

“ 8 Ways of Learning- Developing an Understanding in Aboriginal Pedagogy”



Melissa Kirby - NSW Department of Education and Communities

National Aboriginal Education Committee
in 1985 suggested Aboriginal
perspectives need to come through
pedagogy, asserting the need to develop

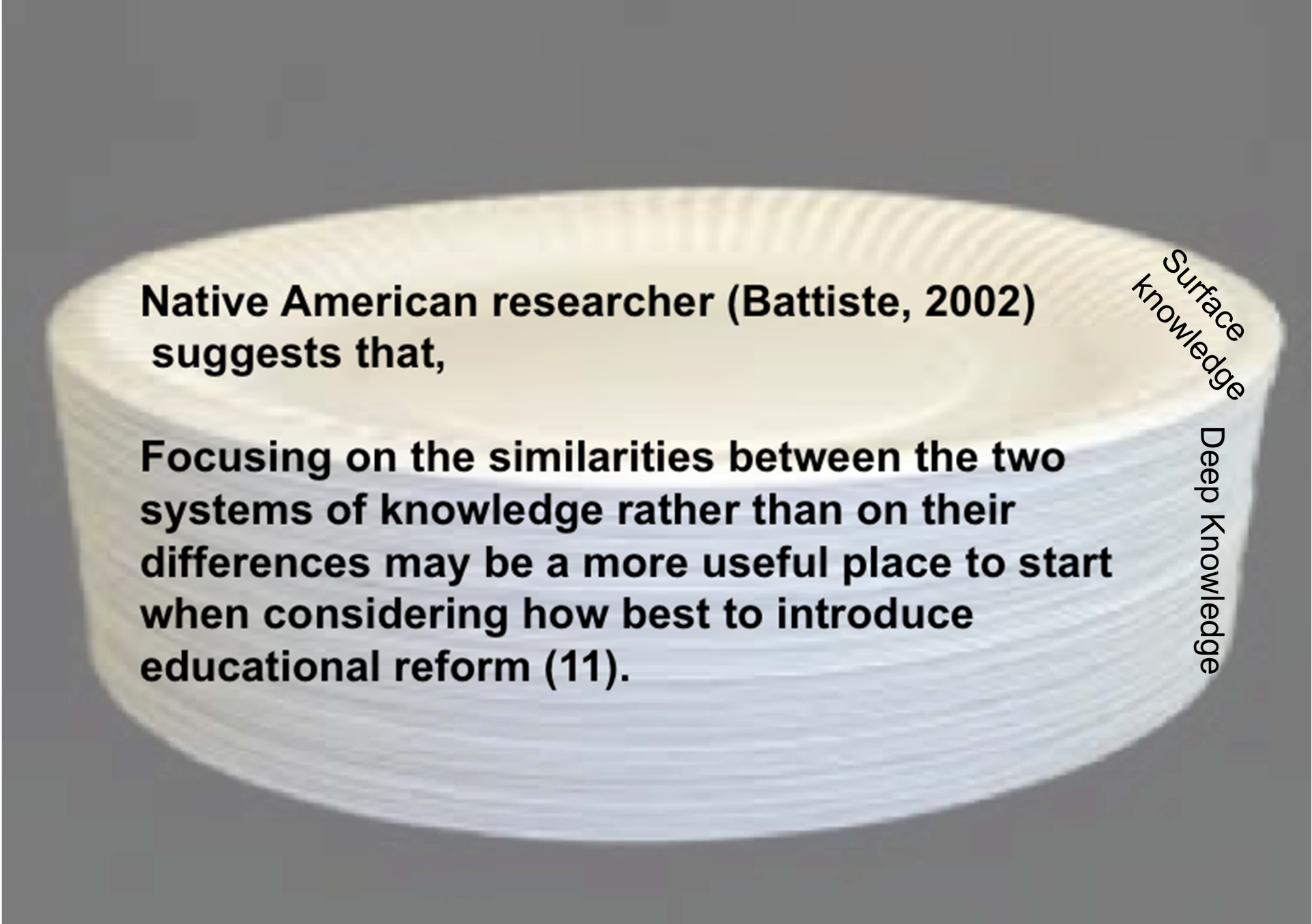
*“pedagogy that takes into account
Aboriginal epistemology. Only when this
occurs will education for our people be a
process that builds on Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander cultures and
identity” (1985, 4).*

Some of the reasons teachers have stated for avoiding Aboriginal perspectives in their teaching:

- “We’ re threatened by Aboriginal content because we don’ t know the rules”
- “fear of offending people or saying something that’ s not right”
- a “sense of urgency... with catching up [to mainstream literacy standards]”
- “[fear] of Anglo parent reaction”
- “fear of offending, but also about looking like a try-hard”
- “Teachers are very wary – it’ s safe to do dot paintings”

Resolving these issues

- Teach using Aboriginal **processes** and protocols, not just Aboriginal content.
- Apply Aboriginal pedagogy to mainstream content – it validates our culture.
- When you focus on “how” rather than “what”, you are teaching *through* culture.
- The common ground between Aboriginal and western pedagogy gives you a safe entry point for Aboriginal perspectives.

