



stronger
smarter

Indigenous Education Leadership Institute

Stronger Smarter: Getting Closer Facilitation Guide

Getting closer to quality education outcomes for Indigenous students

Indigenous community Elders, parents, educators and students share their insights about the teaching and learning space in schools with Dr Chris Sarra



Three 25 minute panel discussions!



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations



Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia



About this resource

The DVD

On the DVD you will find three 25 minute panel discussions in which Dr Chris Sarra, Executive Director of the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute (IELI), invites Indigenous people to share their insights into education.

- Forum 1 Indigenous community Elders and parents panel
- Forum 2 Indigenous students panel
- Forum 3 Indigenous educators panel

You can also download documents from the DVD to help you with your use of the forums.



Stronger Smarter website

The Stronger Smarter website provides further information and stories relating to the themes discussed in this guide. It is located at

www.strongersmarter.qut.edu.au/

You can also download documents from this website to help you with your use of the forums.



Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge the Indigenous Community Elders, parents, students and staff who have shared their experiences and reflections in these forums with Dr Chris Sarra.

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Introduction

Vital questions for educators

How do we improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students?

How do we achieve quality teaching in our classrooms, a quality environment in our schools and a quality supportive context in our communities?

These are among the questions put to students, educators, parents and community Elders in the forums on this DVD.

Dr Chris Sarra, Executive Director of the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute, believes that the tide in Indigenous education is turning.

How this resource can help

The *Stronger Smarter: Getting Closer* forums aim to support educational leaders, teachers and staff in our schools to become part of the wave that will result in quality education for every Indigenous student wherever they are at school.

The *Stronger Smarter: Getting Closer* forums is a series of three videos on DVD in which Dr Sarra invites Indigenous Elders and parents (Forum 1) Indigenous students (Forum 2) and Indigenous educators (Forum 3) to share their insights and experiences about the teaching and learning space in schools.

This Facilitation Guide has been developed to suggest ideas for using the forums as part of professional learning or reflection/planning activities.

Panel members – selected from schools and communities from all over Queensland – are led in discussion by Dr Chris Sarra.

The community panel includes respected Elders, Aunty Val Coolwell, Uncle Albert Holt and Uncle Warry John Stanley who give accounts of their years spent encouraging stronger links between schools and the communities they serve. Teachers and teachers aides on the Educators Panel speak of the importance of building trust in the classroom and young men and women speak of finding inner strength as Indigenous students to succeed in achieving their goals.

The series of twenty five minute programs is shot against a beautiful backdrop produced by local Indigenous artists Nancy Torrens and Troy Little, 'Stronger Smarter: Getting Closer!'

Dr Sarra says: 'If we are serious about improving Indigenous educational outcomes we really have to begin to take responsibility – all of us – teachers, students, school leadership, communities, families at home. We have to work hard to build stronger smarter relationships among all these individuals. By doing this we can create classrooms as sacred spaces in which Indigenous children can be exceptional.'



Using this resource

Audiences for the Forums

The forums have been developed as stimulus for reflection and discussion by school staff.

The perspectives shared by Indigenous panel members focus directly on education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Schools with no Indigenous students could focus discussion on relevant questions for the broader curriculum in terms of the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives, professional learning for staff and the nature of relationships between the school and its local Indigenous community.



Planning your viewing

Considerations

Step 1

Preview the forums by viewing the Introductions from Chris Sarra on each Forum

Note: The same general introduction is included at the beginning of each program (Appendix 1). This is followed by a specific introduction to each forum. (Transcripts can be downloaded from the DVD and website).

Step 2

Scan this facilitation guide for suggested activities and important links to assist you in tailoring the materials to your needs

Step 3

Consider where the forums could fit within your school planning

Who?

leadership/executive curriculum/faculty
Indigenous education focus group/committee

What?

school planning, professional learning for particular staff, classroom practice/pedagogy, student support/student welfare practices

How?

individual/group/whole staff

Step 4

Identify and involve key people

Who?

principal/executive, professional learning coordinator, Indigenous staff, curriculum coordinators/head teachers, Indigenous studies teachers, student support/welfare staff

Step 5

Plan the facilitation of the **Getting Closer** forums discussion/s

Each forum runs for 25 minutes. You may wish to view all three forums over a period of time or you may choose to focus on the one or two which best suit your purpose. Consider seeking advice from Indigenous community members or staff about opportunities for demonstrating respect for cultural practices within the activity.

Step 6

Conduct the **Getting Closer** forums discussion

Step 7




Record decisions/actions from the discussion and integrate 'next steps' into school planning

Many resources are available to assist you. See the list at the end of this guide for some additional suggestions.

