The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education
Volume 49 ▮ Number 1 ▮ pp. 32–45 © The Author(s) 2018 doi 10.1017/jie.2018.10

High-Expectations Relationships: A Foundation for Enacting High Expectations in all Australian Schools

Chris Sarra,[1] David Spillman,[2] Cathy Jackson,[1] John Davis[1] and John Bray[3]
[1] *Stronger Smarter Institute, Caboolture, Queensland, 4510, Australia*
[2] *Leadership Development, MurriMatters Consulting, Boonah, Queensland, 4310, Australia*
[3] *Department of the Chief Minister, Northern Territory Government, Darwin, Northern Territory, 0801, Australia*

Enacting high expectations for all students in the classroom is a complex undertaking. Underlying, out-of-awareness assumptions may lead to actions, behaviours or pedagogic choices that do not support these high expectations beliefs and intentions. For Indigenous education, this is compounded by public and professional discourses around deficit positioning, and by historical conditioning, where many Indigenous students do not see achieving in school as part of their cultural identity. High expectations are usually considered as a performance agenda — in terms of effort, learning and achievement. In this paper, we introduce the concept of high-expectations relationships where viewing and enacting high expectations through a relational lens equips educators with strategies to support such performance outcomes. We describe this relational lens where fair, socially just relating establishes a relational space of trust, thus enabling both student motivation and the firm, critically reflective relating necessary for quality learning. Using the voices of educators, we describe how high-expectations relationships can promote collegiate staff environments, strong teacher–student relationships and trusting and supportive relationships with parents and carers. We show how these positive educational attributes of any school community, seeded through a focus on high-expectations relationships, work to support the performance outcomes of a high-expectations educational agenda.

■ **Keywords:** high-expectations relationships, high expectations, teacher–student relationships, student engagement, community engagement

There is general agreement from researchers, policymakers and education professionals alike, both in Australia and overseas, that it is essential for educators to hold high expectations for their students (e.g. Hattie, 2008; Papageorge & Gershenson, 2016). In Australian Indigenous education, recommendations for 'what works' for Indigenous student success start with high expectations, along with strong teacher–student relationships, quality teaching and positive cultural acknowledgment (e.g. Lewthwaite et al., 2015; Ockenden, 2014; Productivity Commission, 2016). Despite this, as educators, we work within a policy environment where public discourse around educational underachievement and failure frequently relies on deficit accounts that attribute blame to 'disadvantaged' groups. For Indigenous communities in Australia, this is compounded by historical conditioning where the communities and the children themselves have often been seen as the cause of their educational failure (Sarra, 2011a, p. 161).

Recognising this historical policy environment, much has been written about the importance of *believing* in high expectations for all students. These high expectations are usually considered as a performance agenda — high expectations for effort, learning and achievement (e.g. Hattie, 2008). What has been consistently absent from the literature, however, is the discussion of *how* to enact these high expectations beliefs, or what high expectations mean for the daily interactions of an educator in the classroom. Further, while the literature describes the need for quality teacher–student relationships, there has been limited discussion about what these relationships look like, how to create them, and how such relationships support the high expectations performance agenda.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Cathy Jackson, Stronger Smarter Institute, Caboolture, Queensland, 4510, Australia.
Email: cathy.jackson@strongersmarter.com.au.

This paper introduces the concept of high-expectations relationships, described as two-way relationships that are both supportive and challenging (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014), as a key foundational element to support and enact a high expectations performance agenda. We propose that when a school environment is underpinned by high-expectations relationships, this provides the basis for educators to develop quality relationships with their students, robust and dialogic environments with colleagues that are conducive to high expectations pedagogy, and strong relationships with parents and carers that will optimise support for students' educational efforts and aspirations. These positive educational attributes work to ensure that the school's vision for a high-expectations educational agenda is supported and owned across the whole school community.

What follows in this paper is first an outline of theoretical perspectives that support the concept of high-expectations relationships as a way to enact a high expectations educational agenda. This includes how the notion of high expectations emerged to counter the pervasive deficit discourse in Indigenous education. We then describe and unpack the critical components of high-expectations relationships and discuss how to enact them. The research methodology is then outlined. Finally, the various ways high-expectations relationships can be enacted are analysed and discussed using the voices of a variety of educators.

Understanding High Expectations — Countering Deficit Discourse

Matthews (2015) suggests that the colonisation of Australia under the doctrine of terra nullius created a void in the psyche of mainstream Australia with a population of non-Indigenous people who know little about Indigenous people. In the absence of knowledge, the void has been filled by stereotypes that misrepresent Indigenous people (Sarra, 2011b), and where Indigenous knowledge and cultures are seen to have no relevance in a modern, advanced, technological, industrial society (Matthews, 2015). Several researchers (e.g. Habibis & Walter, 2015, p.140; Mathews, 2015; Mills, 2008) have drawn on Bourdieu's work to describe how the culture of an education system reproduces the culture of a society's dominant classes — in other words, schools are microcosms of societal power structures. If this is the case, then our education system is based on social constructs where racism, even if out-of-awareness and based on an absence of knowledge, is historically reproduced and culturally embedded (Benveniste, Guenther, Rainbird, Dawson, & King, 2017).

Matthews (2015) suggests that terra nullius continues to impact on the education system as an 'all-pervading' pedagogy which places the dominant culture of mainstream Australia in a privileged position. Students who are socialised into this dominant culture will be automatically advantaged with the onus on the 'outsider' to fit into this established system (Gale, Mills, & Cross, 2017). Habibis and Walter (2015) call on us to question whether our education system is meritocratic — a system that allows those with ability and fortitude to succeed regardless of social background — or whether it is a system that socially reproduces intergenerational inequality.

It is well understood that, historically, Australian society has conditioned educators to have low expectations of Indigenous students (Sarra, 2011a, 2014). Even as this began shifting to a recognition of the importance of high expectations, for Indigenous students, high expectations has nevertheless too often been positioned within a 'deficit' framework. Deficit discourse posits that Indigenous children are less able to learn than their non-Indigenous counterparts because of their external situation (Dodson et al., 2017; Fforde, Bamblett, Ray, Gorringe, & Fogarty, 2013; Gorringe, 2015). The deficit positioning of Indigenous people is strongly reinforced through the language of disadvantage and the discourse of progress and enlightenment (Harrison, 2007; Mills, 2008; Vass, 2013).

Awareness of the negative educational impacts of this deficit positioning of Indigenous students is certainly increasing. For instance, the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2014 report, after consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and their organisations, academics, researchers and service providers, refocussed on a strength-based approach to move from concepts of disadvantage to improving wellbeing (SCRGSP, 2016).

