Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in kindergarten
July 2005
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Foreword

I’m very pleased to be able to support the Koorie Kindergarten Inclusion Kit and to promote inclusive kindergarten services for children and their families. The Government’s social action plan, A Fairer Victoria, launched in April this year sets out a new framework to improve services and make Victoria a better place to live for all Victorians.

As the Minister for Children, I am ensuring that our children take centre place in the Government’s plans for Victoria’s future. Koorie children are an important part of this focus. We know that the first four years are critical to the long-term health and development of all children and their future life chances.

Participation in kindergarten has been demonstrated to benefit all children, particularly those who are experiencing disadvantage. By giving every Victorian child the best possible start in life, we will give young Victorians the opportunity to grow up healthier and happier. In this way they will be better able to fulfil their potential and contribute to the future life of their community.

The Koorie Kindergarten Inclusion Kit is a comprehensive and practical tool for preparing culturally inclusive programs. It will assist kindergarten staff to affirm Aboriginal cultural identity which will build children’s self esteem and pride.

I invite all Victorians to help build kindergartens that are cool for Koorie Kids.

Hon Sherryl Garbutt MP
Minister for Children
Minister for Community Services
Acknowledgements

The Advisory Group for the Koorie Kindergarten Inclusion Kit would like to thank the many people who contributed to this project including:

• community members, community organisations, Elders and mainstream service providers
• the Early Childhood Advisory Committee of Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) – Lionel Bamblett, Rose Bamblett and Roland Finette
• the advisory group members, Ron James (Department of Human Services) Rose Bamblett, Roland Finette (VAEAI), Moira Rayner, Wendy Barnes, Anna Briggs, Margaret Taylor, Lynette Dent, Tracey-Lee Beer, Jackie Marion, Fay Muir, Diane Lanigan (KECFOs)
• the Project Team – Priscilla Clarke, Melinda Chapman, Ann-Maree Martin
• Coordinator, Koorie Early Childhood Education Program, Ron James

Department of Human Services Koorie Early Childhood Field Officers (KECFOs)

- Wendy Barnes: Hume Region (Shepparton Office)
- Tracey-Lee Beer: Hume Region (Ballarat Office)
- Anna Briggs: Eastern Metropolitan Region
- Lynette Dent: Gippsland Region (Bairnsdale)
- Diane Lanigan: Loddon Mallee Region (Mildura)
- Jackie Marion: Northern Region
- Fay Muir: Barwon South Region (Geelong)
- Moira Rayner: North/Western Region (Fitzroy)
- Margaret Taylor: Southern Region (Dandenong)

Koorie Preschool Assistants

- Kaylene McKinnon: Jenny King
- Judy Atkinson: Rebecca Clayton
- Melissa Lillyst: Helena Baxter
- Corinna O'Toole: Colleen Howell
- Jodie Harvey: Diane Morgan

NOTE: Unless otherwise specified, the use of ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Indigenous’ throughout this kit relates to Australian Indigenous people, which includes Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander people.
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Introduction

In 2003, FKA Children’s Services was commissioned by the Department of Human Services Early Years Program to facilitate the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood resource materials. The role of FKA Children’s Services was to facilitate discussion with the Koorie Early Childhood Field Officers (KECFOS), Koorie Preschool Assistants (KPSAs) and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) in order to develop materials to enhance kindergarten participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Project objectives

• Enhance support for Indigenous children and their families to actively participate in kindergarten programs.
• Promote the value of, and participation in, kindergarten to Indigenous children and their families.
• Support the work of the Koorie Early Childhood Field Officers in encouraging the inclusion of Indigenous families.
• build the capacity of the early childhood sector to provide culturally relevant early childhood information and resources to support Indigenous families across Victoria.

This project aims to develop culturally responsive materials for Indigenous families within Victoria. It aims to assist them to understand the early childhood education, development and wellbeing needs of their children and families. The materials have been written and developed by Koorie early childhood staff. The materials in the kit focus on information for parents and kindergarten teachers and support KECFOS in their role.

The anticipated outcomes of the materials are:

• better access to culturally relevant information for Indigenous parents about the value of early childhood education;
• improvement in parents’ understanding of kindergarten and their place within these communities;
• increased teachers’ knowledge about how to best meet the needs of Indigenous families and children;
• encourage early childhood communities that are more child-and-family-friendly.

History of Indigenous people

Before the arrival of European settlers, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples inhabited most areas of the Australian continent, each speaking one or more of hundreds of separate languages, with distinct lifestyles and religious and cultural traditions. Indigenous Australians had complex social systems and highly developed traditions, reflecting their deep connection with the land and the environment.

Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are ethnically and culturally different. Historically, Aboriginal people have lived throughout Australia and on many of the continent’s offshore islands. Torres Strait Islanders come from the islands of the Torres Strait between the tip of Cape York in Queensland and Papua New Guinea and have many cultural similarities with the people of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific (Australian Government-Department of Foreign Affairs -www.dfat.gov.au/facts/indig).
Terra Nullius
From 1788, Australia was treated as a colony of settlement, not a conquest. Aboriginal land was taken over by British colonists on the premise that the land belonged to no one (terra nullius). Australia’s colonisation resulted in a drastic decline in the Aboriginal population. At the time of European settlement, it is estimated that between 300,000 and one million Indigenous people lived in Australia. Many died from conflicts and massacres with Europeans and from introduced diseases, such as smallpox, influenza and measles.

Protection policies and assimilation policies
Indigenous survivors of frontier conflict were moved onto reserves or missions. From the late nineteenth century, various state and territory laws were put in place to control relations between Indigenous people and other Australians. In 1937, the Australian Government agreed that Aboriginal people ‘not of full blood’ should be absorbed or ‘assimilated’ into the wider population. Indigenous people experienced separate education for their children, town curfews, alcohol bans, no social security, and lower wages. The government had guardianship of all Aboriginal children and there were laws that segregated Indigenous people, mainly onto reserves outside towns or in remote areas. At this time children were forcibly removed from their families and placed in white institutions or foster homes.

Stolen children and Stolen generations
The history of the stolen children varies depending on time and place. For a detailed account of this time, read the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997, ‘Bringing Them Home’ report of the National Inquiry into the ‘Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families’.

Citizenship
In May 1967, a constitutional referendum was passed with a ‘Yes’ vote of almost 91 per cent, which enabled the Australian Government to make laws on Aboriginal affairs and to include Indigenous people in the national census.

Self-determination and land rights
In 1972, the Australian Labour Government led by Gough Whitlam adopted the policy of self-determination for Indigenous communities. This recognised that Indigenous people had the right to be involved in decision making about their own lives. In 1976, the Australian Government passed land rights laws for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. All states have followed except Western Australia.

Native title
‘Native title’ is the name given by Australian law to Indigenous people’s traditional rights to their lands and waters.

In the Mabo case of 1992, the High Court of Australia rejected the long-standing doctrine of terra nullius and found that Indigenous people who maintained a continuing connection with their land, according to their traditions and customs, may hold native title.

What is the right to self-determination?
Most Indigenous people in Australia want self-determination within the existing nation. This would require recognition by the government of their distinct cultures and forms of social organisation, governance and decision-making. It would mean transferring resources, responsibility and power for decision-making to Indigenous people, so they can make and implement decisions that affect them.

Questions and answers about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander/Indigenous people of Australia

1. **Who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are descended from the original/Indigenous inhabitants of Australia. The Australian Government defines an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person as someone who:

- is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- is accepted as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in the community in which he/she lives or has lived.

