

A mesh of High-Expectations Relationships across transitions in the Early Years





Photos:

Front page: Sacred Heart school, Beagle Bay, Western Australia.

This page: Mackay Central School, Queensland.

Recommended citation:

Stronger Smarter Institute Limited (2020). *A mesh of High-Expectations Relationships across transitions in the Early Years?* Stronger Smarter Institute Limited Position Paper.

©Copyright 2020 Stronger Smarter Institute

ISBN-978-0-6480258-3-8

Preface

I joined the Stronger Smarter Institute in 2015 as Team Leader of the Stronger Smarter Jarjums™ program, bringing with me 30 years' experience in the Early Years profession. I have had many roles in that space from Teacher Aide, Teacher, and Relieving Principal and then various project roles working with Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in schools and in early childhood. From these experiences, I know how important it is to build relationships with families from home to school and all the spaces in between to create a rock-solid foundation for our Jarjums¹.

This paper, *A mesh of High-Expectations Relationships across transitions in the Early Years*, expands on earlier work from the Stronger Smarter Institute describing High-Expectations Relationships as supportive and caring relationships that are built on high expectations (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014), and showing how such relationships can support a school community (Sarraj, Spillman, Jackson, Davis & Bray, 2018). We know that quality relationships equal quality teaching across the educational sector. In the Early Years, these relationships are especially important when our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums are navigating a third cultural space (Davis, 2018).

If we want smooth transitions for our Jarjums across the Early Years, we have to build those same High-Expectations Relationships across the sectors. We need to work with the centres or spaces our Jarjums are in before they come into our own learning space. Equally, we need to work with the space they are going into. If we don't, we end up with abrupt situations where Jarjums have to re-navigate every year because the educator turns momentum on its head and wants to start again. We hope this paper will provide a basis for discussion and we invite our Stronger Smarter Jarjums Program™ alumni and others to provide their thoughts on what a High-Expectations Relationship means to them in the Early Years.

*Fiona Bobongie,
Stronger Smarter Institute (Team Leader Jarjums Program,
2015 – 2018), currently Senior Program Officer, SSiSTEMIK*

¹ Jarjums is an Aboriginal word for children used in the Bundjalung and Yugambeh languages. We use the word Jarjums throughout to reflect the name of our program. We acknowledge that language words for young ones are different for other first nations' languages.

Introduction

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Jarjum may start school with the ability to speak two or more languages, and yet our Western standards fail to recognise this as a strength, seeing only the deficit of a child struggling with English. For these Jarjums, the cultural and world views they bring from their home life can be very different to those in the school. Entering the school system means navigating a third cultural space (Davis, 2018) where the rules and expectations have changed from those at home. If these expectations continue to change each time they move to a new space, the Early Years' experience will be a series of abrupt transitions that fails to support the sense of identity, participation and belonging that are so important as protective factors in the Early Years (AEDC, 2015; Armstrong et al., 2012).

Strong social and emotional skills in the Early Years are associated with greater resilience and better academic results later in school (Collie, Martin, Nassar & Roberts, 2018; Collie, Martin & Frydenberg, 2017; Krakouer, 2016). However, when it comes to these indicators of future success, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums are falling behind (Armstrong et al., 2012, and see Stronger Smarter Institute, 2019, Reading Review).

Research around Early Years transition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums has promoted much discussion around what is needed. However, there is little information about how to design and deliver successful transitions programs, no single best practice approach and limited professional development opportunities for educators (Armstrong et al., 2012; Krakouer, 2016; Tayler, 2016). The Institute's Stronger Smarter Jarjums Program™ (SSJ) has been designed to fill this gap, providing Early Years educators with the tools to design successful transition programs. This

Jarjums is an Aboriginal word for children that is used in a the Bundjalung and Yugambeh languages on Australia's eastern coast. We use it here to mean all Australian children in their early years.

Stronger Smarter Jarjums are strong in their culture and smart in the classroom.

paper complements the SSJ, describing the characteristics of successful Early Years transition programs and how they can be achieved to support our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums.

Building relationships in the third cultural space

If we are to build successful Early Years transition strategies that suit individual contexts, they will need to be built on respectful and caring High-Expectations Relationships with Jarjums and families (DEEWR, 2009; Krakouer, 2016b; Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014; Sarra, Spillman, Jackson, Davis & Bray, 2018). This starts by recognising and understanding the third cultural space (Bhabha, 1994; Davis, 2018).

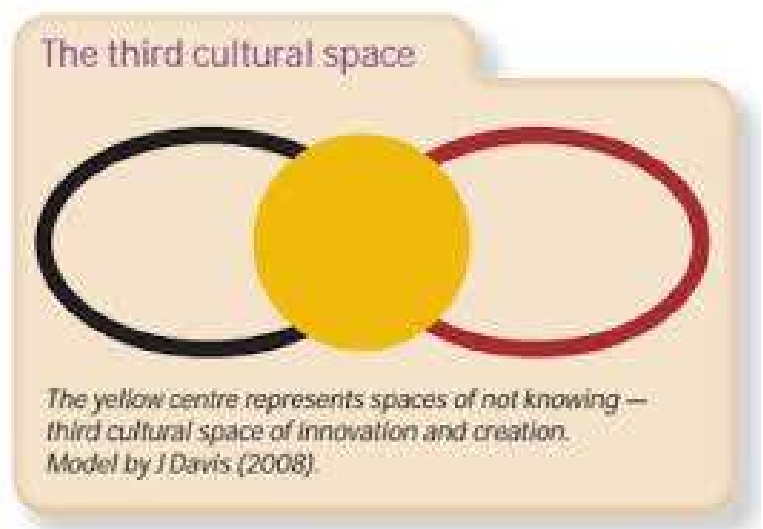


Figure 1. The Third Cultural Space (from J Davis, 2008)

Dr John Davis explains the third cultural space in the 2011 Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in schools guide (p.9). He explains the diagram (Figure 1) as follows:

The third cultural space recognises that Indigenous communities have distinct and deep cultural and world views — views that differ from those found in most Western education systems. When Western and Indigenous systems are acknowledged and valued equally, the overlapping or merging of views represents a new way of educating.

In the diagram, the black circle represents Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, and the red circle represents Western ways.

Within the third cultural space, the relationship is built on valuing strengths, holding high expectations, and deep listening to understand the perspectives, expectations, hopes and aspirations of others. The expectation is with the educator to get to know Jarjums and their families and understand the strengths they bring to the Early Years space. This is the starting point to creating a learning space of positive cultural identity,

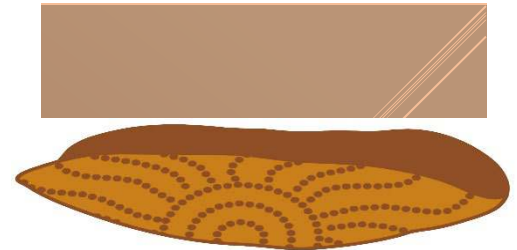
belonging and participation where Jarjums can continue to build the resilience and socio-emotional skills they need for the future.

