



**ABORIGINAL
EARLY CHILDHOOD
CULTURAL
PROTOCOLS**

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TERMINOLOGY

Protocol

The values and protocols outlined in this document are for appropriate recognition, respect, and courtesies to be extended by staff to Koorie children in the early childhood education sector. These protocols are also intended to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from other parts of Australia, now living in Victoria.

Koorie

Koorie is a term for Aboriginal people, whose traditional lands and waters exist within the boundaries that today frame the state of Victoria. They are often collectively called Koorie peoples or Koories (some–times spelt ‘Koori’).

Other terms that are used for Australian Indigenous people include ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Indigenous’, ‘First Nations Peoples’, or for Indigenous people traditionally from the Torres Strait region ‘Torres Strait Islander’ to ‘Islander’. When referring to Australia’s First Peoples, upper case or capital ‘A’ and capital ‘I’ are used for Aboriginal and Indigenous Australians respectively.

The best way to find out which terms to use when referring to the local community is to listen to Koorie community members themselves, and hear what term they use to describe themselves culturally.

Country

Country refers to the traditional lands of a particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island language or cultural group. This is commonly seen and heard in phrases such as ‘Welcome to Country’ and ‘Acknowledgement of Country’, “I grew up on Country”, “We’re taking students and families back to Country for language and culture workshops”. Sometimes the name of the clan or nation may differ from the language they speak.

When talking about Country, people may also talk about Nation/s. Nations refers to a larger grouping or federation of clan groups, often combining a cluster of geographically, socially, politically and/or linguistically linked groups.

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation focused on advocating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities by providing advice to Government on Koorie education and training priorities. VAEAI was established in 1976 as a peak state advocacy and advisory body for Koorie education and training that through the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, enables Koorie Communities to have a voice in the development of education policy and programs at all levels of education, from early childhood, to compulsory schooling and on to post-compulsory education. It delivers policy and strategic development through Local, State, and National partnerships.

The Koorie community has an invaluable role in contributing to education today and into the future by imparting unique cultural knowledge and heritage to the broader community. Valuing Koorie culture and heritage in the Victorian education sector is an important step in the processes of reconciliation and self-determination.

VAEAI has produced this guide, 'Protocols for Koorie education in Victorian Early Childhood Centres' in response to requests for guidance on appropriate protocols for centres to follow when seeking to provide a welcoming educational environment for Victoria's Koorie communities and for working respectfully with them to enrich the early childhood experience. By incorporating the Protocols into their centres the centres will be culturally inclusive leading to better engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and a richer experience for the children.

This document has been discussed and authorised by VAEAI and representatives from Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECG's), the vehicles through which Koorie parents, carers and community members have a voice in education in Victoria. They represent local Koorie community perspectives and have Statewide coverage.

These protocols outline the foundational principles, procedures and behaviours requested of the early childhood education sector in Victoria in order to demonstrate respect to Koorie communities in Victoria.

These protocols don't override the discrete cultural values and practices in local Koorie communities. It is important that the protocols are discussed and refined in the context of building relationships and a working partnership between VAEAI's LAECGs and local early childhood centres, in order to develop appropriate local practices for sound school-community partnerships of the various kinds required for positive and progressive school practice.

These protocols include knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture, respect and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, reflection, research, and relationship building.

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

At State and Commonwealth levels there is heightened awareness of the importance of ensuring social inclusion. Social inclusion requires the accomplishment of social participation and social integration. Education is seen as key to the progress of social inclusion, because education offers a means of redressing social exclusion. This is because education provides pathways to enhancing levels of social inclusion through attention to overcoming communication and language barriers, to providing access to skills and knowledge, to building confidence and trust in institutions, to enhancing engagement and to effectively disseminating information.

It is vital that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture because learning about Koorie culture, history and languages fosters a high level of understanding, acceptance and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and contributions by non-Indigenous children. This is an ideal way of positively addressing reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, which cannot be achieved and maintained without the effective teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives to all students in a Koorie inclusive learning environment.

The Early Childhood Context

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are twice as likely to be more developmentally vulnerable early in life than non-Indigenous children because of the continuing impact of colonisation. Accessible and culturally safe early years care, early childhood education, and family support services are vital to address this reality and enable children's safety, development and wellbeing.

Evidence reveals that experiences in early childhood have the greatest impact on children's school readiness, educational engagement, and later health, social and well-being outcomes. Culturally strong approaches that support Aboriginal children and families to thrive from the start are the most successful approaches.

Every child should be able to see themselves, their identities and cultures reflected in the curriculum so they can fully participate in learning and build their self-esteem. As the First Peoples of this country and the world's oldest continuous living cultures, it is fundamental to cultural inclusivity to recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are different from mainstream cultures and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people occupy a unique place in Australian history and culture.

