

When challenged, how do you respond?

Educators taking Responsibility for Change



Honour the humanity of those you serve.

Archbishop Tutu



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Preface

It has become obvious to me that self-reflection over time and in a different place can change your view, and this takes many forms on many levels. It is a privilege to feel that as a facilitator in the SSLP, I have been able to influence change, both directly and indirectly, in the lives of individuals which in turn snowballs to impact the education experience for many. Thank you Stronger Smarter for the opportunity to transform and challenge myself to be the best version of me.

Dyonne Anderson, Principal, Cabbage Tree Island Public School, NSW
Department of Education

Will this idea of 'taking responsibility for change' actually transform anything? At the Stronger Smarter Institute, we believe it will and it is. The data collected by the Institute over the past 14 years demonstrates this fact. Our interviews (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2018a) with participants in the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program™ (SSLP) show the enormous impact on participants in terms of their sense of 'Responsibility for Change.' These are the educators who are in the 'contact zone', working with students on a daily basis to build high expectations relationships and supporting students to be Strong and Smart.

As a result of the personal drive of these individuals, and their confidence to build collaboration and influence others to come on board, we know that Stronger Smarter schools are making a difference. To you, our partners in change, we send our heartfelt thanks for your work in bringing about transformative change for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums.

This paper forms one of the cornerstones pieces of the Stronger Smarter Approach™. It is the third in the series, which includes the already published foundational Strong and Smart thesis and High Expectation Relationships paper.

In this paper, former SSI Chief Operations Officer, Dyonne Anderson is joined by Dr John Davis, Dr Rhonda Coopes, Michal Purcell and Cathy Jackson. The paper incorporates Dyonne's reflections of her experiences with participants in the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program (SSLP) and comments from the evaluations and interviews provided by participants in the program.



stronger smarter
institute



Painting by Morris Sullivan, Aboriginal Education Worker, St Patrick's Primary School, Brewarrina, NSW – describing his experience with the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program.

Flag: Australian and Aboriginal flag- Unity.

Didgeridoo: Holds the flag – embedded history

Spear: Breaking the barriers and moving forward in life.

The cross: faith.

Water dripping: all the emotions shared throughout the program that were brought out of everyone during the Stronger Smarter program.

U shapes and nets: helping each other and anyone who we think needs help – the children, the community etc

Qantas plane: the main transport that delivered us all to the Strong and Smarter program.

Inside circle: Sydney Harbour bridge and centre point tower, Qantas plane been flying us to Sydney and then home to all our final destinations.

Boomerang: returning Boomerang to return everyone home safe to their communities.

Turtle: represents Cherbourg and our journeys and powerful experiences the group went through.

Man's face in the cloud: at Cherbourg the elders talked about spirits, when an elder pass away they mention the Willywagtail looking after us, the man's face is the spirit looking after us.

Circle in the middle of flag: Women and men sitting around a circle sharing stories

Emu: represents all the beautiful women who attended the Stronger Smarter program, who are strong and deadly role models.

Shadow of the Emu: is acknowledging the P3's sitting in the shadow, waiting to get their confidence to talk and try to move to P2. The P3's are not forgotten and are very important people and this shows their strong presence.

Landscape: represented in the top and bottom of the flag – where we all come from.

SS corner of the flag under the turtle: STRONGER AND SMARTER.

Introduction

'In a society where social inequity exists, educators can decide whether they continue to support the status quo, or deliberately choose to challenge these inequities.'

Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017, p 4.

The Stronger Smarter Approach™ (SSA) is grounded in the belief that every educator can make a difference to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their classrooms. As the statement above from the Institute's *Implementing the Stronger Smarter Approach* position paper suggests, every educator can challenge the status quo and take an individual 'responsibility for change'. The Stronger Smarter Approach (Figure 1) is not just about the individual tools, practices or strategies that participants utilise, adjust and implement. It is much more profound and impacting. It is the fact that individuals see themselves differently and, as a result, view their role in the world differently.

The Institute's Stronger Smarter Leadership Program (SSLP) aims to put educators in a place where they feel they have agency, reject attempts to externalise the blame, and can enact high expectations for all students. As one participant explains, it is about having high expectations *for* Jarjums, rather than *of* them.