2. **How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are there?**

In the 2001 Census, 410,003 people identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representing 2.2 per cent of the total population of Australia. Of these:

- 366,429 were Aboriginal
- 26,046 were Torres Strait Islander
- 17,528 identified themselves as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

In 2002, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 2.2 per cent of the population of Australia. The number of people identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander has quadrupled since 1971.

3. **Where do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live? How old are they?**

**Place of residence:** The Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is 25,078 which is 6.1 per cent of the (total) Victorian population.

Half of this Indigenous population lives outside of the Melbourne metropolitan area compared to 28 per cent of the non-Indigenous population. Aboriginal people tend to live in the urban areas of Melbourne or regional and rural towns. In Melbourne, Aboriginal Victorians constitute 0.38 per cent of the population and are widely dispersed across the metropolitan area.

**Age:** As a whole, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people population is much younger than the non-Indigenous population. For example, 26 per cent of the Victorian Indigenous population is under the age of 10 years and nearly 60 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Australia is aged under 25, compared with 34 per cent of the non-Indigenous population.

Indigenous children and families and kindergartens

Status of Indigenous children in Victoria

In Victoria, the Indigenous population is growing at 2 per cent a year, twice the rate of the non-Indigenous population (VACSAL 2004). In 2001, the total number of Indigenous people in Victoria was 25,078, which is 6.1 per cent of the total population. Twenty-six per cent of the Indigenous population is under the age of 10 years. With premature deaths and a life expectancy 20 years less than that of non-Indigenous Victorians, the Indigenous population has an age profile similar to some developing countries (VACSAL 2004).

In Melbourne, Indigenous Victorians constitute 0.38 per cent of the population and are widely dispersed across metropolitan area, which makes it difficult for families to access Indigenous specific services (VACSAL 2004).

Victorian Indigenous families have poorer health, higher unemployment, lower incomes and poorer educational outcomes than non-Indigenous people. When these factors are combined with problems of parenting and family violence, they can have a negative effect on early childhood development.

Kindergarten participation rates of Indigenous children

The kindergarten participation rate of Indigenous children is significantly below that of non-Indigenous children (60.3 per cent compared with 96.4 per cent of non-Indigenous children, – VAEAI 2003).

Many Indigenous people affirm the importance of kindergarten and are concerned at the low level of attendance. Low kindergarten attendance rates compound the difficulty many Indigenous children face when they enter school, as they have not encountered a structured program and this may have a negative impact on their ability to learn.

Indigenous children also achieve lower literacy rates in school than non-Indigenous children. The barriers identified preventing access by Indigenous children to kindergarten include:

- lack of information
- cost of service
- accessibility
- lack of transport
- lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
- culturally irrelevant programs.

(VAEAI 2003; VACSAL 2004)

Many Indigenous families believe mainstream kindergarten programs are not always culturally appropriate. Cultural appropriateness can relate to the language used by staff, the use of jargon, the hours of operation and the visual impact of the service.

Indigenous families may feel intimidated and self-conscious about using the service. This highlights the need for non-Indigenous staff to engage with Indigenous families using the service in a way that inspires confidence and understanding.

Sections 3, 4 and 5 in this publication provide practical strategies for encouraging Indigenous families to use kindergarten and assist teachers to develop a culturally inclusive program.
Culturally inclusive programs for Indigenous children

The Victorian Indigenous community comprises a number of communities and extended family networks. A significant number of people within the community have also moved to Victoria from interstate and many maintain strong links to other parts of Australia.

‘The present day Koorie Community in Victoria is still closely-knit by strong family kinship ties, shared experiences and on-going cultural and social links with specific places’ (Atkinson 1985).

Special government programs have been introduced for Indigenous people because they are the most economically and socially disadvantaged group in Australia. These programs are necessary to help overcome disadvantage and to assist the non-Indigenous population to work more sensitively and appropriately with Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Education Program–Supplementary Recurrent Assistance

The national priorities for Indigenous education and training will continue to focus on:

• making educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians similar to those for non-Indigenous Australians;
• setting literacy, numeracy and employment targets;
• involving Indigenous parents in their children’s education;
• improving kindergarten education outcomes;
• expanding secure employment and training of Indigenous people at all levels, particularly for Indigenous education workers;
• ensuring appropriate professional development of staff involved in Indigenous education;
• developing and extending culturally inclusive curricula;
• involving Indigenous people in educational decision making;
• achieving literacy and numeracy outcomes for Indigenous Australians similar to those for non-Indigenous Australians;
• addressing the development of sound foundation competencies.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (SRA) Program provides supplementary per capita funding to education providers across the kindergarten, school and vocational education and training sectors and also funds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education projects. The program aims to achieve:

• the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in education decision making;
• equality of access to educational services;
• equality of educational participation;
• equitable and appropriate early childhood educational outcomes.

The Koorie Early Childhood Education Program (KECEP)

The Koorie Early Childhood Education Program (KECEP) aims to support Koorie children and their families with access to, and participation in, kindergartens. It works to increase the number of Koorie children attending kindergarten, and encourages all kindergarten programs to become more culturally relevant for Koorie children.

Jointly funded by the Department of Human Services and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, the KECEP is implemented in partnership with local Koorie communities, who employ and administer the Koorie Preschool Assistants (KPSA) Program, and requires effective relationships with local kindergartens.
The KECEP comprises three components:

1. **State coordinator**

   The state coordinator provides support, information, training and assistance to those working with Koorie children in kindergartens. The coordinator oversees the KPSA Program and the KECFOS at a state level, and liaises with other government departments and community organisations to ensure effective delivery of the KECEP.

   State Coordinator, Koorie Early Childhood Education Program, Tel (03) 9616 8715

2. **Koorie Preschool Assistants (KPSA) Program**

   The KPSA Program supports attendance of Koorie children in kindergarten services, encourages Koorie community involvement in the development and delivery of kindergarten services for Koorie children, and assists with the development of kindergarten programs that embrace Koorie culture. The KPSA Program is auspiced by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous community based organisations - (details of locations of KPSAs is available from Koorie Early Childhood Education Field Officers – see contact details below).

3. **Koorie Early Childhood Field Officers**

   The Department of Human Services administers the KECEP. The aim of the program is to enhance and increase the kindergarten participation of Koorie children. Each of the eight regions of the department employs a Koorie Early Childhood Field Officer (KECFO) to develop and implement the program at a regional level. KECFOs:

   - work closely with local Koorie communities across the region to develop strategies and initiatives to increase the participation of Koorie children;
   - liaise between kindergartens and Koorie families to facilitate and enhance Koorie participation and involvement;
   - advise the department on Koorie issues related to early childhood services and monitor services funded through the KECEP.

   The program is monitored by the Koorie Early Childhood Services State Coordinator based in the central office of the Department of Human Services.

