

8 WAYS (/)

[ABOUT \(/ABOUT\)](#)

[OUR PROTOCOL \(/OUR-PROTOCOL\)](#)

[TRAINING \(/TRAINING-3\)](#)

[BEST PRACTICE](#)

[OVERVIEW \(/OVERVIEW\)](#)

[BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES \(/BEST-PRACTICE-EXAMPLES\)](#)

[RESOURCES \(/RESOURCES\)](#)

[PRODUCTS \(/PRODUCTS\)](#)

[FAQ'S \(/FAQS\)](#)

[ARCHIVE \(/ARCHIVE\)](#)

[OUR TEAM \(/OUR-TEAM\)](#)

[CONTACT \(/CONTACT\)](#)

Your identity map

There is a strong link between culture and the way people think and learn, so an understanding of the culture of a learner is essential in maximising learning potential. Understanding the way your own culture influences your ways of learning will help you to understand the importance of this for your Aboriginal students as well. This is what we're exploring in the questionnaire below. But first we need to make it clear that we're talking about culture here, not race.

There is no such thing as race. Charles Darwin wrote that humans are polymorphic (taking many forms individually) and that there is more biological difference within so-called racial groups than there is between them. Numerous studies since then by the United Nations and others have shown biological race to be a myth, but for some reason people still define themselves in this way.

A more accurate way to define human groups is by culture. But this can be a problem when people don't really know what culture means, and when people give general labels to huge populations and ignore the diversity within them. For example, people talk about "Aboriginal culture", ignoring the fact that there are hundreds of very different Aboriginal cultures in Australia. People can also generalise about "white culture" in the same way. How would you feel if somebody told you that everybody with fair skin

belonged to exactly the same cultural group? Reconciliation cannot occur if we're trying to reconcile only two groups without recognising all the group identities that exist within them. The truth is that there are multiple cultures in this country, all competing for space. In order to make better relationships between cultural groups, first we need to be grounded in our own genuine cultural standpoints, not some vague idea of "blackness" or "whiteness".

The questionnaire below will help you clarify your cultural standpoint. (Challenging, resisting and questioning the document is a valid way of doing this too.) But first we need to understand what culture really is. It's not about exotic food, skin tone, dances and clothing. It runs deeper, influencing the way we think, the way we do things, the way we live and relate, and the way we value things. Karen Martin, an Aboriginal academic and Noonuccal woman, defines these as "ways of knowing, ways of doing, ways of being and ways of valuing". Western disciplines refer to these as epistemology, methodology, ontology and axiology. An understanding of the culture of a learner is essential in maximising learning potential. Understanding the way your own culture influences your ways of learning will help you to understand the importance of this for your students as well. This highlights the importance of engaging with Aboriginal perspectives in the classroom, not just through arts and history, but by understanding and using Aboriginal processes of learning and knowledge transmission in all subject areas.

But most importantly, it has been found that teachers cannot effectively engage with Aboriginal perspectives and Aboriginal knowledge unless they are first strongly grounded in a critically self-reflective knowledge of their own cultural standpoint. When a teacher is openly bringing their own culture to the table in this way, students and community members are more likely to share their own worldview and cultural orientation to learning. When this kind of deep cultural exchange occurs, there is a synergy created that promotes innovation and stronger learning. In this situation, people from different cultures can focus on common ground – their similarities rather than differences. This dynamic overlap is called the Cultural Interface, and it is a highly productive space for education. It is also a powerful site for Reconciliation.

Your Personal Identity - Questionnaire and Reflection to Map Your Ways of Being, Doing, Knowing and Valuing.

Bringing your stories and stepping into the Cultural Interface, for dialogue with Aboriginal knowledge systems.

Testimony from Catherine at Airds, on how their school exec worked with this activity:

"We at Airds High School have nearly 20% Indigenous students and we have thankfully found a means of developing an 'aboriginal perspective' that is not about creating attractive bookends to mainstream cultural content. We have had some very interesting discussions at executive level - principal, deputies and head teachers - about 'identify' and the results of the 'identify survey' we all completed. It is so fascinating to see the 'symbols' that people have created for their personal ways to knowledge and learning. The responses in the questionnaires were truly inspiring. It is amazing that people you work with and 'normalise' in certain ways can be both what you thought and also so incredibly different in their ways of knowing, being, valuing etc. It has been good to spend time at this activity as there is so much that 'matches' with 'indigenous' ways of learning. We can see that there is an interface that can be negotiated and understood between the cultural ways."