VICTORIA'S COMMITMENT TO KOORIE EDUCATION

Aboriginal people of Victoria are recognised by the Victorian Government as 'descendants of Australia's first people, with their diverse spiritual, social, cultural and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters'. The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities makes explicit reference to Indigenous culture in two parts – in the preamble, and then in the context of the right to culture [Section 19]

Aboriginal persons hold distinct cultural rights and must not be denied the right, with other members of their community -

- (a) to enjoy their identity and culture; and
- (b) to maintain and use their language; and
- (c) to maintain their kinship ties; and
- (d) to maintain their distinctive spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and waters and other resources with

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)

It is compulsory to incorporate Aboriginal content in Early Childhood Education. The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework sees learning about Aboriginal cultures and valuing the place of Aboriginal people as essential because it acknowledges Aboriginal culture as one of the four important areas of practice.

The VEYLDF is a guide for early childhood staff to work with families to support their children, and to respond to the diversity of the Victorian community. The VEYLDF specifically states that "learning about and valuing the place of Aboriginal people will enhance all Victorian children's sense of place in our community."

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, connection to country, including support identity. Family and community are valuable sources of cultural knowledge and skills for all early childhood professionals in developing cultural competence.

Early childhood settings that promote Aboriginal culture and perspectives support Aboriginal children's sense of identity and belonging, as well as promoting a culture of understanding and respect towards cultural diversity for all children.

Early childhood professionals' commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion has a significant impact on children's learning outcomes and their social and emotional wellbeing. Children's personal, family and cultural histories shape their learning and development, and children learn best when early childhood professionals respect their diversity and provide them with support, opportunities and experiences. Early childhood professionals should therefore promote cultural awareness in all children, including greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being.

The Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016 - 2026

The Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026 was launched by the Victorian Department of Education (DET). Unlike Aboriginal education strategies and plans before it, Marrung encompasses Early Years, Schooling, VET and Higher Education, and places the Koorie Community at the core of its implementation. The Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan was co-developed by DET with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.

Marrung requires all services to embed Koorie aspirations and outcomes as core business, including early childhood services, schools and training providers. In 2016, a new 10-year Aboriginal Education Plan: 'Marrung' is the Wemba Wemba word for the Murray Cypress pine tree, representing branches of education and knowledge. We thank the Wemba Wemba people for allowing the use of their language in the naming of this plan.

“The Victorian Government, through the Department of Education and Training, has worked with the Victorian Koorie community to develop Marrung. The Government has listened and has heard. Marrung sets out a 10 year vision and identifies the significant actions its achievement. From this plan there will be some ground-breaking change.”
Geraldine Atkinson, President, VAEAI

COMMONWEALTH COMMITMENT TO ABORIGINAL EDUCATION The Australian Curriculum

Within Australia, recent developments in education at the national level similarly call for greater involvement of First Peoples in education. The Australian Curriculum requires that schools incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders histories and cultures as one of three cross-curriculum priorities to be embedded across all subject areas.

To supplement the Australian Curriculum, the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has outlined new Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST), which include requirements for both the teaching of Koorie students as well as teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content to all students. The APST requires that all teachers possess specific training and experience in:

Focus area 1.4: Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

- Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Focus area 2.4: Understand and respect Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians:

- Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

Pre-service and In-service teacher training requirements

Under the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, all pre-service and in-service teachers will be required to demonstrate detailed competencies in both the teaching of Koorie students, and of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content to all students.

All in-service teachers and other practising education staff are asked to undertake professional development (PD) to ensure they have the skills and confidence to:

- teach Koorie students in a culturally-sensitive, appropriate way
- demonstrate, through example, the importance of the school environment being culturally inclusive and appropriate for Koorie students and families
- Incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives in their teachings.

Schools or teachers can seek information on PD options from the Learning and Teaching Division, DET Central Office, or the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT).

All pre-service teachers currently studying at university are asked to develop the skills necessary to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies in the classroom, and specifically, to learn to teach Koorie students in an effective, appropriate, culturally-sensitive way.



VALUES FOR KOORIE CHILDREN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION SERVICES

Every Koorie child in Victoria is precious. We honour Koorie children enrolled in our centre, a commitment that starts in early childhood and continues throughout life.

Core values nurture and aspiration

- To nurture each and all Koorie children as they grow to become custodians and protectors in their communities of their unique heritage, and contribute this special heritage to the whole Victorian community; and
- To provide education and training services and pathways which will wholly meet their aspirations for success in their own lives and families.

Strategy and actions recommended by Koorie communities:

- Child-centred, and individual-focused self-determination in policy and in action
- Family oriented and success oriented in policy and in action from early childhood onwards
- Unapologetically proactive practice in addressing 'closing the gap', for vulnerable children, where the data shows a continuing gap in participation and outcomes between Koorie Victorians and other Victorians – no gap is acceptable in today's world
- Respectful of gender.

Aspects of teaching Koorie students may extend into traditional, and sacred gender-held business, sometimes referred to as 'women's business' or 'men's business' and need to be respected as such. If there is any confusion or question about whether some curriculum content has a gender focus, teachers are advised to consult with their local LAECG or VAEAI, or check with their region's Koorie Education Coordinator.



PROTOCOLS FOR ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN KOORIE COMMUNITIES AND CENTRES

Any engagement between a centre and the Koorie community in Victoria should be guided by the following principles.

