

HONOURING OUR STRENGTHS – MOVING FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

Persistent perceptions of deficit and conflict have characterised and constrained the history of relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians since contact.

The success of their saturation is apparent in a continuing approach that presents the response to Aboriginal needs in terms of health and education ‘gaps’; ‘the Aboriginal problem’, ‘mainstreaming (making them more like us)’ or ‘interventions’ (and all the lack of ability that such a word implies).

Language in programs and the underlying approach to address very real health, economic and social need continues to carry (and replicate) an implicit assumption of deficit and a positioning of the locus of control away from Aboriginal people (i.e. service ‘delivery’ instead of service ‘access’).

This paper recognises that an erosive mindset of deficit perceptions of Aboriginality is also being widely adopted by Aboriginal people by ourselves and other Aboriginal people – that if un-discussed will continue to impact on the Aboriginal struggle. This paper will unpack an Aboriginal framework (Engoori) that can reconnect people and reignite authentic community engagement discussions.

INTRODUCTION

What’s going on out there? – there are black people fighting black people. As soon as you start to get good education, then you somehow you begin to be ‘less black’; the colour of our skin in some areas seems to dictate how black we are and how black we’re not. It seems we are buying into what mainstream is imposing on us- we are keeping ourselves oppressed. Also language – if you don’t speak language then you’re not black. There’s the ‘where we live’ bit: remote areas are ‘really black’ whereas in urban areas you’re not ‘really black’. It impacts on policy and dollars – [the perception that] ‘money goes to the north’. We always push the blame out there to others, we need to take responsibility and own this situation. For me it’s about how we talk to each other, how we talk about each other and how we talk between each other. We need to take a lead on this instead of sitting

back and chopping each other's heads off. We have to change the conversation from one of deficit to one of strength and stop putting ourselves down. - SG

Nationally we have struggled to solve the 'Aboriginal Problem', the white fella had a go, then we the Indigenous fellas had a go, now the white fellas and the Indigenous fellas are having a go together. Yet I am still not sure if it will be 'solved' this time either. The reason why I am not confident is because nothing significant has changed, the formulations of the problem haven't shifted at all, and the fundamentals of the thinking is the still same. All that seems to happen with this challenge, is that the pictures get moved around a bit on the wall, or we put some new paint on them, yet when it all comes down to it - it's still the same old outhouse that we are looking at.

Let's look at the challenge in this context - Deficit Discourse - this is the thing that hasn't shifted. Since contact White man have looked at me in a certain way ... they seen me as being different, and not just being different good, however, it was different bad. I was seen to be doing everything wrong. I lived in houses made of grass and tree branches, or sometimes a cave. I didn't have fences to let people know which bit of country I owned, (so there ... a challenge straight away for me, I meant to say the country I belong to). I didn't cultivate and sow seed in the way that they did. I didn't have clothes like they did. I didn't speak the same. My dance and stories were seen as Satan's work. My underlying belief system and customs were seen to be wrong, too - so you get the picture, hey. White man seen me in a way which disgusted them, so naturally they wanted to either change me or destroy me - that's a pretty harsh yet fair thing to say I believe. However, what is more disgusting is that over 200 years later it's still happening. Even more disgusting is that we (Indigenous people) are now looking at ourselves in the same way; we are buying into the negative stereotyping of ourselves by others.

Issues surrounding identity and the ways in which negative stereotypes are used by Aboriginal people against other Aboriginal people is a matter of great sensitivity. Candid and rigorous debate are stifled by valid fears of reprisal which include being perceived as disrespecting the real disadvantage of Indigenous people and exposing them and communities to further misrepresentation and outside attack. To the contrary, identifying these issues *does not* mean denying the real need of many Aboriginal people, nor the continuing racism which people experience, but provides way to take this issue to another place. If left un-discussed, issues of negative stereotyping within the Aboriginal community will continue to escalate. I will state this: that I believe that only Aboriginal-led initiatives can navigate effectively though this challenge.