That's the challenge that Stronger Smarter puts out is – this is always possible for you. You've got to do this part. It's high expectations for kids rather than of them. [SSLP participant]

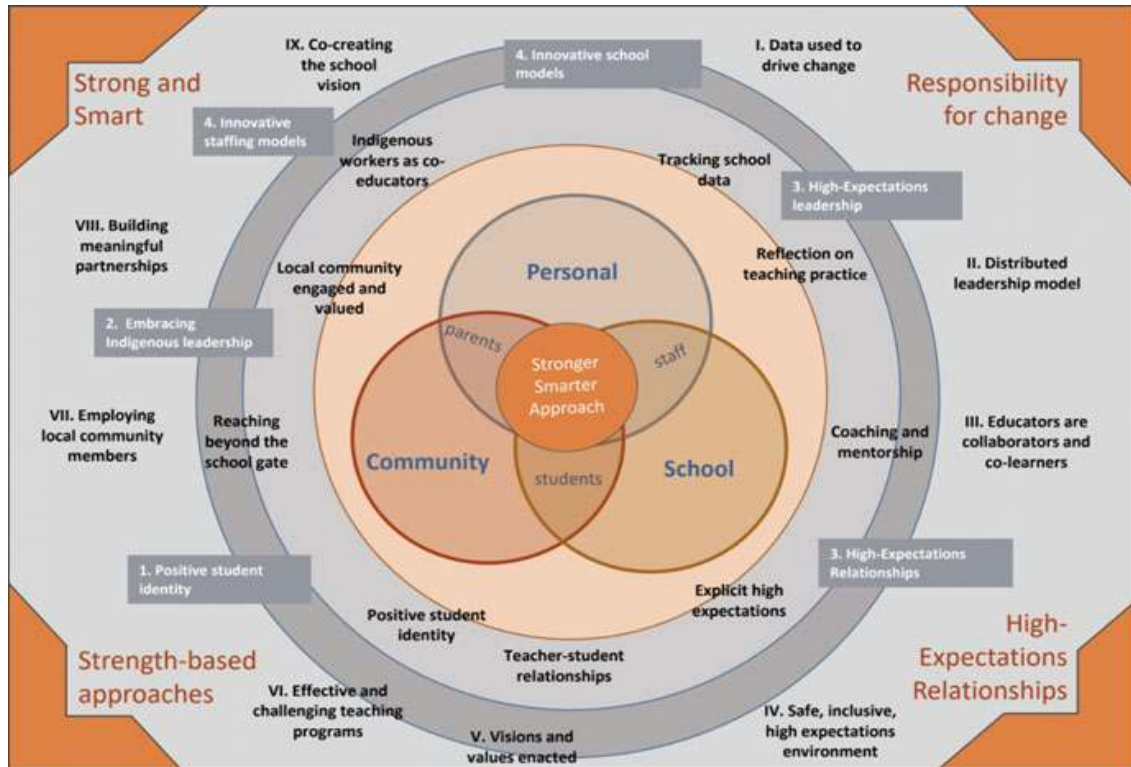


Figure 1. The Stronger Smarter Approach (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2018)

How to go about this, however, is not always obvious. The questions teachers often ask is *'How can we change? What can we do?'* Our schooling system sits in a western framework based on the hierarchy holding the power. It is the people with titles, sitting at the top of the ladder, who determine the agenda, the behaviours and priorities. There is little room for creativity and innovation when the push is compliance and mandatory training and development. Many who do not sit at the top feel disempowered to contribute in the way they would like. This is the challenge to take the individual responsibility for change.

So, imagine the struggle when it comes to implementing change, to do things differently, to include Indigenous Knowledges (IK) as front and centre. Imagine the tensions that may arise when individuals try to challenge the 'status quo'. There is the constant danger that the cry of *"but we've always done it this way!"* will get in the way of change. The truth is that the challenge is the system not the students.

The prospect of tension, however, cannot be an excuse to avoid confronting the need for change. If we can support educators to believe they have agency to contribute to change, then change can happen. This is where the SSLP comes in. As one SSLP participant says, this may not always mean a need to do everything, but small, positive steps can all contribute to transformative change.

I think we've got to do all we can to just fix little things one at a time. It's very hard to do everything but if you can make little changes that are positive then you do change everything. [SSLP Participant].

This paper explores how educators can take a personal responsibility for change and challenge the status quo. This sits beside the Institute's position paper *Stronger Smarter: A Strength based approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education* (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2020) which explores how this sense of responsibility for change then leads to a strength-based approach of doing things 'with people' not 'to people' which underpins the Stronger Smarter Approach.

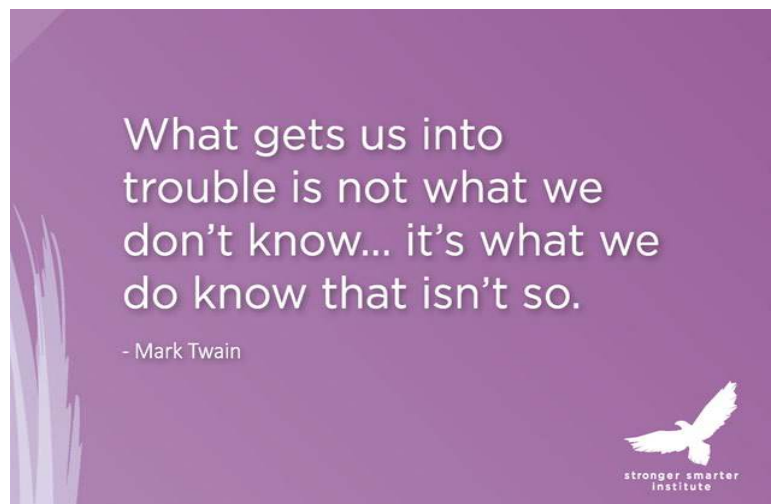


Why weren't we told?

