



The Space Between Knowing and Doing:

Why Relational Practice Requires a Shift from Control to Curiosity

PESA Professional Learning Webinar
Sue Chandler, Founder, Transformative Schools
Thursday 30 July 2026



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Professional Learning Resource

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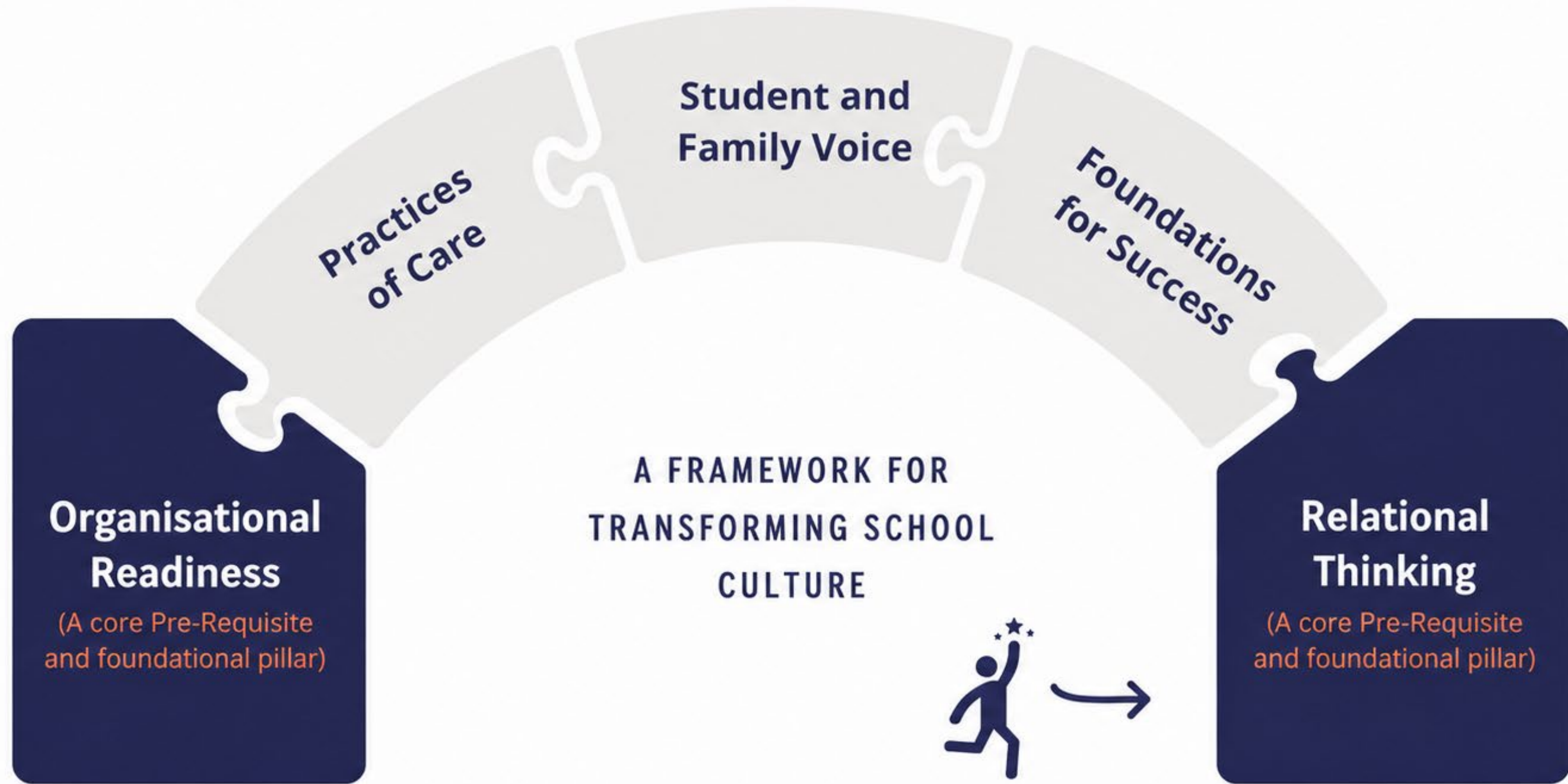
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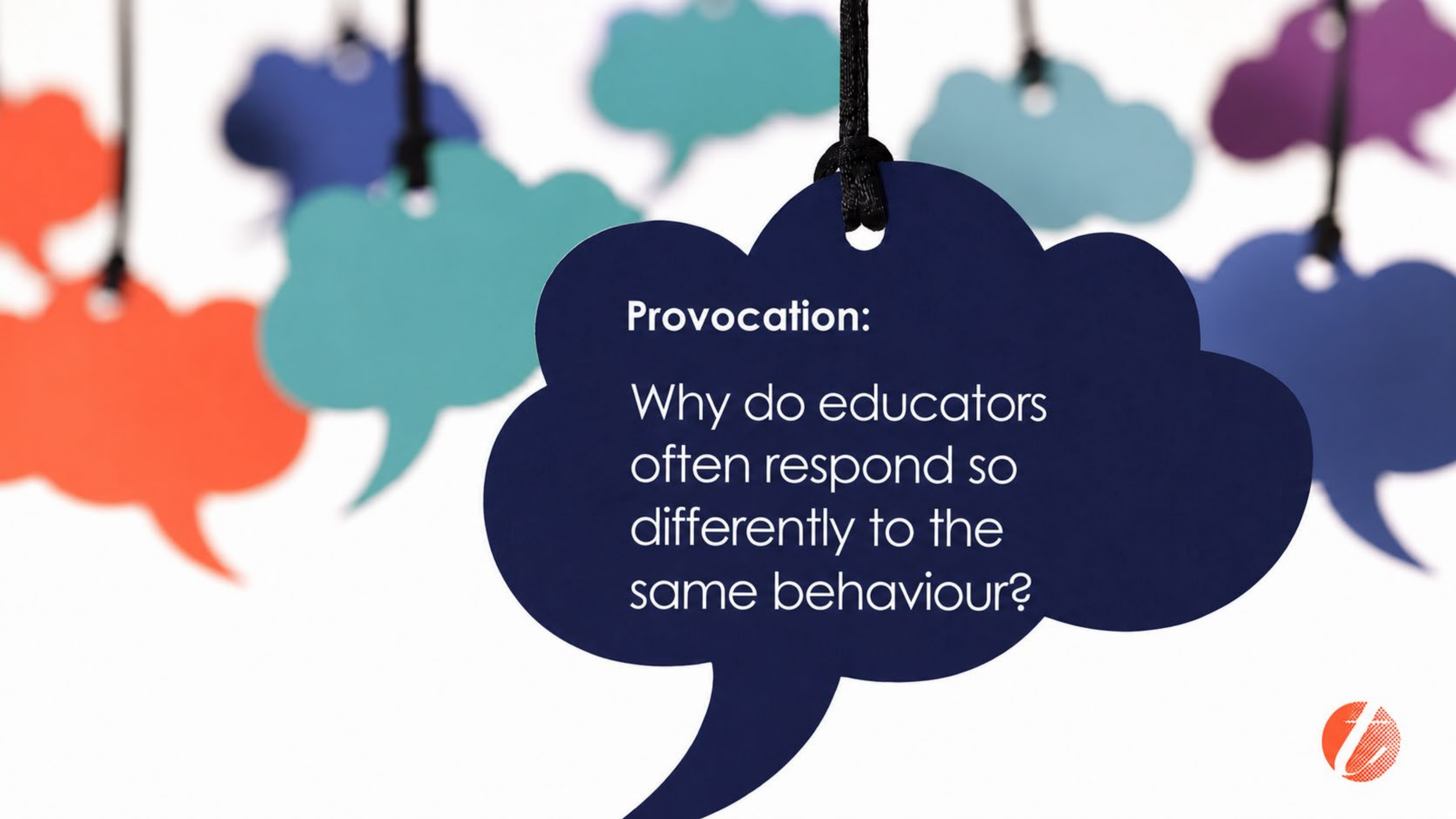
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Introducing The Relational Practice Bridge





Provocation:

Why do educators
often respond so
differently to the
same behaviour?