Persistent perceptions of deficit and difference have characterised and constrained the histories of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians since contact. The success of this constant saturation of thinking is apparent in a continuing approach to Aboriginal needs of health and education and other such challenges, as being 'the Aboriginal *problem*'. This is also demonstrated clearly with

the responses to these challenges with methods like, 'mainstreaming (making *them* more like *us*)' and 'interventions' (and all the lack of ability that such a word implies) and sending the army in because we are so bloody hopeless. The approaches continue to carry (and replicate) an implicit underlying assumption of deficit and a positioning of taking control away from Aboriginal people (i.e. service 'delivery' instead of service 'access'). The use of this type of terminology and approaches frames Aboriginal identity in a negative way and acts therefore, as an embedded/institutionalised component of negative stereotyping. This may not necessarily express itself as active or overt racism but instead as a subtle and underlying prejudice that constrains relationships and engagement – whether between 'white' and 'Aboriginal' governance structures, or service providers and clients, or just between individuals – and is therefore a barrier to equity and change.

These concepts are not only embedded within the negative stereotype armoury, which leads to the derogatory notion of some people as less 'Aboriginal', less 'real' or less 'valid' than others, but also keeps Aboriginal people in a place where we don't want to be.

Moreover, this type of thinking also influences attitudes and behavior. In turn, this then influences policy and practice. Most critically it is reflected in the way that government and non-Indigenous people engage with Indigenous people.

Understanding the consequences of negative stereotyping is increasingly being explored in the health and social sciences literature (Larson et al., 2007; Paradies, 2006; Steele, 1997). In a recent Fullbright lecture, Lawrence discussed the effects of racism on health outcomes, and considered how the effects of consistent negative stereotyping can be internalised:

One of the other consequences of being subjected to pervasive negative stereotypes is that such views are actually internalised by members of the minority group. This means that those who are subjected to constant negative stereotypes come to accept as valid the dominant culture's views about their inferiority. Research has shown that those who do internalize these views about themselves are more likely to consume alcohol to excess, to exhibit psychological distress and psychological problems such as low self-esteem, feelings of isolation and identity crises. (Lawrence, 2008, p. 11)¹

Associated with internalised racism is the effect of 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. As noted by Lawrence (2008, pp. 13-14):

¹ Taylor, J & Jackson, B. (1990) Factors affecting alcohol consumption in black women, part II. *International Journal of Addiction*, 25: 1425-1427.

A self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when expectations about an individual's behaviour cause that person to act in ways which confirm the expectations. The phenomenon has been measured in many situations and it is clear that minority groups in any society are the most vulnerable to such effects, especially if the expectations are negative and constantly repeated. So often do Indigenous Australians hear that they are sick, lazy and unproductive that they internalise these opinions and become convinced of their own unfitness. African Americans told in advance that blacks perform more poorly on exams than whites had lower scores on an examination than control subjects who were not confronted with such a prejudiced claim about intellectual inferiority¹. Research in the U.S. has shown that the more people internalize racist ideas about their group, the higher the level of alcohol consumption and psychological distress, including depression, low self-esteem and feelings of isolation.

Studies such as this which explore the effects of racism, prejudice and stereotyping by non-Indigenous Australians against Indigenous Australians are important in the context of this document as they provide insight into the nature of the impact of the adoption of perceptions of deficit, authenticity and additional prejudicial stereotyping about Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people. However, Lawrence's observations are also intrinsically embedded in an approach centred around outside imposition of perceptions onto passive recipients.

White Australia has got it so wrong. But we shouldn't try to change white Australia, we should be strong in ourselves. What white Australia thinks is inconsequential really - CS

While perceptions may have arisen first within non-Indigenous Australia, introduced concepts of deficit, difference, authenticity and validity are also prevalent among Aboriginal people and are having an effect on relations between the many different nations, groups, communities and individuals that now constitute 'Aboriginal Australia'. Words which undermine Aboriginal identity are commonly used as insults and tools of social exclusion (such as 'coconut', 'text book black' or 'air-conditioned black'), as are accusations of supposed privilege and favouritism given to those perceived as (or even accused of being) 'more Aboriginal' (i.e. 'the government only gives money to real blackfellas'). In doing so, divisions based on perceptions of identity are fabricated between individuals, groups, communities and even geography – thus the remote/urban or North/South divide.

