

Presence Over Attendance

A New Framework for Understanding Engagement
and Becoming in Neurodivergent Education.



The System is Failing Our Most Vulnerable Learners

“We’re just basically making these kids fit into an oppressive system which systematically destroys them.”

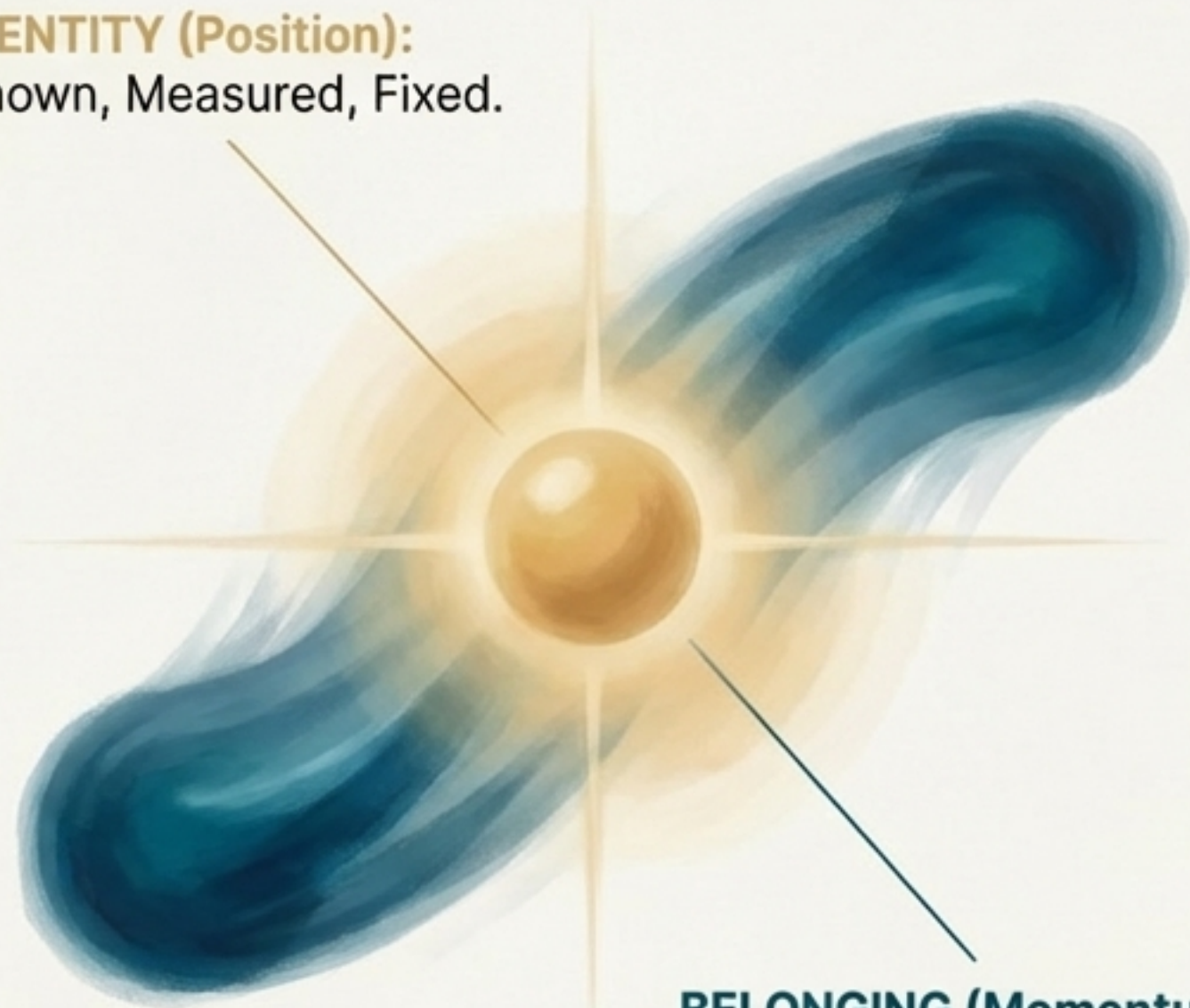
The current model of education is built on principles of compliance, measurement, and binary outcomes (e.g., attended/absent). For neurodivergent students, this rigid structure is not just unhelpful; it is actively harmful. It triggers trauma, stifles identity, and ignores the complex reality of their engagement.