### KECFOS regional telephone contact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Telephone Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hume</td>
<td>5832 1502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grampians</td>
<td>5333 6640</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern Metropolitan</td>
<td>9843 6352</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gippsland</td>
<td>5177 2558</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loddon Mallee</td>
<td>5022 3111</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Metropolitan</td>
<td>9275 7053</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barwon South/Western</td>
<td>5226 4950</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Metropolitan</td>
<td>9412 2626</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>9213 2091</td>
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### Indigenous support organisations/programs

**Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)**

VAEAI is the peak Aboriginal education body in Victoria. It is a community-based and community controlled organisation. One of the major aims of VAEAI is to develop processes for the involvement of Victorian Koorie community members in decision-making regarding education and training for Koorie students. Central to VAEAI’s approach to education is a holistic view of the needs of Koorie students, advocating a birth-to-death philosophy of education.
This belief calls for the provision of services that incorporate all sectors of the education system; beginning with the provision of early childhood services right through to post-compulsory education and training, creating educational pathways for Koorie people. Furthermore, recognising the influences of social and economic issues on the individual and on the Koorie community, VAEAI supports a cross-sectoral approach where education works closely with health, social justice, housing and employment services for the social well-being and economic development of Koorie communities.

VAEAI provides an advocate role for the Victorian Koorie community and provides representation in relation to all education and training policy, strategy and program development at the local, state and national levels. It promotes the provision of education and training that is culturally relevant, reinforces cultural identity and provides supportive learning environments for Koorie people. VAEAI also supports the provision of education to the wider community to increase the awareness of Koorie culture, communities and aspirations.

VAEAI is a statewide organisation with a regional structure, divided on the basis of family ties. VAEAI’s local advisory arrangements are solidly embedded in local communities through the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECGs). The YALCA ‘Partnership in education’ recognises LAECGs as equal partners in the development, implementation and evaluation of education and training programs at the local level.

Reference: VAEAI website — www.vaeai.org.au

Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECG)

LAECGs fulfil a significant role in providing links between Koorie communities, the VAEAI structures, government departments and education and training institutions. They are best placed to provide local perspectives on education and training matters and highlight the needs and aspirations of local Koorie communities (VAEAI and Education, 2001).

There are currently 29 LAECGs located across Victoria. The role of LAECGs includes:

- providing advice on all education and training matters that affect Koorie students;
- monitoring current trends in education that impact on all Koorie students;
- providing an advocate role for Koorie students and their families in respect of education;
- providing representation to local and regional committees and forums in relation to education and training; and
- providing representation to all VAEAI forums.


Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)

VACCA was established in 1978 as statewide Aboriginal community-controlled services. VACCA operates within the context that Aboriginal children continue to be significantly over-represented in the protection and care system within Victoria. VACCA considers that it has the responsibility and the opportunity to promote, advocate and achieve positive changes in the lives of Indigenous children, their families and their community.

VACCA objectives include the preservation, strengthening and protection of the cultural and spiritual identity of Indigenous children and the provision of culturally appropriate and quality services that are responsive to the needs of the Indigenous community. VACCA provides the following services: Family Support, Lakidjeka Crisis Support, Extended Care and Permanent Care, Link-Up Victoria, Family Preservation, Kurnai and a debriefing officer.

Reference: VACCA website www.vacca.org

Secretariat for National and Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)

The Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care is a national non-government peak body in Australia representing the interests of Indigenous children and families. Formally established in 1981, SNAICC has received Federal Government funding support since 1983.
SNAICC operates from a membership base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community based child care agencies, multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), family support services, foster care agencies, Link-Up services and family reunification services, family group homes, community groups and voluntary associations, long day child care services, kindergartens, early childhood education services and services for young people at risk.

A National Executive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people drawn from their members governs SNAICC.

Contact: SNAICC Suit 8/level 1, 252 – 260 St George's Road North Fitzroy 3065.
Tel: (03) 9482 9380
Email: snaicc@vicnet.net.au
Website: www.snaicc.asn.au

The Department of Human Services, Aboriginal Best Start Program

Best Start is a prevention and early intervention project that aims to improve the health, development, learning and well-being of all Victorian children from conception through to transition to school (taken to be children 0-8 years of age).

The Aboriginal Best Start Project is a component of the Best Start Project and was developed in two phases:

1. the development of an Aboriginal Best Start Project;
2. the implementation of two local demonstration projects.

The status report has focused on:

3. providing a better understanding of the specific health, education and wellbeing needs of Aboriginal children and their families;
4. providing a profile of Aboriginal children and their families;
5. combining the evidence based for the importance of early childhood with the knowledge and experiences of Aboriginal parents, communities and organisations;
6. identifying barriers that Aboriginal parents and families with young children face in accessing Aboriginal and non-Indigenous universal early years services.

The Aboriginal Best Start Demonstration Project will bring together health, education, welfare service providers, parents and community to initiate partnerships between service providers and communities. The partnerships will develop and implement new ways of working together to support service innovation within early childhood services. The projects have been established in Horsham and Districts and Baw Baw and Morwell Districts. The project will be supported by the Aboriginal Best Start Advisory Group with representation from the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL), the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO).

2005 Best Start:

There will be $10.8 million to expend for Best Start programs over the coming four years. Best Start will be expanded to a further 14 local government areas across the state, including four Best Start projects in Indigenous communities.
Culture

Cultural diversity
Diversity within Indigenous groups is a complex issue in itself, however, there are common threads that run though history and, therefore, the present circumstances of Indigenous people.

There are more than 700 languages within Indigenous communities in Australia. These communities all have their own practices, beliefs, language and values. (VACCA Aboriginal resource and cultural guide).

‘Culture in many ways defines who we are, how we think, how we communicate, what we value and what is important. Culture constantly evolves and adapts and is always a significant and changing influence on us.’ (Salamone and Cadd)

‘It is not possible to understand all about Aboriginal people.’ (Salamone and Cadd)

The three levels of culture

a) Surface level of culture
This level of culture can be seen or heard and is separate from the people who are its creators. It is the easiest aspect of culture to recognise-clothing, food, music, dance and art are part of the surface level, for example, Anglo-Celtic Australian culture may be bush hats, lamingtons, meat pies, bush music, and dances.

b) Activity level of culture
This level consists of the customs and traditions of a culture, the ways in which people carry out their everyday life. It is seen through the way members of a culture live their life and includes such things as language, mode of dwelling, customs, traditions, recreation, ownership, child-care outside the home.

c) Deepest level of culture – values
Values form the basis on which a society operates. They are so embedded in people that it is hard for an ‘outsider’ to see them directly or accurately. Values determine the way people react in response to the actions of others, and determine what people emphasise in their lives. Values are learned indirectly and often unconsciously, and are expressed through a society’s laws, education, attitudes and religions (Dent 2003a).

Indigenous identity
As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are very diverse in Australia, it is important to acknowledge this diversity with each individual family.

Ask the family how they wish to be identified.

The term ‘Koorie’ (Koori) is used as an umbrella term for Aboriginal people living in Victoria and southern New South Wales. (VAEAI 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Koorie (Koori)</th>
<th>Victorian and Southern New South Wales</th>
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<tr>
<td>Murri</td>
<td>Northern New South Wales and Queensland</td>
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<tr>
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There are 700 language names associated with Indigenous people. These communities all have their own practices, beliefs, language and values (VACCA Aboriginal resource and cultural guide).
Map 1: Aboriginal Language Areas in Victoria
The family in Indigenous communities

People from Indigenous communities have much in common but do not form a single homogeneous group. They all believe in their spirituality and acknowledge the experiences their families have suffered as a result of white settlement of Australia. There are many voices that tell of customs and culture. (Walker 1993).

Historical factors

Before the white invasion of Australia, Aboriginal families enjoyed an ideal lifestyle. Families lived together in a communal environment and responsibilities were shared throughout the family. The roles assigned to different family members depended on individual positions within the tribe. Responsibilities included hunting, cooking, child rearing and the teaching of knowledge by the Elders of the Tribe (Walker 1993b).

