

Communicating With Purpose, On Purpose

Taming the Turbulence in Educational Leadership



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Let's begin by saying that we are living through a very dangerous time. To any citizen of this country who figures himself as responsible – and particularly those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people – must be prepared to 'go for broke.' Or to put it another way, you must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance. There is no point in pretending that this won't happen.

James Baldwin, from *A Talk to Teachers* (1963)

In light of growing resistance to practices we know serve learners, how might we adjust how we communicate our vision without compromising the work we're trying to do?



What Is the Good Work We're Doing for Learners in our Schools?

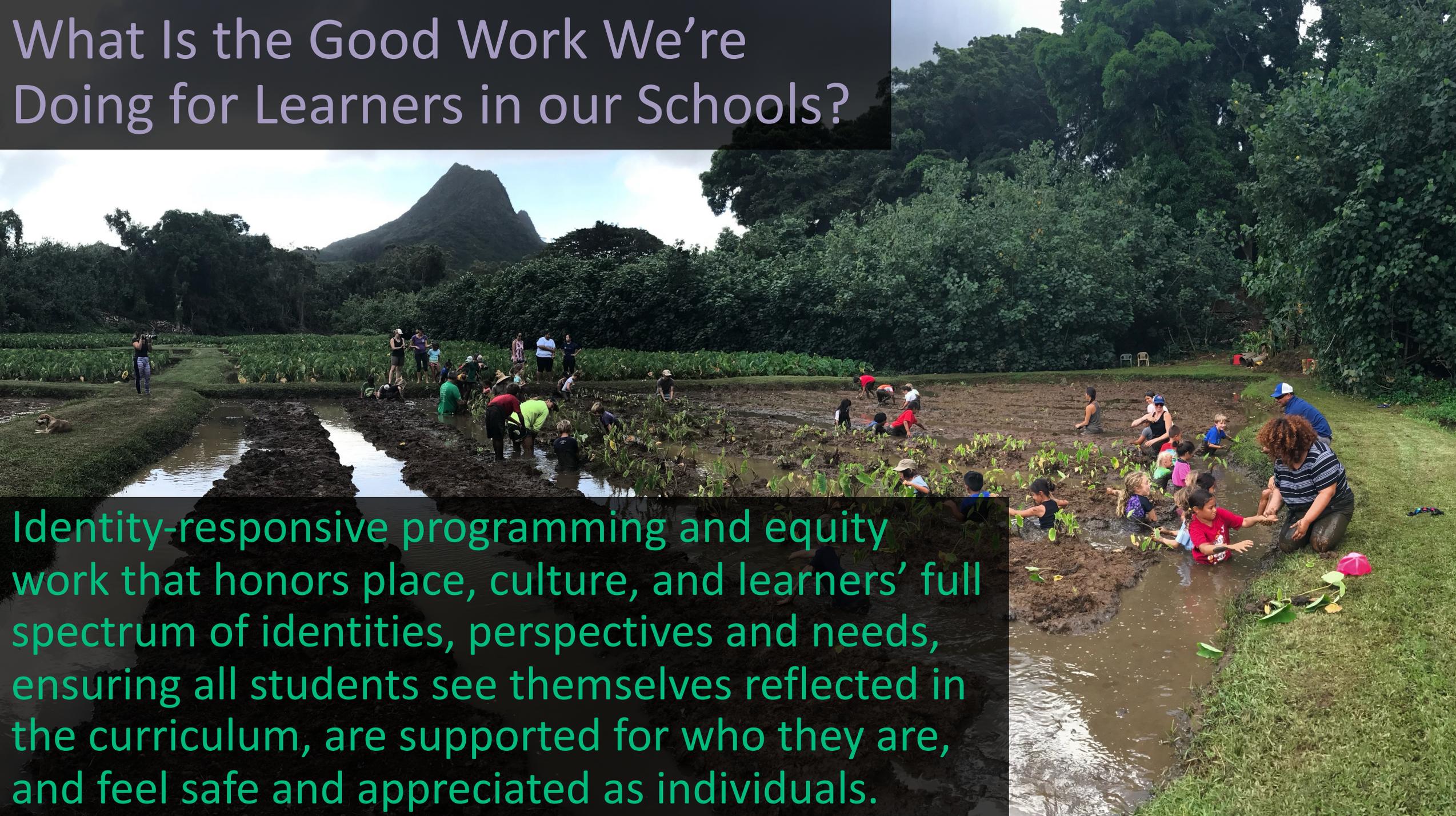


Pedagogical and instructional innovations that prioritize student-centered learning, helping ensure all students learn and thrive, regardless of where they live and attend school.