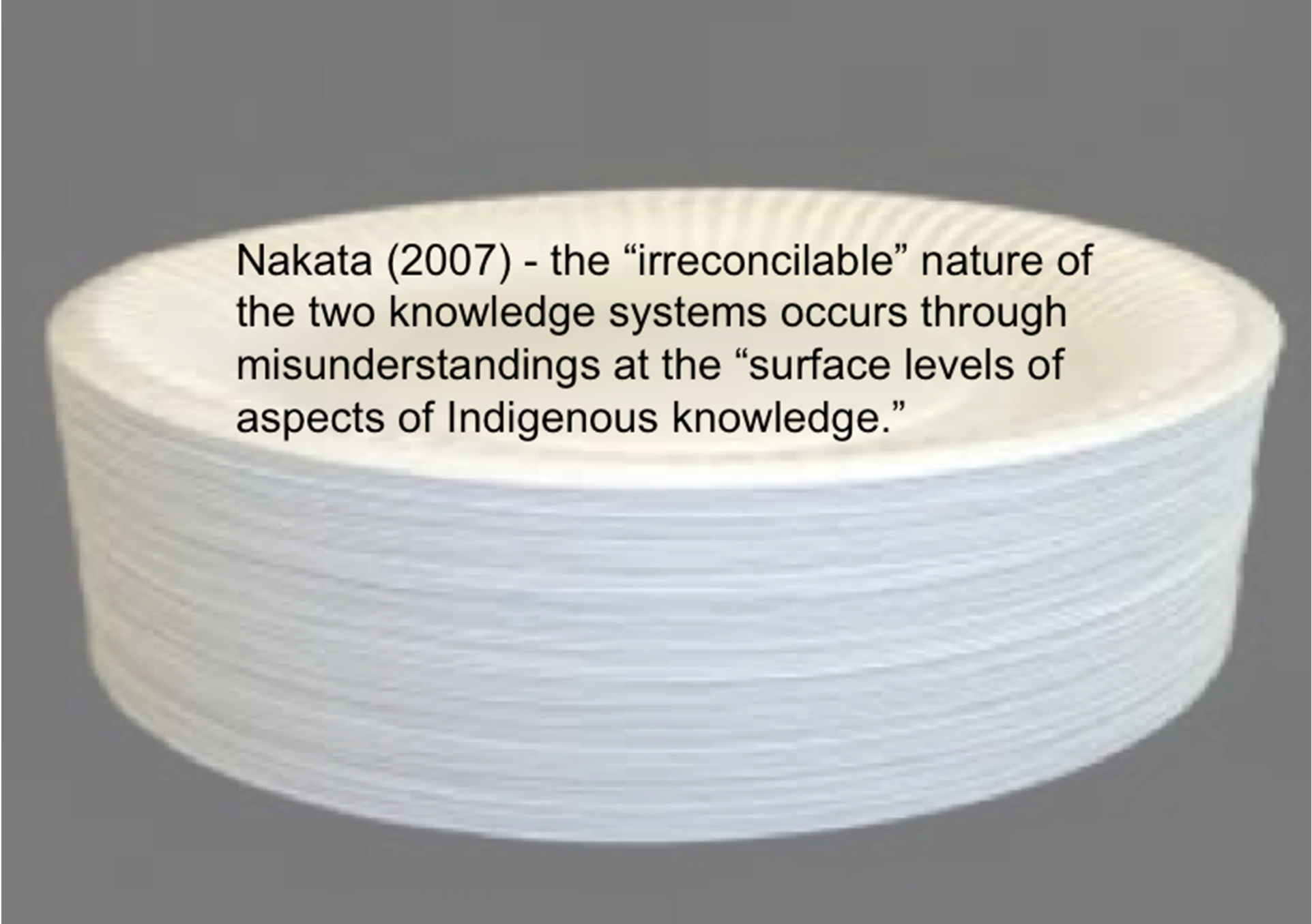


Native American researcher (Battiste, 2002) suggests that,

Focusing on the similarities between the two systems of knowledge rather than on their differences may be a more useful place to start when considering how best to introduce educational reform (11).

Surface
Knowledge

Deep Knowledge

A stack of white, disposable paper plates is shown against a dark grey background. The plates are stacked high, with the top plate clearly visible. The text is overlaid on the top surface of the stack.

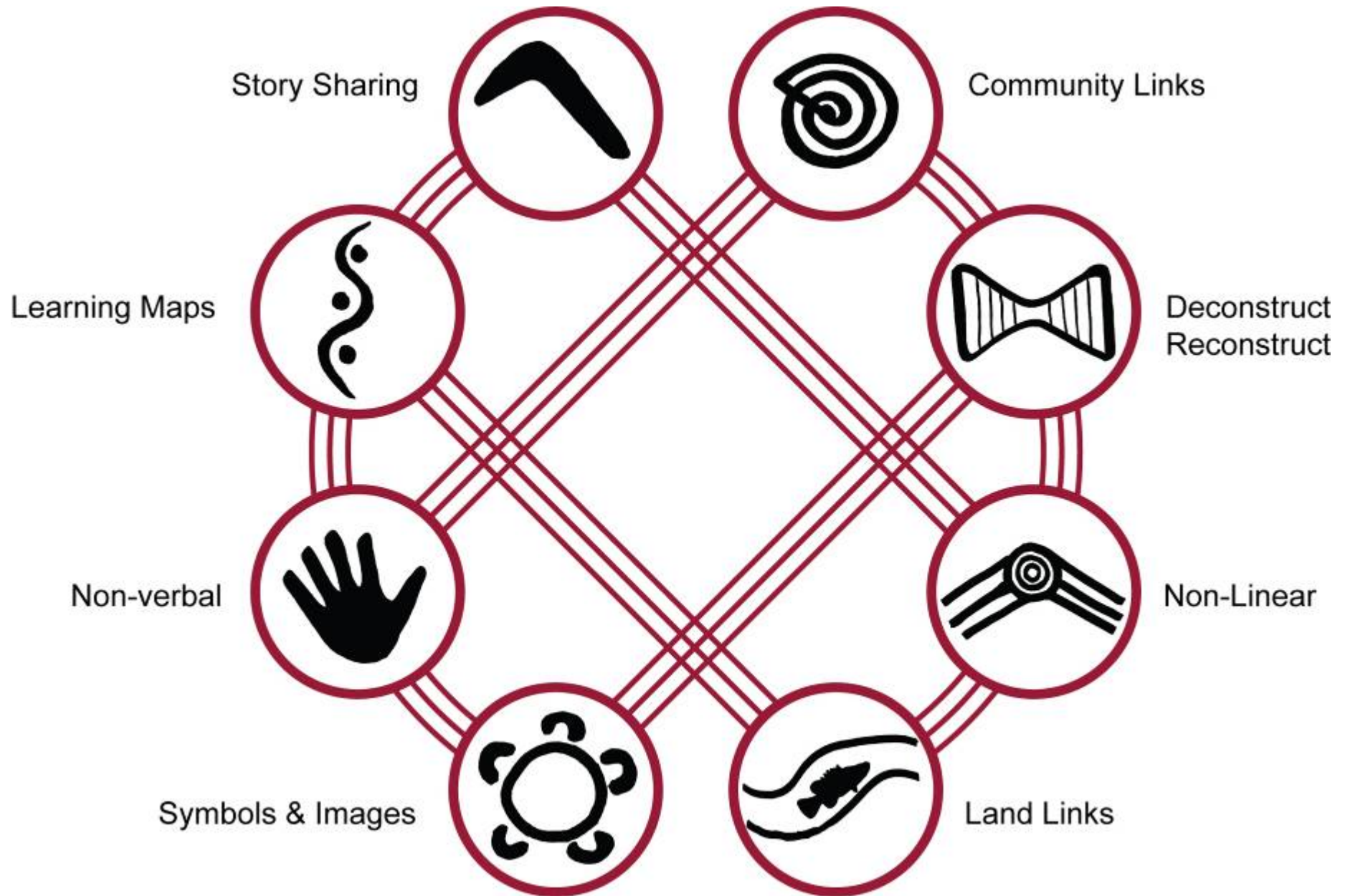
Nakata (2007) - the “irreconcilable” nature of the two knowledge systems occurs through misunderstandings at the “surface levels of aspects of Indigenous knowledge.”

Common ground between best mainstream and Aboriginal pedagogies:

Finding **common** ground is reconciliation

1. Learning through narrative.
2. Planning and visualising explicit processes.
3. Working non-verbally with self-reflective, hands-on methods.
4. Learning through images, symbols and metaphors.
5. Learning through place-responsive, environmental practice.
6. Using indirect, innovative and interdisciplinary approaches.
7. Modelling and scaffolding by working from wholes to parts.
8. Connecting learning to local values, needs and knowledge.

Here is a dynamic framework for these common ground pedagogies:



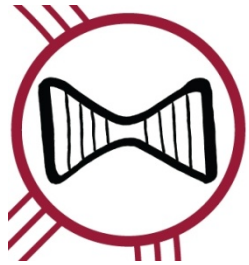
Key Findings from the International Literature and Research on Aboriginal Pedagogy



“Ted Fields said each [Yuwaalaraay] person had a dhumbaay, a stick two to three feet long, used to express things, e.g. to draw things on the ground.”
Ash et al, Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay, Yuwaalayaay Dictionary.

Images or visualisations are used to map out processes for learners to follow.

In optimal Aboriginal pedagogy, the teacher and learner create *“...a concrete, holistic image of the tasks to be performed. That image serves as an anchor or reference point for the learner.”* (Hughes and More, 1997)



Holistic, global, scaffolded and independent learning orientations of Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal pedagogy is about *learning wholes rather than parts* (Harris, 1984).

Aboriginal students begin with the *whole structure, rather than a series of sequenced steps* (Hughes, 1987; Stairs, 1994).

The Aboriginal learner “... **concentrates on understanding the overall concept or task before getting down to the details.**” (Hughes and More, 1997)



Aboriginal Pedagogy is Community-Based

Aboriginal pedagogy is group-oriented, localised and connected to *real-life purposes and contexts*.

In Aboriginal pedagogy, the motivation for learning is *inclusion in the community*.

Aboriginal teaching refers to *community life and values* (Stairs, 1994).



Symbol, image and metaphor are central to Aboriginal pedagogy

Visual/spatial learning is appears throughout the research as a central part of Aboriginal pedagogy (Hughes, 1992).

Aboriginal pedagogy utilises all the senses to *build symbolic meaning* in support of learning new concepts, drawing on both *concrete and abstract imagery* (Bindarriy et al, 1991).



