

# ONE MINUTE WITH CHRIS MATTHEWS

## I AM...

Professor Chris Matthews FTSE, CEO of ATSIMA.

## MY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE INFLUENCED ME DEEPLY...

Dealing with racism from teachers and students had a huge impact on my school life. My maths teacher consistently humiliated me about being Aboriginal. I was born and raised away from my Community on Minjerribah in Toowoomba. I was the only Aboriginal student in my cohort. I felt angry, frustrated and a strong sense of not belonging: the system was not there for me. You can easily head down a self-destructive pathway or aim to make a change in the world and prove everyone wrong. My journey moved between these paths. I value all the people who kept me on a positive journey. Not one of them was a teacher.

## MY INTEREST IN MATHEMATICS EDUCATION WAS SPARKED BY...

Science fiction fuelled my interest in the sciences. I was obsessed with the Commodore 64 and taught myself to program in Basic. I learnt about the intersection between mathematics and computing. This focus eventually led to a PhD in applied mathematics. I started my career as a research mathematician at a University in Queensland but again, I was continually pushed outside and found it difficult to deal with the racism I was experiencing from my colleagues. I moved to mathematics education because I wanted to make a change in the teaching and learning of mathematics for all Indigenous learners across Australia that supported and valued their identity and culture. I know our children are smart and the statistics that we continually hear are not a true reflection of their ability. I wanted to take what I had learnt and give back to Indigenous communities across Australia

## INDIGENOUS STUDENTS FACE CHALLENGES IN MATHEMATICS...

The education gap has not moved and in some areas the gap has widened. Indigenous people are simply not valued in the education system. ATSIMA advocates for a culturally responsive teaching practice in mathematics and one that is connected



to Indigenous culture and people. We are still fighting for bilingual education for first language speaking communities across all learning areas as a valid and successful approach. We still measure Indigenous students on standard tests that have very little to do with their language and culture of their people and get judged by their test performance. We still do not have an adequate pre-service teacher training in a cross-cultural context particularly in relation to Indigenous peoples.

## GIVE IT A GO....

Teachers have a lot of fear when it comes to being more culturally responsible in their planning, teaching and learning. I encourage all mathematics educators to have the courage to give it a go. If you are worried about whether you are doing it right, you can practice a simple test. During the planning process simply ask yourself, 'will this activity respect and value Indigenous people and culture?' If you can answer with a yes, chances are that you are on the right track, which will improve as you develop your practice.

Start with areas that are your strength, explore the cross-curriculum priorities elaborations in the mathematics curriculum and explore books like *Dark Emu* that re-tell our history and demonstrate the sophistication of Indigenous culture in Australia.

## I LOVE TO GO....

Camping in the bush on Minjerribah away from tourists, swimming, fishing and sitting around a fire.

## I LISTEN TO....

Aboriginal rock bands like Warumpi Band, Blues, Billie Holiday and Nina Simone. I am a big fan of Archie Roach, Ruby Hunter and Kev Carmody whose lyrics had a profound impact on my life.

ATSIMA and AAMT have partnered to develop national, state and territory action plans to make a difference in mathematics education for Indigenous learners. Visit [www.atsima.com](http://www.atsima.com).