Respectful communication

In Victoria, Elders and other respected people from our communities are often heard referred to as 'Aunty' or 'Uncle'. These titles are a respectful recognition of an Elder's or respected person's role in their community. At the same time, 'Aunty' or 'Uncle' is also used for relatives who are direct aunts or uncles.

'Aunty' or 'Uncle' is also used informally across Koorie extended families to show respect for generational seniority; for example extension of aunty or uncle title sometimes to cousins who are of an older generation, or in other roles commanding intergenerational respect within the community, for example Koorie childcare workers being called aunty or uncle by the children in their care.

'Aunty' or 'Uncle' is also used by some non-Aboriginal people to show respect which is a little differently because they are not Koorie community members. However, it is recommended that a non-Indigenous person should refrain from using the 'Aunty' or 'Uncle' title in one-on-one communication unless the Elder or respected person has invited them to use the 'Aunty' or 'Uncle' title, or another Koorie community member has recommended this use of 'Aunty' or 'Uncle'.

Respectful partnerships between Koorie communities and centres

There are two main types of partnerships between our Koorie communities and centres:

1. Partnerships for the successful education of each Koorie child
2. Partnerships for embedding and delivering learning about local Koorie histories and heritage, culture and perspectives across the Victorian Curriculum, for all Victorian children.

Both types of partnership, to be delivered respectfully and appropriately, must be guided by the Koorie community.

Partnerships require clear roles between the centre and local Koorie community and the appropriate, precise defining of roles of members of the community and centre staff.

Local Protocols for When Engaging with VAEAI & LAECGS

Within a context of self-determination centres, must understand that non-Indigenous people cannot know, determine and direct what is appropriate for Koories. Therefore a set of local and state level protocols for the delivery of education and training services have been developed in VAEAI partnering with the Koorie community through Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs).

1. The LAECGs
 - Are made up of local Koorie community members who volunteer their time because they want to see better outcomes for our people through education and training.
 - Are recognised as the primary source of advice on education and training matters at the local level.
 - Participate as equal partners in the planning, development, operation, monitoring and evaluation of local education programs containing Koorie content.
2. Central and Regional DET staff will ensure that they work together with VAEAI and its LAECGs to implement the partnership.
3. Any provision of education services involving Koorie children or Koorie curriculum should be done in consultation with the appropriate LAECG/s in the region.
4. In locations where there is no active LAECG, or the LAECG is unavailable to assist, schools and education providers are encouraged to seek advice and assistance from VAEAI .

Protocol for People Approaching Schools to Offer Services to Koorie Families

From time to time there are approaches to centres by organisations or individuals wanting to access Koorie families directly to promote and engage them in various Indigenous projects or programs, including research projects.

We ask that these approaches be redirected promptly to the local LAECG, and/or VAEAI, who will consider the offered project or program after a presentation is made to them. The VAEAI Secretariat (based in Northcote) is also able to be involved in this process where needed, on behalf of the local Koorie community.

After the LAECG liaise, they can advise the centre/s of the families view on the offer; and where agreed families can be then contacted for them to consider taking up the offer.

VAEAI can help direct schools to their LAECG where needed, assist directly in regions where there is no LAECG and/or be part of the consultation process where the LAECG is unavailable or unable to assist.

This protocol places an appropriate buffer and screening process for unexpected approaches from centres that may be inappropriate for Koorie families.

Protocol for Teaching Koorie Content

Local Koorie cultural and historical content should be a priority focus and tapped into wherever possible and appropriate, following a Koorie community-preferred education model which focuses at the local level first (ask your- self whose land or Country the school is situated on), followed by regional, state, national and international indigenous perspectives.

Centres need to appreciate and acknowledge that this local content may not be representative of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the centre whose families may have moved to the area from other parts of the state or country. It is therefore also important to include material about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and histories from other regions of the state, and parts of the country. It is best practice to identify where each teaching resource comes from, for example “this is a creation story told by the Gunditjmara people of south-west Victoria” or “we’re about to watch a dance performed by Yolngu women from East Arnhem Land.”

In Victorian schools, protocols for teaching and interacting with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students from outside of Victoria do not differ from those for Victorian Koorie students and families.

It is important for schools to acknowledge and respect the distinct Country, culture and history of any Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individual, whether they are from Victoria or elsewhere in Australia.

Eurocentrism

Eurocentrism is seeing the world from a European perspective, denying the perspectives and experiences of non-Europeans.

Reconciliation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples requires that schools and teachers commit to ensure eurocentrism is not alive in curriculum as it can foster or nurture serious inaccuracies and biases that inhibit reconciliation and can lead to racist beliefs. For example, accurate understanding and teaching of Australia’s history should be founded upon Australia’s complex, ancient Indigenous cultural history, not on recent examples in the last 200 years of Europeans discovering aspects of Australia that have been well known by our First Peoples for tens of thousands of years.