Aboriginal pedagogy utilises non-verbal methods

Kinaesthetic, *hands-on learning* is a characteristic element of Aboriginal pedagogy (Robinson and Nichol, 1998).

Body language plays an important role in Indigenous pedagogy (Craven, 1999)

The use of silence is a feature of Aboriginal learning and language use (Harris and Malin, 1994).

But this not just imitation and practical action as pedagogy (Gibson, 1993).

E.g. *Aboriginal learners test knowledge non-verbally through **experience, introspection and practice**, thereby becoming critical thinkers who can judge the validity of new knowledge independently* (Wheaton, 2000).



Aboriginal pedagogy is about connecting and relating learning to the land

The strong Aboriginal *connection between land and knowledge/learning* is widely documented (Battiste, 2002; Shajahan, 2005).

Aboriginal pedagogies are intensely ecological and place-based, being drawn from the living landscape within a framework of profound ancestral and personal relationships with place (Marker, 2006).

Indigenous land-based pedagogy is affirmed by the work of place-based education researchers, with *links between western place-responsive practice and the narrative pedagogies of Native Peoples* clearly demonstrated (Cameron, 2003).



Aboriginal learning has story as a central pedagogy

Well-documented Indigenous teaching methods make use of *personal narratives in knowledge transmission and transformation* (Stairs, 1994).

It has long been observed that Elders teach using stories, drawing *lessons from narratives* to actively involve learners in *introspection and analysis* (Wheaton, 2000).

Learning is grounded in the *exchange of personal and wider narratives*. Narrative is a key pedagogy in education for students of all cultural backgrounds (Egan, 1998).



Aboriginal pedagogy contains non-linear ways of learning

Aboriginal pedagogy is non-linear – a complex cycle of learning composed of processes that occur continuously (Wheaton, 2000).

Indirect rather than direct orientation to learning concepts, avoidance of direct questioning (Hughes 1987), avoidance of direct instruction and behaviour management (West in Harris and Malin, 1994).

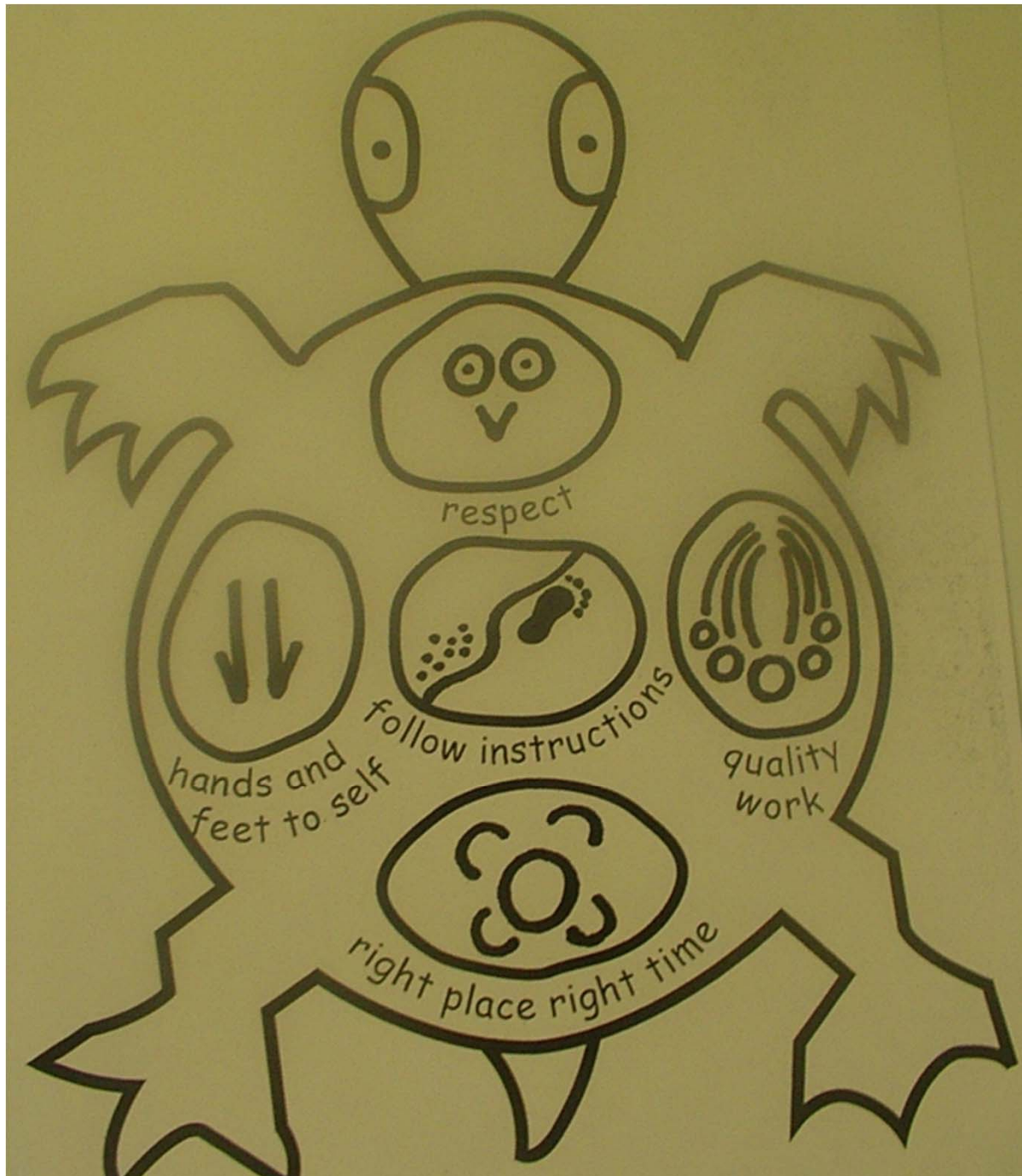
Aboriginal people think and perceive in a way that is not constrained by the serial and sequential nature of verbal thinking (Gibson, 1993).

Linear perspectives in schooling marginalise Aboriginal people and prevent us from constructing our own identities (Wheaton, 2000).

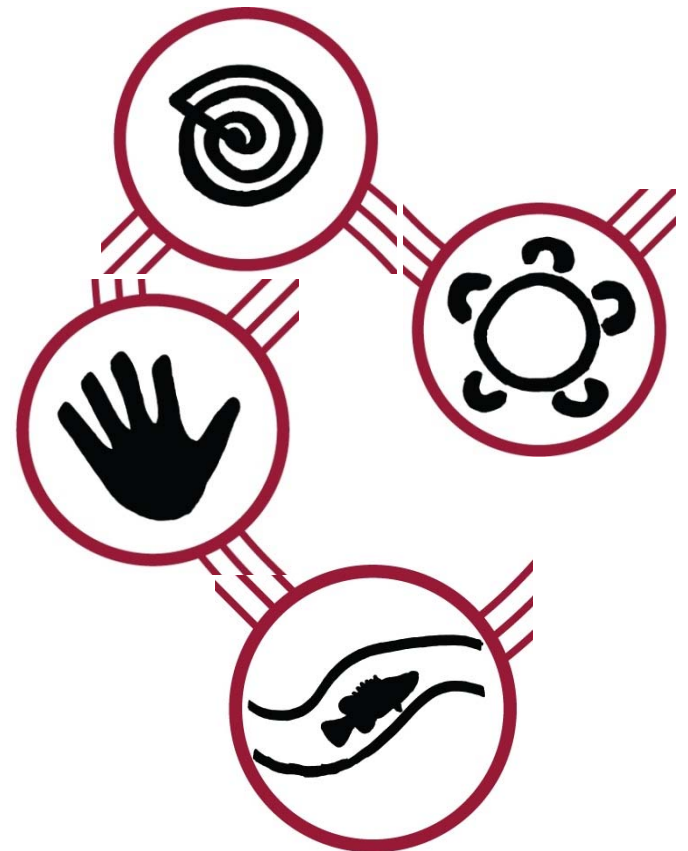
Non-linear Indigenous ideas of overlap and synergy can give a view of two worlds as complementary rather than oppositional (Linkson, 1999).

