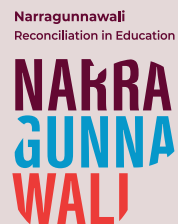


National Reconciliation in Education Forum: Bridging Now to Next

Summary Report

Thursday 6 November 2025
Museum of Australian Democracy, Ngunnawal Country, Canberra



The National Reconciliation in Education Forum was hosted by Reconciliation Australia's [Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program](#) and brought together 200 representatives from every state and territory.

Participants included education leaders and professionals from across the government, Catholic and independent education sectors; key representatives from national, state and territory organisations; and leaders from schools and early learning services who are championing reconciliation.

The forum was facilitated by MC Shelley Ware, a proud Yankuntjatjara and Wirangu woman and renowned educator and media presenter.

The purpose of the forum was to create a space for connection, shared learning and critical reflection with a focus on:

- identifying the barriers and enablers to progressing reconciliation in education and systems change
- inspiring and challenging organisations and institutions to deepen reconciliation actions
- strengthening networks and opportunities for cross-sector collaboration.

The three panel sessions were structured around the following topics:

1. **Reckoning with the Truths of our Education System.**
A conversation on how First Nations led, place based truth-telling can help transform education systems shaped by colonial histories into pathways for reconciliation.
2. **Building a Culturally Responsive Education Sector.**
Examining how cultural responsiveness is shaping expectations and practices across education, and what it takes to embed it as a foundation for inclusive, quality learning.
3. **Guiding and Driving Reconciliation Practice.**
Unpacking the shared responsibilities of reconciliation in education – when non-Indigenous educators must step up to lead change and when they must step aside to centre First Nations voices and self-determination.

Glenn Stephenson from [Capture This](#) visually recorded key points of each session, the narrative images are interwoven into this summary report.

Report purpose and structure

The panel sessions and each accompanying participant table discussion identified a wide range of challenges, opportunities and ideas for the future of reconciliation in education across Australia.

This summary report brings together the core enablers and priorities that emerged across these discussions.

Building on these reflections, Reconciliation Australia has identified key recommendations – actions that must be implemented at the sector, school and service, and individual level – to support the next steps in advancing reconciliation in education.

These recommendations are structured around the three panel focus areas reflecting the themes explored on the day and the practical factors identified as critical to driving future action and meaningful progress.

Throughout this report, the forum reflections are framed by the five dimensions of reconciliation – race relations, equality and equity, institutional integrity, unity and historical acceptance. These dimensions drive the work of reconciliation. In education, this looks like:

RACE RELATIONS:

By actively practising and promoting anti-racism and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous cultures, rights and experiences, education builds relationships grounded in understanding and trust, free of racism.

EQUALITY AND EQUITY:

The education system upholds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, children and students' right to self-determination through equitable access to quality education, culturally responsive and safe learning environments and opportunities to succeed.

HISTORICAL ACCEPTANCE:

Education is central to learning and accepting Australia's true histories, including the ongoing impacts of colonisation and the strength, resilience and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, fostering deeper understanding.

INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY:

The education sector commits to reconciliation through policies, curriculum and practices, setting an example that fosters a culture of change.

UNITY:

Education plays a key role in building a shared national identity that values and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures and heritages.

Keynote: Reimagining Education

Speakers: Hayley McQuire, National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (NIYEC) CEO, and Liz Ross, Youth Design Group Congress member.

