being an 'ant' (working hard) and when a 'grasshopper' (enjoying yourself)? How can we ensure there is room for both in the classroom?"
4. *Theater activity*: Create a role-play in which the class visually depicts how the strict, organised world of the ant merges with the colourful, musical world of the grasshopper to form a 'compassionate school'.

2. African culture - Anansi the Spider and the Pot of Wisdom

Based on Akan traditions (Ghana) regarding humility, shared knowledge and community building.

Myth

In the beginning, Anansi the Spider owned all the wisdom in the world. Instead of sharing it, he grew greedy. "If I keep all the wisdom for myself," he thought, "I will be the most powerful creature in the forest."

He sealed all the clever thoughts and ideas inside a clay pot. To keep it safe from everyone else, he decided to tie the pot to his belly and climb to the top of the tallest silk-cotton tree.

But with the heavy pot dangling in front of him, his spider legs couldn't grip the bark. He slipped and stumbled, getting more frustrated by the second.

His young son, Ntikuma, stood at the bottom of the tree, watching his father struggle. Finally, Ntikuma called out: "Father, if you tie the pot to your back instead of your belly, you can easily climb the tree!"

Anansi paused, stunned. A young child had just solved the problem he couldn't. Angered and embarrassed that he didn't possess all the wisdom after all, Anansi dropped the pot. It shattered on the ground below.

A great wind swept through the forest, blowing pieces of wisdom to every corner of the earth. Today, everyone owns a little piece of it, but no single person holds it all.

Meaning and wisdom

The myth of Anansi's pot teaches us about humility and the collective nature of knowledge. It shows that true wisdom is not a possession to be hoarded or used to feel superior. No matter how smart or experienced someone is - even a leader or a

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teacher - they can always learn from others, including children. Well-being and progress come from sharing insights and working together as a community.

Work with the myth

Themes

• **Humility and collaboration**: Recognizing that we need other people's point view to see the whole picture.

• **The power of sharing**: Learning that knowledge grows when it is shared.

Creative tools

1. The Community Pot:

• Place a real clay pot or bowl in the center of the classroom.

• Give each pupil a piece of paper ("a piece of wisdom") to write down one thing they are good at or a helpful tip for a classmate.

• Collect them in the pot and draw a few out to read aloud whenever the class faces a collective challenge.

2. The Father-Son Dialogue:

• Have pupils work in pairs to write or act out a short conversation between Anansi and his son Ntikuma right after the pot shatters.

• One plays the prideful spider who just learned a lesson, and the other plays the clever child.

• Focus the dialogue on how Anansi feels about losing his absolute power but gaining a closer bond with his son.

3. Reflection Circle:

• Gather the pupils and ask: "When did someone younger or unexpected teach you something valuable?" or "Why is it sometimes hard to admit we don't know the answer?"

4. The Wisdom Web:

• Stand in a large circle outdoors or in the gym.

• Hold a ball of yarn, state one thing you appreciate about the group, and toss the ball to a pupil while holding onto the end of the string.

• Each pupil repeats this until a large, interconnected spider web is formed.

• Discuss how the web (their community) is strong because everyone holds a piece of it, but if one person lets go, the web weakens.

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3. Asian culture - The Bamboo and the Hidden Roots

Based on East Asian philosophies (such as Confucianism and Taoism) centred on inner strength, harmony and the power of the collective.

Myth

In a beautiful valley, a young bamboo shoot grows right next to a proud, old oak tree. Every day, the oak boasts about its thick branches and its deep, visible roots. “Look at me,” cries the oak, “I stand here all on my own and brave every storm! You are thin, flexible and you grow so close to the other bamboo stalks that no one can see you as an individual.”

The young bamboo remains silent and bends gently with the wind.

Then a severe typhoon breaks out. The oak fights the wind with all its individual strength, but its branches snap and eventually the storm uproots it, roots and all. The bamboo stalks bend deeply, collectively absorbing the wind, and spring back upright, unscathed, once the storm has passed. The oak whispers in amazement: “How is that possible?”

The bamboo replies: “You thought we stood apart, but underground all our roots are intertwined into a single unbreakable network. Our strength is invisible, and our flexibility is super strong.”

Meaning and wisdom

This story reflects Asian wisdom on the power of adaptability, humility (*‘bamboo mentality’*) and the preservation of harmony (*Wa* or *Ren*). True strength lies not in individualism or rigidity, but in the invisible, deep connection with the group and the ability to move with change.

Work with the myth

Themes

- **Resilience through flexibility:** Learning that yielding or adapting is a necessary for growth.
- **Collective harmony:** Prioritising the success of the group over the individual ego.

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Creative tools

1. **The Bamboo Forest:** Get the class to draw a large network of 'roots' on a poster, with each root representing an invisible connection (such as friendship, help or respect) between two classmates.
2. **The Dialogue between the Oak and the Bamboo:** Ask pupils to write a conversation in which the oak asks the bamboo how it feels to be 'part of a larger whole' rather than being in charge.
3. **Reflection circle:** Question: *"When have you ever gone along with something or given in to keep the atmosphere in a group positive, and what did that achieve?"*
4. **Creative activity:** Set pupils the task of building a structure using skewers or straws. Let them experience that loose materials break easily, but that - just like bamboo roots - they become extremely strong when connected to one another.

4. Australian & Oceanian (Māori) culture - Whānau and the Woven Basket

Based on the Māori concept of 'Whānau' (extended family/community) and the well-known proverb about the 'Kete' (woven basket).

Myth

A young fisherman wants to impress his tribe. He sets out alone onto the wild ocean and refuses his cousins' help. He catches an enormous fish, but his canoe is too heavy and threatens to capsize. From the shore, the village elders watch the scene unfold.

They do not shout at him to give up, but instead begin to sing a traditional song (Waiata) together. The rhythm of their voices gives the boy the strength and the right pace to paddle against the waves.