Since the European invasion of Australia, Aboriginal people have suffered harsh oppression and discrimination. This has resulted in a lack of trust towards mainstream society. The land of Aborigines has been taken away from them, their children removed and families destroyed. Aboriginal people have been denied the right to live according to their customs and to determine their own future. They were denied access to choose whom they could marry, to decide where to live, to travel, to mix with others. Most of the problems facing Aboriginal people today stem from the many years of oppression they have experienced since European settlement. A similar situation exists for Torres Strait Islander people.

Over the past years there have been many changes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and this has meant a loss of knowledge, tradition and culture.

‘Family means to us caring for each other, friendship, respect and love. Apart from our immediate family we have lots of cousins, aunties, uncles and grandparents (Elders). Our names all have special Koorie meanings which are important to us’ (FKAMRC 2001).

The role of family in Indigenous communities

Indigenous communities attach great importance to maintaining the family and to preserving knowledge, tradition and culture. They stress the significance of family kinship ties and spiritual bonding, as well as respect for the Elders and for each other (Walker 1993).

Kinship relationships

Kinship relationships have a special significance for Indigenous people, since they are a major part of their culture. These relationships are clearly defined and understood by each family member. They make up a complex network of extended family ties, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, as well as parents, brothers and sisters are all included in the extended family.
Aunty | An older woman, often wise in traditional knowledge, having status within her community. It is also used as a term of address to an older person. Aunt is also used.
---|---
Blood | Of close relatives. Blood relatives are usually those who are too close to be eligible for marriage. Traditionally, Aboriginal people had a limited range of people considered appropriate marriage partners.
Cousin | A relative of either sex, used as a form of address.
Cuz | A familiar modern form of address for a cousin.
Brother | A close relative of the same generation, often parallel cousin (father/brother/son FBS). Male friends will also call each other brother.
Father | A man of the generation above who stands in the relation of a parent, biological, stepfather, father’s brother, close uncle.
Grandfather | Biological father’s father or a great uncle. Same for grandmother, great aunty or biological mother’s mother.
Mother | A female relative of the same generation as the speaker’s biological mother or MZ (Mother’s sister).
Sister | A female of the same generation, biological or extended family. Females also call another female friend ‘sister’.

(Prepared by Lynnette Dent, KEFCO, Gippsland Region, 2003, used with permission.)

In Indigenous communities, the extended family often provides care for the children. Grandparents, especially grandmothers, play a significant role in raising children. Sometimes they have the main authority over the children and enjoy a very close relationship with them. The grandparents may live in the same house and fulfil many of the primary care-giving responsibilities. Older brothers and sisters are also expected to care for younger siblings. This care may include minding the children after school, protecting them, and sharing food. It can also involve picking children up from kindergarten or school. Older brothers and sisters are significant models for younger siblings in terms of language and behaviour.

Within the family, the Elders are important decision makers. They are held in very high regard. They play a significant part as role models, caregivers, educators and in transmitting the culture.

The Elders are custodians of spiritual knowledge; they tell the stories. When developing a culturally inclusive program and developing a process for communicating with Aboriginal families, it is important to always consult Elders in the design, development and delivery of the kindergarten program.

**Indigenous children at kindergarten**

**Cultural identity**

The specific cultural identity of Indigenous kindergarten children needs to be acknowledged and their heritage supported. The diversity of Indigenous communities should be recognised and incorporated into the kindergarten program. If kindergarten staff treat families with respect and do not make stereotypical assumptions, families will be happy to acknowledge their identity and share important information about their child and their culture with the teacher and other families.

Good communication between kindergarten staff and Indigenous families is essential. Teachers must develop strong lines of communication and consult the families about their children and what they want for them.

Indigenous children do not fit a stereotypical image. There is great diversity in skin, eye and hair colour. When families feel comfortable in the kindergarten environment, they will share information about cultural identity. Do not make assumptions about the families in the centre.

Kindergarten staff need to feel confident to inquire about the cultural identity of each Indigenous family. They should ask both the father and the mother about their background and the language group they identify with. It is important that enrolment forms provide a place for both the mother and the father to state whether they are from an Indigenous background. It should be explained that this would enable the staff to respond sensitively to the needs and culture of the children.
Models of behaviour
The kindergarten teacher needs to be aware of the way children are raised in an Indigenous family and to recognise that the rules that govern their behaviour are well defined in a particular cultural context.

‘Aboriginal children are given greater personal freedom from an early age, such as deciding when to eat, sleep, wash etc, as a means of developing personal autonomy and responsibility and of ensuring the child’s survival if separated from the family group.’ (Children’s Services Office, South Australia, 1993)

As noted, the kinship role is very important in Indigenous communities. If one member of an extended family is unable to fulfil this role, then another member will automatically take it on. Thus a 10-year-old child may help a three-year-old to get dressed. All adults and children have responsibilities to the family and each person, no matter their age, is respected, with the right to be an equal and to make decisions. Many Indigenous people believe that you give your child strength by letting them do things. The child knows that you trust them, because they feel the strength coming from you.

Eye contact, non-verbal communication and physical contact
Within the diverse Indigenous communities, emphasis on physical communication is learned from an early age. Children learn that touch is necessary to initiate a conversation, and that avoiding eye contact shows respect. Much of a child’s involvement with adult conversation is limited to a passive role. Kindergarten staff should understand that direct eye contact may make Indigenous families feel uncomfortable or intimidated. Shyness is a common characteristic: it takes time to build a sense of trust.

Body language and non-verbal communication are important features of communication for Indigenous families. Staff should not misunderstand the use of silence. It may mean that parents are listening and reflecting. It is necessary for this silence to be accepted.

Touching and hugging are significant behaviours for Indigenous children, since they help build self-esteem. Children are usually swamped with affection not only from mum and dad but also from the extended family. This affection can be kissing and hugging and is often accompanied by play. It is normal for a child to touch an adult to communicate a need, rather than use language to verbalise this need. Kindergarten staff must understand these cultural differences and emphasise and accept different forms of communication.

Discipline
It is traditional for Indigenous children to have a very free life where they determine their own boundaries, settle their own conflicts and learn to conform through the reinforcement of positive behaviours, ignoring mistakes and being teased or shamed. Teasing occurs to prevent irregular behaviours occurring. The kindergarten teacher needs to develop a relationship with the children and have an understanding of acceptable behaviour. The children should not be treated differently from others in kindergarten as this can be seen as unfair. Shouting at the children or using a loud voice must be avoided: this can cause a sense of shame. It is important to speak quietly, but firmly. If the children are upset, a ‘cooling off’ or ‘time out’ period should be used.

Where possible the teacher needs to deal with discipline problems personally or to consult someone who has a relationship/bond with the child. The KECFO should be contacted for advice and support. Most importantly the teacher needs to get to know the parents and the family and to seek advice on how best to manage their children.

Sources
Koorie Early Childhood Field Officers

Department of Employment, Education and Training, Learning about Aboriginal children and their culture, Adelaide, Children’s Services Office.
Planning a culturally inclusive program

When developing a culturally inclusive program for Indigenous children in the kindergarten, the teacher should establish a working relationship with the parents, families and members of the community. The following ideas may help to establish this relationship:

• get to know family members on a first name basis;
• know all family members, both immediate and extended; and
• help when family members drop off or pick up a child, as this can vary from time to time (the teacher needs to be aware of this and take action to cater for it).

