Implementing the Stronger Smarter Approach

A comprehensive reflection of the characteristics of a Stronger Smarter Approach in action.

Acknowledgements

Front page photograph

Stronger Smarter Program run by the Positive Learning Unit based at the Mount Isa Central State School. Tina Butcher and Auntie Joan Marshall are running a cultural program with the children from six schools in the Mount Isa area, taking a proactive, strength-based approach.

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Contents

Introduction

Everyone can remember a teacher who had an impact on their lives.

This is the "power and the magic" of the teaching profession (Sarra, 2012).

At the Stronger Smarter Institute, our vision is that every Indigenous student in Australia should have the opportunity for a high-quality education underpinned by the

Stronger Smarter Approach.

Every school is a 'mini-version of society' (Perso & Hayward, 2015). The relationships that occur in a classroom mirror those in the world outside.

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

At the Stronger Smarter Institute, we challenge educators to choose to make a difference.

We challenge you to be remembered by your Indigenous students (and all your students) as

'a deadly teacher'.

▶ ## A standard that should always have existed

▶ "It is about making this school what it always should have been ….

delivering a level of education that we've happily delivered to non-Indigenous students for many, many years, but have denied our Indigenous students.

It's about making a standard that should always have existed."

Lisa O'Malley, Head of Weipa Primary at Western Cape College.

What the OECD is saying…

In schools where Indigenous students are achieving well, there is generally a highly effective and committed school principal who has done 'whatever it takes' to ensure Indigenous students are at school, engaged in learning and making sound progress.

'Deprivation is a destiny' is a myth or a false assumption that can stand in the way of educational improvement.

Teachers should be better supported to collaborate and exchange information about students' difficulties, character and strengths with their colleagues so that they can collectively find the best approach to make students feel part of the school community.

Schools that work alongside parents as partners can achieve gains for students in many areas.

Teachers are sometimes not aware of the assumptions they are making about their students, especially if there are cultural or linguistic differences between themselves and their students. However, such assumptions can change when teachers become aware of their preconceptions, including the impact these have on their students.

In 2017, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released a report called *Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous students.*

Based on this and other data, Andreas Schleicher, the Director for Education and Skills at the OECD, has written several recent articles about success for Indigenous students. (Schleicher, 2017, a, b and c).

The strategies and ideas provided in this paper and described as the

Stronger Smarter Approach

provide an underlying strategy for schools seeking to implement reform agendas and provide deeper support for their Indigenous students

Teachers who think of themselves as cultural beings will open the door to thinking about their students as having their own culture, which in turn can profoundly influence their thoughts and behaviour

1. The foundation for the Stronger Smarter Approach

The **Stronger Smarter Philosophy** honours a positive sense of cultural identity, and acknowledges and embraces positive community leadership, enabling innovative and dynamic approaches and processes that are anchored by high expectations relationships.

The Stronger Smarter Philosophy and Metastrategies

The **Stronger Smarter Approach** articulates the philosophical framework developed by Dr Chris Sarra, which he has described as the Stronger Smarter Philosophy and Metastrategies.

The **Stronger Smarter Metastrategies** provide a set of five context-specific strategies. School leaders can use these as appropriate for their local context, using processes of relationship-building and co-creation to determine priorities. The Metastrategies are interconnected, so that as schools work on one area, things also start to change in other areas.

In the **Stronger Smarter Approach** we describe four underlying key elements that we believe need to be in place for the Stronger Smarter Metastrategies. Again, there is interconnection with the Metastrategies themselves. These four key elements are

▶ Responsibility for change (professional accountability)

▶ Taking a strength-based approach

▶ Embracing a positive Indigenous student identity (Strong and Smart)

▶ Building High-Expectations Relationships'

The Stronger Smarter Approach asserts confidently that we give Indigenous children hope, if we work from the assumption that they have strengths, and if we do things with them and their communities, then there is a tendency … for them to succeed in education' (Sarra, 2017).

Metastrategies

The Stronger Smarter Philosophy articulates a set of five interconnecting strategies:

▶ Acknowledging, embracing and developing a positive sense of identity in schools.

▶ Acknowledging and embracing Indigenous leadership in schools and school communities.

▶ 'High expectations' leadership to ensure 'high expectations' classrooms, with 'high expectations' teacher/student relationships.

▶ Innovative and dynamic school models in complex social and cultural contexts.

▶ Innovative and dynamic school staffing models in complex social and cultural contexts.

Responsibility for change (professional accountability)

The **Stronger Smarter Approach** begins with the concept of professional accountability (Sarra, 2011). The **Stronger Smarter Approach** asks educators to first examine their own beliefs and mindsets, and look at their out-of-awareness assumptions.

Sarra (2011, p.160) introduces an Accountabilities Matrix to guide the professional accountabilities of educators.

Professional accountabilities

Chris Sarra (2011, p.161) says.

'Education systems have demonstrated a tendency to readily accept Indigenous underachievement in schools as somehow 'normal' or 'given'….. It has seemingly been easier for education authorities to hold Indigenous communities culpable for failing to engage with schools for the purpose of education…. However the professional challenges for classroom teachers and their support infrastructures is to reflect inwards and evaluate the effectiveness of their own teaching practices and ask what it is that they are doing or not doing as a teacher that contributes to Indigenous student failure.'

▶ 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 to engage students better?"

Saeed Amin, Principal, Broome Senior High School

Strength-based approaches

An aspect of this mindset shift is to reject negative thinking and deficit conversations, and enable strength-based approaches. This means a 'beyond the victim' type leadership (Sarra, 2010) where we are all accountable for our actions, have the hard conversations, and focus less on blaming and more on the plan of action moving forward. The **Stronger Smarter Approach** is about schools recognising the strengths that exist in their local communities, working in partnership, and embracing positive Indigenous community leadership.

Strength-based approaches

A mind shift to reject deficit thinking and enable strength-based approaches underpins the Stronger Smarter Approach. This involves doing things 'with people' not 'to people'.

- ▶ In the staffroom, this means strength-based conversations.
- ▶ In the classroom, this means identifying and building on students' strengths.
- ▶ With the community this means 'co-creating' the way forward.

▶ Positive identity

▶ What we want is smart Aboriginal kids. We don't want to make the kids smart white kids, because they're not white kids. They're Aboriginal kids and we want them to embrace that sense of self, embrace who they are and value that as something important, that to be as good as the next person you don't have to be white. You can be an Aboriginal person and be as good as the next person.

Donna Bridge, Principal

Embracing a positive sense of identity (Strong and Smart)

Embracing a positive sense of identity is again based on an understanding of out-of-awareness assumptions and beliefs. This means understanding that a negative stereotype exists, naming it, understanding the impact and being committed to challenging these stereotypes and being responsible for bringing about change.

High-Expectations Relationships

High-Expectations Relationships are authentic two-way relationships that are both supportive and challenging (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014). The concepts of High-Expectations Relationships support educators to build strong relationships with their students, a collegiate work environment, and trusting and collaborative partnerships with parents and the local community.

Strong and Smart

The Stronger Smarter Approach is a transformational process for schools where students, staff, parents and community believe that all students can be both strong in their identity and smart in the classroom.

Figure 1: Key elements of the Stronger Smarter Approach Framework

Transformation

Strong and Smart

Sometimes, despite a commitment to high expectations, the 'out of awareness' beliefs and assumptions that teachers may bring to the classroom about Indigenous or disadvantaged students can impact in the classroom.

Strong and Smart is a belief that all students can be both strong in their identity and smart in the classroom.

Responsibility for change

Stronger Smarter asks everyone to first examine their own beliefs and mindsets. Once this understanding is in place, it is possible to shift and renew cultures and build places of learning and opportunity where high expectations exist and grow.

A mind shift to reject deficit thinking and enable strengths-based approaches underpins the Stronger Smarter Approach.

In the staffroom this means focusing on strength-based conversations. In the classroom this means identifying and building on students' strengths.

The Stronger Smarter Approach involves doing things 'with people' not 'to people'. If a school creates spaces for meaningful engagement, the way forward can be 'co-created' by the school together with the local community.

Effective communication between teachers and students, their families and the community requires an authentic two-way relationship that is both supportive and challenging.

This is a High-Expectations Relationship that has the compassion to be fair and the courage to be firm. Everyone has a responsibility for enacting change. Stronger Smarter asks leaders to not only set high standards and expectations, but recognise their own role in meeting those expectations.

Strength-based approaches

High-Expectations Relationships

Co-Creation

Doing things differently

The **Stronger Smarter Approach** purports an underlying belief that to improve outcomes for Indigenous students, we need to do things differently (Sarra, 2011a, p.163).

▶ **Transformation requires innovation:** Transformation means an improvement agenda that looks for creativity, innovation and how to change the future rather than trying to maintain the present (Dempster, Lovett, & Fluckinger, 2011; Robinson, 2015).   We recognise transformation as a journey and a continual process.

▶ **Local approaches**: To support our unique and diverse communities, we need local approaches (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015). We see transformation as not only a change process for the school but also a personal leadership approach. Taking personal responsibility for change and working with others to co-create strategies provides the starting point for creating local approaches.

▶ **Quality teaching:** Quality teaching pedagogies for Indigenous students is quality teaching for any child. Strategies for Indigenous students should be integral to the core business of the school rather than 'bolted on' as separate 'Indigenous education strategies (Evaluation of the 2010-2014 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan, 2014).

The **Stronger Smarter Approach** described in this paper shows educators *how* they can build a supportive and challenging learning environment for all students.

Making a difference

Hattie (2015) emphasises that 'a belief that we can make a difference for children from poorly resourced families is a critical starting point and the mantra needs to be, '*I can make a profound positive difference to every person who crosses the school gate into my class or school regardless of their background*.'

Stronger Smarter Journeys

Across Australia, many schools are already on the Stronger Smarter journey (see Figure 2). These schools

▶ use the **Stronger Smarter Approach** as an underpinning common language and framework to support the improvement journey

▶ have a highly collaborative school staff who work together to take responsibility for change

▶ are involved in partnerships where community members have meaningful engagement within the school and

▶ use processes of co-creation for the school's strategies and visions.

▶ An Indigenous education lens

▶ Stronger Smarter is about big-picture Indigenous education... the lessons we learn here about how we approach children and how we approach children's learning can be passed to all education. But what it's made me realise is that we really do have to have a specific Indigenous education lens put over what we do, because it's about time, it's about time we got it right, because we've been getting it wrong for too long.
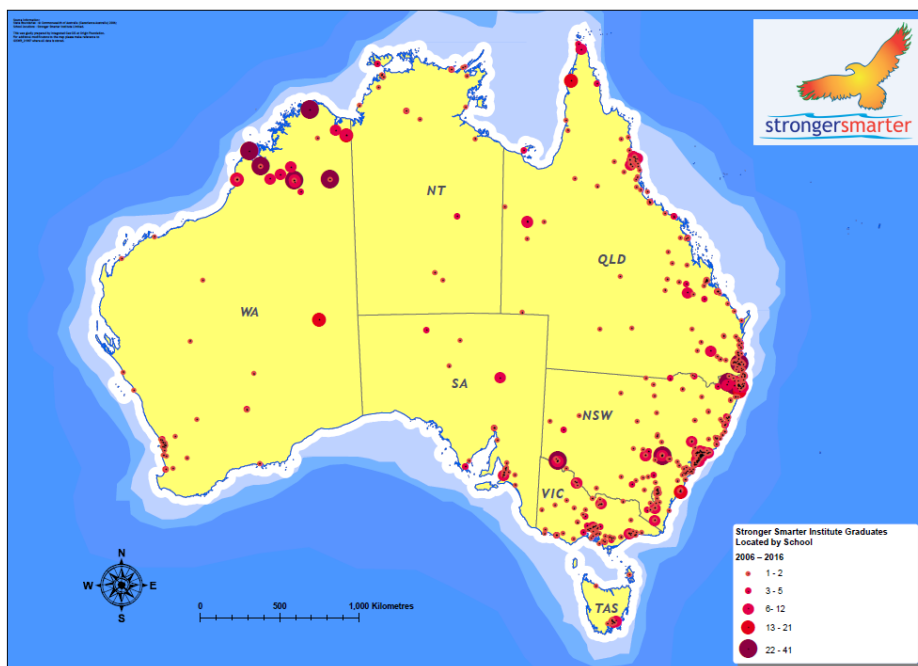
Tracy Stevens, Assistant Principal

Figure 2: Map of SSLP alumni in schools across Australia

As the Institute has worked in partnership with schools through our Stronger Smarter Leadership Program (SSLP), we have gathered a range of data on what the **Stronger Smarter Approach** looks, sounds and feels like when it becomes an integral part of everyday life in school communities (Sarra, 2012, Luke et al., 2013, Fleming, McGovern, Moore, Sunners, Ralph, & Watson, 2015, Stronger Smarter Institute internal research, 2017).

After a decade of working with educators the Institute is armed with volumes of rich Field Note and Case Study data from our SSLP participants who undertake 'Workplace Challenges' (Action Research projects).

This research is showing how the Stronger Smarter Approach is used in schools in a variety of ways to suit different contexts.

This paper brings our research together with supporting international and national research to describe the characteristics of a **Stronger Smarter Approach** in action in schools**.**

If we came into your school… what would we see?

▶ "The Stronger Smarter Philosophy integrated through our planning and school vision." [Principal, 2011].