Once safely on the beach, the tribal chief says: "Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou ka ora ai te iwi" ("With your basket and my basket, the people shall thrive"). The boy learns that his individual talent only shines when it is supported by the group.

Meaning and wisdom

Within Māori culture, the Kete (basket) symbolises knowledge and resources, and Whānau represents the deep conviction that learning and survival are a collective responsibility. Success is never the achievement of one person alone.

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Work with the myth

Themes

• *Shared responsibility*: Learning that we support one another, even when someone is working independently.

• *Humility and pride*: Using your talents to serve the group.

Creative tools

1. The Braided Kete: Have pupils weave strips of paper into a small basket. They place notes containing compliments for one another inside the basket.

2. The Canoe Dialogue: Write a dialogue between the young fisherman and a village elder shortly after he has landed on the beach.

3. Reflection circle: Ask: "When has encouragement or support from others helped you to persevere?"

4. Creative activity: Design a class logo or 'Waka' (canoe) showing how all the pupils are rowing together towards the same goal.

5. North American (Native American) culture - The Medicine Wheel and the four cardinal directions

Based on Indigenous traditions (including those of the Cherokee and Sioux) surrounding holistic balance.

Myth

A young warrior runs frustrated into the forest. "My spirit is strong and my body is swift, yet I feel empty and cannot find peace," he laments to a wise elder. The elder takes him to a clearing and draws a wheel with four equal sections in the sand.

"You nourish your physical strength in the South, and your intellect in the North," says the elder. "But look to the East and the West. Where are your emotions? Where is your connection with nature and the spirit?"

The boy looks at the wheel and realises that he can only truly be a leader if he gives equal attention to all four parts of his being.

Meaning and wisdom

The Medicine Wheel is a sacred symbol of total interconnectivity and balance. It teaches that wellbeing is a holistic concept: the mind, body, emotions and spirit must work together in harmony.

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Work with the myth

Themes

• Holistic balance: Learning that your feelings (heart) are equally important as academic performance (mind).

• Self-reflection: Recognising your own needs.

Creative tools

1. My Medicine Wheel: Pupils create their own wheel with four quadrants (add example in book or online?): North (Physical), East (Mental), South (Spiritual) and West (Emotional). They write down how each aspect is going today.

2. Dialogue with the East: Ask pupils to write a conversation between the young warrior and the wind from the East (which represents a new beginning and fresh ideas).

3. Reflection circle: Ask: "What do you do to find peace when your mind is too full?"

4. Creative activity: Collect natural materials (leaves, pebbles) and, as a class, lay out a large Medicine Wheel outdoors to visualise connecting with the environment.

6. South American (Native American) – which myth?

Myth

Meaning and wisdom

Work with the myth

Themes

Creative tools

7. Russian/Mongolian? culture -

.....

Myth

Meaning and wisdom

Work with the myth
Themes

Creative tools

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PART IV

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Part IV: **Universal values at work**

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Values in action

> *If you want to build a ship, do not gather people together just to haul timber or draw plans.*
> *Do not assign them tasks, nor involve them in planning, but first teach them to long for the boundless sea*
> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

The power of values in practice

In Part III, we saw how stories and symbols bring values to life. Now, we translate those values into everyday school practice. When teachers and school leaders actively engage with these values, they become more aware of their own personal motivations. This is the very core of a compassionate school: universal values can only serve as a compass for the entire organization when they are deeply connected to your personal drive.

In day-to-day actions, values are often implicit. This section makes them visible and tangible. Using clear frameworks and worksheets, you can translate values into step-by-step plans and behavioural agreements. In this way, the school develops into a safe and welcoming community.

Values as pedagogical foundation

A value is a quality with a specific meaning, such as commitment, solidarity or loyalty. These are qualities that everyone can recognise and which guide the way we live and work together. Values only take on meaning when people consciously strive to uphold them. They transcend religions, (political) beliefs and social differences, and thus form a unifying element in the compassionate school.

Working with values provides a school with a solid pedagogical foundation. It may sometimes seem like extra work to commit to values, but in practice, school teams find that the work actually becomes easier when there is agreement on intentions and values.

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From origins to practice

Within every cultural context, pupils learn values such as respect, compassion and cooperation. In some traditions, the importance of the group takes precedence; in others, it is the autonomy of the individual. Not every behaviour automatically contributes to a school where every child feels seen; that is why values are needed as a compass to maintain cohesion and safety.

From values to needs

To understand how values become embedded in people's behaviour, it helps to look at models that map out needs. Two well-known pyramids - by Maslow and by Pinto - offer different perspectives on this. They reveal how individual growth and the interests of the community can complement one another or, conversely, create tension.

Maslow and Pinto: two perspectives on human needs

Maslow's pyramid is a well-known psychological model that describes the hierarchy of human needs. First, basic needs such as food, drink and safety must be met; only then does space emerge for personal growth and self-actualisation.

Pinto's pyramid places a different emphasis. This model aligns more closely with indigenous wisdom and community-centred thinking. The fulfilment of needs begins with upholding the honour of the community and ends with primary, physical needs.

Application in your school context

Use both pyramids as a frame of reference when choosing the values that underpin your school. They help you to invite balance: when should individual development take centre stage, and when should the interests of the group take precedence?

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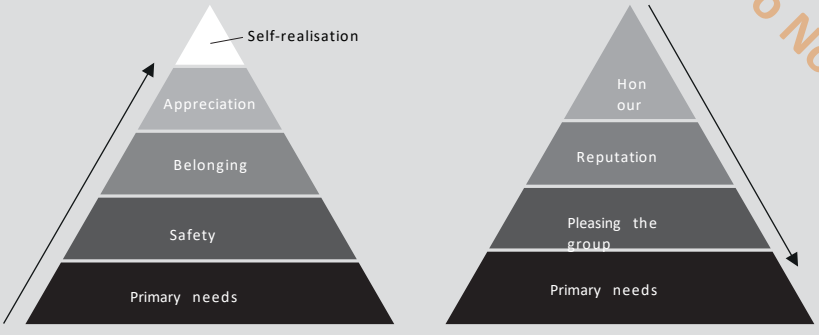
Why two pyramids?