This isn't a problem of adjustment; it's a problem of fundamental design.

A Quantum Perspective on Identity and Belonging

IDENTITY (Position):

Known, Measured, Fixed.



BELONGING (Momentum):

Becoming, Dynamic, Unfixed.

Applying Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle to education reveals a profound truth about neurodivergent students.

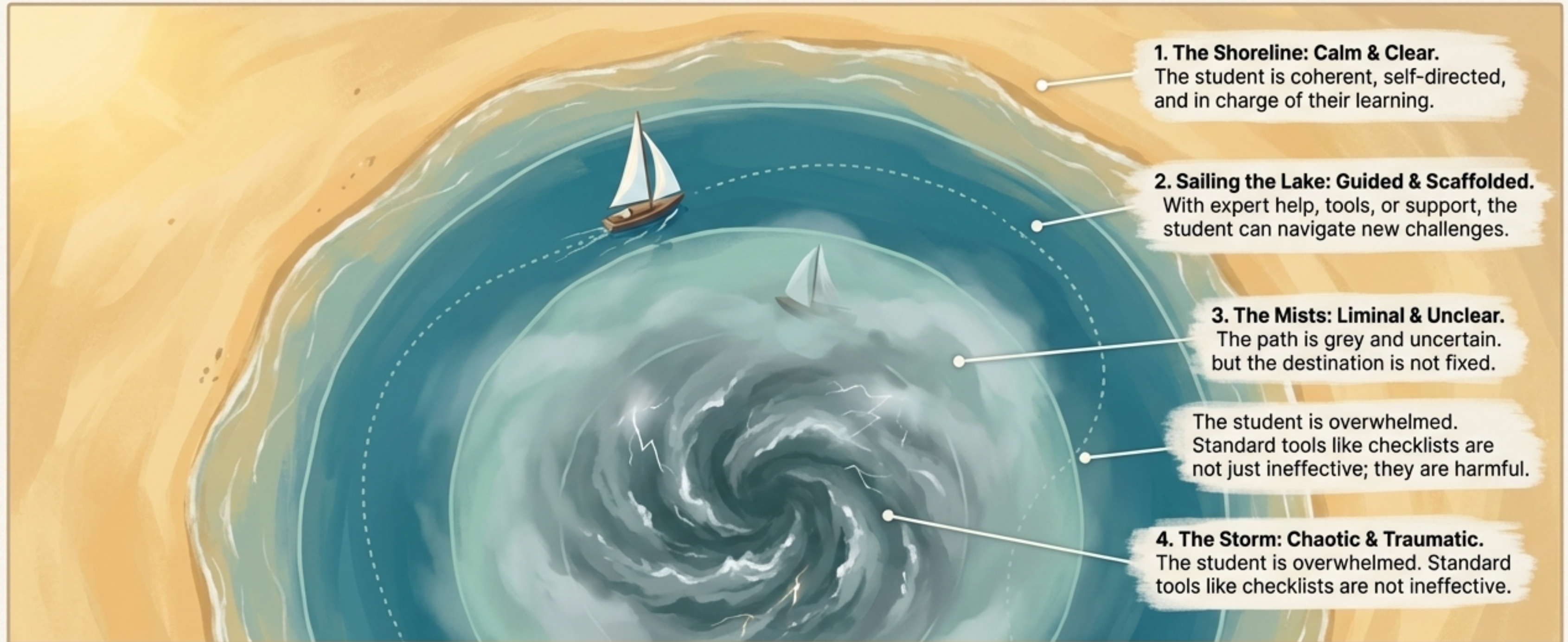
“We can't know a neurodivergent student's identity and belonging at the same time.”

