



DIALOGUES @ SCHOOL GUIDE FOR MODERATORS

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Introduction

Thank you for generously volunteering your time to participate in the Dialogues @ School (D@S) program. We are excited to hear what comes out in the discussions and see the impact they will have amongst students and school communities, but none of this would be happening if it weren't for moderators giving their time and skills.

Moderators are the single most important ingredient in what The Brisbane Dialogues does generally and this is no less true for D@S. A good moderator can get the best out of a mediocre panel and make a good panel even better. However, we can all only do our best and your best will be good enough, or better. The main thing is to enjoy the experience - most moderators get a real buzz from engaging with the bright, articulate students who typically take part in these events.

We hope that you find the following document useful. It is only five pages (plus appendices)! If you have any questions or would like more information, reach out to us any time on the contacts below.

“The aim of argument, or of discussion, should not be victory, but progress.”
Joseph Joubert, French Enlightenment/Romantic writer



Dialogues @ School program

The following is a brief summary of the D@S program for your own background and to use as appropriate when talking to others about it, including during the event itself, as appropriate:

- Dialogues @ School is a significant civic and pedagogic initiative of The Brisbane Dialogues, a leading independent forum and Australia's first and only dedicated "civil discourse organisation"
- Multiple secondary schools across the country that will conduct moderated discussion events on a single youth-oriented topic
- The topic is: **COULD AI IMPROVE EDUCATION FOR ALL?**, which is designed to engage students, has several interesting dimensions, is something many will have views on and something teachers and parents want to understand better.
- The Brisbane Dialogues will provide detailed curatorial and logistical guidance and support to each school, including suitable external moderators in some cases.
- Each school will organise 4-6 student speakers, a venue, the audience and an AV recording of the dialogue.
- These will be collaborative dialogues, not adversarial debates! Different views need to be aired, but the objective is to find areas of common ground on a topic, searching together for truths and solutions, not to win an argument.
- The Brisbane Dialogues will produce a showreel and paper on the "voice of youth" on the topic, which will be publicised and presented to parliaments.

Before the day

- **Get in touch with schools** when assigned (the sooner the better) to confirm logistical details and discuss how the school would like the dialogue to run
- **Do your own preparation**, including research into AI and its impact on education (including some firsthand experience with the tools!), a prepared set of opening remarks, a list of potential topics and questions to ask speakers.

Checklist to clarify with the organising teacher ahead of time:

- time and meeting point before the event
- transport or parking
- mobile phone numbers for backup contact if needed
- is there a separate MC? or does the school want you to do:
 - welcomes and thank-you's
 - acknowledgment of traditional owners
 - introductory and background comments about the program, and
 - introductions of panellists at the beginning, plus
 - concluding comments and thank-you's at the end?
- is there a run sheet? Schools have been provided with sample runsheets and ideally will have done one, but if not, just agree when you will take charge of the discussion and when you will hand it back to the MC or conclude proceedings.



On the day

On the day, the moderator's job is to:

- Deliver a **brief opening statement** to provide context to the audience about the topic (about why we are here at all and discussing this topic).
- Generally promote the mission of The Brisbane Dialogues to stimulate better discussions ("Beyond Debate") on big ideas and issues.
- Deliver an acknowledgement of the traditional custodians (if requested).
- **Moderate the discussion** so that:
 - conversation flows smoothly and that all speakers have adequate opportunity to be heard;
 - dialogue does not breakdown or become too adversarial; and
 - conversation moves smoothly from one point to another so that the dialogue covers various components of the topic
- At the end, do a **short recap** of the discussion (preferably) and thank participants

The topic

The topic for all dialogues in this second series is the open-ended: **COULD AI IMPROVE EDUCATION FOR ALL?**

Dialogues on this topic will allow for broad discussions on a variety of social and political issues whilst remaining youth-focused. The aim of these dialogues will be to help students find points of agreement on, for example:

1. What is useful about AI? What are its applications in educational settings?
2. What are some of the positive effects of this? What about negative effects?
3. Should something be done to manage the not-so-good aspects of these tools?
4. If so, what should be done and who should do it?