Both pyramids provide a valuable framework for choosing the values that underpin a school. Maslow's approach is: the individual first, and the community last. Pinto places the emphasis differently: the community first, and then the individual. Together, they demonstrate that needs can be culturally influenced.



Maslow Pinto

Values amongst Indigenous peoples

What happens to values such as compassion and cooperation when education becomes detached from children's everyday lives? When Western countries imposed their educational systems, pupils from Indigenous peoples often lost their connection with their own culture.

Whereas they used to discover patterns in nature through play, they were required to learn facts from books. As a result, they were estranged not only from their traditional knowledge, but also from original values such as respect for the land, caring for one another, cooperation within the community and compassion as a guiding principle for daily life.

At school, children learn what a tree is by reading about it in a book, looking at a picture and memorising its name for a test. That knowledge can be fleeting. Many teachers find

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that it only really sticks when they take the lesson outdoors and pupils can learn through their senses.

Indigenous children learn about trees by touching them, gathering fruit and hearing stories about their significance. They discover through participating in the community and experiencing how everything is part of the bigger picture. They see where berries grow, observe the behaviour of animals and talk about their dreams with the elders. What they learn through experience becomes part of who they are.

This way of learning is embedded in the wheel of life, a circular model that connects the stages of life, the elements and the relationships between people and nature. It helps to place experiences and insights within the bigger picture.

The knowledge of Indigenous children is practical, hard-won and rooted in values such as connection, respect and the realisation that everything is animate. In this worldview, people, mountains, trees, wind and stars are kin - each with their own role in the whole. This outlook on life encourages harmonious coexistence.

By learning from Indigenous traditions, we recognise the wisdom of communities that have lived - and continue to live - in connection with their environment for generations. By inviting these traditions into education, pupils remain connected to their families, their stories and their way of seeing the world. In this way, we contribute together to the survival of cultures in which values such as caring for one another and respect for the land are lived every day.

> "Traditionally, we were taught kindness and compassion, and how to live according to the Buddha's teachings. But nowadays, with progress, all parents send their children to school. With modern education, the old values of cooperation and compassion are beginning to fade. People now think: I must become a doctor or an engineer, and the traditional ways of helping one another, of kindness and cooperation, are slowly dying out."
>
> *Schooling the World*, a documentary by Roger Charlesworth on the effects of Western education on the rich culture of Indigenous peoples.

Reflection question

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1. In what ways are we failing our pupils – or perhaps not failing them at all – by keeping nature so far removed from the classroom and focusing primarily on knowledge from books?
2. What can we learn from Indigenous traditions about the value of community and growing up with values such as compassion and cooperation?
3. What cultural richness do your pupils embody?
4. How much scope do you feel to integrate that richness into your curriculum?

Values in school practice

Working with values in the compassionate school requires joint decisions, clear agreements and leading by example. A school team starts by exploring values that align with their mission and translating them into concrete agreements for teachers, pupils, and parents.

These chosen values are then compiled into a practical Values Book that promotes transparency and personal responsibility. Ultimately, this approach fosters a cohesive school culture where connection, trust, and compassion are actively exemplified both inside and outside the classroom.

In the next chapter, '5x Values in Action', you'll find five core values that guide such a school culture, along with practical tips you can put into practice today.

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5x Values in action for educational professionals

Take the first step with confidence, you don't need to see the whole staircase yet, just take the first step.
Martin Luther King

In this chapter, you'll find five core values for an inspiring school environment: connectedness, compassion, reliability, authenticity and integrity. Each value is explored in detail with characteristics, a practical case study and exercises for teachers and school leaders. As situations often touch on several values, I invite you to continue practising flexibly and mindfully. In the second part, you'll find practical activities for pupils and parents. Feel free to open a random page if you'd like to get started – you'll find exactly the value you need today.

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1. The value of connection

> *We are all related.*
> Lakota Sioux (Mitákuye Oyás'ĩ)

Characteristics

- First, take a moment to reflect on your own feelings and thoughts.
- Enjoy working together as a group.
- Make an effort to make the moment more enjoyable for someone else.
- Be mindful of what others need.
- Standing up for someone when the situation calls for it.
- Recognise what support you yourself need, give it to yourself or ask for it.

Case study: Teacher – Teacher

Within a school team, connection is essential for a pleasant working atmosphere and inspiring collaboration. When colleagues struggle to see eye to eye – for example, on teaching methods or the division of tasks – this affects the team dynamics. This not only impacts their own job satisfaction, but also the learning environment for the pupils and the atmosphere throughout the school.

Connection Roadmap

To foster strong collaboration and mutual connection between teachers, follow these steps:

1. Unlikely pairs

Actively seek out colleagues with whom you work less frequently. This will increase your mutual understanding and help you discover new perspectives.

2. Let leaders take the lead

Give each other the space to take the lead in different situations. This helps to develop respect and mutual trust.

3. Group rotations and team-building

By regularly working with others, you prevent colleagues from always working in the same groups. This creates a dynamic working environment in which everyone has the chance to connect with one another and utilise different talents.

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4. Setting your course together

Emphasise that everyone makes a unique contribution within the team. By sharing ideas about school-wide goals, such as timetables or pupil support, everyone is involved in setting the school's direction.

5. Reflection and open communication

Schedule regular opportunities to reflect together on collaboration and communication. This could, for example, take the form of a brief discussion about what is going well and where there is room for improvement. Communicating openly and honestly fosters a positive working atmosphere centred on understanding and connection.

Behavioural agreements on connection

These behavioural guidelines strengthen cooperation and mutual bonds between teachers.