Issues surrounding identity produce destructive relationships in the Aboriginal community – there are tensions. This is a dialogue that needs to be had. Remote communities don't have a public output for these tensions - JR

The statement by Lawrence (2008) about the internalising of imposed negative stereotypes and the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' effect reflects observations made by many participants at the workshop. Chris Sarra described his research that observed

¹ Steele, C.M (1997) A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *Am Psychol*, 52: 613-29.

the regular and dominant use of negative words used by non-Indigenous Australians to describe Aboriginal people. These included: 'drunks', 'boongs', 'got it good', 'well kept by government', 'lazy', 'welfare-dependent', 'aggressive', and 'disrespectful'. Perceptions of Aboriginal students were similarly laden with negative language: e.g. 'lazy', 'under achievers', 'cheeky', and 'defiant'. But Sarra also found that such language was echoed in the words used by Aboriginal people to describe themselves, and noted that this underpinned damaging and self-limiting behaviours:

The greatest tragedy is that young black kids make choices about these perceptions as well. Too many aspire to be these negative things thinking that they are supporting their Aboriginal identity. So those who do well get picked on by other kids who say 'you're a coconut' etc. These kids think that the negative stereotype is a cultural identity but of course it's not. At Cherbourg I was determined to smash this perception of Aboriginal identity, but we had to replace it with something – which brought us to the 'Strong and Smart' philosophy - CS

Smith (2002, 2003), Adams (1995), Pearson (2000), and Freire (1972), speak about the need for Indigenous/oppressed people to take control of their destiny by first taking control of themselves. Freire's notion that, "*the oppressed must also free themselves and that the oppressor alone cannot free the oppressed*" is paramount in this context. Freire (1972) also talks about an internalization of oppression through what he calls the "*existential duality of the oppressed.*" He says that until the oppressed concretely *discover* their oppressor and in-turn their own consciousness, they nearly always express fatalistic attitudes toward their situation (p. 43).

My perception of what Smith, Pearson, and Freire are referring to is the right to self-determine from within. The right to self-determine one's destiny is often seen from only one perspective, which is what the dominant force should do to empower the oppressed. In particular, Pearson (2000) is critical of Indigenous peoples' acceptance of welfare as a legitimate income and calls for them to become self-sufficient and self-responsible. Self-determination is a right that individuals and individual groups must experience for themselves. Often people get caught in the '*poor bugger me*' syndrome, or the '*if only they would*' syndrome. For me, Pearson, Smith and others are saying that it is time to stop using '*they*' has an excuse for not advancing Indigenous affairs. Indigenous people must free themselves of the excuse shackles and take control of their situation before they can take the road to freedom.

Although he is looking through the same eyes, Adams (1995) explains it differently. Adams speaks of *ideology domination* as a primary means by which the state maintains control over its citizens. Adams says in terms of Aboriginal (Canadian Native Indian) consciousness that is determined by the objective reality, that our life experiences shape our thinking. Our collective experiences as colonized peoples such as poverty, racism, racial stereotyping, the devaluation of our histories and cultures, the non-recognition of our traditional lands, and the devaluation of our ways of doing and learning, all contribute to our oppression by the dominate culture and by ourselves. In fact, Adams goes as far to say that the state's ideological system has a

correlation with religion, in that it is not subjected to scientific or objective analysis, and is “put forward to be accepted on faith”. This, then becomes hegemony for our people, a taken for granted notion that this is the way it must be. Furthermore Adams says that:

By accepting the ideology of the dominant class (or culture) as their own, the subordinate masses not only submit to it, they also legitimize the rule of the establishment. In this way, ideology oppresses the masses. (Adams, 1995, p. 38)

Adams, Freire, Pearson, and Smith all argue for Indigenous people to discontinue the accepting of a second rate positioning in the ‘new world’ by freeing ourselves of self-oppression and taking control of our own situations. This means challenging the dominant culture on matters of power-relationships, political status and economic independence as well as challenging ourselves. Indigenous spokespeople and Indigenous leaders must not lose sight of the real struggle, which I hope is to maintain and celebrate cultural difference, Indigenous values and principles, and their hopes and dreams; not to turn them all into ‘black white fellas’.

This kind of thing happens, as explained by an article in *The Australian* newspaper on 4th – 5th December 2005 (p. 24) by the Editor Deborah Hope. It was reported that Archbishop Desmond Tutu and South African President Thabo Mbeki are in conflict. Tutu warned:

... that poverty had become a political powder keg in South Africa, and claimed government “empowerment” programs – meant to target the most disadvantaged – were instead creating a wealthy black elite. (Hope 2005)

God forbid we end up down this track, but the point I am making is that the danger and the opportunities of this occurring in Australia are ripe. In the same article, Hope (2005) reported that the *Sunday Times* (South African newspaper) commented that: “Nothing has changed. We used to have a white capitalist elite, now we have growing a black capitalist elite”.