Smooth, seamless transitions

The Early Years pathway for any Jarjum is a series of adjustments: from home to playgroup, to Prep, to Kindy, and finally through to Years 1 and 2 at school. If this pathway through the Early Years is a series of discrete experiences in different settings, including the home setting, Jarjums find themselves having to continually navigate a different set of rules and expectations

As Krakouer (2016a, 2016b) describes, transition needs to be a holistic process where High-Expectations Relationships underly the whole program to ensure that everyone is involved and working together. This may mean thinking outside the box, taking local approaches, and shifting thinking from focusing only on the current space to igniting conversations across sectors and across communities (Bobongie & Jackson, 2018; Hirst et al., 2011; Rigney, 2010; Krakouer 2016b).

Figure 2 shows how a successful transition program will be a smooth, seamless process for Jarjums, underlain by a mesh of High-Expectations Relationships. This is a transition program that recognises the third cultural space and uses Indigenous Knowledges and ways of thinking to provide an incremental process whereby Jarjums gradually learn the new rules and routines and build familiarity of the next space before they move up to that new level.



At the Stronger Smarter Institute, we use the coolamon metaphor. The coolamon is an oval vessel cut out of the bark of trees that is used for cradling and rocking babies.

The coolamon can carry our Jarjums safely, proud, strong, smart and deadly through the sectors of the early childhood years and create a solid foundation to begin their schooling.

In our metaphor, the coolamon has *High-Expectations Relationships* as a foundation.

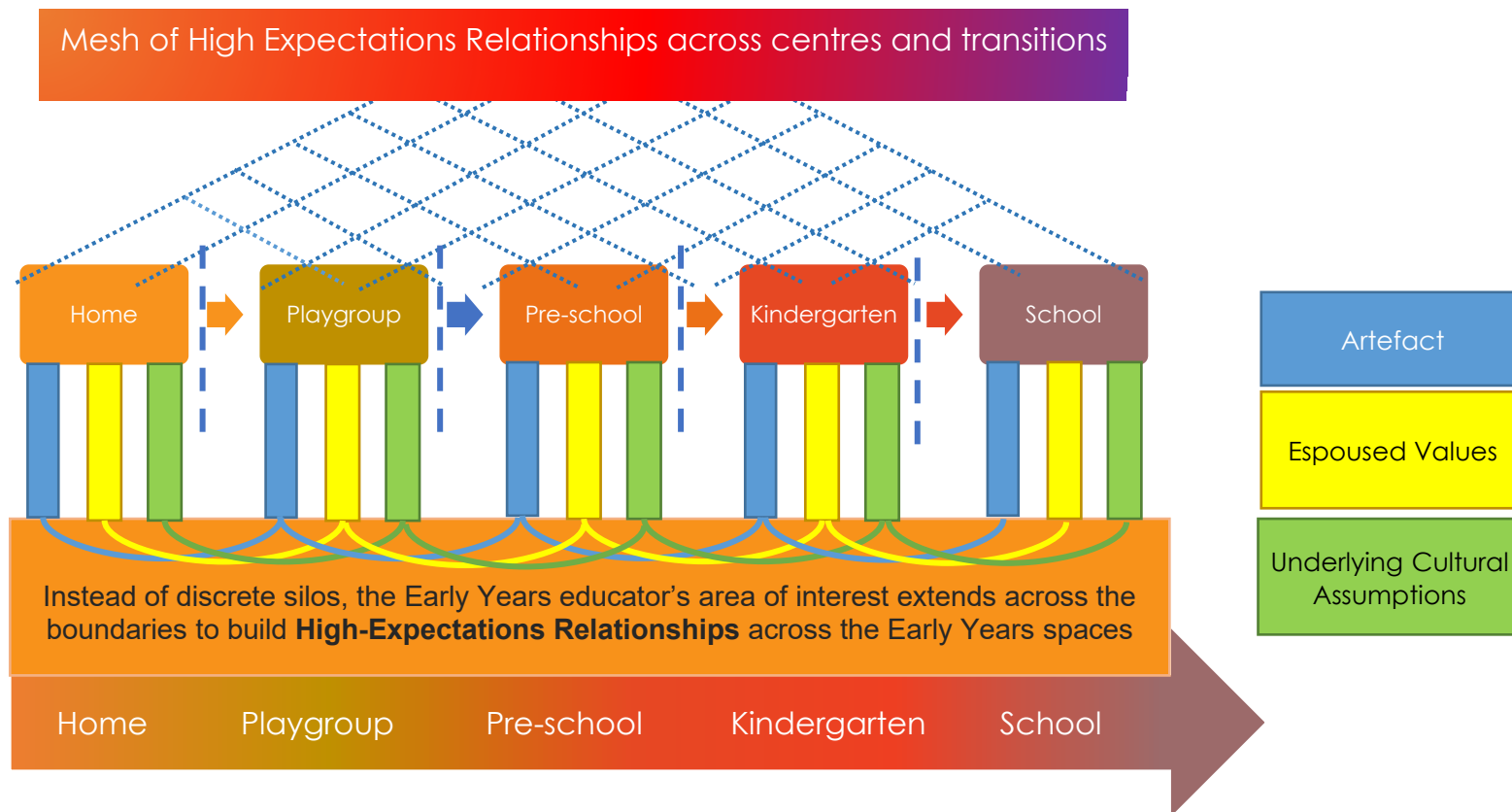


Figure 2: A smooth, seamless transition replaces a series of discrete silos (Bobongie, 2018).

Figure 2 shows how each silo (e.g. home, school) represents a space of culture. The culture within the home, within a playgroup, preschool, kindergarten and school can be analysed with the Cultural Analysis Framework by Edgar Schein (Figure 3) which shows how each space has Underlying Cultural Assumptions, Espoused Values and Artefacts. The Artefacts are what can be seen and heard. The Espoused Values are the rules and mottos that have been formulated from the beliefs and values that are embedded in us and most times are not in our awareness.

To build High-Expectation Relationships across the Early Years Sectors, educators need to understand the culture of family homes and work towards building the Artefacts and Espoused Values in their educational spaces to reflect the Jarjums' Underlying Cultural Assumptions. Once the Artefacts and Espoused Values have been set strong, educators are in a position to hold conversations with other key stakeholders to ensure seamless transitions. For example, curriculum and pedagogy can be built on to develop deeper learning. As shown in Figure 2, these seamless transitions replace the individual silos.