However, while the focus is changing, there is still a need for deep recognition of the ongoing impact of this legacy of deficit language and thinking. Some government educational policies continue to perpetuate such discourses. 'A Share in the Future', the latest review of Indigenous education in the NT, offers one example (Wilson, 2014). This review positions Indigenous children and families from an entirely deficit perspective, and focuses exclusively on 'catching them up' to mainstream western educational benchmarks (Fogarty, Lovell & Dodson, 2015; Spillman, 2017). What is exemplified here is the way a system dominated by Anglo-Australian, middle class educators and policy makers generally favours students with the same cultural background as those responsible for the creation and design of the system. In such a strongly deficit-focussed system, it is difficult for educators to promote actions, behaviours and pedagogic choices that truly support their high-expectations beliefs. Rather it is more likely that with the strong, systemic deficit assumptions about Indigenous children operating moment to moment, educators, without being fully aware of it, may search for evidence to reinforce these assumptions. In such a way, deficit discourses can be self-perpetuating.

In addition, strongly deficit-focussed educational policies and programmes, such as proposed in 'A Share in the Future', serve to perpetuate Indigenous people's

negative self-perceptions — a strong legacy of colonisation (Gorringe, Ross & Fforde, 2011; Sarra, 2011a). As a result, educators may be dealing with students who have a negative sense of their own cultural identity and with parents and community who have a negative sense of the value of schooling based on past experiences (Sarra, 2011a).

If society has conditioned us to have low expectations of Indigenous students, it can be very difficult to change such perceptions and judgments even for those who genuinely believe in high expectations for all. Our education system cannot be meritocratic when it is operating within a deficit framework and while Indigenous students are expected to 'fit in' to an education system based around the culture of mainstream Australia. In such a system, a focus on access to education through school attendance will not, on its own, improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. We need to look deeper at what schools are doing to recognise the strengths and values that Indigenous students and their families and cultures bring to the classroom. Fogarty et al. (2015) and Spillman (2017), in their critiques of 'A Share in the Future', argue for a strengths-based focus as the dominant educational paradigm. High expectations of Indigenous children are clearly more likely to be enacted and realised from such a paradigm.

High-expectations relationships take this strength-based approach and signal that others are worthy of a 'fair go' and are capable of lifting themselves, and then find ways to support, develop and embrace this capacity. As educators, we must challenge these dominant historical and systematic constructions, recognise how low expectations have developed and are perpetuated, and understand how to truly enact high expectations. In this paper, we present the concepts and strategies of high-expectations relationships as the vehicle to support educators in this endeavour.

The Spheres of the Stronger Smarter Approach

The concept of high-expectations relationships was developed by Sarra (2011b) as one component of the Stronger Smarter Approach — an approach for Indigenous education in Australia (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017a). In addition to high-expectations relationships, other key concepts of the Stronger Smarter Approach are strength-based processes, positive student identity and professional responsibility — all elements which interrelate with high-expectations relationships.

The Stronger Smarter Approach posits three interlocking educational spheres: the spheres of the 'personal', the 'school' and the 'community' (Figure 1) (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017a). When high-expectations relationships are put in place, these three spheres come together to create a crossover or flow space. This connecting third space (Bhabha, 1994; Chilisa, 2011) is a part of Indigenous Knowledge thought worlds, and a site of innovation and creation (Davis & Grose 2008; Nakata, 2007; Yunupingu, 1994).

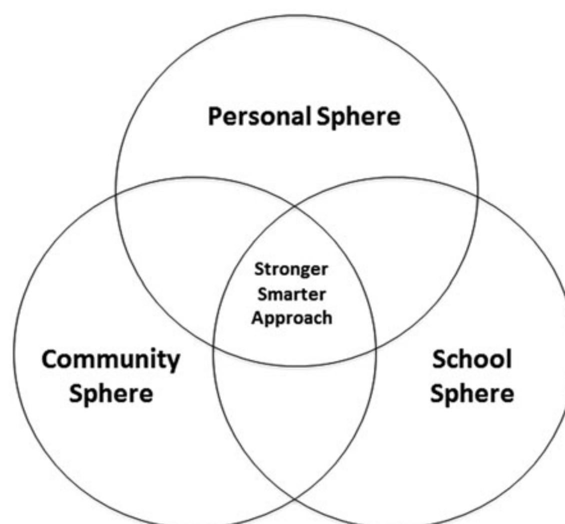

FIGURE 1

Spheres of the stronger smarter approach.

Within the Personal Sphere of the Stronger Smarter Approach, focussing on strengths ensures a change in thinking from 'catching up the student' to believing that any Indigenous child can be as smart as every other child in every other school if they are provided with the opportunity to do so. In the School Sphere, the focus is then about ensuring the same high-quality teaching strategies, for instance, tasks requiring intellectual rigour and higher order thinking, explicit criteria, explicit high expectations for student performance and culturally responsive pedagogies (CRPs), are available to all students regardless of location, socioeconomic status or cultural identity. Focusing on the strengths that students bring to the classroom encourages a strong sense of cultural identity and sense of belonging in a supportive, high-expectations student learning environment. In the Community Sphere, a school community culture that focuses on establishing and maintaining high-expectations relationships creates a robust supportive environment with parents and carers for the wellbeing, learning and achievement of their children.

Unpacking High-Expectations Relationships

High-expectations relationships combine the *belief* of high expectations with the *behaviours and dispositions* needed to create a high-expectations learning environment. We offer a framework for high-expectations relationships (Figure 2) that describes these behaviours through the areas of