1. Teachers cover for one another when absent

This ensures that lessons and support can continue, so that pupils continue to feel supported.

2. The management ensures there is a sufficiently large pool of cover teachers

This means there is always someone available to step in, which strengthens continuity and collaboration.

3. Teachers, support staff and pupils work together to create a positive atmosphere

Everyone feels responsible for creating a pleasant and safe environment.

4. Issues are discussed quickly and openly

We actively work on solutions to ensure tensions do not simmer beneath the surface.

5. Pupils and staff show appreciation for one another

Compliments and positive feedback are encouraged, which strengthens the sense of connection.

What agreements would you add regarding connection?

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2. The value of compassion

> *Walk gently upon the earth, knowing that it is not given to you, but lent to you by your children.*
> Native American wisdom

Characteristics

- Making space for self-compassion.
- Being able to empathise with what another person is going through.
- Responding gently, even when there is friction in an interaction.
- Trying to be patient when working with others.
- Being mindful of what you say and do towards others.
- Paying attention to what is going well.
- Being mindful of your own growth and that of others.

Case study: teacher – pupil

Alwin, a twelve-year-old pupil, behaves in a strikingly rude manner towards his teacher during an observation session. Afterwards, he bursts into tears and explains that there are many problems at home. He is currently staying with his grandmother, but no one else at school is aware of his personal circumstances. This makes him feel insecure and alone, which manifests itself in defiant behaviour.

When a pupil has to deal with official bodies, such as youth care or social services, due to problems at home, this can have significant emotional consequences. The insecurity, worries and anxiety involved often affect their behaviour and academic performance. As a teacher, it is important to deal with this professionally and empathetically.

The *Compassion Step-by-Step Guide* offers guidance in such situations.

Compassion Roadmap

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1. Examine your own feelings

A pupil's situation may stir up emotions in you as a teacher. Discuss your feelings with colleagues, family or friends before you speak to the child and their carers. This will help you to act professionally and empathetically.

2. Create a safe environment

Make sure the pupil knows they can speak in confidence. A designated support teacher or mentor at school helps to provide a safe foundation.

3. Be open to listening to the parents or carers

If parents or carers are involved, listen to their side of the story without judgement. You do not need to go into details, but let them know that the school wants to support them and their child. Discuss the level of confidentiality and what information can be shared.

4. Ask the child and their parents how you can help

Work together to identify the practical help or emotional support the school can offer. This can range from extra support with schoolwork and a listening ear to a referral to a care team.

5. Regular check-ins

Ensure that a teacher, form tutor or support staff member regularly checks in with the pupil to see how they are getting on and whether any further support is needed.

By following these steps, Alwin can feel supported and gradually work on building his sense of safety and stability.

Practising compassion

1. How is your self-compassion?

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2. Think back to the last time you needed compassion from a colleague. How did you receive it?

Behavioural guidelines on compassion

As well as fostering connection, compassion is essential for a positive atmosphere. These behavioural guidelines will help you promote compassion within the school.

1. Listen before you respond

Take the time to listen carefully to what someone is saying before you reply. This leads to greater understanding and less miscommunication.

2. Show respect, whatever the situation

Even if you disagree with someone or someone behaves differently to what you expect, try to imagine the other person's perspective.

3. Offer support

If you notice that someone isn't feeling well, ask how they are and offer help where possible. This could involve working together, saying a kind word, or making a special effort to include them in the team or in the class.

4. Be open to different perspectives

Everyone has their own background and experiences. By being curious about others and taking their stories seriously, you foster greater mutual understanding.

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5. Self-reflection

Teachers and pupils encourage one another to reflect on their own behaviour and how it affects others. This can be done through a brief moment of reflection at the start of the day or through whole-class discussions about connection and compassion.

What agreements on compassion does your team add?

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3. The value of trust

> *The strength of the tribe lies in the trust between its people.*
> Indigenous wisdom

Characteristics

- Daring to be honest, even when it's nerve-wracking.
- Doing what you say.
- Taking commitments seriously and replying to emails.
- Taking responsibility for your role and behaviour.
- Demonstrating time and again what you stand for.
- Remaining loyal to the team and the shared vision.

Case study: headteacher – team

As a headteacher, you know that connection within the team is essential for effective collaboration. However, situations can arise in which certain colleagues are not fully engaged, which puts pressure on the team's dynamics and reliability.

Kim is consistently late for meetings and regularly withdraws from working groups, despite previous commitments. Despite your repeated discussions on this matter, her behaviour remains unchanged. Colleagues want to maintain a positive atmosphere, but find they cannot rely on her. This causes frustration and uncertainty within the team, as no one else dares to speak to her directly.

How can you, as colleagues, tackle this? And what if you recognise Kim's behaviour in yourself?

To make these kinds of situations open to discussion without resorting to blame, it is important to reflect together on what reliability actually means. The *Reliability Stepby-Step Guide* helps teams to do this in a constructive way.

Reliability Roadmap

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1. Schedule a meeting on reliability

Organise a 59-minute discussion in which you, as a team, discuss what reliability means to everyone. This can be different for every colleague – for one person it's about being on time, for another it means clear planning and predictable communication. By discussing this, mutual understanding grows and everyone has a clearer idea of what to expect.

2. Make practical behavioural agreements

To ensure reliable collaboration, follow the behavioural agreements set out below.

3. Review and improve the agreements

Meet monthly to review how things are going with regard to reliability within the team. Are the agreements working in practice? Are there any areas that need adjusting?

Nothing is more inspiring than when things are going well and you simply need to fine-tune them. Small improvements can make a big difference to how reliably and effectively a team works together.

Behavioural agreements on reliability

These specific agreements will help you strengthen reliability at school.

1. Be on time and prepared

Make sure you're ready five minutes before a meeting starts, so you can begin calmly. Arriving on time and being well prepared contributes to a positive flow in collaboration.