For example:

‘Lawrence Hargraves discovered gold in New South Wales’ – WRONG ‘Lawrence Hargraves was the first European to have his finding of gold, on Wiradjuri land, made public’

In the first statement, the facts that the ‘discovery’ was on Wiradjuri land and that Wiradjuri people knew of gold long before, are left out rendering the teaching Eurocentric. The second statement is more factually enriched and correct by incorporating an Aboriginal perspective in the teaching.

Koorie English

Understand that some Koorie children speak Koorie English. Koorie English is a dialect of English that has evolved from traditional Aboriginal languages. Because language is culture, it contains the culture of Aboriginal people in various parts of Australia. There is a resource on the Fuse website (fuse.education.vic.gov.au) called the Koorie English Teacher Guidance Package that gives a very good overview about Koorie English.

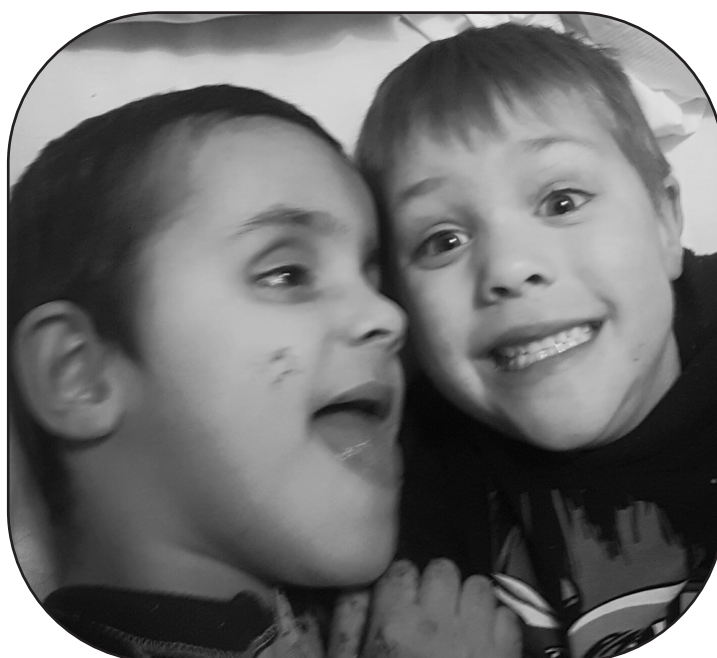
Don't correct a Koorie child's language. Correction of the child's language assumes it is a deficit model and makes the child feel that the 'mother tongue' they bring with them to the centre is not a legitimate language. This can lead to a child being confused about their language and not wanting to come to the centre.

It is common in Victoria for some Koorie students to speak amongst their families and communities in what is known as Koorie English, which is a distinct Australian English dialect that incorporates Koorie specific phrasing, idioms, forms of address and humour.

In 2012, VAEAI undertook research into the role and importance of Koorie English for Victorian Koorie students, and in particular code-switching.

"Code-switching refers to a person's ability to move back and forth between two languages or dialects depending on who they are speaking to and in what context. Code-switching is also a skill that people of multi-cultural and bi-lingual backgrounds have long recognised as necessary for success within mainstream education and employment.

Koorie students often attain code-switching skills naturally, as they switch from speaking Koorie English in the home and amongst family and peers, to Standard Australian English (SAE) in the classroom and more formal environments. When this skill is encouraged, Koorie students are able to gain a full grasp of the SAE required for academic achievement, while maintaining a strong cultural identity through the geographical and kinship linkages associated with their home language.



Protocols for Involving Koorie Speakers

In light of increased expectations and requirements of schools with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, as outlined in the Australian Curriculum, we can expect a greater role for Koorie community members within their local centres. Koorie community members are best placed to share cultural knowledge and expertise with centres, and presentations by local Koorie people should be incorporated into centre curriculum and events.

When inviting a local member of our community to share their knowledge, the centre should:

- Ask the LAECG to nominate a community representative/s, or if an individual has already been recommended advise the LAECG, and ensure the LAECG that the guest speaker will be treated with care and respect
- Arrange to spend time with the guest speaker before the class event, to discuss the plan, especially to check if there are any sensitivity issues, and to build trust
- Discuss any fees and reimbursement costs and plan accordingly
- Arrange any travel and transport requirements for the guest speaker if they need it
- Encourage the guest speaker to bring a family member or friend with them for support, especially if there is any concern about coming to the school alone
- Discuss any assistance needed or difficulties such as wheelchair access or no stairs (low steps)
- Provide a welcoming, informal setting for the guest speaker (eg. in a classroom have chairs in a circle)
- Ensure students know the title and name of the guest speaker they must use to show respect
- Ensure the guest speaker knows that they do not need to discuss anything, or answer any questions, that they are not comfortable with and should the session become unexpectedly uncomfortable for them then they have free choice to withdraw from it
- Ensure the guest speaker knows that the teacher and school will not condone any student misbehavior, and should any occur, that the teacher responds immediately.