The topic has many interesting aspects, which will result in plenty of material for discussion and allow for a variety of opinions and perspectives to be aired. These include but are not limited to:

- Fake content
- Plagiarism
- Data privacy and copyright
- Increased access to resources
- Personalised learning
- Increased teacher productivity
- Bias in responses
- Lack of ethical framework
- Technological optimism vs. Luddism
- Impact on educational/individual development

Opening statement

Moderators should prepare a brief opening statement. The opening statement can take any form, from a personal reflection to a strictly informative piece. In your opening statement you may wish to provide:

- An introduction to the aim of the discussion, that is, to have a collaborative dialogue rather than an adversarial debate, and explore a variety of complex issues around the topic and clarify points of agreement and disagreement between the speakers.



- Any personal reflections on civil discourse and dialogue
- An overview of the differences between a dialogue and a debate (see table below).
- An overview of the topic including key pieces of context and a personal reflection on why discussing the topic is important
- The statements should only be a few minutes long - the shorter and snappier the better.

While not mandatory, this is a good opportunity to spell out the “Brisbane Rule”, set out at the establishment of The Brisbane Dialogues:

All participants agree to listen carefully, speak respectfully and concentrate on the content of discussions, not on characters - before, during and afterwards, online as well as offline.

Moderating the discussion

Even when hosted on the same topic, no two discussions are ever the same. Moderation is more an art than it is a science, yet there are still broad principles which tend to hold true across all good discussions. The following is an edited list of principles sourced by highly experienced moderators on what they believe is most important when moderating a discussion. A more detailed list can also be found in the appendix.

1. Keep the Conversation Moving

“If you have prepared the panellists appropriately, and you kick off the discussion with a few good questions, the conversation will start to flow on its own. Encourage each panellist to comment on particular parts of other panellists’ statements. Be flexible about following the natural conversation path, as long as it is interesting and the audience is engaged.

You may, however, need to interject a follow-up question here and there to keep the conversation moving at a brisk pace. **Probe deeper, make bridges between ideas, present opposing views, catch contradictions, test the unsaid, shift gears, create transitions and intervene firmly and respectfully to keep everyone on track.”** [Kristin Arnold](#).

2. Do your own research and ask questions

“Moderators can push envelopes with ‘what if’ questions, taking panellists beyond their prepared remarks. ‘What if you had....started sooner or later? Not doubted yourself? Won the lottery? Had no customers? Kept your job? Could only use one hand? Were trying to do this in 1985? Heard about a better option?’ Plenty of room here to get creative.” *To ask insightful questions and guide conversation towards the most interesting parts of the topic, being familiar with the topic is essential. Being knowledgeable about the latest news, expert opinions and the history of the topic is essential to asking high quality questions* [Denise Graveline](#).

3. It’s All About the Audience.

“Never be afraid to [cut off windbags](#) and quickly ask another panellist to take a different tack. Your [audience](#) will love you for it, and it is the single biggest source of positive reviews/comments I get on panels I moderate.

“You are not there to make friends with the panel. You may already be friends with the panel. I am not antagonistic, but I make it very clear to conversation dominators that



off-topic excursions will be halted pretty quickly. Generally, the folks who are likely to do this are pretty self-aware and will quickly recognize that they are dominating and will back off, and the other panellists will also appreciate the gesture and do a better job of “moderating” themselves. Early in my career I would just let these people finish, until I realized that many of them had enormous breath control :). A firm, but polite interruption is just the ticket.” [Tom Webster](#).

The difference between dialogue and debate

As a moderator you will be promoting the aim of the Brisbane Dialogues by doing your best to keep the discussion in a dialogue as opposed to a debate format. The key differences between dialogue and a debate are summarised below:

Dialogue	Debate
Speakers aim to explore complex issues to find points of agreement and acknowledge points of disagreement	Speakers aim to defeat the arguments of their opposition
Speakers talk about their own opinion on the matter	Speakers argue for or against a position based on what they are assigned by a moderator
Speakers talk to each other in a conversational format	Speakers speak in a rigid, one-way format which focuses on argumentation over discussion
Speakers can occupy “grey areas” where it isn’t clear if they are in favour of something or against it	Speakers are divided into two teams and must clearly be for or against something
Speakers are allowed to acknowledge things they like about the positions of other speakers and seek to incorporate their ideas into their own perspective	Speakers cannot change their mind and must attack the arguments of others to “win”.