2. Clear and timely communication

Be open about what you can and cannot do. Try to reply to emails within 3 to 5 working days. Efficient information handling supports the entire teaching process and prevents miscommunication.

3. Taking responsibility

Take an active approach to your responsibilities and ensure you do not need to be reminded of commitments.

4. Treating information confidentially

What is shared in confidence remains confidential. This helps pupils and colleagues feel safe to speak their minds.

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5. Act consistently

Ensure that your thoughts, words and actions are consistent. This reinforces your reliability.

What agreements on reliability would your team add?

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4. The value of autonomy

> *There is wisdom in those who walk gently on the earth, encouraging others as they move forward.*
> Winona LaDuke

Characteristics

- Taking the space to act independently.
- Having the courage to take control of your own choices.
- Being motivated from within to contribute.
- Daring to ask questions and maintaining a critical mindset.
- Having confidence in your own ability to find solutions.
- Feeling free to choose what suits you.

Case study: teacher – parent

Teacher Lisa is having a meeting with the mother of pupil Eva. The mother is unhappy with how her daughter is being supported and feels her views are not being taken into account in the decisions the school makes. Lisa realises that the conversation is in danger of getting bogged down in a debate about control: the mother wants more say, whilst Lisa wants to make decisions based on her professional role.

To ensure the next meeting with the mother remains constructive and to strengthen mutual understanding, Lisa chooses to take autonomy as her starting point. The *Autonomy Step-by-Step Guide* helps her to reach joint decisions on an equal footing.

Autonomy Roadmap

1. Recognise each other's expertise

In the follow-up conversation, Lisa suggests that both parents and teachers are experts, each from their own perspective. Parents know their child best, whilst teachers have expertise in education and child development. By recognising this equality, the conversation with the mother becomes more relaxed.

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2. Listen without immediately steering the conversation

Instead of immediately explaining her own view, Lisa asks: “What do you think is important in

Eva’s support?” She gives the mother space to share her concerns and expectations, without interrupting her.

3. Facilitate joint decisions

Lisa offers the mother a number of options within the school’s framework. For example: “We can schedule extra consultation sessions or provide more insight into how we monitor Eva’s development. Which option suits you best?” This makes the mother feel taken seriously and involved in the learning process.

4. Establish clear responsibilities

Autonomy means clarity about everyone’s role. Lisa and the mother agree on who is responsible for which steps: Lisa monitors the learning process, whilst the mother ensures Eva goes to bed on time so that she is well-rested in class.

5. Build trust through transparency

Lisa keeps the mother actively informed of Eva’s progress and asks her for feedback. This fosters an open partnership in which both parties feel heard, without autonomy on one side taking precedence.

This approach shifts the conversation from a debate about control to a dialogue about equality and cooperation. The mother feels taken seriously, Lisa retains her professional autonomy, and together they arrive at a sustainable solution.

Behavioural agreements on autonomy

Take a look at the step-by-step plan on autonomy – what agreements would you like to add?

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5. The value of integrity

> *The more you know, the less you need to say.*
> Jim Rohn

Characteristics

- Having the courage to be honest, with yourself and with others.
- Sharing openly what you think and do.
- Being genuine in your interactions with others.
- Standing up for what is right.
- Showing your individuality.
- Sticking to your guns, even when things get tough.

Case study: headteacher – parent

Headteacher Bas leads a team of fifty teachers and care professionals. During a parent-teacher meeting, he loses his temper and snaps at a pupil's father. He feels guilty; this is not the side of himself he wanted to show. 'What will my team say about me now?', he wonders.

To turn this situation into a learning opportunity, Bas chooses to take responsibility immediately. The *Integrity Step-by-Step Guide* helps him to take action and restore trust – in himself, with parents and within his team.

Integrity Roadmap

1. Take responsibility for your behaviour

Bas acknowledges his mistake and decides to contact the parents that very evening. He is nervous and offers his apologies openly and sincerely. He emphasises that he is aware of his behaviour and suggests a further meeting with the parents.

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2. Ensure transparency within your team

After his meeting with the parents, Bas informs his deputies and the pupil's mentor about the incident. He explains what happened and shares how he handled the situation.

3. Create space for dialogue and reflection

Bas realises that the situation can be a learning experience for the whole school team. He suggests that, during a team meeting, they reflect on the importance of acting professionally and maintaining integrity when communicating with parents.

4. Remain engaged and approachable

His openness and reflective attitude ensure that parents accept his apology and retain their trust in the school. His colleagues appreciate that he is transparent about the incident and dares to show vulnerability. This strengthens the sense of mutual commitment and trust within the school.

5. Learn and grow as a leader

Bas takes this experience as a valuable lesson. He decides that, during difficult conversations, he will first take a moment to gather his thoughts before responding. In this way, he remains true to the core value of integrity and fosters a positive, respectful culture of communication within the school.

Behavioural guidelines on integrity

Integrity is about honesty and striving to act with moral integrity. Six specific guidelines that bring this to life:

1. Act proactively

Do you see room for improvement? Don't wait – take action. This shows that you are taking responsibility for the bigger picture.

2. Taking responsibility for your behaviour

Consider the consequences of your choices and explain why you are doing something. This makes your actions transparent and strengthens the trust of others.

3. Don't make empty promises

Only promise what you can actually deliver. So if you say "I'll text you", then do so, because otherwise the other person will be waiting for your message.

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4. Admit mistakes quickly

Everyone makes mistakes. By acknowledging them straight away and putting things right, you demonstrate honesty and strength.

5. Keep your promises

Do what you've agreed to do. This brings clarity and predictability to your collaboration.

Don't gossip

Talk to people rather than about them. This keeps communication and relationships on the up and up. Pupil reviews should not be held in the staff room, but in the privacy of a suitable room.

What else do you agree on at school regarding integrity?

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5x Values in action
Exercises for pupils and parents

Discover how to apply the five values in a practical and inspiring way. They feature in each exercise, sometimes with an emphasis on connection and engagement, at other times on autonomy or integrity.