▶ "Engaged students – who know that every student is important to us and that we monitor their progress across a range of academic and social areas." [Head of Curriculum, 2006]

▶ "Staff working to achieve the same goals, students working hard, great attendance and parents keen on getting kids at school and learning." [Principal, 2011].

▶ "A more relaxed and approachable teaching and learning space that is focused on student achievement, success for all students, and pride within self, culture and community." [Principal, 2011].

▶ "A tight team with a common purpose; to make sure that we reach every student and give them the skills that they need to be strong in their resolve and smart in the way that they deal with their lives." [Assistant Principal, 2011].

▶ "A curriculum which incorporates Aboriginal perspectives. Teachers passionate about teaching and learning and the achievement of our Aboriginal students." [Principal, 2010].

2. The Spheres of Influence

A cross-over or flow space between separate moving parts is part of Indigenous Knowledge thought worlds.

The spheres of the personal, school and community come together as the Stronger Smarter Approach in a connecting space of innovation and creation.

Across the Spheres

The Stronger Smarter Approach connects across the spheres of 'personal', 'school', and 'community' (Figure 3 and Figure 4). The characteristics described across these three spheres signal the pathway for a **Stronger Smarter Approach.**

In the 'Personal Sphere'

▶ we support educators to build their belief and confidence in their personal ability to contribute to change.

In the 'School Sphere'

▶ we provide the tools for school leaders to implement a **Stronger Smarter Approach** within their own school context using the common best practices for school and classroom transformation.

In the 'Community Sphere'

▶ we use strategies of High-Expectations Relationships (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014) to develop Community Partnerships built on cohesion and collaboration.
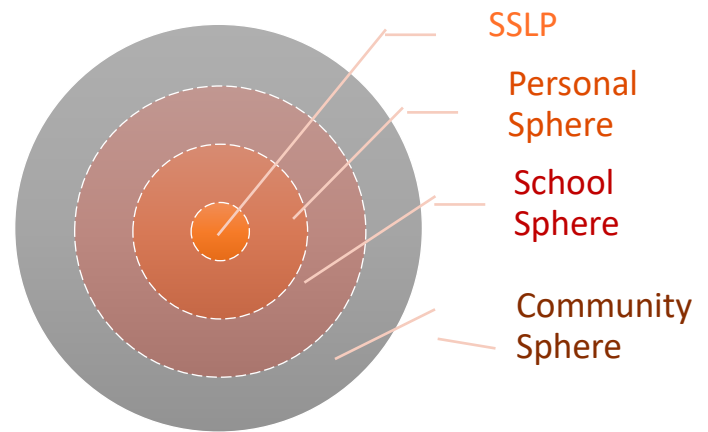
Figure 3: The Spheres of influence

SSLP

Personal Sphere

School Sphere

Community Sphere

▶ Across the spheres

▶ Stronger Smarter has really affected the whole culture of the school from the teaching to the learning, to the kids, to the staff, it's embedded in everything we do. We've adopted the Stronger Smarter motto, but we've added to it 'proud' so we ask our kids if they're being 'strong, smart and proud learners' and that's embedded from pre-school through to the kids that have left and are in high school now.

Sarah Jefferies (2014), Teacher, Glenroi Heights Public School. SSLP participant in 2009

Connecting the spheres

Success for all students means moving beyond simply a belief in high expectations, and building High-Expectations Relationships across the school community.

When High-Expectations Relationships are in place, everyone across the school community is ready to take responsibility to do things differently and build the relationships to bring the school community together to work towards transformative change.
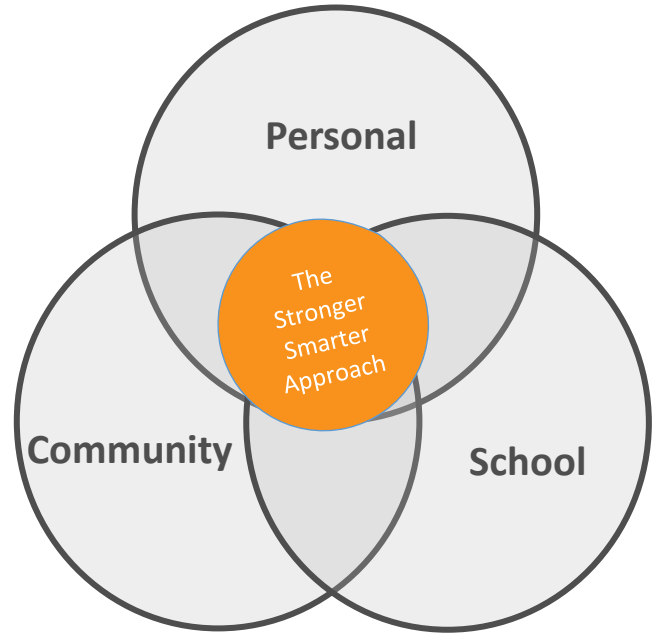

Figure 4: Connecting the Spheres

► Connecting with the community

► I came back from the program and felt quite empowered. I could see a real sense of purpose. I was new to the role in the school, and the first thing I really needed to do was to start building the relationships with my whole school community. I could see the strength to be gained from working with people in a positive way and having good solid conversations would help us with how we were working with the kids in the school. I didn't see we could move forward without having that trust in each other.

Ken Jeanes (2014), Principal, Nowa Nowa Primary school. SSLP participant in 2012.

The connecting 'third space'

A cross-over or flow space between separate moving parts is part of Indigenous Knowledge thought worlds.

This connecting 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994) is a site of innovation and creation (Yunupingu 1994; Nakata, 2007; Davis & Grose, 2008).

3. The Stronger Smarter Approach Framework

"In the same way that we say to Indigenous students that they have to believe positively in themselves and their ability, we have to say to ourselves as educators that we have to believe positively in our ability to deliver the best for Indigenous students in our schools." *Chris Sarra*

Introduction to the Stronger Smarter Approach Framework

The literature has documented *what* we need to achieve in schools to improve outcomes for Indigenous students.

What has not been so clearly documented is *how* we achieve these school characteristics.

The **Stronger Smarter Approach Framework** that follows seeks to describe how school reform can be achieved using strength-based approaches and High-Expectations Relationships.

The Framework

▶ describes how the four key elements of the **Stronger Smarter Approach** (described in Figure 1) can be applied across the three spheres of Personal, School and Community

▶ looks in detail at each of the elements of the **Stronger Smarter Approach** across these spheres, building on the Stronger Smarter Metastrategies.

The literature

The characteristics of a school environment needed to support Indigenous students have been described in the literature. What is not so clearly documented is *how* to achieve these school characteristics.

Examples include

▶ the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities Longitudinal Study (Luke et al., 2013)

▶ the 2015 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy

▶ the 2016 Productivity Commission Report on Indigenous primary school achievement.

▶ Milgate and Giles-Browne's (2013) presentation on Creating an Effective School for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students, which illustrates the factors that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their parents and carers have identified as important in education.

▶ the 2014 Resource Sheet on positive learning environments for Indigenous children and young people (Ockenden, 2014).

The Framework the multiple pathways across the spheres and the Stronger Smarter Leadership Journey which takes education practitioners from

- developing 'high expectations' of Indigenous students and education outcomes
- through 'taking responsibility for change'
- to embedding 'High-Expectations Relationships.'

Three diagrams (Figures 6, 7 and 8) describe what the Stronger Smarter Approach looks like in the Personal, School, and Community spheres, and describe the journey through to High-Expectations Relationships.

▶ ## A journey

▶ The processes and language of Stronger Smarter became a vehicle for me to verbalise what I wanted to say and to express things intrinsically inside me, things like High-Expectations Relationships.

From a management perspective, once I'd undertaken the program, I sat and worked out how this could work over a number of years in our school. Primarily I went with the philosophy to get what you want on the ground, you change the way your leadership team works.

Dennis Mitchell (2014), Principal, Ranfurly Primary school. SSLP participant in 2011.

In developing this framework, the Institute has been guided by Luke et al's (2013) report. In this report, the authors recommended the development of an Indigenous Education Reform Template.

The Framework provided in this document is the first stage in providing such a template. Future Stronger Smarter Institute research will explore deeper into the elements of the framework.

The Framework is shown in diagrammatic form in Figure 5.

The elements of the Stronger Smarter Leadership Journey across the three spheres of Personal, School, and Community are detailed in the text that follows

▶ Underpinning framework

> ▶ "The whole philosophy and approach underpins what we do for our kids in our school, whether they're Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal."
>
> *Steve McAlister (2015), Principal, Forbes North Public School. SSLP participant in 2015.*

A template for Indigenous school reform

A 2013 review of the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities project by Luke et al. recommended the development of a P-12 Indigenous Education Reform Template as "a comprehensive template for Indigenous school reform that outlines multiple pathways and considerations that principals and teachers, schools and communities need to address (Luke et al., 2013, p.39).

Luke et al cite the Ontario K-12 School Effectiveness Framework (p.40), which has guided and consolidated reform in the Canadian province of Ontario, as an exemplar for a Reform Template.
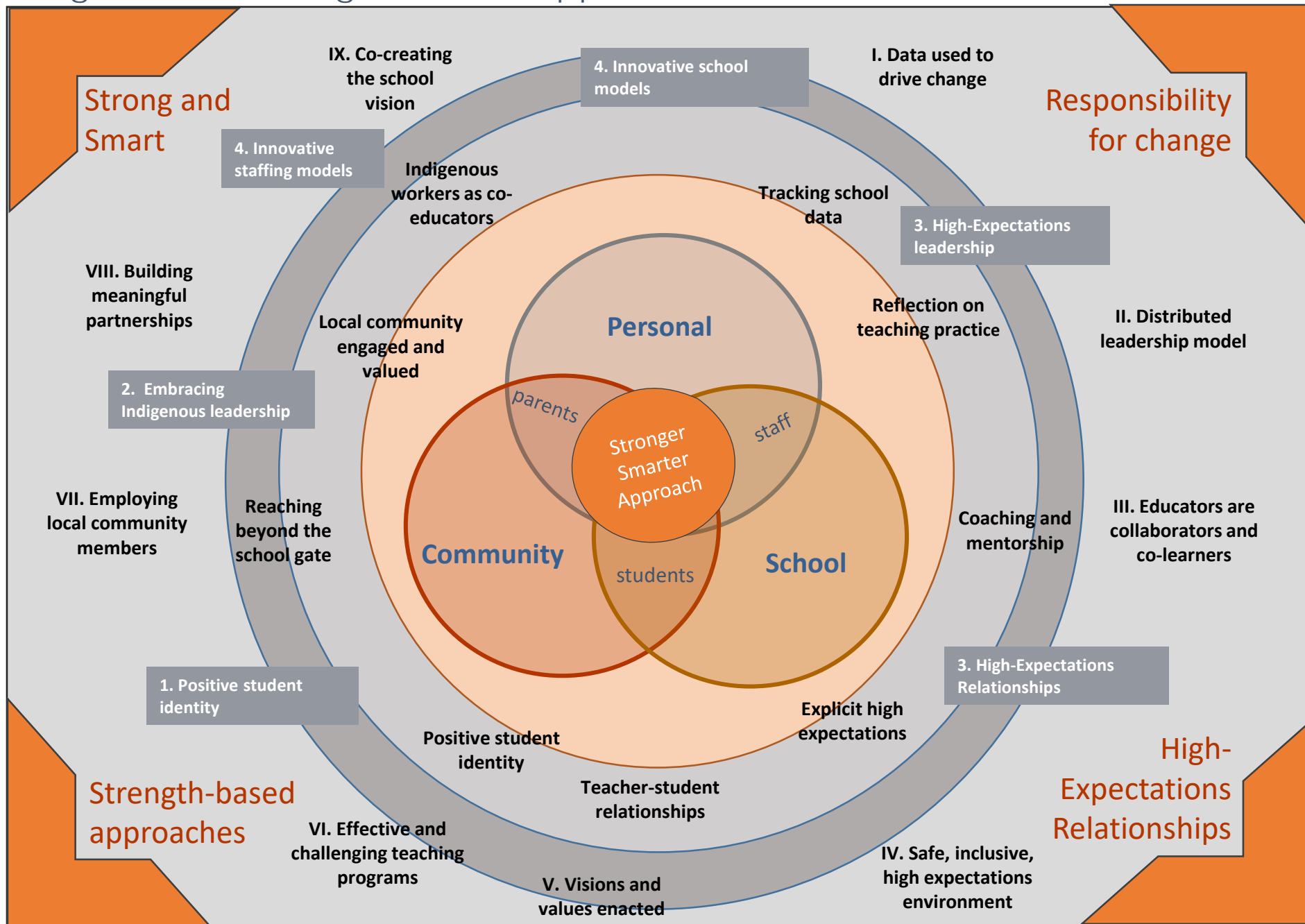
Figure 5: The Stronger Smarter Approach Framework

Strong and Smart

Responsibility for change

Strength-based approaches

High-Expectations Relationships

IX. Co-creating the school vision

4. Innovative school models

I. Data used to drive change

4. Innovative staffing models

Indigenous workers as co-educators

Tracking school data

3. High-Expectations leadership

VIII. Building meaningful partnerships

Local community engaged and valued

Reflection on teaching practice

II. Distributed leadership model

2. Embracing Indigenous leadership

Personal

parents

staff

Stronger Smarter Approach

VII. Employing local community members

Reaching beyond the school gate

Community

students

School

Coaching and mentorship

III. Educators are collaborators and co-learners

1. Positive student identity

Explicit high expectations

3. High-Expectations Relationships

Positive student identity

Teacher-student relationships

VI. Effective and challenging teaching programs

V. Visions and values enacted

IV. Safe, inclusive, high expectations environment

Figure 6: Unpacking the Stronger Smarter Approach Framework: The Personal Sphere

The Personal Sphere

High-Expectations Relationships are visible through
- professional conversations and open exchange of ideas
- staff working as collaborators and co-learners
- teacher aides and Indigenous workers as co-educators in the classroom

Responsibility for change is visible through
- coaching and mentorship
- distributed leadership models
- reflection on teaching practice

High expectations are visible through
- a focus on using data to drive change
- a commitment to employing Indigenous staff

High-Expectations RelationshipS

Taking responsibility for change

Building high expectations

In a **Stronger Smarter Personal Work Environment**

There is a strong sense of shared vision, collegiality and cohesiveness amongst the staff.