I. understanding personal assumptions;
II. creating spaces for dialogue;
III. engaging in challenging conversations.

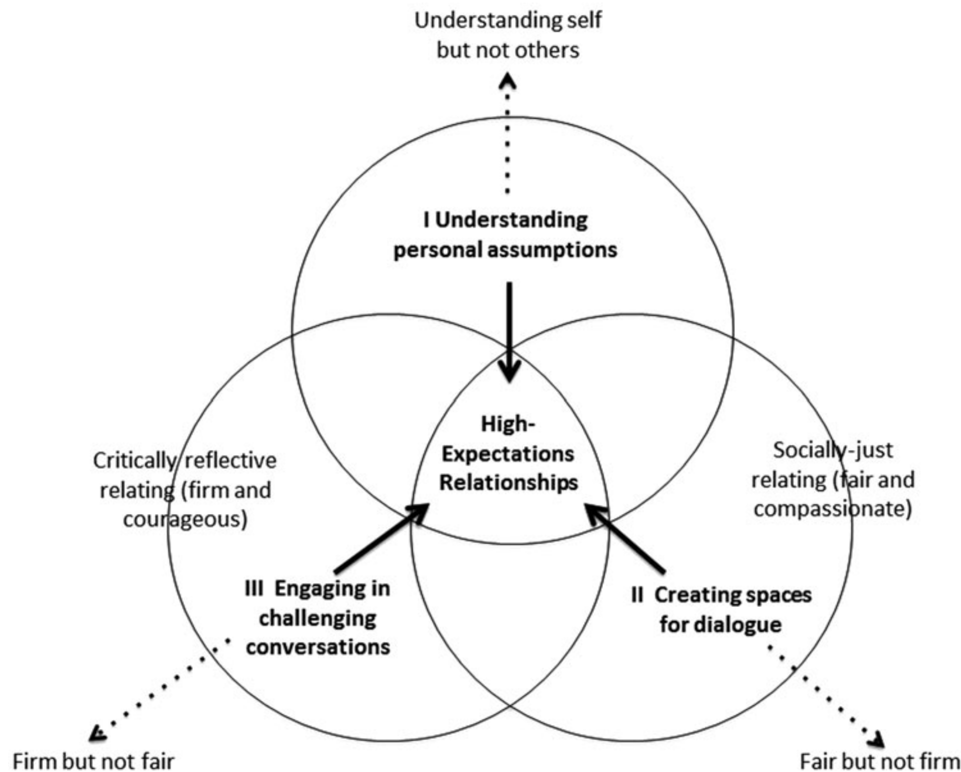

FIGURE 2
The high-expectations relationships relational lens.

Understanding Personal Assumptions

In Australia, our sociohistorical and professional conditioning into a discourse of deficit and disadvantage regarding Indigenous people means that even with a conscious commitment to high expectations, educators may adopt 'defensive' teaching strategies that simplify content and reduce demands on students (Griffiths, Amosa, Ludwig, & Gore, 2007; Perso, 2012). This out-of-awareness negative stereotyping and its underlying assumptions results in unproductive teacher–student relationships where students respond negatively, and the quality of student work is lower (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, 2009; Lewthwaite et al., 2015). A self-fulfilling prophecy results where low-expectancy children receive watered-down lessons which are further removed from students' personal experiences, background knowledge and culture and in turn limit students' academic growth (Papageorge & Gershenson, 2016; Torff, 2011, 2014).

There is evidence that educators' expectations for students can vary by racial group, even when educators think they believe in high expectations for all students. In the USA, Papageorge and Gershenson (2016) found that white teacher expectations differed by racial group in a way that puts black students at a disadvantage. In New Zealand, Bishop and Berryman (2006, 2009) report how Maori students explained their own absenteeism and disengagement as a way of asserting their own self-determination in situations where they believed the teacher held low expectations and treated bad behaviour as being 'Maori' and good behaviour as being assimilated into the majority culture. Teachers in the same study focussed on socioeconomic problems as the main cause of low Maori achievement.

High-expectations relationships must begin in the personal sphere. Within a high-expectations relationship, an educator is asked to contemplate and understand the baggage they bring to a relationship. This baggage includes out-of-awareness assumptions, the products of our socialisation through family, schooling and professional learning, such as those of deficit discourse. Schein (2010) demonstrates how such assumptions often determine our habits of perceiving, thinking, judging and acting, despite conscious beliefs to the contrary. Once educators come to understand the pervasive discourse of deficit and disadvantage in Indigenous education they can begin critically reflecting on their own assumptions and habits of thinking and doing. It then becomes possible to consciously focus on strength-based approaches while being ever mindful of the potential emergence of deficit assumptions. Critical self-reflection and seeking personal feedback, as a key element of high-expectations relationships, support an acknowledgment of the dispositions, strengths, weaknesses and cultural assumptions that shape 'self'. The result is a deeper understanding of both oneself and others as unique cultural beings.

Spillman (2013) explains the need to liberate ourselves from negative or disabling assumptions and think beyond simply bridging a cultural gap regarding Indigenous students. If we have made assumptions about what is on the other side of that gap, then we can deny ourselves the possibility of fully recognising and knowing the person as a unique human being with a complex and layered identity. By assuming that what we 'know' about a culture automatically applies to a person, endangers us of limiting the conversation and can deny the possibility of a high-expectations relationship.

The self-reflective aspect of high-expectations relationships sits closely with Critical Race Theory (CRT) that seeks to ensure that individuals and schools take time to understand how the narratives of their local contexts continue to impact today (Vass, 2015). Vass (2015) uses CRT to call for a critical investigation of the deep seated 'racialised fire that continues to burn in education', recognising the desire to be good teachers can, nevertheless, result in uncritically upholding an education system that does not adequately meet the needs of anyone outside the mainstream dominant culture.

Benveniste et al. (2017) suggest that CRT demands that every day practice match the rhetoric for social change, and that the application of CRT in educational research facilitates questioning of the roles of educational structures to expose underlying racism. In such a way, accepting the doctrine of terra nullius as part of our shared history would contribute greatly to dismantling the assimilationalist education paradigm that positions Indigenous cultures as deficit (Matthews, 2015).

In the USA, Peggy McIntosh's work on white privilege and unpacking the 'invisible knapsack was designed as a way to help whites overcome their racial blindness by 'confessing to their white privilege' (Margolin, 2015). Margolin (2015) argues, however, that what is gained from confessing and renouncing privileges is simply a new set of misrepresentations — allowing whites to retain their imagined innocence, moral elevation and the privileges they are renouncing.

Sarra (2011a, p.67) looks at this in a different way, using the analogy of 'buckets of opportunity' in terms of access to education, employment, health and housing and human rights issues in relation to equal wages, rightful access to wages earned and the ability to own property and to move around in society without restriction. Two buckets represent the flow of opportunities for white mainstream Australia and for Aboriginal Australia. Clearly in the past, the bucket of opportunity for Aboriginal Australia has seen a lower rate of flow. Sarra (2011a) says increasing the flow of opportunity for Aboriginal Australia is essential if Aboriginal Australia is to catch up with mainstream Australia. One area of increasing that flow is to ensure that the educational opportunities provided to Indigenous students in all schools across the country are equal to those provided to mainstream Australia (Benveniste et al., 2017).

High-expectations relationships provide educators with a recognition of the impact of terra nullius pedagogy. Once such awareness is raised and critical self-reflection has occurred, educators are able to recognise themselves as agents of change (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). As educators become comfortable to acknowledge their limited knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and honour Indigenous cultures, languages and world views, they can use the tools of high-expectations relationships to develop partnerships with their local Indigenous community (Buckskin, 2012; Davis, 2012). Against the background of such reflection, educators can make up their own minds about whether their personal and professional rhetoric matches the day-to-day realities of their exchanges with children and colleagues. A high-expectations relationship invites educators to ask themselves, 'Am I "walking the walk" or just "talking the talk"'?

We should note that breaking the doctrine of terra nullius is not straightforward and this topic deserves greater consideration than is possible here. This is addressed in greater depth through the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program (SSLP) run by the Stronger Smarter Institute.