Figure 3: Cultural Analysis Framework (Edgar Schein, 2010)

Smoothing transition across the sectors

My grandson came home from school with a behavioural card – a warning. He had taken his shoes off in class, and that wasn't allowed. To make things worse, when the teacher told him to put his shoes back on, he refused. So, he got into trouble in class, and then got in trouble again from his parents when he came home with the behavioural card.

When I heard this, I thought about what had been going on for both the teacher and my grandson. The teacher is seeing a child who has broken the rules and then refused to comply with a direction – and this is a high expectation that all students keep to the rules. My grandson was simply confused. He was more comfortable with his shoes off and last year in Pre-school he was allowed to take his shoes off whenever he wanted without asking anyone – so suddenly the rules had changed, and he didn't understand why.

The Jarjum here has found an abrupt situation where he has needed to re-navigate the rules. What was acceptable in one space is no longer acceptable in another, but no-one has made him aware of this.

Supporting transitions requires educators to understand the rules and requirements of the space before or after and provide the opportunity to learn new rules.

Perhaps the Pre-school could have started to teach students about some of the expectations of Kindy – for instance that they'll need to keep their shoes on. Maybe this could include getting the Jarjums to practice keeping their shoes on for periods of time, and then eventually keeping shoes on for the whole day?

Maybe the Kindy teacher could have done something to help negotiate the space before sending the behavioural notice – for instance letting the Jarjum take his shoes off for a short period while the class was sitting on the floor doing puzzles or listening to a story but explaining that he is then expected to have shoes on for the rest of the day.

High-Expectations Relationships

Understanding the third cultural space and thinking holistically across the Early Years spaces requires relationships built on a strength-based approach. High-Expectations Relationships (Figure 4), as developed by Dr Chris Sarra, describe these relationships as a two-way relationship that is both firm and fair, finding the balance between high expectations and supportive relationships (Sarraf, 2011; Sarra, Spillman, Jackson, Davis & Bray, 2018; Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014).

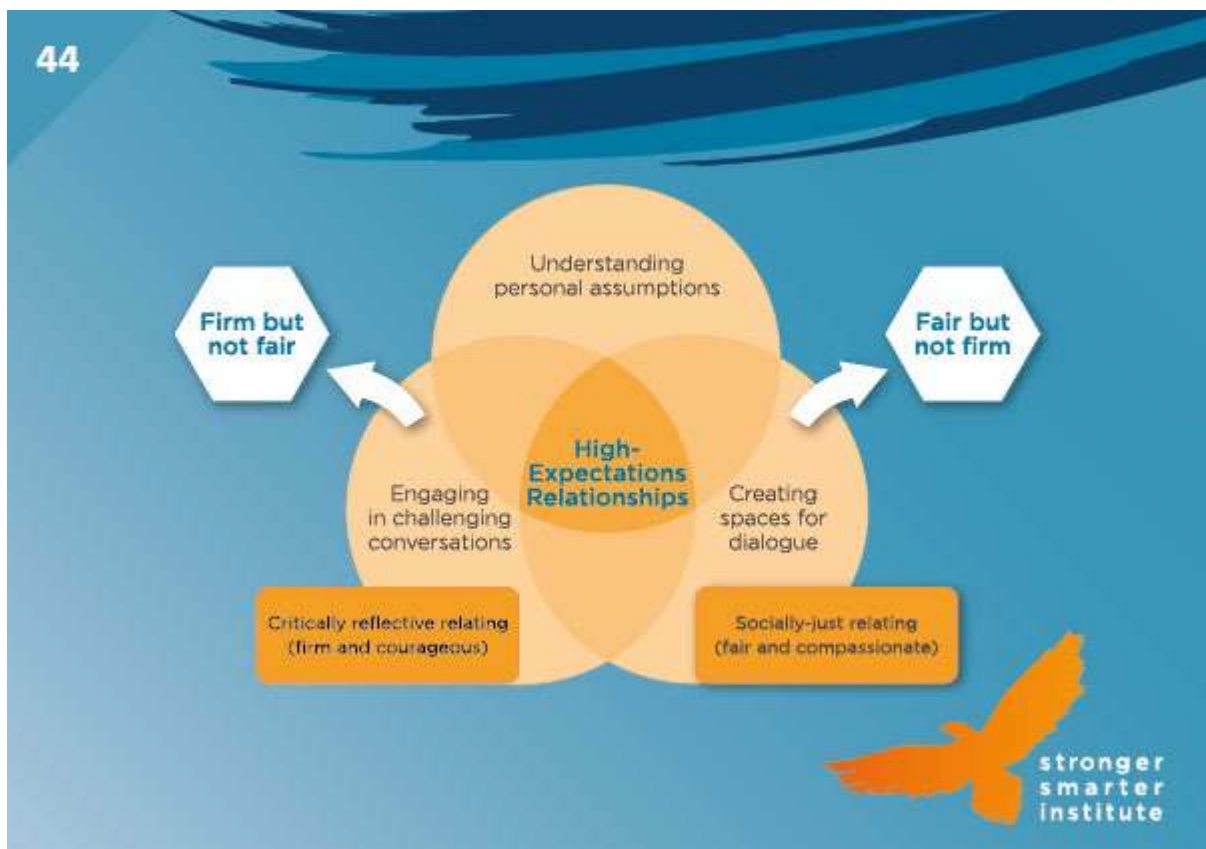


Figure 4: The High-Expectations Relationships Framework (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014)

Perceptual Positioning

In the Stronger Smarter Jarjums Program™, we use the concepts of Perceptual Positioning, (Hoag, 2018; Andreas & Andreas, 2009) to provide a framework around the elements of High-Expectations Relationships and understanding the viewpoints of others (Figure 5).

- ▶ *P1 – How am I with self?* High-Expectations Relationships start with a deep level of self-reflection to uncover and interrogate the personal assumptions we might bring to the relationship.
- ▶ *P2 – How am I with others?* P2 is the position of entering the conversation from the intention of taking the time to listen and understand other points of view. This is understanding what the other person in the conversation thinks, feels and believes.
- ▶ *P3 – How are we together?* P3 is the position of stepping back and watching and listening to understand what is happening for the whole group. How are families and Jarjums interacting with the preschool or centre? How are the staff responding to the needs of Jarjums and families?
- ▶ *P4 – How are we together, with others?* P4 is a synthesis of the other perceptual positions – and a sense of belonging to the whole system. In P4, this is where we can look at the interactions across the system and look at what we can do to ensure the individual spaces of the Early Years journey are acting as part of the overall system rather than as individual silos or separate entities.

A High-Expectations Relationships is a two-way relationship that is both supportive and challenging. This is both 'firm' and 'fair'. Being 'fair' in the relationship means engaging in enabling processes and is essential to establish trust and safety. Being 'firm' is characterised by courage, resilience, and rigour to challenge mindsets in self and others. (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014; Sarra, Spillman, Jackson, Davis & Bray, 2018).