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For pupils

Get to grips with the values during social-emotional development lessons, citizenship lessons or form time. Depending on the pupils' age, let them choose, or select the exercise you feel most connected to.

Exercise 1. A class you can rely on

1. Thinking about reliability

Ask the pupils: "When do you think someone is trustworthy? What do you see them do?"

2. Collecting examples

Ask everyone to give examples of reliable behaviour. Write them on the board or on large sheets of paper.

3. Identifying personal traits

Discuss together which qualities are associated with reliability.

4. Compiling a list

Work with the class to draw up a list of 'reliable behaviour'. Display the list in the classroom.

5. Giving feedback

Discuss regularly: "How are we getting on with our theme of 'reliability'? What are we proud of, and what could we still improve?"

Exercise 2. Recognising your unique value for the class

1. Introduction

Tell the pupils that everyone contributes something special to the group. Explain that today the class is going to discover which qualities help you all to support one another.

2. Exploring the situation

Ask the pupils to imagine that a classmate is absent for a day. Which quality or contribution would the group miss the most?

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3. Sharing and collecting

Ask pupils, in small groups or as a whole class, to name the qualities they would miss if someone were absent. Write these qualities down on a large sheet of paper.

4. Expressing appreciation

Discuss together who usually contributes these qualities. Ask pupils to put into words what they appreciate about one another. This way, everyone hears what their unique value is.

5. Reflection and consolidation

Discuss with the class how it feels to receive appreciation and how important everyone's contribution is. Display the qualities you've collected so that they remind pupils of the strength of the group.

Exercise 3. Fulfilling wishes brings people together

1. Introduction

Tell the pupils that everyone has dreams and wishes. Explain that they are going to discover how they can help one another to bring those wishes closer to reality.

2. Collecting wishes

Ask the pupils to think about what they believe to be the biggest wish of three of their classmates. If they're stuck, ask everyone to write down their own wish.
Collect the wishes and choose three to work with.

3. Sharing and discussing

Discuss with the class how to treat someone's wish with care. Ask: "Should this wish be shared out loud, or would it be better in a smaller group?" Let the pupil choose for themselves. Form pairs or small groups if that feels more comfortable.
This creates space for trust and openness.

4. Offering advice

Let the pupils give each other a suggestion to help bring the wish closer to reality. This could be something small, such as encouragement or a practical idea.

5. Reflection and connection

Discuss how it feels to share your wish and be heard. What is it like to think along with someone else's wish? Point out that speaking a dream aloud brings it closer to reality. And that listening to each other's dreams strengthens the group in terms of trust, support and cooperation.

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Exercise 4. Standing strong together

1. Introduction

Tell the pupils that cooperation is more than just dividing up tasks. It's also about encouraging and supporting one another, and ensuring that everyone feels heard.

2. Gathering examples

Ask the pupils how they demonstrate cooperation in their day-to-day work. Ask them to give specific examples.

3. Identifying moments of group cohesion

Discuss with the class the moments when they really function as a group and what they do to achieve this.

4. Discussing areas for improvement

Ask how cooperation can be further strengthened and what actions would help achieve this.

5. Reflection and consolidation

Summarise the qualities the group is already demonstrating and the agreements they wish to make to further improve their cooperation.

Exercise 5. Being genuine

1. Introduction

Tell the pupils that honesty forms the basis of trust. Explain that they are going to explore how sincerity contributes to a safe and respectful atmosphere.

2. Exploring situations

Ask the pupils to brainstorm together the situations in which sincerity is important. Also discuss when it can be difficult to be honest.

3. Gathering ideas

Work with the class to draw up a list of actions that help you to remain honest and act with integrity. Examples include: expressing your true feelings in a respectful way, admitting when you haven't made the best choice, and listening to others without judging them.

4. Making values visible

Display the actions and values you've collected in the classroom to emphasise that honesty and trust form the foundation of your strong group.

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5. Reflection and follow-up

Repeat the exercise after a month and discuss whether there have been any changes. Ask what new behaviours pupils have noticed in themselves or in each other.

For parents

Activity 1. Looking together, sharing together

Ask parents to work with their child to find an image that, for them, expresses connection or reliability. Ask them to explain this image to the class and hold a group discussion about the different ways in which we can view connection and reliability.

Tip: Is there an Amazigh storyteller within a pupil's family who could share a story about connection or reliability from that tradition?

Activity 2. A picture says it all

Ask the class representative to work with other parents to create a collage for each value. Display the collages in the classroom so that they serve as a visual reminder of the group's core values. This helps pupils and parents to experience the power of these values on a daily basis.

Activity 3. A warm moment of attention

Suggest to parents that they give their child a 'weather forecast' massage. This is a playful and loving way to encourage connection and relaxation. Here's how it works:

- Ask the child if it's OK to be touched.
- If so, place your hands on their shoulders and stroke from their shoulders down to their arms and fingers.
- Gently tap their back with your fingers: it's raining!
- Draw a cloud and blow first a gentle and then a strong breeze across their back.
- Rub your hands together to warm them up and place them on their back: the sun is shining!
- Ask the child what other kinds of weather they'd like to experience.
- Thank your child for letting you give them a massage.

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By asking for permission and saying thank you, the child learns that they have autonomy over their own body and feelings. This not only strengthens the bond between parent and child, but also encourages empathy and respect for boundaries.

Activity 4. Space to be yourself

In Arab and Asian cultures, family honour plays a major role, which means that some topics are less easily discussed. This can affect how openly pupils dare to express themselves, whilst the value of integrity actually requires remaining true to one's own feelings and identity.

Encourage parents to give their child space to develop their own voice. Here are a few practical suggestions:

- First, let the child breathe calmly and, after thirty seconds, describe what they are feeling.
- Use moments of calm or simple meditation to connect with emotions.
- Give parents a worksheet with emotion icons and ask them to fill in, at the end of the weekend, which emotions they noticed in their child. Discuss together whether this assessment is accurate and continue the conversation about any feelings that arise during the discussion.