Australia is changing its mind about its own history – there is a conversation going on.

Bruce Pascoe quoted in Gulliatt, 2019

For most Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not their workmates, neighbours, or friends (Habibis, Yaykir, Walter & Elder, 2016, p.59; Walter, 2016, p.93). Polity Research and Consulting working for Reconciliation Australia (2018, p.20) report their findings that '63% of Australians never or rarely socialise with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians'. Most social connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians are interactional, not relational. The attitudes held by non-Indigenous people about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and issues are predominantly formed outside of any social relationship (Walter, 2016, p.105), with the main source of information being the media. The media has the power to construct reality, and often mainstream media coverage does not paint a pretty picture. In the Australian media, there continues to be a level of institutional racism, an entrenched culture that chooses to emphasise conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, to frame reporting through a narrow lens of crisis and failure, and to marginalise and construct Indigenous communities as associated with criminality or conflict (McCausland 2004, p.84; McCallum & Waller, 2017, p.110). As such, the media can be a key perpetrator of structural and social inequity (McCallum & Waller, 2017, p.108).



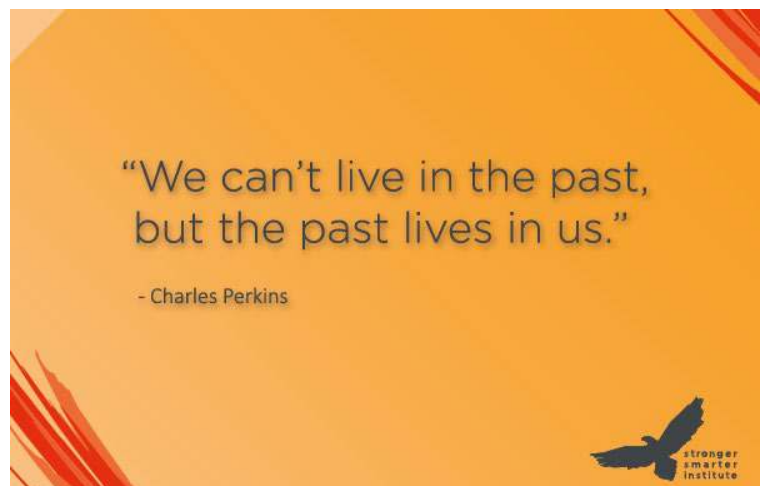
While it is relatively easy to identify those making overtly racist comments, there are more subtle ways the media perpetuates negative viewpoints. Indigenous voices are often missing and when they do occur, they are outnumbered and often mediated by white voices and are 'those that are culturally approved by the white elite' (Bullimore,

1999, p.72). It is as much about what is not reported as what is. More recently, 2014 research from Curtin University showed that media continues to perpetuate racist stereotypes of Indigenous Australians. An examination of the media portrayal of Indigenous Australian public health issues over a twelve-month period and found that, overwhelmingly (74%) of the articles were negative in their portrayal of Indigenous health (Stoneham, Goodman & Daube, 2014). The nature of media portrayal is important when the findings of the Reconciliation Barometer show that 34% of Australians cite the media as their main source of information about Indigenous Australians and that 42% believe the portrayal is negative (Polity Research & Consulting, p.43).

As Aboriginal politician Rosalie Kunoth-Monks explains, the media should be amplifying the story of Indigenous excellence rather than disadvantage (Glanville, 2014).

Their world view changes when you engage their hearts and minds with the idea and possibilities of excellence. Their belief in themselves changes and a new view of Australia emerges It remains incumbent on media at every level to ensure that when telling the indigenous story, they tell the full story to remind all Australians of the good as well as the bad.

Our education system has also been complicit in telling a story where much is left unsaid. In the absence of knowledge, the void has been filled by stereotypes that misrepresent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and cultures as having no relevance in a modern, advanced technological industrial society (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2020). The common 'knowledge base' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been framed by Eurocentric versions of history written by the conqueror, framed by the concept of *terra nullius* and '*Intellectual Nullius*' (Rigney, 2001, p.4). This is the story that has been presented in school and university syllabi and served to shape attitudes and opinions for eons.