Examples from Western NSW Classrooms

Sample Lessons and Units



How Lightning Ridge Central used four of the 8 pedagogies to develop a way to deliver on their school rules.



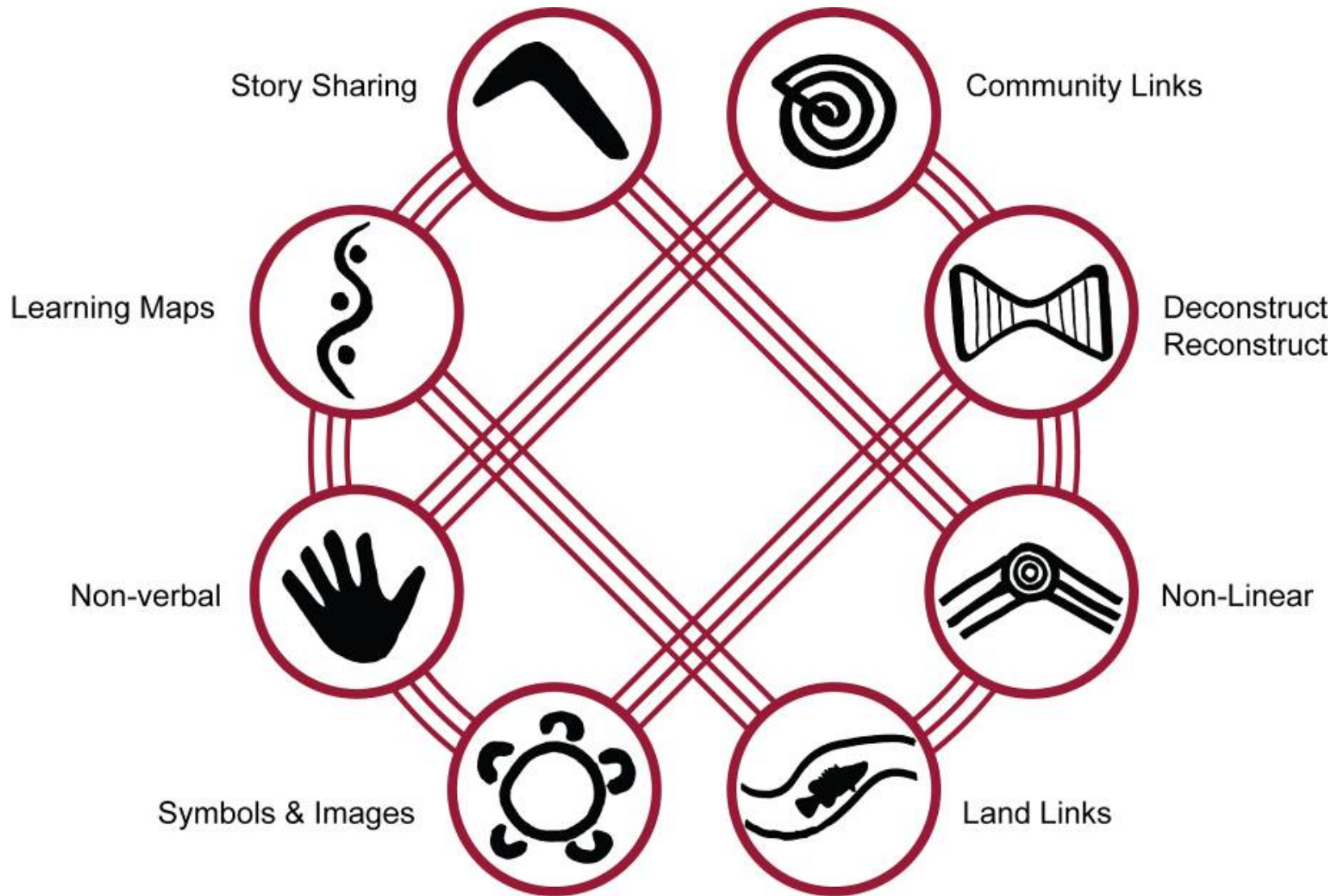
Eight Ways of Learning



You can use alternative names and symbols/metaphors appropriate to your community

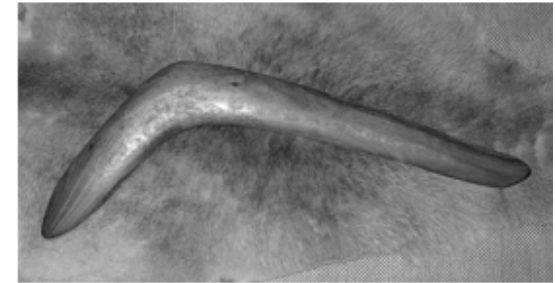
8 Ways Activity

Here is a dynamic framework for these common ground pedagogies for the purpose of reconciliation:

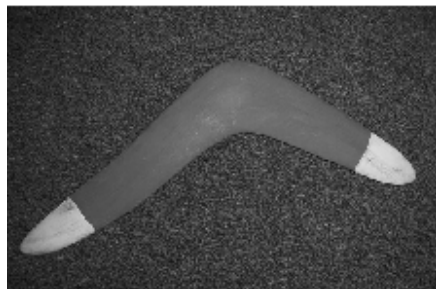
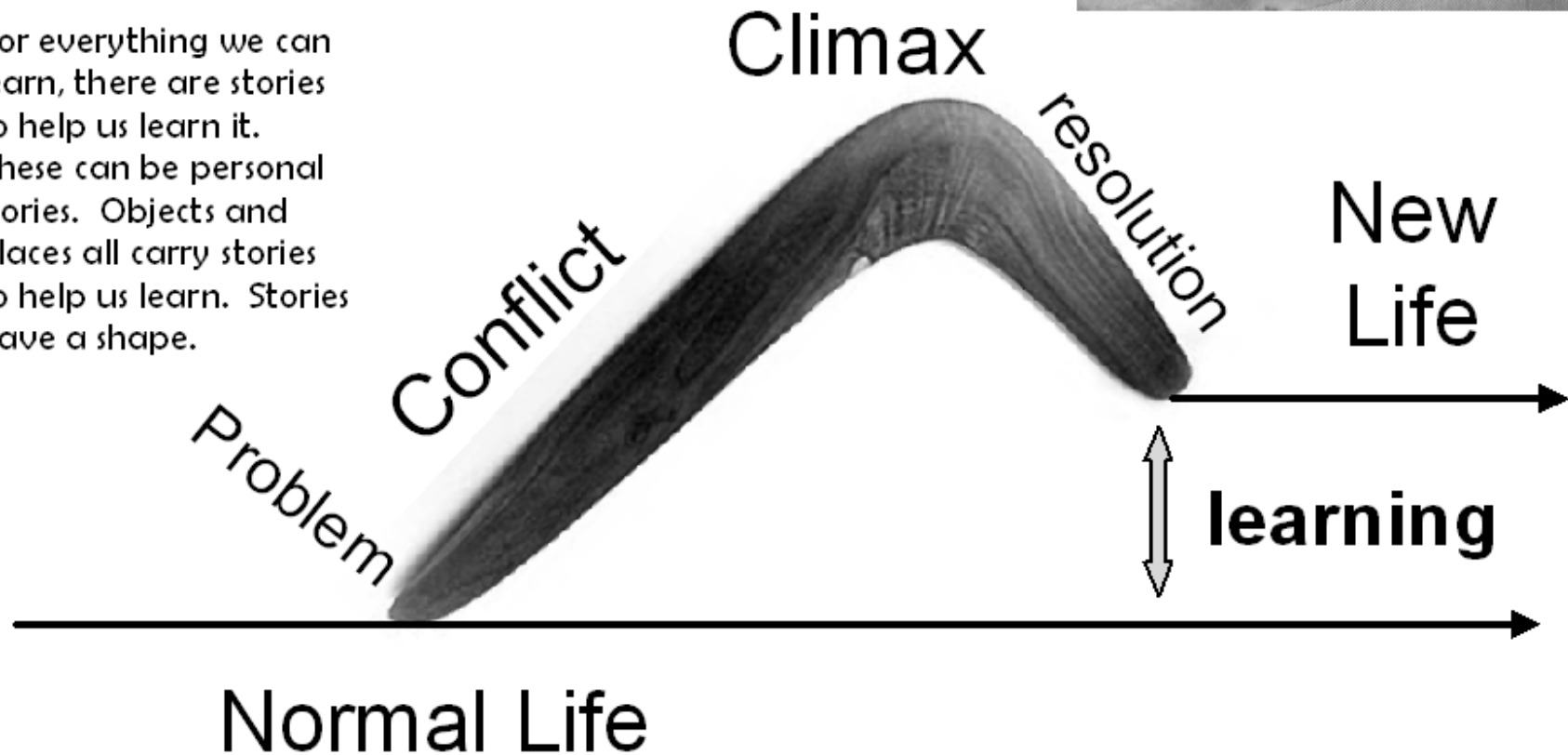