In this way, children learn to recognise and express their own emotions more effectively, in a safe and understanding environment.

Activity 5. Dare to show who you are

Although courage is not a core value in this book, it plays a supporting role when working with values. Courage helps pupils to put autonomy, connection and integrity into practice, even when it feels daunting.

Courage isn't just about grand deeds, but also about small moments when you speak your truth or show who you really are. Ask parents to think of a situation, together with their child, in which they showed courage. Let parents first share their own experience and then engage in a conversation with their child using questions such as:

- When did you show that you were brave?
- How did that feel?
- What helps you when you need courage?

Let them choose a symbol together that represents courage to them. They can use this symbol to remind each other that courage starts with a small step.

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When values are put to the test

In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, we may find ourselves treating our values with less care than we'd like. Under pressure or when stressed, we sometimes react impatiently and only realise later that we'd have preferred to say or do something different.

It is precisely those moments when our values are under pressure that offer us the chance to deepen our understanding and grow. They invite us to reflect on the question: what do we truly stand for, and how do we put that into practice?

Discomfort as a mirror

In schools, I see situations where colleagues and managers unintentionally create an atmosphere in which team members feel less secure. It can be daunting to raise this as a topic for discussion if we are inclined to avoid feelings of discomfort. However, how a team deals with vulnerability and missteps determines whether a safe, compassionate learning environment can flourish. It is precisely by voicing our feelings and then seeing how they are received that it becomes clear where our values clash with reality. Or vice versa. Mistakes and discomfort become valuable learning moments, because they shape a school's culture.

Four practical examples

The examples in this section are based on real-life school situations. They have been combined and anonymised so that the focus remains on what we can learn when values come under pressure.

Each example invites reflection: to examine what is happening, what that says about the culture, and how we can work more effectively with values in action.

Reflection questions

Read the practical scenarios whilst asking yourself:

- What do I recognise here from my own experience?
- Which value was under pressure here?
- How could I (or we as a team) approach this differently?

1. The power of words in leadership

During a team meeting, a colleague's workload is brought up. He is juggling several tasks, and the deputy head notes that this places a heavy demand on him. Manager Karin responds curtly: "That's his own choice." The room falls silent.

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In all communication, language influences how safe and seen people feel, and this is certainly true within school teams. Brief, businesslike responses can give the impression that concerns are not being taken seriously and that there is little room for vulnerability.

It is precisely as a leader that you have the opportunity to use your choice of words to energise values such as compassion and connection. In this way, you foster a school culture in which people feel confident enough to speak their minds.

Additional reflection question

What does it mean for colleagues when a leader speaks curtly about them?

2. Well done… or not?

You've just finished your lesson. The atmosphere in the classroom was fine, but you also sense that some pupils are under a lot of stress in their personal lives. Despite this, they participated well in the lesson, and as a token of appreciation, you decide to let them play outside for longer. They walk quietly down the corridor, exactly as you'd asked. The pupils are happy, you're happy. The next day, a colleague approaches you: "You were late bringing your pupils back inside yesterday." That comment sticks with you.

Additional reflection questions

- Where is the line between rules and scope for reward?
- How much leeway do you have to gauge what your pupils need?
- What happens to pedagogical leadership when protocols take precedence?

3. When the pressure to perform struggles with compassion

Malik is sitting quietly at the back of the class. Normally he is active and engaged, but today he is distracted. He is trying to complete his test, but he can't manage it. Teacher Thomas asks him what's wrong.

Malik whispers: "My grandmother passed away last night." Thomas hesitates, as he doesn't have time to address Malik's feelings right now. He's already behind with his work and has to enter all the pupils' marks today. He says: "That's really sad, but you need to finish the test now. We can talk about your grandmother later." Malik nods and falls silent.

Additional reflection questions

- What happens emotionally to a pupil when the pressure to perform weighs heavily on them?

- How can a teacher make space for emotions without losing sight of the learning objectives?
- What signs indicate that a pupil needs more than just to finish a test?

4. Who is responsible for this pupil?

The pupil review is stalling, as a boy is at risk of falling between the cracks in terms of support. “Who’s actually in charge of him?” someone asks. Everyone looks at one another, but no one answers.

“He’s not in my maths class,” says Paul. Raiza adds that he isn’t in her language class either. It’s as if the pupil is a ball being tossed about. Although the boy isn’t present at the meeting, he can sense that he’s adrift in a system that doesn’t really support him. The boy senses this invisibility and needs someone to say: “This is my pupil; I’ll stand up for him.”

Further reflection questions

- What does it mean for a pupil when they feel truly seen by a teacher or a team?
- Why are we sometimes afraid to take the lead and shoulder responsibility?
- Are we a community that looks out for one another, or does everyone work in isolation?

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PART V

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Part V **Roadmap towards the compassionate school**

The songs of our ancestors are also the songs of our children Aboriginal Australian wisdom

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The five building blocks

Education is a human process centred on development, connection and meaning. Those who teach or lead are not only involved in the transfer of knowledge, but also in the formation of people. This requires inner growth, reflection and the ability to put universal values into action.

This chapter sets out the five building blocks for your journey towards a compassionate school culture. They invite you to make compassion and connection a natural part of who you are – within yourself, within the team and in the world around us.

1. Develop who you *are*, not just what you *do*

The core objectives for primary and secondary education describe what pupils need to know and be able to do. One of these objectives is ‘Orientation towards oneself and the world’: an invitation to personal development, social interaction, citizenship and finding meaning.

What is not specified, however, is what knowledge and skills teachers and school leaders need to guide pupils in this area. That responsibility lies with schools and school boards. But if you want to support pupils in their personal and emotional growth, you can only do so if you yourself continue to work on your own inner development.