STORY 1

The Stories We Inherited

How our own experiences of discipline quietly shape the educators we become.



Reflect on your own biography of discipline

Our experiences shape how we respond today.



Choose only two or three questions that resonate most strongly.



In the chat, let's harvest single words that capture your experience.

Dr Lori Desautels, 2022. Trauma Aware Conference, Brisbane



What did those experiences quietly teach me?

My experiences led me to believe that...

How might that show up in my practice today?

Adults should always be obeyed.

I feel uncomfortable when students question me.

Consequences teach responsibility.

I move quickly to impose consequences.

Children need firm boundaries.

I become anxious if there isn't a clear sanction.

Conflict should be avoided.

I rescue instead of coaching.

Mistakes warrant correction.

I focus on fixing before understanding.





STORY 2

The Stories We Adopted

Exploring the theories of change that sit beneath educator responses.



IMAGINE A YOUNG PERSON MOVING THROUGH SIX CLASSROOMS TODAY.

Same student. Same day. Different response. Different culture. Different growth.



WHICH SCHOOL DID THAT YOUNG PERSON ATTEND TODAY?

ONE SCHOOL.
SIX CULTURES.





*"No philosophy...
No guide..."*

Ross Greene



TWO EDUCATORS. ONE BEHAVIOUR.

DIFFERENT EXPLANATIONS.



TEACHER A



He chose to be disrespectful.



TEACHER A ASKS:
WHAT CONSEQUENCE?

ONE BEHAVIOUR

A STUDENT SHOUTS AT TEACHER.



Why do two experienced educators see the same behaviour so differently?

TEACHER B



He's struggling to regulate.



TEACHER B ASKS:
WHAT'S GETTING IN THE WAY?



Both educators care about the student.
Their difference lies in **how they believe capability develops.**

TWO PATHWAYS TO ACCOUNTABILITY



Same destination. Different theories about how we get there.

LEGACY PATHWAY (CONTROL-BASED)



Core belief

Accountability grows primarily through **external control** and consequences.



How capability develops when adults:

- reinforce expectations
- apply consequences
- direct behaviour
- hold students accountable



Underlying assumption

Accountability **produces** capability.

VS.

RELATIONAL PATHWAY (CAPABILITY-BASED)



Core belief

Accountability grows through **understanding, skill development** and **shared responsibility**.



How capability develops when adults:

- understand barriers
- teach missing skills
- strengthen relationships
- support regulation
- share responsibility and problem solve