Story Sharing



For everything we can learn, there are stories to help us learn it. These can be personal stories. Objects and places all carry stories to help us learn. Stories have a shape.

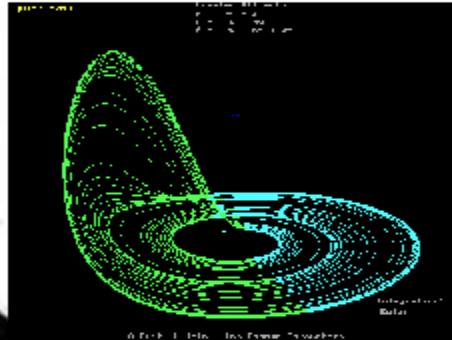
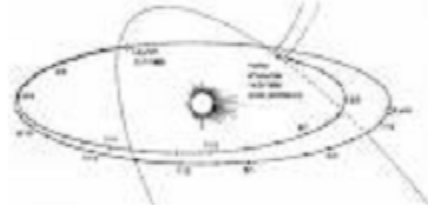
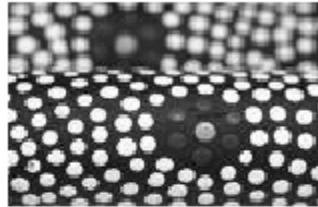


Story takes you up, then down, leaving you in a place that is higher than before. It runs through everything in land, body, mind and spirit, tying together the shape of learning for all peoples.



Community Links

You don't have to change when you have learning from outside community. Stand strong with who you are and ask three questions when you find new knowledge from outside:

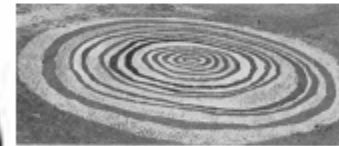


What does this mean for me and my family?

What do we have here the same, and what is different?

How can I use this new learning to help my community?

Travel out for knowledge, but bring that message home.



snake entering a hole

snake leaving a hole

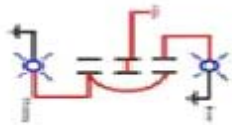




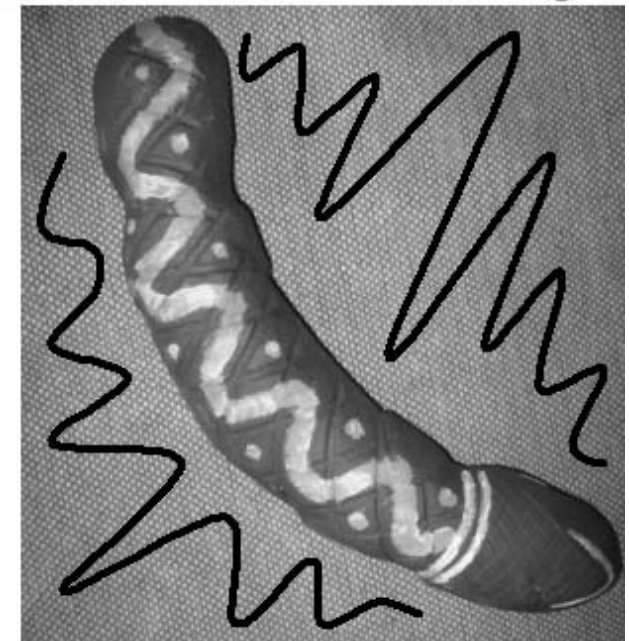
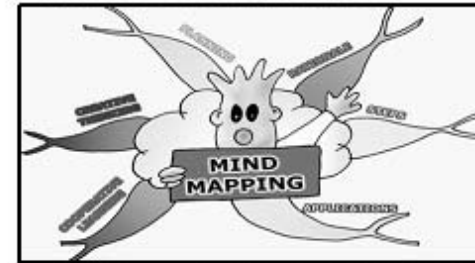
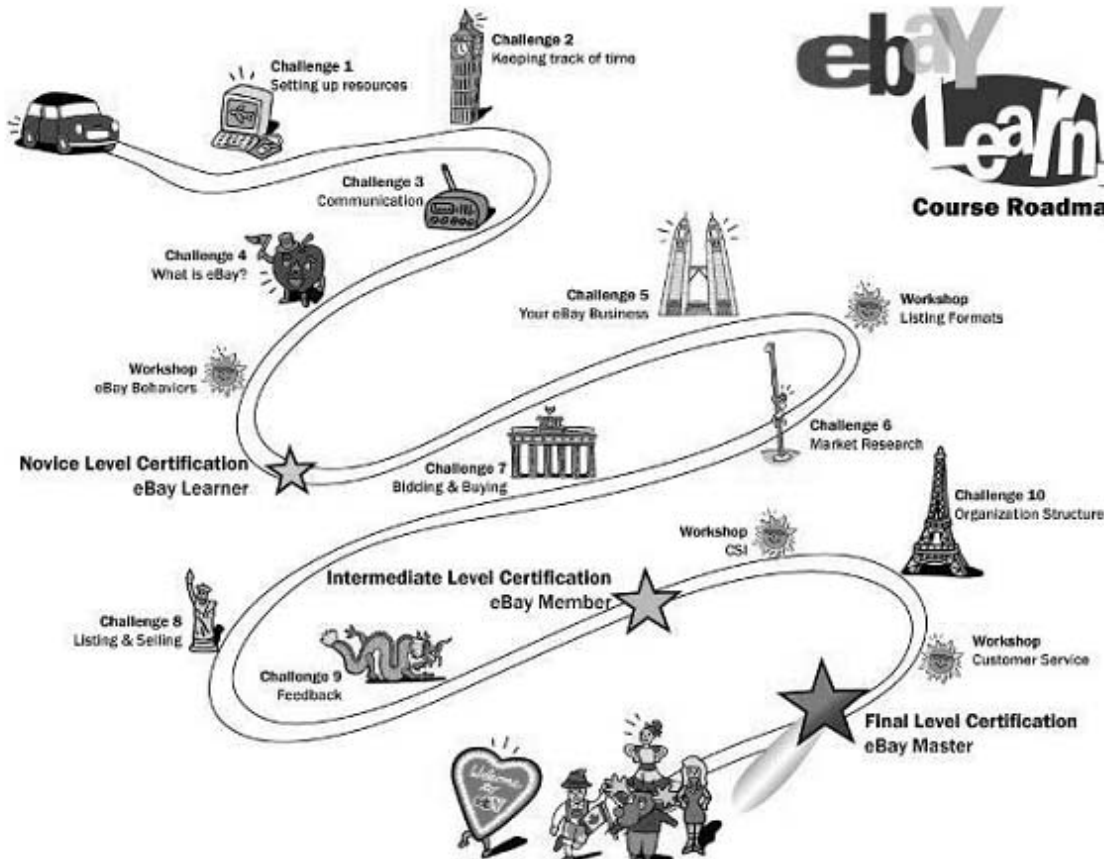
Learning Maps



We can see the shapes of learning and ideas. We can plan them out. Usually these shapes aren't straight. You can find the shapes of learning journeys in the land, like with the tracks of these blue tongue lizards.