P1 - Understanding personal assumptions

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums need the same high-quality teaching and quality relationships as any other Jarjum (Bahr, 2016; Lewthwaite et al, 2015; Sarra, 2011a). Like any other Jarjum they need to feel that their strengths and their cultural identities are a part of their schooling. For a non-Indigenous Jarjum, this sense of cultural identity is simply part of the system where the majority of their teachers come from the same background as them.

In contrast, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums enter a school system where Australia's socio-historical context has suppressed and devalued all aspects of Indigenous ways of Knowing, Being and Doing, and they are asked to 'fit in' to a system built entirely on western views of what constitutes strengths (Martin, 2008; Matthews, 2015; Pascoe, 2014; Rose, 2012). Jarjums enter this complex and contested third cultural space where everyone, Jarjums, families and educators, bring assumptions based on their own histories, discourses and social practices which condition how they look at the world (Nakata, 2007) and these are often widely disparate.

For this reason, High-Expectations Relationships start with the deep critical self-reflection in the P1 perceptual position that seeks to understand what "I think, feel and believe." This asks educators to understand the nature and level of knowledge of Australia's colonial history and the impact it has on Western education systems. Educators then need to reflect on their own personal assumptions and thinking and consider whether the baggage of deficit discourse is getting in the way of quality teaching.

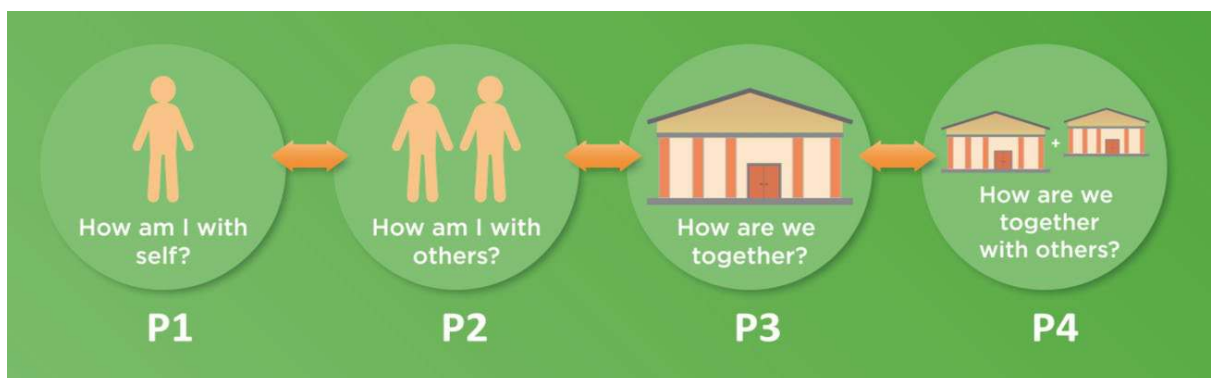


Figure 5: Perceptual Positioning

The impact of deficit thinking

If a positive sense of identity is important to resilience and well-being in the Early Years, and our education system fails to recognise the need to build a positive and supportive third cultural space, then from the moment our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enter the classroom, they are not being given the same learning opportunities or quality teaching as non-Indigenous children. If high expectations for students are based on performance standards set by a Western system without any consideration of the strengths these students bring to the classroom, then when students fail to meet those standards, it can be easy to place the fault with the students, their family and their circumstances.

This type of thinking can lead too far down the path of 'fairness' which loses the rigor needed for quality learning, moving away from a true High-Expectations Relationship. As the reasons for non-achievement become externalised, educators can become disempowered and lose belief in their personal ability to help Jarjums to succeed and achieve (McNaughton & Lai, 2008; Sarra, Spillman, Jackson, Davis & Bray, 2018). This becomes a belief that our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums are less able to learn

Jirribal Elder, Uncle Ernie Grant explains

Teachers have been brought up that authority is what you should have. I'm the boss, but that's not with Indigenous kids - I am your benefactor, I'm the one going to look after you. That is what the Indigenous child needs. They don't need somebody to walk in there with a big stick and say, "I'm the boss". They need somebody to walk with them..... "look, at 10 o'clock I'm going to have a cup of tea and a sandwich for you, but in the meantime I'm going to talk to you and teach you about certain things".

There's a big difference between how Indigenous people want to be involved as compared to how the non-Indigenous wants the parent to be involved. Kindness and caring, and anything that goes along those lines, that will get you a long way further. It's as simple as that. They've got to feel comfortable to where they're going.

(Grant, 2016)

and need to be taught differently or treated differently to allow for their circumstances. The changes to accommodate the 'fairness' of supporting the perceived deficit result in the rhetoric of high expectations not being matched by the pedagogies in the classroom.

Using the P1 perceptual position of deep self-reflection, we can ask ourselves 'Are we really building our relationships from a strength-based approach?' 'Are we really holding high expectations?' We can interrogate our relationships to ask 'Are we keeping at the forefront of our minds that it is not about us as educators, or about the system, but about the Jarjum and their needs? 'Are we sure that we are not building the relationship on a need for the Jarjum to 'fit into' the system? Have we taken our communication with families beyond simply sending out lists and instructions to tell them what 'they need to do'?

The role of the Early Years educator then, rather than building transition programs around supporting students to 'fit in' to the system, is to look at where the system can change in a way that might, in fact, benefit all students. The 'fairness' in a High-Expectations Relationship means looking beyond a personal world view, understanding that Jarjums may come from a different frame of thinking, and rejecting any out-of-awareness deficit discourses that can act as excuses. This involves an authentic dialogue with children and parents with deep listening, genuine interest and non-judgement. In this situation of equitable power relationships where all voices are heard, families and Jarjums are much more likely to feel a sense of belonging. It also places the educator in a position of greater agency and personal belief in their ability to solve problems and make a difference (Bishop & Berryman, 2009).

One participant in the Stronger Smarter Jarjums™ program explains how the program left her with a greater sense of agency, and the courage to believe in herself. She found herself stopping to listen to others more and understand a different perspective.

For me personally, it was looking at myself and my perspective of things. Jarjums made me think about other people and what they're going through to maybe get to school in a morning. So, it was changing how I see things, my own perspective of things and taking a good look at myself.

P2 and P3– How am I with others? How are we together?

A High-Expectations Relationship means recognising the tensions that exist for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the strengths that everyone brings, recognising that there is no 'single truth' or 'authentic account' of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander experience (Nakata, 2002). For the educator, this means considering the P2 Perceptual position to look at 'how am I with others', changing from the usual role of 'knower' or 'knowledge holder' to one of 'learner' with deep listening to the needs of the students and their families. The responsibility of the educator is to afford agency to people and ensure that the third cultural space becomes one of trust, safety and equal power.

