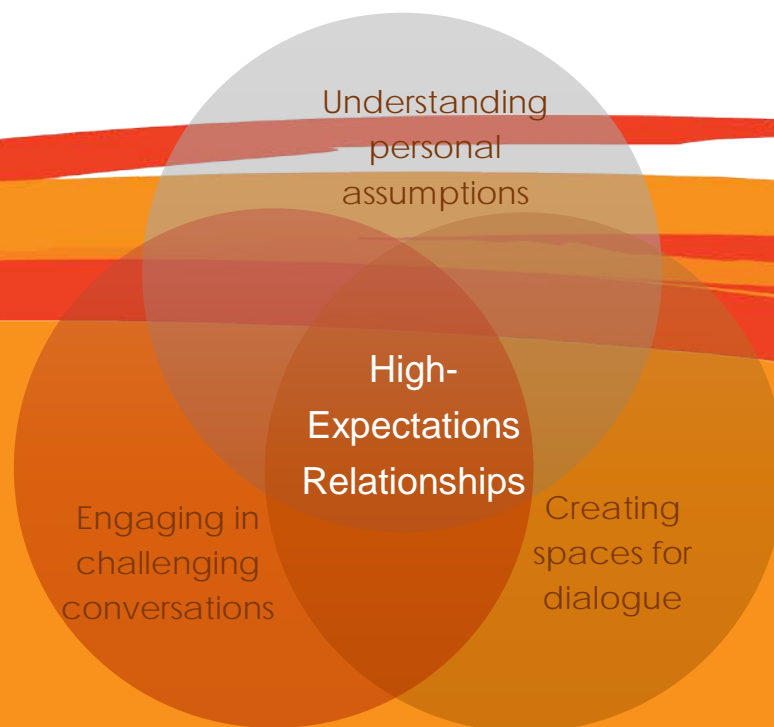


High-Expectations Relationships – Illustrations of Practice



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The High-Expectations Relationships Behavioural Index

A High-Expectations Relationships is an authentic two-way relationship that is both supportive and challenging

(Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014)

The Stronger Smarter Institute has developed a High-Expectations Relationships Behavioural Index (HERBI) to describe the behaviours associated with High-Expectations Relationships.

The HERBI provides a Relational Lens where fair, socially-just relating builds a space of trust where firm, critically-reflective relating and challenging conversations can be achieved.

This document describes the elements of the HERBI relational lens and provides illustrations of practice from educators who have undertaken the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program (SSLP).

For further information on how High-Expectations Relationships can support educators to develop strong relationships in schools, see the Institute's position paper on High-Expectations Relationships.

<http://strongersmarter.com.au/resources/high-expectations-relationships/>

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge all our SSLP alumni who have taken the time to talk to us about how they are implementing High-Expectations Relationships in their schools and classrooms.

A number of the illustrations of practice provided in this document were undertaken by undergraduate researchers from the School of Social Science, University of Queensland. (Fleming et al, 2016)



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High-Expectations Relationships

High-Expectations Relationships is about both 'high expectations' in terms of performance, and supporting this through building strong relationships.

High-Expectations Relationships are a dialogue built on respect and deep listening. This is a relationship where both parties feel empowered, understand each other's perspectives and their voice is heard.

High-Expectations Relationships is about bringing both sides together and finding the balance of being both fair and firm – supportive and challenging.

Getting the relationship right

“You see the people who have the really strong relationships, but there's not as much accountability for the kids. Or the people that have just really high expectations, but there's no relationship and the kids either just don't come to school or there's always a power struggle and the kids take off anyway.” Catherine's role is to help staff with that balance between being supportive and still having high expectations in the classroom

Catherine

Firm and Fair

Being fair in a relationship

- ▶ engage in acknowledging and enabling processes
- ▶ take time to observe and acknowledge the strengths of an individual or community.
- ▶ honour the humanity of others by signaling a belief in their sense of capacity and worth, and finding ways to support, develop and embrace existing capacity

Being firm in a relationship

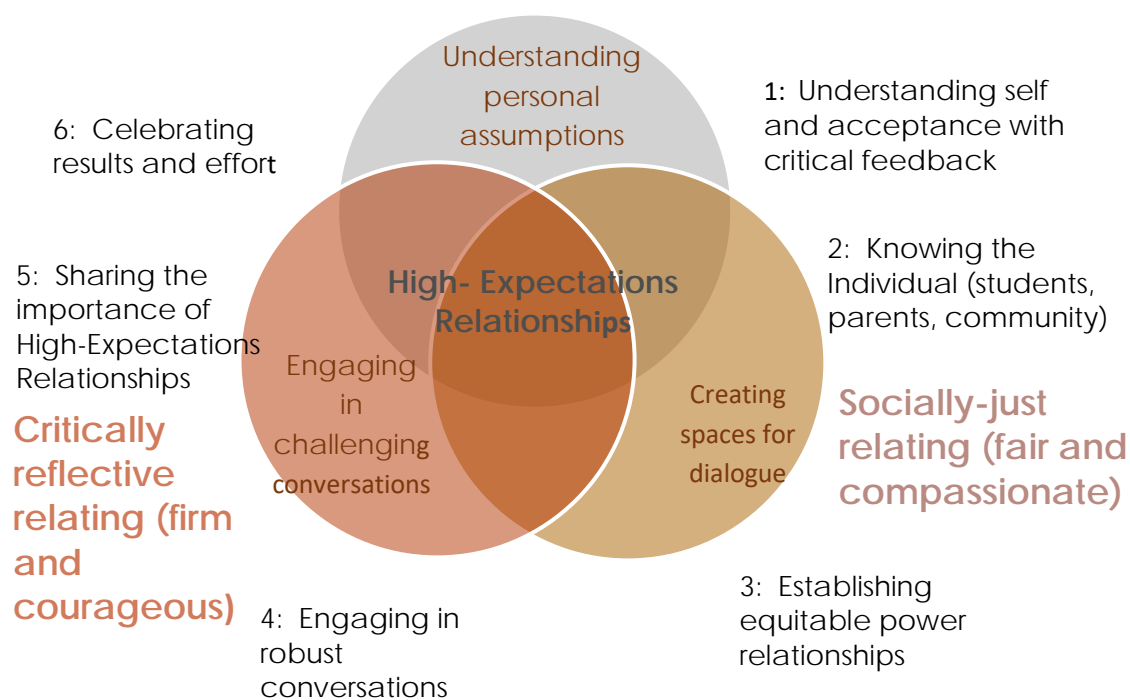
- ▶ have courage and be prepared to challenge and intervene when we need to (at times when individuals or communities are clearly not exercising their responsibilities appropriately).
- ▶ challenge behaviour and engage in an authentic dialogue with children and parents to discover what they might need to change
- ▶ reflect on our own classroom practice to consider what we might need to do differently

The HERBI relational lens

The relational lens for the High-Expectations Relationships Behavioural Index covers six areas:

1. Understanding self and acceptance with critical feedback
2. Knowing the Individual
3. Establishing equitable power relationships
4. Engaging in robust conversations
5. Sharing the importance of High-Expectations Relationships
6. Celebrating results an effort

The High-Expectations Relationships Behavioural Index





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1. Understanding Personal Assumptions

Critical Reflection

- Identify self as a unique being

Robust conversations and critical feedback

- Seek feedback, act on challenging feedback.

Celebrating achievements

- Recognise and celebrate personal results and effort.

Personal assumptions

Our social conditioning and 'out of awareness' beliefs and assumptions may mean that voicing a commitment to high expectations is not always matched by actions in the classroom. These underlying assumptions may lead to actions, behaviours or pedagogic choices that do not support these high expectations beliefs. For Indigenous education, this is compounded by public discourses around deficit positioning and historical conditioning where Indigenous students do not see achieving in school as part of their cultural identity.

The starting point for the High-Expectations Relationships Relational Lens is critical self-reflection. The two key elements are professional accountability and taking a strength-based approach.

Professional accountability

Professional accountability means being aware of subconscious patterns of accepting watered down expectations, and understanding the impacts of colonization.

A mindset shift leads educators to have higher expectations of themselves, their practices and relationships. Educators challenge themselves and others to expect more, or both themselves and their students.

A different lens – taking a strength-based approach:

As educators see the world through a different lens and shifting thinking, they reject deficit discourses and instead build to build on the culture and strengths of children without lowering expectations,

This can involve putting a mirror up to both self and the school and then setting up the consultative approaches to seek feedback and discuss ideas, and find innovative ways of thinking.

Seeing every student as a whole person, an individual, rather than just a set of behaviours, leads educators down a different path of finding out how the student is feeling from their point of view.



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This leads to

- ▶ a mindset of not using excuses, or using the fair aspect of relationships to let expectations slip
- ▶ a continued expectation of being able to push students that little bit further and expect that students can learn every day, while still caring for students individually and dealing with the underlying issues that caused the student to arrive late or misbehave.
- ▶ differentiated teaching, putting in place things to minimize the behaviours so that the student can still learn, and switching the teaching around and making adjustments when necessary.