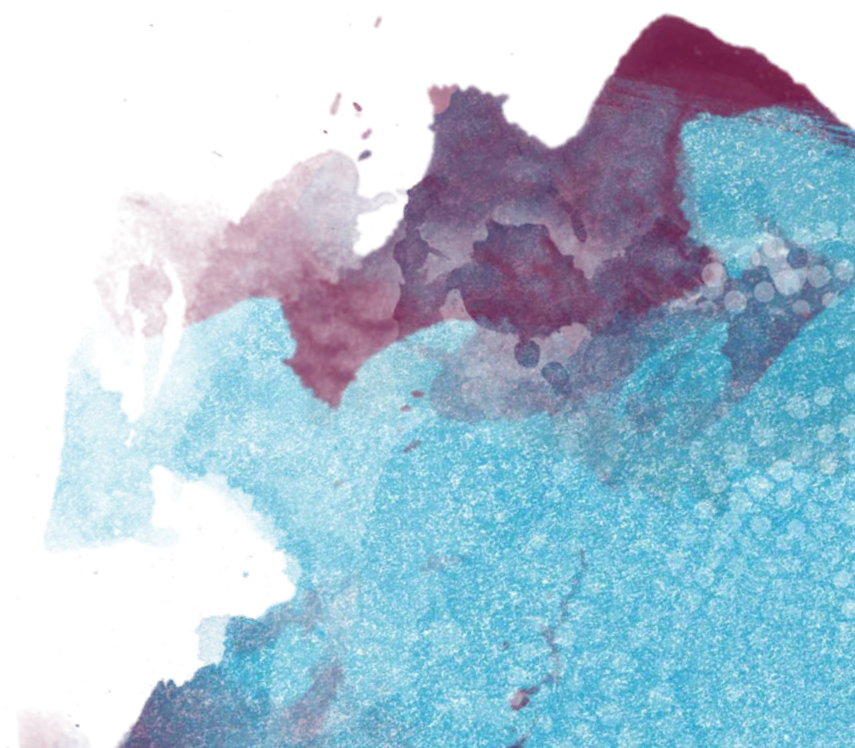
After Reconciliation Australia's CEO, Karen Mundine, set the scene on the current reconciliation landscape and the role of education in creating and shaping a stronger, reconciled nation, the forum keynote explored ways to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are included in the decisions made about their education and education systems.

Hayley McQuire and Liz Ross explored this in their keynote address, sharing a collective vision for transformed education systems grounded in First Nations self-determination, driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student voices and agency.

NIYEC, with the support of the [Foundation for Young Australians](#) and the [Australian Government Office for Youth](#), is spearheading the development of the [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Congress](#) – a body that would work to connect the 100,000 First Nations high school students across the continent to collectively shape decisions impacting their education. Liz Ross is one of the 120 students and young people who have contributed to the co-design process to date.

'How can we be good ancestors to future students? It's a slow process but we have to be there to get the journey started for the students of today.'