Conclusion

Once again, thank you so much for your participation in this program which depends critically on volunteers, especially moderators. We hope you enjoy and gain something from the experience and would greatly appreciate any feedback after the event so we can improve the program for future participants.

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Appendix A - Sample Run Sheet

DIALOGUE @ SCHOOL [school name and logo]

Sample Run Sheet - Version 1.0

Date & Times: Thurs, 28 Apr 2022
Doors open 3.30pm
Stage discussion 4-5.30pm
Social discussion 5.30 onwards
Doors close 6pm
Location: The School Auditorium [Address]

Earlier Setting up

Chairs, lectern, microphones, lighting, water, any stage dressing etc.
Audio and video recording equipment

3-3.30pm Event Manager tasks

Any tasks that need to happen before the event (i.e. confirming stage layout, sourcing water for speakers, testing AV)

3.30pm Doors open

Any ushering/ticketing arrangements

3.45pm Pre-event run through with speakers

MC/Moderator go through the runsheet to make sure everyone is on the same page

4.00pm MC Opening Comments

MC gives general welcome, explains the event context, acknowledges traditional custodians and introduces speakers

4.07pm Moderator opening comments

..... Dialogue

5.00pm Moderator calls for questions from audience

5.20pm Wrap up by Moderator

5.25pm Closing remarks: MC comes on stage

Thanks to moderator, speakers and audience
Brief personal reflections and event signoff
Repeat plug for the Dialogues @ School program and The Brisbane Dialogues

5.30pm Stage proceedings conclude



Appendix B - Sample MC Speaking Notes

NB You will probably not need these, which are part of the brief for schools - included here just in case you are asked to MC or if you notice that the MC does not explain The Brisbane Dialogues or Dialogues @ School program.

[Brisbane Dialogues Context] [c. 1 min]

Mention the broader Dialogues @ School project and the mission of The Brisbane Dialogues, e.g.

“Dialogues @ School is the schools-based program of The Brisbane Dialogues, a leading independent public forum and Australia’s only dedicated civil discourse organisation. In this series, schools from across the country will conduct dialogue events on the same topic, to be distilled into a highlights reel and a report on the voice of youth for presentation to parliaments. The program continues to grow and spread the values of productive civil discourse.”

Tie this back to why the school is involved and how the school’s values or objectives align with civil discourse [or, if moderator is speaking, personal view of relevance of civil discourse and dialogue].

[Acknowledgment of traditional custodians] [c. 1.5-2 mins - long but important!]

See Appendix E below.

[The Brisbane Rule] [c. 30 secs]

And so to today’s discussion, to be conducted under “ The Brisbane Rule”. This was created at the launch of The Brisbane Dialogues as a starting point for not just civil, but enjoyable and enlightening discussions:

All participants agree to listen carefully, speak respectfully and concentrate on the content of discussions, not on characters - before, during and afterwards, online as well as offline.

[Introduction of Speakers to the stage] [c. 1 min]

Give a one-sentence introduction of each of the speakers and the moderator.

-----Dialogue-----

[Vote of thanks to speakers][c. 1:00]

Thank the panellists for their participation,[the moderator for volunteering time and effort] and ask for audience applause

[Event wrap-up] [c. 2:00]

Thank the audience

Any brief personal reflections, key points or takeaways from the discussion

Plug for The Brisbane Dialogues other main activities:



- Big Dialogues series - major public discussion events in Brisbane. See brisbanedialogues.org
- Australian Dialogues network - building a coalition of other organisations which support the principle and practice of dialogue between people who disagree (australiandialogues.org)

Stay, enjoy and carry on the discussion (if appropriate)



Appendix C - Actual Example Moderator Prep/Speaking Notes

Note that these are more detailed than you will need, something of a laundry list you can pick items off according to yours, panellists' and audience interests. Ideally the dialogue will drill down into a handful of issues rather than skate over too many, but this is not always possible.