And from a 4th year teaching student at CSU:

"Completing the Personal Identity Reflection Questionnaire was challenging because it was the first time that I had been challenged to reflect deeply on my own personal belief systems and cultural understandings. I have previously considered what my beliefs are, yet not uncovered the reasons why I hold these beliefs and how they influence my actions. [It] also provided the opportunity to identify and challenge the personal ideologies I hold about Indigenous Australians. Lampert (2005) suggests that as our beliefs are politically and socially constructed, we often develop opinions without knowing why. Our beliefs and attitude are shown in our discourses and actions. In the classroom context, teachers hold significant power to contribute to the ways Indigenous Australia is perceived and understood by students. Therefore, self reflection is critical for educators to identify and address cultural biases (Harrison, 2008)."

Note: Questioning, challenging and resisting this document is a valid way of engaging with it. Just make sure you're not really doing this as a way to avoid self-scrutiny...

The Questionnaire/stimulus:

Here are some questions for reflection on your own unique cultural standpoint, no matter where you are from in this world. Feel free to share your reflections in the discussion page. This could be a good exercise for your students as well. These questions were developed from a lesson on identity in Rhonda Ashby's Aboriginal Studies class at Lightning Ridge, and inspired by the work of Dr Karen Martin, Noonuccal woman and Aboriginal researcher. Feel free to add and delete whatever you need.

The questions will help you reflect on your ways of being, ways of knowing, ways of doing and ways of valuing. In western knowledge systems these become ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology.

1. Ways of being.

Where do you belong? Who do you belong to?

How do you know that something is real?

List some categories of the things you know are real in this world.

From the following sets, select the land orientations you feel most comfortable with:

Saltwater / freshwater

High ground / low ground

Hills / plains / ridges / mountains / coast

Open country / forest

Wet / dry

Red soil / black soil

Sand / dirt / rock

Warm / cool

Fur / feathers / scales / fins

Wood / rock / earth / wind / fire

Where are your ancestors from and how do you connect with them?

How are you accountable for maintaining relationships with ancestors, people and the environment? (What are your personal consequences for damaging these relationships?)

How will the knowledge you have learned in this life be passed on, and to whom?

What things in your life-world must change, and what things must always stay the same?

2. Ways of knowing.

How did you know the answers to the questions so far – how did you learn these things?

Sketch a diagram of the way you solve problems. What shape does this take for you?

When you access knowledge from memory, what form does that take in your head? (e.g. images, sounds, print, language, shapes)

What are the stories that have had the biggest impact on how you relate to the world around you? (Might be books, films, oral histories, fables etc.)

What symbols are most meaningful for you? (e.g. crucifix, tag, icon, flag)

How do these symbols inform your life and work?

What sorts of things do you know implicitly, without having to be taught?

Do the answers to any of these questions make you want to change any of your answers back in section 1? (Because our ways of knowing shape our ways of being.)

3. Ways of doing.

Do you learn new knowledge best with others, for others, alone, or for yourself?

Do you internalise new knowledge through dialogue, reflection or both?

Do you achieve learning outcomes at the end of a process, or during the process?

What are the signs you look for to know if what you are doing is right?

What does it usually take for you to change your mind about something?

What tools do you use for teaching and learning?

What are your main cultural practices, your ways of expressing your culture (e.g. singing, sport, events, rituals)? How do these cultural practices impact on the way you do your work?

4. Ways of valuing.

What is truth?

What would be your top three rules for living? Top three for learning?

What is the most important thing in the world to you?

How did you learn your values? Where did they come from?