What Is the Good Work We're Doing for Learners in our Schools?

Identity-responsive programming and equity work that honors place, culture, and learners' full spectrum of identities, perspectives and needs, ensuring all students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, are supported for who they are, and feel safe and appreciated as individuals.



Where/Who Is Resistance Coming From?

Internal Community Constituents

Teachers, Administrators & Students

External Community Constituents

Parents, Donors, Community Partners

External Non-Community Groups

Legislators, Regional & National Groups



Connect Initiatives to
“What Makes Us Who We Are”



Leaders need to communicate an appealing vision of change in combination with a vision of continuity. Unless they are able to assure people that what defines the organization's identity—'what makes us who we are'—will be preserved despite the changes, leaders may have to brace themselves for a wave of resistance.

Venus, Stam & van Knippenberg
from "To Get People to Embrace Change,
Emphasize What Will Stay the Same" (2018)

Mission, Vision, Values, and Institutional History



The Power of “All” and the Child Protection Argument



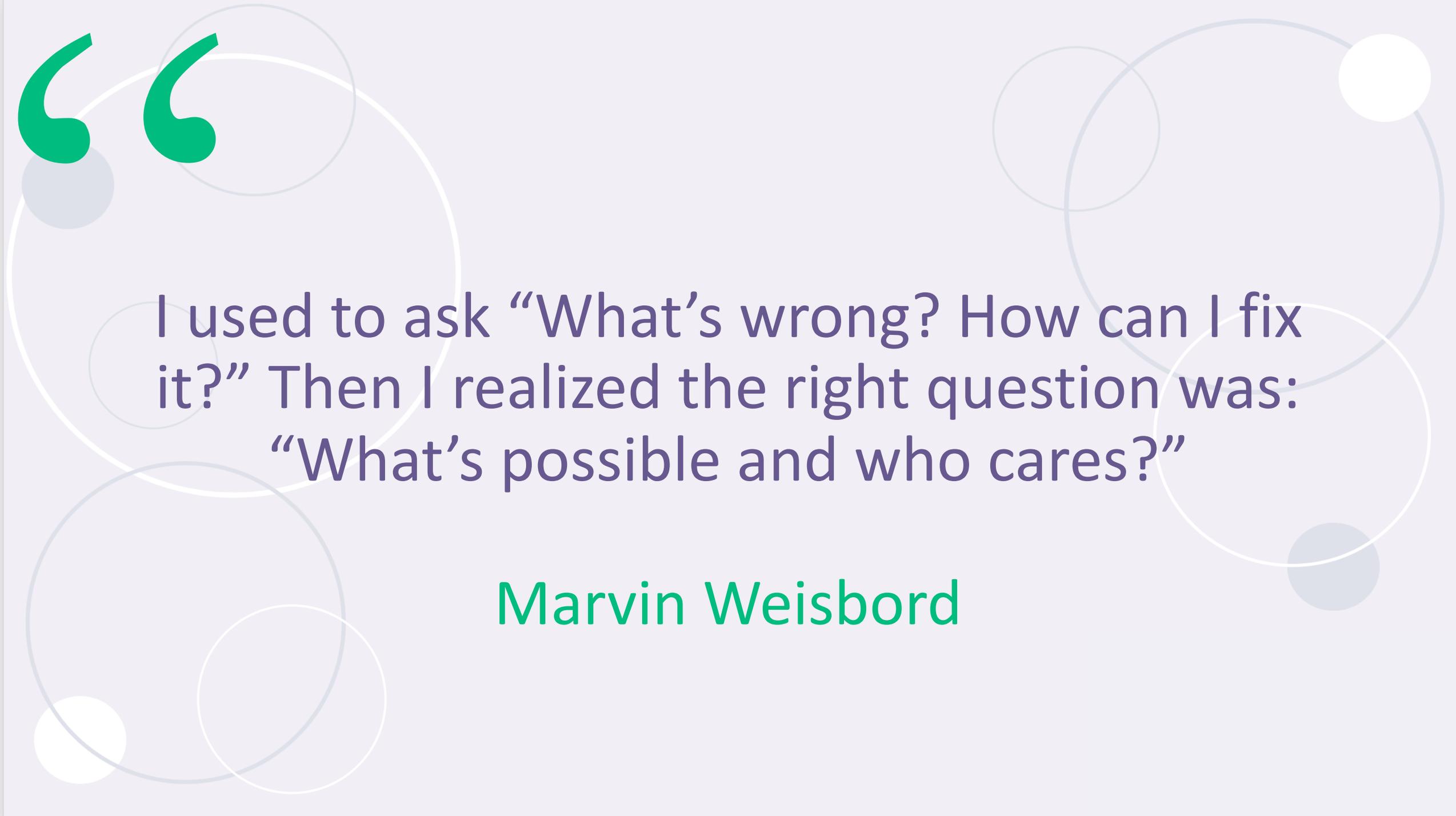
The United Nations as Legal Precedent



UNITED NATIONS



Identify and Engage
Allies as Advocates
Inside the Community

The background features several overlapping circles in light blue and white. In the top left corner, there is a large green quote icon. The text is centered and reads:

I used to ask “What’s wrong? How can I fix it?” Then I realized the right question was:
“What’s possible and who cares?”

Marvin Weisbord

The Community Voice Paradox

Community voice can help us understand what people need, their “appetite for change,” and offer ideas we haven’t considered

Community voice can embolden constituency groups to push back, turn dialogue into a fight over priorities, and disrupt important work



