

Aboriginal Knowledge Systems



Aboriginal culture is not the *topic* for learning now –suddenly it’s become part of our *framework* for learning.

We’ve gone deeper, used some higher order thinking, synthesised, and found that Cultural Interface.



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FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

8 Ways of Working with Aboriginal Knowledge

I have a Bachelor of Education, a Master of Social Policy and am a Narrative Therapy Counsellor who specialises in the areas of Aboriginality predominantly and currently working with the Ngroo Education team within the Walking Together Program, in partnership with the NSW Department of Education.



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Ngroo Education focuses on Aboriginal Early Childhood Educational Practices, that benefits children in starting out well in life, within their first mainstream education experience.

Ngroo is fully involved in the Aboriginal Communities they work beside and are advised by Aboriginal Elders, Aunts, Uncles, Parents, Children, Committee Members and Professionals who are part of the Aboriginal Community.

Ngroo listens well and supports Aboriginal teaching and learning processes while walking with Aboriginal knowledge holders, who willingly pave the pathways for their children towards reconciliation.



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Can you imagine what 'Belonging, Being and Becoming' consciously looks like at the Cultural Interface, the synergy of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge systems within the Early Years Learning Framework?



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At this point, if an Aboriginal child is not supported under the Early Years Learning Framework in a way that culturally nurtures their learning, Aboriginal families will not benefit.

Cultural nurturing needs to extend on what the child knows, from their own path created by their previous teachers at home.



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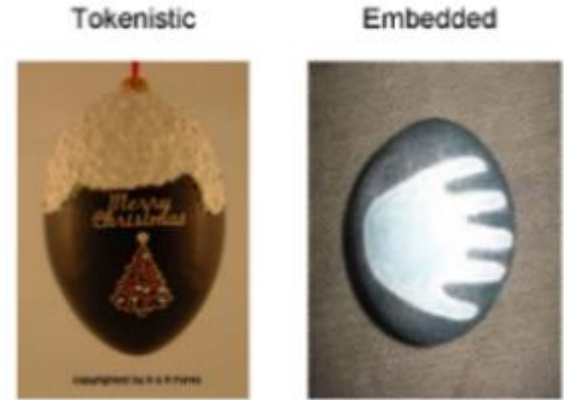
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“Suddenly now, right here, our Aboriginal perspectives and ‘cultural awareness’ are not just coming in at the level of content. Suddenly, we are moving away from tokenistic cultural information and towards embedded knowledge.

Not just looking at what we know, but our best ways of knowing it. Ways of learning. Suddenly we’ve taken Aboriginal perspectives out of that arena of content and cultural items, and we’re exploring those Aboriginal perspectives in pedagogy.”

Dr Tyson Yunkaporta – Professional Doctorate (Research) Thesis 2009
“Aboriginal Pedagogies at Cultural Interface” p.26



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Inclusiveness in Aboriginal Education does not mean '**One Way Fits All Approach**'.

Inclusiveness is not about personal views on '**equality is where every one does the same thing to get to the same place**'.

Equality is about recognising difference and catering for difference to enhance the child's experience, '**not ironing out difference or assimilating it to the same for everyone**'.



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Kevin Rudd, former Prime Minister of Australia acknowledged in his 2008 Apology speech in Parliament that “A business as usual approach towards Aboriginal Australians is not working... We need to allow flexible, tailored local approaches to achieve agreed national objectives.”

Rudd went on to say “Let us resolve today to begin with the little children. Let us resolve to build new educational opportunities for these little ones, year by year, step by step following the completion of their crucial preschool year.”

“None of this will be easy, in fact most of it will be hard, very hard, but none of it is impossible... Let it not become a moment of mere sentimental reflection... or a political football, as it has been so often in the past.”



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Today I am standing here before you to share knowledge about Aboriginal pedagogies.

I use these pedagogies with my children either directly or indirectly as these ways were taught to me by my own mother (Ghunni). I also learnt while on Country growing up as an Aboriginal woman in my community where I belong, while a student in Aboriginal education and as an Aboriginal professional.

I share with you the way I teach my children, a home style that differs on some levels from mainstream practices.

Aboriginal pedagogies have a depth that relates to all teaching and learning styles at the '**Core Root**' within those processes (human nature).

I will share a way forward that is inclusive to all teachers and learners from all backgrounds; that was formed by the '**Oldest Living Culture**' know to mankind - Australian First Nations Peoples.

It is not necessarily the teaching and learning of Aboriginal content, but utilising particular **processes** when sharing or receiving knowledge.



8 Ways of working with Aboriginal Knowledge

Introducing "'**Aboriginal Pedagogies at the Cultural Interface**', is the work of Dr Yunkaporta, Tyson (2009), the Professional Doctorate (Research) thesis, James Cook University.