I want to shift the focus now, from that of describing the challenge that confronts us as an Australian society to a place of why it may have come about. It is those influences just described that impacts and shapes Indigenous engagement. Local, national and global issues can corrupt, threaten and challenge Indigenous societies. There appears to be no room for the social agenda in the new world. Pearson (2000), with his deserved hatred of passive welfare which he believes is “an irrational, ‘gammon’ economic relationship where transactions between the provider and the recipient are not based on reciprocity” asserts in some way a society which is determined by the global economic market. Only recently the world experienced the instability of this unwarranted faith through the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) debacle.

The great scholar Karl Polanyi (cited in George, 1999) in his masterwork, “The Great Transformation in 1944” which was a fierce critique of 19th century industrial, market-based society warned us by saying:

To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and the natural environment ... would result in the demolition of society. (Polanyi cited in George, 1999)

The ideas of private ownership of Aboriginal communal lands, smartcards, Indigenous Enterprise driven communities, are clearly market driven. Pearson and his irritation with passive welfare, and Mundine (Karvelas, 2005) with his argument for private ownership of communal lands, advocate for such change within Indigenous communities.

Private ownership of communal lands has got its critics, though. New South Wales State Labour MP, Linda Burney fears are that:

This (Private ownership on communal lands) is about getting people off their land, it's about the mining and property industry. If people can't see that they are fools. (Karvelas, 2005)

Burney also goes on to say that:

The challenge of developing a viable economy in tiny communities where people are barely surviving ... where disease and short life-expectancies and constant funerals are daily events, then bureaucrats and officials in Canberra need to be realistic. I don't call this mutual obligation, I call the kinds of processes that are going on at the moment ... social engineering. (Karvelas, 2005)

It could be argued that both Pearson's and Mundine's approaches are very different to that of Burney's, yet all three undoubtedly want the best outcomes possible for Indigenous peoples. Mundine says in the same article:

You can't have people sitting around collecting the dole and doing nothing in the community for it. You've got to be a contributor to your community to get it moving forward. (Karvelas, 2005)

So I pose the questions: what does it mean to be a contributor, and is making a contribution to the economy the only way you can become a contributor? I suggest that the most common way of thinking for most Australians around this question be that black or white, is to firstly consider financial contributions. This thinking, I believe, has its foundations firmly planted in neo-liberalism and a market-driven world which I suggest may not be an Indigenous way.

As Taiaiake Alfred powerfully states:

The primary goals of an indigenous economy are the sustainability of the earth and ensuring the health and well-being of the people. Any deviation from that principle – whether in qualitative terms or with reference to the intensity of activity on the land – should be seen as upsetting the ideal of balance that is at the heart of so many indigenous societies. (Alfred, 2001)

Smith (2003), Adams (1995), Freire (1972), and Pearson (2003), all offer arguments that imply that the dominant structures and colonization has and continues to have negative effects on Aboriginal peoples throughout the world. Others mention globalization and neo-liberalism as the new forms of dominance; the new forms of colonization. People like George (1999), Apple (2004), Walters (2000), and Stromquist and Monkman (2000) emphasise the enormous influence multi-national companies and neo-liberalism is having on higher education and the globalised market. This, in turn, makes me wonder about the pending impact of the competitive nature of this paradigm in terms of Indigenous engagement in education when the current intent of education is clearly to prepare them for work.

Western leadership dominates ways of doing in this context, and continues to impose a foreign value on Indigenous people and implies that assimilation is still a key strategy for oppressing Indigenous people. Smith (2003) also suggests that the new forms of colonialism are economic and political forces (neo-liberalism). The fact that these forces are having such a huge impact on our systems throughout the world demands that we must become conscious of the power of neo-liberalism, and its impact on leadership and educational engagement (Apple, 2004; Stormquist & Monkman, 2000; George, 1999; Walters, 2000).

The unrelenting notion that economic development in Indigenous communities is the answer to all Indigenous social challenges is questionable. Evidence is also strong within the education system for this notion, in that schooling's main focus appears to be to get children ready for work (Learn or Earn, Birth to Work). So are there other purposes for education? And what is the intent of educational engagement?

This conversation will now digress to a way forward. *Engoori* is not the only way, yet this is an approach grounded on the notion that all people are strong. It's about reconnecting and remembering who we are and how we are meant to be together, and importantly, it is grounded in Aboriginal knowledge.