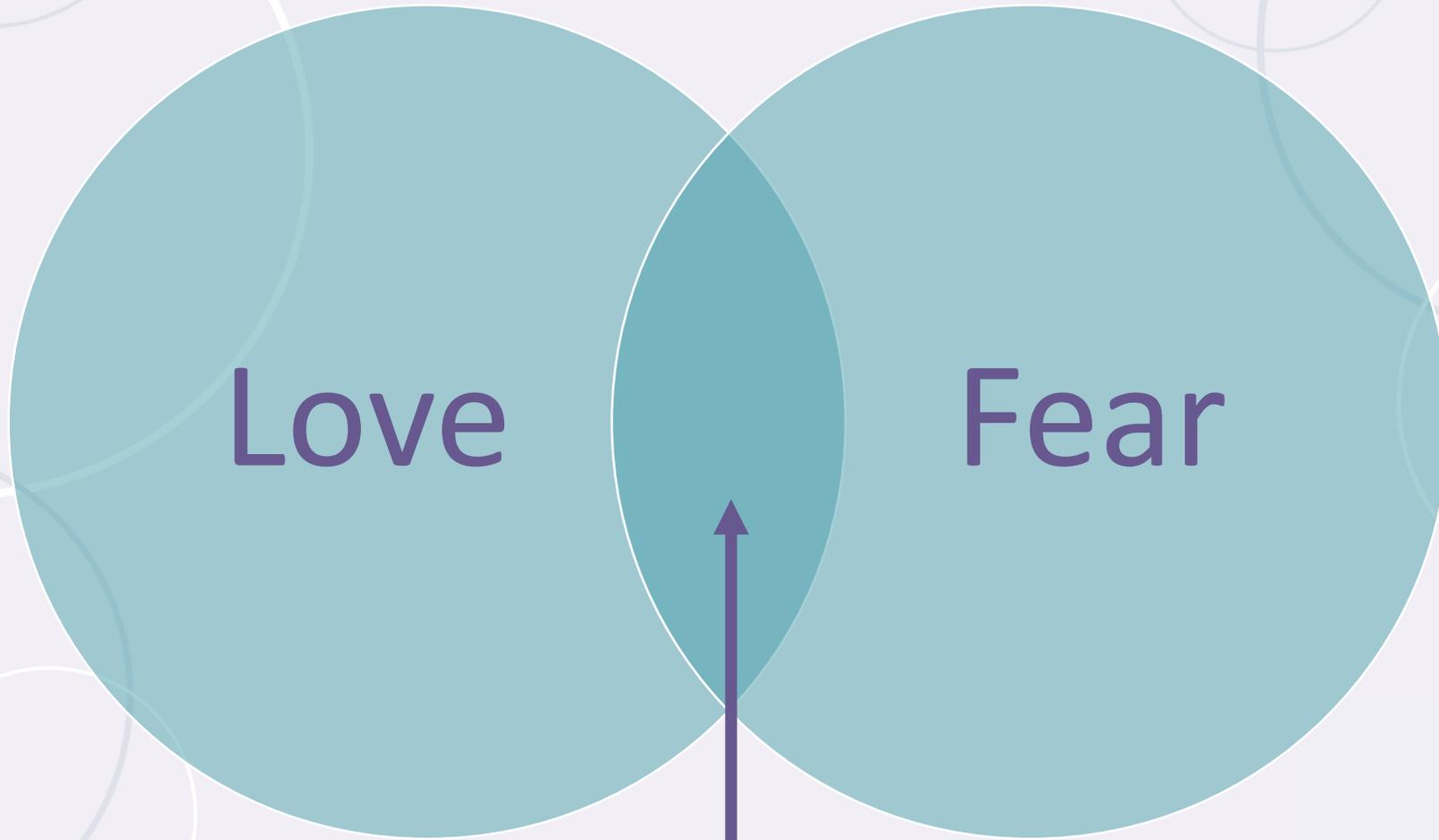
Principled
Learning
Strategies



Community Constituents Include...