Dr Yunkaporta's work; '**The 8 ways of Aboriginal Learning Framework**' is about '**Meta Knowledge**' (that is knowledge about knowledge, or awareness of the process of learning and knowing) rather than about the content of what is known. It is the processes within the Aboriginal teaching and learning pedagogies that increases empowerment not only within autonomy but surrounding relatedness around the topic of thought, regarding processes towards all things living.

Lets get out the '**Dhumbaay**' '**Doom bye**'- **Gamilaraay word meaning 'the drawing stick'** to map out plans and processes, understand knowledge more deeply and to increase verbal conversations triggered by Aboriginal symbols.



8 Ways of working with Aboriginal Knowledge

It is time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge to be validated, so that First Nations Peoples can engage more fully in education to have improved outcomes in every area of their life.

It starts in early childhood education **when the child leaves the family home and steps out into the general community for the first time to learn without their parent/s/kin.**

Aboriginal children need to learn through the context of their cultural and family values.



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8 Ways of working with Aboriginal Knowledge

The 8 ways concepts explored here today are related to the

Belonging - 'Knowing where and with whom you Belong, where a child knows their sense of Identity which is important in their development of relationships.'

Being – 'Knowing the here and now and where you fit in the bigger picture, where one stands in the system, children are getting a sense of this'. **and**

Becoming – 'Getting to know the shape of your changing identity according to your participation in society'.

These concepts are within the learning foundations of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) work practices. Lets see how.



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Dr Yunkaporta (2009), pg. 20 says ***“I know that this way of learning gave me a depth and integrity of carving knowledge that I could not have learned through a simple program or class. I also know that when I have applied the same orientation of learning to my western tertiary education, I have enjoyed a level of academic success higher than ever before. More than that – I know my children do well at school because these are the values of learning that they have picked up from me. This makes me question whether my culture really does disadvantage me intellectually and academically, as many people have lead me to believe.”***



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8 Ways of working with Aboriginal Knowledge

Dr Yunkaporta asks 2 questions –

'How can teachers engage with Aboriginal knowledge?

“The processed solution involves applying a reconciling theory of Cultural Interface to Staff Development”.



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The second questions asks

“How can teachers use Aboriginal knowledge productively in schools?”

“The processed solution lies in the application of Aboriginal process rather than content, specifically the application of Aboriginal Pedagogies.”

Dr Yunkaporta (2009), pg. XV Abstract.



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These questions arise out of Dr Yunkaporta's (2009) study that give reasons to explain why Aboriginal pedagogy (**Aboriginal Meta Knowledge or Native Knowledge**) is so important to learning and teaching techniques, “to serve with the main curriculum to increase intellectual rigour for Aboriginal and other learners within mainstream systems.”

To do this one must make sure they do not have a shallow perception of Aboriginal knowledge as being limited to token cultural items; in turn to be mindful not to marginalise Aboriginal thought and processes.



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Finding Common Ground between two different learning systems is the key to this research.

“Aboriginal people focusing on their cultural intelligence rather than just the social disadvantages” is a better approach to Reconciliation. Dr Yunkaporta (2009), pg. 3

Look at the boomerang illustration. The cultural interface is the commonality for teachers and learners. Aboriginal Community knowledge verses non-Aboriginal Academic knowledge *is key to finding the 'common ground'*.



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There are ways Aboriginal people work that create patterns and there are processes that determine the way Aboriginal people do things, the way one thinks, learn, feels and lives. The methods focus on the locality of different clans groups within each land and place – teaching and learning is the winding path and is no straight line.

With teaching and learning Aboriginal way, the Elders talk of the right way in the Dreaming to be on the right path which is the *winding* one.

“Learning is not a straight progression of memorised facts – it is a journey, and these journeys can be planned or recorded as a visual map that makes outcomes explicit for students right from the start... This allows students to navigate visually through the process of becoming self-directed learners.” Dr Yunkaporta (2009).



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Finding a way between tight and loose as in the way you hold a clap stick and clang it to make the right sound, in the same way you'll find the balance within teaching and learning with Aboriginal children.

In Aboriginal society we provide that balance of communal support (circle learning) and independence. Relatedness and autonomy are central to Aboriginal world views.

“Aboriginal people relate everything they learn back to who we are, and its assessed against Community Criteria of local worth and protocol issues” Dr Yunkaporta (2009), pgs. 26-28 & 34



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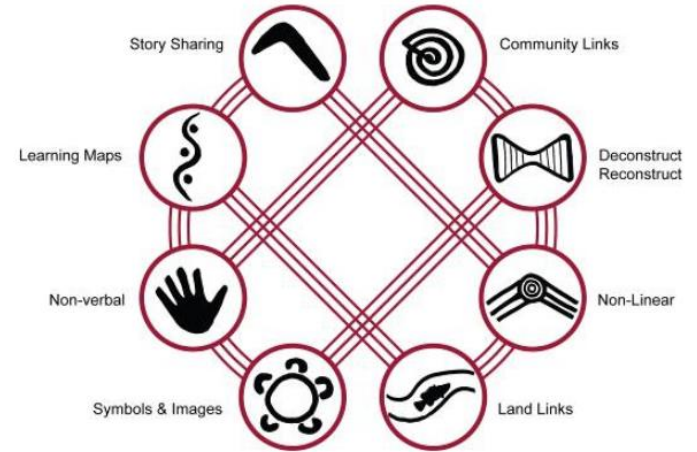
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8 Ways of Working with Aboriginal Knowledge

The 8 Native Knowledge concepts shown here are found to be useful for teachers of any background with children from any Nation. This is an inclusive educational framework.