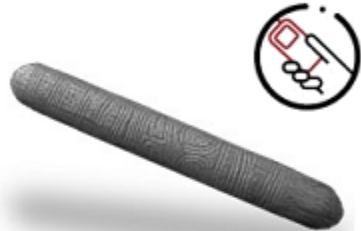
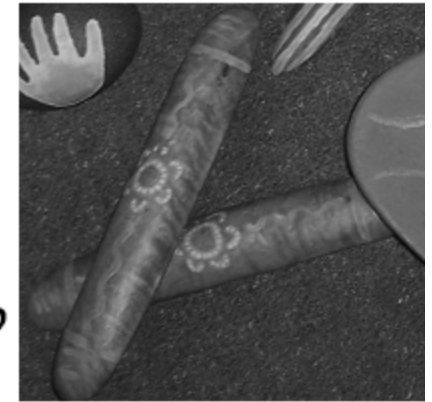
You can plan learning out on a map to see it better. Even this EBay course has a learning map...





Symbol and Image

Our thinking is often done in shapes and images. Learning and knowledge is carried best by symbols and diagrams to help us see and remember.

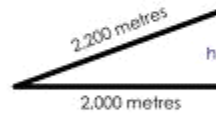
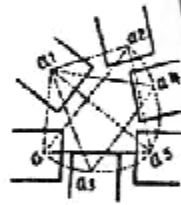
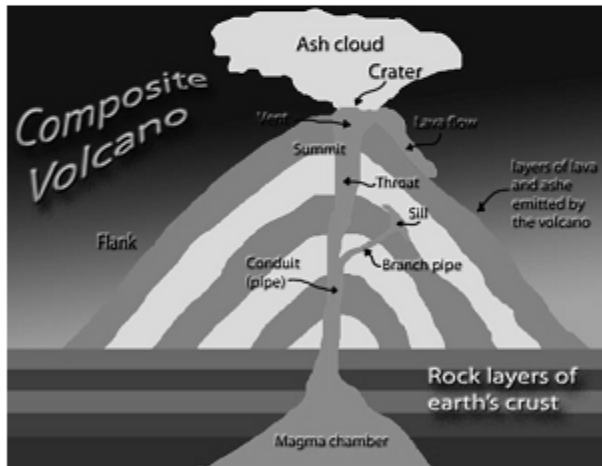


Message stick

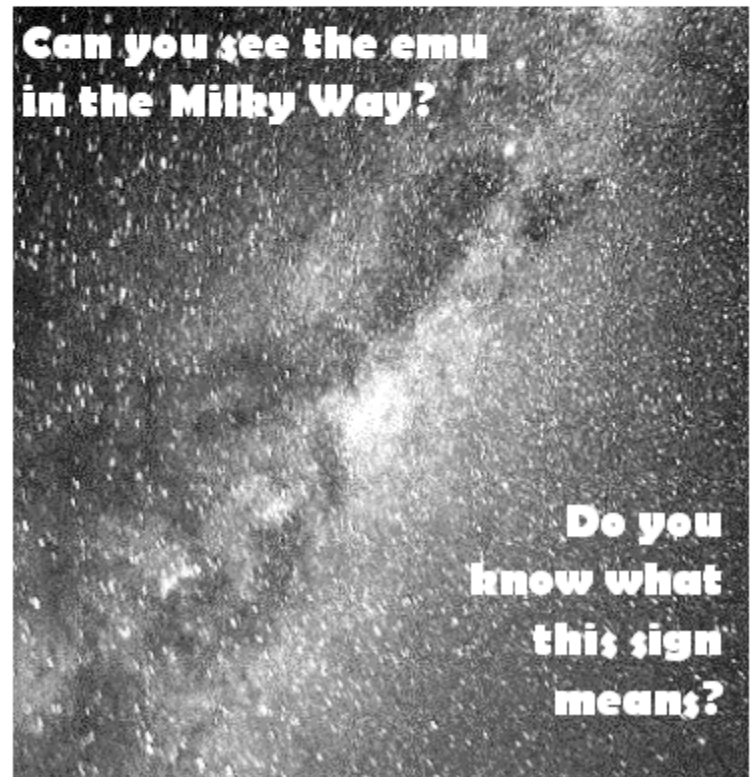
All cultures have symbols to help with learning.



Symbols and signs are everywhere in the world around us, and above too.



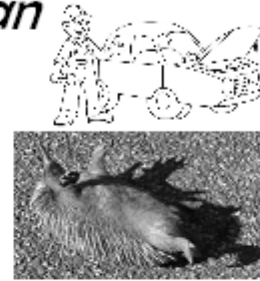
Always use pictures and diagrams to help your learning!



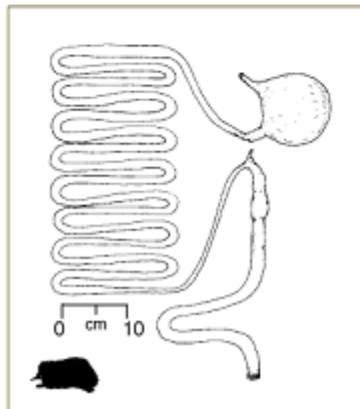
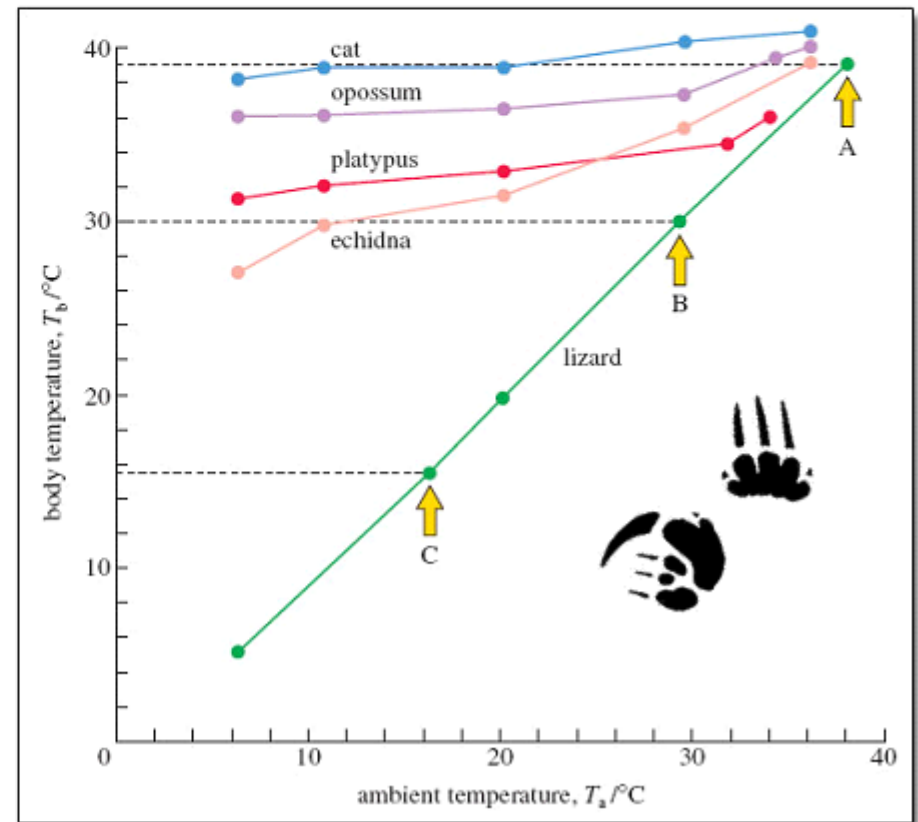


Land Links

All of the animals, plants and places in land and water carry knowledge and can help us learn. Also, the things we are learning can effect them. Everything we learn and do is linked to the land.