Pupils are inspired when they see you as a role model and can sense what it means to develop socially and emotionally. Just as we experience the difference between a teacher who teaches from books and one who teaches with conviction and enthusiasm, so too do pupils sense it when we embody what we teach. Leading by example makes all the difference.

Current professional development programmes focus mainly on methodology, pedagogy and communication. That is very important, but training in deeper selfknowledge is often lacking: awareness of your emotional undercurrents, and the courage to follow your own path. That is precisely where there is scope for growth and for providers who focus on identity development from the core.

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2. Turn dealing with change into a skill

Change is a constant in education. Those who learn to understand their inner currents get to know themselves better and can focus on connection and progress, rather than on what is going wrong.

When ‘coping with change’ becomes a subject taught by teachers who are consciously working on their personal development, it becomes easier for pupils to go with the flow of life’s dynamics. They develop resilience, recognise resistance and see change as an opportunity for growth.

3. Invite the sources

Pupils, parents and educational professionals from non-Western backgrounds are bearers of culture. They bring with them wisdom that has often been lost in Western thinking. By incorporating the indigenous life lesson ‘Everything is one and interconnected’ into the curriculum, traditional knowledge is given a place within the school culture. This enriches the learning process, strengthens mutual understanding and creates a universally inclusive school where every pupil feels seen.

Put it into practice:

- Invite parents and grandparents to share stories in Riffian or Arabic (with translation).
- Link their stories to lessons on citizenship, sustainability or philosophy.
- Ask pupils to write a letter to ‘the Earth as a teacher’.
- Ask the speaker later for feedback on those letters.

4. Truly implement lessons in social-emotional development – for teachers too

Social-emotional development falls under the core objective ‘Understanding oneself and the world’, but in practice it still does not have a firm place in the curriculum.

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As a result, pupils miss out on opportunities to understand themselves better, which leaves them vulnerable to negative influences.

Social-emotional development is about learning to manage feelings, relationships, stress and interactions – skills that pupils need to stand firm in life. Every time you do deliver a social skills lesson, pupils' self-confidence grows, as does their receptiveness to the subject matter.

The additional benefits are:

1. Pupils find their place and often say with relief: "At last, I can say what I'm feeling."
2. The atmosphere in the classroom improves as pupils connect on a deeper level.
3. Bullying is identified and addressed sooner.
4. Group disputes decrease, as pupils find the words to describe what they're feeling and learn to express their emotions more effectively.
5. Pupils experience greater self-confidence and enjoyment.
6. School drop-out rates are reduced because pupils feel seen.

According to ……., social-emotional learning enhances pupils' social safety, self-awareness and engagement. It helps them to manage stress, build relationships and feel connected to their school - essential conditions for a healthy learning environment. **ADD GLOBAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**.

To embed social-emotional development sustainably, it is essential that teachers themselves also schedule SEL moments. Learning about oneself and one's interactions with others is just as crucial for professionals. When teachers systematically set aside time for their own social-emotional development, it fosters greater calm, clarity and resilience within the team. This has a direct impact on classroom safety and the quality of interaction with pupils.

All the worksheets, tools and insights in this book support the social-emotional learning of both the teacher and the pupils they guide.

5. Incorporate personal development and change management into training programmes

Teachers and leaders guide their own development and that of their pupils. It is therefore essential that, during their training, they learn to reflect on their inner processes. Armed with the three principles of change from Part II, future educational professionals learn how they can proactively contribute to sustainable improvements. This strengthens their capacity to act and prevents burnout in the tension between professional practice and personal struggles in turbulent times.

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I am deeply grateful to Indigenous peoples. Despite the constant undermining by Western systems, they continue to keep their traditions alive and share their contemporary knowledge and wisdom with us. Many pupils and families from Indigenous communities have suffered and continue to suffer under an education system that disconnects them from their culture, language and worldview.

Yet their intention remains clear: to live together in love. *One large family, one earth*.

Time and again, I experience how what we feel or need at our core is naturally present among these peoples. Their fluid connection with nature offers us signs, insights and glimmers of hope to walk our path of change with confidence. For we are all part of an invisible, connecting web.

My thanks also go to all the wise pupils, teachers and school leaders with whom I was able to walk a little way. A special thank you to my mentors and teachers, who made the invisible tangible for me. It is a privilege to meet more and more people who want to elevate education on an emotional level – to a place of connection, compassion and growth.

To all my readers and supporters: thank you very much for your presence, attention and trust.

Hélène van Oudheusden

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This book has come about through the knowledge, perseverance and insights of many dedicated people who wish to make the world a little better. First and foremost, I owe a special debt of gratitude to the oral traditions of Indigenous peoples. Much of their knowledge, which we can apply today, has been shared, passed on and carefully preserved in stories that have been handed down time and again to new generations – sometimes adapted to resonate with the experiences of young people, but always rooted in that warm wisdom: we are all one.

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About the author

Hélène van Oudheusden is a mythological mentor and educational leadership counselor for professionals. She facilitates profound growth processes and provides mentoring on how you yourself can initiate the change needed to create a better world for children and young people.

For consultancy and talks
helene@helenevanoudheusden.com

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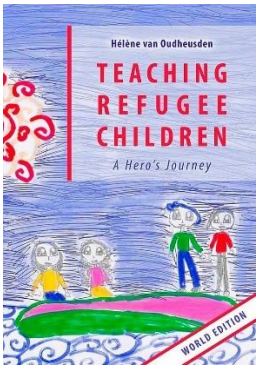

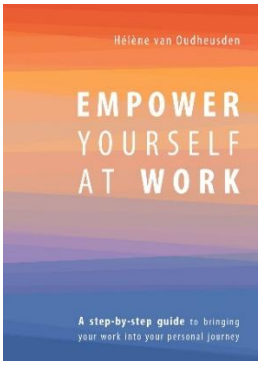

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