

# How can we manipulate the cultural forces to meet the individual needs of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander students and explore Indigenous content within our classroom?

## What are the cultural forces?

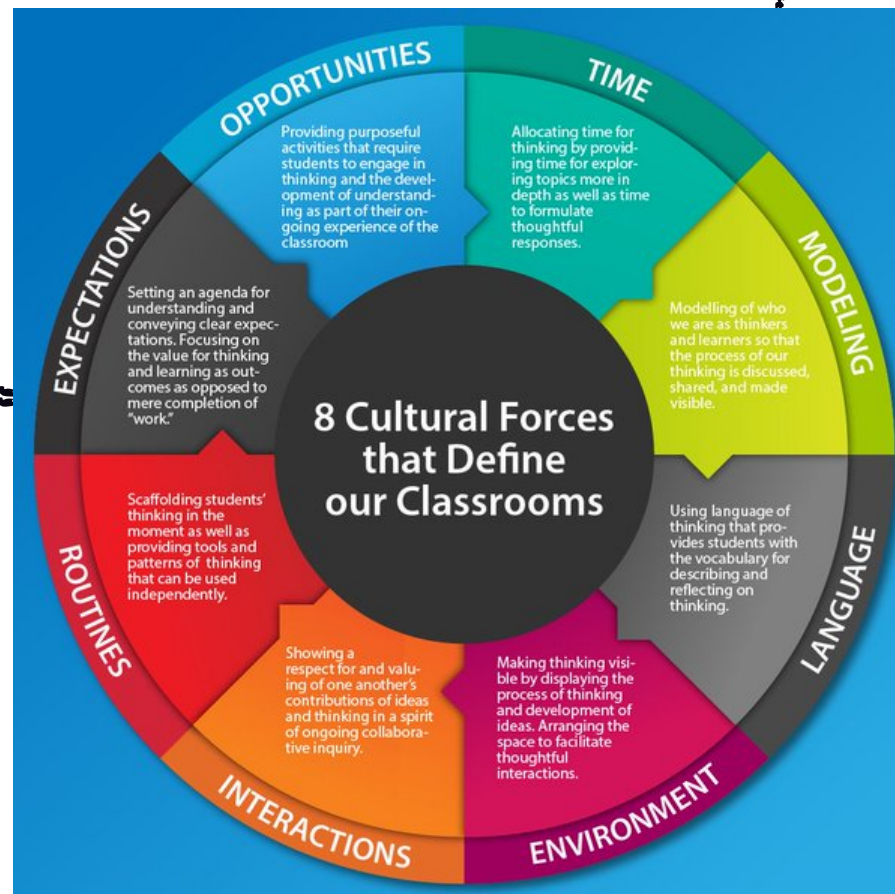
Derived from research examining the ways teachers developed students as powerful thinkers and learners, Ron Ritchhart developed these eight cultural forces that he believes assist in the formation of a culture of thinking.

## In a Culture of Thinking:

- there is a sense of purpose to the learning.
- there is a commitment both to individual and whole group learning.
- students are engaged due to the active nature of cultures of thinking.
- students are challenged.
- students have a connection to their learning.
- equity is paramount and community is valued.

## If we apply a Culture of Thinking to an Australian school context we must ensure that:

- there are meaningful connections for all students to Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander content.
- all students are engaged in learning that allows an Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander perspective to be meaningfully explored.
- Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander students are challenged and presented with purposeful learning that meets their individual needs.
- the classroom culture is equitable for all students allowing Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander students to be part of a community built on respect, relationship and reconciliation.
- there is a commitment to the ongoing learning of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander students.
- there is a recognition of Australia's Indigenous culture as part of our nation's history, present and future.



PZ PROJECT ZERO | Cultures of Thinking | [pz.harvard.edu/projects/cultures-of-thinking](http://pz.harvard.edu/projects/cultures-of-thinking)

Ron Ritchhart writes, "At its best, a culture of thinking lifts up individuals to achieve heights that he or she could not reach alone." This should apply to ALL our students and should lift Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders up to new heights as learners and thinkers too.