We connect through the stories we share;
We picture our processes of knowledge;
We see, think, act, make and share without words;
We keep and share knowledge with art and objects;
We work with lessons and metaphors from land and nature;
We put different ideas together and create new knowledge,
We work with wholes to parts, watching and then doing;
We bring new knowledge home to help our mob.

The 8 concepts above actually overlap the two systems of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal pedagogies.



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8 Ways of Working with Aboriginal Knowledge

The First Way is Community Links/Community Way

This is about grounding the learning content and values in *community knowledge*, working on community projects and using or displaying knowledge products publicly for local benefit.

Dr Yunkaporta 2009, pgs. 35-38



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The Second Way is Deconstruct/Reconstruct or Deconstruct/Reconstruct Way

This is about modelling (copying/showing) and scaffolding (creating a platform), balancing teacher instructions with independent learning and working from wholes to parts.



8 Ways of Working with Aboriginal Knowledge

The Third Way is Non-linear Concepts/Non-linear Way

This is about indirect management strategies, lateral thinking (solving problems by means not by conventional logic), comparing and synthesising (combining of elements into a whole) diverse cultural viewpoints, innovating, adapting, working with cycles and working with holistic knowledge.



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The Fourth Way is Land Links/Land Link Way

This is about place-based pedagogy linking content to local land and environment.



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The Fifth Way is Symbols and Images/Symbols Imaginal Way

This is about exploring content through imagery and using visual cues and signals.



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The Sixth Way is Non-Verbal Learning/Non-Verbal Way

This is about hands-on learning, critical reflection and least intrusive management strategies.

Ancestral/spiritual Knowledge also comes through this way of learning.



8 Ways of Working with Aboriginal Knowledge

The Seventh Way is Learning Maps/Learning Map Way

This is about making learning pathways and processes explicit visually.



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The Eighth Way is Story Telling/Story Sharing Way

Teaching and learning through narrative.



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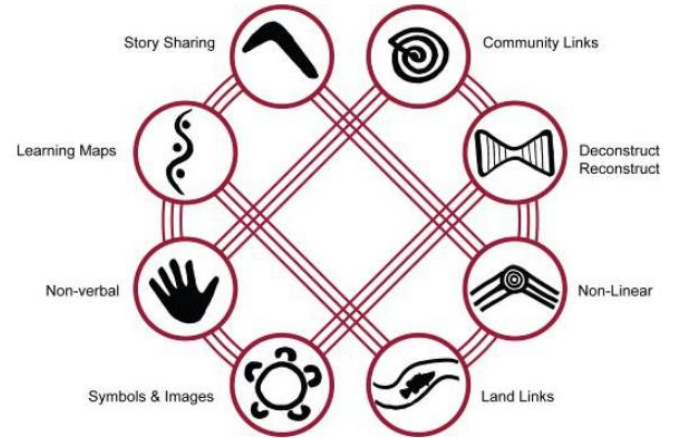
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It needs to be noted that the 8 ways of knowing is interlinked with each other and is not separated from the other, it is based on a **Kinship** system to each other.

8 ways is not a gathering of arbitrary learning styles to be given to students like Astrology signs. Rather the 8 symbols and meanings of them show interrelatedness to the other.

For example – Dr Yunkaporta describes “Story sharing is the husband to Non-Linear, the son of Learning Maps and Land Links, the In-Law of Deconstruct and Reconstruct, and the maternal Grandfather of Community Links.”
Dr Yunkaporta (2009) pgs. 35-38.



8 Ways of Working with Aboriginal Knowledge

Research has shown a strong link between culture and how people think and learn. So under this belief you can see the need to adopt Aboriginal pedagogies in order *to address the Aboriginal disadvantage in education*. Cole and Means, 1981 More 1990.

“It must be noted that to date that most Australian teachers **have been unwilling or unable to use teaching processes which harness the learning strengths of Aboriginal children**” Hugh and More, 1997, Dr Yunkaporta 2009, pgs. 35-38.



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8 Ways of Working with Aboriginal Knowledge

Bridge Building and Connection Building on a **local level geographically**, that explores **Aboriginal 'Proppa Way'** processes within educational practices can be potentially utilised within the mainstream systems to benefit all early childhood learning services.

In doing this, one will discover the synergy of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge systems and balance these to find common ground for best practice strategies.



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