And yet, concerns about this mainstream understanding have been voiced as far back as 1936, when anthropologist Bill Stanner used the media, *The Illustrated London News*, to

call the Australian government to account regarding policies related to Indigenous peoples (Mulvaney, 2012). This was against the background of the lead up to the 150th anniversary of the colonisation of Australia'. From the 1930s more Aboriginal voices were calling for change, for government support and for Australian recognition of Aboriginality. The early development of an activist movement was occurring and a number of organisations were formed by some of the people who would go on to organise the 1938 Day of Mourning. One of these was Doug Nicholls who after a long career pursuing a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was knighted in 1972. In a 1937 newspaper report of the planning for the anniversary Day of Mourning Nicholls is quoted in relation to weekly ration issue stating 'We do not want chicken feed. We are not chickens: we are eagles'¹. People were asking to be heard by all Australians, for their stories and perceptions to be recognised and accepted.

In his 1968 Boyer Lecture, Stanner coined the phrase the 'great Australian silence' to describe the version of history dominant in the school curriculum. In 1999, Australian historian, Henry Reynolds, drew attention to this again. In his book, *'Why Weren't We Told'* he shares his realisation that, like generations of Australians, he grew up with a distorted and idealised version of the past (Reynolds, 1999). He describes arriving in Townsville to take up a job.

'I was suddenly confronted with aspects of Australian life that I knew nothing about, things I had not even suspected. There was a history at work, a powerful all-important history which pressed heavily on the present. I knew nothing about it even though I had both honours and a master's degree in history (Reynolds, 1999 p.3).

This sense of 'why weren't we told' is one that is often expressed by SSLP participants. One Principal explains this as follows

I'd come from pretty much a white middle-class background and it [SSLP] really opened my eyes to the hidden cultural perceptions that I have. From that perspective, about high expectations for kids, that really started me on the road of that big piece that drives my leadership values now. [Principal, SSLP participant 2007].

However, the dialogue is changing. Bruce Pascoe's popular book, *Dark Emu* is one example of books capturing the public's imagination with its positive message and

¹ <https://aiatsis.gov.au/exhibitions/day-mourning-26th-january-1938>

optimistic vision of the truth of Aboriginal² culture and Aboriginal people as the world's first scientists (Pascoe, 2014.) Pascoe argues in the book that the true history of pre-colonial Australia was hidden away for more than 150 years. Like Reynolds, he uses primary sourced evidence of earlier 'Settler' voices to show what they saw in early 1800s contact with our First Australians that got ignored later by the writers of the imperial chronicles as Pilger (1992) describes the history written from the perspective of those immersed in the goal of spreading the British empire across the globe. Other Indigenous writers are also bringing Indigenous Knowledge to the forefront – showcasing what has been ignored by the mainstream. Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr (1998) gifts her fellow Australians with *Dadirri* – 'inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness'. Dr Tyson Yunkaporta in *Sand Talk* and Victor Steffensen in *Fire Country* both bring to the stage how ancient knowledge can address contemporary issues (Steffensen, 2020; Yunkaporta, 2019).

This increasing presence of books by Indigenous people writing about Indigenous Knowledge on bookshelves around the country is now bringing to the forefront the conversation about 'Why weren't we told?' Pascoe says, in an interview with The Australian (Gulliatt, 2019), about the success of his book

It just goes to show that Australia is changing its mind about its own history — there's a conversation going on, and people are using the book to open that conversation.



² The reference here is not meant to exclude Torres Strait Islander peoples as among the world's first scientists. It reflects the perspective Pascoe writes from. The same convention is used with quotes from other Aboriginal people.

A journey of self-discovery

'Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for.

Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, 1988

Research by Collie and Martin (2017) has shown that a significant proportion of teachers falls into what they describe as maladaptive motivation profiles, where they are motivated by fear failure, or have in fact, simply accepted failure. Our Australian education system founded in Western culture has effectively endorsed the fact that, when it comes to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums, it is acceptable to be in a failure profile – in other words it is acceptable to believe that locus of control lies externally from the teacher. The SSLP is about turning this around and finding ways to move educators into the positive motivational profiles and back to a position where the locus of control and the responsibility for change lies with the educator (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2018. p.8).

For too long we have been trying to fit a square peg into a round hole...it just doesn't fit. When all your life you have been led to believe one thing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the discovery that you have been misled, lied to, that your view is wrong and could even be considered blatantly racist, will inevitably shift thinking. For some this is immediate, for others it may take time to digest such confronting thoughts.