Just as one cannot simultaneously know a particle's exact position and momentum, attempting to rigidly define a student's identity at a single point in time obscures the dynamic, chaotic, and essential process of their becoming. Our system's obsession with measurement destroys the very thing it seeks to understand.

This insight is the foundation of a 42-page quantum framework derived from first principles.

Navigating the Weather of Knowing

We must understand that intelligence is not a fixed trait within an individual, but a quality that ‘exists in the space between people.’ The environment, or ‘weather’, dictates the nature of engagement.



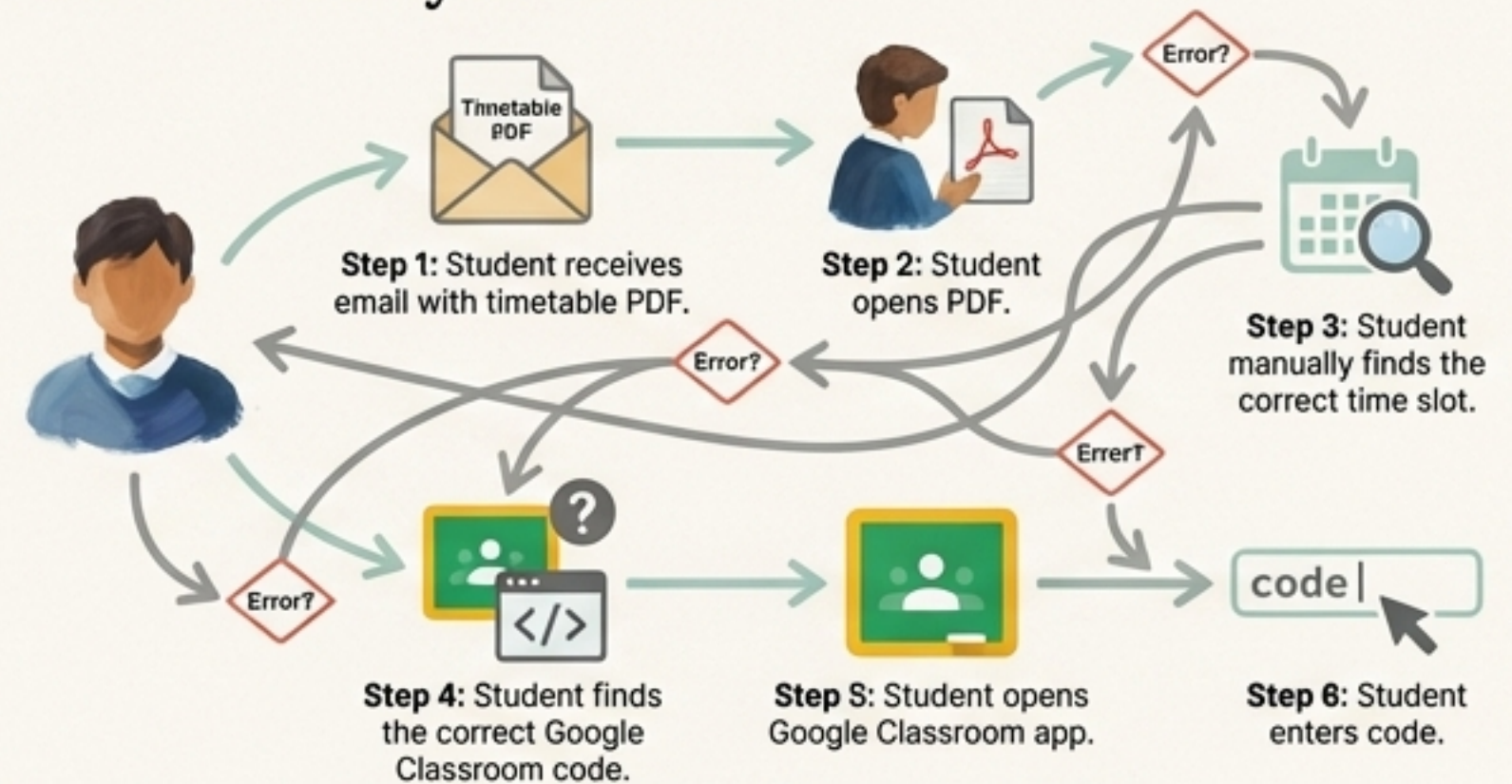
The Real-World Lab: The Riverside Pilot

Context: Riverside, a school for neurodivergent students, operates on a full Google technology stack (Classroom, Calendar, etc.).