This leads to a co-creation of power which creates a symbiotic relationship where both world views are valued – teachers alongside community –bringing powerful expertise into the learning environment and creating a space for meaningful engagement (Davis & Grose, 2008). This is where P3 looks at what is happening for the group, ensuring a space where challenging, respectful and open dialogue can occur.

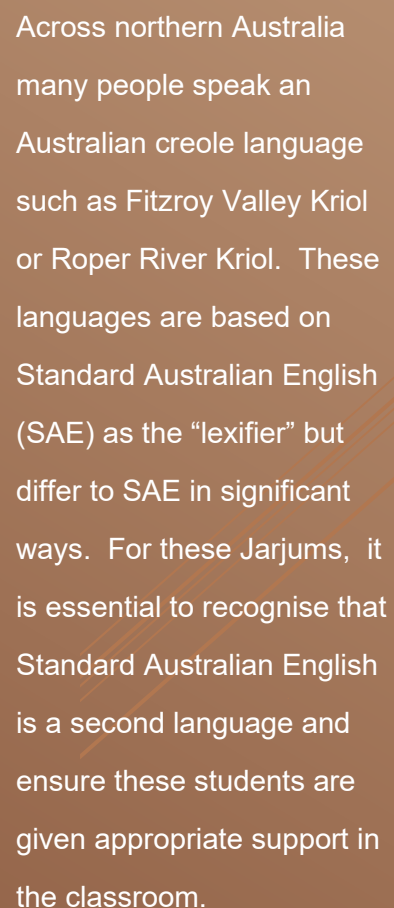
With Jarjums

In the classroom, P2 means taking the time to understand what might be happening for a Jarjum or a parent that is making them react in a particular way. This can begin by understanding some simple things about Jarjum's home lives and stories. For instance, what they are responsible for at home, how they partake in food, what sleeping arrangements they have. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Jarjums may be motivated to engage in schoolwork by relationships and community rather than by work ethic or authority (Lewellyn et al, 2018). The role a child plays at home may impact at school – for instance the oldest child in a family may believe that they are expected to look after the space they are in and the other Jarjums in that space. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Jarjum are often raised with more autonomy than Western Jarjums which may seem like slowness or disobedience in the classroom, or a tendency to seek help from peers rather than from adults (Llewellyn, Boon & Lewthwaite, 2018).

Perhaps it is understanding the languages Jarjums speak and are exposed to. For instance, speaking a dialect of Australian Aboriginal English or an Aboriginal Kriol or Torres Strait Creole, might impact on learning (Dickson, 2016; Wigglesworth & Billington, 2013). Some Jarjums, even in their short lives, may have already acquired a mesh of

languages which could consist of Traditional Language, creole, Aboriginal English and dialects of these as well. Jarjums may be code switching in language when visiting different spaces such as grandparents, other family members and Early Years Education spaces. Jarjums' families may have also created their own language that features all the languages or dialects from families and the communities in which they have lived. For these Jarjums, school may be their first real encounter with Standard Australian English (SAE). Recognising creole, Aboriginal English and these mesh of languages as Jarjums' first languages is essential to ensure that students are given appropriate support in the classroom.

Uncle Ernie Grant, a Jirrbal elder from North Queensland, describes how Aboriginal culture is based around relationships and connections (Grant, 1998, 2016). Uncle Ernie Grant's Holistic teaching and planning Framework is a way to understand the learner and their family (Grant, 1998). As Uncle Ernie explains, the Holistic Teaching and Learning Framework *allows us to see the world holistically, not just the tree but what goes with the tree. Land, language, culture, at a certain time, at a certain place, and how those things are joined together* (Grant, 2016).



Across northern Australia many people speak an Australian creole language such as Fitzroy Valley Kriol or Roper River Kriol. These languages are based on Standard Australian English (SAE) as the “lexifier” but differ to SAE in significant ways. For these Jarjums, it is essential to recognise that Standard Australian English is a second language and ensure these students are given appropriate support in the classroom.

Yarning Circles

Yarning Circles can help educators learn a little more about what is happening in the lives of the Jarjums in their class (Mills, Sunderland & Davis, 2013). When Jarjums sit together in a circle facing each other, this creates equal power relationships where Jarjums are more likely to feel comfortable to speak up. The Yarning Circle can be used for a quick check-in each morning, for longer conversations, or as a tool to bring the class back together when things are getting out of control.

When Jarjums come in excited to tell the class about everything they've done over the weekend, Yarning Circles teach sharing, turn taking and listening. This process builds empathy – so that if one Jarjum says they are feeling sad about something the other Jarjums will be there immediately with support.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums will build resilience and social and emotional skills if they feel that their culture is acknowledged and respected in their preschool, centre or school. Using Acknowledgements to Country as part of the morning ritual and working with Jarjums to develop their own Acknowledgements is a simple starting point. However, this needs to go deeper to build the relationships with parents and Elders to invite them into the classroom to contribute to the curriculum. Learning the local Indigenous language or learning culture in the classroom all help to build pride and resilience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums.

Building these levels of trust and safety in the classroom and building genuine relationships with students helps build the emotional bank account (Covey, 1990) which then makes it easier to have the challenging conversations about behaviour or expectations if needed. A relationship that places too much emphasis on 'firmness' and high expectations may leave Jarjums feeling they don't belong, resulting in poor behaviour and disengagement.

One Participant in the Stronger Smarter Jarjums™ program explains why building relationships with the students early so that they get to know their teacher for the following year is so important to help with transition.

Investing time into relationships, not just with Indigenous kids but with all kids, was something I really thought long and hard about to make sure I did it well. It's not just the relationships, but also thinking about things from the perspectives of the children coming into your class. What's going on for the group and what's best for them. [Teacher].

With families

Aunty Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Bauman (1988, 2017) has described a deep listening process called Dadirri. In our busy Western system where we tend to value production over connection, we don't always take the time to listen. In the same way that you cannot hurry the river, relationships cannot be rushed and need to be built over time. Understanding the unique circumstances of families and building strong relationships through regular, positive feedback does take time. However, ultimately the time taken to build relationships will result in more positive and productive learning environments for Jarjums, with more time spent on learning and less on behaviour management. This space of trust then becomes one where educators and parents can hold challenging conversations about their expectations.

Finding out more about communities and families involves taking every opportunity to create a space to initiate genuine conversations about their Jarjums. It might be as simple as a quick conversation when they pick up their Jarjums at the end of the day. When the conversation comes from a place of deep listening that seeks to embrace the values and expectations of others, this establishes the equal power relationships that ensure families feel part of a system that values their culture and listens to their desires for their children's education.

One participant in the Stronger Smarter Jarjums™ Program described how her strategies for positive communication with parents and families include inviting families to cultural activities throughout the year, first making sure that they develop the relationship with families early.