A Thematic Approach

The following themes have been identified as important in the discussion. They are linked to specific forums because there is a relevant focus in the panel discussion and for ease of organisation. In reality, the students, educators and community members all contribute rich and relevant insights across all themes and if time permits, you are encouraged to incorporate all of the forums in your activities.

Key

-  Community Elders
-  Educators
-  Students

Student Forum

Theme 1 Changing the tide of low expectations in Indigenous Education

'We all know as educators that low expectations has the potential to result in low educational performance... we also know that high expectations from us can and do influence students to perform much, much better.

'For too long I think many of us as educators have colluded too easily with the notion that Indigenous children are automatically underachievers at school. There is no basis for this belief and it is one that must be purged from our profession.

'I am very happy to say that the tide is turning – in the last decade or so, there has been a wide-spread change in attitudes – both on the part of the educators like us and on the part of the young Indigenous learners...families and communities'

Chris Sarra
(Introduction to the Student Forum)

Educators and Community Elders Forums

Theme 3 Culture and the Classroom

'I'm very pleased to say that in the past few years much of this has changed in many places. Schools are turning to their communities creating a space for parents and community to be actively engaged in the education of our children.'

Chris Sarra
(Introduction to the Community Elders Forum)

Students and Community Elders Forums

Theme 2 Quality Relationships

'...one of the most important relationships to build is with Elders, parents and community. When school leaders acknowledge and embrace the strength of community leadership we'll be off to a good start. When school and community share the responsibility of leading and supporting this change, great things really can happen.'

Chris Sarra
(Concluding comments in the Community Elders forum)

Educators Forum

Theme 4 Knowing your Indigenous students and supporting them to develop to be 'Strong, Smart and Deadly'

'Our motto is 'Stronger and Smarter' – strong in our hearts, proud of our identity, solid in our community – and smart in the way we do things, focussed on high achievement, determined to succeed.'

Chris Sarra
Stronger Smarter website

Community Elders and Educators Forums

Theme 5 Putting it all together

'If we're serious about transformation in Indigenous education then we must embrace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in schools and in communities. Engaging community people in schools and making them an integral part of progressive and dynamic learning communities is crucial in turning schools around.'

Chris Sarra
(Introduction to the Educators Forum)



Theme 1 Changing the tide of low expectations in Indigenous Education

Key ideas

'We all know as educators that low expectations have the potential to result in low educational performance. . . we also know that high expectations from us can and do influence students to perform much, much better.'

'For too long I think many of us as educators has colluded too easily with the notion that Indigenous children are automatically underachievers at school. There is no basis for this belief and it is one that must be purged from our profession.'

'I am very happy to say that the tide is turning – in the last decade or so, there has been a wide spread change in attitudes – both on the part of the educators like us and on the part of the young Indigenous learners. . .families and communities'

Chris Sarra

(Introduction to the Student Forum)

Student Forum

For reflection as you watch the DVD

'You're black – you're not going to make it'

In what ways have low expectations been communicated to these students?

What expectations do the students have now?

What do they consider has helped them to find reasons for being at school and for being successful?

For discussion

Chris Sarra says: 'These fine young people are proof that the tide is turning.'

In what ways do these students challenge stereotypes of Indigenous learners?

What has supported their engagement with their schools and learning?

A number of the students speak about being 'pushed'. How does this relate to your experience of Indigenous students?

Now thinking about your school

How does your school address the issue of accountability?

How could your school promote greater focus on high expectations for Indigenous students and all students?

More ideas for exploring this theme

Two stories on the Stronger Smarter website:

- Zillmere State School story
- 'I thought we were doing well'

www.strongersmarter.qut.edu.au

Keywords

- expectations
- stereotypes
- accountability
- engagement
- aspirations



Theme 2 Quality Relationships

Key ideas

'...one of the most important relationships to build is with Elders, parents and community. When school leaders acknowledge and embrace the strength of community leadership we'll be off to a good start. When school and community share the responsibility of leading and supporting this change, great things really can happen.'

Chris Sarra
(Concluding comments in the Community Elders forum)

'If we are looking to build quality classrooms, quality schools, quality education we have to create quality relationships. When we say relationships we don't mean "too friendly" or "too soft" or "too forgiving" – on the contrary – we need to be firm and respectful. We all agree here that for successful teaching and learning to occur strong relationships of trust, high expectation and commitment must be built and maintained in classrooms, in schools, in communities and in homes.'

Chris Sarra
(Concluding comments in the Educators Forum)

Students and Community Elders Forums

For reflection as you watch the DVD

What do the students identify as characteristics of quality relationships between staff and Indigenous students?