[After formalities and introductory personal comments including why you are doing this, about Brisbane Dialogues, Dialogues @ School and dialogue/civil discourse in general]

So I am looking forward to hearing the panel's views on today's topic: *Could AI improve education for all?*

Audience, you are welcome to get involved in this conversation as well, so have your questions and comments ready as I plan to come to you in due course.

Just a reminder, this is not a debate. It is a conversation and all views are valued and welcomed. We are trying to find points of agreement between people who might have very different and sometimes strongly-held views.

So let's begin.

Ice Breaker

Could I have a show of hands in the room, both on the panel and in the audience?

- Who has used AI?
- Who has actually made something for a project or school?

Topics/Questions

Conversation starter

1. So, panel, tell me... What is exciting about how AI could help us in schools? What is concerning about its abilities? Could I throw to you, [name], as first cab off the rank?

Topic: using of AI for schoolwork

2. What about AI and schoolwork and study? How do you decide when it's helpful and when you're taking away your opportunity to learn?
3. Do you find AI to be a shortcut that you rely on sometimes when you shouldn't? Has it made it harder to do some things yourself? Could it be in the future?

Topic: Equality of Opportunity

4. Much of a person's life outcomes are determined by their opportunities during school. How might AI reduce this gap? In what ways could it exacerbate it?
5. How could AI make it easier for teachers to tailor content for different students?



Topic: Preparing students for the future

6. How do you think AI might change the work of the future? What kinds of jobs might cease to exist, and what might replace them?
7. What skills will be required for these jobs? How can schools prepare students for them, and what skills will cease to be useful?

Topic: Personal Development

8. How does the process of learning help us grow? Does using AI impede this, or help us become more in some ways?
9. What educational opportunities does AI give students that they wouldn't have otherwise had? What might it take away?
10. How can users of this technology decide when it helps them grow, versus when it might reduce their capability?



Appendix D - 20 tips from 20 professional panel moderators

Below is a summary of a web document by Kristin Arnold entitled **“20 tips from 20 professional panel moderators”** The link is [here](#). There are links to the individual authors / advice in and after each tip. We have taken the liberty of tweaking them very slightly to suit the D@S context and *adding comments in italics*.

1. **Frame the Panel as a Discussion with a Clear Question.**

Of course, we are conducting dialogues not debates and the topic has already been framed.

“Avoid panels with the title, ‘What is the future of blah blah blah?’ This rarely works. It’s too vague. Instead, the moderator should work with the panellists to frame a more definitive, and polarizing structure. ‘Will blogging still be here in the year 2012?’ Assign each panelist a yes or no end of that question. If they balk at this being artificial, ask them to propose a better question, or series of questions to frame the debate. Pick the right spine and many problems will take care of themselves.” [Scott Burkun](#).

2. **Command the Space.**

The space will be set up by the schools before your arrival. Our events usually seat moderators on stage and to the left of the panellists to encourage conversation as opposed to debate, but you will need to work with whatever is provided.

The [setup](#) of the room is important. Do you want to be in the middle of the panel looking to either side like Tony Jones on *Q and A*? Do you want to be seated centrally in the middle of the audience, like Drew Carey on *Whose Line is it Anyway* or the moderators of the [US Presidential debates](#)? Or do you want to stand at a podium next to the panel? All of these will shape the way you can command the attention of panelists and audience.

The setup gives you another secret weapon. It is hard to confront somebody who is beside you. Compare sitting at a dinner table to standing at the front of a classroom. You can engineer this so that the most combative panelists are defused by sitting next to each other, or – if you want fireworks, sit them opposite each other and they’ll easily get into battle. [Claire Duffy](#).