Underlying assumption

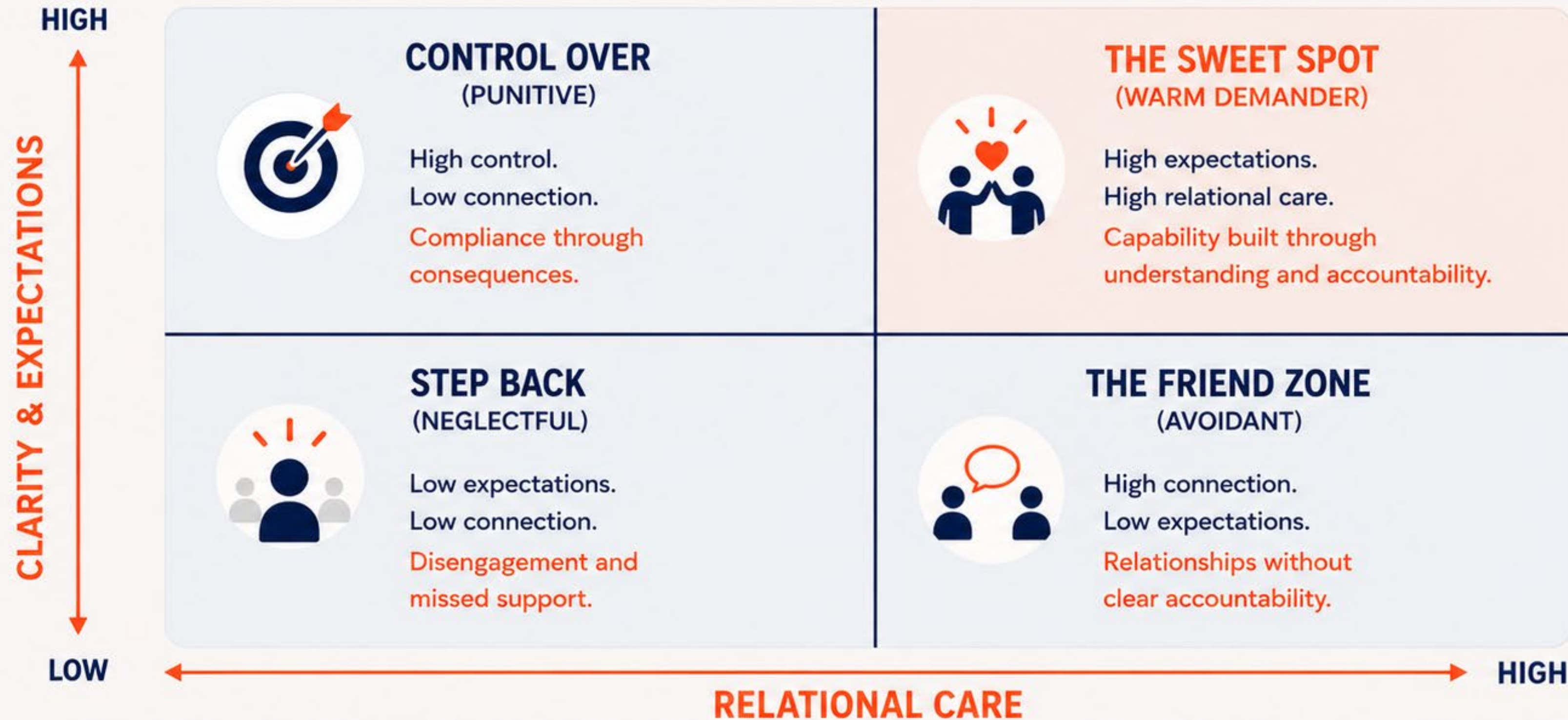
Capability **produces** accountability.



Both pathways aim for the **same outcomes**: responsible, accountable young people who contribute positively to their community. The difference lies in **how** we believe those outcomes are achieved.

4 WAYS OF WORKING

Different ways adults respond to behaviour.
Each reflects a **theory of change**.



Every quadrant has consequences **to relationships**.

The Sweet Spot is where high expectations and high relational care meet – the most powerful pathway to accountability and growth.

Reflection:

When you hear the word,
'consequence' what
immediately comes to
mind?





*A consequence is simply
something that happens
after the fact.*

Ross Greene





STORY 3

The Stories Our Systems Reinforce

Exploring how organisational systems quietly influence professional thinking while reminding educators that systems shape us but do not determine us.



What is our system ultimately trying to develop?

Where would you place your school today?



Compliance

Our system is focused on...

- Stop the behaviour.
- Follow directions.
- Meet expectations.



Capability

Our system is focused on...

- Build regulation.
- Strengthen problem-solving.
- Increase responsibility.
- Develop skills.



Type a number (1–5) in the chat to show where your school sits today.



What information does our system naturally invite us to gather?

Where would you place your school today?

Evidence

1

Strongly
towards evidence

2

Mostly
evidence

3

A balance
of both

4

Mostly
understanding

5

Strongly towards
understanding

Understanding



Evidence

Our system invites us to ask...