Ideas for developing a culturally inclusive program

• Help Indigenous parents, families and children feel welcome by displaying contemporary Indigenous pictures and posters;
• Place some posters and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags in the main entrance so that parents and families will notice these and enquire about enrolling their children;
• Accept different values and recognise that the family plays a large and important role in Indigenous communities;
• As a teacher, it is important to show an interest in learning and to value the Indigenous cultures. Teach children to value themselves and their own culture. Teachers need to value this culture too, as this helps children to grow up feeling proud and strong;
• A Koorie perspective can be introduced into music and movement. For example, children can learn how animals are represented in music and movement.

Kangaroo
Paws held in front of the chest and slowly bent down and nibble the grass, turn the head from side to side to look.

Emu
Use your arms to extend your hand – this is the neck of the emu. Shape your hand as a beak and head of an emu. Alternatively, lift a leg up one at a time. Move the emu's head back and forth.

Brolga
Use your extended arm as the long neck, with the child’s hand in the air and one hand behind the back. Jump from one foot to the other on the same spot.

(Lynette Dent, Koorie Early Childhood Field Officer, Gippsland Region)

Indigenous education in early childhood

When teaching children about Indigenous culture, start from the present day. For example, use photos and information about Indigenous people in the 21st Century. Avoid stereotypes such as Indigenous people wearing loincloths and carrying boomerangs. The Indigenous people in Victoria that children will meet will not look like this. It can be explained to children that some Indigenous people in Australia are hunters and live a traditional lifestyle, while other Indigenous people live in towns and cities. All are Indigenous and have a strong cultural identity. Teach children to respect diversity in lifestyle for all people, including Indigenous people (McMahon 1996).

It is important that children meet people from Indigenous backgrounds. Always contact a local Aboriginal organisation to request a guest speaker. Find out from that person what they would like to teach children when they visit—it may be contemporary art, music, story telling, or something you had not considered (McMahon 1996).

Check with local Indigenous people about the information you are teaching the children:

• Is there any information about your local area?
• Is it historically accurate and relevant?
• Has the information been written by an Indigenous person?
Remember, it is important the teacher explains to the parents/caregivers that anyone who is authorised to pick their child up from kindergarten needs their name recorded on the enrolment form. The parents need to provide authorisation for someone else to collect their child. In Indigenous communities it is common for different family members to deliver and pick up the child from the kindergarten. This may include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins or older brothers and sisters.

The best advice is to get to know the Indigenous parents and family and seek advice on how best to manage their children in a difficult situation. In getting to know the parents and families you will know when there are situations happening outside the centre, that affect the child.

**Participation in special events**

Indigenous children may be more involved in family events than children from a non-Indigenous background. These events include funerals, functions at night and weekends and events away from home or in the country. At funerals there is an extended family member to care for the children. Children may witness a family crisis or stay up late at night. Kindergarten teachers need to be aware and understand the effect that this may have on the children. Sometimes attendances at these events may lead to absences by the child at kindergarten.

The most common reasons for absence from kindergarten are:

- personal illness or illness of a family member;
- attending funerals;
- death in the extended family (an Indigenous family will not hesitate to travel several hundred kilometres to attend a funeral and may stay with the remaining family for as long as they are needed, sometimes weeks or even months);
- NAIDOC and other community activities;
- conflict with the teacher; and
- a sense of shame (some families may feel their children do not have adequate shoes or clothing, a lunch box or lunch).

**Strategies to support the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in kindergarten (VAEAI 2003)**

- Ensure that all eligible families are aware of the kindergarten subsidy;
- Ensure that services are aware of resources available to discount fees for eligible families;
- Establish a nutrition program;
- Help families share transport resources;
- Make sure SRA funds are used in a flexible way;
- Find out about local Indigenous playgroups and develop links;
- Participate in cross-cultural training;
- Organise transition sessions with the KECFO/KPSA;
- Ask the KECFO/KPSA to organise community assistance to ease new families into the routine of kindergarten and school.

**Important points to remember**

- Parents and community are the most important influence in their child’s development;
- Parents, family and community are a great resource for helping all children in the kindergarten;
- The parents and family may have a great number of valuable contacts within the community;
- The parents, family and community of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should be invited to the kindergarten not only for their knowledge but also to sit and play;
- What families and the community have to offer must not be abused;
- It can take time to get them to engage in activities;
- It is always best to take things slowly.
Aboriginal English

Aboriginal English is the first language, or home language, of many Aboriginal (Koorie) people in Victoria and throughout the whole of Australia. This is a distinctive language, which is a powerful way Aboriginal identity is transmitted. Although many Aboriginal languages are no longer spoken, patterns and influences can be seen in the ways Aboriginal people speak English. Aboriginal English is the name given to dialects of English spoken by Aboriginal people and there are different regional variations. Aboriginal English differs from Standard Australian English not only in words and meanings but also in grammar and ways of thinking and feeling. The language encompasses gestures, body language, eye contact, sounds, expressions and tone. It is through this language that Aboriginal children learn to communicate and function. Aboriginal English is a living oral language and should be valued and respected in its own right.

In kindergarten the language spoken and used for teaching is ‘Standard Australian English’. There is nothing about this language that makes it better than any other form of English, it is simply the language spoken by the dominant group in Australia. Staff need to recognise it is highly likely that the Aboriginal children they teach in kindergarten speak a variant of Aboriginal English. The staff need to recognise and respect the Aboriginal English spoken by the children and help them to also become competent users of Standard Australian English.

Aboriginal children very quickly become competent in using both Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English. This use of both dialects is called ‘code switching’. Sometimes the children will be more comfortable with Aboriginal English and will know more vocabulary associated with this dialect, while on other occasions they may feel more comfortable using Standard Australian English. Sometimes children will recognise it is more appropriate in some settings to use Aboriginal English. The staff needs to validate the children and families’ use of Aboriginal English by accepting this use in positive ways (Eades 1995; 1995a; 1995b).

Effective communication

The most appropriate and effective way to consult with Indigenous people is to go to their communities and meet in a place of their choosing. Ensure an appropriate introduction to the community by seeking permission in advance. Access can be gained through primary organisations that represent the community (councils and cooperatives) and through community Elders (VAEAI 2002).

Negotiate and announce your arrival well ahead of time to ensure your visit will not clash with other priorities the community might have. Approach agreed community leaders when arriving and establish your credentials — authenticity and advise the community in advance of anyone who will be visiting with you (VAEAI 2002).

Local Aboriginal Educational Consultancy Groups (LAECGs) should be involved in all stages of planning and consultation. This could include assisting with preparation, providing advice, acting as interpreters, conducting interviews and facilitating discussion groups (VAEAI 2002).

‘For Indigenous Australians, family ties are at the heart of culture’
(Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation: Learning circle kit 1999)

- Indigenous society is made up of a number of families who represent the community. The bigger the family, the greater the likelihood that the members will hold positions of power in the wider community.
- Each family has its own hierarchy with recognised roles for the individual leaders. For example, one leader will have the responsibility as the spokesperson for the wider community.
- If in doubt about local protocols, ask. People will see this as a sign of strength that you are willing to learn and respect their local customs and protocols (VAEAI 2002).
Written communication

• Written material is not always the most appropriate method of information dissemination in Indigenous communities. This is because the emphasis in Indigenous culture is on verbal rather than written forms of communication.

• Indigenous people identify and associate with Indigenous colours and art. If Indigenous art catches their eye there is a much greater likelihood the person will pick up and pursue a pamphlet or study a poster.

