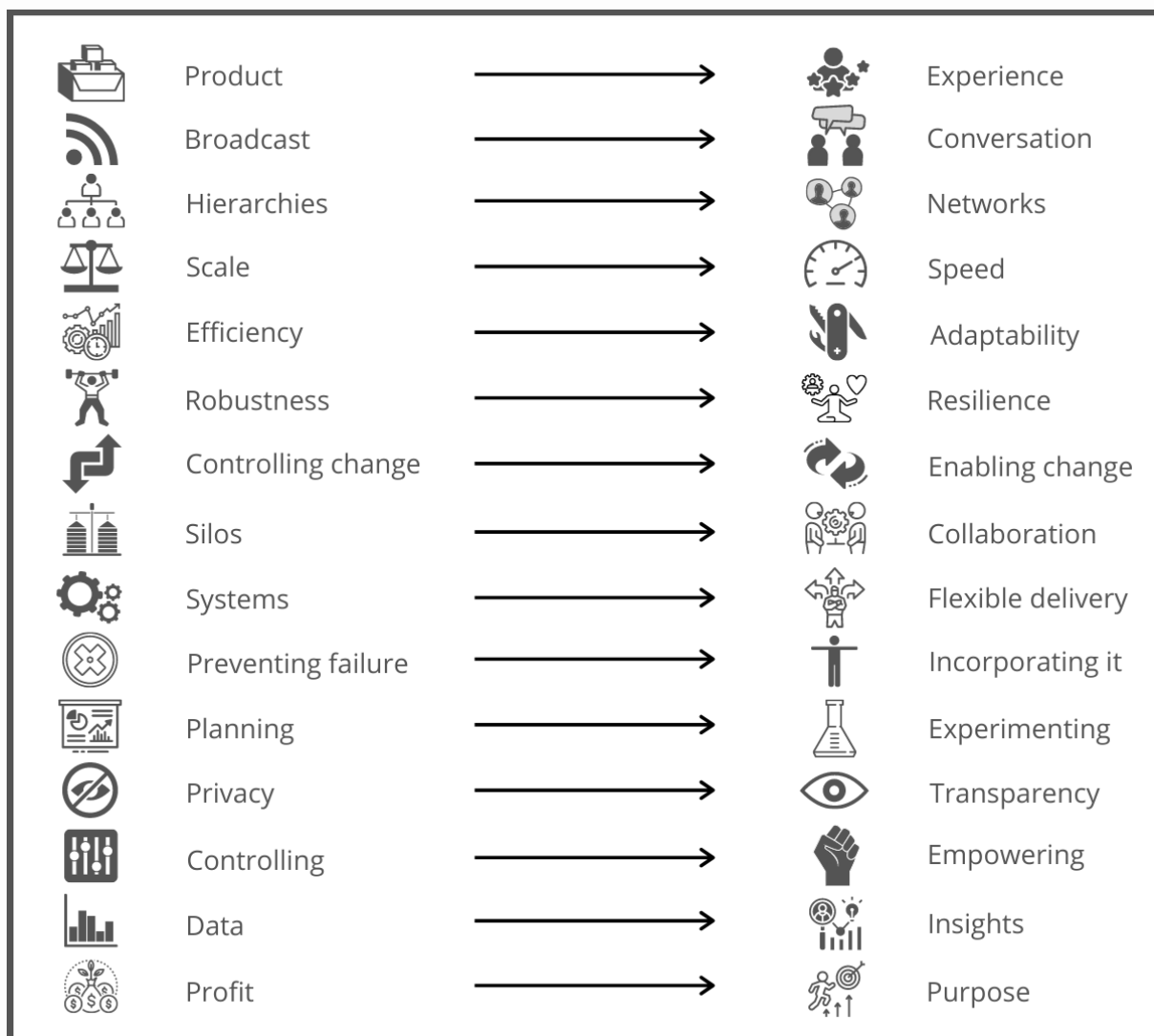


## Empathy and Value in Education

The future will look very different; but are our schools and teachers ready for it?

In the graphic below, we have defined changes we believe schools and their teachers will need to make, not only to create value and maintain relevance but to align schools to their stated mission or ethos. In essence, what we predict will be required is a pivot from teacher-centric to student-centric and from teaching as a 'product' to learning as an 'experience'.

Disrupting the prevailing thinking, we also foresee a shift away from 'leading' and towards 'service', or perhaps more accurately, a redefining of 'leadership'; placing service and care at the centre of all of a school's relationships – Through this lens, 'empathy' becomes the key driver of value in education:



Please note: This paper is the latest in our series: **Creating Value In Society** and it was born from a video-conference, on 7 October, between People At Their Best Principal, Dom Meli; Principal of MacKillop Catholic College, Eamonn Pollard and; Business Manager of the Armidale Waldorf School, Steve Klipin. As such, comments and conclusions are particular to primary and secondary education rather than tertiary or vocational education. Additionally, the participants did not address organisational or workplace skills training, although some conclusions may still be valuable to these areas.