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- What rule was broken?
- What level is this?



Understanding

Our system invites us to ask...

- What was happening for you?
- What don't we yet understand?
- What's getting in the way?
- What might help next time?



Type a number (1–5) in the chat to show where your school sits today.



What kind of thinking does our system naturally encourage?

Where would you place your school today?



Certainty

Adults are invited to ask:

- I know what happened.
- I know why they did it.
- I know what needs to happen next.

The emphasis is on:

- explanation
- certainty
- proving
- deciding



Curiosity

Adults are invited to ask:

- What am I missing?
- What else might be true?
- What do I still need to learn?
- What matters to this young person?

The emphasis is on:

- exploring
- wondering
- learning
- understanding



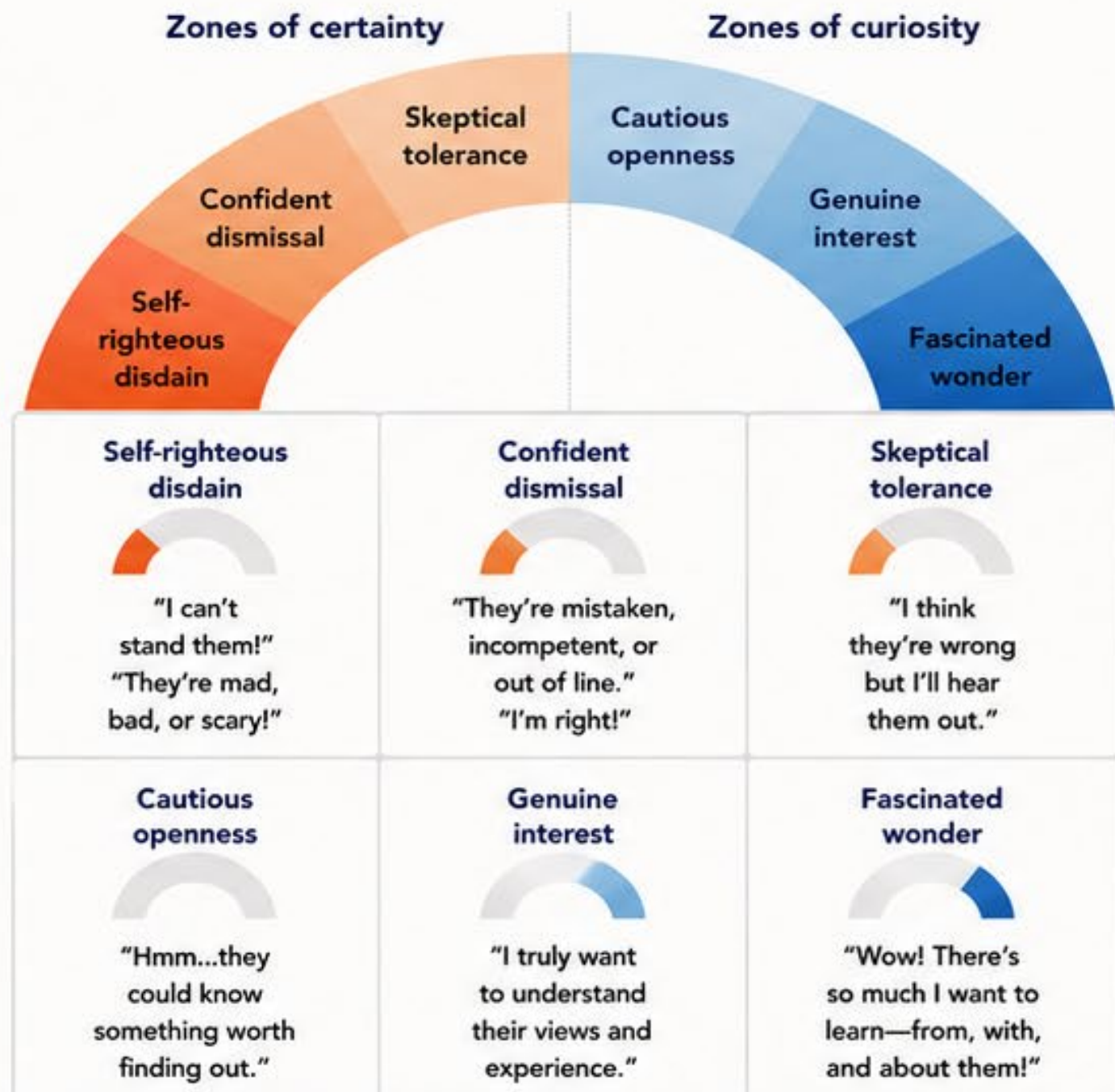
Type a number (1–5) in the chat to show where your school sits today.