• Posters are particularly popular as a means of communication, as the message can be portrayed with a picture story and few words are needed.

Sensitive issues

Sensitive issues are not often widely discussed among Indigenous people, let alone with members outside their own community. For example, Indigenous people are reluctant to discuss sensitive health and welfare issues with mainstream service providers.

Good practice

Good practice involves:

• approaching the LAECG;

• speaking with the administrator in the local co-op and taking advice on the most appropriate people to consult;

• being sensitive in your approach;

• talking with Koorie people, not at them;

• taking time to listen and accept advice;

• breaking down jargon into meaningful language.

Sources

VAEAI 2002, More than just words: Good practice in the literacy provision in the Koorie vocational context, Koorie Culture 2002.

VAEAI 2001, Yalca: a Partnership in education and training for the new millennium, Koorie Education Policy.

Protocols

Protocols are appropriate ways of behaving, communicating and showing respect for diversity of history and culture. This involves understanding and appreciating the cultural identity and knowledge held by Indigenous people. Indigenous people from local communities are able to provide assistance in finding out specific protocols to consider. In Victoria, KEFOs and KPSAs can assist you to make links with communities and help you understand the protocols necessary for working effectively with families and communities.

Koorie Preschool Assistants (KPSAs)

- If you work in a kindergarten where a KPSA is permanently located, then the KPSA in the kindergarten will link directly with the families, with the community and with the KEFOs.
- If you work in a kindergarten and share a KPSA with a cluster of kindergartens, then you can make links with the community through this KPSA. The KPSA links with the KEFOs.
- If you work in a kindergarten where there is no KPSA, then the point of contact is the Department of Human Services, Children’s Services Team and a KEFO.

Making contact

Contact the Department of Human Services Children’s Services team and KEFO

- The KEFO will make contact with the local community.
- The KPSA will organise to visit the kindergarten.
- Ask the KEFO/KPSA to assist you with program information and resources.
- The KPSA/KEFO will support you in the development of a culturally inclusive program.
- Remember that a culturally inclusive program is an integral part of every day and takes place regardless of whether the KPSA/KEFO is present.
- There are some parts of the program that can only be delivered by an Aboriginal person, for example, introducing Aboriginal language, or talking about Aboriginal artefacts.
- Parents and family members are an integral part of the kindergarten program. It is important to always ask the parents what they would like for their children to see incorporated in the program. For example, families who come from parts of Australia outside Victoria may have different cultural practices that should be respected.

Working with Indigenous parents

There are many ways that you can encourage parents to take an active role in your program. They can:

- sit with the children to share their play;
- assist with ideas to make the program more culturally inclusive;
- participate in the same way that other parents take part;
- go on excursions with the children;
- share aspects of culture.

Some parents may be happy to be involved with cultural activities. Some parents may choose not to be involved.

Just because you have a family from an Indigenous background, do not expect them to know everything about their culture. Families may not want to talk publicly about their culture, families, histories or issues.
Sometimes it's easy to engage parents in the activities of the kindergarten. The introductory protocols are very important. If there are difficulties, don't be offended, don't give up, just keep on building relationships with the families and community and utilise the KECFO and LAECG when developing personal contacts with families.

**Advancing Reconciliation**

It is important to understand the past in order to build a reconciled future. All Australians should engage in a shared process of healing, on a personal and national level. Strategies that advance reconciliation should be put on the agenda for early childhood education and become part of a continued dialogue.

**Strategies to consider**

- Make a personal commitment;
- Find one other person (at least) who shares your commitment and will support you;
- Get in touch with the right people, such as your KECFO, KPSA, Koorie workers in local government;
- Discover the name of the traditional owners of the land where your kindergarten is located;
- Display a plaque with this information written on it;
- Discuss your willingness to make a commitment with your local KECFO/KPSA;
- Ask them to put you in touch with the local community/ies;
- Get a copy of the reconciliation document (Available from Aboriginal Reconciliation Council, telephone: 1800 060 265);
- Go to your local library and find out about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and history;
- Join an organisation that needs support in furthering the cause of reconciliation;
- Display the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags with pride;
- Check the books and resources in your kindergarten and get rid of old and racist materials (FKAMRC, 2000).

**Making a ‘Sorry Statement’**

Many organisations across Australia have made statements to express their sorrow at the treatment of Aboriginal children and their families. Your kindergarten might like to consider writing such a document on behalf of staff, children and families. For more information on this process, contact the Reconciliation Council.

**Important dates for Indigenous people**

**National Reconciliation Week – 26 May to 3 June**

This week begins with National Sorry Day and ends with Mabo Day. On 27 May of the inaugural week national leaders gathered for the 'Corroboree 2000: Sharing our Future' ceremony at the Sydney Opera House. This marked the end of the ten-year 'Process of Reconciliation', which had begun with the establishment of the Council for Reconciliation in 1990, and the release of the Council’s Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation and Roadmap for Reconciliation. On the next day, more than 250,000 people joined the Walk for Reconciliation across the Sydney Harbour Bridge and many others joined in on walks and events in other cities. Each year since, the week has featured activities across the country.

**Sorry Day – 26 May**

This day marks the anniversary of the 1997 tabling of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission ‘Bringing them home’ report. Hundreds of thousands of Australians participated in the first National Sorry Day in 1998. The following year the day was used to launch the 'Journey of Healing', with ten pairs of message sticks which had been despatched from Uluru three weeks earlier being received in the capital cities. Every year since, there have been gatherings and activities across the country, including bridge walks, barbecues, concerts and a Message Sticks Festival at the Sydney Opera House. A National Sorry Day Committee maintains a web-site with an events calendar at http://www.journeyofhealing.com.
NAIDOC Week – July

NAIDOC Week commences on the first Sunday in July and is a way of celebrating and promoting a greater understanding of the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In all states in Australia, communities throughout the country come together to celebrate the survival of Aboriginal people and the continuation of Aboriginal culture and to demonstrate the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have made to our nation.

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day – 4 August

This day was first observed in 1988 and each year has a special theme. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care has always produced a poster to celebrate the day.

Contact: SNAICC Suit 8/1st Floor 252 – 260 St Georges Road North Fitzroy, 3065
Tel: (03) 9482 9380
Email: snaicc@vicnet.net.au
Web: www.snaicc.asn.au

International Day of the World’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People – 9 August

This day was designated by the United Nations General Assembly in 1994 to be observed each year throughout the International Decade of the World’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (1995-2004). This day, on the anniversary of the first meeting in 1982 of the Working Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Populations, was to be an opportunity for intergovernmental and non-governmental groups to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and others to organise activities that contribute to a greater appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture, languages, rights and aspirations.

The decade’s theme is ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: partnership in action’ and its purpose is to recognise the value and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Two central objectives have been the establishment of a permanent forum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the adoption of the draft declaration on the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Reference

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)
Providing a culturally inclusive program

A culturally inclusive kindergarten program is important because:

- all children have the right to develop and retain their cultural identity;
- the identity and self-esteem of all children must be supported by the services offered to them;
- Indigenous children, people and community have a unique contribution to make to Australian society and particularly to the kindergarten;
- such a program provides a positive representation of Indigenous people at the crucial early age;
- such a program teaches and values an important part of Australia’s history while focusing on the contemporary issues;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are living and growing, they are not stagnant.

(Adapted with permission – Dent 2003)

Kindergartens, in consultation with their local community, should develop their own philosophy for their culturally inclusive program. The KECFO can help you make contact and support the development of a philosophy and policy.