Dadirri is a deep listening process which is based on 65,000 years of continuous cultural knowledge from the Daly River People in the Northern Territory.

Aunty Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Bauman says, *"We cannot hurry the river. We have to move with its current and understand its ways"* (Ungunmerr, 1988, p.3)

At the beginning of the year I make a phone call to every parent to touch base and ensure that the first conversation is a positive one. You need to eliminate the fact that lots of the previous contact and experiences that our Indigenous parents have had at school with education has not been positive so it's important that we're developing that positive relationship and communication early. [Assistant Principal]

For new families, creating opportunities for families to come into the preschool for play days can create familiarity with the preschool before their children attend. This gives the opportunity for informal chats where parents can ask questions and staff can find out more about the families. One Preschool in NSW helps with familiarity with a picture story book that parents can read with their Jarjums over the holidays that provides everything they need to know about 'When I arrive at Preschool'.

One participant in the Stronger Smarter Jarjums™ program explains how these types of programs help build relationships with families.

It gives us a chance to get to know the kids and any services that might be involved with them. It gives us a chance to build those relationships with families too and get the kids used to being in the environment. [Learning and Support Teacher].

When this relationship is in place, it is possible to have more open dialogue, to sit together as equals and agree on expectations. Building the relationship with parents may also mean building their confidence to support their Jarjums, where parents may have not had much access to schooling themselves. When these relationships are in place, families feel more empowered and are more willing to be involved in preschool or centre activities. This in turn builds the confidence of Jarjums when they see their family members as part of the preschool or centre.

P4 - Relationships across the sectors

In the book *Treading Lightly* (Sveiby & Skuthorpe, 2006) the authors describe how Aboriginal people (in this case the Ngunnigabarra people) use stories as an educational tool. Every story has four levels of meaning, with the deeper levels only available to those with the 'keys' (Sveiby & Skuthorpe 2006, p.41). The first level of meaning is the story the child hears first which might answer simple questions about the environment. At the second level, the story provides examples of how to behave with others, the third

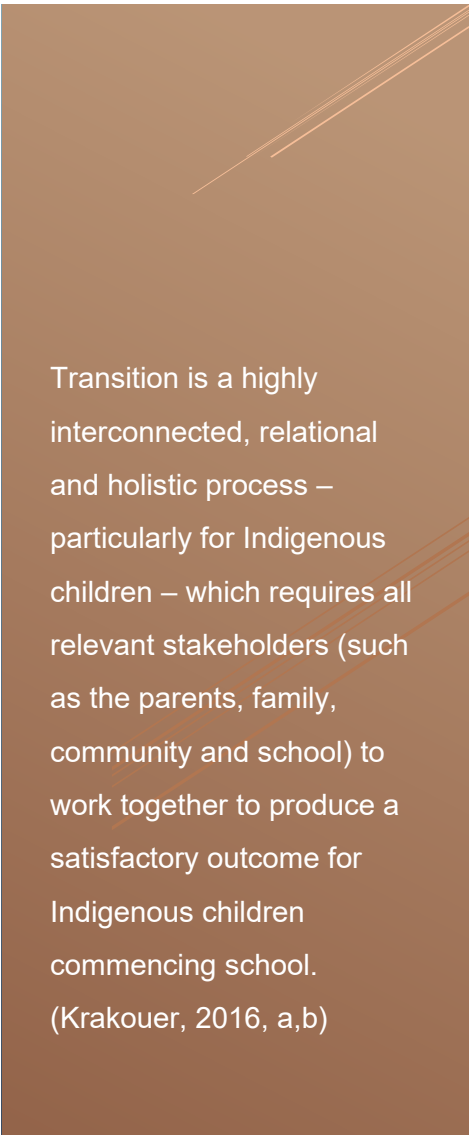
level providing information about relationships with other communities and the environment, and the fourth level of spiritual action. The stories are repeated, perhaps with actions and dances to go with them, and as the Jarjums get older they learn the deeper meanings.

The P4 of perceptual positions provides a sense of belonging to the whole system and a way of looking at transition as an interconnected, holistic process. Using the same ideas of scaffolding stories with deeper meaning at different levels, we can look at transition as a process where the knowledge and skills for Jarjums are gradually scaffolded across the whole space of the Early Years.

Another example of this scaffolding is Sorry Business, where Jarjums are involved from an early stage to start to observe emotions and protocols. As they get older their responsibilities change to perhaps cleaning the house or preparing food, and then as adults they become involved in the planning, or preparation, eventually becoming responsible for the full organisation of the event. The involvement in the same event changes with different roles and responsibilities, with each level practiced before moving to the next level.

Using the same stories and songs across the Early Years sectors can help Jarjums feel familiarity and connections. Each time the learnings can be deeper, going from listening, to actions, learning to do the actions without Mum's help, singing, knowing the words, knowing the meaning behind the words, and then eventually knowing more about the song, its history, and where it comes from.

Using these Indigenous Knowledges and ways of learning can help to build a smooth, seamless transition process. If sectors work together, they can use the same processes of using familiar



Transition is a highly interconnected, relational and holistic process – particularly for Indigenous children – which requires all relevant stakeholders (such as the parents, family, community and school) to work together to produce a satisfactory outcome for Indigenous children commencing school. (Krakouer, 2016, a,b)

examples and gradually building knowledge and ensuring deeper learning across the sectors rather than starting anew each time. Visits to the school build up familiarity with the new space, where Jarjums can learn about the library, the playground, what the bells mean. A buddy program can help provide support where a buddy from the year above explains how everything works and looks after the Jarjum in the visits to the school. When they start at the school the following year, they have already formed relationships.

One participant in the Stronger Smarter Jarjums™ program explains how their transition program involves the pre-school Jarjums going to a Kindy class a few hours a week.

All the staff who do our relief are the staff from the school. We want the children to have a strong relationship with the Kindy teachers, and we start building these relationships really early. So, by the time they get to Kindy, they're not trying to start from scratch. They already know the teachers and the teachers know who they are and how they work and how they learn. [Pre-school teacher]

In Central Queensland, a super playgroup is held once a month in one of the local schools. Several playgroups come together, and this gives the opportunity for the Jarjums to become familiar with the spaces of the school – the school gate, the playgrounds, the school hall. It also provides the opportunity for staff from different playgroups and the school to get together for a yarn.

Holding classes with the teacher the Jarjums will have the following year builds familiarity. When they start the next year, the connections and expectations are there already. Teachers know the Jarjums, their families and connections, how they work and how they learn. The Jarjums know the teacher, the routines and expectations, and they've already 'tested the waters'. The result is that behaviour management is easier, and the Jarjums are socially and emotionally ready for the next step and settled and ready to start learning.