Creating Space and Time for Dialogue — 'The Compassion to be Fair'

If a school is to enact high expectations, this requires a shared understanding and ownership of what this means for the school. This can only occur where educators create a space of equal power dynamics with high levels of trust and safety. In this space, it becomes possible for everyone to sit together as equals, agree on what expectations should be, and create a way forward in a genuinely collaborative manner. In this space, there is time for dialogue, a conversational process that focuses on synthesising or building on multiple perspectives and enables collective sense-making and consensual decision making. Dialogue involves being prepared to challenge and replace personal perspectives and assumptions. Dialogue accepts the uncertainty of 'not knowing' and as such enacts an engaged curiosity about what others bring. This contrasts with debate, where personal perspectives are defended as being 'known' or 'right' and there is no desire to actively enquire into the perspectives of others with the possibility of shifting our own (Spillman, 2013).

These kinds of equal power interactions have been called *socially just relating* (Mills, 2008). Socially just relating involves tuning into the feelings, experiences, perceptions, strengths, needs and desires of others. It involves deep listening and being genuinely and compassionately interested in what others communicate or as Sarra (2011b) puts it 'having the compassion to be fair'.

These rich conversations require an investment in both space and time for dialogue. One way to provide this is through conversational circles such as yarning circles (Davis, 2012). Circles are used as a process where group members can work towards a space of equal power, safety

and trust. Within the circle, everyone's feelings, perceptions and experiences are ideally validated. Over time these become spaces where ideas are challenged in a nonjudgmental and productive manner (Spillman, 2013).

Engaging in Challenging Conversations — 'The Courage to be Firm'

When we create the kind of socially just dialogic environment discussed above, people become comfortable to discuss issues and hold robust conversations on challenging and emotionally charged topics (Spillman, 2013). In this way, a compassionate and fair group culture enables robust challenging conversations — which can be described as *critically reflective relating* (Spillman, 2013). This kind of relating is characterised by courage, resilience, rigour and firmness in order to challenge mindsets, in self and others. This is also the space for giving and receiving feedback. As Sarra (2011b) describes, this means being firm and having the courage to challenge and intervene when necessary, for instance, at times when individuals or communities are clearly not exercising their responsibilities appropriately. When these conversational processes are embedded as routine, they become cultural practices, enhancing the likelihood of sustainability of the relationship. In this way, high-expectations relationships are not a 'bolt on' or additional requirement in the school or classroom; they are an underlying way of doing business.

The Fair and Firm Coupling

For a high-expectations relationship to occur, it is critical that both socially just relating (fair) and critically reflective relating (firm) are present. Socially just relating on its own may be supportive and affirming but lacks the rigour and robustness necessary to challenge and intervene and facilitate the high-expectations performance agenda. Educators can think they are holding high expectations by being supportive and responsive to culture by, for instance, providing easier tasks or simply accepting that Indigenous students always turn up late when, in reality, they are simply colluding with low expectations.

Equally, critically reflective relating needs a socially just relationship for the challenging conversations to occur. Without this trust and safety, critically reflective relating may be perceived as uncaring and lead to defensiveness and disconnection. Critically reflective relating on its own can manifest as high-expectations rhetoric that suspends a child from school for swearing at the teacher, or sends a child home for not wearing a full school uniform.

In a high-expectations relationship, where the 'firm' and 'fair' aspects work together, the educator will both challenge behaviours and at the same time seek to understand the circumstances that caused the incident and work with the child and parents to discuss expectations and co-create constructive solutions (Sarra, 2014). Examples of the differences in the behaviours that come from believing in high expectations (rhetoric) and enacting high-expectations relationships, showing this coupling of 'firm' and 'fair', are provided in Table 1.

Research Methodology

Our research to develop and understand the strategies associated with high-expectations relationships and describe how these strategies are being used in Australian schools builds on the work of Professor Chris Sarra. Sarra brought consideration of the need for high expectations to the forefront of discussions about Indigenous education in Australia (Sarra, 2011a). Since 2008, Sarra has been calling for high-expectations teacher–student relationships (Sarra, 2008 , 2010 , 2012). In 2012, Sarra took the concept beyond the teacher–student relationship and called for a high-expectations relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia (Sarra, 2011b).

The joint authorship of this paper allows us to see the topic from both an Indigenous and non-Indigenous standpoint. The concepts of high-expectations relationships are grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, and we bring these into an education system that is built around western ways. Our research has been conducted in two phases. The first phase has been the development of the concepts described here over a decade of working with educators (teachers, school leaders, teacher-aides, Aboriginal Education Workers and Community Elders) through the SSLP, where we continually test ideas, hold critically reflective conversations, and seek feedback. In 2014, the Stronger Smarter Institute presented these ideas as an Institute position paper (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014). This paper is now used in the Institute's leadership programmes and by schools for staff professional development, providing a further testing of the ideas.

As a part of every leadership programme, participants undertake 'workplace challenges' (action-research projects) and, at the culmination of the programme, share their practice and model their high-expectations relationships journey. The concept of high-expectations relationships has become well understood among educators who have undertaken these leadership programmes, providing a rich and diverse group who have provided information about how they enact high-expectations relationships in their schools. Over the last decade, the concepts of high-expectations relationships have been put into practice by over 3000 educators in schools who have completed the SSLP. These educators cover the complete range of roles in schools, and are located at over 850 schools across Australia varying from very remote to metropolitan. Over 500 of these schools are in areas with a lower than average index of community socioeducational advantage and have Indigenous student populations of between 9% and 100%.

The second phase of the research comprises a series of semistructured interviews with selected educators about what high-expectations relationships mean to them, and

TABLE 1

Examples of the Difference Between High Expectations Rhetoric and a High-Expectations Relationship