The staff learning environment is characterised by professional conversations, mentorship, feedback, dialogue and open exchange of ideas.

Everyone has a belief in their ability to contribute to change and understands their role in achieving the school's vision.

Co-creation

Transformation

stronger smarter institute

Personal Sphere

In a Stronger Smarter Personal Work Environment ….

There is a strong sense of shared vision, collegiality, and cohesiveness amongst the staff. The staff learning environment is characterised by professional conversations, mentorship, feedback, dialogue and an open exchange of ideas. Everyone has a belief in their ability to contribute to change and everyone understands their role in achieving the school's vision.

A high staff morale where staff are proud to be part of something special, a high level of professionalism, and high staff retention are all evidence of a productive work environment.

Within the 'Personal Sphere', 'transformation' is about transforming ourselves, and consequently our spheres of influence, whether school, corporate, or community, into agents of change. This begins with a mindset shift to take a strength-based approach and recognise our own responsibility for change.

The Stronger Smarter Approach

▶ incorporates notions of shared leadership, distributed leadership, facilitative leadership and teacher leadership, to recognise the leadership qualities needed in everyone to take this 'responsibility for change'

▶ seeks a 'transformational leadership' or professional transformation' approach which is values-based and vision driven, and has a strong focus on relationships. This seeks to empower staff and school communities to bring about socially constructive, people-focused change. Leaders create spaces for participatory decision making, question accepted views, analyse and reshape personal and collective professional knowledge and consider alternative approaches (Dempster et al., 2011; Zammit et al., 2007).

I. Using data to inform change

With effective instructional leadership, leaders develop the capacity of people and systems to both deliver whole of school practices, but also identify, gather and use evidence so that staff know how the school is performing (Bishop, O'Sullivan and Berryman, 2010; What Works, 2012).

In a high expectations environment, educators focus on using data to inform change. Schools track their internal school data, make this visible to staff, and respond by:

- using data for specific cohorts (e.g. Indigenous students) to ensure all cohorts are performing to the same levels

- tracking reading and numeracy data at the individual student level and developing personalised learning plans for students

- developing systems to interrogate anything that is not working, and using this analysis to determine where to focus on change and to drive reforms.

▶ A data driven culture

▶ "It was my responsibility as a leader to move a culture of "NO' data to a culture of 'KNOW' data."

Judd Burgess, Principal

Sharratt & Fullan (2012)

identified three domains of leadership around using data

Know-ability

- understand what it looks like to use data to improve instruction in each class

- make the relevant data transparent, and articulate the expected use of data

- provide environments where teachers work together to frame good practice

Mobilize-ability

- hold and sustain high expectations

- ask the question 'are my expectations high enough?'

- create a positive and caring community

Sustain-ability

- establish a lasting culture of shared responsibility and accountability

- create 'second change agents' (distributive leadership)

- think about how the impact on student learning is monitored

Strategies for a data driven culture

Principal of Aitkenvale School, Judd Burgess, shifted the school from thinking about data collection as compliance to viewing data as a tool to drive rich conversations and teacher reflection. Strategies he has used include

- ▶ teachers setting class targets to ensure a mindset of a culture of improvement

- ▶ all teachers collecting pre and post short term data aligned with NAPLAN

- ▶ whole school data walls with probe data for each child

- ▶ whole school data walls by class sets for discussion and target setting

- ▶ student data walls in every classroom for reading and attendance

- ▶ student achievement meetings to set goals for student performance and be clear about teacher accountability.

▶ Using data for change

▶ "We all have a conversation about attendance on a fortnightly basis about how we're going. We have five-weekly data snapshots with data walls. We're using data for change, not data for data's sake. I think that's a big positive moving forward."

Principal

Jensen (2014)

describes data driven analysis and measurements of effective learning as one of the steps to 'school turnaround'. This includes personalised learning plans and looking at the daily learning progress of every student.

What Works (2012)

describe the importance of whole of school instructional models and approaches to literacy and numeracy teaching.

Hattie (2015)

describes high-impact instructional leaders as those who make formal classroom observations, interpret test scores, insist teachers collaborate in planning and evaluating the teaching program, insist teachers expect high proportions of their students to do well on achievement and social outcomes, and ensure the staffroom and classroom atmosphere is conducive to learning for all students.

II. Distributed leadership

In a Stronger Smarter Personal Work Environment, everyone has a belief in their ability to contribute to change and understands their role in achieving the school's vision.

All staff recognise their role in supporting the visions and high expectations for the school. Staff believe they have both a responsibility and an ability to personally contribute to positive change in the school. This is as a distributed leadership model where:

▶ school leaders explain and share their expectations and visions with staff

▶ all staff recognise and understand their leadership responsibilities within their roles and spheres of influence

▶ there is an emphasis on reflection on teaching practice

▶ a 'circle' approach to leadership supports staff to take responsibility for change.

Dweck (2016)

Carol Dweck (2016) summarises her research that shows that a growth mindset, a belief that you can develop your talents and abilities through hard work, can have a profound effect on student motivation. A growth mindset is in opposition to a fixed mindset which is the belief that talents and abilities are unalterable traits that cannot be improved. In this article, she talks about the complexities and the dangers of a false growth mindset – when educators believe they are promoting growth mindsets, or declaring themselves to have a growth mindset without actually taking that long journey.

Sarra (2011)

Chris Sarra (2011, p.162) says that 'schools with high proportions of Indigenous students are in the greatest need of quality teachers and quality leadership. He describes how, at Cherbourg school, he used Michal Barber's (2003) boldness matrix to encourage staff to try new strategies. If they were seeking transformation, they needed to be bold about the reforms and deliver them skilfully with a high quality of execution.

III. Collaborators and co-learners

The **Stronger Smarter Approach** calls for

▶ reflection on teaching practice

▶ coaching and mentorship

▶ a staff culture where educators are collaborators and co-learners.

In a High-Expectations Relationships work environment, all school staff are responsible for developing a collegiate and supportive work environment. This is an environment where all educators

▶ hold professional conversations and co-create the school's vision and strategies for high expectations

▶ recognise what the school's high expectations mean for their professional practice and challenge themselves to play a part in delivering on these expectations for the school

▶ reflect on their classroom practices, are open to feedback and work together as collaborators and co-learners

▶ recognise and acknowledge the strengths that all school staff bring to the school or classroom, and work with teacher aides and Indigenous workers as co-educators in the classroom

Collegiate work environments

The literature describes school work environments that are more productive when staff work together in a collegiate way.

▶ Coe et al's (2014) research on what makes great teaching considered the importance of professional behaviours including reflecting on professional practice and supporting colleagues.

▶ Hattie (2015) says leaders need to build collaborative expertise and seek and privilege successful teaching that leads to maximum student growth and understanding.

▶ Klem & Connell (2004) suggest that the visions of transformative leadership should be combined with pedagogic or instructional leadership to bring collegiate discussions, and professional learning communities amongst staff.

and school leaders

- ▶ provide coaching and mentorship to support, develop and challenge their staff to meet these expectations
- ▶ ensure the staffroom is a positive space where staff hold positive conversations about what they can do to move the school forward.

What makes a deadly teacher

Figure 7 describes, from the point of view of students, the personal characteristics of teachers that students say will support them in their learning. In other words, 'what makes a deadly teacher.'

- ▶ This information is taken initially from student surveys and interviews undertaken by the Stronger Smarter Institute in 2011 as part of an AITSL pilot project, (Anderson & Thomas 2011).
- ▶ This research is supplemented by the literature
    - o Bishop & Berryman, 2009
    - o Lewthwaite, et al., 2014
    - o McKew, 2014
    - o Ockenden, 2014
    - o Sarra, 2011a,b;
    - o Sarra, Matthews, Ewing, & Cooper, 2011

Investing in Mentoring

Gabrielle Stroud in an ABC opinion piece (Stroud, 2017) quotes Associate Professor Philip Riley from the Australian Catholic University, and Professor Robyn Ewing from the University of Sydney, who are both researching teacher attrition.

They suggest that teacher burn out is, in part, because teachers feel unsupported and disillusioned.

They both suggest that it is important to invest in teachers, and that support and mentoring for staff is important.

Ewing suggests "*A well-mentored new teacher is three times more likely to stay in the game.*"

Figure 7: Students say that Stronger Smarter Teachers are deadly teachers who …

Are friendly, approachable and supportive

- genuinely interested in us as individuals
- like being around young people
- make time for us out of class
- ask about what we did on the weekend
- come to watch us play sport
- meet with our parents to say good things about us
- notice us, make the time to listen, get to know us
- offer to help us with our work and don't make us feel stupid for asking
- make us feel happy, bubbly and fun

Promote a positive cultural identity

- treat us with respect
- give us a feeling of strength and importance
- makes us feel brainy and cool – that we can go anywhere
- make us feel welcome, give us a sense of belonging

Make the learning interesting and fun

- show that they are passionate about the stuff they are teaching
- work from what we already know
- make the lesson about things we are really into
- use practical, hands-on examples
- give us a range of different activities and vary the teaching styles

Make the learning challenging

- believe in us, support us, but also challenge us to be our best
- push us with complex tasks
- make sure we understand their expectations
- explain to us why what we're learning is important
- help us understand what we need to do.
- give us feedback

This information is from student surveys and interviews undertaken by the Stronger Smarter Institute as part of an AITSL pilot project, (Anderson & Thomas 2011). This research is supplemented by information from

- Sarra, 2011a,b
- Sarra, Matthews, Ewing, & Cooper, 2011
- Bishop & Berryman, 2009
- McKew, 2014
- Ockenden, 2014
- Lewthwaite, et al., 2014

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Figure 8: Unpacking the Stronger Smarter Approach Framework: The School Sphere

The School Sphere

High-Expectations Relationships are visible through
- processes to work with the community to co-create visions, priorities and strategies
- Effective and challenging teaching programs, that connect to individual learning styles, interests and aspirations

High-Expectations Relationships

Taking responsibility for change

Responsibility for change visible through staff who are
- committed to improvement and reform
- understand and act on shared visions and values
- teachers take time to know their students

Building high Expectations

In a **Stronger Smarter Whole School Environment**

Students feel cared for and supported in a positive environment where they can be proud of their culture. They have a strong sense of belonging and a high level of connectedness with their teachers. Students see school as having direct relevance to their lives, and the learning is challenging, interesting and fun. They have a strong belief in their own ability to achieve to high standards.

Parents and community members have a high level of confidence that the school is a positive influence in the lives of their children and will provide a quality education.

High expectations visible through a school environment that is
- clean, tidy and well-maintained
- free from racism, sexism and bullying
- Supports a positive sense of student identity
- explicit in high expectations

Co-creation

Transformation

School Sphere

In a Stronger Smarter Whole School Environment ….

Students feel cared for and supported in a positive environment where they can be proud of their culture. They have a strong sense of belonging and a high level of connectedness with their teachers. Students see school as having direct relevance to their lives, and the learning is challenging, interesting and fun. Students have a strong belief in their own ability to achieve to high standards.

Parents and community members have a high level of confidence that the school is a positive influence in the lives of their children and will provide a quality education.

In the school sphere, the **Stronger Smarter Approach** provides an underpinning, common language and approach that helps staff understand the school's vision and ties other programs and strategies together. School principals have described Stronger Smarter as 'an essential piece of the jigsaw' or the 'train tracks showing the direction for the school.'

IV.   A safe, inclusive, high expectations school environment

For quality learning to occur, an orderly, safe, and inclusive environment that is welcoming for students and families from all backgrounds will be in place.

This school environment

- ▶ is clean, tidy and well maintained, and free from racism, sexism and bullying

- ▶ has visible symbols such as flags or art that represent all cultural groups and physical spaces in the school where people can sit together and yarn

- ▶ might include specific programs (where needed) such as youth programs, programs of excellence, breakfast programs, homework centres, attendance programs, or programs to re-engage students.

School climate characteristics to support Indigenous students as described by the research….

▶ An orderly learning environment, with a safe school culture free from bullying and racism is a pre-condition for school turnaround.

▶ The school promotes and values Indigenous culture and Indigenous students feel safe, welcome and valued at school.

▶ A strong and effective school leadership is critical to improving a school culture…. not just one leader, but a leadership team.

▶ A leadership team that sets new expectations for teaching and learning and models the expectations needed to bring everyone on board.

▶ A school environment based on high expectations for all students. These high expectations aim not just for levels of similar schools, but for state and territory levels.

▶ A focus on learning.

▶ Actions are guided by core beliefs about the learning capacities of Indigenous students, and these core beliefs are shared across the school staff.