I wanted to be the best teacher I could be for these kids. If I could understand the perspective that would help them the most - that's what I wanted to do. But in the process you had that confronting of where you stand and what were the reasons why and your whole history and background - of how I had been brought up. I grew up in very white middle class Sydney and didn't know any Aboriginal people and only knew what I was taught at school about Aboriginal histories, which was very minimal. [SSLP alumni]

Deep listening

Understanding the impact of the version of Australia's history perpetuated by the media and our education system and challenging these deep-seated assumptions will only happen with deep reflection and deep listening. The opportunity to sit and reflect on

self is so powerful and yet is often disregarded as not as important as 'getting on with business'. As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reflecting on where we have come as societal priorities have shifted, we realise our fast-paced lifestyle has stolen from us the time to stop and ponder 'what is really going on for me?'

This time to reach into the inner core is described as 'Dadirri' by Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr (1998, p.1), an Elder from the Daly River region in the Northern Territory.

'tapping into a deep spring that is within us. a special quality of my people. I believe it is the most important. It is our most unique gift. It is perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australians. In our language this quality is called dadirri. It is inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness. Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for. It is something like what you call "contemplation".

The SSLP sits in this space of deep reflection and listening that is so often never ventured into. Largely set in the safety of Yarning Circle, the SSLP provides this luxury, this gift, to reach down deep into your inner core and understand what really matters. As one participant says

it was such a good space to really have a think about your practice and what you were doing and how could you make it better for all of the kids. [Assistant Principal 2017]

The four-day experience of the SSLP exposes a rawness that takes courage to share. The realness of the experience and the safety and respect that is built from the openness and generosity of the facilitators allows participants to be real and authentic, to willingly give so much and in many cases share a piece of them that has never been shared before. Some participants describe how an initial reluctance disappears and the willingness to share grows across the four days. There is a sense of cleansing and healing, of transformation, even though this is not the deliberate intention of the experiences.

As a result of finding your true self and discovering your truth, many opportunities arise that brings to the forefront the question 'how do I build on this experience to continue to sustain and grow my sense of purpose and real responsibility?'

So, it's not just a program, but it changes your whole way of being and how you do business in everything, not just in school. [SSLP Participant].



This is the focus of the SSLP – transformational change in the ‘Personal Sphere’ (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017). This space of deep reflection in the SSLP is a significant starting point to guide each participant through an authentic individual journey of self-discovery. This journey involves owning the thoughts, behaviours, highs and lows of self-discovery. Sometimes we are kind to ourselves and sometimes we are not. Sometimes we like what we discover and at times we don’t. It is part of the individual journey for each person to determine.

Wherever the place you sit ... it is what it is. Letting go can be difficult, even terrifying, when you are unsure where you may end up in your own mind. For some the experience is overwhelming, confronting and extremely challenging. It is difficult to own your own thoughts, behaviours and attitudes when they may have been damaging to others. This is a sophisticated unravelling or pulling back of the layers to expose a realness which makes you extremely vulnerable.

The SSLP is a program that is designed as a learning experience but the truth telling that is necessary can be a challenge that requires courage to face. Some SSLP participants experience a level of reaffirming that ‘I thought what I was doing was OK but I didn’t really know if that was so’. For many it is a bringing the unknown into the light and realising that they have probably not given themselves enough credit for what they do know and do. Either way, as one Principal describes, Stronger Smarter changes the way of doing business.



When you go through it [SSLP] and you really reflect on that, it does become a way of being. So, it's not just a program, but it changes your whole way of being and how you do business in everything, not just in school. [Principal]

The planting of the seed that you have something special to offer and a new way to view the world is revitalising for educators. It is why the Institute presents provocations and takes the positions it does for the sake of our Jarjums. Provocations provide the stimulus for personal learning journeys to authentically confront underlying assumptions and reflect on the steps needed for transformational change in education. In a system of inflexible curriculum delivery, reporting and assessment regimes, rather than continuous diagnosis of a student's learning needs and progress (Gonski, 2018, ix), it is not surprising if educators feel stale or restricted by the system's constraints and boundaries. The sense of new purpose and reason to continue for participants shines another light on the value of the SSLP. As one participant says



It's such a personal reflection journey that I don't think you're the same person after you do it. It changes your ideas and thinking about things which then influences how you will teach kids, because you learn the relationships are the key to everything. [Assistant Principal]

Participants, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, leave with fresh eyes and a new world view, one that had never been explored before. There is a real sense of purpose and permission to go back and explore and discover the students in their school and see them differently, framed within a set of High-Expectations Relationships (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014; Sarra, Spillman, Jackson, Davis & Bray, 2018). This is empowering for participants and life changing for students. One School Learning Support Officer explains this as 'lighting the fire in her belly.'