– Liz Ross, Youth Design Congress member



National Reconciliation in Education Forum: *Bridging Now to Next*

Museum of Australian Democracy, Nggunawal Country, Canberra, 6 November 2025

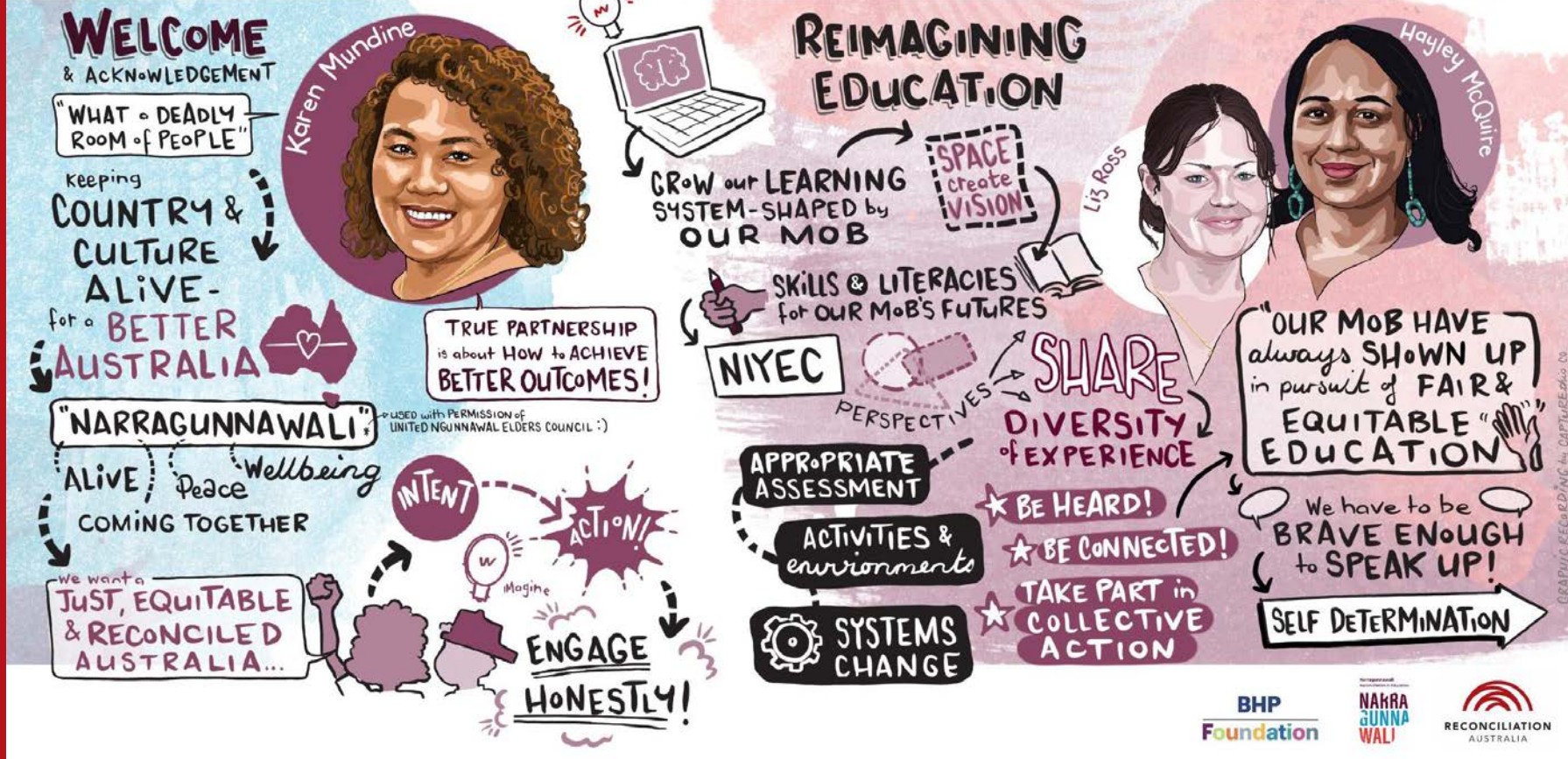


Illustration of key points shared by Reconciliation Australia CEO Karen Mundine, and Hayley McQuire and Liz Ross during their 'Reimagining Education' keynote. Illustration: Glenn Stephenson/CaptureThis

Reckoning with the Truths of our Education System

This panel explored how First Nations led; place based truth-telling can transform education systems shaped by colonial histories to advance reconciliation.

Moderated by Professor Melitta Hogarth (University of Melbourne) with Cmm Sue-Anne Hunter (National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People), Luke Allan (NSW Department of Education) and Jenny Walker (Kellyville Public School, NSW).

The panel explored:

- Key education findings and recommendations in *Yoorrook for Transformation* and learnings from Victoria's First Nations led truth-telling process and the implications for other jurisdictions.
- The NSW Department of Education's engagement in truth-telling and the insights emerging from this process.
- Kellyville Public School's whole-school RAP-driven truth-telling on its 150-year history; the relationships built and the impact on the community.

'We have to keep the fire burning, every year for my new staff, for the students and for my parents. Morella Mission and what truth-telling is, it's part of what we do every year, it's just not done once, it's done all the time.'

– Jenny Walker, Principal, Kellyville Public School

Table discussions strongly expressed that robust First Nations representation in governance and leadership, including on boards and in policy decision-making processes is vital to the process of truth-telling in education. It also requires different parts of the educational ecosystem working together to embed truth-telling in a cohesive and impactful way.