▶ The high expectations and school values are a shared vision across the whole school community.

▶ The school is welcoming to the whole community, and the community is involved in planning and providing education.

From the research

▶ The 2012 *What Works* study of 11 improving remote schools.

▶ Jensen's 2014 report for the Grattan Institute - *Turning around schools: it can be done.*

▶ Zammit *et al* 2007 review of research into teaching and leading for quality Australian schools

▶ Purdie & Buckley's 2010 paper on *School attendance and retention of Indigenous Australian students.*

▶ Purdie et al 2000 to 2006 study of 13 Australian schools (ACER).

▶ Helme and Lamb's 2011 *Resource sheet on closing the school completion gap for Indigenous students*

▶ Ockenden's 2014 *Resource Sheet* on positive learning environments for Indigenous children and young people

Explicit high expectations

The school's high expectations for behaviour, attendance and academic achievement will be explicit. This might include:

- ▶ embedding expectations, targets and strategies into school plans

- ▶ developing specific attendance and behavioural plans and strategies if needed

- ▶ developing a Reconciliation Action Plan

- ▶ ensuring all staff, students and families know and understand the school's expectations.

V. Enacting visions and values

As staff take responsibility for change, school strategies are underpinned by the concept of both supporting and challenging students to meet the school's high expectations. The school leadership is visibly committed to school improvement. Whole-of-school strategies are in place to ensure that all educators in the school have this same commitment and understand their role in achieving change. These strategies might include:

- ▶ high expectations targets that are clearly related to achievements at state and national standards

- ▶ strategies for staff to enact messages of high expectations with students within the framework of being both challenging and supportive and being consistent in demanding high expectations to an agreed standard

- ▶ strategies to act out the school's values with students in a daily basis

Circle of Courage

Rauland and Adams (2014) describe how the **Stronger Smarter Approach** and the Circle of Courage, which is based on Native American wisdom aligned with resilience and self-worth, are both being used in Western Australia to embrace a strong sense of cultural identity in Indigenous students. Rauland and Adams describe how the Circle of Courage elements of Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity align closely with the **Stronger Smarter Approach**.

Both approaches draw on the wisdom of Indigenous cultures and both share a strength-based, restorative approach that celebrates positive self-identity. The authors suggest that both approaches are universal and relevant for all educational settings.

Teachers can make a difference....

A 2016 Productivity Commission Research Paper on Primary School Achievement describes an analysis of the ACARA datasets for Year 3 and Year 5 primary students that link student demographics and school characteristics to NAPLAN results.

Their conclusion is that even when observed characteristics such as language and socio-economic status are taken into account, Indigenous primary school students still have lower test scores on average than non-Indigenous primary school students. This is across all states and territories and all areas from metropolitan through to very remote.

In other words, most characteristics relating to Indigenous student achievement (and in fact all students) are student-related characteristics.

The Productivity Commission describe these as unobserved characteristics, and use the literature to suggest that these unobserved characteristics might include student attitudes, abilities and aspirations, parent engagement, school culture, and teaching styles and teacher attitudes.

The authors suggest that a one-size fits all approach is unlikely to be effective for improving Indigenous outcomes, but that teachers and schools can make a difference through

- ▶ a culture of high expectations,
- ▶ building strong teacher-student and community relationships,
- ▶ supporting Indigenous student identities, and
- ▶ individualized learning strategies.

In schools with low Indigenous student numbers where school-wide support may not be possible, quality teacher-student relationships and understanding Indigenous cultures become even more important. They suggest that as most teachers across Australia are likely to interact with Indigenous students at some time, an understanding of Indigenous cultures and how to establish strong relationships with Indigenous students is essential for all teachers.

Positive student identity

A positive student identity involves recognising students' self-worth and constantly challenging students to achieve. Purdie et al (2000) explain that when young people have positive conceptions of themselves both as Indigenous people and as students, attachment and commitment to school and successful school performance will be more likely outcomes than when there are tensions between the various aspects of self.

In a 'strong and smart' classroom, high expectations for students include support for all students in their own ability to achieve and a **strong sense of identity**. All educators take responsibility for

► embedding the school's values and high expectations into the classroom, perhaps including 'strong and smart' or similar messages as part of everyday business in the classroom

► acknowledging students for specific achievement and then challenging students to extend to the next level

► ensuring students understand that the expectation is that they will perform at the same standards as the rest of Australia.

► **A deadly teacher**

► A deadly teacher made me feel happy, bubbly and fun. When it was fun we wanted to do more so we could have fun but learn. Everyone respects you more. If they are nice to us then you get more work done.

Student (Stronger Smarter Institute AITSL project)

My deadly teacher made me feel welcomed, she made me feel stronger and didn't make me feel bad... She noticed me.

Student (Stronger Smarter Institute AITSL project)

A deadly teacher is someone who respects you and pays attention to you and looks you in the eye and tells you that you can do it! My teacher said that I could be a role model and I thank that teacher for believing in me.

Community member from Fitzroy Crossing & AIEO

A positive sense of student identity is developed where….

▶ students have a sense of belonging, and the school environment is one where students feel they belong

▶ there are positive expectations and strong teacher-student relationships

▶ there is a curriculum that Indigenous students see as relevant to their lives and culture with subject matter that is connected to their personal interests and aspirations

▶ teachers value students' cultural background and the skills and knowledge they bring to the classroom

▶ the school values Indigenous staff and promotes Indigenous role models

▶ there is diversity and flexibility in pedagogy, and there is a focus on the learning needs of individual students

▶ there are high standards in the classroom for academic learning and conduct

Source: Purdie et al, 2000; Ockenden, 2014; Social Justice Report, 2008; Purdie & Buckley, 2010; Klem & Connell, 2004; Zammit et al, 2007; Helme & Lamb, 2011).

The Dreaming Circle

Davis-Warra et al (2011) describe the example of *The Dreaming Circle* as an after-school homework hub for Indigenous students in an urban primary school. This involves "setting the circle" as a space where everyone is equal and takes turns to hold the message stick as the symbol for permission to talk and share a thought about the day. The students are expected to introduce themselves in Aboriginal language taught at the school. In addition to setting the circle, they share food, identify a homework task to complete, and engage in cultural activities.

VI. Effective and challenging teaching programs

When educators believe in their own ability to make a difference to all students, they become more confident in ensuring effective teaching and learning programs which will incorporate:

- ▶ diversity and flexibility in pedagogies

- ▶ pedagogies that are responsive to individual student needs and differentiated learning styles

- ▶ subject matter that is connected to personal interests and aspirations

- ▶ quality feedback to students on their learning

- ▶ a whole of school approach to embedding Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum.

Firm and fair teacher-student relationships

Various researchers have linked a positive teacher-student relationship to improved attendance, retention, student engagement, student self-esteem, mental health, and self-concept.   In turn, these aspects have been linked to a higher quality of student work and improved academic performance (Klem & Connell, 2004; Thapa et al, 2013; California Safe & Supportive Schools, 2012; Cornelius-White, 2007).

Shared language for high expectations

A 2017 report from the Grattan Institute (Goss et al, 2017) considered a number of studies around student engagement and concluded that students who have a good relationship with their teacher tend to succeed at school. They describe this type of relationship as one where empathy is vital, but the teacher also has high expectations and gives strong guidance and clear purpose.

They suggest teachers will be effective if they know their students well, and consider how their own teaching behaviours might be contributing to poor student behaviour and engagement.

The authors also recommend that a school-wide approach is critical. This should involve common expectations, language and understanding of appropriate behaviour for learning across the whole school.

Our research has shown that schools are successfully using the Stronger Smarter Approach to provide this common language and understanding across the school.

Several researchers have looked at how out-of-awareness assumptions can impact on teacher-student relationships and lead educators to believe that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are not ready for high-critical thinking activities.

As a result, educators lower their learning expectations and use a pedagogy that revolves around providing information, giving directions, and setting assignments and tests. A self-fulfilling prophecy results and disadvantaged children receive a 'dumbed down' curriculum and watered-down lessons which limit students' academic growth (Torff, 2011; Perso, 2012; Williams & Wilson, 2012; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012).

A study in the US by Papageorge et al (2016) asked for teacher's views on how far they expected their student to go in their education through to grade 12 and college/ university. Ten years later, in 2012, they tracked what had happened to these students and concluded that teacher expectations tend to line up with student outcomes. They concluded that teacher expectations do have a causal impact on student outcomes. In other words, teacher expectations are a self-fulfilling prophecy – the reasons being that lower expectations could lead to fewer resources, or the student internalising these low expectations.

A self-fulfilling prophecy

A study in the US by Papageorge et al (2016) involved 6,000 tenth grade students and used data from the national 2002 to 2012 Education Longitudinal Study.

The researchers found that while a white teacher and a black teacher would usually agree on expectations for a white student, a white teacher and black teacher tended to disagree on expectations for a black student. The black teacher would generally have far higher expectations than the white teacher, with those expectations on average 40 percent higher.

The authors suggest that a white teacher with good intentions may be over-estimating the challenges that black students face in their education, and unintentionally expressing lower expectations which could ultimately be detrimental to those students. They concluded that teacher expectations do matter, and that teacher expectations can differ by racial groups in a way that puts black students at a disadvantage.

In teacher-student relationships built on High-Expectations Relationships, educators ….

- ▶ create a supportive learning environment

- ▶ have enough 'credit in the emotional bank account' to offer feedback to students and be 'firm' when it is needed'

- ▶ challenge all students to succeed

- ▶ understand the potential impacts of their own personal assumptions and social conditioning and try to understand through the eyes of students

- ▶ make the time to understand students' backgrounds

- ▶ understand the impacts that previous negative school experiences, racism, sexism, language barriers, or poor self-perception of academic ability might have on students

- ▶ understand the impact that 'code switching' may have for students

- ▶ expand their knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures as relevant to their school context.

Teacher-student relationships can make a difference

Positive teacher-student relationships, and a positive learning environment can have a greater positive effect on Indigenous students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds because the expectations and aspirations of these student groups are low (Polidano, Hanel, & Buddelmeyer, 2012).

Culturally-Responsive Pedagogies

In the United Kingdom, a major study summarising great teaching (Coe et al, 2014) found that the classroom climate and the quality of teacher-student interaction was important to educational outcomes. They describe a need to create a classroom that is constantly demanding more, but still recognises students' self-worth, and attributes student success to effort rather than ability and valuing resilience to failure.

Lloyd et al (2015) and Lewthwaite et al (2015) develop this further and propose a strengths-based approach to develop "*Culturally Responsive Pedagogies*" (CRP) or a "*pedagogy of difference*". The underlying premise of CRPs is that learning experiences reflect, validate and promote students' culture and language, and the role of the school is to understand the cultural context and respond appropriately for the benefit of each student.

A culturally-responsive pedagogy

Lisa Delpit (2008), working in the US, recognised that in schools the 'culture of power' will predominantly be determined by the white, middle class educational structures.

There are codes or rules for participating in that power related to language, communication strategies, and ways of writing, talking, dressing and interacting. Those with the power are least aware of these rules or unwilling to acknowledge their existence, which ensures that the status quo remains the same. Those without the power are most aware of the rules.

Delpit argues for a culturally responsive pedagogy where the teacher helps students to establish their own voices – to "tell them that their language and cultural style is unique and wonderful", and at the same time to give students the skills and structures to be heard in the wider world.

Effective teaching practices occur where teachers accept they can be central players in fostering change. Culturally responsive teachers alter their beliefs to regard students and the cultures they represent as assets. They use the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference and performance styles of students as a lens for reconsidering their teaching.

Towards an Australian culturally-responsive pedagogy

Iribinna Rigney (2017) is working on Australian Culturally-Responsive Pedagogies at the University of South Australia. In 2017, he presented the inaugural David Unaipon lecture at Kings College, London. Professor Rigney explores research from around the world and concludes that the use of students' cultures in teaching is critical, but more research is needed to fully understand the depth to which this impacts on student success.

▶ Quality teaching

▶ "If we want high standards it has to be quality teaching. We need to ensure our kids are successful learners, are confident and creative and are active in their learning. All that Hattie research that's out there… even Ken Robinson... it's all the same conversation – 'good teachers make big differences to kids lives'. If we support that through targeted intervention and we can buy into student belief systems, what they think of themselves, their values, and support and nurture that around the relationships framework, then we can move forward and see change."

Principal

Lloyd et al (2015) suggest that their literature review validates the need for CRPs and for more research into appropriate place-based pedagogy for Indigenous learners from the perspectives of Indigenous students, their communities and their teachers.

Williams & Wilson (2012) agree that pedagogies that connect intellectual challenge and relevance are critical to improving educational outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. They suggest that our Western educational framework constructs academic rigour and relevance as being incompatible. They suggest that in such a framework, teachers struggle with a conceptual dilemma of creating learning experiences that are both intellectually challenging and relevant.

We believe that the Stronger Smarter Approach can support educators to overcome these conceptual dilemmas and develop Culturally-Responsive Pedagogies.