Stronger Smarter has changed my life both professionally and personally. I am proud of what I do and will be forever thankful to the institute for lighting the fire in my belly. You don't have to be a teacher to make a difference. [School Learning Support Officer, SSLP 2015]

Stronger Smarter prioritises other understandings that are not necessarily obvious. Jumping to conclusions and making assumptions that are incorrect or damaging to building relationships is challenged once you learn to practice self-reflection openly and honestly. It is refreshing and liberating. There is a rejuvenation reaction with an energy and appetite to take a renewed approach to education with commitment and determination. Dyonne Anderson describes how one participant in a program felt enthused and reinvigorated. Dyonne notes that this is not such an extraordinary comment, as it is one shared regularly.

I will never forget a participant coming up to me and thanking the SSI for allowing her to attend the SSLP. This graduate was near the end of her career and had started planning for retirement but as a result of the SSLP experience she felt invigorated and enthused to give as much as she possibly could before retiring, she was also considering extending her time in the classroom.

A sense of urgency

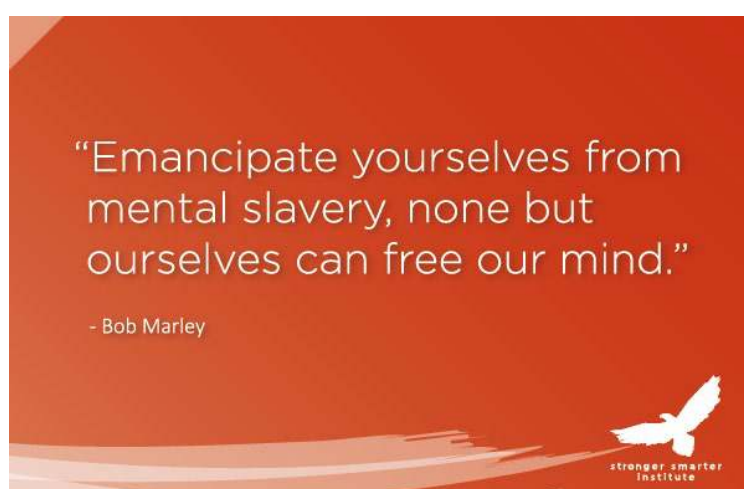
Many participants leave the program with a profound understanding and responsibility to lead change. Once eyes have been opened, it becomes impossible to ignore the pull to do things differently. It is an 'ahha' moment for many, with a sense of urgency to rectify the misled picture that has set up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to fail or be excluded. There is a tension for teachers who need to 'unlearn' what they have been misled to believe was good practice.



One participant described this as being empowered:

I walked away feeling really empowered by a standard that, a position that we all have to take on is having those high expectations. And allowing and giving our children the opportunity to rise to those standards as well. [Teacher, SSLP 2018]

The responsibility for change is even greater for those non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who have been working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education for a long time: those who understand the complexities and the danger of getting it wrong and where there is a level of caution and hesitation. One Principal describes how this involved not walking past a standard that shouldn't be accepted.



One of the sayings that stuck with me – the Ghandi quote, “Be the change you want to see in the world”. We decided we were going to not walk past anything, just take on a more pronounced leadership role, a more involved role, not step back, and try and step forward. And if we do step back, keep going. [Principal].

Another describes how this sense of responsibility for change may not always be deliberate but becomes an unconscious way of doing things differently.

It's not something that you consciously go 'Oh what part of Stronger Smarter can I use in this situation, or with this issue, or move this forward?' It just happens. And then you think later on, you reflect on it later on, and you go, that's exactly what the facilitators were talking about. [Principal].

For many it is straight forward.

I've always been a believer that you can unlock the desire to learn in any child and it's up to the teacher to go about it. So that high expectation of not only high expectation of what you do with these students but also high expectations of yourself as an educator. That really, really resonated for me. [Deputy Principal, SSLP, 2013]

The SSLP provides a set of processes, insights and knowledge owned by Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander people and being shared willingly. As already discussed, the SSLP introduces participants to Dadirri or deep listening as a tool, along with the processes of Yarning Circles and check in/check out which will all contribute to foundational relationship building. In the Strength based approaches paper (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2020) the reader is introduced to processes for co-creating a Cultural Action Plan grounded in the Coconut Tree symbol created by great Torres Strait Islander leader and thinker Uncle Steve Mam (Mam, Elu, Trevallion & Reid, 1993)

For participants, there is a level of sensitivity required to bring back these processes to ensure culturally responsive ways of being are prioritised for students in their care. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators the complexities are well known and respected but with challenges about how to be inclusive of all perspectives when ownership of knowledge is shared.

The SSLP gives participants the tools to challenge the misalignment between how it needs to be and what it is. As one Principal explains

We used Stronger Smarter to really shape our thinking and our conversations, to really highlight the importance of positive, self-affirming conversations that aren't deficit. It's not acceptable for any staff member to have a low expectation here and that's modelled by the staff [Principal]

Collective thinking: Enacting Yarning Circles?