RESEARCH

In order to have a knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture and Torres Islander cultures you need to conduct research and speak to your LAECG. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the traditional owners of Australia and have the oldest living culture in the world. It is a dynamic culture that is based on a strong spirituality through the 'Dreamtime or Dreaming' that impacted everyday life. It included a very cohesive kinship with structure, many different nations with their own languages and a complex social system.

Conduct your own research to build up your knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture. There are many resources that have been written that are a positive portrayal of Aboriginal people and their cultures.

- **Gain new knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people.**
If you find that you do have negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Island people, change the way you think by learning the truth about their cultures.
- **Recognise that Koorie children have a strong cultural background.**
Do this by finding out contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Ask yourself the following questions: where are Aboriginal people living today? What is their culture? Do they still identify strongly as a people? What are issues that impact on communities today?
- **Recognise that Koorie identity is not based on the colour of a child's skin.**
Identity is very important for Aboriginal children. There is a common stereotype that is perpetuated by the wider community through the media that Aboriginal people have to be a certain colour to identify as Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander. This is not true and very hurtful. So don't use terms such as 'part Aboriginal' as this is based on the racist terminology that some Aboriginal people are half-castes. These terms go back to the early days of colonisation when Aboriginal people were classified as 'natives' based on blood quantum (the amount of Aboriginal blood a person had) hence the term full blood.
- **Use local Aboriginal words when possible**
You can check with the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) to make sure you have permission and that you're using the right words.

REFLECT

As a teacher have a time of personal reflection. We all have attitudes about different cultures and sometimes these attitudes are not positive and many are not based on fact. Our attitudes impact on the way we teach children from different cultural groups. Attitudinal change is not easy to achieve but it starts with reflection.

- **Examine your attitudes to Aboriginal people.**
Examine stereotypes (if any) you have about Aboriginal people and think about where these attitudes come from. Question whether they come from the media, family, other people's opinions, or books.
- **Change any stereotypes you have.**
Challenge yourself to change attitudes you may have that are not based on fact. Do this by finding out the truth and dissecting any beliefs that are not factual.

RESPECT AND VALUE

Respect for Koorie culture comes by valuing it. Understand that Koorie culture is the culture of this land and as such is of great value because it teaches about how to look after country and how to value country. Country is very important to culture, therefore acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the country where the centre is located.

- **Acknowledgement and Welcome to Country**
Pre-colonisation, Australia was not made up of one country, but rather many Countries and Nations (approximately 200+) with each Country or Nation having their own language, lore, traditions, customs, stories, song lines, art, dance, and ecosystems. For Aboriginal people, the concept of Country goes beyond boundaries that outline a certain area of land, because the meaning of Country is more than just connection to the land through ownership. It is the recognition that the land is the 'mother'.

Professor Mick Dodson
"When we talk about traditional 'Country'...we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians...we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a place on the map. For us, Country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains. While they may all no longer necessarily be the titleholders to land, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are still connected to the Country of their ancestors and most consider themselves the custodians or caretakers of their land."

- **Why is it important to Acknowledge Country and/or to be welcomed on Country?**
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced significant exclusion from Australian society for many years. At the same time, many non-Indigenous Australians have not had the opportunity to learn about, and celebrate, the rich cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This contributes to a disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians that persists today. Acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during events is one way of ending this exclusion. It recognises the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first people of this land and promotes awareness of the history and culture of Indigenous people.
- **Protocols for having a 'Welcome to Country' or Acknowledgement of Country'**

Welcome to Country

You could have a formal Welcome to Country at the opening of your centre, your graduation, or at an important event, for example, if you were opening a new bush tucker garden. You can invite a local Traditional Owner to come and give a Welcome to Country and do a smoking ceremony.

An official 'Welcome to Country' can only be provided by a member of the Traditional Owner group from the Country where the event is taking place and is performed on ceremonial and other significant occasions to follow traditional protocols and show appropriate respect. The right to welcome people on one's land is an inviolable right. Welcome to Country therefore is a fundamental and traditional practice and should be included in all formal occasions to honour First Nations peoples, to demonstrate a genuine respect for Koorie culture, and traditional practices.

Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country can be less formal and can be given by any member of the community, Indigenous and non-indigenous, who wishes to pay their respects to the Traditional Owners of the land on which the event or meeting is taking place.

An example of an Acknowledgement of Country

"I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of this land, the [insert local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island Nation]. I would like to pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are here today."

It is important to try to find out the name of the Aboriginal Nation you wish to acknowledge. You can refer to the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation of Languages Map or get in contact with your local Aboriginal organisation/Co-operative.

HOW TO INCORPORATE A WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY IN YOUR CENTRE

- **Acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of the land.**
Teach the children that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the first peoples of the land and about their cultural practices. Display the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation of Language map that shows the different language groups and their country in Victoria. This is a great tool to not only teach gratitude and mindfulness but also to incorporate and embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and perspectives into your service.
- **Using acknowledgement in everyday situations**
In more everyday situations, you could also adapt the language of 'Acknowledgment of Country' to make it something that is understandable and relatable for the children. For example, during circle time the children could acknowledge, say hello to, or thank (for example) The local Traditional Owners, the land, the sky, their teachers, family and their friends.
- Display an 'Acknowledgement of Country' plaque at the entrance of the centre, and teach the children who the local custodians are, and display information about them such as local significant site, stories and/or Elders.