The following priorities were identified by participants as non-negotiable enablers for meaningful truth-telling across education settings:

- Truth-telling must be driven by First Nations voices and knowledge and embedded across all curriculum frameworks, stages and learning areas.
- Education systems must lead by acknowledging their colonising role and build frameworks that empower and support educators to pursue truth-telling.
- Initial teacher education (ITE) needs to better equip graduates with skills to safely and confidently educate students about truths, connect with Elders and engage community to learn about local histories.
- Curriculum frameworks must allow space and flexibility for schools and early learning services to integrate local truth-telling and build relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- School leaders should prioritise and embed truth-telling processes in their settings and model truly transformative practice by owning and telling the truths from the top.
- Schools and early learning services must embed truth-telling into the fabric of their culture, importantly within policies and processes that withstand staff turnover.
- Schools and services should prioritise ongoing, contextual truth-telling in professional learning for educators.
- Non-Indigenous educators need to be willing to step up, sit with discomfort, and push through uncertainty and the fear of making mistakes to meaningfully engage in truth-telling.

Primary dimensions: Historical Acceptance; Unity

National Reconciliation in Education Forum: *Bridging Now to Next*

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We want our CHILDREN to EXCEL & EXCEED - to SEE THEMSELVES in their EDUCATION

TRUTH-TELLING
OPPORTUNITIES for JUSTICE

WILLINGNESS to CONFRONT the PAST!

Attain a QUALITY EDUCATION...

RECKONING WITH THE TRUTHS OF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

TRUTH-LISTENING
SUPPRESSION, PREVENTION & ABSENCE of TRUTH...

Yoorrook... WHAT DID YOU HEAR?
WELLBEING... EXCLUSION... RACISM...

the TRUTH from CHILDREN IMPACTS HEAVILY

STARTED by YARNING!

THE SYSTEM INJUSTICES TRANSFORM THIS!

DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES

UNDERSTAND PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE...

ACTION

ACCOUNTABILITY TRANSPARENCY

MARELLA MISSION

KELLYVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOL
ITS TIME TO TRAVEL the JOURNEY of TRUTH

CHALLENGES are an OPPORTUNITY to LEARN!

WALK BESIDE US - HOLD OURSELVES ACCOUNTABLE!

OUR CHILDREN deserve to feel PRIDE in THEMSELVES

BUILD on the NUCLEUS!

BUILD DEEP RELATIONSHIPS

GET IT RIGHT for ABORIGINAL KIDS - GET IT RIGHT for EVERYONE!

BE SILENT & ALLOW the TRUTH to FILL the ROOM!

ALLIES & this WORK - HOW IMPORTANT are THEY

Prof. Melitta Hogarth
Cmm. Sue-Anne Hunter
Luke Allan
Jenny Walker

BHP Foundation
NARRAGUNNA WALI
RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA

Illustration of key points and ideas shared by Professor Melitta Hogarth, Cmm Sue-Anne Hunter, Luke Allan and Jenny Walker during the 'Reckoning with the Truths of our Education System' panel session. Illustration: Glenn Stephenson/CaptureThis

Building a Culturally Responsive Education Sector

This panel examined how cultural responsiveness is shaping expectations and practice across education, and what it takes to embed it as a foundation for inclusive, quality learning.

Moderated by Dr Justine Grogan (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership) with Rachel Elphick (Australian Education Research Organisation), Amy Shine (Forbes Community Preschool, NSW) and Keely Wrathall (Winterfold Primary School, WA).

The panel explored:

- Cultural responsiveness as a foundation for reconciliation practice.
- AITSL's *Building a Culturally Responsive Australian Teaching Workforce* project.
- Forbes Preschool's approach to building educator understanding of reconciliation and culturally responsive practice.
- Winterfold Primary School's commitment to anti-racism and culturally responsiveness practice.

'It makes a world of difference when you have leadership that is driving the change.'

– Keely Wrathall, Teacher, Winterfold Primary School

Table discussions emphasised the need for a sector wide approach of intentional, localised culturally responsive practice with an anti-racist lens.