All Australians want to be valued for the knowledge they bring to the learning situation and to be respected as equals in Australian society (Herbert, 2012, p.92). In Aboriginal ways there is still a level of respect bestowed upon those who are elderly and experienced and hold greater responsibility. However, there is always an opportunity for all to contribute in a collaborative and constructive way by practicing the age old 'circle' to set discussions, solve problems and celebrate together.

This is what the SSLP and 'circle' approaches brings to the table a sense of deep listening and ensuring that everyone has a voice. The setting of circle, 'a sophisticated communication technique, which has grown and regrown around the country since time immemorial' (Davis, 2017, p.13), kinnects to higher order thought process of creating equal and equitable communication systems. The Yarning circle disrupts the power balance because it 'cuts across the formality of identity' of the participants (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p.47). Yarning circles facilitate respect and inclusion in the sharing of knowledge (Gruppetta et.al., 2018, p.6). Sheehan (2011, p. 70) describes yarning circles

as 'de-centering' as authority moves from one speaker to the next and part of the safety of circle coming from each 'speaking responsibly from self and not about others' in a manner that enriches creativity of the conversation.

These Indigenous Knowledge systems have survived colonisation. In today's world, they offer a culturally responsive way to be together, focused on a strength- based approach. This way of thinking equips SSLP participants with ways to move forward. Sometimes it is to have patience, sometimes it is about listening perhaps to students.... perhaps to the community... because maybe you don't have the right plan and listening to others may set it on the right track. Maybe it is adding in additional steps to get to where you want to be. Ungunmerr (1998, p. 2) provides the best understanding of this patience and deep listening.



".... the contemplative way of Dadirri spreads over our whole life. It renews us and us peace. It makes us feel whole again. In our Aboriginal way, we learnt to listen from our earliest days. We could not live good and useful lives unless we listened.... Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. There is nothing more important than what we are attending to...."

As an SSLP participant describes, this patience and active listening can lead to challenging yourself.

Listening –as leaders we don't always do that all that well – just listening to what our community is saying – listen to that feedback. If you're listening, you're building that high-expectations relationship. It's deep relationships and deep understanding of what you're about. [SSLP participant]

For others, the sense of ensuring that all voices are heard is empowering. As one Aboriginal Education Worker describes

I've found my courage and I've found my voice, but to do it in a right way as well. So, I make sure that I have high expectations of myself. Because I think to have a high expectation relationship of someone else, then you've got to have a part in that as well. [Aboriginal Education Worker]

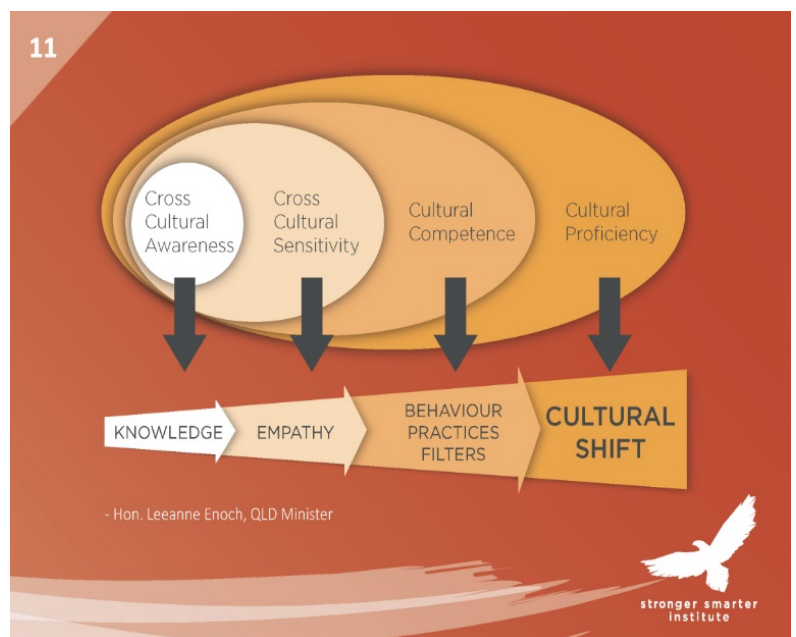
When challenged, how do you respond?

'The lessons learnt from strategic intervention programs are to be built in to core business to become everyone's business.'

Wonnarua educator, John Lester, (2011, p.223)

How do we deal with complexities when they arise? When things get tough, do we give up or do we look for other ways to deal with complexity? The SSLP uses the provocations of "When challenged how do you respond?" This is how the SSLP sets up participants to own their responsibilities. The biggest influence that you can have is on yourself, when you adopt the mindset that you have control over what you think, say and do. This becomes ownership of values, thoughts and behaviours that have impacted negatively on how you view and relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, the SSLP does not encourage feelings of guilt, but rather of self-reflection. Learning is powerful when it comes from within, giving the ability to shift and change, and leading to a cultural shift that promotes cultural proficiency.