OTHER ACTIVITIES

- **Plant an Indigenous/bush/garden**
Teach the children about the plants and traditional ways of using them. Some of the Australian Indigenous plants include the Australian daisy (Brachyscome), Banksia. Banksias), Bird's nest fern (Asplenium australasicum) and Bottlebrush (Callistemon).
- **Display Aboriginal signage, photos and artwork in your centre.**
Display the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags in the centre, Koorie artwork, photos of significant Koorie leaders such as William Cooper and Sir Pastor Doug Nicholls and photos of contemporary Aboriginal sporting heroes such as Ashleigh Barty and Adam Goodes.
- **Use Koorie resources in the everyday learning curriculum.**
Read Koorie stories to all the children. Use Koorie resources in your teaching ie when teaching English, use Koorie books such as 'The Adventures of the Little Black Trackas'. There are repetitive English words in these books that can be used to teach English such as 'can you find', a phrase that is repeated in 'the first book in the series, 'The Adventures of the Little Black Trackas: Yedabila'. These books are based on Aboriginal culture ie: tracking animals.
- **Dance and movement**
Organise for Koorie dancers, artists and musicians to visit your kindergarten to teach the children corroboree, art and Aboriginal music. Decorate the children's faces with body paint and teach them how the paint relates to the dance.
- **Play Koorie games**
Teach the children traditional Koorie games such as string games, Marngrook with a possum skin ball, and hunting games. You can find out more about these games on the internet.
- **Acknowledge and celebrate significant Koorie cultural events.**
Ensure that the whole centre celebrates significant Koorie events, such as NAIDOC week, SORRY DAY, the Indigenous AFL round, Reconciliation Week, MABO DAY, and, the National Apology to the Stolen Generations. Ask an Aboriginal Elder or someone from the local Aboriginal community to can come to the centre and explain the significance of these events and to participate in activities with the children.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Don't expect parents to engage with you until you have built a relationship with them. Aboriginal people are a relationship people and because of the terrible history of the relationship between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people in Australia since 1788, such as massacres and the stolen generations, there is a lot of mistrust and suspicion. This means that sometimes it may take time to build a relationship with Aboriginal parents. Be prepared for this to happen. Invite parents to come into the centre. Make them feel that their children will receive the same love and support from the staff at the centre that they give them. This will most likely be the first time their child will be away from their family since birth, so make sure you are sensitive to this.

Kinship

Traditionally Aboriginal people had a classificatory kinship structure where everyone in the Nations were classified as kin. In many ways this kinship structure still exists whereby there are many people in the communities who are classified as kin. In some cases the number of people classified as close kin can number over 500 people. Aboriginal people don't just call their own Aunties and Uncles by this term but also Elders in the community who they admire. So an Aboriginal child could call you Aunty or Uncle when talking to you or asking for things as a mark of respect. Play a kinship game where every child in the centre is given a kinship relationship to each other and talk to them about how the kinship operated in traditional Aboriginal culture.

Building relationships with Koorie parents and the Koorie community

Introductory protocols are important. Be prepared to spend time sharing personal background information about yourself and the purpose of your activity. Realise that relationships take time to develop.

Be patient when asking questions. Look, listen and learn, as it may take time for some community people to become involved. Some people may work towards giving their opinions by initially talking about other issues or stories.

Do not expect every Koorie person (including children at your service) to know about or want to talk publicly about Koorie cultures, families, histories or issues.

Some Koorie people might not openly express an opinion. They may choose to talk indirectly about an issue if they do not agree with the previous speaker. And not all Koorie people will share the same opinions and feelings. Different opinions should be acknowledged and valued.

The use of silence should not be misunderstood.... It is important that this silence is respected and not interrupted unnecessarily.

There are different types of knowledge – for example, spiritual knowledge and scientific knowledge – and these may conflict. Educators should be sensitive to these differences when talking to a Koorie person about issues and experiences.

Do not force a point of view.

Use language that respects the integrity and beliefs of the person or group with whom you're meeting. Be prepared to accept that some questions you have may remain unanswered.

Family obligations and funerals affect many people in Koorie and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and may impact on previous obligations made to an education setting (kinder/school). Immediate and extended family obligations will always take first priority.

Remember that different families have different values and cultural beliefs, even if they are from the same community. Consult with a variety of people from the local community.

- **Be positive about the children.**
Aboriginal parents want to hear positive messages about their children. Don't concentrate on any deficit educational achievements the child may have, but rather concentrate on the positive outcomes of the child. Tell the parents how the children's day was and how happy they were so the parents feel comfortable to bring them back.
- **Use words that Aboriginal children understand**
Use words such as "deadly", "mad" and "mob" because the children hear them from their parents and family members. Using words that are familiar to them will help them to enjoy their experience.
- **Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan.**
Work with your local Koorie community to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This does not have to be a large document that has many different actions. No matter where your organisation, school or club is at on its reconciliation journey, there is a RAP to suit. Schools and early learning Centres can develop a RAP through Narragunnawali. Workplaces can be supported to develop four types of RAP – Reflect, Innovate, Stretch or Elevate.