## Creating Value in Primary and Secondary Education - Key takeaways:

- 80% of future economic growth is dependent on the quality of education - it is by far the most important lever our society can pull to ensure our future success and, it is the dominant factor driving economic growth over the long term in developed countries
- Teachers and more broadly, school leadership, must better define their value. Despite the experience of Covid-19, it is safe to say, that teachers are under-appreciated in Australia, not only in terms of remuneration but also in terms of professional standing
- Exacerbating the challenges, questions of value are often addressed in a nebulous or intangible way. Bluntly stated, most schools and teachers could better describe where their value resides and how it is now built in this accelerated change environment with the ensuing complexities of automation, technological disruption and the decay of traditional operating models. To borrow from Malcom X, schools and teachers must be able to explain that, “Education is the passport to the future” and explain how they will deliver on this promise
- Within education, as in nearly all industries, future success will fall to those who can create meaning, who can facilitate understanding, those that can take people on a journey of discovery and help them make sense of the world around them – in short, those who can create positive experiences which are valued. To achieve this, however, requires an ‘outward facing mindset’ which is typified by tremendous curiosity, fierce empathy and a profound consciousness and care for the ‘customer’ – without these, one cannot build the deep levels of trust required to connect with others and engender meaningful experiences
- For children, and all humans, our greatest urge is to feel that we matter, that our existence has meaning. This is because meaning produces coherence in someone’s world, it indicates significance, that life is worth living and that one’s pursuits are worth the effort. The wonderful children’s educator, Fred Rogers, put it like this: There is no person in this world who is a mistake, no matter how different that person may seem
- When looking at young adults, however, there is a strong correlation between a poor education and social/personal difficulties. As such, the value of teachers resides in something far greater than the dissemination of information or subject matter expertise
- In this sense, those teachers who can help children to translate the world into something that makes sense, help children discover a pathway to a better future, those that can help children have hope, are the ones that will create value. Further, teachers who can make children feel valued and understood will be the ones who flourish
- Today, many established education practices, products, solutions and operating models are not fit-for-purpose and consequently, subject to degrading relevance and value; this includes the very act of disseminating information or ‘teaching’

- What this means for most of us is that, increasingly, 'learning' will be more important than 'knowing' and creating positive experiences which are meaningful is more valuable than products and services. For teachers, this means that their value does not reside in their subject matter expertise. In fact, this is more rightly described as a threshold domain. Make no mistake, it will continue to be essential that teachers have subject matter expertise to enter the industry, but beyond that, this expertise is not how they create value or serve their students. In fact, for teachers and all knowledge workers, the 'customer' will not engage in the process of learning, development or change without the **tremendous curiosity, fierce empathy, profound consciousness and care and deep levels of connection (described above) which creates meaningful experiences**. To borrow from Theodore Roosevelt: Children will not care about what you know, until they know that you care
- It also means that as we move further and further beyond the Information Age, relevance and value fall to the quickest learner, not to the one who knows the most; and it will belong to those teachers (and schools) that are willing to adapt and change their approach so as to not only maintain their relevance but to create value in society
- In this future, teachers and all knowledge workers will need to 'operate to learn' and use their role as a teacher as an input to design new ways to serve their customers
- 'Operating to learn' or in this case, teaching to learn is a radically different approach. It demands that teachers empathise rather than 'be the expert'. While confronting, it is a fact that information, data and knowledge is no longer proprietary and unless teachers appreciate this, they run the risk that they, themselves, will stop learning and rest on their expertise and knowledge, or more correctly, run the risk of believing their 'value' resides in their 'knowledge'

Nobel Prize winner, William Bragg said the important thing is not to uncover more facts (data or information), but to discover new ways of looking at those facts. This is learning in action, this is the process of discovery, this is what is meant by provoking insights. In this brave new world, we all need to be far less 'sure' and much more humble; far less 'certain' and far more ready to learn

- The wonderful advantage teachers have, however, is that technology can't build trust - only humans can because only humans can demonstrate empathy and make someone feel valued. So, while technology is automating rule-based tasks and democratising knowledge, it cannot perform the human tasks of demonstrating empathy or making someone feel valued
- Empathy makes people feel understood and people who feel understood are far more likely to trust you. This is crucial, because in the absence of trust, one is far less likely to engage in learning or development or behavioural change