3. **Choose Panel Members Carefully.**

This will have been done by the schools, so is just of background interest here.

“[Research the panelists](#) and know their points of view on the topic, as well as as much as you can about their interests and background. Look for diversity in backgrounds, opinions and vested interests. Be cognizant of the hidden agenda they’ll each have for agreeing to be on the panel.” [Ian Griffin](#).



4. **Don't Over-Prepare The Panellists.**

Student panellist preparation is being done by the schools, but if you have an opportunity to talk even briefly to the students before the dialogue, the following might be helpful.

“Talk to the panellists. I outline what I want to see happen on that stage and share my thoughts with the panellists, ideally in a **conference call** versus individual calls.. This is about working together on stage, and a conference call starts it off as a team versus ‘me.’ On the call, we discuss the individual goals of panel members and how they all fit together to achieve the overall goal of the panel. I discuss their thoughts and concerns, emphasizing that the discussion will be about successes, challenges and the future. Then we go through the no-no’s:

- No use of slides (with rare exceptions).
- No sales pitches – including selling yourself.
- No questions given to panellists in advance, except for the lead question. Overview category questions are OK to share. This keeps the panel from over-preparing.” Denise Restauri.

5. **Open Smartly.**

This needs to be brief.

“Grab the attention of the audience with a relevant fact, statistic, quotation, anecdote or joke. Then welcome the audience, thank panellists, link the opening line to the purpose of the panel, and preview how the panel will unfold. Be explicit about when and how audience members can ask questions. The opening sets the tone for the entire panel; carefully craft and rehearse it until your delivery is smooth and enthusiastic.” Christine Clapp.

6. **Moderator Intros Each Person.**

This will generally be done by the MC.

“This is one of my personal pet peeves. Either each panelist is allowed to tell the room about themselves or the moderator reads out the pre-written bio. The issue is, given an open window, panelists can talk about themselves for 3-5 minutes each. Doesn't seem like much, except with 4 panelists and a moderator that can last anywhere from 15-25 minutes! Most panels last for an hour.

I'd prefer the moderator, who sometimes picks who goes on the panel, to introduce each person with the reason they picked the person, one minute each, tops. I realize a lot of people speak on panels to get exposure for their company, but the best way to do this is to get into the meat of the panel topic and share great info.” Scott Stratten.

7. **Keep the Conversation Moving.**

“If you have prepared the panelists appropriately, and you kick off the discussion with a few good questions, the conversation will start to flow on its own. Encourage each



panelist to comment on particular parts of other panelists' statements. Be flexible about following the natural conversation path, as long as it is interesting and the audience is engaged. You may, however, need to interject a follow-up question here and there to keep the conversation moving at a brisk pace. **Probe deeper, make bridges between ideas, present opposing views, catch contradictions, test the unsaid, shift gears, create transitions and intervene firmly and respectfully to keep everyone on track.**" [Kristin Arnold](#).

8. **Microphones.**

Microphones can be a real pitfall for a panel. Panel members are most often not professional speakers, and usually a microphone intimidates them. If panelists don't use the mic, they won't be heard—which means the audience will become bored... Make sure you have at least one [microphone](#) per two panel members. Show panelists how to use it in advance. Encourage them to move it closer or take it in hand each time they speak. If they forget, *stop them in their presentation to remind them.* (Do not be afraid to interrupt panel speakers to correct logistical problems.) The audience will thank you for it. [Mary McGlynn](#).

9. **Periodically [Poll](#) the Audience.**

"One fun improvisational tip is to leverage a yes or no topic. Ask the audience: 'Let's pause and see what our audience thinks of that. Raise your hand if you would have taken action. Great. Now raise your hand if you would have waited without taking action.' That involves the audience, and gives you fodder to comment on the panelist's story. 'Wow, John, less than half of our audience would have taken action as you did. Tell us how you summoned the courage to do so.'" [Karen Hough](#).

10. **Don't Forget Audience Q&A.**

This will depend on whether the school has allowed time for questions from the audience.