PREPARATION FOR SCHOOL

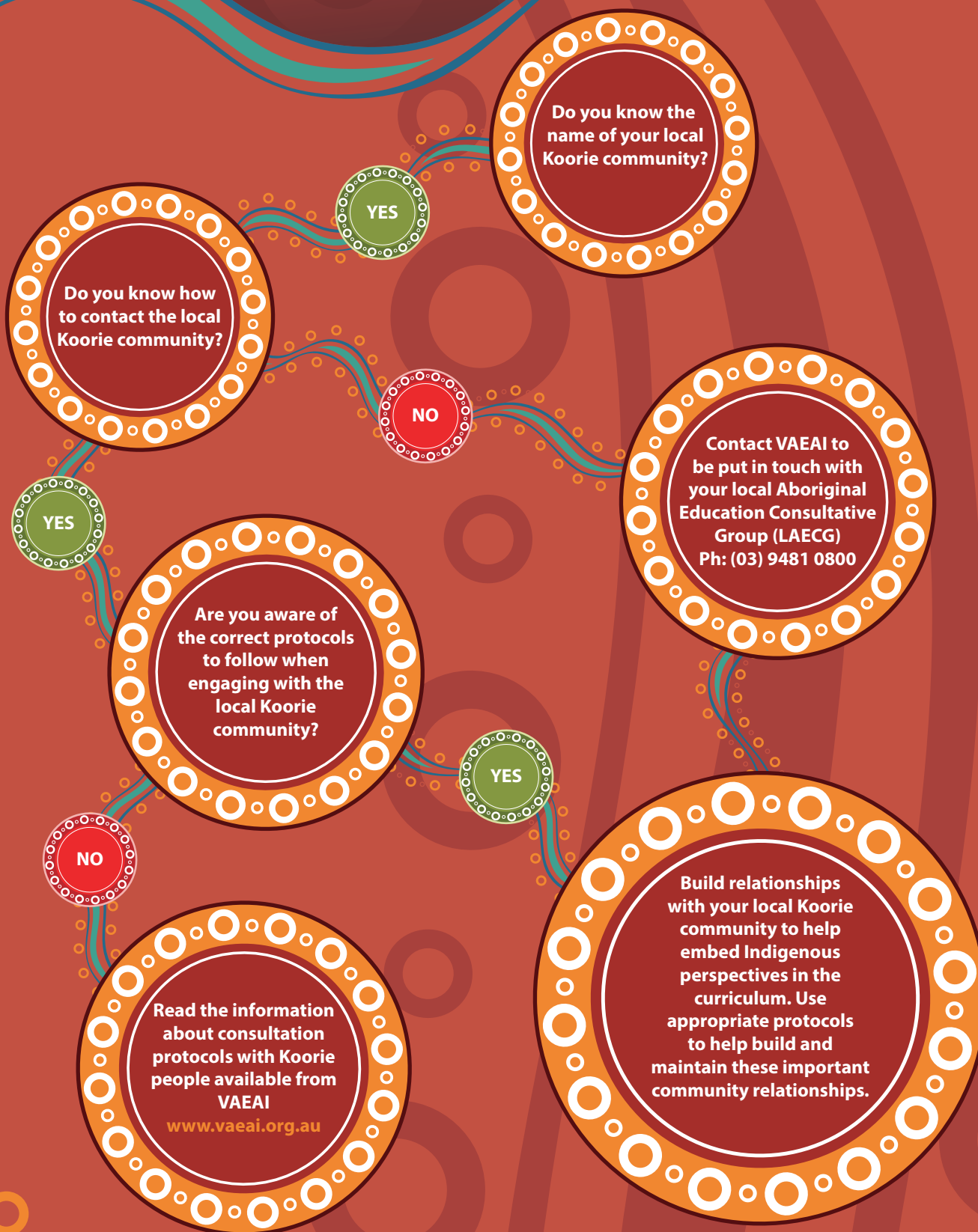
The transition to school can be very difficult for many children, but particularly those from different cultural backgrounds such as Koorie children. It is imperative that Early Childhood Centres develop strategies to support the transition to school for Koorie children.

- **Acknowledge and support engagement with Koorie children's families**
Families are very important in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, so it is fundamental to engage with the families, seeking their guidance on how best to support and respond to the needs of their children as they transition to school. Recognise that this might include a wider group of people beyond the immediate family because of the Aboriginal kinship system.
- **Ensure that family members know where their children will attend school.**
Give the parents opportunity to go to the school prior to their child starting. Invite them to go into the classroom and speak to the teachers before their children attend school.
- **Communicate with the parents about their child's transition to school**
Oral communication may be preferred to written communication when engaging with Koorie children and their families, so speak to the parents about the transition.