Understanding Self

Critical reflection

- ▶ Identify self as a unique being and acknowledge the specific dispositions, strengths, weaknesses and cultural assumptions shaping self.
- ▶ Identify the ways in which one's uniqueness affects patterns of behaviour and relationships with others and acknowledge the immediate and lasting impacts of personal behaviour.
- ▶ Undertake critical self reflection.
- ▶ Understand the elements of a High Expectations Relationship, apply it to self, and able to explain a personal "high-expectations" philosophy

Robust conversations and critical feedback

- ▶ Seek feedback on self and have discussions to understand the feedback.
- ▶ Accept and act on challenging feedback

Celebrating achievements

- ▶ Recognise and celebrate personal results and effort, and share personal results and effort with others.



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Being accountable

Dave says Stronger Smarter has also been about having high expectations of himself. “When you talk about high expectations, it’s not just high expectations of others, it’s also of ourselves. So making sure I’m accountable for every program or initiative I put in place and seeing it through is something that I’ve taken a lot of pride in and probably given a lot more attention to since doing the course. ”

Dave



Professional accountability



it is about having high expectations of yourself, your practices, your relationships and the whole feeling of the school and how the school ran

Expectations of yourself

The delivery of high-expectations in the school was in place, we thought, but discussing high-expectations through the Stronger Smarter Philosophy put a different light on what high expectations could look like, and how you could bring everyone into that expectation throughout the community. It wasn’t just about having high expectations of the children, it was about having high expectations of yourself, your practices your relationships and the whole feeling of the school and how the school ran.

Lesley

Personal responsibility

Saeed says a key factor in the success of the school is the fact that all staff have personal responsibility for improving Indigenous outcomes. “We talk about the performance line – do you want to perform above or below the performance line? There are lots of things below the performance line, and they are all excuses. You can blame someone else, you can justify, you can deny, you can hand over, you can hand ball. Above the performance line there is only one thing, and that is personal responsibility. What do you need to do differently in your paid profession to engage students better?”

Saeed



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Holding up the mirror



“It’s putting a mirror
up to yourself and
the school

and then setting up
the consultative
approaches to seek
feedback and
discuss ideas

Putting a mirror on the school

Sharon started by going around the school and writing down what she saw – how the staff were interacting, what the classrooms looked like, what the office looked like. She started running every second staff meeting as a yarning circle. Sharon says this was awkward at first, but is now empowering.

She has been able to use the yarning circle to talk about her ‘mirror on the school’, and this consultative approach allowed for feedback and then to look at some challenging questions.

Sharon

Putting a mirror on yourself

Paul has a chart on the back of his office door that shows the key players in the school – both staff and community members. Against each person, he puts the date when he has a conversation, and if the conversation was about raising expectations, he puts a star against it. This was one of the strategies Paul put in place to help him ‘put a mirror up to himself’ and see who he hasn’t spoken to for a while.

Paul

A different lens

It's not like I wasn't empathetic before, it's not like everybody else isn't empathetic beforehand. It's hard to put into words how it shifts you, but that is what happens, you just look at everything through a slightly different lens and maybe it just polishes the lens a bit and you just look at everything differently."

Bronwen

Not using excuses

Before enacting High-Expectations Relationships, Louise says if a student arrived late, "I would say to myself, 'They've had a rough morning so they're not going to learn anything today', whereas now it's more, 'What can I do to make it easier for them to learn?' Now in our classroom we have a reading corner and sometimes I'll allow the students just to take some time out, to gather their thoughts. It's caring for them individually but still with an underlying expectation that today they can still learn."

Louise

▶ A different lens

▶ Maybe it just polishes the lens a bit and you just look at everything differently.

It's caring for students individually but still with an underlying expectation that today they can still learn



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Seeing the student as a whole person

Bronwen works with the kids who have challenging behavior, whose brains are wired differently due to suffering trauma and struggle with the day to day of classroom life. She says it can be easy to fall back in to the attitude of “if you just do this little bit I’ll be happy...Just do that and don’t annoy the kid next to you.” But taking a Stronger Smarter Approach, she says she is more likely to question that attitude in herself, challenge herself to do more and say, “hang on, no I’m not happy, he can do better than that and how do I put in place stuff to avoid the behaviour that’s preventing him from achieving academically?”

Bronwen she says, you have to look at the student as a whole person, rather than just a set of behaviours, “You need to be there for the long haul. You need to say, ‘Right, we’ve got him in the classroom, now let’s get him at the desk, and now that we’ve got him at the desk let’s give him a pencil’. You’ve got to have high expectations of yourself - as well as the student - that you can keep chipping away at it until you get him or her doing the right thing, doing the work he’s capable of, expecting more of himself. Putting in place things that are going to minimise the behaviours so that they can learn.”

Bronwen

▶ A strength-based approach

▶ So that reminder to say, ‘Let’s go back to what we do have and lets build on that’, rather than concentrating on what we’re missing, is a much more powerful and effective way of working

High expectations of self

David says Stronger Smarter enforces the idea of taking into account individual circumstance. He says the mind-shift sends you down a different path of finding out how the student is feeling from their point of view, regardless of actions that need to be taken based on the school's procedures.

“If the students felt like they've been treated unfairly, whether they have or not is irrelevant. If they feel like they've been treated unfairly, they probably won't get over that for some time. That can have an effect all the way through school, particularly high school. That strengths based, high expectations, isn't just putting it all on the students, that's high expectations of colleagues. We're not going to be lazy; we can't revert to 'that has to be a suspension'. There are actions you still have to take based on policy and procedures, but you find out from the kid's point of view why they got angry at the teacher – didn't sleep well? Mum's new baby keeping them up? Little things like that. Remember, students are children and teachers are adults. While we expect mature, well-reasoned behaviour from our students, not all have reached that point of development precisely because they are children. It is part of our job to help children learn to navigate their way responsibly to adulthood.”

David



High expectations of self



It's part of our job to help children learn to navigate their way responsibly to adulthood. There are actions you still have to take based on policy and procedures, but you find out from the kid's point of view why they got angry with the teacher



Impacting pedagogy

“It’s changed how I approach things, it changed how I think about the student’s capabilities and what I can expect. I find I can push them a little harder in a sense, expect more, but I can do it more individualistically. My expectations can be different, one child might not be as smart in one area as another but it doesn’t mean my expectation of them is lower. I’ve given myself permission to think of them individually.”

Louise



Differentiating teaching



Everyone’s different. So my assumptions were challenged - that you just can’t treat or teach all children the same way or the same thing at the same time.

Changing assumptions

“I see every student as an individual and understand where most of them come from, their backgrounds and why they may have difficulties, and sometimes it does involve talking to parents and working things out. Everyone’s different. So my assumptions were challenged - that you just can’t treat or teach all children the same way or the same thing at the same time. There’s so many things going on for kids that affect their learning, so I definitely try to be more patient, more empathetic, I’ll switch things around if I think one kid might be having a hard time doing something. We have adjustments for them and sometimes it can be on a daily basis, or sometimes it’s for a term where sometimes kids have troubles at home and they’re just not in the zone to do what every other kid in the class is doing, so I’ve adjusted my teaching to cater for that.”

Melanie

2. Knowing the individual

Students

- understand all student's sociocultural backgrounds, strengths, preferences, and interests.

Colleagues

- understand colleagues' sociocultural background, strengths, preferences, and interests.

Parents/ community

- Understand the unique circumstances of families as they affect the students' wellbeing, learning, and achievement.



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Enacting high expectations requires a shared understanding and ownership of what this means for the school. This can only occur where there are spaces of high levels of trust and safety where equal power dynamics are established. In this space, everyone can sit together as equals, agree on what expectations should be, and create a way forwards in a genuinely collaborative manner.

To start developing these spaces of trust and safety requires deep listening and tuning into the feelings, experiences strengths and needs of others.

Teacher-student relationships – getting to know students:

In the classroom, the relationship a student has with their teacher is an influential force on the student's ability to achieve. Students will only truly learn when they believe that their teachers care about them as human beings and care about the value they bring to the classroom.

High-Expectations Relationships is deeper than using a particular technique, but is involved in every interaction with students. One of the most important things is for teachers to get to know their students, both in the classroom and by showing an interest in their lives outside school. If we can find out more about what is stopping students from coming to school, listening to their stories and responding to their needs, then this should impact on attendance and behaviour.

Tapping into cultural pride

For Indigenous students, promoting a positive sense of student identity is essential. This needs to go beyond providing sporting or cultural activities and extend into the classroom. Our research interviews describe Indigenous students who misbehave in class, but on the sporting field they listen respectfully to the coach, or hold themselves high and show real pride in their culture when they're dancing. Tapping into that same cultural pride in the classroom has the potential to change student behaviour and engagement.