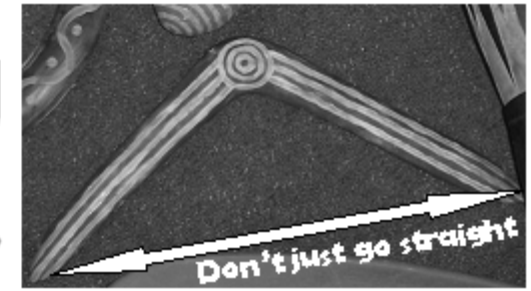
Find the links between the things you are learning and the land. Use knowledge of land and local places to ground your learning activities.



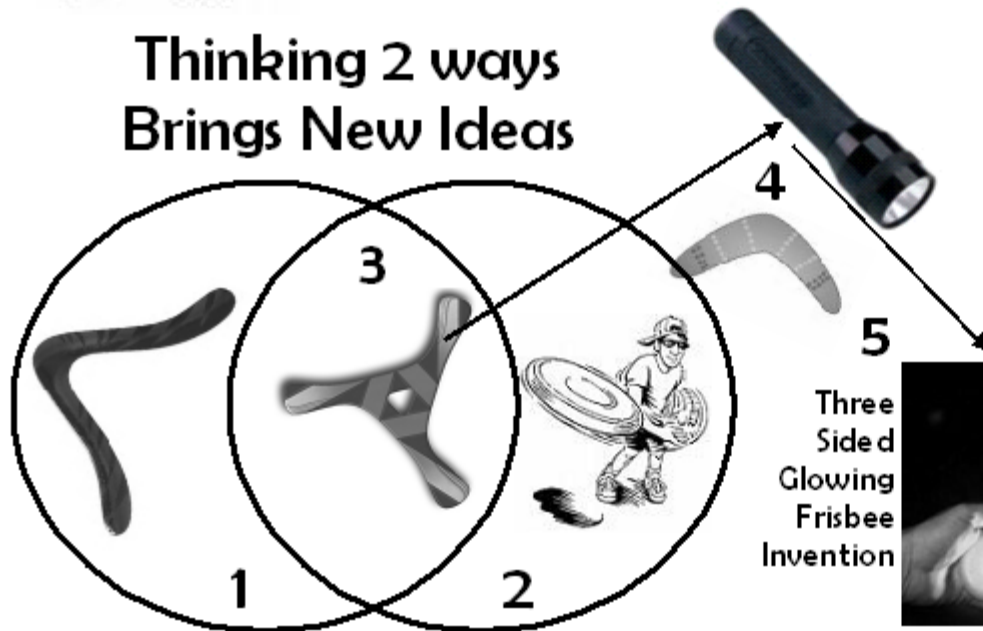


Non-linear Thinking

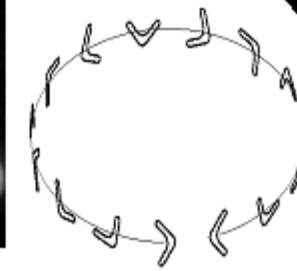
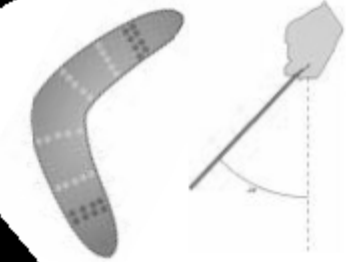
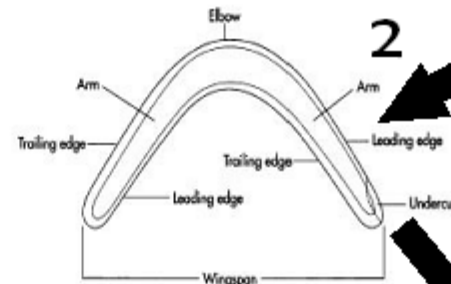
Proper learning doesn't go straight. It's crooked, or it goes around in a circle. Think outside that straight path, find answers in strange places, and look at things from different points of view.



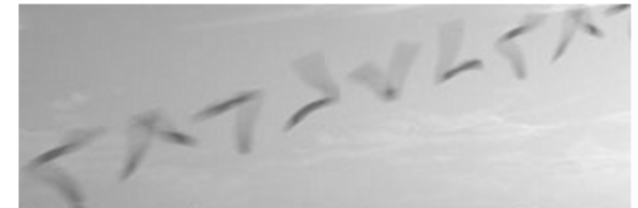
**Thinking 2 ways
Brings New Ideas**



Three
Sided
Glowing
Frisbee
Invention

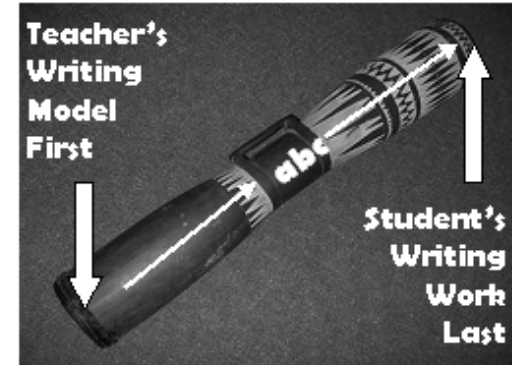


Look at things from two sides. Put yourself in the shoes of a person from another culture. Find things that are in common from both cultures. Find new ideas and inventions by putting two ways together.





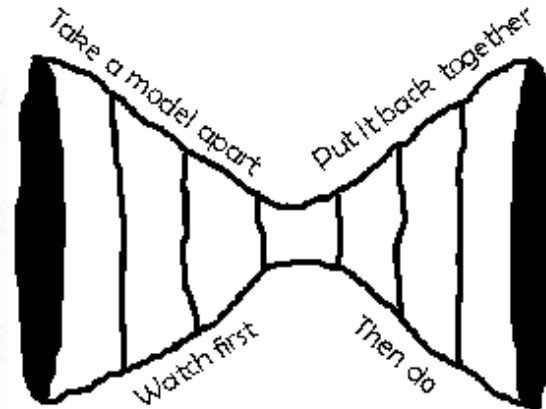
De-construct Re-construct



This way of learning is in the shape of a *Warup* from the Torres Strait.



When Do I Start?
The learning process starts with the learner seeing the whole thing first. Then they are given the parts to work on. This is the de-constructing phase. After that, they are given the parts to work on again, but this time they are given the parts to work on in a different order. This is the re-constructing phase.



Watch, Listen, and Repeat
The learning process starts with the learner seeing the whole thing first. Then they are given the parts to work on. This is the de-constructing phase. After that, they are given the parts to work on again, but this time they are given the parts to work on in a different order. This is the re-constructing phase.

Learning hard things is like the shape of a drum. You start by seeing the whole thing, then smaller parts or stages for doing it. After you learn all of those parts with a teacher then you try to put it all together yourself...