**OPPORTUNITIES** - This force is about creating powerful learning opportunities for *all* students focussing on what is potentially compelling for the learners. These are opportunities that engage learners, challenge misconceptions, delve deeply into content, explore, and create meaning.

For Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander students these opportunities could:

- connect learning to local values, needs and knowledge.
- engage with the living landscape, ecology and place.
- approach learning through personal narrative and storytelling.
- engage local elders and community members.

These opportunities could also include:

- the choice of Indigenous texts, novels, or plays that allow meaningful connections to our Indigenous story eg. *The Secret River*, *The Rabbits*.
- responding, delving and exploring our Australian story from an Indigenous perspective to challenge student thinking.
- PBL that centres on reconciliation, relationship and respect within the local community.
- the use of Indigenous traditions such as art, dance and music as a way to explore content and express meaning.

**MODELLING** - Modelling is integral to effective teaching of respect, reconciliation and relationships within the classroom. "Adult models surround students and make real a world that they may choose to enter or reject." (Richhart, 2015).

We as teachers must model respect for Indigenous content, perspectives and culture. This allows students to undertake a 'dispositional apprenticeship' where they learn from our traits, characteristics and values as dedicated learners and thinkers. This also applies to our entire institutions. Acknowledging the traditional owners of the land, flying the Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander flag, and writing Indigenous content into programs can all model this respect.

Developing a 'cognitive apprenticeship' with Indigenous students would be highly beneficial. This involves modelling thinking, problem solving, making decisions and a love for learning. This can be achieved by speaking through strategies out loud when problem solving or making thinking visible through the use of routines. It would also be more effective if those modelling the cognitive processes could be from the Indigenous community. Inviting elders, community members and older Indigenous students into the classroom could effectively achieve this. Storytelling and narrative could also be manipulated as an effective tool to model visible thinking to Indigenous students.

**ROUTINES** - "Routines help minimise confusion, reduce uncertainty, and direct activity along known paths" (Richhart, 2015). Routines function at different levels - a) as tools to accomplish something, b) as structures that direct and guide actions, and c) as familiar patterns of behaviour. The presence of routines in the classroom can assist Indigenous students to settle into a 'community of practice'. When students know what to expect, in their interaction with others, thinking, instruction and behaviour, they feel supported in their learning and personal growth.

Many visible thinking routines marry with the eight Aboriginal ways of knowing. The routines assist in picturing pathways of knowledge through images and visuals, joining ideas together to create new knowledge and use symbols and images. Eg. *Colour, Symbol, Image; Connect, Extend, Challenge; Peel The Fruit; Compass Points*.

Routines can also lend themselves to exploring Indigenous perspectives for all students. Eg. *Circle of Viewpoints and Step Inside*. Adding an Indigenous view to all topics leads to relationship, respect and reconciliation. Truth routines could also be a way to open discussion about Aboriginal content, clarifying claims and identify truth.

**ENVIRONMENT** - This cultural force involves creating an environment which inspires learning, encourages interactions and develops thinking. It would make sense in this area to extend the classroom environment to include outdoor learning zones. Extending learning outdoors, either in the school grounds or beyond, may allow for greater application of Indigenous teaching strategies. "Aboriginal pedagogies are intensely ecological, place-based and drawn from the living landscape within a framework of profound ancestral and personal relationships with place" (Marker 2006).

Within the classroom environment students would benefit from:

- various learning zones - These could be themed around nature or landscape. Eg. Many modern classrooms have spaces labelled the waterhole, campfire etc.
- validation of Indigenous perspectives and input by increased visibility of Indigenous materials, symbols and images. The Council of Catholic School Parents have a number of posters promoting Aboriginal Education for use in your classroom. Visit - <http://www.ccsp.catholic.edu.au/atsi-resources>
- spaces that promote comfort and calm through use of natural lighting and colours.