Our approach (is) based on the genuine belief that there is no challenge presenting today that has not already been confronted and addressed by our ancestors. They simply manifest now in different forms. The real challenge however is for us, their descendants, to revisit and repackage (my definition of innovation) in 21st century 'speak' that which they believed in voiced and practiced. (Parata, 2004, p.2)

Engoori is founded on the belief that any group of people already hold the collective knowledge and wisdom to successfully meet the challenges they face. Accessing this collective knowledge and wisdom requires time and focus to remember and share stories of success and strength. This is essentially about reaffirming those powerful and positive narratives and identities that are the heritage of particular groups or organisations. Successfully utilising this knowledge and wisdom requires deep listening and reflection, and collective sense-making and decision-making processes. *Engoori*, from Mithaka country in South-west Queensland offers such a set of processes (Figure 1).

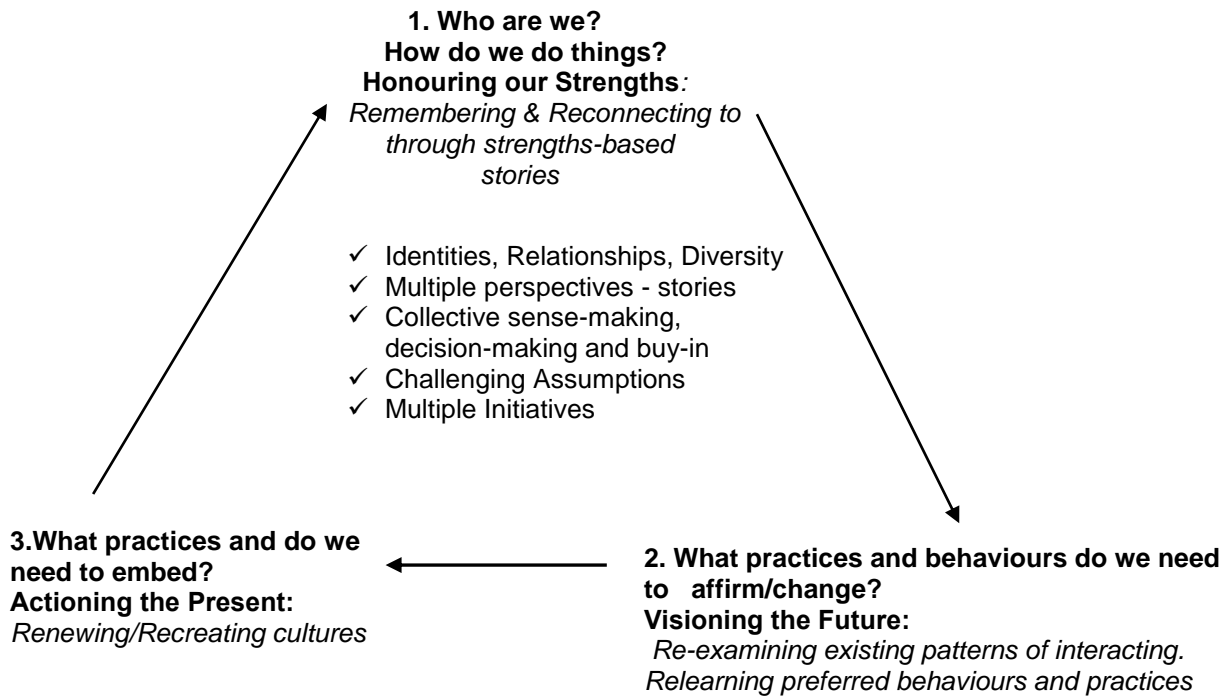


Figure 1: *Engoori* – Local Leadership for Cultural Renewal

Engoori begins by honouring people and identities, with an initial focus on questions of who we are and how we should be together. This provides a strengths-based platform from which to move forward. As such it stands in stark contrast to a commonly practiced consultation process that begins with deficit ‘what’ type questions such as ‘what are the issues or problems?’ Grounded in strength of identity and the positivism of success people are better able to uncover and own habitual patterns that enable and disable them from meeting particular challenges. Finally new and/or old and/or different ways of seeing, talking and doing can be practiced, ritualised and embedded.

*We cannot solve today’s problems with the same mindset that created them.
(Albert Einstein)*

ENGOORI METHODS – PROCESSES AND PRINCIPLES

The following processes and principles are employed throughout *Engoori*.