Reflection:

Now, track back through your responses and find the points that relate to:

Stories and histories

Knowledge pathways/processes

Unspoken/instinctive/ancestral knowledge

Metaphors and symbols

Land and place

Non-linear/contradictory/irrational/creative ideas

Wholes vs parts / Macro vs micro / Communal vs independent

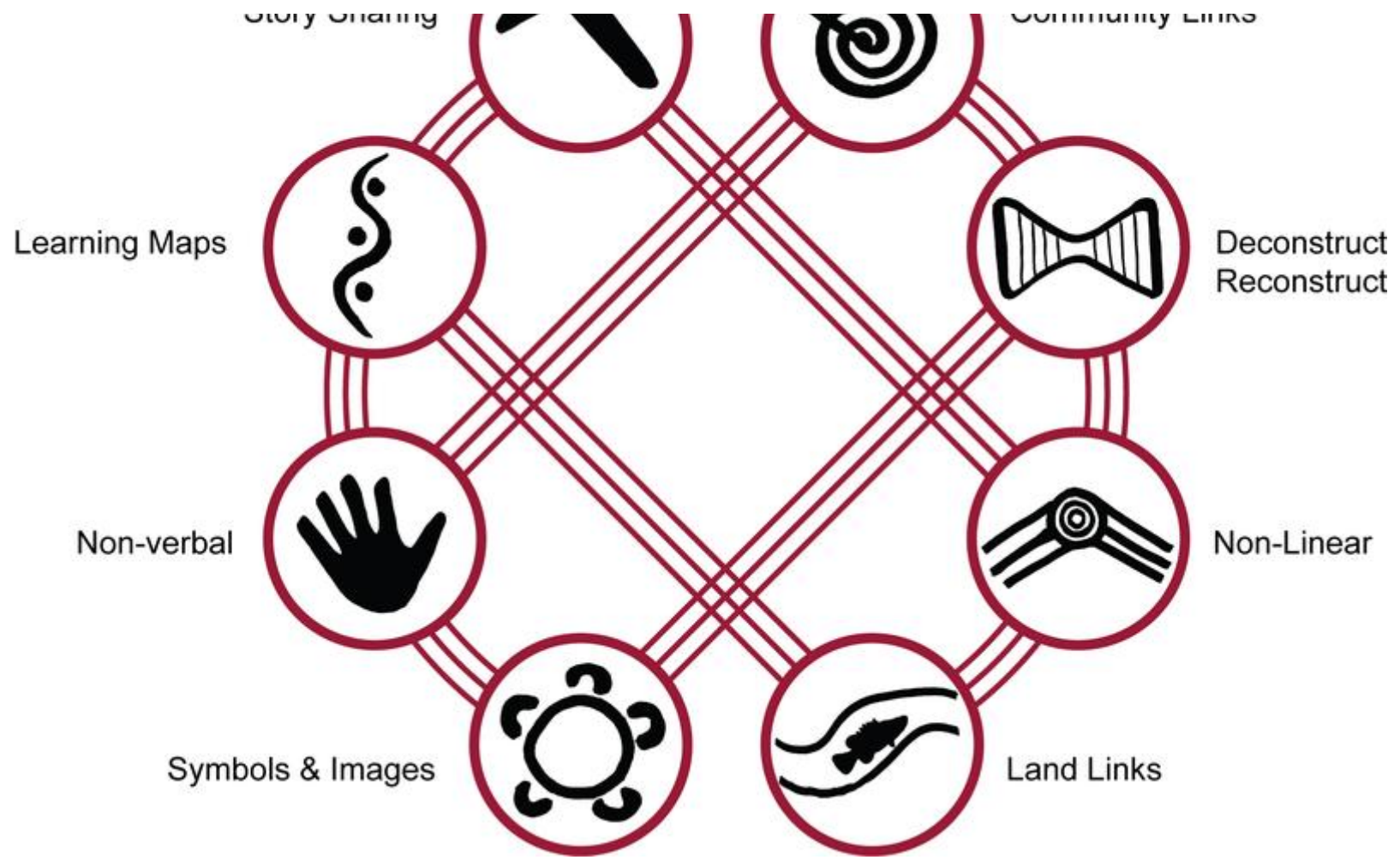
Family, community, cultural base

These points relate your identity to the 8ways framework. Match these with the 8ways diagram below and reflect on your identity within this framework (starting top left with story sharing, then working anti-clockwise).

Story Sharing



Community Links



HOME (/WORK)
ABOUT (/ABOUT)
BEST PRACTICE (/BEST-PRACTICE)
RESOURCES (/IMPLEMENTATION-1)
OUR PROTOCOL (/OUR-PROTOCOL)
TRAINING (/TRAINING)
PRIVACY (HTTPS://EDUCATION.NSW.GOV.AU/ABOUT-US/RIGHTS-AND-ACCOUNTABILITY/PRIVACY)
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