Situation	Low-expectations response	High-expectations rhetoric (believing)	High-expectations relationship (enacting)
A student arrives at school without a uniform.	Ignore the absence of the uniform, believing that confrontation is not worth the time, effort or potential conflict.	Send the student home for not following the school rules.	Talk with the student about why they are out of uniform. Engage in a conversation with parents/carers about options, for example, the school providing uniforms if cost is an issue.
A student is not attending school regularly.	Refrain from talking to the student or contacting parents or carers — it is not the teacher's role to get students to school.	Suspend or punish the student for not adhering to school policy.	Work with the student to explore the reasons affecting attendance. Talk with the family to work together to find solutions.
A student enters your classroom visibly upset because of relationship difficulties with another student.	Ignore the student, or state that the demonstrated behaviour is 'ridiculous' and unnecessary.	Insist that students keep their problems 'out of the classroom' because everyone is 'there to learn'.	Talk to the student to determine what support they need in order to engage in the class or if another option is appropriate. Make a time to talk to the student further.
Two students are fighting in the playground.	Stop the fight and follow the school's procedures for unacceptable behaviour, thinking that it is typical of those students and they are on their way to a suspension.	Follow the school's procedures for unacceptable behaviour and divorce yourself of any further responsibility.	Stop the fight, follow the school's procedures for unacceptable behaviour and actively engage with both students individually and together to identify the cause of the fight and address those issues. Encourage students to reflect on their behaviour and accept responsibility for their part.
An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander parent or Elder complains about how elements of Indigenous history or cultural studies are being taught in your classroom.	Listen to the complaint and decide to refrain from teaching Indigenous studies again.	Listen to the complaint and respond that as the teacher you are responsible for what is taught and that parents/elders should not interfere.	Engage in an open conversation with the parent/elder to better understand their concerns, apologise for the distress. Consider options to address their concerns, for example, invite parent/elder to contribute to future lessons on Indigenous studies.
Students are heard using racist language when talking about a particular individual or group in the school (or in society).	Pretend not to hear the comments, as the situation is too complex, or it is harmless because it does not involve physical violence or casually tell the students to 'cut it out' without any follow-up.	Confront the students and implement school's procedures for unacceptable behaviour.	Intervene and explain that their language is inappropriate, implement school's procedures for unacceptable behaviour and organise a time to meet each student individually to discuss motivating factors and potential harm of their comments and attitudes.
A student refuses to participate in or complete a classroom, homework or assessment task that it is 'too hard'.	Accept the student's attitude, and make concessions for their inaction.	Demand that the student completes all set tasks and outline the consequences if student does not comply.	Discuss their concerns and explain the importance of the task, work with the student to understand what 'too hard' means to them and which parts of the task need additional scaffolding and if there are other forms of support that the student may require in order to complete the task.
Teacher shows a video in class.	Show a video loosely tied to the curriculum without an introduction to the purpose and context and without follow-up activities as a way of simply keeping the students quiet in the classroom.	Use the video to deliver the established curriculum inflexibly believing this will deliver on high expectations, with no consideration for student interests, capabilities or preferences.	Develop an understanding of students' interests and cultural backgrounds to deliver curriculum based on culturally responsive pedagogies.

how they enact high-expectations relationships in their school or classroom. Interviews were undertaken by video or a recorded phone conversation with a total of 16 interviews conducted from 2014 to 2017. In addition to the interviews undertaken by the authors, a further 12 interviews were conducted by six students from the Department of Social Science at the University of Queensland as a final year research project (Fleming et al., 2015). We have also incorporated data from these interviews within our research. The Stronger Smarter Institute augments this field research with a quantitative analysis tool, the high-expectations relationships behavioural index, used with SSLP participants. An analysis of this data will form a third phase of the research.

Discussion of Findings

In the sections that follow, we use interviews from the second phase of research to provide rich examples of how high-expectations relationships are being enacted across the three spheres of the Stronger Smarter Approach.

The Personal Sphere

As we have described, high-expectations relationships must begin in the Personal Sphere where there are two key elements of critical self-reflection. These are professional accountability and taking a strength-based approach.

Professional Accountability

Interviews with educators show that this mindset shift of high-expectations relationships leads to a greater level of professional accountability. Educators describe how, when they think about what high-expectations relationships mean to them, this involves a clear element of holding higher expectations of themselves. Educators talked about high-expectations relationships as challenging themselves to have the courage to hold difficult conversations and accept feedback. One principal describes this as the performance line, implying critical self-examination rather than finger-pointing when things do not go to plan. Supported by a collegiate and accountable staff, this high school in remote WA is achieving increasingly great results, particularly for their Indigenous students. They now have 90% Indigenous student retention from Year 10 to Year 12, and overall the number of students graduating from senior secondary school each year has jumped from around 30 to nearly 90 (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017b):

> 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. [Principal, Remote WA].

A Strength-Based Approach

Deficit conversations in the staffroom can be a way of venting frustrations or trying to deal with difficult situations. However, deficit conversations can disempower educators by reducing their belief in their own capacity to support Indigenous children to succeed and achieve (McNaughton & Lai, 2008). The interviews showed that as educators see the world through the lens of high-expectations relationships, they reject deficit discourses and build on the culture and strengths of students without lowering expectations. The educator below is talking about the possibility of positive behavioural change among staff that can result from shifts in thinking following critical self-reflection regarding deficit assumptions of Indigenous children:

> Once the thinking can shift, then [our] behaviours and actions [as educators] shift. 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. [Teacher, Very Remote WA].

Some educators discussed how viewing every student as an individual, rather than simply a set of behaviours, led them down a different path of high expectations. Instead of using the fair and compassionate aspect of relationships as an excuse to let expectations slip, they talk about a continued expectation of pushing students that bit further, expecting that students can and will learn every day, while still caring for students individually and seeking to understand the underlying issues that might be getting in the way of learning. One educator described how this enabled a greater emphasis on the high-expectations performance agenda:

> Before enacting high-expectations relationships, 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?' [Teacher 1, Regional NSW].

Many educators acknowledged the challenges of finding the middle ground between firm and fair and how some teachers have strong relationships without accountability leading to low expectations and others have high expectations, but without building the strong relationships to support these expectations:

> So the high expectation is that [the student] will be here on time and will turn up every day. 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. [Teacher 2, Regional NSW].

The School Sphere

In the School Sphere, high-expectations relationships provide both the basis for maintaining a collegiate and collaborative teaching staff and for developing strong teacher–student relationships in the classroom. Both aspects are

essential to support the high-expectations performance agenda.

Collegiate Staff Environment

Educators report that once high-expectations relationships are embedded within school protocols, procedures and processes, this provides the school with a shared language to hold robust conversations with colleagues. One educator described how the processes and language of high-expectations relationships became embedded cultural practice among staff, where challenging one another was accepted as opportunity. At this school, academic results showed significant improvements on 9 of the 10 NAPLAN measures (Years 3 and 5) immediately after introducing a school culture of high-expectations relationships. All five Year 3 average scores improved between 34 and 55 points within a year (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017b):

> High-expectations relationships is a real vehicle to challenge and be challenged. You can challenge a colleague and say, 'is that really a high expectations relationships comment?' [Principal 1, Regional Victoria].

Educators who have attended Stronger Smarter Institute leadership programmes use processes of check-ins and yarning circles with their staff. They report that spending time in these conversational circles where roles are suspended, every voice is of equal value and everyone is given space to speak, is powerful in building a more collegiate staff. Using language such as 'how do we as a group feel about something', helps staff feel more supported when sharing issues, talking about frustrations and engaging in challenging conversations. One educator described how their staff yarning circles had brought down barriers and opened up possibilities:

> [The staff yarning circles] have brought down a few barriers and we can be more open and more upfront where people are not so offended but more so see the possibilities. [Teacher 3, Regional NSW].