Building a collegiate staff environment

Check-ins and yarning circles used in staff meetings can help staff to get to know each other, and become more comfortable to talk about their frustrations and engage in challenging conversations. Using the language of High-Expectations Relationships or language such as 'how do we as a group feel about something,' can make staff feel more supported when sharing issues.

Building relationships with the community

Building relationships with the community, particularly in a small Indigenous community, might mean stepping outside the school gate and knocking on doors, or holding barbecues or parent events in the community instead of in the school. A number of educators talked about the importance of building up the bank account of positive stories to start building the relationships with parents.

It is important to make sure the dialogue is built on respect and deep listening, so that parents feel valued. Educators report that once such relationships have been built up, parents are much more likely to come into the school to talk about issues.

Knowing the individual

Students

- ▶ Seek to develop an understanding of all student's sociocultural backgrounds, strengths, preferences, and interests.
- ▶ Create opportunities for students to share their backgrounds, strengths, preferences and interests as a group.

Colleagues

- ▶ Seek to develop an understanding of colleagues' sociocultural background, strengths, preferences, and interests.
- ▶ Create opportunities for colleagues to share their backgrounds, strengths, preferences and interests as a group.

Parents/ community

- ▶ Speak regularly to parents/ caregivers from all backgrounds.
- ▶ Understand the unique circumstances of families as they affect the students' wellbeing, learning, and achievement.
- ▶ Engage with the community or local agencies outside of formal school-agency meetings.
- ▶ Participate in local community events such as festivals, celebrations, gatherings and sporting events.



▶ Getting to know students

▶ “When you get to know Aboriginal kids, and have conversations with them and break down the barriers, when you do get that connection, they will do anything for you.

If you go in all guns blazing and don't get to know them, they will put those barriers up



Getting to know students

Damian says Stronger Smarter in the classroom is not necessarily something that is conscious for him, or something that can be identified directly. The changes he has made are “...deeper than ‘Okay, now I’m going to use this Stronger Smarter technique’”. Rather, it is in every interaction he has with all his students. “When you get to know Aboriginal kids, and have conversations with them and break down the barriers, when you do get that connection, they will do anything for you. If you go in all guns blazing and don't get to know them, they will put those barriers up. Once their barriers are up, they are hard to break down and you'll have a constant battle with them because you've created that from the start.”

One way that Damian fosters these meaningful relationships is by showing a genuine interest in their lives outside of school. “It is about getting to know the kids, having conversations, getting involved in their lives, going to watch them dance, going to watch them play football. And that means a lot to them, especially to Aboriginal kids. When I go watch them play football, they love it. They come up to me and say ‘Hey, how did I play?’ and I have these conversations with them that I've never had before, because they see that I'm showing an interest in them.”

Damian



Having the courage

As staff have begun to understand Stronger Smarter, the ripples have spread out to student engagement. Teachers are using Stronger Smarter strategies in the classroom. They run check-in circles every morning and afternoon with the students, and when something needs to be discussed in class they will use a yarning circle. For instance, part of a maths lesson might be a Stronger Smarter circle where students can discuss any issues and learn to have the courage to say, 'I'm having problems with this,' and throw it to the group with the idea that they help each other. These processes help to upskill the students in conversations and relationships. "That's what's going to be important for their future," Michael says. "That the kids learn how they should be with other people."

Michael

▶ Teacher- student relationships

▶ Check-ins are all about getting to know the student a bit more.

Student check ins

"When I mark the roll, my check-in will often be what you had for breakfast this morning or what's your favourite TV show. Then I get to hear who didn't have breakfast. So check-ins are all about getting to know you a bit more. I might say 'tell me something nice you did for someone in the check in today,' So it's making them smarter, and stronger just by listening to what other kids are doing and what they're eating and playing. Just so that they're not in their own little world all the time, it just builds up their capacity."

For a quick check-in on how everyone is feeling about a task or whether they need help, Melanie uses the 'Thumb-o-meter', asking kids to put their thumbs up for "yep I feel great" or down "no, I need help" or "I'm not good". She used the Thumb-o-meter three times during the math class the day I spoke to her.

Melanie



Tapping into cultural pride

Watching his Indigenous students participate in sports and traditional dance also gives Damian the opportunity to see a side of them that they don't show inside the classroom or schoolyard. "There are kids at school who just won't go to class, who will pick and choose which classes they want to go to, and when they do go to class, give staff a lot of grief. Yet, you see them on the sporting field and they transform. They listen to Coach, they're respectful, they hold themselves differently – they're totally different.

There are other kids who also really muck up, don't go to class, often suspended. When we take them dancing, they get dressed up in the Lap Laps and put ochre on their skin... and they just walk a different way, they hold themselves high and show real pride in their culture, and also in themselves. And it's a really amazing thing to see, and I say to all staff, 'if they've got it there, they've got it'. You've just got to tap into that pride that they show in their dancing when you've got them in your classroom."

Damian

Tapping into cultural pride

You've just got to tap into that pride that they show in their dancing when you've got them in your classroom.

Strong and Smart

Once the thinking can shift then the behaviours shift and actions shift. If you can change the way you think, then you change the actions. It's the thinking and emotion that drives the behaviour. To look at the kids through a strength based lens has the potential to have amazing outcomes in schools and will create places where kids thrive." She talks to students about what it means to be strong and smart about "what it means to embrace your own culture and how to be aboriginal and knowing that's awesome and believing you can achieve as high as you want to and anything is possible".

Catherine



▶ Supporting all kids

▶ The concept of Stronger Smarter applies across the board for all kids

Stronger Smarter applies to all kids

"I think Stronger Smarter is about going through the process of figuring out who you are and how you feel about things and applying that to kids – and the beautiful thing about Stronger Smarter is it applies to all kids. It's got an Aboriginal focus, but we have a lot of low socioeconomic kids and we find that a lot of the issues facing our Aboriginal students are as much to do with their socioeconomic status as it is to do with their culture. So equally, children of other cultures in a similar socioeconomic status are facing similar issues and handling them in similar ways in a lot of respects. The concept of Stronger Smarter applies across the board. It applies to all kids, it's about being empathetic and being in tune with them and putting yourself in their shoes a bit more often, and focusing less on what they're learning and more on who they are, it's a bit of a shift, you know?"

Bronwen



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Getting to know the community

Ken says, as a Principal of a small school in an Aboriginal community getting to know families meant stepping outside the school gate, “I needed to speak with community people. To knock on doors, introduce myself, go out and say ‘hello’ – to have the positive stories, so that had a bank account of things to draw on, and start building the relationship.”

Ken went along to events such as the school holiday program to show “that I care not just about something that’s connected to the school, but I care about the kids and what people are doing within their community”. Instead of expecting parents to come into the school, he took the school to the community. “So instead of having a family barbecue at the school, we held it out at the Trust.” The staff brought all the kids along and everyone joined in singing a few songs in a concert for families.

These “stepping stones” have gone a long way to facilitating genuine connections with parents and carers. “There’s an openness in the conversations we’ve had. There’s been a lot more respect for each other.” And for the kids, seeing the school working together with their families in a positive way provides a foundation for building the strength and resilience they will need for secondary school and beyond.

Ken

▶ Getting to know colleagues

▶ The check-in circle has helped to break down barriers and create more inclusive spaces between staff.

Getting to know the teacher aides

Indigenous teacher aides weren’t comfortable coming into the staffroom at lunchtime. For Louise, as a school principal in a remote school, that meant going outside and sitting under a tree to have a conversation and start building the relationship. She set about working with the teacher aides to build their capacity, find out what they had to offer and nurture their aspirations. “They have so much skill to offer”, she says,

Louise

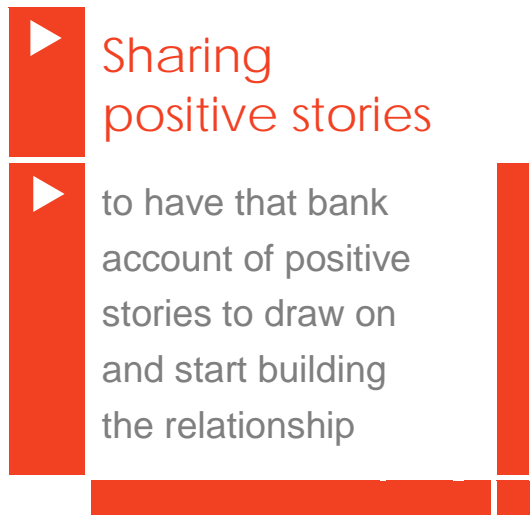
Sharing conversations with colleagues

At Leon's school the staff communication meetings, held every Monday morning, are run as a check in circle. The check-in circle has helped to break down barriers and create more inclusive spaces between staff. "In the past we never really got to know about anyone, we never got to hear much about who they were as a person. Staff room meetings were held in the staffroom which is a little cramped, and you'd go to the meeting, and no one would say a word at times other than the principal."