"My belief about panels is that the moderator can easily spend the entire time asking questions that she believes the audience cares about... or she can actually let the audience ask questions that it cares about. I can't emphasize enough how important a [Q&A](#) period is; without one (or with an abbreviated one), it sends the message that the audience is there to be passive listeners, rather than active participants." [Scott Kirsner](#).

11. **Know the Impact of Body Language.**

"I've studied this a few times, when I moderate, the body language I give off will be echoed by the panelists. If I sit up straight, or if you fidget, they will follow, the same happens when you speak. Look at the panelist when you ask a question, then look at the audience (they will follow suit). If you look at the panelists after you've asked a question, they will instinctively look back at you, an odd site to the audience. Unless responding to another panelists, the panelist should be addressing the audience so keep your attention on the customer." [Jeremiah Owyang](#)



12. **Stand Up for the Audience.**

Hopefully there won't be much need for this!

"Making panelists look smart does not mean letting them bull shitake the audience. My theory is that the moderator is called the moderator is because her role is to ensure that there is only a moderate level of bull shitake and sales pitches. **A good moderator is the audience's advocate for truth, insight, and brevity—any two will do.** When a panelist makes a sales pitch or tells lies, you are morally obligated to smack him around in front of the audience." [Guy Kawasaki](#).

13. **Make Sure Everyone Has a Chance to Talk.**

Pay attention to who is contributing and how long. Take active steps to balance this out. This can mean asking quieter panellists whether they have anything to add before you move on to another question, addressing new questions first to people who have spoken less, figuring out when quieter panellists are trying to interject and facilitating their interruption, specifying that you'd like someone to keep their answer or interjection brief (or to hold it entirely) for the sake of time, or cutting someone off if they're taking over. I know it can feel rude to signal to a speaker that they're [talking too much](#), but it's also rude to your other panellists and to your audience to let one or two people dominate the discussion. People committed their time to your event expecting a panel, not a speech. [Stephanie Zvan](#).

14. **Prepare Your "Cutoff Phrases" Ahead of Time.**

"Be prepared to cut off long-winded panel members or those who ramble off topic. Having some pre-planned cutoff phrases helps. For example, if someone goes off on a tangent that is not useful to the overall topic, you could interrupt and say, 'You have an interesting point there, but we want to know more about _____.' Likewise, if someone is dominating the discussion, watch the person's natural breathing rhythm and then interject between breaths, 'Thank you, Julie. Now let's hear Bob's perspective on this topic.' It's always best to ask the panel members what "cutoff phrases" they respond to. Tell them you will use this tactic for keeping the discussion focused and on time." [Angela DeFinis](#).

15. **Ask What If Questions.**

"Moderators can push envelopes with 'what if' questions, taking panellists beyond their prepared remarks. 'What if you had...started sooner or later? Not doubted yourself? Won the lottery? Had no customers? Kept your job? Could only use one hand? Were trying to do this in 1985? Heard about a better option?' Plenty of room here to get creative." [Denise Graveline](#).



16. **It's All About the Audience.**

"You must never, ever forget that they are the folks who (one way or another) paid to be there. If a panellist veers off-topic, or starts into a sales pitch, I am merciless. Absolutely merciless. Never be afraid to [cut off windbags](#) and quickly ask another panellist to take a different tack. Your [audience](#) will love you for it, and it is the single biggest source of positive reviews/comments I get on panels I moderate.

You are not there to make friends with the panel. You may already be friends with the panel. I am not antagonistic, but I make it very clear to conversation dominators that off-topic excursions will be halted pretty quickly. Generally, the folks who are likely to do this are pretty self-aware and will quickly recognize that they are dominating and will back off, and the other panellists will also appreciate the gesture and do a better job of "moderating" themselves.

Early in my career I would just let these people finish, until I realized that many of them had enormous breath control :). A firm, but polite interruption is just the ticket." [Tom Webster](#).