The following priorities and enablers were identified by participants as critical to advancing culturally responsive, anti-racist practice across all settings:

- Cultural responsiveness must be explicitly embedded in institutional values, leadership expectations, workforce strategies and professional learning, with clear and culturally safe accountability at all levels.
- Schools and services must adopt a place based approach to cultural responsiveness, informed by local communities, responsive institutional policies and resources, and meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional learning providers, consultants and businesses.
- The sector must reject racism that is systemic, linguistic, and also pedagogical – where cultural and familial learning has been devalued in Western education.
- Aversion within the education sector to hard, open discussions about racism and substantive action must be addressed through safe spaces for educator learning, explicit naming of interpersonal and systemic racism, targeted anti-racism strategies and clear, accountable reporting and consequences.

Primary dimensions: Race Relations; Equality and Equity

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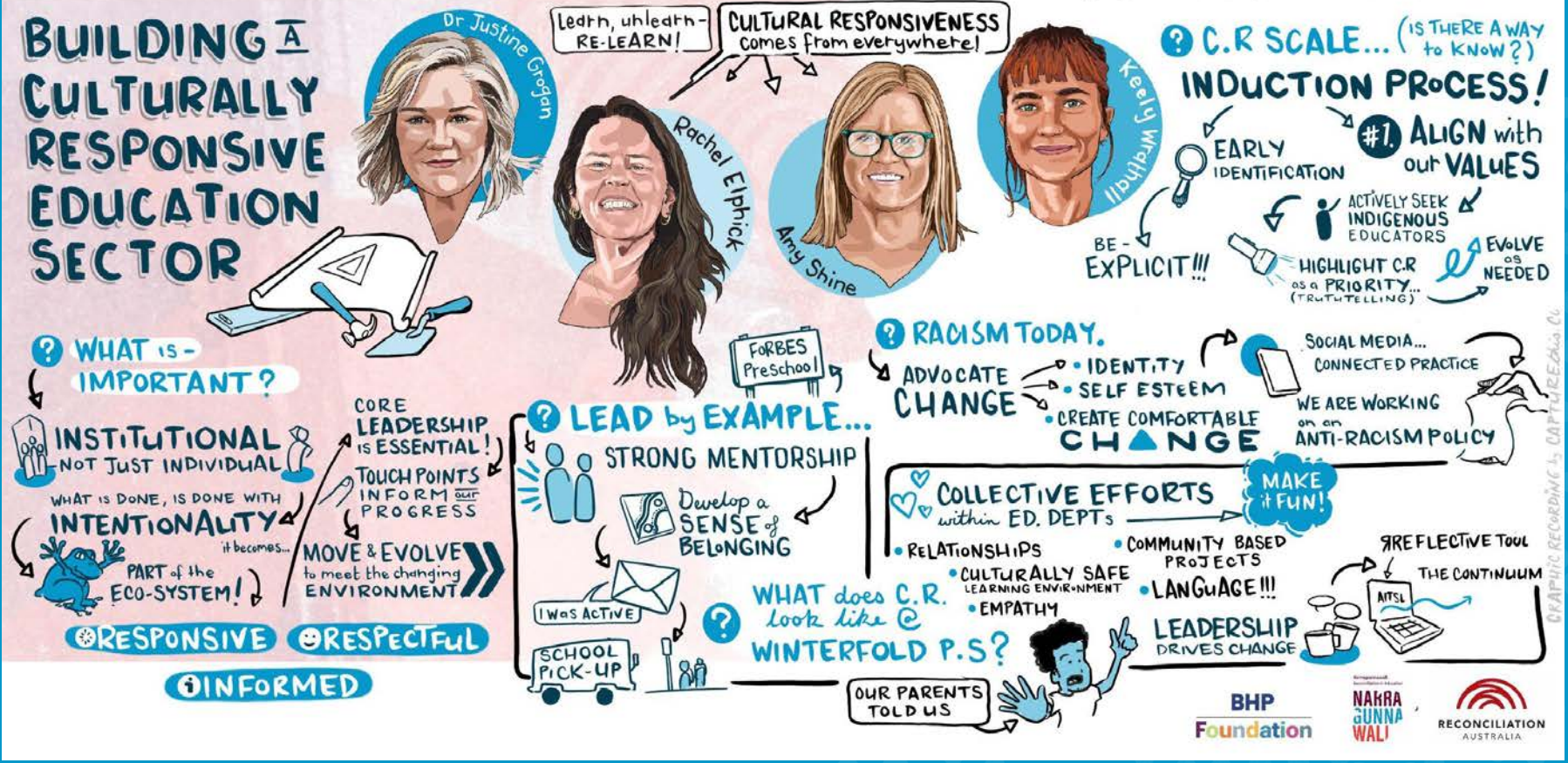