The Challenge: How do you create a seamless, one-click experience for students who have highly personalised, individual timetables? The administrative burden on staff was immense, and the cognitive load on students was a barrier to entry.

The Goal: To automate the creation of personalised timetables that link directly from Google Calendar to the correct Google Classroom, reducing friction for both staff and students. This was the first practical step in designing a more humane system.

The Journey Before



The Desired Journey



The Tyranny of the Register

The Legal Requirement

If a child doesn't arrive in a planned lesson, what's the escalation safeguarding procedure?

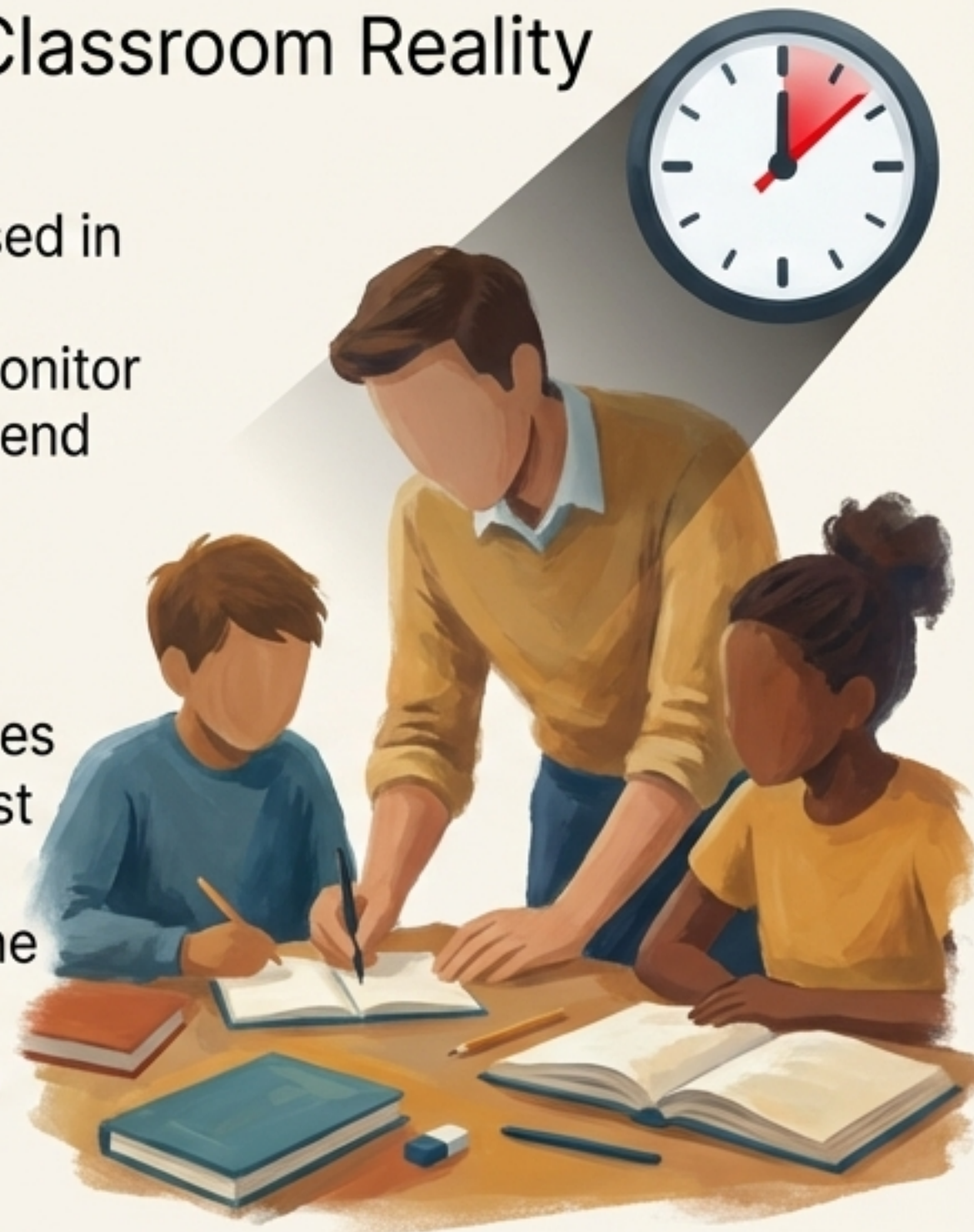
A binary 'Are you there or are you not?' approach is demanded. The register is a legal document.