Pedagogic rights

Exley et al (2015) consider Bernstein's' model that suggests three pedagogic rights are required if education is to contribute to developing the minimal conditions of democracy – these being, the right to individual enhancement, the right to social inclusion, and the right to political participating. Within Australia the authors suggest this means that teachers should be enabling a sense of connectedness to schools for Indigenous students including a pride in knowing and understanding that the history of Indigenous people has a valid place in our classrooms.
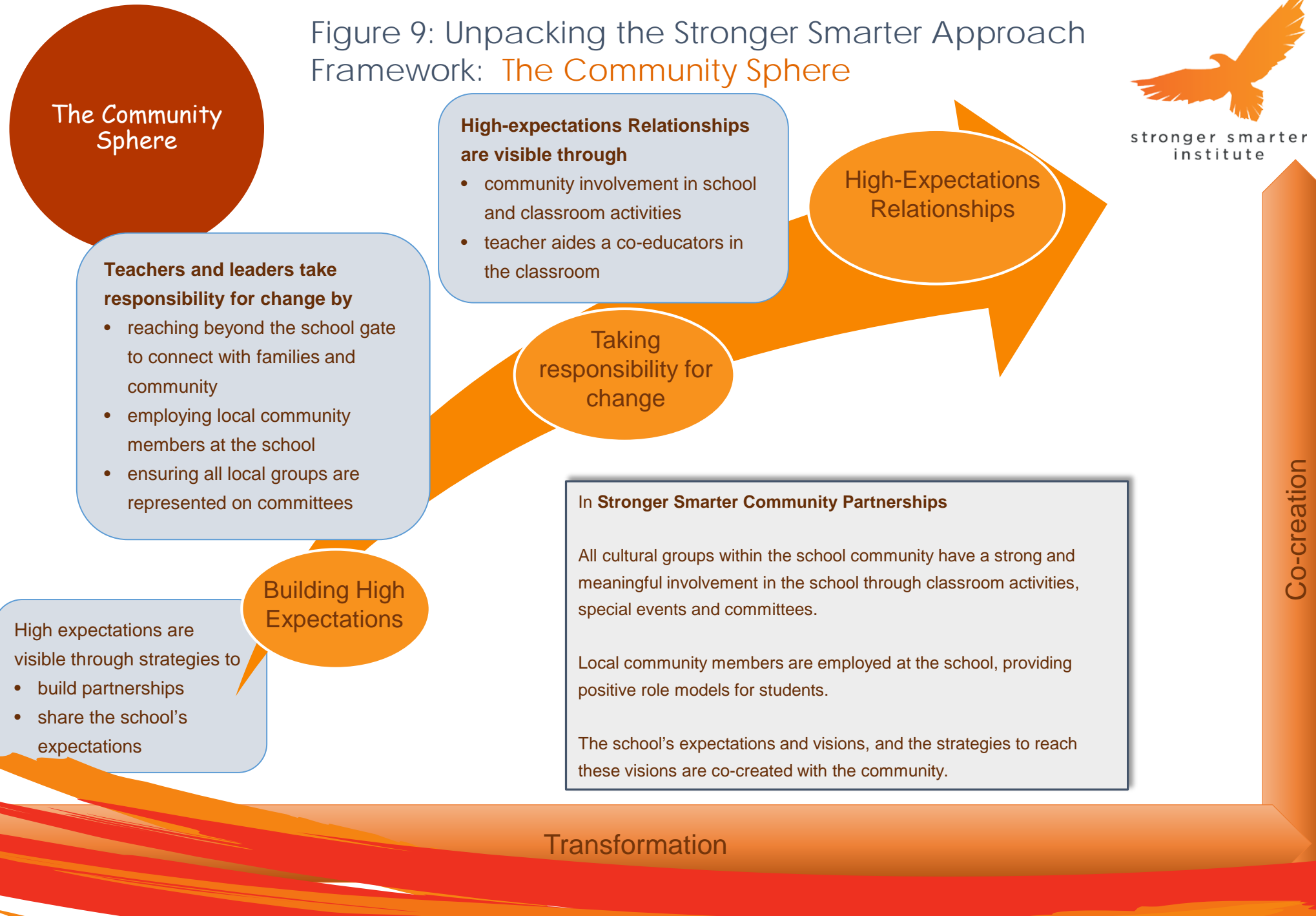
The Indigenous lens

"We've worked hard at understanding the Indigenous lens and how to meet their needs. 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'."

Saeed Amin, Principal, Broome Senior High School

Figure 9: Unpacking the Stronger Smarter Approach Framework: The Community Sphere

The Community Sphere

stronger smarter institute

High-expectations Relationships are visible through
- community involvement in school and classroom activities
- teacher aides a co-educators in the classroom

High-Expectations Relationships

Teachers and leaders take responsibility for change by
- reaching beyond the school gate to connect with families and community
- employing local community members at the school
- ensuring all local groups are represented on committees

Taking responsibility for change

Building High Expectations

High expectations are visible through strategies to
- build partnerships
- share the school's expectations

In **Stronger Smarter Community Partnerships**

All cultural groups within the school community have a strong and meaningful involvement in the school through classroom activities, special events and committees.

Local community members are employed at the school, providing positive role models for students.

The school's expectations and visions, and the strategies to reach these visions are co-created with the community.

Co-creation

Transformation

Community Sphere: Stronger Smarter Community Partnerships

In a Stronger Smarter Community Partnership….

All cultural groups within the school have a strong and meaningful involvement in the school through classroom activities, special events and committees. Local community members are employed at the school, providing positive role models for students. The school's expectations and visions, and the strategies to reach these visions are co-created with the community.

The **Stronger Smarter Approach** involves processes of 'co-creation' or doing things 'with people' not 'to people'. A school's annual cycle of review and renewal requires a collaborative approach with staff, students, parents and carers, and community. In a **Stronger Smarter Approach**, this means not just consulting with others on plans that have already been developed, but co-creating a way forward together with staff, students and their families, and the community. Strength-based approaches reject deficit thinking, and High-Expectations Relationships enable processes of true co-creation. Adaptations and linkages to local area Indigenous Knowledge are key examples of co-creating power.

Within the community sphere, the **Stronger Smarter Approach** advocates that

- ▶ all cultural groups within the school have a strong and meaningful involvement in the school through classroom activities, special events and committees.

- ▶ local community members are employed at the school, providing positive role models for students.

- ▶ the school's expectations and visions, and the strategies to reach those visions, are co-created with the community.

The research supports strength-based, local approaches

▶ The 2015 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy notes the importance of meaningful relationships that value community cultural knowledge, wisdom and expertise and demonstrate trust and respect. However, the Evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010 – 2014 suggests that developing relationships and community engagement is not easy.

▶ The 2016 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report (SCRGSP, 2016, p.12), makes recommendations for factors which underpin successful programs which include flexibility in design and delivery to take into account local context and needs, community involvement in design and decision making as a 'bottom-up' approach.

▶ The 2015 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy describes partnerships between educators and Indigenous communities as being characterised by listening and responsibility and

> ## ▶ Building relationships
>
> ▶ Engaging with community is difficult to define if you don't know what you want. It is a combination of so many things. I need to understand the needs of the community from a community perspective. It's about me door knocking, talking with families about what I see the direction for the school will be and do they think it is the right direction to take. And doing that on an individual basis … building relationships. I would then do it collectively bringing everyone together to share.
>
> *Donna Bridge, Principal*

active engagement, and collaborative information sharing and informed decision making. These should be partnerships where Indigenous people are engaged in decision making, planning, delivery and evaluation.

▶ Roberts' 2009 study of leadership skills in NSW schools said that successful leaders provided opportunities to develop authentic relationships and opportunities to hear the Aboriginal 'voice' of their students and the community.

VII. Employing local community members

In a high expectations environment, the school values the input of the local community. Teachers value and recognise Indigenous workers and community members as co-educators in the classroom.

This will be seen through

- ▶ staffing models that employ local community members at the school
- ▶ teachers talking to Indigenous community members when developing lessons
- ▶ a school priority to embed Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum for all students
- ▶ inviting local Indigenous community members into the classroom to lead activities with students or run programs, homework centres, and cultural activities
- ▶ a school Reconciliation Action Plan, which is regularly updated and acted on
- ▶ partnerships with local community groups or businesses.

Community voices

A Community Study to document Indigenous Community Elders' and parents' views on school engagement with local communities (Luke et al, 2013) showed that the Community members had articulate and powerful voices and a deep understanding of school practices and operations.

However, their experience was often that the schools' engagement and consultation processes were token and not part of substantive input into policy and decision making.

Indigenous students, parents, community members and educational staff all recognised the need for substantive, informed and sustained engagement between schools and communities, characterised by mutual respect.

Luke et al (2013) also reported that overall, teacher self-reported knowledge of Indigenous cultures and engagement with communities outside the school was low. Their Policy Action 3, (p.43) recommended that schools and states should put induction and mentoring systems in place for teachers and principals with limited prior experience with Indigenous communities and students. This should include those teachers working in urban and provincial schools with smaller Indigenous student cohorts.

VIII. Building meaningful community partnerships

As all educators recognise their role in building stronger partnerships with families and the community, they reach beyond the school gate. This might include:

▶ opportunities for staff to meet with parents and community in environments that best suit the community

▶ educators contacting parents and carers with positive news about their children to build relationships

▶ educators sensitive to the effects of parents' negative experiences of school, or feelings that they lack skills and knowledge to support their students

▶ specific activities might include yarn ups, cultural activity days, playgroups, school gardens, and events such as NAIDOC week, Coming of the Light Festival, and Reconciliation events.

Community partnerships

Researchers agree on the importance of high levels of community involvement in the planning and delivery of school processes, priorities and curricula.

▶ Purdie & Buckley (2010) describe this as creative collaboration.

▶ Buckskin (2012) says that 'we as Indigenous people' ask non-Indigenous teachers to acknowledge that they have limited knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and develop partnerships with those who know more'.

▶ The 2012 research by What Works says there needs to be a two-way dialogue between school and community based on shared assumptions. They say school and community cultures have much to learn from each other, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of thinking, learning and communicating should be respected in decision making.

There is a research gap in terms of deep case studies or quantitative data that share the lived and sustainable best practice approaches to community engagement. The Stronger Smarter Institute led research on a community empowerment model, Community Durithunga (Davis, 2017), is one such deeper case study which provides modelling on community partnership and accessing and developing deeper and sustainable ties with community.

▶ Building trust and respect

▶ In small and remote places, it is not always easy to engage with community out of school. There are not a lot of opportunities. So using football, church and youth group to meet families helps build and develop positive relationships. It is really important that teachers are out and about and that they make the effort to talk to people at the shops. When you develop trust and respect and become a familiar face, parents feel that they can come up to you to talk because it's a neutral place.

Graduate Teacher

Two-way processes

A successful model of community engagement has been put in place in an urban secondary school. Davis & Grose (2008) illustrate how this process of strengthening Indigenous cultural practice and identity can support teachers, students and the community.

The authors talk about two-way processes that ensure a level of community engagement and acknowledge the power that exists in Indigenous communities. This can go some way to moving schools from the traditional silo or separate institute of power and control towards community hubs of learning which value and promote lifelong learning for all. Two–way education is a dialogue and continual reflection process where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators establish tools of engagement. This is a level of community engagement which enables a culture of infusion and interaction with the teaching and learning space for all involved.

Davis (2012) provides further information about this project, and describes how a Yarning Circle is used once a month where Indigenous leaders come together to set circle, and to share and focus yarns on what works in schools and what needs development. This provides a place-based, strength-based community education interface.

IX. Co-creating the school vision

In a High-Expectations Relationships school environment, the school goes beyond the visible aspects of establishing a welcoming school environment and builds strong relationships with families and the community. The school provides opportunities for all groups within the school community to have a true involvement in the planning for the school.

▶ The school develops strong communication channels for all parents.

▶ School policies or processes encourage all staff to take time to listen to parents, talk to families with good news (not just when things go wrong), and work with parents to support their students learning.

▶ Parents and carers, and the community are all a clear part of any attendance or behaviour strategy, and all take responsibility for supporting and enacting the school's values and expectations.

▶ Opportunities for meaningful engagement with the school through membership of School Boards and Advisory Group.

▶ The school ensures a process of shared visioning, and negotiating shared and understood priorities. There is a mutual agreement and understanding of the school's high expectations across staff, students, parents and the community, and everyone takes a role in co-creating those visions and strategies.

Substantive engagement

Dillon and Westbury (2007), in their book *Beyond Humbug; Transforming government engagement with Indigenous Australia* call on policy makers to reject 'one size fits all' approach and support localised, discrete, processes of change. They flag the need to embrace strength-based processes and build on the rich social landscapes that exist already in communities. They refer to this process as building on and developing "in depth nodes" in Communities – working from the networks that already exist. They talk about 'substantive engagement' that is 'iterative and reciprocal' – a dialogue with community. 'Substantive engagement' requires a remake of current strategies and represents a commitment to long term not short-term policy and program action. Positioning Indigenous people within the centre of community capacity building will, when taken up, ensure policy rhetoric is embodied in practice.

Community engagement as seen by participants in the AITSL project ….

It is working closely with IEWs and being introduced one by one. I would go and meet everyone and build up a relationship and have a laugh and joke together.

Community engagement for me is very real and immediate. I had to work hard going beyond just the families in town and going to homes to meet families just to be introduced and saying nothing necessarily about the child so that we know each other's faces and we know each other in town to say hello … that was the first step.

The second step was inviting parents in for morning tea on a one or two people basis not a big group, sharing biscuits and tea with children coming over so we could have a conversation and being very real. If that is too hard and distressing due to past experiences I would take children's work to their home and share that with parents, grandparents and aunties and anyone else who gathered around and was interested in looking.

It is also getting involved in events that are happening in their lives. If a baby was born sending a card or if someone passes away sending a letter to say we are really sorry about their loss and that we won't be coming around for a while, building relationships on a personal level… on a real level. Taking the kids out on Country with relatives and giving them the chance to shine.