Identity, Relationships and Diversity

There is no 'I' without a 'We'.

The individual is the singular while the group is the plural of the same phenomena, relationship. Identity and diversity emerge through relationship.
(Stacey, 2003, p. 323)

Through his Complex Responsive Processes theory, Ralph Stacey proposes that we need to move beyond a 'systems' view of organizations and human interaction, to one that focuses rather on the processes of relating and communicating. Stacey offers a detailed analysis and comparison of 'systems' and 'process' paradigms and approaches. He draws on the work of Elias (1978) to describe and unpack processes of 'emergence' in human interaction and identity formation and in social order and societal development. Some of his central propositions, which highlight key differences between 'systems' and 'process' approaches are briefly identified below.

1. Human interaction and organisational life is ripe with paradox. While 'systems' approaches tend to attempt resolution of paradox, 'process' approaches value it as fertile ground for novelty, diversity and creativity, all essential to dealing successfully with complexity. For example, building on the work of Elias and Mead, Stacey demonstrates how individuals form groups and are formed by them at the same time. Our self-perceptions (individual identities) are the result of self-consciousness where 'one must, as a subject, become an object to oneself', thus creating a necessary subject/object, participant/observer paradox (Stacey, 2003, p. 322). To do this an individual must experience themselves from the standpoint of others. Initially as children, we take on board as self-perception of the attitudes of 'significant others' towards us. As we learn to 'talk to ourselves as others talk to us' through our lives, we move towards taking on the attitudes of whole groups - 'generalised others'. This 'I'/'We' identity paradox highlights the importance of focusing on the processes of creating relationship and power equality between individuals within groups.
2. 'Systems' thinking takes an individualistic human psychology focus on cognitivism, constructivism and humanistic psychology. 'Process' thinking takes on a social relationships perspective.
3. 'Systems' approaches are based upon a spatial metaphor of 'inside/ outside' and are generally built upon a linear notion of time where the past is factually given, the future is yet to unfold and the present is a point of opportunity dividing the two. As 'process' approaches focus on the acts of relating, interacting and communicating, they avoid notions of 'inside/ outside' and linear time, rather focusing on the present. Here, in a sense, the past

constructs the future just as much as the future constructs the past. In this view, the past gets retold in the present, depending on what expectation and desires are held for the future, and at the same time these expectations and desires for the future are being moulded by stories of the past.

4. The focus in 'process' approaches is on the micro, local interactions between people living and working in the present. There is no intention here to focus on the holistic thinking that characterises many 'systems' approaches. As such, the key 'systems' parameters of hierarchies and boundaries are also avoided.

In presenting some of the fundamental differences Stacey proposes between 'systems' and 'process' approaches we are in no way attempting to judge one better than the other, or propose that we only approach life from one perspective, if that were even a possibility. Indeed, this paradox is also useful. We have been drawn to Stacey's approach as it has resonated with strong patterns of narrative, experience and response among ourselves and those we have worked with as well as Aboriginal perspectives central to our work, such as *Engoori*. One of the benefits of the Complex Responsive Processes perspective is that it reminds us of the centrality of relationships and connectedness in all endeavours involving human beings. We have also found that making some of these differences in approach explicit has enabled groups to 'see' blockages or impasses and to transform themselves to move forward.

Authentic human interaction is impossible when we lose ourselves in a role.

(Tolle, 2005, p. 91)

Our approach is as much about inner learning and growth as it is outwardly focused. Another way to consider this is that we focus as much on the 'silent, private conversations' we have with ourselves (self-consciousness) as we do on the interactive conversations we have with others (culture), as we do on the way these conversations (and thus identities) are simultaneously being formed by, and forming each other (Stacey, 2003). As outlined above, it is both the cultures into which we have been socialised and personal characteristics, dispositions and experiences that create in each of us a set of habits – of perceiving, thinking, judging, responding and behaving. These habits are necessary for us to survive. Sometimes, some of them may be preventing us from becoming the best we can be. Embarking on the journey of examining these habits can lead to deep learning, self-healing and individual and collective emancipation. There is a strong thread in many leadership perspectives, ancient and contemporary, that the life-long journey of becoming a better, more authentic human being is the ground of ethical, effective leadership (Senge et al., 2005; Sveiby & Scuthorpe, 2006).