17. **Don't Offer Your Own Opinions.**

"Sad, but true. The audience is there to see you moderate, not be a panellist. If you offer your own opinions, you look like you're trying to hog time from the panellists. Do this only if your panel consists entirely of unbelievable bores, and you can bring down the house with your impromptu comedy routines. And certainly, never offer your opinion or tell a panelist they're stupid. Let another panellist say it instead." [Steven Robbins](#).

18. **Allow for Final Comments.**

"Allow each panellist a minute or two to respond to a final 'big picture' question. Some options: 'Are you optimistic about the future?' 'Where do you think we will be in five years?' 'What one point or theme should we take from this conference?'" [Steve Abudato](#).

19. **Share a Recap.**

This might be done by the MC.

"After an on stage discussion, it is really important to recap the key messages that were shared during the panel and what the big takeaways should be for audience members. This is ideally done at the end of your panel, but can also be done through some sort of recap [after the event](#) itself (I love to do blog posts as recaps of events)." [Rohit Bhargava](#)

20. **Say Thank You.**

This isn't necessary but you're welcome to do so. If you do receive any informal feedback we'd love to hear it so we can improve the program for next year.



“As soon as possible after the conclusion of the event, send thank you notes to the individual panellists, event coordinator, and others involved in planning. For the speakers, include feedback you received either informally from attendees, or that which is relayed to you by the program chair that has received the evaluation forms.” [Mitchell Friedman](#).



Appendix E - Acknowledgment of traditional custodians

(if asked to do by school)

The Brisbane Dialogues always takes a unique, meaningful approach to the acknowledgment, referring to one or more elements of dialogue in aboriginal culture (see next page) .

Draw links between one or more principles of indigenous dialogue and the nature of the Dialogues @ School program or the school's choice to participate, e.g.

"I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather by reference to one of the elements of dialogue in Australian indigenous culture, according to The Brisbane Dialogues' research. This is:

'Reaching resolution on important subjects takes as long as it takes. The process is more important than the destination, or any particular issue.'

This resonates with what we are doing here today, that is conducting a dialogue rather than a debate, attempting to deepen our understanding of a complex topic and make some progress on how to make things better, rather than notch up a victory and move on.

It is interesting to reflect on how this single intangible element or principle might have contributed to the durability of indigenous culture - and how it yet might contribute to ours.

We might not reach any conclusions today, but hopefully everyone will learn something, everyone will have more understanding and respect for others' views and the world might be a little bit closer to adapting to a recent phenomenon which is undoubtedly affecting modern lives, for better or worse."

You could pick any one or two of the elements listed if they see connections they think would resonate with students.



Elements of Dialogue in Australian Indigenous Culture

1. Sit under a tree, or around the campfire: gather in a congenial place for discussion.
2. Listen carefully. “Deep listening” (“dadirri”) was inculcated in upbringing, presumably reflected in adult councils.
3. “Walk together”, literally: move between physical environments if the discussion becomes heated or difficult - break negative energy, work through stubborn differences and seek common ground to go forward from. More directly: “walk and talk”.
4. Reaching resolution on important subjects takes as long as it takes. The process is more important than the destination, or any particular issue.
5. There is no chief, or ultimate authority; however some have more knowledge and authority and are better at dialogue. Inner councils of elders form organically. These can vary depending on the subject.
6. Agreement is not always possible. Decisions are not necessarily a broad consensus, more like the group of elders making judgments about how to maintain cohesion, or making everybody as happy as possible.
7. Dialogue and resulting decisions reflect the serious obligations of members to the community, together with rights.
8. Decisions are respected and implemented. Matters under discussion and decision were sometimes serious and personal, so the decision process had to be respected if escalation was to be avoided and resolution reached.

It seems a fair assumption that “Women’s business” is fundamentally the same in these respects, which would be interesting to explore.

Sources:

- a) Discussions with Lloyd Hancock and Wesley Aird, Feb-Jul 2020
- b) Chistine Jackman (MC of The Brisbane Dialogues launch event) personal contact with Daly River elder Miriam Rose Ungunmer on dadirri: “We could not live good and useful lives unless we listened. This was the normal way for us to learn - not by asking questions. We learnt by watching and listening, waiting and then acting.”