Anne – School Executive

Community engagement as seen by participants in the AITSL project ….

- ▶ We need to have parents of the children engaged with their learning at school to give them self confidence and encourage them to go further, to accept change and not be just satisfied with how they are but be willing to improve and learn more. *Ritchie - Aboriginal Community Health Worker*

- ▶ Our students need to see our community behind them in everything that they do. Along with community comes aunty, uncles, lots of knowledge that the school can't give … local knowledge ….so the more people we get into the school the better it is for all students. *Carmen - AIEO*

- ▶ Community engagement is everybody working together to achieve the best for our students. It is parents in school, people working in shops and us visiting them as well, building up connections – it is making connections. *Anne - Executive*

- ▶ Community engagement happens on different levels from the big picture with parents and interagency around town to community engagement at the classroom level. *Andy – Deputy Principal*

- ▶ Community engagement is not something that you do today and tick the box and it's done. Once you start it is ongoing, it's every day and it's everything you do. It's about your ability to talk to community and have open and honest conversations...things they may not want to hear but also be open to hearing what they have to say and decide whether you respond defensively or with possibility. It is also recognising the complex challenges we do face when it is not just one community but made up of six. You can't just work with one, you have to work with all groups. It is also about knowing who the decision makers and being responsive to them but also be aware of those community members who don't talk up. How do you respond to the needs of the school if you continue to work in the way the school always has without engaging the whole of community? *Donna – Principal*

4. Indicators

To ensure that progress is being made on a system-wide basis, and the pace of this progress is satisfactory, decision-makers and stakeholders must have access to high-quality and timely data on key indicators. *OECD 2017*

External evaluations of the Stronger Smarter Approach

The Stronger Smarter Approach is built on giving and receiving feedback. Every SSLP invites participant feedback which has been used to continually review and refine the program. Our work has also been informed by two external evaluations.

▶ In 2009, the SSLP was evaluated by Clear Horizon Consulting.

▶ In 2013, a major evaluation of the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities (SSLC) project was undertaken, led by the Queensland University of Technology.

The two evaluations found that the Stronger Smarter Approach and the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program had been successful in terms of challenging deficit thinking, mobilizing reform and contributing to improving the educational environment. There was more work to be done in terms of understanding how this would contributed to systematic changes in classroom pedagogy that might 'close the gap' on Indigenous student achievement.

Luke et al, (2013a, p.372) describe three waves of school reform and showed that the SSLP and the SSLC together were successful in terms of the first two waves of reform, but less successful in terms of the third wave.

Clear Horizon consulting 2009

In 2009, the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program was evaluated externally by Clear Horizon Consulting. The findings were that there was strong evidence that the SSLP had made a major contribution to improving the educational environment in participating schools.

However, the evaluation was unable to make a statement concerning the contribution of the program to educational success due to a number of factors including the small data set and short analysis period.

The evaluation made several recommendations including:

▶ Improving documentation on participant's research projects

▶ Addressing the lack of data on Indigenous student outcomes

▶ Addressing the sustainability of the Stronger Smarter Approach if a Principal moves away.

Luke et al (2013a, b) stated that the **Stronger Smarter Approach** is successful in beginning these reforms by mobilising schools and changing the school foci on the need for

- ▶ Indigenous hiring, staffing and leadership in the school

- ▶ improved community engagement and Indigenous participation in school decision-making and governance

- ▶ increasing teachers' attention on the importance of knowledge of Indigenous cultures and communities and the need to embed these in teaching and learning

- ▶ changing elements of school ethos and structure to engage with Indigenous staff and leadership, community and students.

They also noted that the emphasis of the SSLP on personal growth and transformation of beliefs around Indigeneity, difference and culture is resulting in an increase in everyday engagement with and knowledge of Indigenous communities and cultures.

Many of the schools had begun the journey to school reform (as based on the pathways to reform). However, there was a need to further develop the Stronger Smarter model for school reform.

The data used by Luke et al (2013) to look for improvements for Indigenous student performance (ACARA individual data sets

Stronger Smarter Learning Communities Longitudinal Study (Luke et al, 2013)

The Stronger Smarter Learning Communities Longitudinal Study (Luke et al, 2013) was the largest Indigenous education study conducted in schools in Australia.

The evaluation looked at the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities (SSLC) project which aimed to support schools in implementing a **Stronger Smarter Approach.**

The Evaluation Report presented a total of 53 findings, relating in part to the SSLC project and also to schools in general, and 16 recommended actions for educational policy.

In relation to the Stronger Smarter Approach, key findings were that

- ▶ The Stronger Smarter Approach's recognition of the prevalence of deficit thinking in schools is accurate.

- ▶ School reform and improved outcomes for Indigenous students can occur through a combination of emphasis on Indigenous cultural knowledges and engagement and coherent whole-school pedagogy programs.

- ▶ The **Stronger Smarter Approach** is successful in beginning these reforms by mobilising schools and changing the school foci.

for Indigenous/ non-Indigenous student data, 2009-2010 (p.19, p.383) covered the initial start-up period for the SSLC project only (p.12). While Luke et al (2013) note that they were unable to find evidence of improved educational outcomes over this two-year period based on the conventional measures of attendance and achievement, they also note that general estimates of effects in the school reform literature refer to cycles that vary from three to five years.

Three waves of school reform (Luke et al, 2013 b, p.16)

Three waves of school reform as described by Luke at al (2013) related closely to the Stronger Smarter Metastrategies.

1. School climate and ethos

Changing the climate and ethos of schools to reflect the presence of Indigenous cultures and identities.

- ▶ Employment of Indigenous staff
- ▶ Moving towards greater Indigenous governance
- ▶ Directing teachers' attention towards expanding their knowledge of and engagement with Indigenous peoples and communities
- ▶ Setting the grounds for an increased focus on the teaching of Indigenous contents, topics and issues in the curriculum

2. Selecting and prioritising agendas

The second wave of reform involves schools selecting and prioritising different agendas. These include:

- ▶ High expectations promotion and enactment
- ▶ Indigenous community governance and Indigenous school leadership
- ▶ Indigenous community engagement and knowledge

3. Classroom pedagogy

The third wave is to translate high expectations promotion into systematic changes in classroom pedagogy that might 'close the gap' on Indigenous student achievement.

From 2014 to 2017, the University of Canberra Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) project evaluated six Stronger Smarter Leadership Programs held in the Canberra area.

They asked for written evaluations and feedback from 92 participants across five of these six programs. They report that on every measure, the mean response is above 6.5 on a 7-point scale. After the second phase of the program they gathered responses from 68 participants on the program as a whole. Again the responses were above 6.5 on the 7-point scale. These measures were

- ▶ Relevant
- ▶ Challenging
- ▶ Rewarding
- ▶ Affirming
- ▶ Motivating
- ▶ Learned a lot
- ▶ Program was useful
- ▶ Quality of the program
- ▶ Usefulness of the program

"I've been an educator for 40 years and I pride myself on being open to learning that makes me a better person, husband, father, grandfather, teacher and school leader. The Stronger Smarter Leadership Program has been amongst the most influential and most engaging professional learning to contribute to this endeavor. The SSLP challenged my long-held but still supple views of the world, and invited me to do some 'unlearning.' But it did so in a way that introduced me to a powerful and very respectful approach to leading, learning and changing. This way has been the say of Indigenous peoples from all around our world for eons and fortunately, the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program has captured the essence of respectful, insightful, strength-based personal and professional enrichment that does indeed help me be better."

Principal, 2015 SSLP participant. Reported in University of Canberra HEPPP report.

The University of Canberra report that "considering the number of respondents, the number of schools and the diversity of experiences participants have had with professional development in their careers over five program cohorts – these results are extremely significant."

Institute research

The research focus that the Institute has undertaken to date is based on qualitative streams and Indigenous Knowledge Frameworks, as well as quantitative data.

Our SSLP participants tell the greatest stories and provide platforms for future yarns and articulations of the **Stronger Smarter Approach**.

In seeking out these stories we have continually refined the Stronger Smarter Approach. In 2017, we set up the Stronger Smarter Collaborators Circle which is made up of alumni from around the country. This group of alumni has provided input and feedback on the Stronger Smarter Approach.

As well as qualitative stories, the Institute undertakes internal program evaluations and in 2016 and 2017 has been using a High-Expectations Relationships Behavioural Index (HERBI) tool to compare the behaviours of SSLP participants before and after they attend the SSLP (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2015).

Indigenous Primary School Achievement, Productivity Commission Research Paper, June 2016.

A 2016 Productivity Commission report on Primary School Indigenous student outcomes across Australia outcomes found that there are outliers or Case study schools which are outperforming 'like' schools, and recommended further follow up with these schools.

Institute research is focused on studying outliers where schools who have adopted a Stronger Smarter Approach are showing clear improvements in student outcomes.

Indicators of change

Within the **Stronger Smarter Approach Framework,** we have included a draft set of indicators of change which might be used by Stronger Smarter graduates, educators and school leaders to determine where to focus on their Stronger Smarter Leadership Journey.

The Institute has advocated positive change in educational outcomes from the outset. We also recognize that there is a broader and ongoing discussion within the profession and research circles regarding how you measure change. This discussion is continually proposing, testing, and reviewing the suitability and validity of measures of data that capture improvement. In Australia the introduction of national standardized testing, the national standards for teaching and the national curriculum has fundamentally recast the landscape of education and that is an extension of international trends within the profession (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2001).

With specific regards to assessment and educational outcomes, Masters (2013) has offered much on the subject however less has been said about the validity of indicators of change. This is a key area of inquiry for the Institute's purposes.

Whilst the NAPLAN test and individual school attendance are important, the Institute is researching the validity of these types of indicators. The Institute is trying to determine if measures are lead indicators of change or lag indicators of change. Lead indicators offer a predictive dimension, whilst lag indicators are most valid capturing change after its occurred. Determining the validity of data points as measures of change is critical to our efforts. Improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students and for all students takes time, so having valid measures of change is an important consideration. As schools move along a Stronger Smarter journey, they may focus on different indicators or cohorts of students.

Below we describe our initial work on indicators of change (Figure 10). We use 'confidence' and 'engagement' as lead indicators that need to be in place to support the final student outcomes (lag indicators). We recognise the importance of measuring both 'smart' (academic outcomes), and 'strong' (student resilience and well-being).

In recognising the importance of both the academic or cognitive strengths around collaborative problem solving, and the non-cognitive attributes such as resilience and well-being, the Stronger Smarter Approach is leading the way in terms of what researchers agree is needed for 21st Century Learning (OECD, 2008; Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2007).

Lead Indicators of Change

Lead indicators help to understand what is happening in the school that will influence student learning. Lead indicators are grouped around confidence and engagement.

- ▶ Confidence: to what extent do students, parents and community have confidence in the level of quality in the school?

- ▶ Engagement: to what extent are students, staff, parents and community engaged in the school and working towards the same understanding of high expectations?

Lag Indicators of Change - Student outcomes

Student outcomes are the ultimate aim. We describe these indicators in terms of

- ▶ student retention and graduation
- ▶ academic outcomes
- ▶ readiness for the next level of learning or employment.

Evaluation Index

Appendix 1 provides an evaluation index for use by schools as a self-assessment tool.

Figure 10: Descriptors and Indicators

The Stronger Smarter Approach

Responsibility for change

Strong and Smart

High-Expectations Relationships

Strength-based approaches

Personal Sphere
High-expectations, supportive and welcoming school environment, strong teacher-student relationships, relevant and challenging learning

School Sphere
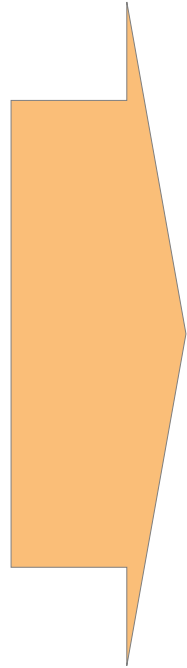Whole of school planning and distributed leadership model where staff work together and take responsibility for change

Community Sphere
Strong partnerships where parents and community have a high level of involvement in the school.