For discussion

The Community Elders in the Forum talk about a range of different experiences in their own schooling. How do they want young people to be treated within education today? What is 'respect' in this context?

What insights do the students offer into 'hard head behaviour'? What do they recommend for assisting students who are behaving this way?

What do these students seem to value in relationships with staff? What barriers do they identify?

Now thinking about your school

What does your school do currently to promote quality relationships with Indigenous students and all students? Do you have ways of identifying what your students value most? If not, how could you involve students in this process?

How could you strengthen liaison with Indigenous families and communities to:

- let them know what is happening in the school and what their children are learning
- highlight successes across all the activities of the school?

More ideas for exploring this theme

www.racismnoway.com.au

Mind Matters
(Community Matters)

[www.mindmatters.edu.au/
resources_and_downloads/
community_matters/
communitymatters_landing](http://www.mindmatters.edu.au/resources_and_downloads/community_matters/communitymatters_landing)

Keywords

- warm, supportive, challenging
- respect
- getting closer to understanding what's important



Theme 3 Culture and the Classroom

Key ideas

'I'm very pleased to say that in the past few years much of this has changed in many places. Schools are turning to their communities creating a space for parents and community to be actively engaged in the education of our children.'

Chris Sarra
(Introduction to the Community Elders Forum)

'I've gone to parent teacher interviews and P&C meetings and...one or two Indigenous parents have shown up. They pull up in a car outside and look in and see a majority of people that are white and they say 'I'm coming, I'm coming – I'm just parking the car' and I never see them again - It is intimidating for them. We try to get them to overcome that.'

Corine Matasia (Elders Forum)

'My passion and energies are directed towards educational pathways both culturally and academically for my kids... bridging the great divide that I see in the community where I see Elders that have a very important role of inducting into our younger children in the cultural protocols we grew up in... that's very important.'

Uncle Albert Holt (Elders Forum)

Educators Forum

For reflection as you watch the DVD

What do these staff members identify as success in the classroom?

For discussion

Why is recognition of Indigenous culture in the classroom so important for Indigenous students?

What is culture? What are some different cultural groups in your school? What characterises traditional Australian mainstream school culture?

What can we do to enable understanding and respect for cultural diversity?

Now thinking about your school

How effectively do your school's policies and practices guide staff to provide cultural support for Indigenous students while ensuring that they are provided with all the opportunities that the school offers?

What is your school's approach to the language of different cultural groups?

Who can help your school to link with the families and community/ies of your Indigenous students? Are these formal or informal roles? What support do they need?

Do you have guidelines for staff relating to home/community visits? Are they current? Do they support the engagement of Indigenous students?

What next steps can your school take to build staff understanding of Indigenous culture and perspectives and their relevance to their work roles?

More ideas for exploring this theme

What every teacher needs to know: Indigenous Students and English Literacy

www.reconciliation.org.au

Professional standards for teachers Qld (Standards 5, 8, 9, 10 are reproduced on the Stronger Smarter website and the DVD)

What works: case studies
www.whatworks.edu.au/cases1.htm

Keywords

- Culture
- Valuing
- Respect
- Identity
- Strengths
- Language



Theme 4 Knowing your Indigenous students and supporting them to develop to be ‘Strong, Smart and Deadly’*

Key ideas

‘Of course every child comes into our school with his or her own life story – parents, family and community – all can influence a child’s potential for educational failure or success. I must say though, whilst there are tremendous challenges for some Indigenous children located in complex social contexts it is possible – because I’ve seen it happen – to create school and classroom environments that are warm, supportive and challenging: a place where they can experience success.’

Chris Sarra
(Introduction to the Educators Forum)

‘Our motto is ‘Stronger and Smarter’ – strong in our hearts, proud of our identity, solid in our community –and smart in the way we do things, focused on high achievement, determined to succeed.’

Chris Sarra
(Stronger Smarter website)

* ‘Deadly’ is used by Indigenous people to mean successful and ‘switched on’.

Student and Educators Forums

For reflection as you watch the DVD

What improvements in education do the panel members identify?

What other changes can you identify?

For discussion

What do Katy and Steven identify as being helpful about the ‘Knowledge House’ and the ‘Gecko Room’ at their respective schools?

Why do you think ‘offering to go with a student’ for an appointment or activity is so highly valued by these students?

‘If they know who they are and where they come from, that helps them be strong’.
Why do you think there is a strong focus on this approach for Indigenous students?

Now thinking about your school

How do you encourage students to re-enter school after a period of absence?

How do the students know about the school’s attitude to re-entry?

Do students (including Indigenous students) experience it as welcoming and encouraging?
How do you know?

Is there flexibility in your school practices to make it possible for support people to attend interviews/meetings with Indigenous students?