- Students
- Alumni
- Teachers
- Caregivers
- Other Community Partners

When Love and Fear Intersect



Resistance, Defensiveness, and Righteousness



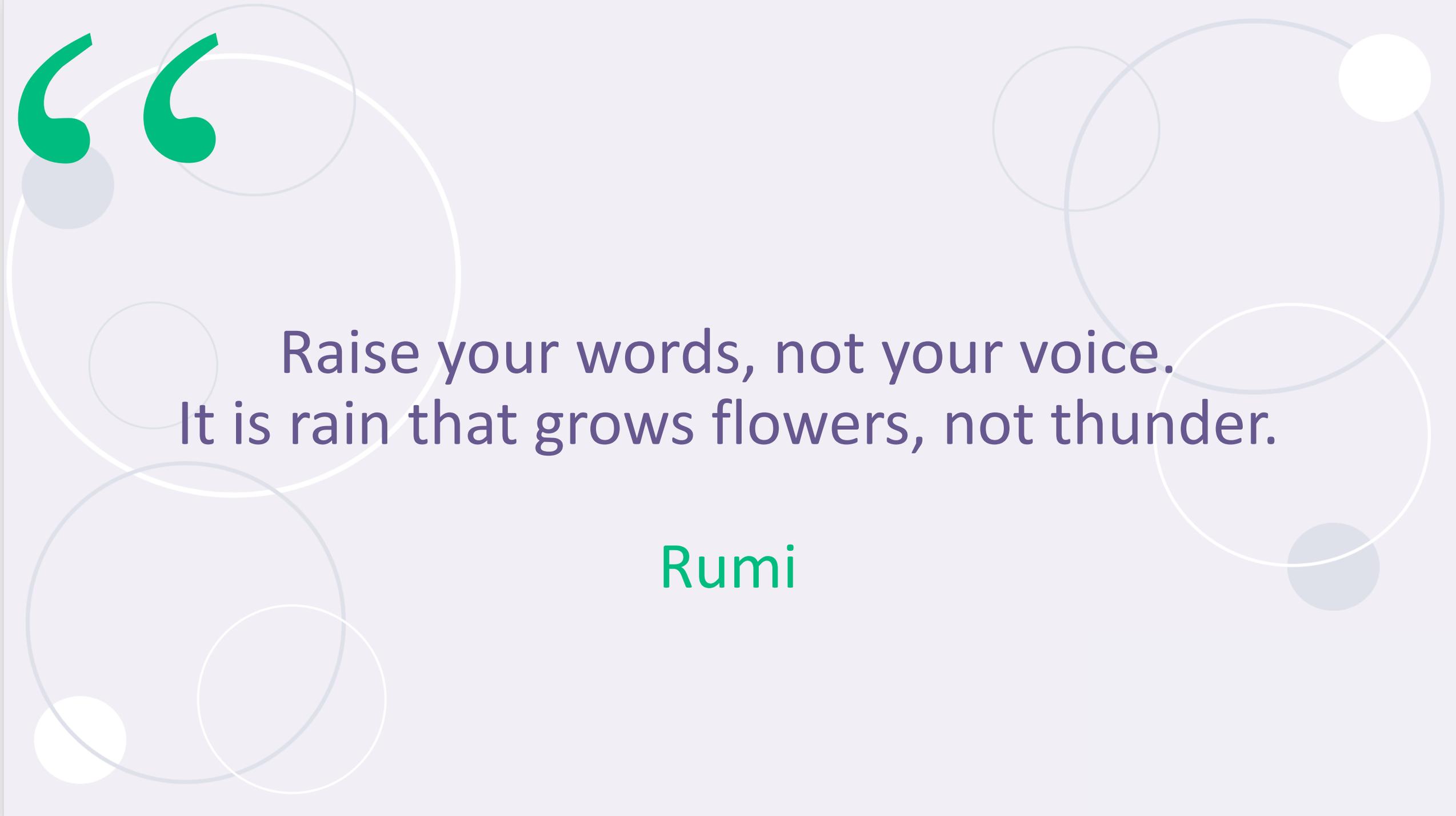
Struggling
≠
Actively
Undermining

The Perils of Alumni Voice in Independent Schools



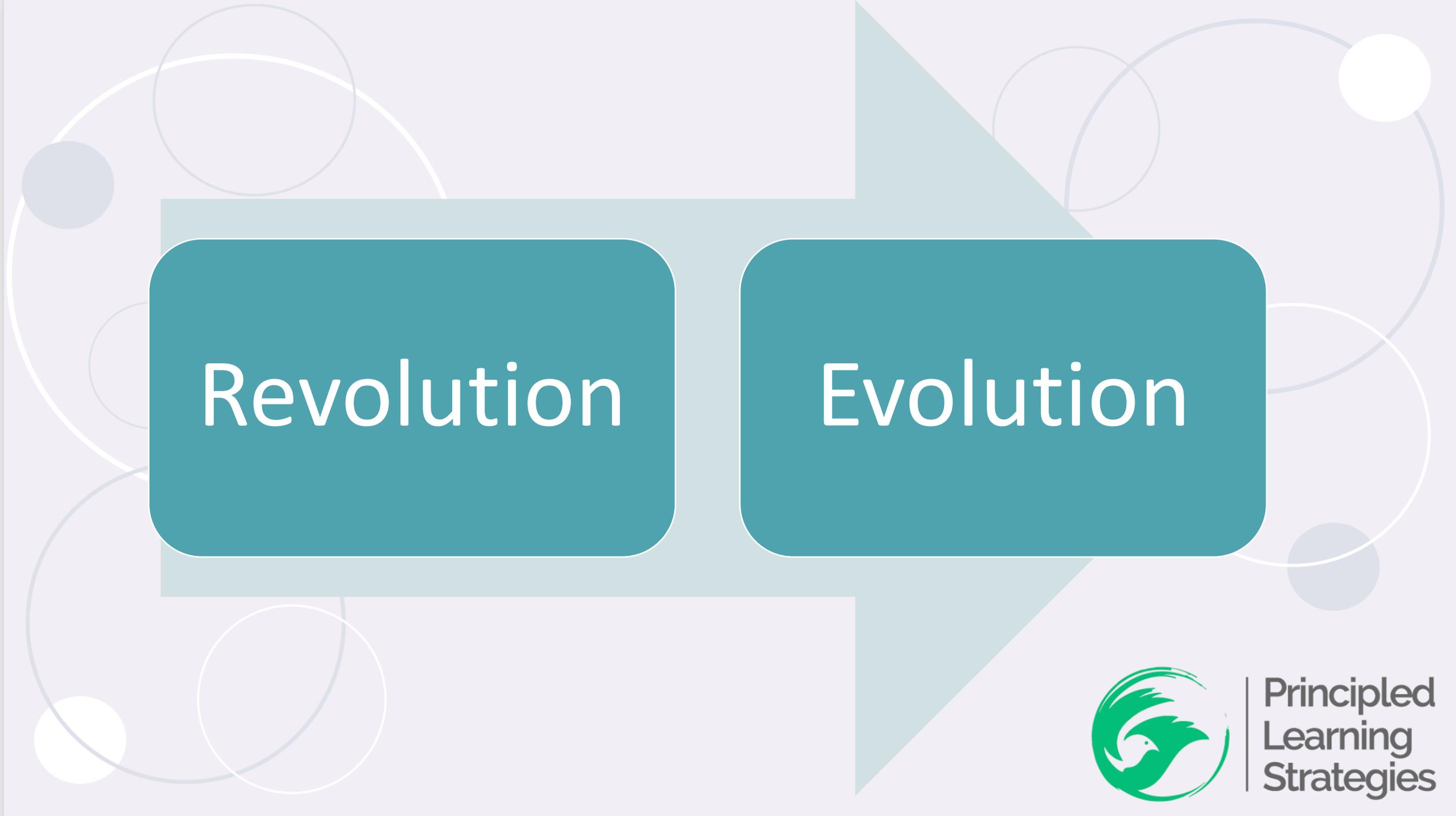


Don't be Mad, Just Be Ready

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Raise your words, not your voice.
It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder.

Rumi



Revolution

Evolution



Principled
Learning
Strategies

Metaphors of War Embedded in Work that Generates Conflict

- We *win or lose* an argument
- We describe those who resist as *opponents and detractors*
- We *attack their positions* and *defend our own*
- We *shoot* people's ideas down
- We *gain and lose ground*
- We call the hidden challenges *landmines*
- We *die on a hill* when we refuse to back down