**EXPECTATIONS** - This cultural force is about shaping mindsets. High expectations = High Outcomes. Richard (2015) defines 5 belief sets for expectations.

1. *Focusing on students learning vs work* - Teachers can do this by building in individual choices, allowing students to direct the pathway of investigation and by highlighting the learning students can gain from completing the task. This can empower Indigenous students and nurture a love of learning.
2. *Teaching for understanding vs knowledge* - Teachers can focus the curriculum around big, generative ideas and develop understanding goals. This aligns with the Aboriginal way of knowing 'Deconstruct / Reconstruct'. Teachers also need to provide ongoing feedback throughout the process that can assist students to improve their performance.
3. *Encourage deep vs surface learning strategies* - Teachers need to assess the relevance of the learning for Indigenous students. This could be achieved by encouraging community links and developing tasks that could be applied for community benefit.
4. *Encouraging independence vs dependence* - In our classrooms we need to build in opportunities for independence and encourage this quality in our students. For Indigenous students that find this challenging, teachers could develop individual independence goals with the student and/or use social stories for independent cueing.
5. *Developing a growth vs a fixed mindset* - Acknowledging personal growth and learning rather than failure or success is important for all students. Teachers need to change the way they feedback to Indigenous students acknowledging their approach to learning rather than the outcome.

**TIME** - Ron Richhart (2015) writes "*Our allocation of periods of time reflect our values. Our choices, even if we are not happy with them, are sending messages to our students about what is deemed important and worthwhile in the classroom.*" How much time do we truly give to Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander content and perspective? Is it in a passing moment? It is in one unit of work? Or does it claim some time in our classroom every day?

- We need to take the time to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land.
- We need to allocate time in our scope and sequence for meaningful learning centred around Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander specific content.
- We need to ensure we designate an appropriate amount of our professional learning time to fully understand Indigenous ways of knowing and learning and expand our knowledge on Indigenous culture and history.
- We need to designate classroom time to develop students cultural awareness and build a community of respect, relationship and reconciliation.

**INTERACTIONS** - This relates to interactions between student & teacher, student & student, teacher & teacher, and parent & teacher. In the context of Indigenous learning it could also denote the interactions between the school and the local Indigenous community. Richhart (2015) notes that these interactions define the emotional climate, tone, or ethos of place.

Indigenous students within in our classrooms, like all our students, must feel equally valued and respected. We must show an interest in and a respect for their way of thinking and knowing. We can do this by creating new patterns for discourse including the development of non-verbal ways of communicating. Wheaton (2006) writes that 'Aboriginal learners test knowledge non-verbally through experience, introspection and practice'. Providing roles in group work where they can contribute in this manner may be effective in developing positive interactions.

Teachers also need to be mindful of cultural behaviours when interacting with Indigenous students. For example, Indigenous students may avoid direct eye-contact with adults as it is considered disrespectful or may reluctant to answer questions as the traditional way of learning has been through storytelling.

**LANGUAGE** - "*The system of communication used by community to negotiate shared meaning and build group coherence and understanding around ideas, behaviours and actions.*" (Richhart, 2015). Language is a powerful cultural force that could be used to make connections, shape thought and develop a sense of self for Indigenous students.

Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander students would benefit from:

- The use of local Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander languages in the classroom where possible (Access <http://www.fatsilc.org.au/languages/fatsilc-protocols-guide> for additional resources in this area)
- Shifting from questions to statements. This stems from Aboriginal culture being passed on through storytelling, not through questions and answers. It also triggers deeper thinking for all students.
- The use of a language of community encouraging thinking and learning from the whole class. Eg. "We're going to identify connections in this passage".
- A language of identity addressing all students as mathematicians, historians, scientists etc. to lift expectations.
- Provide specific, descriptive and informative feedback rather than general praise.
- Listen whole-heartedly to the Indigenous students within your class. "*When someone receives us with open-hearted, non-judging, intensely interested listening, our spirits expand*" (Rao, 2010).

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