How could you increase this flexibility? What could you do to encourage staff and students to adopt this practice?

More ideas for exploring this theme

Voices from the Knowledge House

www.strongersmarter.qut.edu.au

Mind Matters (Community Matters)

www.mindmatters.edu.au/resources_and_downloads/community_matters/communitymatters_landing

Keywords

- individuals
- using data



Theme 5 Putting it all together

Key ideas

'If we're serious about transformation in Indigenous education then we must embrace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in schools and in communities. Engaging community people in schools and making them an integral part of a progressive and dynamic learning communities is crucial in turning schools around.'

Chris Sarra
(Introduction to the Educators' Forum)

'Our schools and our classrooms must be that sacred space in which Indigenous children can be exceptional. To achieve this, we as educators must be prepared to work exceptionally hard. For a stronger smarter future for our children we must be exceptional educators working in respectful partnerships with exceptional Indigenous community leaders.'

Chris Sarra
(Conclusion to the Educators' Forum)

Community Elders and Educators Forums

For reflection as you watch the DVD

What do forum members see as a quality school for Indigenous students?

For discussion

What do you think are essential elements of quality schooling for Indigenous students? And for all students?

Now thinking about your school

Do you adopt a strengths based approach across all areas of our school practice?

How could you determine whether different groups/cohorts of students perceive your classrooms and the school as focusing on strengths?

What next steps are needed in our provision of quality education?

More ideas for exploring this theme

Stronger Smarter: Yes we can!

A description on the Stronger Smarter website which explains the Institute's philosophy in action.

www.strongersmarter.qut.edu.au

Dare to Lead:

- 10 Things your Indigenous educators want you to know.
- Spidergram to assist in mapping Indigenous programs and strategies across the school community.
- Strategic Planning
 - School review checklist
 - School stories

www.apapdc.edu.au/daretolead

Taking Action. Working systematically.

www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3htm

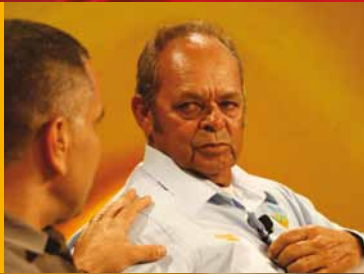
Keywords

- Turning to Indigenous leaders in the community
- Quality classrooms
- Quality educational outcomes
- School transformation



'Over the course of these three programs we'll talk to some students, educators, parents and community Elders, asking them to share their experiences and thoughts about what happens in that space, in the moments of teaching and learning.'

Chris Sarra



Appendix 1

Transcript from the General Introduction to each Forum

'I've always been intrigued and excited by what happens in the classrooms in our schools, where Indigenous children come face to face with the challenges of our education systems. So many factors come together – just there – contributing to the successes or failures of the child's educational achievements.

'This DVD series explores that space – the teaching and learning space in Indigenous Education in our schools.

'Over the course of these three programs we'll talk to some students, educators, parents and community Elders, asking them to share their experiences and thoughts about what happens in that space, in the moments of teaching and learning.

'The fact is that Education systems have by and large often failed Indigenous students in all parts of this state and country. How many times have we witnessed the teacher and the student failing to connect? How often is it said that Indigenous students do not want to learn? And how often is it whispered that Indigenous students are 'incapable of learning?' How many times have we heard of students being offered second-best? How many times have we heard of teachers accepting failure as the norm?

'All of my work is dedicated to improving and strengthening and energising those spaces. For too long as educators we simply accepted that what happens outside that space –home life, community life –as an excuse for failure to deliver high quality education to Indigenous children.

'All of us – leaders, teachers, educators, students, families and communities – we are all responsible. We all have to face the challenges of achieving the best, of lifting our game – **making the teaching and learning spaces meaningful, exciting and productive.**

'In this series of DVDs I am going to explore these areas – looking at these difficult challenges. With my guests we'll address the experiences of the "bad old times" and of the innovative, dynamic new era in which we are currently located. We'll talk about what works and what doesn't work in classrooms; we'll talk about how Indigenous students can be strong in their culture while becoming smarter and smarter.'

Chris Sarra

Appendix 2

Resources and Links

Stronger Smarter website

www.strongersmarter.qut.edu.au

The following links to other key agencies and organisations are offered to those interested in pursuing Indigenous education issues in further depth.

(Note IELI is not responsible for content on any of these external sites)

Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience

www.aimementoring.com

Dare to Lead

www.apapdc.edu.au/daretolead

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)

home.deewr.gov.au

Mind Matters (Community Matters)

www.mindmatters.edu.au/resources_and_downloads/community_matters/communitymatters_landing

Reconciliation Australia

www.reconciliation.org.au





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