The challenge before us is to value difference and embrace diversity.

Yalmay Yunupingu, teach our kids in their native language and you’ll see them grow and blossom.

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What I’m asking here is for someone to produce the data that says things are significantly improving for people whom these programs are targeted at. The Forrest Report hailed by some as the “comprehensive” agenda again lends itself to the same kind of farcical outcomes we see today - ones where we are doing things “to” or “for” rather than “with”.

In the matter who wrote it, whether it was the millionaire mining magnate, or Noel Pearson, or Warren Mundine, the starting point is always framed in deficit assumptions and perceptions of Aboriginality, then we get the same as we already got. Aboriginality (seen as deficient again) appears to be the negative for such strong government support of the Forrest Report.

These assumptions and perceptions have been laid down in people’s minds for so long, that it is most often out of their awareness, out of our awareness as well and have never been subjected to a genuine debate.

Some Aboriginal people all over participate in the deficit assumptions and conversations as much as people who are not Aboriginal. This behaviour is still just as disabling and soul destroying, and in fact some believe its worse.

Dr Chris Sarra (Stronger Smarter Institute) talks about Aboriginal agency: self whom the world values. Where the Aboriginality because they start to believe that’s what it means to be an Aboriginal. I wrote on this subject as well to describe the way in which Aboriginal people engage and participate in destructive behaviour and abuse of each other around identity. We seem to be more focused to “who we are” rather then “how we are”.

Some Aboriginal people also assume that by buying into the “white bashing” or “government bashing”, that it somehow unitises us for the cause and sometimes it does. Yet, what I see it as the argument against this self-denying tendency is denying our own power to change what is happening to us. This ‘bashing’ occurs between Aboriginal people as well and prevents any real dialogue because we are always in either attack or defence mode. It becomes more a personal attack than lead change – to lead change of self and to lead change with others.

This “bashing” is within Aboriginal people, but it also prevalent in the broader society. The defict of Aboriginality is not defined by which side of the great divide you sit on, or whether you are Aboriginal or not, either they exist in you, or you exist in them - or not. I’m not saying ideologies (capitalist/ socialist) are wrong, yet when they are overlaid onto a set of thoughts and perceptions of Aboriginal people that add to the deficit and the public discourse excludes, then they lead to debilitating outcomes both socially and economically.

The complexity of the challenges demands a sophisticated and informed public debate. Not a public debate that attacks and discounts individuals as a way to win, yet one of courage that engages people in a dialogue to challenge assumptions within current approaches; and one which can focus the energy of passionate people who want equity and peace with all people.

I call for a “Bringing Together Leadership” that enables change, rather than imposes it. We need a leadership that will develop policy and embrace practices, which recognise and value the strengths within people, creates spaces for dialogue for them to articulate their future and then supports them to create it. The power is within the difference, not the sameness.

This leadership exists, yet currently it’s being suppressed by a dominant discourse of blame and a discourse of deflection that constantly describes the “problem”. What I mean by this, is when people who advocate for the current approach are challenged, they always begin to describe the “problem” as if I need convincing that there is a “problem”.

How can we be courageous enough to have a sophisticated and public discourse? One that is founded on a evidence-based practice that enables difference to be valued and diversity to be embraced so that together we can progress through this complex maze.

There is a challenge for all who read this: how do we as individuals influence this change? How do we embrace our own agency and participate in the leadership of these challenges? How can we initiate and participate in the sophisticated, informed debates that are ready to happen.

We can all do this by challenging our own assumptions of people who are different to us. You can do this at the kitchen table, at the boardroom table and in the clubs and pubs across this great land of ours. Please stay strong, be safe and enable the space for others to be safe as well.