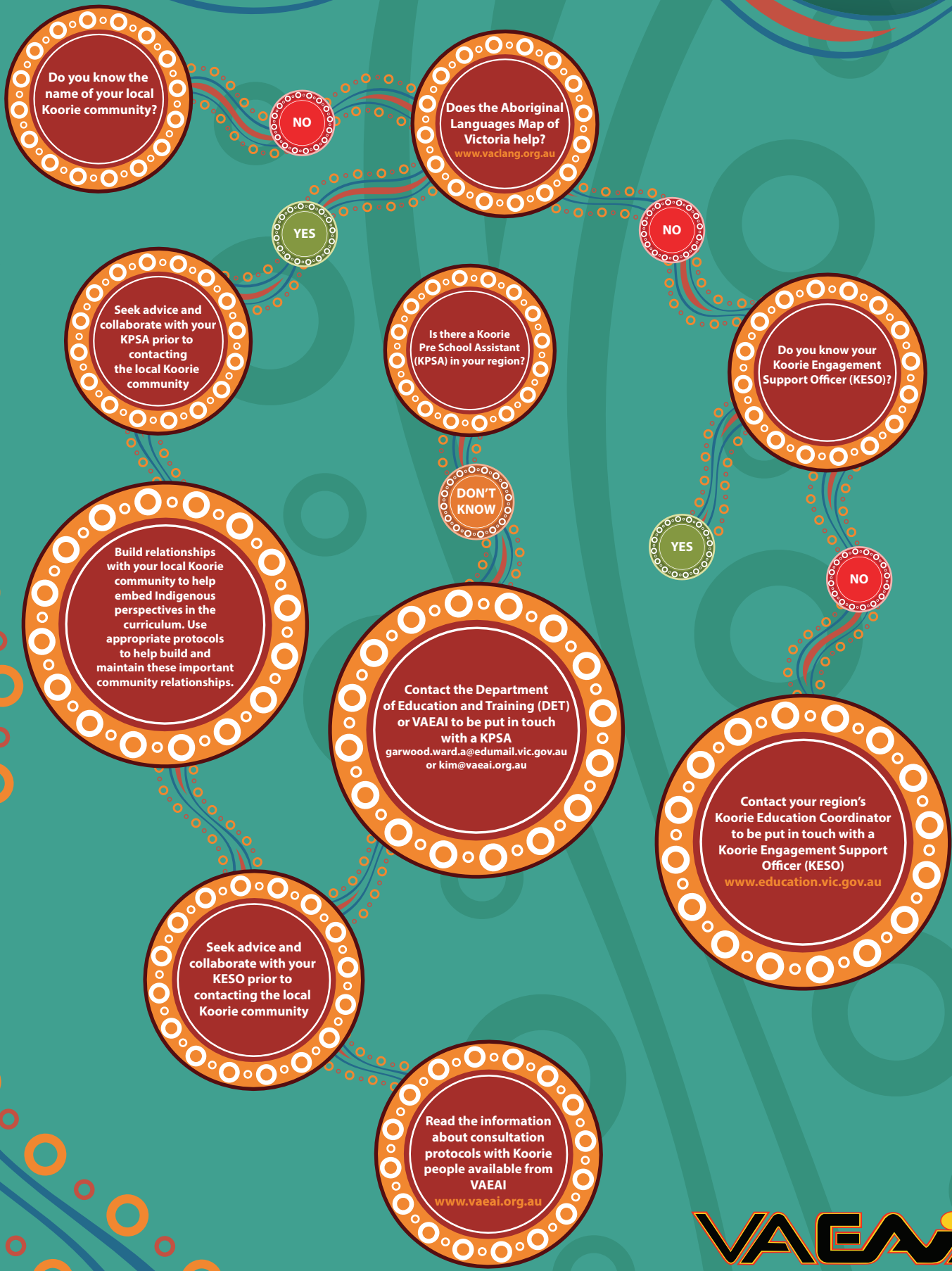
Building Relationships

with Local Koorie Communities for Early Years Services



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REFERENCES

Protocols for Koorie Education in Victorian Primary and Secondary Schools:
www.vaeai.org.au

Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity:
www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/govrel/Policy/culturediversityplan.pdf

Human Rights Commission:
humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au

Victorian Early Years Development Framework:
www.education.vic.gov.au/.../childhood/providers/edcare/veyldframework.pdf
(<https://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlylearning/evi-equitydiversity.pdf>)
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veyldframework.pdf> p.12

The Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan (2016-2026):
www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/aboriginal/Pages/marrung.aspx

Information about LAECG's and VAEAI:
www.vaeai.org.au/support/dsp-default.cfm?loadref=26

VAEAI Secretariat can be accessed on (03) 9481 0800

Koorie English Teacher Guidance Package:
<https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au>

Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VAACL)
vaclang.org.au

Little Black Tracka kits available from merlehall@hotmail.com or Neenann on 0400 013 944

Traditional Aboriginal games and activities:
www.creativespirits.info-sport

Indigenous Traditional Games:
<https://sport.nsw.gov.au-clubs-tig>

Reconciliation Australia to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan:
www.narragunnawali.org.au/