Dyonne Anderson describes how she saw this change in one SSLP participant



I recall a participant who had never been considered as an influential person or saw themselves in that light. The role that they were in was a new, challenging and very complex one. I had concerns that this participant was struggling and had been placed in a position that was uncomfortable and challenging. But somehow that challenge ignited a determination and fire that I had seen before with many participants. This transformation was illuminating with a person with a generous heart who had been ill

equipped to use the strengths that were innate. If there was a person who could influence others to listen it was this participant. She had a plan to change the deficit perceptions of her people and to bring joy through her change process.

When challenged how do you respond - with defensiveness or possibility?



Educators can oftentimes be stuck in old ways, 'doing what they have always done'. There are ways to break away from the usual sceptical view. Each time we seek to answer questions, more questions pop up. We find the more we learn the less we know. We penetrate through another layer of understanding of

what life in the context is all about, only to recognise the existence of many additional layers that lie beyond our current understanding (Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1998). The move away from the aim to get Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education to sit within a western view is powerful. The personal shift and responsibility of every educator is to recognise and respect the existence of multiple worldviews and knowledge systems and to find ways to understand and relate to the world in its multiple dimensions and varied perspectives. This offers learning that does not need to involve exchanging one world view at the expense of the other.

One program facilitator describes an outcome from the program as:

It is so rewarding to experience the thrill and excitement when participants complete the first phase of the SSLP with a plan of action. The plan is designed carefully, and the energy is high. The task is taken seriously and becomes action research to build the bank of successful work and strategies.

One Principal describes this as follows.

Since returning to my school my response and reflection on my responsibility for change has shifted or was much clearer and more definite in my direction and plan of action. I knew that this was not about the individual strategies, processes or activities that I could randomly implement. It was much more about a holistic overarching approach to build a solid and collaborative base for all to contribute and buy into. [Principal]

For non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander participants there is a new sense of confidence to give themselves permission to go back to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and connect to their students and families with understanding of and respect for protocol. They return willing and equipped to take an active lead in changing the deficit conversations and the direction for the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jarjums: to go forward and know that their involvement is needed and appreciated. As one participant explains it – to be the change you want to see in the world.

'Be the change you want to see in the world' because I feel that I'm not going to get that critical mass, and I'm not going to bring the rest of my circle with them – I'm going to end up being the pointy end again – if they don't see me being that change myself.
[Principal]

Challenging the status quo

We are all capable of change and our personal sense of responsibility is sometimes determined by a sense of power or powerlessness. There are barriers we face every day, but how you view that barrier determines your action. If your whole life there has been a sense of powerlessness or a feeling that you are invisible due to your cultural background, gender, sexuality or religious beliefs the responsibility for change can be overwhelming.

Imagine thinking all your life that no one ever listened to you seriously, and now finding you have the tools to confidently challenge the status quo. An empowerment driven by passion, a deep connection to self and a new recognition of your role opens up possibilities that were never considered.

Moving from the personal sphere to seeing colleagues and students through a different lens opens up a fairer and more lenient view. There is a deeper understanding and



appreciation of difference: different is just different and the unknown is unfamiliar. Being less judgmental of others allows for an appreciation of the strengths of others. Fresh eyes and a clear mind allow for a different approach: a strength-based approach that facilitates our individual responsibility for change.

There is room for everyone to come on board to recognise the injustices and inequalities that feature in the lives of our most marginalised people. Our First Nations knowledge keepers who have survived and prospered when others did not even exist are welcomed in this space. Their knowledge is forefront.

Whatever the process and whatever the time it takes if as individuals, as a community and part of a larger society to shift our thinking, if we get to another place and time that is honourable and fair, it is always worth the wait. There is no place for blame but a place for new learning.

What is your personal journey and how will it make a difference?

Who will join us?

I feel as though I have come a full circle and the strength of the circle is generational. Our people have sustained and evolved practices to bring us to this place today to celebrate our achievements. There is strong Cultural Vitality in communities in the face of marginalisation. It is difficult when we reflect on our history of barbaric acts and horrendous attempts to wipe out a race of people for no other reason other than an unfounded sense of superiority and blatant greed. It is not easy to own the lies and inequities inherent in colonial history that persist into contemporary Australian society. That is why the work of the Stronger Smarter Institute and the Stronger Smarter Approach places all people as influencers with the personal duty and way forward as an individual opportunity to contribute to a better society: one more free of racism but connected through humanity and humility that tugs at the heart to bring a realness to life.

Dyonne Anderson.

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