Conclusion

For all Jarjums, a quality learning environment in the Early Years will provide high-quality teaching, quality relationships and a sense of participation and belonging. However, an education system built on western values, where the majority of educators are non-Indigenous, does not immediately lend itself to promoting a sense of cultural identity, participation and belonging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. If a

positive sense of identity is important to resilience and well-being in the Early Years, teachers need to deliberately create a third cultural space where Jarjums are comfortable and feel they belong. Our education system needs to recognise the existence of this third cultural space and create a space where our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums are embraced, acknowledged and celebrated with Indigenous Knowledge firmly embedded as the guiding beacon.

This has significant implications for Early Years transitions programs. Starting from a strength-based approach and incorporating Indigenous ways of Knowing, Being and Doing gives the opportunity to think differently about transition. Rather than transition being a process to move the Jarjums as quickly as possible into a western space, it becomes a process of the educator recognising the impact of the third cultural space for all Jarjums and understanding their personal role as an educator in this space. The transition program is underlain by a mesh of High-Expectations Relationships which take a strength-based approach. Using Indigenous ways of Knowing, Being and Doing and working across silos, the Early Years can become a place of interwoven spaces and incremental learning. This means bringing the village together, thinking outside the box, taking local approaches, and igniting conversations across sectors and across communities. Instead of building transitions programs around supporting students to 'fit in' to the system it becomes about looking at where the system can change in ways that will benefit all students.

High-Expectations Relationships and Perceptual Positioning provide the tools to build strength-based relationships with Jarjums and families. These relationships move the educator from the position of 'knowledge holder' to one of deep listening, recognising strengths, understanding the needs and aspirations of families and co-creating power. The differences in approach are subtle, but the results are significant. The learning space becomes one where Jarjums can be themselves, have a sense of belonging and have the strength to become the great learners they want to be. In this way, the transition program creates a rock-solid foundation for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums in the Early Years.

References

- Andreas, C. & Andreas T. 2009. Aligning Perceptual Positions: A new distinction in NLP. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 16(10-12), pp.217-230.
- Armstrong, S., Buckley, S., Lonsdale, M., Milgate, G., Bennetts Kneebone, L., Cook, L. & Skelton, F. (2012). *Starting school : a strengths-based approach towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*. A report prepared by the Australian Council for Educational Research, for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). https://research.acer.edu.au/indigenous_education/27
- AEDC (2015). Australian Early Development Census - National Report 2015. Australian Government Department of Education and Training Canberra, ACT.
- Bhabha, H. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge. New York.
- Bahr, N. (2016). *Building quality in teaching and teacher education*. Australian education review: 61. (Series editor S. Mellor). VIC: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Bishop, R. & Berryman, M. (2009). *The Te Kotahitanga Effective Teaching Profile*. SET: Research Information for Teachers: 2009(2). www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/set/articles/te-kotahitanga-effective-teaching-profile
- Bobongie, F. & Jackson, C. (2018). Stronger Smarter Jarjums: High-Expectations Relationships in the Early Years. *Pedagogy+* 3, 42-45.
- Covey, S. R. (1990). *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Free Press: New York
- Collie, R., Martin, A., & Frydenberg, E. (2017). Importance of social and emotional competence for teachers, for very young children and for at-risk students: latest research. *EduResearch Matters*. Retrieved 31 July 2018 from <http://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=2604>
- Collie, R., Martin, A., Nassar, N. & Roberts, C. (2018). Understanding social and emotional behaviours in early education. *EducationHQ Australia*. May 21, 2018. Retrieved 31 July 2018 from <https://au.educationhq.com/news/48578/understanding-social-and-emotional-behaviours-in-early-education/#>
- Davis, J. 2018. Durithunga – Growing, nurturing, challenging and supporting urban Indigenous leadership in education. PhD thesis.
- Davis, J. & Grose, S. (2008) Which way? What happens when embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in schools meets the professional standards for

- teachers and an accountability matrix? In World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education 7 - 11 December 2008, Victoria, Victoria Aboriginal Education Association Inc.
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2009). *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Barton: ACT, DEEWR.
- Dickson, G. (2016). Explainer: the largest language spoken exclusively in Australia – Kriol. *The Conversation*, April 26, 2016. Retrieved 27 March 2020 from <https://theconversation.com/explainer-the-largest-language-spoken-exclusively-in-australia-kriol-56286>
- Grant, E. (1998). *My Land. My Tracks*. Innisfail, Queensland: Innisfail & District Education Centre.
- Grant, E. (2016). Transcript: Knowledge leader – Uncle Ernie Grant. Foundations for Success. Queensland Government. Retrieved on 31 July 2018 from <http://www.foundationforsuccess.qld.edu.au/transcript-knowledge-leader-uncle-ernie-grant>.
- Hirst, M., Jervis, N., Visagie, K., Sojo, V. & Cavanagh, S. (2011). *Transition to primary school: a review of the literature*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Hoag, J.D. (2018). Perceptual Positions. NLP. Retrieved on 31 July 2018 from <http://www.nlpis.com/articles/perceptualPositions.php>
- Krakouer, J. (2016a). Literature review relating to the current context and discourse surrounding Indigenous early childhood education, school readiness and transition programs to primary school. Australian Council for Educational Research. https://research.acer.edu.au/indigenous_education/43/
- Krakouer, J. (2016b). Relationships are paramount: Indigenous children's transition. 25 August 2016. <https://www.aracy.org.au/blog/relationships-are-paramount-indigenous-childrens-transition>
- Lewthwaite, B. E., Osborne, B., Lloyd, N., Boon, H., Llewellyn, L., Webber, T., Laffin, G., Harrison, M., Day, C., Kemp, C., & Wills, J. (2015). Seeking a Pedagogy of Difference: What Aboriginal Students and Their Parents in North Queensland Say About Teaching and Their Learning. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(5). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2015v40n5.8>
- Llewellyn, L.L., Boon, H.J., & Lewthwaite, B.E. (2018). Effective behaviour Management Strategies for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students: A Literature Review. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(1). Retrieved from <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol43/iss1/1>