Leon says the staff decided to meet in a different classroom each week. While sitting in a circle, the teacher who is hosting for that week constructs a question and the staff members respond and discuss in turn. Moving into classrooms has "personalised" the communication meetings and staff can see what different classrooms are doing by looking at their displays. Staff are more comfortable to talk about their frustrations and to engage in challenging conversations with each other. Leon explained how using language such as "how do we as a group feel about something", has made staff feel more supported when sharing issues they may have.

"...during communication meetings people are putting things out there that I believe they would not have shared in the past. I think it's because we all appreciate that things need to be aired. It's bought us closer together, and I believe it's bought down a few barriers and in that regard we can be more open and more upfront where people are not so offended but more so see the possibilities of things to come."

Leon



▶ Sharing positive stories

▶ to have that bank account of positive stories to draw on and start building the relationship



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A dialogue

“It’s the dialogue between staff, staff and community, with the students, again built on that respect and really listening to what people have to say, and those people knowing you will listen to what they have to say, and you will consider it from their perspective, not just from your own perspective or the school’s perspective. I think people feel valued in that situation and have no hesitancy in coming to the school and discussing anything. Even when there is a problem people know they can come and talk about something that’s upsetting them, without being upset, or indeed if they are upset that’s OK, we can talk through it.

Lesley

Using data to support the kids

Rather than basing decisions solely on behaviour and attendance, the staff at Broome Senior High School also look at a student’s potential for achievement. They track data on every child so if, for instance, a child has achieved well in primary school, there are sophisticated checks and balances in place before staff decide to close a pathway for that student. Saeed says, “So it’s been a shift, a mental understanding that we do need to tweak our work and do it slightly differently . . . we need to cross-reference a whole bunch of data and make sure we’re not closing doors on kids just because they may have some issue at home, or they haven’t been attending school.”

Saeed

3. Establishing equitable power relationships

Students

- Engage students in co-developing challenging objectives for themselves..

Colleagues/Parents/ community

- Share your personal history and interests with others.
- Engage colleagues and parents/caregivers in co-developing challenging goals and aspirations for students.

Community

- Involve community members)
- Involve students or school facilities in activities towards community outcomes

Establishing equitable power relationships

Establishing equitable power relationships is about creating spaces for dialogue, and being fair in the relationship.

Building trust with students:

Building trust with students means buying into the relationship. For educators, this may mean sometimes ‘removing the role’ of teacher or principal to connect with students and let them feel they are supported. When these relationships are in place, if things do go wrong for a student, it is possible to have challenging but supportive conversations. This about following up with students and keeping them accountable, but at the same time responding to the student with possibility – not ignoring problems or bad behaviour, but working out where to go next. These are positive, strength-based conversations.

Building trust with colleagues and community

Building trust with others in about approaching conversations with a desire to learn and understand from others’ points of view, letting others speak for themselves and being genuinely and compassionately interested in what they communicate.

With staff, running check ins and yarning circles with staff can help to build trust. Again, this involves removing the role – in the circle everyone is equal and everyone is given space to speak.

With parents and community, this may mean taking the time to observe and acknowledge strengths, and finding ways to support, develop and embrace existing capacity.

With parents, building trust may mean increasing the friendly supportive phone calls or texts, meeting parents at the school gate, and giving them the assurance that “I’m there for your child”.

Establishing equitable power relationships

Students

- ▶ Extensively share your personal history, circumstances, preferences and interests with students.
- ▶ Engage all students in co-developing challenging objectives for themselves.

Colleagues and Parents

- ▶ Extensively share your personal history, circumstances, preferences and interests with others.
- ▶ Engage colleagues and parents/caregivers in co-developing challenging goals and aspirations for students

Community

- ▶ Regularly involve community members in workplace activities (e.g. classroom teaching, school committees etc)
- ▶ Involve students or school facilities in activities towards community outcomes (e.g. community fair, fundraising for local groups etc)

Strength-based conversations

“You ‘buy in’ to your relationships. So when it gets to the point where you have to have a more difficult conversation, you’ve got the trust built there. “I’m here, this is genuine”, so when it gets to a harder conversation I’m going to be in the best place to have it, and they’re going to be in a better place to receive it. I think strength-based conversations are keeping it positive, looking for the good, and where you can go. ‘We’re not saying forget about stuff that’s happened, but what we’re saying is, where can we go to from here?’ If something happens it’s about responding with possibility, not with defensiveness. Problems happen all the time at school. Conflict happens, but what’s my next step? Am I going to listen to that person? Am I going to respond defensively?”

Wendy

Breaking down power structures

“It really is about stripping back all the layers, and it’s about two people sitting there, or a group of people, and connecting to each other. There’s no hierarchy of ‘I’m a teacher’ or ‘I’m a principal’, and ‘you’re a labourer’, or ‘you’re a student’. I’ve thrown all that out, especially when I talk to parents, and try to connect on a really basic level. That, to me, is where Stronger Smarter is really at its best, because you can have these honest conversations and develop that trust and respect, and from there the possibilities are, not endless, but a lot greater than if you say ‘come here, I’m telling you how it is because I’ve got a degree behind me’.”

Damian

▶ Removing the role

▶ You ‘buy in’ to your relationships. So when it gets to the point where you have to have a difficult conversation, you’ve got the trust built there

Following up with students

Catherine says she makes sure she follows up on students who have got into trouble. “While I tell them the behaviours is not ok and we’ll need to repair the harm that we’ve done but also that that student is an important part of the classroom. That the behaviour was wrong but student is not a bad kid, rather they are a great person with a lot of strengths”.

Catherine says that without this follow a student can be left thinking that you don’t really care and can send a message that it doesn’t really matter. Instead, by enacting High-Expectations Relationships and saying you are important and this is too important not to do anything about, it’s keeping the kids accountable but at the same time honouring them.

Catherine


Building trust with students

With the kids I think it’s built a lot around trust. Them trusting you enough to have a go and make mistakes, but also that you expect a certain level from them, and they need to be respectful enough of you to provide that. They feel comfortable enough to go through their learning journey with you and feel that they’re supported, but also know that when I’m in this classroom there is a certain expectation that I need to meet.

Sarah



Building trust with students



they feel comfortable enough to go through their learning journey with you and feel that they’re supported.

Check-ins with staff

“Check-ins are the most valuable things, because you get to tune into how everyone is feeling. It’s hard for staff to do that at first, to open themselves up, but we are at the point where staff feel comfortable doing that, and now can take the time to follow-up with people if they feel they need it, if it’s been a rough day for example.

Melinda

▶ Building trust with colleagues

▶ That triangle approach is so branded in our minds that there’s a long way to go before we can say we trust each other enough to speak about our thoughts without worrying about what the other person might be thinking

Running staff meetings differently

Steve introduced a yarning circle to staff meetings with check-ins and check-outs. He says this wasn’t an easy thing to do. “We work in such a triangular, top-down structure in our organisations that it can be quite daunting to take the edges off that triangle and circle up”, he says. “That triangle approach is so branded in our minds that there’s a long way to go before we can actually say we trust each other enough to go with our feelings, and speak about our thoughts without worrying about what the other person or the supervisor might be thinking and might be filing away for later.”

He also needed to think about how he set up the yarning circle. “The first couple of times I arranged our chairs in a circle, sat down and waited for people to come. No-one sat next to me. The chairs on either side of me remained empty, and the chairs either side of those chairs were empty”, he says. “So I still felt like the pointy end of the circle”. So he now sets up the chairs, leaves the room and lets other people come in first, and places himself in a chair with people on either side.

Steve

▶ Building trust
with
colleagues

▶ everyone is equal in
that circle and
everyone is given
space to speak

Supporting colleagues

Jess says staff meetings have changed from the principal sitting at the front, directing the discussion. Now the staff sit in a circle where “everyone is equal in that circle” and everyone is given space to speak. At the start of every staff meeting five minutes are allocated a check-in where everyone has a turn to describe how they are feeling. If someone is not feeling great, then everyone knows to look out for that person or check-in with them later to make sure they are okay. The new staff meetings have become an embedded ritual in the school with the biggest benefits being that “everyone is valued and everyone is supported by each other”

Jess

Building trust with colleagues

What High-Expectations Relationships does ... we have this place where it's OK to have this professional dialogue and it's OK to challenge a colleague and it's OK to say “Do you realise what you just said about that child is dismissing the fact that they're a person, and they want to learn and they want to be in school, so it's a low expectations statement.’ So we've been able to gravitate that thinking using the High-Expectations Relationships culture.