You can't have a partnership without a relationship, and you can't have a relationship without a conversation. You've got to have the conversation. Everything starts there. (DEEWR, 2008, p. 4)

A developing area of focus in our work is the creation of 'cultures of dialogue' within participant groups. Dialogue is a unique kind of conversation, almost the antithesis of debate. Firstly, dialogue is an interaction where people can explore the assumptions, beliefs, experiences and feelings that shape and control the ways they participate in interactions (Bohm, 1991). It offers spaces for deep reflection, personally and collectively. As this happens, new possibilities open up as barriers dissolve. In this way dialogue is a vehicle for Schein's cultural analysis. Secondly, dialogue is a space where people listen deeply to each other, deepening connectedness, building trust and a willingness to disclose (Bohm, 1991). Thirdly, dialogue results in new deeper meanings and new ways of 'seeing' particular issues or challenges through the emergence of collective meanings (Gerard & Teurfs, 1995). Dialogue is an old process that can be traced to Greek, Native American and other Indigenous cultures (Gerard & Teurfs, 1995). It is a process central to spaces of 'not knowing' (see next section), which are themselves essential for dealing successfully with complex challenges.

Multiple Perspectives - Sharing Stories

When dealing with complex inter-cultural challenges the question of truth is irrelevant. Multiple perspectives are all we have to work with.

What gets us into trouble is not what we don't know. It's what we do know that isn't so. Mark Twain

Successfully meeting complex inter-cultural challenges with all their unpredictability and uncertainty requires something other than the frameworks, knowledge and patterns of perception and interaction of the past several decades (Senge et al., 2005). For such challenges 'there is no blueprint or roadmap to follow' otherwise these challenges would have been addressed a long time ago. We have no clear knowledge of how to proceed and there are no experts (Bloemhard, 2003). This represents a major challenge for academic, research, bureaucratic and scientific knowledge systems and cultures (Bloemhard, 2003). A common response to unpredictability and uncertainty in the western world is the tightening up of management and accountabilities and investment in futile attempts at long-range prediction (Gimpl & Dakin, 1984). What is required, however, is the creation of spaces of 'not knowing' where people with an emotional stake in the particular issue or challenge can come together and share their knowledge and experiences through stories (Bloemhard, 2003). Participating in such processes is difficult for many professional people, as socialisation into a profession results in many underlying cultural assumptions – beliefs, values, judgements – leading us most often to the position of 'what should happen here', which blocks us from deep self-reflection, from seeing what 'does and can happen', and prevents us from truly 'being present' (Bloemhard, 2003; Senge et al., 2005).

Collective sense-making, decision-making and buy-in

Stories and perspectives are shared as multiple perspectives. Through co-creative processes of pattern identification and dialogue these multiple perspectives can be woven into a collective narrative (Stacey, 2003). This provides a powerful platform of shared history, understanding and commitment from which to move forward. The people facing the challenge are more than likely the people who know the most about it. It would therefore be wise to include them in every phase of the solution to the challenge, from sense-making, to designing, to implementation of processes and strategies to address it.

Challenging Assumptions

Identifying, owning and challenging personal and cultural assumptions is an important habit of cultural competence. This includes assumptions about:

- Ourselves, self-perceptions, identity
- What we know and how we know it
- How we think
- How we judge, interact, responds and behave.

Multiple Initiatives

Complex challenges are an ongoing reality of contemporary school communities. Some issues have been present or recurring in some schools for many years such as student engagement and achievement, authentic community engagement, the overburdened curriculum, maintaining educational relevance in a dynamically changing world etc. In addition, more specific challenges may arise within particular contexts at certain times e.g. particularly controversial and/or divisive events or circumstances. In view of all that has been said about complex challenges it is important where possible to 'seed' multiple attempts to address these challenges. Our experience is that it is often those initiatives that we believe least likely to succeed that do.

CONCLUSION

The challenge of engaging Indigenous peoples in education will be overcome when people within the education system create space for Indigenous people to step into. The space I am referring to occurs in three sites: minds, hearts and hands. It will not happen if the space only happens in one of the three; it must happen in all three. *Engoori* provides a way forward and honours the strengths that already exist within all groups of people. We must consider the impact of negative stereotyping and policy development on vulnerable groups of people. The conversation needs to shift from one of deficit to one of strengths – to one where the questions we are asking are ones around what makes us strong, and who are we, not ones around what are the

issues. Space must be created in the in minds, hearts, and hands of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people if we are to ever eliminate the challenge of Indigenous engagement in schooling.

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