57

LEAD and LAG INDICATORS

stronger smarter
institute

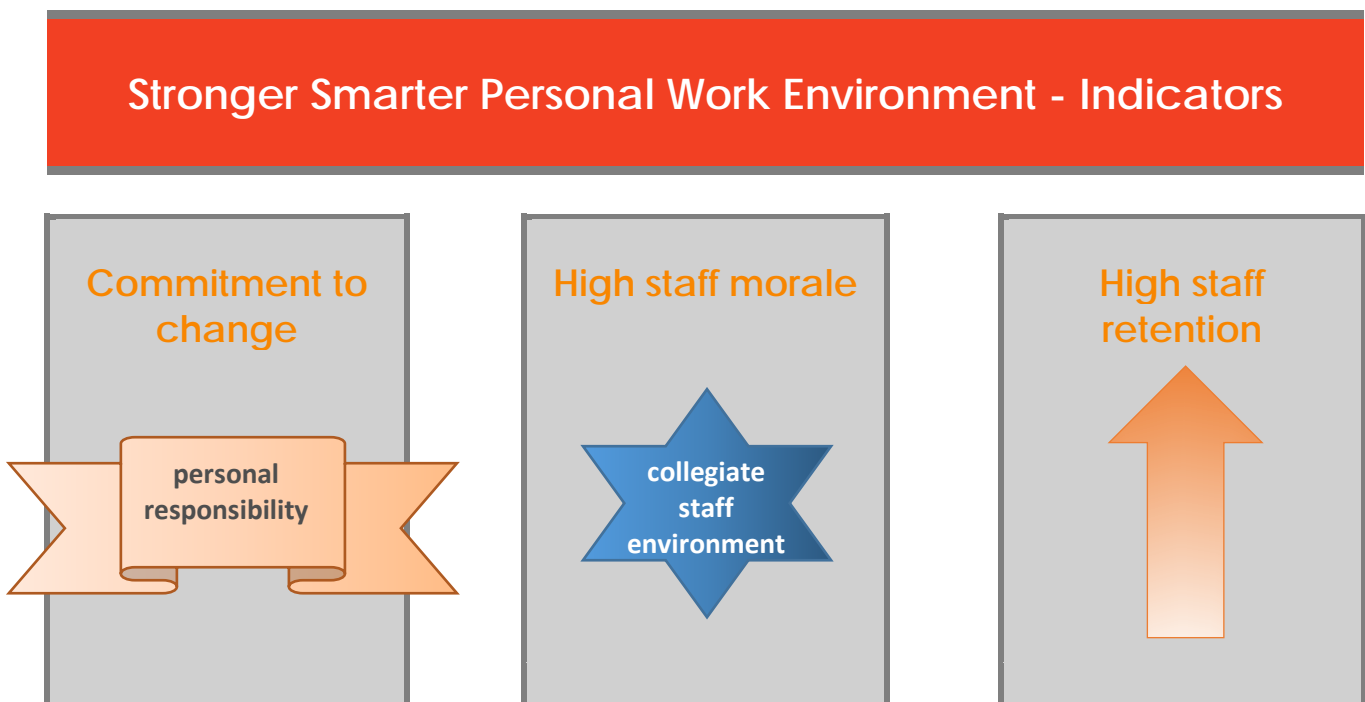|	Confidence	Engagement
Personal	▶ staff morale ▶ staff retention	▶ commitment to change
School	▶ student motivation, connectedness, and relationships ▶ low suspensions/ expulsions, ▶ high retention rates	▶ high attendance ▶ low unexplained absenteeism, student disciplinary absences
Community	▶ school enrolments ▶ parent connectedness ▶ what parents think of the school	▶ involvement of parents in the school ▶ partnerships ▶ number of Indigenous staff employed at the school/ involved in the school

Student Outcomes
▶ Graduation rates
▶ Readiness for next level of learning (high school/further study/employment.
▶ Academic outcomes

Personal sphere indicators

In the personal sphere, the indicators are

- ▶ Leadership - staff commitment to change and acceptance of professional accountabilities
- ▶ Staff morale – evidence of a strong collegiate work environment
- ▶ Staff retention – evidence of high levels of staff retention.
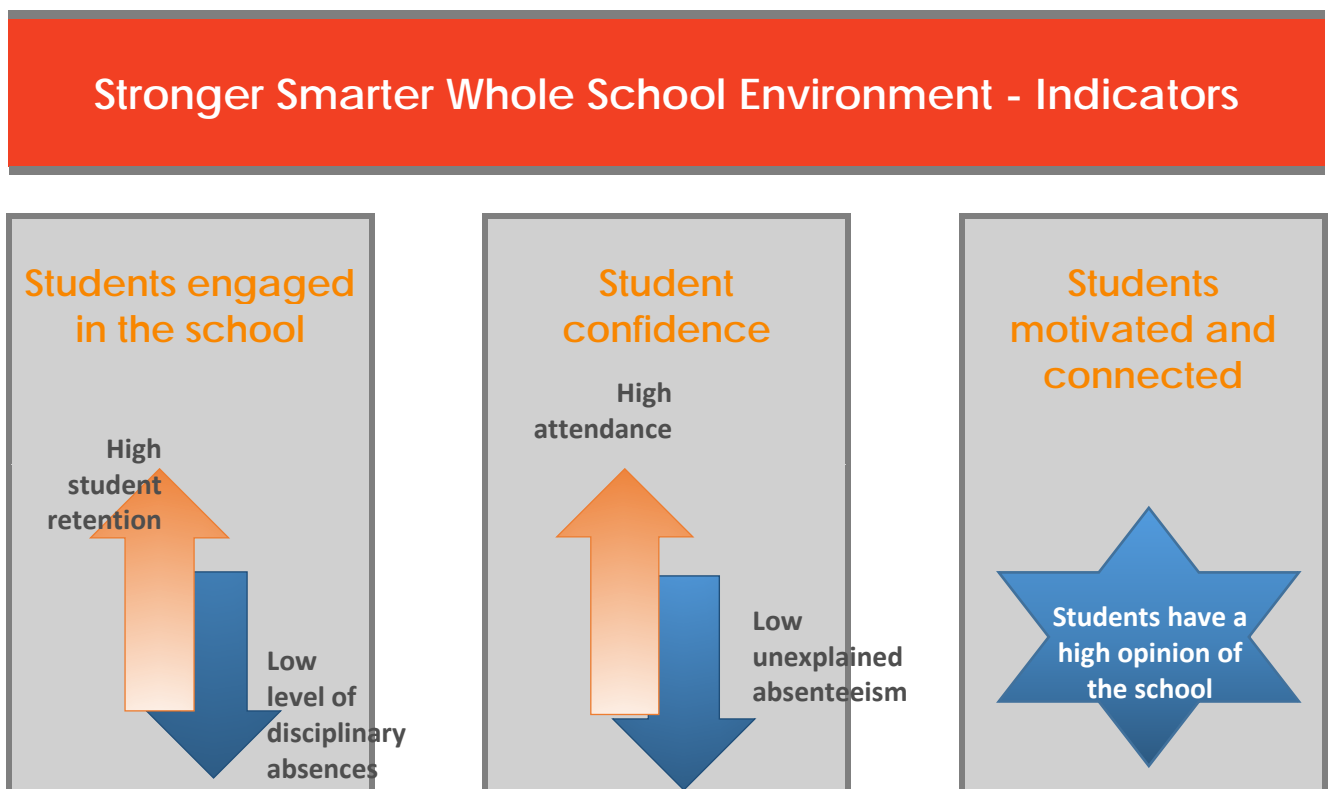
Figure 11: Personal Sphere Indicators

Stronger Smarter Personal Work Environment - Indicators

Commitment to change

personal responsibility

High staff morale

collegiate staff environment

High staff retention

Whole School Environment sphere indicators

In the school sphere, the indicators are

▶ Student engagement – which may be shown by factors such as high student retention and low disciplinary absences

▶ Student confidence – factors such as attendance and low unexplained absenteeism

▶ Student motivation and connection – evidence from student surveys
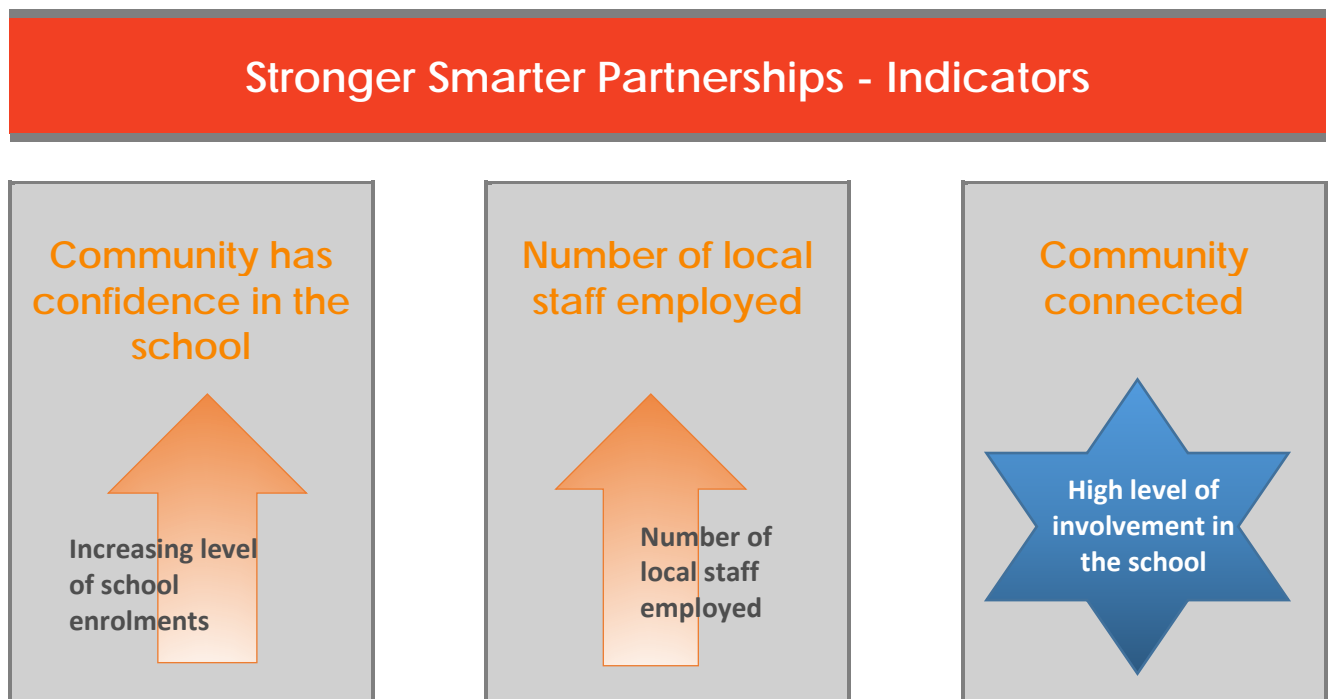
Figure 12: School Sphere Indicators

Stronger Smarter Whole School Environment - Indicators

Students engaged in the school

High student retention

Low level of disciplinary absences

Student confidence

High attendance

Low unexplained absenteeism

Students motivated and connected

Students have a high opinion of the school

Community (Partnerships) sphere indicators

In the school sphere, the indicators are

▶ Student engagement – which may be shown by factors such as high student retention and low disciplinary absences

▶ Student confidence – factors such as attendance and low unexplained absenteeism

▶ Student motivation and connection – evidence from student surveys

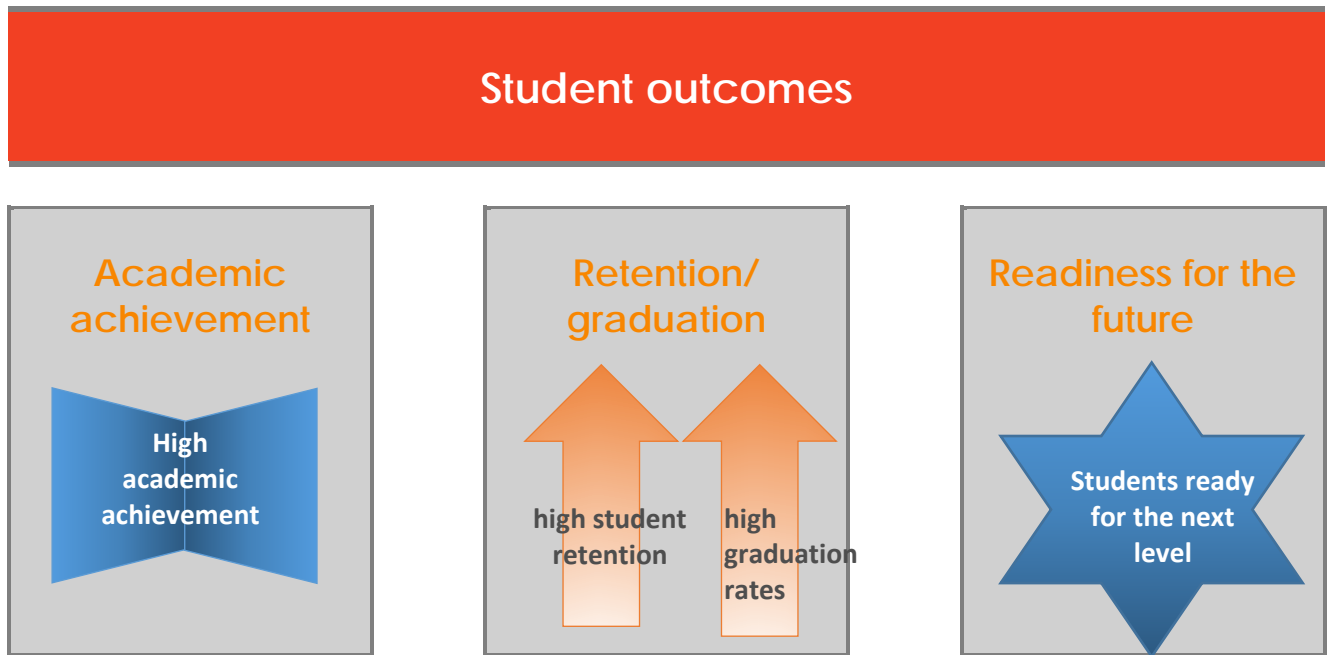## Figure13: Community Sphere Indicators

Stronger Smarter Partnerships - Indicators

Community has confidence in the school

Increasing level of school enrolments

Number of local staff employed

Number of local staff employed

Community connected

High level of involvement in the school

Figure14: Student Outcomes

5. Supporting the National standards

'The school is driven by a deep belief that every student is capable of successful learning.'