- Martin, K. (2008). *Please Knock Before you Enter: Aboriginal Regulation of Outsiders and the Implications for Researchers*. Brisbane: Post Pressed.
- Matthews, C. (2015) Maths as Storytelling: Maths is beautiful. In K. Price (Ed) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education: An introduction for the teaching profession*. Second edition. Cambridge University Press: Melbourne, VIC.
- Mills, K.A., Sunderland, N., & Davis, J. (2013). Yarning circles in the literacy classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, 67(4), pp.285-289.
- McNaughton, S. & Mei Kuin Lai. (2008). *A model of school change for culturally and linguistically diverse students in New Zealand: a summary and evidence from systematic replication*, Woolf Fisher Research Centre, University of Auckland (paper commissioned by IELI and QUT)
- Nakata, M. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and the cultural interface: underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems. *IFLA Journal*, 28(5/6), 281-292.
- Nakata, M. (2007). The Cultural Interface. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 36 p.7 - 14
- Pascoe, B. (2014). *Dark Emu: Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?* Magabala Books
- Rigney, L. (2010). Indigenous education: The challenge of change. *Every Child*, 16(4). Early Childhood Australia. <http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/every-child-magazine/every-child-index/every-child-vol-16-4-2010/indigenous-education-challenge-change-free-article/>
- Rose, M. (2012). The 'Silent Apartheid' as the Practitioner's Blindspot. In: Price, K (ed). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sarra, C. (2011a) *Strong and Smart – Towards a Pedagogy for Emancipation. Education for first peoples*. Routledge: New Studies in Critical Realism and Education.
- Sarra, C. (2011b). *Time for a High-Expectations relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia*. <http://chrissarra.wordpress.com/2011/10/19/time-for-a-high-expectations-relationship-between-indigenous-and-non-indigenous-australia/>
- Sarra, C., Spillman, D., Jackson, C., Davis, J., & Bray, J. (2018). High-Expectations Relationships: A Foundation for Enacting High Expectations in all Australian schools. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*. First View. doi 10.1017/jie.2018.10
- Schein, E. (2010). *Organisational Culture and Leadership*. Fourth edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Stronger Smarter Institute (2014). *High-Expectations Relationships: A Foundation for Quality Learning Environments in all Australian schools*. Stronger Smarter Institute Limited Position paper. <http://strongersmarter.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SSI-HER-Position-Paper-Final-lowres.pdf>
- Sveiby, K., & Skuthorpe, T. (2006). *Treading Lightly: The Hidden Wisdom of the World's Oldest People*. Allen & Unwin: Crows Nest, NSW
- Taylor, C. (2016). *The E4Kids study: Assessing the effectiveness of Australian early childhood education and care programs*. Final report to the Partner Organisations of the Effective Early Educational Experiences (E4Kids) study.
- Ungunmerr, M. R. (1988). Dadirri: Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness. Retrieved 11 Oct 2019 from <http://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/about-dadirri/dadirri-text>.
- Ungunmerr, M.R. (2017). To be listened to in her teaching: Dadirri: Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness [online]. *Earthsong Journal: Perspectives in Ecology, Spirituality and Education*, Vol. 3, No. 4, Autumn 2017: 14-15. Retrieved 27 March 2020 from <https://search-informit-com-au.alumniproxy.library.qut.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=732386012034745;res=IELHSS> ISSN: 1449-8367.
- Wigglesworth, G., & Billington, R. (2013). Teaching Creole-speaking children: Issues, concerns and resolutions for the classroom. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* 36(3), p.234-249.

Discussion questions

One purpose in releasing the paper is to promote discussion among the Stronger Smarter alumni and discussions in the Institute generated many questions and points for further discussion. Here are some suggested questions for discussion with your colleagues.

High-Expectations with Self

- ▶ *To what extent do I recognise my own views of the world and how those may differ to those of families and Jarjums from other cultures?*

High-Expectations Relationships with families

- ▶ *What are we doing to understand our families better – to understand the rules and expectations at home and how they may differ to our Early Childhood space, and to understand the expectations and desires of all our families?*
- ▶ *What are we doing to make sure our families feel comfortable and understand our expectations and we understand their expectations?*
- ▶ *What have we done/ can we do to create a High-Expectations school culture with parents, families and the school community?*
- ▶ *What have we done to understand the role the Jarjums plays in the family, their family values?*
- ▶ *How are we supporting our Jarjums to negotiate the cultural interface?*

Building smooth transitions

- ▶ *How have we embraced and built on the knowledge Jarjums' bring to the classroom?*
- ▶ *What have we done in our school to understand how to prepare our Jarjums for the next space?*
- ▶ *How can we build stronger relationships with educators in the next space, and make sure the Jarjums also build those relationships early on?*
- ▶ *How can we plan with educators in the next space for smooth transitions?*

High-Expectations Relationships in the school community

- ▶ *What opportunities exist to engage the wider community in our Early Childhood spaces?*
- ▶ *Are there ways we can involve local Elders in the teaching and planning to make our Early Childhood spaces feel more familiar for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums?*
- ▶ *How can we find ways to 'bring the village together' through a non-threatening space where everyone can talk and share idea? (e.g. super playgroups, under 8s week etc)*

Appendix 1: Examples of High-Expectations Relationships responses

Situation	Low Expectations Response	High Expectations Rhetoric (Believing)	High-Expectations Relationship (Enacting)	Building transitions (Enacting)
A Jarjum turns up at school without their backpack with their books/ coloured pencils or food.	Ignore this, expect that this always happens for this student, and provide replacements	Tell the student off and send a note back to the parent to tell them they need to have this tomorrow.	Have a conversation with the parent when they pick up the child to find out what happened and discover how you can help.	Build the relationship with the parent, make sure they know what is needed, provide information packs or reminders to parents.
A Jarjums takes their shoes off in class and refuses to put them back on.	Ignore it, even though it is against school rules and has safety implications in the playground.	Send a behaviour card home reminding parents that the school has high expectations.	Recognise what might be happening for the Jarjum and negotiate the space so that the shoes on routine gradually becomes normal.	Have conversations across the Early Years spaces to make sure the routines and expectations of the next space are practiced before the Jarjum gets there.
Jarjums are fighting over a toy or a resource and refusing to share.	Give the Jarjums a second toy or resource to resolve the argument quickly.	Punish the Jarjum by making them sit on a chair for 5 minutes to think about what they've done.	Talk to all students about being kind to each other and sharing and taking turns.	Start building the skills early so that Jarjums have the skills in their backpack about what to do in these situations.
A Jarjum is consistently absent from class.	Ignore and accept that this Jarjums has poor attendance or accept the reasons the family provides.	Talk to the family about the importance of attendance.	Explore the reasons for low attendance with the parents and provide ideas and solutions.	Build relationships with both the family and the Jarjum early on so that the Jarjum feels valued in the learning environment and wants to be there.
Parents don't seem to want to come into the learning space or help their Jarjums in their learning.	Ignore based on a belief that these parents just aren't interested in their Jarjums education.	Send a note around to parents about the importance of being involved in their Jarjums education.	Have one-on-one conversations with parents to understand their beliefs and expectations and build a safe space.	Build strategies into the transition from home to Preschool process to empower families as second educators.
Jarjums are noisy and disruptive in class.	Ignore – this is a normal situation. Let them do their favourite activity.	Discipline the Jarjums – keep strictly to the rules.	Build a High-Expectations Relationship with the Jarjum that gradually builds towards the high expectation.	Build an understanding of Jarjums culture and home lives to build a culturally inclusive classroom.