Activities and materials

Try to use books and pictures written and prepared by Victorian Koorie people and depict Victorian Koorie people in a positive image. Check with a Koorie person whether the activities you plan are appropriate and culturally sensitive. For example, dot paintings are stories of people’s Dreaming. They are very important and sacred messages. It may not be appropriate to allow children to ‘play’ with dot paintings. Check with the Koorie parents, KECFOs and your local community. Creation and Dreaming stories need to be treated in the same respectful manner as any other religion would be treated (McMahon 1996).

Traditionally, didgeridoos are only played by men and boys and were used by Indigenous people from the Northern Territory within their communities. The didgeridoos were traded with Indigenous people from the southern states for other hunting implements, such as, flints and green stones. In Indigenous cultures there are specific, important roles for men and for women.

It is important that non-Indigenous people do not make value judgments about what is ‘right or wrong’. It is essential that parents and the local community are consulted to find out whether it is appropriate for children to use some materials or resources.

Teach children about the Indigenous flags. Ensure you display the flag the right way up.
Checklist for a culturally inclusive perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IS</th>
<th>IS NOT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A perspective across all aspects of the kindergarten program</td>
<td>Celebrated only on special Indigenous days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance that there is no one right way</td>
<td>Getting children to ‘fit into’ the existing program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focusing on similarities and commonalities as well as difference</td>
<td>Ignoring differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement of bias and prejudice in oneself and others</td>
<td>‘Colour blindness’ against Indigenous people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An integral part of the daily program</td>
<td>A ‘tourist’ curriculum – for example, Aboriginal day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The recognition of the diversity of Indigenous people</td>
<td>A tokenistic view of Aborigines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives, particularly a Koorie perspective</td>
<td>An Indigenous theme introduced by the teacher without consultation with the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support by strong links with families and communities</td>
<td>‘Doing another culture’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A perspective that recognises Australia’s cultural diversity</td>
<td>Treating language as separate from culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement of language as part of culture</td>
<td>Having a culturally inclusive program only if a Koorie child in kindergarten</td>
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<tr>
<td>The provision of a culturally inclusive program for all children</td>
<td>A week of ‘Koorie’ activities once a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement and collaborating with families and communities</td>
<td>Attention to times long ago and places far away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing on experiences from the daily lives of the people in the community</td>
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Adapted from: Stonehouse, A. 1991. Opening the Doors. AECA Canberra, pp.20–21
The Aboriginal Flag

Harold Thomas designed the Aboriginal flag in 1971.
The black represents the Aboriginal people, the red represents the earth and their spiritual relationship to the land; the yellow represents the sun and the giver of life.

The Torres Strait Islander Flag

The Torres Strait Islander flag is attributed to the late Bernard Namok of Thursday Island.
The flag is emblazoned with a white Dari (headdress) which is the symbol of Torres Strait Islanders.
The white five pointed star beneath it symbolises the five major island groups and the navigational importance of stars to these seafaring people.
The green stripes represent the land, the black stripes represent the people, the blue represents the sea.
## Ideas for Developing a Culturally Inclusive Program

### Policies

**For Committees of Management**

1. Does the kindergarten have a written policy to ensure access and participation of Indigenous families?
2. Does your criteria include knowledge and understanding of Indigenous issues when employing teachers?
3. Do you have Indigenous representation on your committee of management?

### For staff

1. Is there a written policy reflecting diversity and anti-bias principles across the program?
2. Does your enrolment form have a category to identify children from Indigenous backgrounds?
3. Are equity principles reflected across the program in terms of purchase of resources and employment of staff?
4. Are the committee of management and staff aware of Equal Opportunity Act and Anti-Discrimination Act?
5. Are equal opportunity and the anti-discrimination policies monitored, and are staff confident in their Anti-Discrimination practices?
6. Are parents and children supported against discrimination in the community?
7. Are staff informed of, encouraged and supported to participate in Indigenous cross-cultural training?
8. Do staff have up-to-date information on the diversity of Indigenous groups in Victoria and Australia, including access to appropriate terminology?
9. Do staff acknowledge that Indigenous children do not fit a stereotype in terms of skin tones, hair and eye colour and facial features?
10. Are staff aware of the local Koorie Early Childhood Field Officer (KECFO) and Koorie Preschool Assistant (KPA) and the services they provide?
11. Are Indigenous people encouraged to apply for employment in kindergarten?
12. Does the kindergarten have a flexible policy for payment of fees to meet needs of Indigenous families?

### Enrolment procedures

1. Do your enrolment procedures meet the needs of Indigenous families?
2. Do you involve the KECFO or KPSA in your enrolment day?
3. Do you consult with your local Maternal and Child Health Service about the ‘3’ / ‘5’ year old kindergarten assessment’?
4. Do you visit Indigenous families prior to children starting in kindergarten?
5. Do you widely advertise your kindergarten waiting list and enrolment procedures to ensure Indigenous families know when to enrol their children, for example, through Maternal and Child Health Service, Local Aboriginal Educational Consultative Groups, Koorie educators?
6. Do you provide a flexible start to support needs of families when Indigenous children begin kindergarten?
### Settling children in

1. Do you encourage parents to stay at kindergarten during the first few days?
2. What do you know about the specific cultural needs of Indigenous children?
3. Do you ensure you provide a welcome and are open with families?
4. Do you encourage parents to feel welcome and to trust you by making sure you tell families that their children will be safe and secure?
5. Do you ensure parents understand they are welcome there at any time?
6. Do you ensure that the kindergarten provides a welcoming environment?

### A Setting up the environment – the entrance

1. Do you ensure the foyer/entrance of the kindergarten reflects an Indigenous perspective?
2. Are there visual displays that portray positive images of Indigenous people?
3. Is information displayed about Indigenous services and support agencies?
4. Is information available about the KECFO and KPSA programs?
5. Are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags displayed at all times?
6. Do Indigenous families have easy access to the kindergarten?
7. Is the environment welcoming? Is a welcome sign displayed?
8. Is an acknowledgement of the traditional owners of the land displayed?

### B The playroom

1. Are Indigenous dolls (both genders) available all year round, for example, in the home corner or dolls house?
2. Are Indigenous toys and props available, for example, Australian animals, figures with diversity of skin tones?
3. Are there puzzles that display images of Indigenous families in contemporary and everyday activities?
4. Are there Indigenous artefacts and props available, including woven baskets, coolamons?
5. Are Indigenous fabrics, cloth and material available for display and use as table coverings and in the home corner?
6. Do you use bright happy colours? Including the Aboriginal colours of black, yellow and red?
7. Is there a special interest table with natural materials, artefacts and other Indigenous resources displayed?
8. Do you have displayed mobiles of Australian native animals? Find out their names in the local Indigenous language.
9. Are the Indigenous flags displayed and with them is there an explanation of their meaning?
C The outdoor area

1. Are there Indigenous activities in the sand pit, for example, making footprints?
2. Is there a Koorie trail available?
3. Is there an area with rocks where a bush camp can be set up?
4. Do all children have the chance to experience a campfire or role-play at fishing?
5. Do children learn about bush-tracking, bush–tucker, flora and fauna, use of natural materials?
6. Do children learn about the use of sandstone and grinding?
7. Do children have the opportunity to go on excursions and bush walks with an Elder or leader?
8. Are special days organised with cultural officers?