Dennis

Learning together

At Gunbalanya School in West Arnhem Land the Sharing Together process has been established as an intentional fortnightly process to build relationships between the locally employed co-teachers and their classroom teachers. The Sharing Together time is timetabled and resourced . Topics for discussion include sharing history of family, language background, sharing local knowledges and language. The emphasis is on sharing and building a relational view of culture which is a foundation of the “turtle steps” of the school.

John

Getting parents on board


“There is that shared interest when you are teaching kids, so I try to incorporate home and school into my teaching, because we want kids to become lifelong learners. You really need to break down those barriers and get the parents involved. Perhaps they’ve had bad interactions at school, but at the end of the day, parents and educators have really got the best interests of the kids at heart. You’ve got to clear that air of ‘us versus them’, and make it about ‘we’.

Because I’ve changed the way I’ve been talking, the way I’ve been interacting with parents, the interactions have been a lot more positive. I teach some pretty tough kids, so when you have the parents on board and have honest conversations with them, it makes things a lot easier for all parties.”

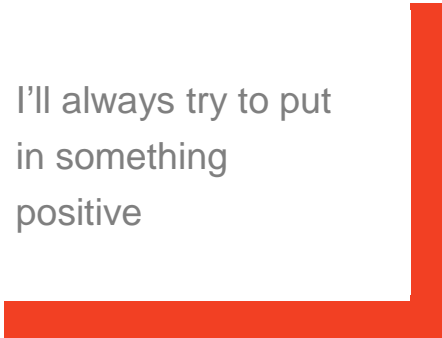
Damian



Getting parents on board



I’ll always try to put in something positive



Keeping the contact with parents positive

Bronwen uses text messages to keep in regular contact with parents. “Good day to day, bad day today, need to see you tomorrow’, whatever it is. Just a check in. And I’d always try to put in something positive, you know, ‘did a fantastic artwork but then screwed it up when he got cranky’. My approach generally is judgement free, and I think slowly they get to see it, slowly they see that I’m not actually criticizing, I’m not judging, I’m just helping. Sooner or later they get to the ‘Thanks for letting me know’ and ‘Okay I’ll come in and see you tomorrow about this’.

Bronwen

Powerful conversations

Having the conversation with the parents and the students as well and that has become a very powerful three-way buy in for the school. Just being able to discuss things and for parents to feel comfortable to come and discuss academic issues with staff – has really improved in the school – has really lifted a high expectation – is now academic and learning questions happening from parents where in the past in might just have been around sporting expectations. The bar has lifted.

Karen

▶ Building relationships with parents

▶ It's just a friendly call home, just touching base.

Building relationships with parents

Leon makes a determined effort to talk with families and to create spaces within his classroom and school where families are valued and welcome.

He makes courtesy calls as a way of creating High-Expectation Relationships with his students and their families. “It’s just a friendly call home, just touching base, checking-in to make sure everything’s okay. This is all about high expectations because I’m not wanting any student to fall behind in any way or form.”

Leon makes an effort to talk to Mum and Dad when they drop their child off to class in the morning and takes “that extra time to say hello and just give a little bit of feedback on their little fella or just see how they’re going in general”. Leon says this shows that they’re all on the same page, and it’s all giving parents the assurance that he’s there for them and for their child.

Leon

▶ Removing the
role

▶ It's easy to get into
a habit of not seeing
things in terms of
relationships but in
terms of structures

Getting lost in the role

Damian says at times you can get lost in your role. "I feel that as an executive teacher there are times when the role and the actions you need to follow as part of the protocols of the school can get in the way of actually being open to finding authentic ways for resolutions. It's easy to get into a habit, usually because of time constraints of not personalising it, not seeing things in terms of relationships but in terms of structures."

This is particularly important for parents who haven't had a good experience of school themselves "...they may have felt they weren't treated very well here from their point of view, that they didn't get any help as students, and it wasn't a great experience.

Damian says with one family when he rang up, he says "I knew that parent was thinking..... 'here we go again...another suspension'. I could tell the parent was getting fed up. It seemed to them that the school only talked with them about negative things. We ended up having talks about that and I realised that the parent's entire experience of high school, their own and through their children, was negative. But, importantly, that parent still valued education." Eventually, as Damian was able to turn those phone calls into more informal, positive conversations, the parent became much happier to pick up the phone when school rang.

Damian

▶ Building trust
with the
community

▶ Instead of expecting
parents to come into
the school, the staff
now meet with
parents on their
country.

Sharing

I think it means there's a real sharing between the two parties and in that we are expecting that we can both get something out of it, and building that confidence with each other, and building the confidence in the school, and building the expectations of what we expect from our students and from our families and keeping raising the bar and saying we all know that attendance is important and were really pleased that we're seeing your guys come along all the time, and the effort that they're putting into their work and they're happy about being successful and with what they're doing.

Ken

Building trust with the community

When she first arrived at the school, Janet spent time talking to parents so they could get to know her and she could find out more about what they wanted for their kids. She set up a Koorie Steering Committee which involved parents and other community members. The Steering Committee worked on developing a Koorie classroom. "For me, the challenge was to let go and allow them to have a say and give them a budget," Janet says. "I had to work alongside them. They chaired meetings... I would speak to the chairperson beforehand and guide them, and the KESO would send out notices and made sure everybody knew about the meetings." Both the Committee and members from the wider community became involved in painting and decorating the room, and the opening of the room in NAIDOC week proved "a huge success".

Janet

First contact

David says one of the most valuable things he took from Stronger Smarter was the idea of 'first contact' to keep all families informed.

"In many schools that first contact is a negative contact - made for disciplinary reasons in response to an incident that may have been prevented earlier by the school and the parent working together with a common goal. If parents aren't informed of possible issues early on, how can they work with the school in a positive way to improve their child's relationship with the school? If the school's only contact with parents is a formal response to negative things, how can the parent feel valued?"

"That first phone call should be framed in a positive way...even if the reason for it comes from a concern, such as in learning...or in behaviour.....'we'd like to support (student name) to develop their ability to do as well as they should in class. Can we get together to talk about our options because at the moment (student name) is having difficulty with these things'. So while the reason for the phone call might come from a concern, that first contact and the way it is managed, is really important. Schools become only about formal teaching and learning, marking and grades, but really, what they're about is relationships. It's important that you establish a relationship with the student and with the parents and the carers."

David

▶ Investing in relationships

▶ We wanted to give more ownership to our community of what the school does

Setting up an Aboriginal Engagement Committee

Steve set up an Aboriginal Engagement Committee with staff to look at how to "make the school a more inviting place for our community and give more ownership to our community of what the school does." Steve runs the meetings as a yarning circle. "They understood the relevance of the circle and knew they could speak their minds. The yarning circle approach – where everything's valid and valued – they were more comfortable with that, so they quite openly challenged me about a couple of decisions which, unbeknownst to me, had actually alienated the community, rather than included them." Since these meetings, Steve says there has been much stronger communication between the Aboriginal staff members and himself which gives him a greater awareness of the impacts of his decisions. "We're more aware of what each other's doing, and why we're doing it."

Steve

4. Robust conversations and sharing critical feedback

Spaces for discussion

- create spaces for open and free discussion.

Engaging with community

- be involved in community events.

Sharing critical feedback

- Provide feedback and engage in robust and open discussions

Robust conversations and sharing critical feedback

Being firm in the relationships requires having the courage and be prepared to challenge and intervene when we need to (at times when individuals or communities are clearly not exercising their responsibilities appropriately). This means getting the balance right of balancing high expectations with being supportive, and not letting the high expectations become the victim of empathy.

Setting goals

With students, this means finding ways to articulate expectations for students, setting more challenging work, pushing students more, and making sure students realise it is OK to have a go and make mistakes. It might mean students setting goals in class, and then finding strategies and opportunities to help students meet those goals. As educators start to highlight and build on strengths, students become more conscious of each other's strengths and goals and encourage each other.

Strengths-based

High-Expectations Relationships involve viewing behaviour through a wellbeing view, highlighting strengths first and then acknowledging the challenge and engaging in an authentic dialogue with students. This might mean teaching the students that you can always fix something, and give students a fresh start the next day.

Within the school, High-Expectations Relationships need to be embedded within the school system – the protocols, procedures and processes. This provides teachers with a vehicle to have the robust conversations when they are needed.

Conversations with parents

Schools redesign the way they communicate with parents and community – moving away from 'this is how the school does business and this is what we expect you to do, towards 'what do parents need and how can we do things to meet those needs. The language of High-Expectations Relationships can help to explain the school's visions. Conversations with parents about student behaviour are strengths-based, looking at how the school, parents and students can work together to work out where to next. Community yarning circles provide successful ways to work with parents and community.

Robust conversations and sharing critical feedback

Spaces for discussion

- ▶ Create spaces for open and free discussion of opposing views where they can explore different perspectives and express their emotions (with students, colleagues, and parents/caregivers).
- ▶ Talk regularly about emotionally charged (challenging) topics with students and colleagues, and parents/ caregivers.