The Classroom Reality

A teacher immersed in a lesson cannot simultaneously monitor attendance and send chase-up messages.

The first 10 minutes of a lesson are lost to administrative tasks, breaking the connection with the students who *are* present.



An Attempted Solution: The Automated Attendance Trigger

The Innovation:

An Apps Script was developed to automate the attendance check.

How it Worked (in theory):

1. The script pulls live lesson information directly from Google Classroom.
2. Every 10 minutes, it checks which students have joined the lesson.
3. It auto-populates a spreadsheet with attendance data.
4. An email is automatically sent to the attendance officer (Leanne) with a list of non-attendees.

The Stumbling Block:

The script struggled to accurately identify individual students within group email addresses, marking entire groups as present. The technical solution was blocked by the system's structure.



The Deeper Insight: 'Attendance' is a Flawed Metric

ATTENDANCE → **PRESENCE**

The Revelation

The script's failure forced a conversation that revealed the inadequacy of binary attendance. The school's attendance officer noted that for their students, "attendance looks very different."

Introducing 'Presence'

We must shift our focus from physical or virtual attendance to a more meaningful concept of "presence". This aligns with the "Community of Inquiry" framework, which defines presence through social and cognitive engagement, not just being logged in.

“Attendance is pointless... there are kids in traditional classrooms, so while there as a physical being they are there in that room but they are not present.”

What Meaningful Presence Can Look Like

We can capture data on presence without creating a threatening or high-demand situation for the student. It is about providing multiple, low-friction ways to signal engagement.



The Spark

A student who attends for only two minutes but gains a valuable spark of an idea.



The Contribution

A student who submits a piece of work without speaking in the lesson.



The Connection

A parent who summarises the lesson for their child over the phone.



The Signifier


Glyphonics in Practice: They communicate their emotional state by putting a simple signifier (e.g., an emoji, a colour) in the chat.



The Signal

Glyphonics in Practice: A student signals their presence by changing the colour of their personal 'pencil space'.

Our Strategy: Building a Bridge to a New System



The Dilemma

We cannot simply ignore the legal and financial realities of the existing system. Ofsted inspections and Local Authority funding are tied to compliance with the old rules.

“We’re literally building a bridge to a new system.”