- So it follows, that there are three clear areas where schools and, specifically teachers, can create great value for children and society:
  - ✓ Help children to feel valued
  - ✓ Help children to make sense of the complex and uncertain world around them
  - ✓ Help children to see a future that is better than the present – this is about hope and a pathway to a better future
- In turn, these will increase the likelihood that schools will deliver on their own purpose and mission, which is typically a variation on: **To help nurture great humans and to facilitate opportunities and pathways that empower and enable children to make their lives and society better** (OR) **To develop free human beings who are able to impart meaning and direction to their lives**, and in so doing, help children to role-model functional behaviours and lead from the front
- Expanding on comments above regarding ‘building trust’, we believe there are seven components to this and at the centre of these is empathy. The seven components are: Customer-centricity, Courage, Curiosity, Connection, Care, Collaboration and Consciousness (profound attentiveness). In fact, we would go further and suggest that the demonstration of these seven components are how teachers ‘serve’, not only children but society
- There is a fallacy that ‘conversation’ is a waste of time but we know that it is essential for helping people to feel understood, helping people to feel valued and helping people to envision a better future. In fact, a good listener is magnetic and others are drawn to them because in the conversation, ideas are created and unfold and futures are born. More importantly, listening is a demonstration that someone is a person of worth but at its very heart, listening is how we understand the needs of another and learn how to serve them
- Never has consciousness and connection to others been more important - with the pace of change today and our ensuing diffused attention, we have lost our capacity to make meaningful connections and to engage authentically with others. Therefore, in this hyper-busy reality, our ability to demonstrate empathy and create value, vanishes
- For this reason and, for many others, we feel that in this time of Covid-19, the greatest asset any organisation, including schools, can have, is ‘listening’. But to listen effectively, requires a mindset shift from ‘teacher’ to ‘educator’ and from ‘teaching’ to ‘learning’
- An important by-product for teachers, is that having an outward mindset or being ‘other’ focused, renders teachers less susceptible to anxiety because attention on the ‘other’ and anxiety cannot easily exist at the same time. Essentially, ‘getting out of our own head’ does wonders for our own wellbeing or conversely, as Martin Seligman would say, “The self is a very poor place from which to find any meaning”

#### Characteristics of successful schools:

1. Schools must know their purpose - why they exist – this is non-negotiable
2. Leadership must bring vitality and new ideas
3. Goals must be set that 'raise-the-bar', that set higher standards for staff and student performance
4. Standards and expectations must be communicated, understood and everyone must align with them
5. It is critical that staff understand what is required of them
6. Staff must be given honest, accurate and timely feedback on their performance in relation to the standards and expectations
7. Bespoke, non-fixed, actively generated and emergent approaches are most needed today. As Darwin said: Those that flourish are neither the biggest or strongest or smartest but those which are most flexible, those that adapt most easily to changes in their environment. In this accelerated world, where most operating models have been disrupted and rendered incapable of making sense of the world around us, our core evolutionary requirement must be flexibility

- John Hattie, the Professor of Education at Auckland University, suggests learning occurs best when 'learning' is the explicit goal, when students show self-regulatory attributes such as self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-assessment and self-teaching – cultivating this environment for students, surely, must be where teachers value resides
- The measure of a teacher's and a school's success, must be the impact on children. In fact, if this were to be how we measure success, then this criterion would instantly shift where schools and teachers invested their efforts and energy and we would see a move away from 'transferring information' to the joy of learning, to ways to make children feel understood and valued and to helping children to see a brighter future. In this pivot, teachers would come up with all manner of new, creative and innovative ways to help children and, for both teachers and schools, this would be a competitive advantage that would lead to higher levels of sustained performance

Fundamentally, the pivot required is away from regarding students as economic units to seeing students as individual persons. More broadly, teachers and schools ought not be measured by what they accomplish but by what their children are able to accomplish. In this context, a teacher's expertise and knowledge might well be holding them back, leading them to 'tell' and 'inform' rather than create insights, understanding and hope

- Some will claim that this approach wastes too much time and that it is imperative to move onto disseminating information. Ultimately, the test is: Does the relationship create meaning and help the child to imagine a better future? If the child does not develop and move towards the best version of who they are then surely, there is little value being created

- Certainly, children and society would benefit from an education which helps all of us to 'learn' the following:
  - ✓ Resilience – being able to adapt and respond effectively in challenging situations and uncertain times
  - ✓ Well-being – to be able to flourish and feel positive about oneself and the world
  - ✓ Adaptability – to keep learning and to respond positively to change
  - ✓ Purpose - to understand that “Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose” (Victor Frankl)
  - ✓ Love of Learning – to approach circumstances and occupations as opportunities to learn and as the foundation for continuous improvement

It is important to note, however, that teachers are not responsible for a child's wellbeing but rather to care for and about a child's wellbeing – to be deeply connected, curious and conscious about the child and place the 'person' at the centre of the relationship

The great American poet Maya Angelou said: People will not remember what you say or what you do but they will always remember how you make them feel. If teachers want to inspire children to be their best and to imagine a brighter future for themselves, then they must fundamentally change the operating model under which they 'teach' – help kids to discover and learn; help them to feel valued; help them to understand and make sense of the world – this is the pathway to value creation for our children and our society.