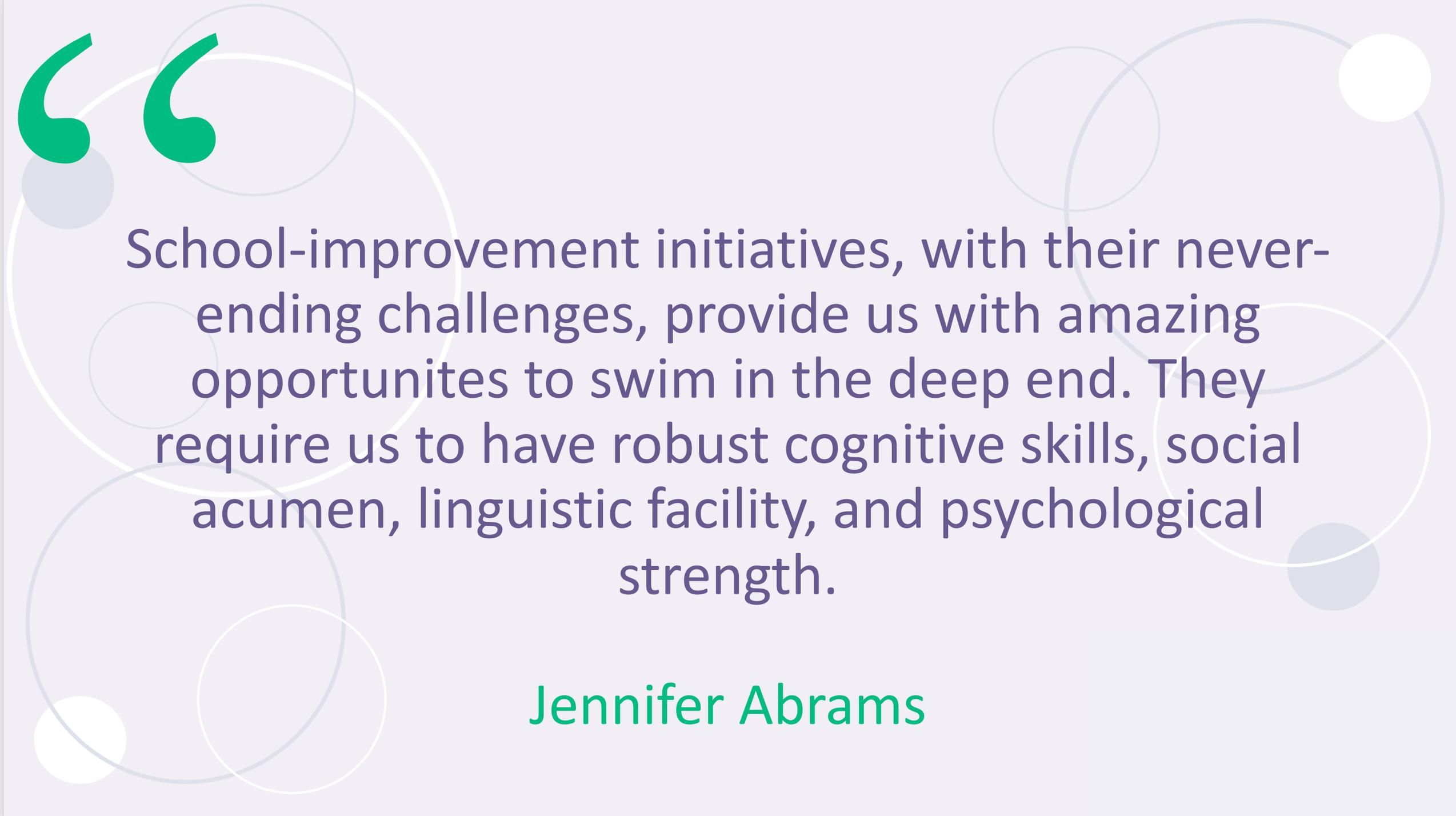


...imagine a culture where argument is viewed as a dance, the participants are viewed as performers, and the goal is to perform in a balanced and aesthetically pleasing way.

George Lakoff & Mark Johnson
from *Metaphors We Live By* (1980)

Reflection Questions

1. How much of your communication with resistant community members ends up centering on conflict, polarization, and political, religious, or other cultural differences? How do you handle that when it happens?
2. How consistently are you engaging in dialogue and communications with vulnerability and humility? To what degree might you be coming across as stubborn or aggressive? How might you ensure you come across in the best way possible?

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School-improvement initiatives, with their never-ending challenges, provide us with amazing opportunities to swim in the deep end. They require us to have robust cognitive skills, social acumen, linguistic facility, and psychological strength.

Jennifer Abrams





When you're working in this space where folks are looking for you, you have to turn out the lights.

Caroline Danvers (pseudonym)

Interview Participant for
Taming the Turbulence
Southwestern United States

When the Word *Does Matter*: The Identity Story





Activities and Resources

The Communications Continuum

Note that this activity is best done with a variety of teams, each using their own color sticky notes, so that all teams can see and reflect on strengths and opportunities across teams—and know who posted what





The Communications Continuum

1. Identify 4-5 communications strategies you use in your role – write each on a separate sticky note
2. Place your sticky notes where you feel they belong on the continuum, from low communication to high communication
3. Discuss the results to identify strengths and areas needing improvement

Communications Improvement Worksheet

Find all book resources at <https://bit.ly/JDKbooks>



CHAPTER SIX WORKSHEET

Develop Communication Strategies
That Engage With Purpose and Intentionality

This worksheet is designed to help leaders begin to develop a proactive, clear, and purpose-driven communications plan that will help you prepare for and respond to backlash and, hopefully, to control the narrative. Please discuss these questions with your core leadership team, including students and other community members as appropriate.