Teacher–Student Relationships

The relationship a student has with their teacher is an influential force on the student's ability to achieve (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). High-expectations relationships are central to every interaction with students.

Getting to Know Students and Building Trust

Students are far more likely to challenge themselves when they believe their teachers care about them as human beings and believe in their potential. Educators explained the importance of building trust and getting to know students better. This teacher noted this was particularly important in remote communities where there is a high turnover of teachers:

> Kids can be so adult-wary, particularly in remote areas where there's a high turnover of teaching staff. I think it takes a while for kids to even work out in their minds 'How long are you going to be here? Are you someone I can trust? If I have to trust my educational pathway to you, how can I do that if you're always yelling at me and telling me off, when all I really want to do is connect, to be part of this school.' [Teacher, Remote WA].

Educators talked about being able to break down the barriers by getting to know the kids better:

> It is about getting to know the kids, having conversations, getting involved in their lives. When I watch them play football, because my son plays football with them, 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. [Teacher 4, Regional NSW].

Strength-Based Conversations — Enabling High Expectations

Educators recognised the importance of building an 'emotional bank account' (Covey, 1990). This emotional credit, built up through socially just relating, enables an educator to hold the challenging conversations with students when needed, but without students feeling the only exchanges they have with a teacher are negative. Educators recognised the power of strength-based language, through encouraging students to have a go and take pride in their work, and planting ideas that they can learn from mistakes, aim high and celebrate achievements:

> So that reminder to say, 'Let's go back to what we do have and let's build on that', rather than concentrating on what we're missing, is a much more powerful and effective way of working. It's much more empowering for their families, and the students, and for us. It's all about building rather than worrying. [Teacher 2, Regional NSW].

Using this strength-based approach, educators discussed how they view student behaviour, attendance and engagement through a wellbeing lens. Students are still held accountable for poor behaviour; however, the conversations are a dialogue with students which looks at strengths, acknowledges the challenge and proceeds to work out where we can go to from here. Building trust with students means buying into the relationship. This may sometimes mean 'removing (suspending) the role' of teacher or principal to connect with students and let them feel they are supported. At the school where this Assistant Principal is based, embedding high-expectations relationships has seen enrolments jump from 520 in 2011 to over 680 in 2016 as community confidence in the school increases (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017b):

> You 'buy in' to your relationships [with students] and build the trust up. '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. [Assistant Principal, Regional NSW].

One educator described this as making sure the student understands that it is always possible to fix things and is given the chance to make a fresh start the next day:

> So, if we can find out why kids don't want to come to school or what's stopping them from walking through the gates or walking into class ... finding out the kid's story and listening to them and responding to their needs, rather than reacting to the problem. That in itself should have a natural impact on attendance and behaviour. [Teacher, Very Remote WA].

Educators were clear that high-expectations relationships are about high expectations, and setting goals and challenging work. For Indigenous students and remote communities, educators describe this as rejecting deficit discourses and ensuring they are providing the same high level of learning opportunities as any school in Australia. Supporting students to reach those goals requires the 'fair' aspects of high-expectations relationships:

> Rather than saying 'you're late, you haven't been here for two weeks what's the reason?', a strength-based way would be saying, 'Hi Johnny great to see you, we've missed you for the last couple of weeks hope you're OK. I'll catch you up on what the work is that everyone is doing' and then approach the student at a convenient time in a private space. [Teacher, Very Remote WA].

Positive Student Identity

High-expectations relationships 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. These strengths-based approaches instil values of respect and positive relationships into learning, helping students believe in themselves and providing strategies to cope with difficult situations. Educators reported that students became more conscious of each other's strengths and goals and encouraged each other:

> The empathy that it [high-expectations relationships] builds between the kids and the power it gives me to intervene, is fantastic. 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. [Teacher 2, Regional NSW].

Educators reported that building high-expectations relationships with their students included thinking about differentiated teaching strategies to support student learning:

> 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 [Teacher 5, Regional NSW].

The discussions with educators about how they use high-expectations relationships in the classroom, show how they recognise the importance of supporting students to bring their existing cultural knowledge and experiences to classroom interactions (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Purdie et al., 2000). This clearly supports the use of CRPs that value learning experiences that reflect, validate and promote students' culture and language (Lewthwaite et al., 2015), make a connection between school knowledge and the personal world they experience and understand without compromising the intellectual quality of their school experience (Griffiths et al., 2007), and both teach students their own voice and ensure that voice can be heard in the wider world (Delpit, 1988).

The Community Sphere

With parents and community, high-expectations relationships provide the vehicle to ensure the school's vision for high expectations is owned by everyone. High-expectations relationships redesign how schools communicate with parents and community. One educator described this as moving 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?' Other educators talked about the importance of listening to parents and community. The Principal below has built a long-standing relationship with the local community for a school with 75% Indigenous students. This school culture of high-expectations relationships has resulted in school attendance of around 90% and academic results consistently above those of similar schools (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017b):

> It's [high-expectations relationships] a dialogue between staff and community, built on that respect and really listening to what people have to say. And it's those people knowing you will listen and you will consider it from their perspective. I think people feel valued in that situation and have no hesitancy in coming into the school and discussing anything. [Principal, Regional NSW].

Building Trust: Beyond the School Gate

Conversational processes between educators and parents are about taking the time to observe and acknowledge strengths, listening and yarning, and finding ways to support, develop and embrace existing capacity. Educators described how they built trust by knocking on doors and getting to know people or holding barbecues or parents' nights in the community and listening to what the community was saying. In regional Victoria, this Principal of a school with predominantly (80%) Indigenous students has also built high-expectations relationships, particularly with the local Indigenous community. In recent years the school has consistently achieved 90% attendance and academic results above similar schools (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017b):

> 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 I had a bank account of things to draw on, and start building relationships. [Principal 2, Regional Victoria].

Educators talked about being sure they are visible and providing positive feedback and stories to parents through friendly, supportive phone calls or texts home or sending videos of students, and through social media. The emphasis is on ensuring that parents have a positive interaction with the school and giving the assurance that 'I'm there for your child':

> I do a 'front gate' with my exec team. We each have a front gate and we say goodbye and give a 'high five' and start to be visible in the school and start to change the conversation. [Principal, Metropolitan NSW].

The language of high-expectations relationships explains the school's vision and expectations. 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'. Several educators reported that community yarning circles provided successful ways to work with parents and community where the relationship goes beyond 'consultation' and becomes a partnership where pathways are co-created:

> In our thinking of a high expectations culture we set the groundwork for how that relationship is going to be, that you as the parent are part of that relationship and the child is part of our relationship and we expect amazing things together. [Principal 1, Regional Victoria].