Illustration of key points and ideas shared by Dr Justine Grogan, Rachel Elphick, Amy Shine and Keely Wrathall during the 'Building a Culturally Responsive Education Sector' panel session. Illustration: Glenn Stephenson/CaptureThis

Guiding and Driving Reconciliation Practice

This panel unpacked the shared responsibilities of reconciliation in education and explored when non-Indigenous educators must step up to lead change and when they must step aside to centre First Nations voices and self-determination.

Moderated by Tessa Keenan (Reconciliation Australia) with Dr Jenny Donovan (Australian Education Research Organisation), Sam Page (Early Childhood Australia), Angela Falkenberg (Australian Primary Principals Association), Dyonne Anderson (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association) and Sharon Davis (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation).

The panel explored:

- The work of First Nations Elders in supporting both First Nations education and reconciliation in education.
- The unique role school and service leaders have when driving reconciliation and harnessing their spheres of influence to progress reconciliation in their communities.
- Upholding self-determination, enabling First Nations led research, and balancing reconciliation responsibilities across all staff.
- The balancing of the responsibilities for First Nations principals and leaders when driving and engaging with reconciliation and navigating colonial load.
- Key challenges and learnings for non-Indigenous leaders.
- Future shifts in how the sector engages in reconciliation practice.

Table discussions connected misaligned roles and responsibilities in reconciliation practice to the devaluing of the cultural knowledge, skills, workloads and lived experiences of First Nations peoples.

Remuneration and recognition of colonial load placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching and non-teaching staff was considered as well as the need for more non-Indigenous education leaders, teachers and professionals to

start 'driving the bus' to assume more of the workload and responsibility for the practical work of reconciliation – with guidance from First Nations peoples.

The following priorities and enablers were identified by participants as critical to ensuring non-Indigenous leaders and professionals take responsibility for reconciliation while guided by First Nations voices and knowledge to reduce colonial load:

- Non-Indigenous education leaders, teachers and professionals must be responsible for reconciliation work, adopting constructive, responsive approaches that shift the load from First Nations staff and communities.
- Non-Indigenous leaders must prioritise First Nations agency and self-determination by building high expectation, strengths based relationships modelling anti-racism and respectful practice with structures embedded that ensure continuity despite staff turnover to reduce repeated colonial load on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Reconciliation needs to be embedded in education through success stories, a strong evidence base, shared best-practice networks, and the support and amplification of young reconciliation leaders and their innovations.

Primary dimension: Institutional Integrity

'To non-Indigenous people, you've got to drive it [reconciliation]. Don't be scared, you're going to muck it up but you'll survive, I promise. And for mob; just let them have a go.'

– Sharon Davis, CEO, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation

National Reconciliation in Education Forum: Bridging Now to Next

12/05/2025

**...Let's look to the FUTURE...
...what is YOUR ROLE?**

GARMA REFLECTIONS

- RELATIONAL TRUST: KEEP the FIRE GOING... APPRECIATE the WORK of RECONCILIATION AUS.
- GENEROSITY- I HAD to LISTEN... what drives the will to tell the truth?
- YOLNGU CULTURE exposure

SHIFTS in SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

NO EXCUSE for NOT KNOWING!

NON FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE to DO the WORK ALONGSIDE US

INITIATIVES ENACTED in PRACTICE (AERO)

CHALLENGES driving to RECONCILIATION

- I HAD to be SCHOOLED INITIALLY -
- I HAD to ADDRESS this... PRE-CONCEIVED IDEAS
- ...be PART of the LEGACY
- RISK** TAKING is NECESSARY
- YOUNG STRONG LEADERS
- BALANCE

SCHOOL LEADERS UNIQUE ROLE?