Curiosity is a Choice

The Curiosity Curve

Before high-stakes conversations, gauge whether you're actually open to vital new information from your counterpart.



Source: Jeff Wetzler, inspired by Breyer Angels' "The Emotional and Intellectual Transformation of De-Polarization"



- **Certainty closes the door on curiosity.**

When we are certain, we stop listening, stop asking questions and stop learning. We protect our conclusions instead of being open to new information.

- **School systems can reinforce certainty.**

When we are asked to *investigate* • *report* • *escalate* • *assign a consequence*, the focus shifts from understanding to confirming.

- **Certainty leads to predictable – and unhelpful – outcomes.**

Students feel judged, not understood.
Conversations become defensive.
Opportunities to learn, repair and grow are missed.

- **Curiosity is a choice we can make.**

Choosing curiosity keeps us open to multiple truths, enables better decisions and leads to wiser accountability.

What most influences what happens next?

Where would you place your school today?



Process directs the response

In our system...

- The policy or procedure determines what happens.
- Steps and pathways are followed.
- There is little room for professional judgement once the category is set.
- The response is largely the same for similar incidents.
- The conversation has limited impact on what happens next.



Conversation shapes the response

In our system...

- The conversation informs what happens next.
- Understanding the context influences the response.
- There is room for professional judgement.
- Different situations can lead to different responses.
- The conversation has a real impact on what happens next.



Type a number (1–5) in the chat to show where your school sits today.



The Space Between Knowing and Doing

Three stories help explain why that gap exists.



1 The Stories We Inherited

The experiences that shaped us.

Our own experiences of discipline influence what feels normal, what we value and how we respond when behaviour challenges us.



What from my own story still shapes my practice today?



2 The Stories We Adopted

The beliefs we've inherited about how people become capable.

The assumptions we hold about behaviour, accountability and growth quietly shape the responses we believe will help.



What beliefs shape how I think people become more capable?



3 The Stories Our Systems Reinforce

The patterns our schools make easy.

Policies, processes and everyday expectations shape our habits—but they do not remove our professional judgement.



How do our systems reinforce—or constrain—relational practice?



Explore the role of **curiosity** in everyday school conversations.

A practical and timely article from Education Today that looks at how the questions we ask shape the outcomes we create.



Read the article online
[educationtoday.com.au/
news-detail/Are-We-Curious---or--6807](https://educationtoday.com.au/news-detail/Are-We-Curious---or--6807)

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT



Are We Curious - or Are We Simply Trying to Prove We Are Right?

Curious questions are less concerned with proving and more concerned with understanding.

SUE CHANDLER, FOUNDER, TRANSFORMATIVE SCHOOLS JUN 24, 2026



Rather than trying to fix, to advise, to counsel, try listening.





YOU.

I invite your
perspective.



ME.

I share mine with
clarity and respect.



US.

We plan a way
forward together.

THE COLLABORATIVE *Spirit* APPROACH

Informed by Ross Greene's
Collaborative and Proactive Solutions Model



Thank you

Let's stay in touch.



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My book: *The Relational School*

Available to purchase from

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