Conclusion

Educators in this study confirm the complexities of enacting high expectations beliefs. Our research has shown that using a relational lens can support the performance agenda of high expectations. The 'fair' aspects of building relationships and the 'firm' aspects of robust dialogue and professional responsibility need to work together to support the high-expectations educational agenda in schools.

In this paper, we have described how high-expectations relationships focus initially in the personal sphere with an examination of the impact of social conditioning and out-of-awareness assumptions. This often provides the shift in thinking needed to understand how history has impacted Indigenous education in Australia, and to move beyond essentialised cultural assumptions (such as deficit) to a more realistic and deeper understanding of the context of the individual students and their families. This opens up the possibilities for educators to change their beliefs around what is possible for high expectations in Indigenous education and their personal role in contributing to this. Once educators can look at their own practice through a different lens and understand 'how am I with self?', they are able to move to understanding 'how am I with others, and how are we together?', providing the basis to build high-expectations relationships in the school and community spheres.

Our phase 2 research (2014–2017) shows that educators adopting the strategies of high-expectations relationships use both socially just relating and critically reflective relating to enact their high-expectations beliefs and visions with their colleagues, students, families and communities. Building such relationships takes time and energy, and requires deliberate strategies to recognise and accept personal accountability. The educators who do invest in this time report that this creates environments where challenging conversations can be held safely, high expectations can be upheld, and student learning can occur.

In a high-expectations relationship, cultural differences are celebrated, and strength-based conversations provide a solid basis for group members to work together to co-create solutions. Yarning circles enable spaces for dialogue where ideas can be challenged, and multiple perspectives enact collective sense-making and consensual decision making. When the thinking, conversing and behaviours that build high-expectations relationships become cultural practices within a school, the quality of collegiate staff environments, strong teacher–student relationships and relationships with parents and community are all enhanced. In doing so, this provides the essential, underlying basis for the culturally responsive learning environments needed to support the performance outcomes of high expectations.

Acknowledgments

Concepts within this paper have been discussed and developed together with staff from the Stronger Smarter Institute. Former Institute staff, Jemima Welsh and Ben Wilson, provided research support. We acknowledge the rich discussions held with educators who attend the Institute's leadership programmes, and in particular those educators who have provided their insights on how they are using high-expectations relationships in their classrooms and schools. The Institute's research is supported through funding from the Commonwealth Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

References

Benveniste, T., Guenther, J., Rainbird, S., Dawson, D., & King, L. (2017). Race, rules and relationships: What can critical race theory offer contemporary aboriginal boarding schools? In *Knowledge Intersections: Exploring the Research of Central Australia. Research Symposium Proceedings.* Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.

Bhabha, H.K. (1994). *The location of culture.* London: Routledge.

Bishop, R., & Berryman, M. (2006). *Culture speaks.* Wellington: Huai Publishers.

Bishop, R., & Berryman, M. (2009). The Te kotahitanga effective teaching profile. *SET: Research Information for Teachers, 2009* (2). Retrieved from www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/set/articles/te-kotahitanga-effective-teaching-profile.

Buckskin, P. (2012). Engaging Indigenous students: The important relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their teachers. In K. Price (Ed.), *Aboriginal and torres strait Islander education* (pp. 174–188). Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Chilisa, B. (2011). *Indigenous research methodologies*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc.

Covey, S.R. (1990). *The seven habits of highly effective people*. New York: Free Press.

Davis, J. (2012). Community connections in education: Community Durithunga – yarning in a circle on country, our way. In J. Phillips, & J. Lampert (Eds.), *Introductory Indigenous studies in education*. NSW: Pearson Education Australia.

Davis, J., & Grose, S. (2008). Which way? What happens when embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in schools meets the professional standards for teachers and an accountability matrix? In *World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education* 7–11 December 2008. Victoria: Victoria Aboriginal Education Association Inc.

Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, *58*(3), 280–299.

Dodson, M., Fogarty, B., Wilson, B., Gorringe, S., Waller, L., & McCallum, K. (2017). Deficit discourse in Indigenous education. Presentation on Tuesday 21 March 2017 for Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Retrieved December 20, 2017 from http://aiatsis.gov.au/publications/presentations/deficit-discourse-indigenous-education.

Fforde, C., Bamblett, L., Ray, L., Gorringe, S., & Fogarty, B. (2013). Discourse, deficit and identity: Aboriginality, the race paradigm and the language or representation in contemporary Australia. *Media International Australia, Incorporating Culture & Policy*, *149*, 162–173.

Fleming, E., McGovern, M., Moore, S., Sunners, K., Ralph, B., & Watson, M. (2015). *Stronger smarter in action: Stories of school practice*. Paper presented at the Stronger Smarter Institute by Social Science students at The University of Queensland. Unpublished report, School of Social Science, The University of Queensland.

Fogarty, W., Lovell, M., & Dodson, M. (2015). A view beyond review: Challenging assumptions in Indigenous education development. *UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts*, *4*, 1–21.

Gale, T., Mills, C., & Cross, R. (2017). Socially inclusive teaching: Belief, design, action as pedagogic work. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *68*(3), 345–356. doi:10.1177/0022487116685754.

Gorringe, S. (2015). Aboriginal culture is not a problem. The way we talk about it is. *The Guardian*. Retrieved May 15, 2015 from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/15/aboriginal-culture-is-not-a-problem-the-way-we-talk-about-it-is.

Gorringe, S., Ross, J., & Fforde, C. (2011). 'Will the real Aborigine please stand up': Strategies for breaking the stereotypes and changing the conversation. AIATSIS Research Discussion Paper 28.

Griffiths, T., Amosa, W., Ludwig, J., & Gore, J. (2007). *Equity and pedagogy: Familiar patterns and QT based possibilities*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Freemantle, 25–29 November 2007.

Habibis, D., & Walter, M. (2015). *Social inequality in Australia: Discourses, realities and futures* (2nd ed.). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Harrison, N. (2007). Secret transmissions: Modelling cross-cultural relations in classroom discourses. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *35*(1), 41–53.

Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Oxford, UK: Routledge.

Lewthwaite, B.E., Osborne, B., Lloyd, N., Boon, H., Llewellyn, L., Webber, T., Laffin, G., Harrison, M., Day, C., Kemp, C., & Wills, J. (2015). Seeking a pedagogy of difference: What aboriginal students and their parents in North Queensland say about teaching and their learning. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *40*(5). Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2015v40n5.8.

Margolin, L. (2015). Unpacking the invisible knapsack: The invention of white privilege pedagogy. *Cogent Social Science*, *1*, 1053183.

Matthews, C. (2015). Maths as storytelling: Maths is beautiful. In K. Price (Ed), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education: An introduction for the teaching profession* (2nd ed., pp. 102–120). Melbourne, VIC: Cambridge University Press.