- TOP DOWN - BOTTOM UP!
- PREPARE OUR LEADERS!
- Where are the POINTS of INFLUENCE?
- How to CORRECTLY REPORT RACISM?
- encourage & PROVOCATIONS
- Nesting

WE NEED TO DEVELOP:

- Deep Understandings
- Connections
- Supports
- Allyship
- How do we AMPLIFY INDIGENOUS VOICES...
- FIRST NATIONS PRINCIPALS...** (BALANCING RESPONSIBILITIES & NAVIGATING COLONIAL LOAD)
- DRIVE the BUS
- UNDERSTAND the ENVIRONMENT from WITHIN
- Do it SLOW, do it RIGHT WAY!

Logos: BHP Foundation, NARRAGUNNAWALI, RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA

Illustration of key points and ideas shared by Tessa Keenan, Dr Jenny Donovan, Sam Page, Angela Falkenberg, Dyonne Anderson and Sharon Davis during the 'Guiding and Driving Reconciliation Practice' panel session. Illustration: Glenn Stephenson/CaptureThis

Key recommendations for advancing reconciliation in education

Across the forum, a consistent message emerged: reconciliation in education cannot rely on individual goodwill alone. Transforming education systems in ways that genuinely support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination requires strong leadership, equitable resourcing and clear systems-level accountability.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) was viewed as the critical building block for systems-level change. ITE programs need to consistently and cohesively embed truth-telling, cultural responsiveness and reconciliation in education practice across all pedagogical phases.

Reckoning with the Truths of our Education System

RECOMMENDATION: Support place based, First Nations community led truth-telling to deepen understanding of Australia's education system and its impacts.

Sector: Provide both financial and non-financial support to endorse and resource opportunities that build and deepen the sector's understanding of the histories and ongoing impacts of Australia's education system in support of collective reckoning and systems change.

School and Service: Leaders prioritise place based, First Nations community led truth-telling in professional learning and support opportunities for whole scale relationship building with local First Nations community members.

Individual: Teachers and educators undertake their own learning, unlearning and relearning journeys around the true histories of Australia and the Country they work on.

Building a Culturally Responsive Education Sector

RECOMMENDATION: Embed cultural responsiveness through systems-wide expectations, time allocation and resourcing.

Sector: Explicitly embed cultural responsiveness as a systems wide professional expectation with considered accountability measures.

School and Service: Leaders implement a whole scale approach to support staff with regular and progressive professional learning around cultural responsiveness.

Individual: Teachers and educators build capacity in authentic self-reflection and understanding of conscious and unconscious bias.

Guiding and Driving Reconciliation Practice

RECOMMENDATION: Clarify, resource and administer shared responsibility for reconciliation.

Sector: Clearly define and build a systems wide understanding of the shared responsibility for reconciliation and resource First Nations peoples' expertise, time and cultural knowledge.

School and Service: Leaders should model shared reconciliation responsibility in actions and policies as well as support appropriate capacity building for non-Indigenous educators to remove colonial load from First Nations staff and community members.

Individual: Non-Indigenous educators need to assume more substantive responsibility in reconciliation practice, with clear understanding of when to step aside to centre First Nations leadership and self-determination.



Final notes

The key challenges identified across all three panel sessions around truth-telling, cultural responsiveness and reconciliation practice within education systems and across the sector are the time, capacity and resources required.

Individual and whole scale reconciliation commitments can be stifled by institutions unable, or unwilling, to give the time and support required.

Allocation of resources, time and people to reconciliation activities as core business is needed. Adequate budgeting demonstrates the importance and value of reconciliation work to the whole organisation, school or service and to broader community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

Reconciliation is everybody's business for everybody's benefit, and whole scale change will ensure reconciled education systems where the five dimensions of reconciliation are enacted.





Narragunnawali
Reconciliation in Education



NAKRA
GUNNA
WALI