Engaging with community on key issues

- ▶ Actively lead in decision making on key issues/ challenges (from the school as well as community/ agency perspectives) that impact student wellbeing and achievement.
- ▶ Regularly be involved in organising community or agency forums to discuss topical issues

Sharing critical feedback

- ▶ Provide extensive feedback to students of a behavioural or relational nature and co-develop strategies.
- ▶ Engage colleagues in robust and open discussions in response to deficit conversations.
- ▶ Provide regular feedback to parents/caregivers about their child and co-create strategies to support their child's education.

Expecting more

Louise says that if a student arrives late with their parent saying they've had a 'tough morning', before enacting High-Expectations Relationships Louise might have thought, "They've had a rough morning so they're not going to learn anything today", whereas now she thinks "What can I do to make it easier for them to learn?" "Now in our classroom we have a reading corner and sometimes I'll allow the students just to take some time out, to gather their thoughts. It's caring for them individually but still with an underlying expectation that today they can still learn."

Louise

▶ Balancing high expectations

▶ That's one of our greatest challenges – finding the middle ground between holding up high expectations and being empathetic to family situations

Balancing high expectations

Bronwen says it can be difficult to find the balance between holding up high-expectations and being empathetic to situations of Indigenous families. "High-expectations relationships in schools like ours, sometimes become the victim of empathy – the two can work against each other a little bit. One of my jobs as learning and support teacher is working with families on attendance, so our high-expectations are that they will get their acts together and send our students to school everyday and that those students will be on time. So the high expectation is that you will be here on time, and you will turn up everyday. However, the empathy then kicks and goes well on the other hand, Mum doesn't have a car, they've got a brand new baby in the house. So, I think that's one of our greatest challenges – finding that middle ground between the two. Particularly as 'white fellas' trying to tell them that, because it's all well and good for me to go 'We have high expectations, you need to get your kid to school', but then again, you're balancing that whole 'I'm sympathetic to where you're at. I find it one of the most challenging aspects of the whole thing...You're balancing getting them to school and ruining the relationship with the family

Bronwen

▶ Setting goals

▶ giving people the opportunity to reach their full potential

Strength-based conversations

Jess says high-expectations are about “giving people the opportunity to reach their full potential”. Jess gets her students to identify personal goals as well as strategies for achieving those goals. This works to make Jess aware of what the students want to achieve so she can “push them a bit further” and help with the strategies and opportunities needed to reach their goal. The goal-setting is helping students to have high-expectations with themselves,

“If a student set a specific goal to speak nicely to their peers, and there’s a situation where they’re not speaking nicely with their peers, I can simply say something like “think about your goal”. And I can see they’re actually reflecting on that and they’re thinking they know that they’ve let themselves down because it wasn’t me that set that goal for them, it was themselves.”

Jess

Recognising strengths

In the classroom Louise makes the daily check-ins strength based. At the end of the week everyone shares something they have done that they are proud of. Students also set goals by writing them on sticky notes and sticking them to their desks - the goal could be personal, relational or academic. Student’s successes are celebrated and “makes them understand what their strengths are and what they can do”

Louise says “It was a little bit of a process of teaching them what their strengths can be, like being a person that you respect. They’re a lot better at it now”. For Louise strength based thinking had changed the classroom. She spoke about how it “filters down to the kids”, how students just inherently encourage one another more and are more conscious of one-another’s strengths. She shared how a particular student would normally be intimidated by having to participate in a running event and how three different kids in the class invited him to run with them and encouraged him. “So it’s effected their understanding too, they get that everyone’s different and that’s not a bad thing”

Louise

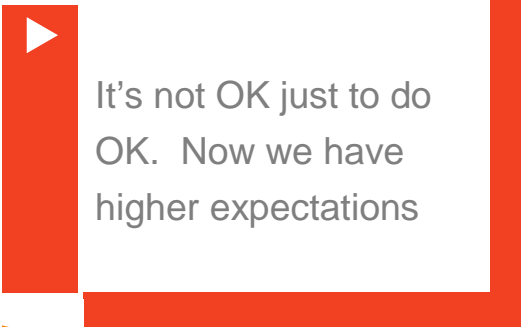
Challenging ourselves to expect more

“Up to recently, we were happy with just getting the kids to school and the kids being happy at school. They were happy to do the work if they were spoon fed and if they were told what to do and what sheet to fill out. But now we're getting them to do a bit more of it themselves and have them be involved in their learning, and we're really pleased with how that's coming on board. It's not ok just to do ok, now we have higher expectations of them. It's fitted in with a lot of the Department's reforms in terms of quality teaching and Visible Learning and John Hattie's work. Not only are we a school that looks after its kids, we also have high expectations of them as well”.

Peter



Enacting High expectations



It's not OK just to do OK. Now we have higher expectations

Enacting high expectations

“If they [student] felt like they've been treated unfairly, whether they have or not is irrelevant. If they feel like they've been treated unfairly .. that can have an effect all the way through school, particularly high school. That strengths-based, high expectations, isn't just putting it all on the students, that's high expectations of colleagues. We're not going to be lazy; we can't revert to 'that has to be a suspension'. There are actions you still have to take based on policy and procedures, but you find out from the kid's point of view why they got angry at the teacher – didn't sleep well? Mum's new baby keeping them up? Remember, students are children and teachers are adults. While we expect mature, well- reasoned behaviour from our students, not all have reached that point of development precisely because they are children. It is part of our job to help children learn to navigate their way responsibly to adulthood.

David

High-Expectations Relationships for behaviour

"If a student doesn't turn up until 10 o'clock, and the teacher is saying 'Where were you? You haven't been here for ages. You've missed so much school' ... that gets off on a negative foot straight away. That can sometimes be enough for the really disengaged kids to turn on their heel and just leave your classroom and not come back for another week." Instead Catherine's approach is to say to the student 'Oh, great to see you. We've missed you. Welcome back! We're doing some work that I think you'll enjoy. Come and have a seat, and this is where we're up to.' At some point in the next ten or fifteen minutes Catherine will find an opportunity to have a quiet conversation and say, 'I have been worried about you. Is everything OK? You've missed school for a couple of weeks. I'd like to catch you up on what you've missed.'

Catherine



Student Behaviour

Understanding what's behind the behaviour

Bronwen sees the challenges of approaching student behaviour through a well-being view. "I have had a lot of very surprising conversations with teachers along the lines of 'Do you realize that this is what's happening in that kids life?', and so when teacher says, 'Oh Johnny's this and that and you know', I say 'Well do you realize that he's not living at home at the moment' or, 'do you realize that his grandfather just died?' Sometimes they just don't make that extra step. They're approaching it all through a behavioural view, rather than a wellbeing view. So their approach might be 'Johnny, what are you doing?', whereas my approach might be 'I can see you're sad, what's going on? How can I help?'

But Bronwen says teachers are empathetic people by definition, so as soon as you say 'Did you realize that this is what's happening?' they all go 'Oh, the poor little thing, let me look after them!' The kids who need the most love, ask for it in the most unloving ways. So the harder they kick you, the more they need it. And it's whether or not you can get yourself in a position to be willing to get through the kicking to get to them. It's not a criticism, it's a very hard thing to do."

Bronwen

The early years

“We had to embrace the fact that all our children had the capacity for further learning and higher learning and higher order thinking and we had to work out the best way to make that happen,” Dennis says. Taking this thinking on board, they brought in a number of curriculum-related strategies, including accelerated learning and small group work, for any students below standards. They invested heavily in the early years, including a Prep year where children, who often have low language levels, spend 12 months in an environment that is all about talking and articulation. By the end of Grade 2, all students are ready for the next level.

Dennis

▶ Dialogue

▶ If you’ve got that discussion or dialogue going on in the school community, student outcomes have to improve

Understanding perceptions

Paula took her staff through an exercise to think about both their own perceptions of the school, but also to think about how students and parents might view the school. There were positive view, such as the school being well-resourced and having good teachers, and a number of negative views such as students having a lack of purpose, finding school boring, finding the school unsafe, having poor behaviour, and parents viewing the school as having a lack of cultural recognition and lack of educational outcomes. The next step was a survey of students, and this confirmed that for the majority of students, the most important reason they came to school was to learn reading, writing, science and maths. But the main reasons for not attending school were bullying, teasing and fighting.

Paula

Dialogue

If you've got that consensus of opinion or that discussion or dialogue going on in a school community, and it's positive with everyone involved, student outcomes have to improve, because the students are at the centre and focus of everything. And I think that is a hugely supportive environment and it helps the understanding of the education process which then helps those kids succeed in the school setting.

Lesley

Yarn-ups with parents


Melanie says that a monthly 'yarn-up' session for Indigenous parents has been set in place since the school embraced the Stronger Smarter Approach.