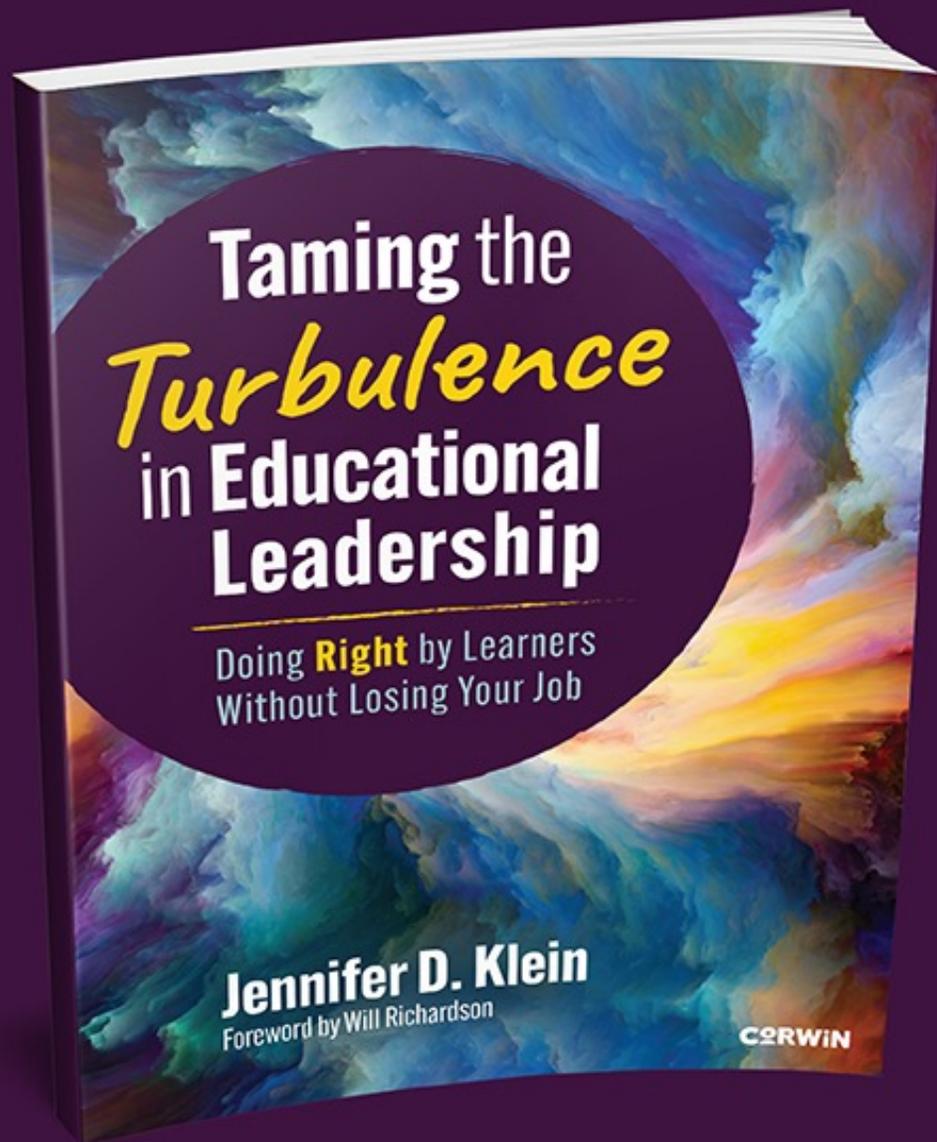


Visit <https://www.principledlearning.org/book-resources> for a fillable version you can download and use with your community.

1. How clear is the connection between your initiative and the mission, vision, and values of the school for your leadership team right now? What needs to be clearer for all involved?

In light of growing resistance to practices we know serve learners, how might we adjust our language and communications without compromising the work we're trying to do?





Learner-centered
leadership grounded in
**courage, integrity, and
love for every child**

CORWIN

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Resources in English, Spanish & French

Follow me on LinkedIn!

Educational leaders are facing more than just challenging times; we are facing ruptures so deep that they threaten the very foundations of what we stand for as educators. It's up to us to tame the turbulence, to cultivate the climate, and to support every child in the best ways we know how.

—Jennifer D. Klein

Taming the Turbulence in Educational Leadership

Jennifer's LinkedIn