National School Improvement Tool – A culture that supports learning

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Mapping against the National Standards

In the tables that follow, the Stronger Smarter Approach has been mapped against the

▶ AITSL (2011) National Professional Standards for Teachers, and the

▶ AITSL (2014) Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles.

▶ The National School Improvement Tool.

The Stronger Smarter Approach provides support for educators around many aspects of the national standards.

In the personal sphere, this includes

▶ professional dialogues and gaining feedback

▶ leading high aspirations for learning and building commitment and optimism in staff

▶ collaborative leadership and a culture of trust, collaboration, coaching and mentoring

In the school sphere, this includes

▶ understanding or and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages

▶ inclusive learning environment with high expectations and an obvious sense of belonging

▶ explicit school improvement agendas, with priority to analysis and discussion of data and culture of self-evaluation and reflection

In the community sphere, this includes

▶ supportive, collaborative and trusting relationship with the community

▶ opportunities to engage parents and carers as partners in student learning

▶ partnerships with local business and community organisations

SSI Metastrategies relationship to National Professional Standards for Teachers

stronger smarter institute

1. Know students and how they learn

2. Know the content and how to teach it

3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning

6. Engage in professional learning

7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community

1. Positive Student Identity

1.4 Impact of **cultural identity** on the education of students from ATSI backgrounds

Indigenous knowledge in curriculum

Students – high expectations relationships

Metastrategies

National standards

3.1 Develop a culture of **high expectations** for all students

1.4 teaching programs to support ATSI students

2.4 Opportunities for students to develop **understanding of and respect for ATSI histories, cultures and langu**ages

3. High expectations

Staff - high expectations relationships

6.3 Implement **professional dialogue** within the school, informed by feedback, analysis of current research and practice

1.4 engaging in collaborative relationships with community

4. Staffing models

Community – high expectations relationships

3.7/7.3 Involve parents/ carers in **their children's learning**

2. Embrace Indigenous leadership

3.7/ 7.3 involve parents/ carers in **broader school priorities and activities**

5. Innovative school models

National Standards – Personal Sphere

National Professional Standards for Teachers

▶ **6.3:** implement professional dialogue within the school or professional learning network(s) that is informed by feedback, analysis of current research and practice to improve the educational outcomes of students

National Professional Standard for Principals

▶ Principals lead high aspirations in learning and inspire the same in students, staff and parents.

▶ Principals model collaborative leadership and engage with other schools and organisations to share and improve practice and encourage innovation in the education system.

▶ Principals build and sustain a coaching and mentoring culture at all levels in the school.

▶ Principals build a culture of trust and collaboration and embed collaborative and creative practices in the school.

The National School Improvement Tool: 1. An explicit improvement agenda

▶ There is a strong and optimistic commitment by all staff to the school improvement strategy and a clear belief that further improvement is possible.

▶ Teachers take responsibility for changes in practice required to achieve school targets.

The National School Improvement Tool: 3. A culture that promotes learning

▶ The school is driven by a deep belief that every student is capable of successful learning.

▶ A high priority is given to building and maintain positive and caring relationships between staff, students and parents.

▶ A strong collegial culture has been established. Teachers have an overt and shared commitment to the improvement of teaching and an openness to critique by colleagues.

National Professional Standards for Teachers

- ▶ **2.4:** provide opportunities for students to develop understanding or and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages

- ▶ **4.1.** develop productive and inclusive learning environments across the school by exploring new approaches to engage and support all students

The National School Improvement Tool:

1. An explicit improvement agenda

- ▶ There should be explicit and school-wide targets for improvement that are communicated to parents, families, teachers and students.

- ▶ The school communicates clearly that it expects all students to learn successfully and has high expectations for student attendance, engagement and outcomes.

- ▶ The school understands current student achievement levels and looks in particular at students who have disengaged from schooling or who are facing disadvantage.

- ▶ The school has an explicit and detailed local school improvement agenda.

2. Analysis and discussion of data

- ▶ A high priority is given to school-wide analysis and discussion of systematically collected data

- ▶ data is used to build a culture of self-evaluation and reflections cross the school and to inform school-level decisions, interventions and initiatives

3. A culture that promotes learning

- ▶ There is a happy, optimistic feel to the school. High levels of trust are apparent across the school community. There is a strong sense of belonging and pride in the school.

- ▶ The school appreciates and values students' varying cultural backgrounds, all students and staff have an obvious sense of belonging

- ▶ The school has clear strategies to promote appropriate behaviour, the school ethos is built around high expectations and a commitment to excellence.

7. Differentiated teaching and learning

- ▶ the school leadership team actively promotes the use of differentiated teaching as a strategy for ensuring that every student is engaged and learning successfully.

National Standards – Community Sphere

National Professional Standard for Principals

▶ Principals develop a mutually supportive, collaborative and trusting relationship with the community to ensure engagement in the life of the school

National Professional Standards for Teachers

▶ **1.4:** engaging in collaborative relationships with community representatives and parents/carers

▶ **3.7:** initiate contextually relevant processes to establish programs that involve parents/carers in the education of their children and broader school priorities and activities

▶ **7.3:** identify, initiate and build on opportunities that engage parents/carers in both the progress of their children's learning and in the educational priorities of the school.

The National School Improvement Tool:

3. A culture that promotes learning

▶ The school works to build mutually respectful relationships across the school community.

▶ The school views parents and families as integral members of the school community and partners in student learning

▶ A high priority is given to building and maintain positive and caring relationships between staff, students and parents.

9. School-community partnerships

▶ The school leadership team makes deliberate and strategic use of partnerships with families, local business and community organisations to access intellectual, physical and/or other resources not available within the school for the purposes of improving student outcomes.

Summary

The schools we create must be places that Aboriginal children and parents can connect with. They must be places in which it is OK to dream great things. They must be places that say to children, 'I believe in you.' (Professor Chris Sarra, NITV, 2016).

The **Stronger Smarter Approach** articulates the practical elements of Dr Chris Sarra's philosophical framework of the Stronger Smarter Philosophy.

In this paper, we have provided a **Stronger Smarter Approach Framework** to guide school reform to improve outcomes for Indigenous students. The Framework incorporates both the Stronger Smarter Metastrategies and the elements of the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program around taking responsibility for change.   In developing this framework, the Institute has also been guided by Luke et al's (2013) Indigenous Education Reform Template.

This Framework describes

- ▶ four underlying key elements
- ▶ three spheres of influences in a school where these underlying elements will impact
- ▶ a Stronger Smarter journey that leads a school from high expectations rhetoric through to high expectations relationships

Four key elements

Four key elements, interconnected with the Stronger Smarter Metastrategies, underlie the Stronger Smarter Approach:

- ▶ Responsibility for change (professional accountability)
- ▶ Taking a strength-based approach
- ▶ Embracing a positive Indigenous student identity (Strong and Smart)
- ▶ Building High-Expectations Relationships.

Three spheres of influence

In a school, we look at the spheres of 'personal', 'school', and 'community.

- ▶ The Personal Sphere is about transforming ourselves into agents of change. This begins with a mindset shift to take a strength-based approach.

- ▶ The School Sphere is about strength-based approaches, High Expectations Relationships, and using the **Stronger Smarter Approach** as an underpinning, common language. This is about mobilizing and motivating staff, and ensuring collaborative practices and shared understandings.

- ▶ The Community Sphere is about using the strategies of High-Expectations Relationships to develop Community Partnerships built on cohesion and collaboration.

Over 2,700 educators

from over 800 schools have completed the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program (SSLP)

Over 140 SSLP alumni

have completed our Stronger Smarter Facilitator course which provides further tools to support educators to undertake in-school Stronger Smarter professional developments with their staff.

Over 1,300 educators, pre-service students and others

have completed the Introduction to Stronger Smarter online module.

A Stronger Smarter journey

The Stronger Smarter Approach Framework recognises the time required for school reform, and describes this as a Stronger Smarter Journey. We describe this journey as taking educators

- ▶ from developing 'high expectations' of Indigenous students and education outcomes

- ▶ through 'taking responsibility for change'

- ▶ to embedding 'High-Expectations Relationships.

When High-Expectations Relationships are embedded across the three spheres, this is where we see the Stronger Smarter Approach in schools. This is where everyone across the school community is ready to take responsibility to do things differently

2016 Stronger Smarter Census

In a 2016 survey of SSLP alumni from 2006 to 2016, 80% of respondents said the Stronger Smarter Approach continues to have 'considerable impact' on their workplace practice (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2016).

and work together towards transformative change**.**

Tools for educators

We have provided several tools for educators:

▶ The **Stronger Smarter Approach** framework with supporting literature

▶ Descriptions of the Stronger Smarter journey across the three spheres.

▶ An introduction to indicators (recognising lead and lag indicators, and using 'confidence' and 'engagement' as lead indicators that need to be in place to support the final student outcomes).

▶ A **Stronger Smarter Approach** evaluation index (Appendix 1)

▶ A mapping of the Stronger Smarter Approach to national standards.

▶ ## A framework

▶ I think the main thing that Stronger Smarter has given our school is the framework to work within and something that everyone can see works. I think that's been really successful. The processes we use now are all strength-based, and that has been introduced to us by Stronger Smarter.

Karen Newton, Assistant Principal

Join us on a Stronger Smarter Journey

The Stronger Smarter Journey is a journey of action that draws on experiences and learnings from real work contexts covering urban, regional and remote education.

▶ Use this document to gain insight into how the **Stronger Smarter Approach** can transform your Personal, School and Community spheres of learning.

▶ Use the scales at the back of the document to get an idea of where you are on this journey.

▶ Connect to thousands of educators across the country.

Appendix 1: A Stronger Smarter Approach evaluation index

There is 'strong evidence that the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program has made a major contribution to improving the educational outcomes in participating schools.'

Clear Horizon Evaluation Report 2009.

A Stronger Smarter Approach Evaluation Index

Personal Sphere: To what extent …	Not at all	We have started working on this	It's going well – but still more work to do	We have moved a long way down the track – pretty close to where we want to be	To the full extent – have reached where we think we should be
a significant proportion of the school leadership has undertaken the SSLP	O	O	O	O	O
the school leadership are visibly committed to school improvement	O	O	O	O	O
the school leadership is committed to the key elements of the Stronger Smarter Approach as an underlying framework	O	O	O	O	O
the school leadership supports staff to take responsibility for change through a distributive leadership model circle approach to leadership	O	O	O	O	O
the school leadership provides coaching and mentoring for staff	O	O	O	O	O
all school staff have some knowledge and understanding of Stronger Smarter as an underlying framework for the school	O	O	O	O	O
all staff recognise their role in supporting and enacting the values and expectations for the school	O	O	O	O	O

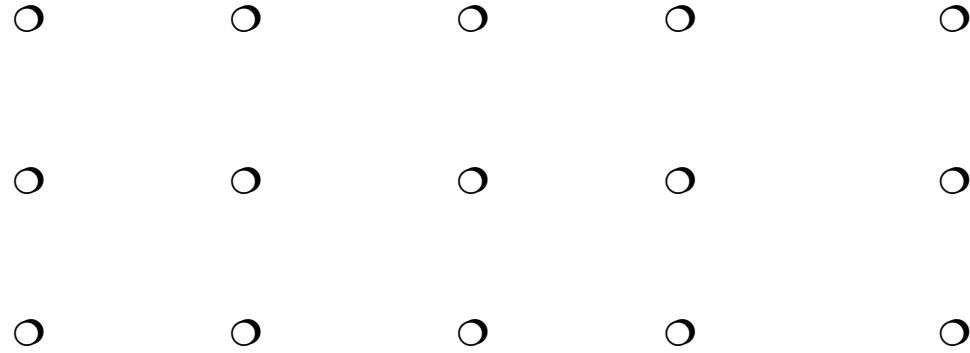# A Stronger Smarter Approach Evaluation Index

School Sphere To what extent …	Not at all	We have started working on this	It's going well – but still more work to do	We have moved a long way down the track – pretty close to where we want to be	To the full extent – have reached where we think we should be
the school visibly promotes an overall vision and values which correspond with a Stronger Smarter Approach	○	○	○	○	○
the school and school grounds are clean, tidy, and well-maintained	○	○	○	○	○
the school environment is a welcoming and safe place for students and their families from all backgrounds and cultures	○	○	○	○	○
the school visibly promotes high expectations for attendance, behaviour and learning outcomes	○	○	○	○	○
the school's values and expectations are embedded into everyday business in the classroom	○	○	○	○	○
classrooms are an orderly space where student behaviour is managed well, and learning can occur	○	○	○	○	○
teachers have High-Expectations Relationships with their					

students	○	○	○	○	○
teachers have a high level of understanding of local histories and cultures, and use this within their teaching	○	○	○	○	○
teachers understand the individual needs of students, and use this knowledge to create effective teaching and learning programs with diversity and flexibility in pedagogies	○	○	○	○	○

A Stronger Smarter Approach Evaluation Index

Community To what extent …	Not at all	We have started working on this	It's going well – but still more work to do	We have moved a long way down the track – pretty close to where we want to be	To the full extent – have reached where we think we should be
Community partnerships provide meaningful ways for the community to engage with the school's strategic activities?	○	○	○	○	○
School staff have deliberate strategies to reach beyond the school gate and build relationships with parents and the local community?	○	○	○	○	○
Community members are involved in school and classroom activities.	○	○	○	○	○
Community members are employed in the school and seen as role models for students and as partners with teachers in the classroom?	○	○	○	○	○

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