McNaughton, S., & Lai, M.K. (2008). A model of school change for culturally and linguistically diverse students in New Zealand: A summary and evidence from systematic replication. Unpublished report Woolf Fisher Research Centre, University of Auckland.

Mills, C. (2008). Making a difference: Moving beyond the superficial treatment of diversity. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *36*(4), 261–275.

Nakata, M. (2007). *Disciplining the savages, savaging the disciplines*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.

Ockenden, L. (2014). Positive learning environments for Indigenous children and young people. Resource Sheet no. 33 produced by the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Papageorge, N., & Gershenson, S. (2016). Do teacher expectations matter? Brookings Institution. Retrieved February 27, 2017 from https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2016/09/16/do-teacher-expectations-matter/.

Perso, T.F. (2012). *Cultural responsiveness and school education: With particular focus on Australia's first peoples: A review & synthesis of the literature*. Darwin: Menzies School of Health Research, Centre for Child Development and Education.

Productivity Commission. (2016). *Indigenous primary school achievement*. Canberra: Commission Research Paper.

Purdie, N., Tripcony, P., Boulton-Lewis, G., Fanshawe, J., & Gunstone, A. (2000). *Positive Self-Identity for Indigenous Students and its Relationship to School Outcomes* [A project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs]. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology.

Sarra, C. (2008). The way forward. Indigenous children of the education revolution. Paper delivered to National Press Club, Canberra 26 May 2008.

Sarra, C. (2010). Stronger Smarter Approaches to Indigenous Leadership in Australia. In I. Snyder, & J. Nieuwenhuysen (Eds.), *Closing the gap in education? Improving outcomes in southern world societies*. Melbourne: Monash University Publishing. Retrieved July 4, 2012 from http://books.publishing.monash.edu/apps/bookworm/view/Closing+the+Gap+in+Education%3F/55/xhtml/part04chapter01.html.

Sarra, C. (2011a). *Strong and smart – towards a pedagogy for emancipation: Education for first peoples*. New York: Routledge: New Studies in Critical Realism and Education.

Sarra, C. (2011b). Time for a high-expectations relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. *Keynote address, Strong Start Bright Futures Conference*, Darwin, 18 October 2011. Retrieved June 22, 2017 from http://chrissarra.wordpress.com/2011/10/19/time-for-a-high-expectations-relationship-between-indigenous-and-non-indigenous-australia/.

Sarra, C. (2012). Reflections of an Aboriginal school principal on leading change in an Aboriginal school: Australia. In T. Wrigley, P. Thomson, & R. Lingard (Eds.), *Changing schools: Alternative ways to make a world of difference*. Oxon: Routledge.

Sarra, C. (2014). Beyond victims: The challenge of leadership. *2014 Griffith Review Annual Lecture* 7 August 2014 (p. 1–21). Retrieved June 16, 2017 from http://www.griffithreview.com/wp-content/uploads/Chris-Sarra-Beyond-Victims.pdf.

Schein, E. (2010). *Organisational culture and leadership* (4th ed). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision). (2016). Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage: Key indicators 2016. Canberra: Productivity Commission.

Spillman, D. (2013). Towards a framework of dispositions, capabilities and cultural practices for developing and enacting high-expectations relationships. Unpublished paper, University of Western Sydney.

Spillman, D. (2017). A share in the future . . . only for those who become like 'Us'!: Challenging the 'standardisation' reform approach to Indigenous education in the Northern Territory. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, *46*(2), 137–147.

Stronger Smarter Institute. (2014). *High-expectations relationships: A foundation for quality learning environments in all Australian schools*. Brisbane: Stronger Smarter Institute Limited.

Stronger Smarter Institute. (2017a). *Implementing the stronger smarter approach*. Brisbane: Stronger Smarter Institute Limited.

Stronger Smarter Institute. (2017b). *Stronger smarter field notes 2014–2017*. Brisbane: Stronger Smarter Institute Limited.

Torff, B. (2011). Teacher beliefs shape learning for all students. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *93*(3), 21–23.

Torff, B. (2014). Folk belief theory, the rigor gap, and the achievement gap. *The Educational Forum*, *78*(2), 174–189.

Vass, G. (2013). 'So, what's wrong with Indigenous education?' Perspective, position and power beyond a deficit discourse. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, *41*(2), 85–96.

Vass, G. (2015). Putting critical race theory to work in Australian education research: 'We are with the garden hose here'. *Australian Educational Researcher*, *42*(3), 371–394.

Wilson, B. (2014). *A share in the future: The review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*. Darwin: Northern Territory Department of Education.

Yunupingu, M., & Australian Broadcasting Corporation. (1994). *Voices from the land*. Sydney: ABC Books.

About the Authors

Chris Sarra is a proud descendant of the Gurang Gurang and Taribilang Bunda people from Queensland. Chris is a Professor of Education at the University of Canberra, focussing on teaching and researching school leadership, Indigenous education and educational equity. Chris is also Chair of the Stronger Smarter Institute, which he founded in 2006 to improve the way Indigenous education is delivered, without compromising cultural identity. Chris's PhD thesis has been published in a book titled *Strong and Smart — Towards a Pedagogy for Emancipation Education for First Peoples.*

David Spillman is a career educator, having worked in mainstream, regional, rural and remote primary and secondary schools, including teaching and leadership positions on remote Indigenous communities in the NT. David was involved in the original design and facilitation of the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program. David now works as a consultant in intercultural and facilitative leadership, cultural capability, Indigenous governance and organisational complexity.

Cathy Jackson is the Head of Research at the Stronger Smarter Institute, and has been involved in educational research with the Institute for the past 6 years. Prior to joining the Institute, Cathy gained extensive experience in higher education, in particular in curriculum design and assessment, evaluation strategies and project management. Cathy has a Master's degree in Science and postgraduate qualifications in management and public relations.

John Davis is a proud Murri Ambae man, and a traditional owner of the western sides of Bunya Bunya mountains. John is the Manager, Research and Impact at the Stronger Smarter Institute. John has worked as a lead educator in schools including positions as Principal, Head of Department and Subject Area Coordinator for Indigenous Education. He has held lectureship positions with the University of Queensland and James Cook University, and has worked as a QCAA and ACARA Advisor. In 2017, John completed his PhD in Indigenous Community Models of Education — *Community Durithunga.*

John Bray works for the Northern Territory Department of the Chief Minister and is the Regional Director for Jabiru. John is leading stakeholder engagements for the NT's work in better understanding economic development, population and infrastructure potential for Jabiru to a postmining future based on tourism and regional service delivery. Previous to this, John was Director of Partnerships and Communication for the Stronger Smarter Institute. John has held a range of senior positions within the NT and Queensland education departments including as a Senior Policy Officer and Senior Director. His leadership experience includes roles as Principal in primary and high schools across remote, rural and large metropolitan schools.