Learner supported

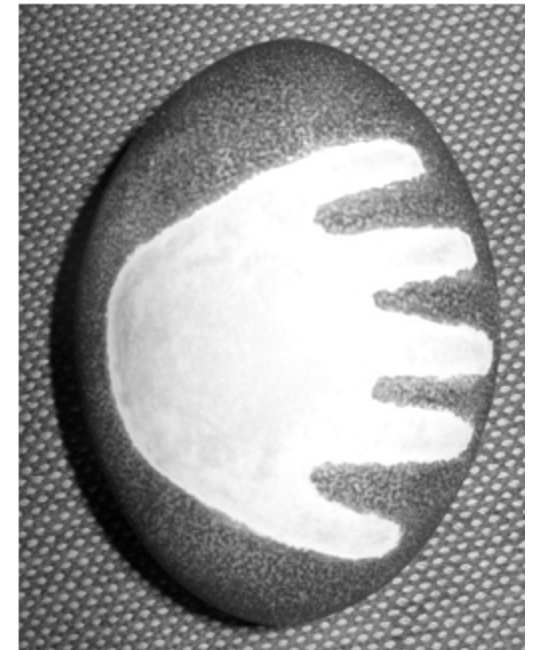
Learner self-directed



Non-verbal

Learning has a lot of deep layers, like an emu egg. A lot of learning is done with hands, body, and mind without talk. We learn by doing, and also by watching.

We look for the things people say without words, when we watch people.



We can do this when we read too. We can ask ourselves, “What is this writer really saying?” We can read between the lines.

Another thing—teachers shouldn't have to growl at students. People make signs to show when something is wrong. We can read these signs and change what we're doing.

Behaviour Management

See details on wiki:
<http://8ways.wikispaces.com>



Least- to most-intrusive strategies. Your “vibe” and baggage. Critical thinking.



Narrative therapy. Tell stories with parallels to the situation.



Track behaviour visually with students – chart? Visual proof of progress is the best reward.



Symbols or pictures for class rules and learning values.

Code-switch school and community behaviours. Draw on community values.



Indirect approach. Misbehaviour a learning opportunity for alternative strategies.



Placelessness in schooling causes misbehaviour. Bring in nature and place.



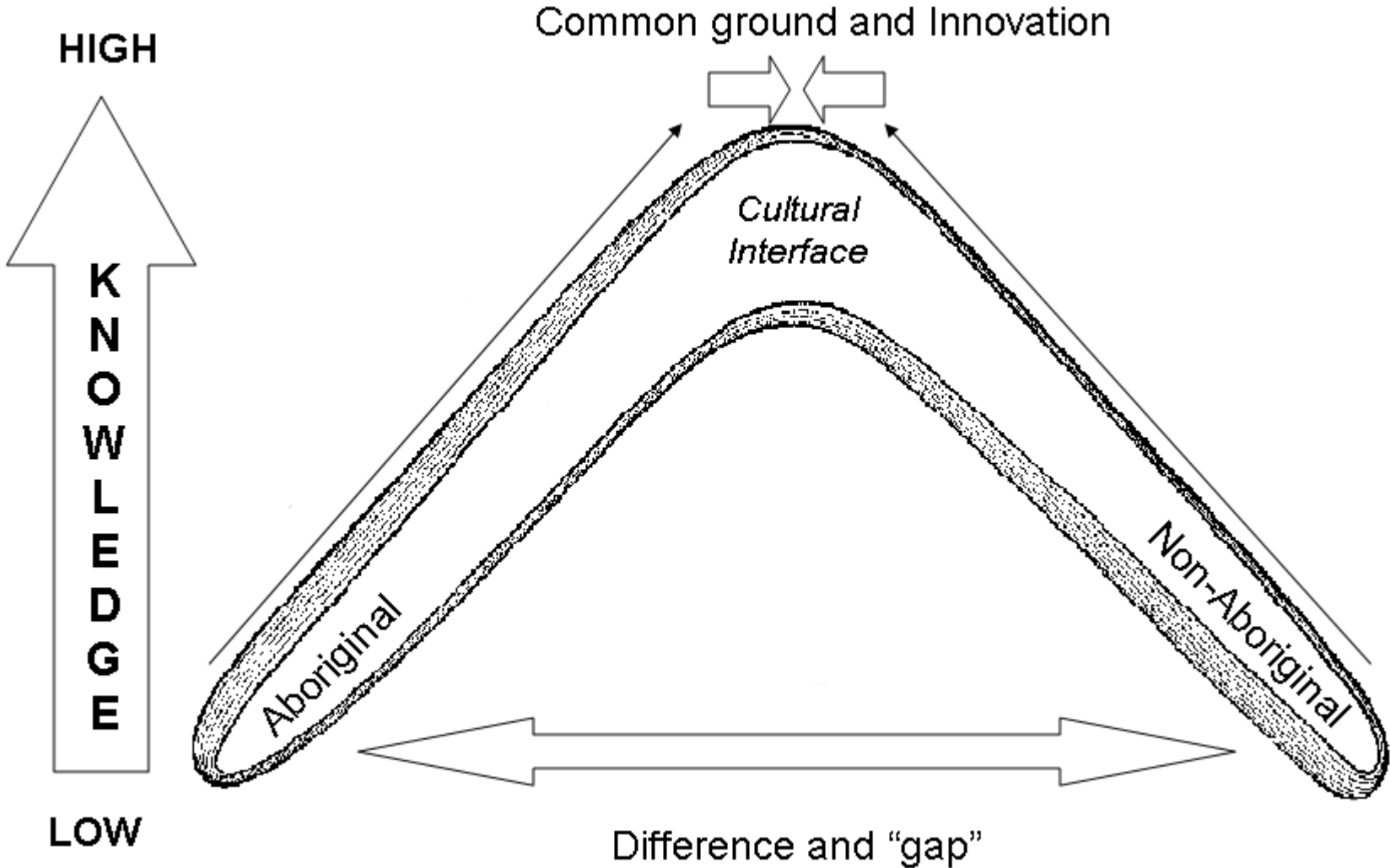
Demonstrate and find models of effective behaviour. Explicitly scaffold for self-regulation.



***"...the approaches consistent with Aboriginal ways of doing things are found in varying proportions in all cultures."
(Harris, 1984)***

Nakata (2007) - the "irreconcilable" nature of the two knowledge systems occurs through misunderstandings at the *"surface levels of aspects of Indigenous knowledge."*

Cultural Interface



Cultural Interface Protocols for Engaging with Aboriginal Knowledge

1. Use Aboriginal processes to engage with Aboriginal knowledge.
2. Approach Aboriginal knowledge in gradual stages, not all at once.
3. Be grounded in your own cultural identity (not just “colour”) with integrity.
4. Bring your highest self to the knowledge and settle your fears and issues.
5. Share your own stories of relatedness and deepest knowledge.

6. See the shape of the knowledge and express it with images and objects.
7. Build your knowledge around real relationships with Aboriginal people.
8. Use this knowledge for the benefit of the Aboriginal community.
9. Bring your familiar understandings, but be willing to grow beyond these.
10. Respect the aspects of spirit and place that the knowledge is grounded in.

At the Cultural Interface, you can develop local pedagogies particular to your students and their families

For example, when you get old Aunty to come to the school to make johnny cakes, don't leave it as some extra-curricular fun. Ask her to tell the story of how she learned to make johnny cakes, and how she teaches her own children and grandchildren. Back in the classroom, map out the learning processes she told you, and work with your students to create systems or protocols from this for mainstream classroom learning.



Can you match these statements with their symbols?

We connect through the stories we share.

We picture our pathways of knowledge.

We see, think, act, make and share without words.

We keep and share knowledge with art and objects.

We work with lessons from land and nature.

We put different ideas together and create new knowledge.

We work from wholes to parts, watching and then doing.

We bring new knowledge home to help our mob.



Whether you like it or not,
Culture is at the core of all
thinking and learning. So if
learning is your core business,
then so is **Culture**.

Please be aware that this is not the be-all and end-all of Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives. These 8 pedagogies are merely a point of entry for teachers to begin a safe and respectful dialogue with the Aboriginal community.

THANK YOU