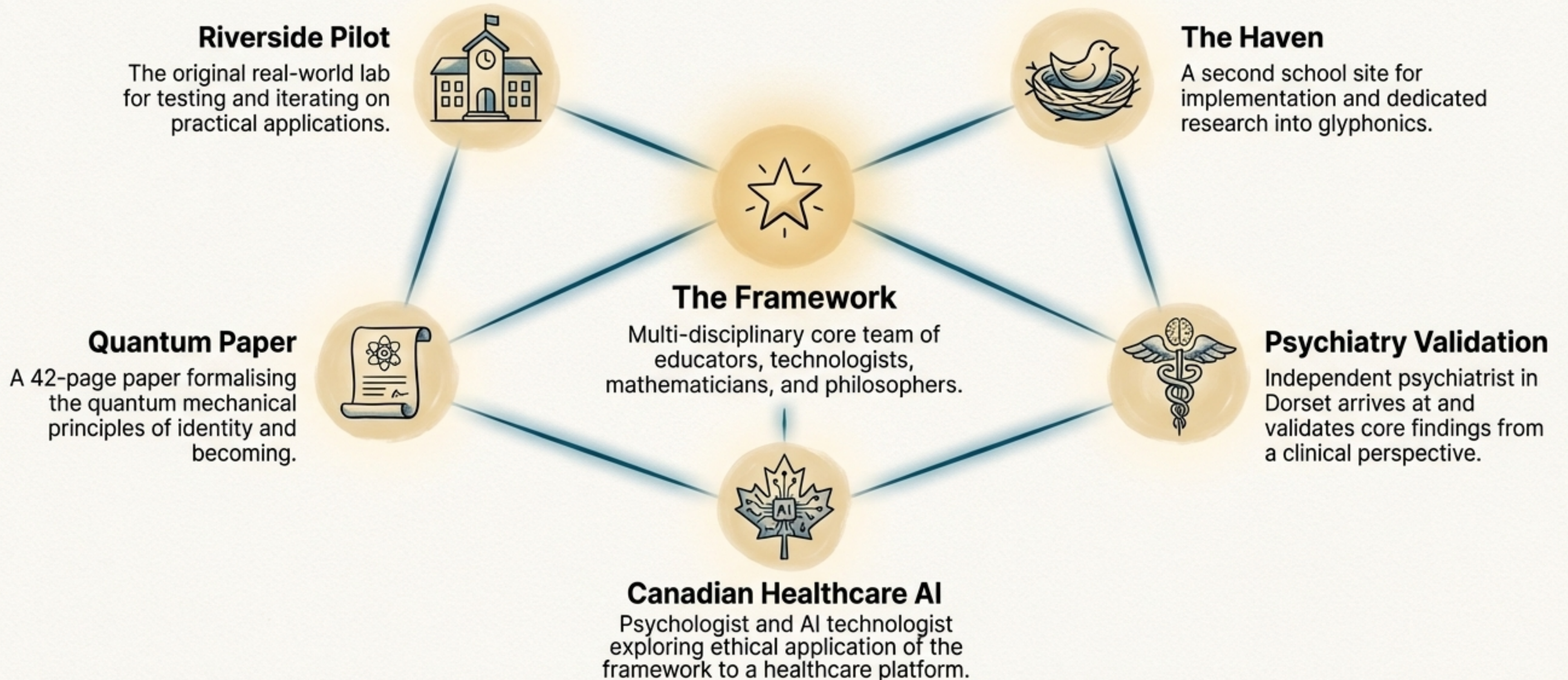
The Approach:

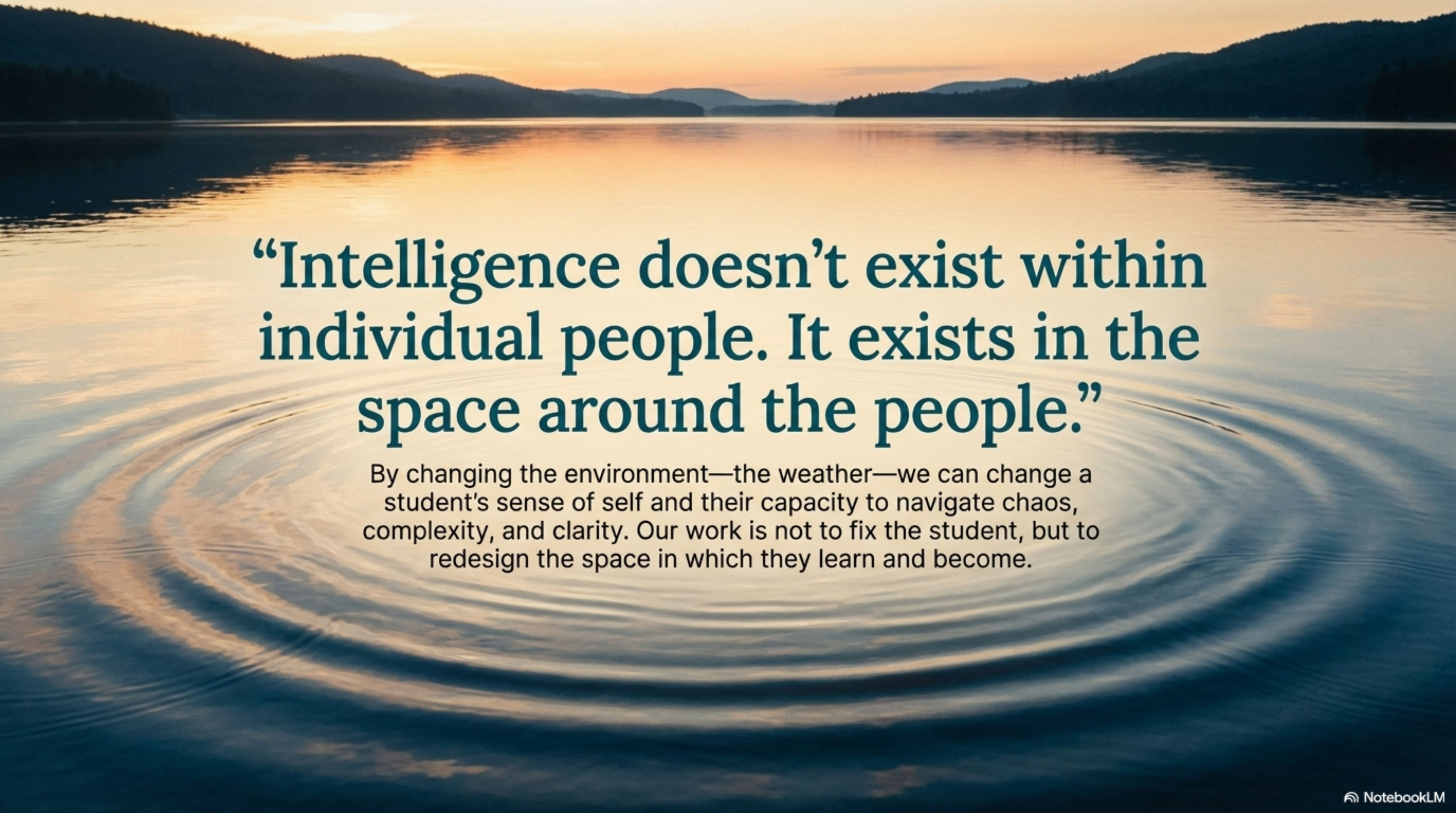
We are not burning down the old system before the new one is built. Our work is to operate in parallel, gathering robust evidence to demonstrate that our new way is not only more humane but also more effective.

The Goal:

To provide stakeholders with compelling case studies and data that show presence can be captured meaningfully, satisfying safeguarding concerns while honouring the well-being of the child.

An Expanding Ecosystem of Practice and Inquiry





“Intelligence doesn’t exist within individual people. It exists in the space around the people.”

By changing the environment—the weather—we can change a student’s sense of self and their capacity to navigate chaos, complexity, and clarity. Our work is not to fix the student, but to redesign the space in which they learn and become.