Yarn-ups are a chance for indigenous parents to come and have a chat to the school's Aboriginal Liaison Officer in school time, while the children are in class. The parents come in and connect with the officer and she passes on the feedback to the teachers. "It's a chance for those parents who have got school aged kids to come in and sit down without the kids there and talk."

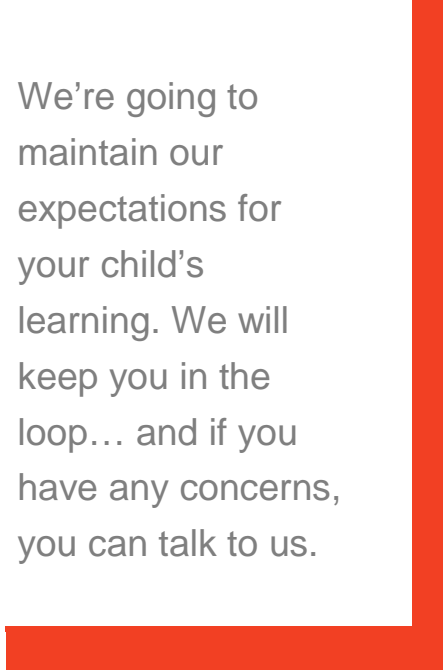
Melanie



Yarn-ups with parents



We're going to maintain our expectations for your child's learning. We will keep you in the loop... and if you have any concerns, you can talk to us.



Strength-based conversations with parents

“When an Aboriginal kid is mucking up.... a lot of teachers, in my experience, accept it. They think ‘oh well that’s how Aboriginal kids behave. You won’t be able to contact mum or dad cause they won’t answer the phone’. We are the adults in this relationship and it’s our job to work with students and parents. Because a kid is misbehaving doesn’t mean the parents condone it. We get into that habit of making assumptions and often, those assumptions make us resistant to changing our traditional practices”

“It’s dissolving the fear in parents mind, that this conversation about this “problem” is actually all about bad stuff. So you point out to the parent that while their child may have done this negative thing, there are the things that have been working well. And this conversation is about a decision that resulted in the school following a policy and procedure. What that means is, that we have a process to follow – and I’m obliged to follow it – but in terms of the positives, these are what we have. So when this is resolved, this is where we go. And we don’t return to ill feelings, we’re not going to hold grudges... and we’re going to maintain our expectations for your child’s learning. We will keep you in the loop... and if you have any concerns, you can talk to us.”

David

Working with community

Dennis says they redesigned the way they invited parents into the school space and spent time making sure families knew the school was a place they could come. They set up school events and celebrated their school culture and achievements. Dennis says this was the trigger to changing the way the Koorie children performed in school. “Now, there is no discernible difference between the Koorie and non-Koorie data in the school. So all of those data sets like attendance, reading results, there is no discernible difference. And we’re pretty proud of that,” he says.

Dennis

A community yarning circle

At Sarah's school, she says they wanted to involve the community in decision meeting. They didn't have opportunities through a PNC or canteen, so they looked at something different. "So we designed a community yarning circle. We facilitated it ourselves and invited members of the community and our Aboriginal staff to attend. "We've had Health professional come in and talk to parents and carers about different things, getting to school on time, healthy lunch boxes. We've had teachers come in and members from Council come along." Sarah says it got a good name within the school community, and AEOs from other schools visited to try to set up something similar.

Sarah

Meeting parents on country

Saeed says, they have recognised the need to do things differently and to take a strength-based rather than a deficit approach. "If you keep doing the same thing, you'll keep getting the same result. So we've worked hard at understanding the Indigenous lens and how to meet their needs of parents and the community. We have certainly moved away from 'this is how the school does it' towards 'if this is what the parents need then this is how we'll do it'." Instead of expecting parents to come into the school, the staff now meet with parents on their country. This might be morning teas in parks, or breakfasts where students cook and then teachers have a yarn to the parents about the progress of their children.

Saeed



Meeting community on country



We have moved away from 'this is how the school does it'

5. Sharing the importance of High-Expectations Relationships

Students

- Talk to students about firm, fair, compassionate and courageous relationships..

Colleagues

- Talk to your colleagues about High-Expectations Relationships

Parents and Community

- Co-create High-Expectations Relationships

Sharing the importance of High-Expectations Relationships

High-Expectations Relationships and taking strengths-based approaches can support students in the classroom to think about their own strengths and find their own tools and strategies to have greater resilience, tolerance and acceptance.

It instills values of respect and positive relationships into learning. This helps students to believe in themselves, and strategies to cope with difficult situations.

It helps to build team environments in the classroom, to build empathy between the students, and helps students to address whatever might be in the way of successful learning.

With staff and parents, High-Expectations Relationships provide a common terminology, so that the relationship with parents becomes a partnership.

Sharing the importance of High-Expectations Relationships

Students

- ▶ Talk to students on a daily basis about the importance of being firm, fair compassionate and courageous in relationships with self and others

Colleagues

- ▶ Talk regularly about High-Expectations Relationships with colleagues to build a shared understanding of how high expectations can be enacted in the school or workplace.

Parents and Community

- ▶ Work closely with parents/ caregivers to co-create strategies to build High-Expectations Relationships in the school and classroom.
- ▶ Regularly discuss with community groups how High-Expectations Relationships are enacted in the school

▶ Tools in the toolbox

▶ What have you got in your toolbox that you can bring out to help deal with these problems?

There's lots of strategies to help students to have that resilience, tolerance and acceptance.

Tools in the toolbox

Melanie asks students to show how they are strong and smart by using the “tools in their toolbox” to deal with social situations they might find difficult. She asks her students to think about their strengths and they display these strengths on a board at the back of the classroom, so that the concept of strengths is always within the students’ visual range.

Melanie talks to students about “steps we can go through to solve these problems on your own before you come and see a teacher. There’s lots of strategies in place to help them be smart about it... to have that resilience, tolerance, acceptance. What have you got in your toolbox that you can bring out to help deal with these problems?”

One of the tools the schools uses is the five-finger friend rule, where the children tick off a coping strategy.

“The first finger is ‘talk friendly’, if someone’s giving you a hard time try and work it out in a friendly manner, if that doesn’t work talk firmly. If that doesn’t work the next finger is ‘ignore’, the next finger is ‘walk away’, and the next one is ‘tell the teacher’. So when issues come up in the classroom like that I’ll say have you used your five finger friends, and that strategy is something in their toolbox that they can pull out and use.”

Melanie

▶ Investing in future learning

▶ They bond with each other, they bond with me. It opens up an opportunity for discussion. It builds a team environment.

So it's an investment in their future learning to address what's in the way of them learning.

Investing in future learning

“At the beginning and end of the day, we come in and sit down and have a little chat. Some days we have an open circle discussion, some days I say ‘Who’d like to share?’ We start with a “Thumb-o-meter” and I say to the kids, ‘Okay, before afternoon circle, check in with somebody who has the same thumb as you and discuss why you’re both happy or you’re both sad, or check in with someone who’s thumb is different to you and find out what’s going on’. Kids come to me and say ‘Oh I’ve just checked in with so and so and she’s really sad because her Nan’s gone away’. And the empathy that it builds between the kids and the power it gives me to intervene, is fantastic. It gives me an opportunity to have a quiet word and say ‘come and see me if you need to, would you like a little timeout or to draw how you’re feeling?’, or ‘would you like to go for a little walk and talk with one of your friends?’...

They bond with each other, they bond with me, it opens up an opportunity for discussion, they develop a situation where there’s 30 other kids for them to go to for help, not just me. It builds a team environment.

Bronwen

It's more than just the academic skills

Bronwen says teaching is about more than just academic skills like times tables and spelling. "It's not enough for us to say 'that kid is never going to make any friends', we've got to have those expectations that he can make friends and we've got to help him, we're teachers, that's what we do. We teach kids things, and it doesn't have to be maths today, today it can be how to make friends, and how to share, and some kids have never played a board-game and they've never learnt to lose with dignity, and they've never learnt to take turns and share. And we all struggled with that, but most of us had parents that put up with Monopoly 25 times until we got it."

Bronwen

Instilling values of respect

We reinforce the school's core values, and are creating a shared learning environment where teachers are "helping you learn", rather than going around "telling kids what to do and what not to do". By teaching kids to 'be their own boss' and instilling the values of respect and positive relationships into their learning, Michael hopes the school will help kids to recognise how to manage their own behaviour. Michael says there are less suspensions and a definite change in the kids' behaviours.

Michael

▶ **More than academic skills**

▶ Some kids have never played a board-game and they've never learnt to lose with dignity, and they've never learnt to take turns and share

Lifting the profile

Dave says 'high expectations' for him meant lifting the profile of Indigenous students and their families to give them a voice in the school. "I used the skills I developed with Stronger Smarter in terms of structuring our initial meeting within a Yarning Circle, introducing ourselves, checking in, talking about our backgrounds," he says. "The diversity of our parents and our community just amazed me. It opened my eyes to the opportunities that our school had gone without for so long, so I really wanted to give those kids and those parents a presence."

"It all came down to culture. Our parents wanted their kids to be able to identify in a positive way, they wanted their kids to learn artwork, dance and song." The program is boosting self-esteem and building pride in both students and their families by identifying them as valued members of the school community with a culture worth celebrating. In the long term he believes this will lead to improved academic results for these students as well.

Dave

Working with staff

As the assistant principal, Wendy often works with teachers to offer solutions. She says it's the way you have the conversation, not "making the teacher feel like they're doing anything wrong, it's more about opening up. I listen to what the teacher is saying and I say 'Okay. What are you doing to help them to start off with?' and they say what they've done, and I say 'why don't we have a look at it a different way. How do you think they want to learn... what kind of learner are they? Did you check in with them this morning, have they brought in any baggage from home that you may be able to work through with them?' ... It's not a one size fits all... It's about differentiating your teaching strategies, and just opening them up to some new ideas."

Wendy

▶ Innovative
strategies

▶ Just opening up to new
ideas

▶ High-Expectations Relationships

▶ A common terminology, a partnership....
Stronger Smarter is the train tracks.

Embedding high expectations

Stronger Smarter is now embedded in daily business at the school. Michael says, "We have lots of sayings that go with this approach, and we revisit them everyday at assembly in the morning. I'll go through something to do with Growing Respect, our four PBL rules or Stronger Smarter. We'll have sayings like, 'The next thing I do is the best thing I do', and try to embed that sort of thought in the kids."

Michael

The train tracks

At Michael's school, staff had already been working with the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) program, and developing an internal program called Growing Respect. These programs unpack the elements of respect and reinforce the values of courage and patience to show kids how to be respectful through their lives. Michael explains how Stronger Smarter has helped to tie these two programs together as an overall approach for the school. "Stronger Smarter is the train tracks where the school is going," Michael says, "and the train itself – the carriages – are our programs. So it's all three things working together."

Michael

A common terminology

It's terminology that's common. Like all good schools if you have consistency from top to bottom, kids get the same messages consistently. And it's no different for our staff, there's this understanding that we have a high-expectations relationships and high-expectations culture.

Dennis

6. Celebrating results and effort

Students

- recognise and celebrate students results

Colleagues

- recognise and celebrate colleagues results and effort

Celebrating results and effort

As well as setting goals for students, it is also important to acknowledge student success, and to do this through conversations to teach students to feel pride in their work.

This can range from one-on-one conversations with students in class to whole school award systems.

meet those goals. As educators start to highlight and build on strengths, students become more conscious of each other's strengths and goals and encourage each other.

Robust conversations and sharing critical feedback

Students results and effort

- ▶ Regularly recognise and celebrate the results and efforts of all students.
- ▶ Actively share students' results, effort and achievement with parents/caregivers and involve them in celebrations.
- ▶ Work with the community to co-create celebrations of students results or to run performances and events .

Colleagues results and effort

- ▶ Regularly recognise and celebrate colleagues' results and efforts.



Acknowledging success

Acknowledging success

Jess believes high-expectation relationships are built by acknowledging the successes of students through positive, one-on-one conversations, as well as having productive conversations with students when they are not achieving at the level that they should be, both academically and behaviourally. If a student does not make a smart choice, Jess engages with the student using constructive language such as “what can you do next time? What can I help you to do next time?” Jess says she has noticed the students becoming more accountable and engaging more in self-reflective practice.

Jess

▶ Acknowledging
success

▶ Acknowledging the
successes of students
through positive one-
on-one conversations

Bronwen says a lot of schooling practices can diminish intrinsic motivation. For instance, using sticker charts rather than teaching kids to feel pride in their work externalizes motivation. She says having a relationship where the kids like you motivates them to want to do the right thing, like workers do a better job for a boss they like, “and from there it’s a really small step to them wanting to do things for themselves, because if they come to you for ‘I want you to be proud of me’, then you can turn the conversation very quickly into ‘How do you feel about this? How does this make you feel when you achieve, and when you’ve done your best?’ So it’s a small tweak, rather than ‘Oh look you got another sticker’. So I think that’s part of the Stronger Smarter attitude too, its that whole ‘Give them the tools themselves, teach them how to fish’. And truthfully the only way any children, but particularly Aboriginal children, are going to get ahead is if they take it on themselves.

Bronwen

Setting goals and celebrating success

Louise has embedded Stronger Smarter principles into the classroom and says “it became a part of our culture”. Her class starts every day with check-ins. This is a great way for the class to bond. It allows students to share how they are doing so they don't have to carry it the whole day thinking that no-one knows how they were feeling.

Louise is conscious of making the daily check-ins more strength based, rather than it just being about how everyone is feeling. At the end of the week everyone shares something they have done that week that they are proud of.

Louise also enacts ‘strength based approaches through using goal setting. Students set goals by writing them on sticky notes and sticking them to their desks. The goal could be personal, relational or academic. Student's successes are celebrated and this “makes them understand what their strengths are and what they can do”.

When students first started going around the circle and sharing what they were good at, the students found it difficult to identify or speak of their strengths. When they did they were superficial skills rather than any “deep value core sort of things”. Louise said, “It was a little bit of a process of teaching them what their strengths can be, like being a person that you respect and more value sort of things. But they're a lot better at it now”.

Louise



Celebrating success



Celebrating successes makes students understand what their strengths are and what they can do.

Encouraging kids to have a go

When you talk to them about sport, or whatever they are interested in, and say look the first time you kicked a ball or threw a ball, it wasn't pin point accurate. You threw it, it didn't work, you practiced, you did it again, you kept trying and from that you gained skills.

So I really try to encourage that with all kids, the ‘have a go’ mentality... I suppose in doing that, in planting those seeds with kids you are creating those High Expectations because it means you are human, you can have faults and make mistakes and learn from your mistakes and that gives you powers. That gives you more ownership over your education, which does therefore create those high expectations

Damian

Celebrating goals

“Now...we’re a little more focused on goal charts, and each child has a coloured slip and they have their goals on that and we just keep adding to that. Every term we set a goal and we revise our Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) and we talk about the goals we’ve had on there. We talk about what we’ve done to achieve the goals, have we got new goals, new strengths, have we learned new things.”

Melanie says she helps the children to understand how to choose tangible, measurable goals both in maths (like going up from level 5 to level 10 in their multiplication/fast-math levels) and behaviour. “We talk about which goals we can measure so then you know we have achieved a goal. We have a whole school behaviour system and they get a reward for classroom behaviour and playground behaviour each week. We have a chart and the kids can say I want to get two ‘Onya’s’ every week.”

“So we’re encouraging kids that ‘this is what you can do and that’s good but if you want to aim a little bit higher you could do it this way’ so there’s that visual every lesson in front of the kids about what do I have to do to make my work better, to make my learning better. It’s a very good way of seeing ‘well I did that’ and that must mean I’m aiming high.”

Melanie

▶ Celebrating success

▶ We have a whole school behaviour system and students get a reward for classroom behaviour and playground behaviour each week.

Using Stronger Smarter language

“I’ll say to my students: you’re smarter than that, what else can you do; by using that tool you are showing me how smart you are and that’s also making you stronger as a person; or that’s showing me how strong you are when you solve problems independently like that. I always go down that path of ‘that behaviour’s not showing me how smart you can be,’ and it does turn them around and they go oh, okay well I’m going to fix that because I want to look smart, they like that language.”

I think the language is really, really powerful and in conversations that I’ve had with students who struggle it is a conversation that does seem to make a difference, using those words, and I feel that those kids who are struggling and who will probably continue to struggle I just hope that they will look back on what we’ve talked about and that I’ve given them a good foundation. I guess that’s my biggest hope, that these kids might be in difficult situations but they know how to get themselves back onto the right track or they know that they’re better than that and they can achieve what they want to achieve.”

Melanie

▶ Stronger Smarter values

▶ the language is really powerful

Sharing Stronger Smarter values

Wendy’s school has a ‘Stronger Smarter award’, for students who reflect the Stronger Smarter values. “So it might be ‘somebody had the courage to stand up for themselves today’, or ‘someone really challenged themselves today, I can see them honouring what was going on in their classroom and they decided to really change their behaviour, and did really good work’.”

The school also has a Stronger Smarter mascot – an eagle. Wendy said the kids love it “the little tiny kids love cuddling him because he’s all soft and fluffy, the older kids high-five him... he’s just a part of our school.” The teachers wear their Stronger Smarter shirts with pride, she said, “we’re really proud to be a Stronger Smarter school... The community ask us ‘what’s that eagle shirt you wear? Tell us about that’...they all know the eagle.”

Wendy