D Music

1. Are a wide variety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musical CDs and tapes available?
2. Does the music include contemporary music from Indigenous well-known artists?
3. Are local community people and Elders invited to share music with the children?
4. Are there Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander instruments, such as clap sticks?
5. Is a local male person invited to play the didgeridoo?
6. Is a variety of music provided in different situations and settings?
7. Is there encouragement for children to enjoy music and the rhythm of CDs and tapes?

A useful resource

‘Growing up Strong’ CD, “Aunty Wendy's Mob”

Students participate in song, dance, language and drama experiences that present contemporary, urban images and ideas about Indigenous people. Available through the Book Garden or ABC Books.

E The book corner and library

1. Are the books carefully selected to represent positive Indigenous issues and lifestyles?
2. Do staff use the criteria for selecting Indigenous books to ensure they are accurate, non-racist or stereotypical, and portray Koorie families in positive roles?
3. Are books written and illustrated by Indigenous people available for children and parents?
4. Are local storytellers encouraged to share stories at kindergarten?
5. Do all children enjoy a diversity of Indigenous stories?
6. Do staff ensure stories that portray negative stereotypes or racist illustrations are removed from the kindergarten?
7. Are parents and community member actively involved in reading and telling stories at kindergarten?
8. Are books in Indigenous languages available?
9. Are stories expanded using drama, puppets and painting?
10. Are a wide variety of books available, fiction, non-fiction, picture books, books about the Creation and the Dreaming?
F Art

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Are natural materials such as bark, shells and paper bark used for art activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Are Indigenous reproductions of artwork displayed in the kindergarten?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Are children encouraged to work together on murals?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Are local artists encouraged to visit and demonstrate Indigenous art?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do children have the opportunity to learn about dot painting and to hear the stories portrayed in the paintings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Do children paint on bark or make prints or stencils on calico with their hands?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Are local community people invited to share information about Indigenous symbols and meanings, for example, spirals, circles, wave lines, bird tracks</td>
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Developing a culturally inclusive program

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is an Indigenous perspective evident throughout the year?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Are special events and holidays celebrated?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do children have the opportunity to try bush foods?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do staff understand special protocols when working with Indigenous families?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do staff endeavour to build links with the local Indigenous community/ies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Is an inclusive/antiracist education program available for all children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Is the written program developed in association with parents and the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Are Indigenous parents consulted in relation to their children’s progress?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Do staff regularly consult with KECFOs and KPSAs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Are regular meetings held with parents to seek advice or report on children’s progress?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Are parents acknowledged as the significant educators of their children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Is the role of the Indigenous communities acknowledged?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Are parents encouraged to participate in the kindergarten Committee of Management?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Are parents and community members encouraged to participate in the program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Does staff make efforts to build strong partnerships with parents?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References:


Aboriginal Resource and Management Support Unit. Cultural environment checklist, South Australia.

Information About Planning the Program

(Prepared by Lynnette Dent, Department of Human Services Koorie Early Childhood Field Officer Gippsland Region)

When developing your program be sure to establish a working relationship with the parents and members of an Indigenous community.
Some helpful points

- Get to know each other on a first name basis.
- Learn the names of all the family, including immediate and extended family members.
- Explain to parents why they need to contact the centre if one of their family members (not listed on the enrolment form) is picking their child up.
- Don't feel intimidated by a parent or community member and be sure not to intimidate them in any way.
- Adapt your language to suit the individual or group of people you are speaking to.
- Develop appropriate communication with parents and community members.
- Provide a comfortable environment when liaising with parents and staff.

Ideas for extending the children’s program

- Try different forms of painting, finger painting, spray painting, stencils, hand and foot prints, dots/hatchet lines, painting on the face and hands.
- Try creating a cave and paint it with rock art.
- Make your own paint using ochres, sandstone.
- Paint on rocks, bark, sticks, clap sticks;
- Show the children traditional and contemporary artwork done by Indigenous artists.
### Checklist for Selecting Indigenous Resources

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is the material up to date?</td>
<td>Check the date of publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Is the material accurate?</td>
<td>Check the facts. Wrong information such as ‘Captain Cook discovered Australia’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Is the author/illustrator Indigenous?</td>
<td>Consult with KECFOs, Indigenous consultants and communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Are over-generalisations made in the resources?</td>
<td>Always use materials that present a balanced view. Check contemporary sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>How well does the story reflect the children’s home lives and experiences?</td>
<td>Make sure stories are contemporary. Consult community members and KECFOs to assist in selection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Can boys and girls identify with characters in the books?</td>
<td>Children develop a positive self-esteem when the culture is valued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Are lifestyles of families depicted in a realistic way in books and posters?</td>
<td>Indigenous and minority characters are often portrayed as poor or primitive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Does the material reflect men and women equally?</td>
<td>Some books over-emphasise the importance of men’s roles, particularly in ceremonies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Are books provided in which similarities of ability and culture are explored?</td>
<td>Ask the KECFOs for assistance choosing suitable books or assisting with places to get resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Do the illustrations treat with respect the diversity of Indigenous families?</td>
<td>Make sure illustrations are realistic and contemporary and show both urban and rural lifestyles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Do books explore different terminology and promote the use of Indigenous languages?</td>
<td>There is a great deal of diversity in the use of Aboriginal words, languages and Aboriginal English that can enrich children’s lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Are a variety of resources provided?</td>
<td>These include books, CDs, computer programs, artwork, craft, music, artefacts, photos, maps and flags.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Are parents and community members encouraged to develop local resources for use with children?</td>
<td>Work with local communities and parents to develop your own resources. Ask Koorie school children to help with artwork.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Information about planning an inclusive program

Corio South Kindergarten
At Corio South/Norlane Kindergarten (Barwon Region) a Koorie culturally inclusive perspective is evident throughout the year. The following are some ideas that are incorporated:

- books reflecting Indigenous perspectives are displayed all year
- posters of Indigenous children and families are displayed in the foyer of the kindergarten
- a special interest table with cultural items, including craft, is set up in the playroom and items are changed regularly to encourage and develop children's interests
- Indigenous families visit the kindergarten regularly to share traditions and interests with the children
- puzzles include Indigenous images
- posters that show Indigenous children engaged in everyday activities are displayed in the kindergarten
- popular songs and children's games are adapted to be more relevant to Indigenous children, for example, ‘Duck, duck, goose’ becomes ‘kangaroo, snake’
- Indigenous children are identified to other children to help them to be proud of their culture
- all the children understand the meaning of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags
- the home corner includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous dolls
- on National Aboriginal Children’s Day, and during NAIDOC week the children are encouraged to wear the Aboriginal colours of black, red and yellow.

In other kindergartens
At one kindergarten the children all decorated a ceramic tile with their hand and footprints. These tiles were then glazed and a pathway to the kindergarten made with them.

A kindergarten made a decorative wall hanging as a group project. Children collected bark and twigs from near their homes and assembled this into a wall hanging. A large piece of hessian was used as the background. Children helped sew the hessian at the bottom and two sides, and the top was stitched to enable a piece of dowel to be inserted. A string was tied at each side so the wall-hanging could be hung up.

Children worked with thick wool, in bright colours. They also glued objects onto the hessian. Pieces of fabric with Aboriginal designs were used, plus feathers, twigs, bark. Natural wool was also used.

At kindergartens in Gippsland, local community people visit regularly to talk to the children. They demonstrate their knowledge of Aboriginal culture and develop an understanding of the importance of land and animals through showing what artefacts are used for, and telling stories of bush tucker, hunting and gathering foods, (Dent 2003).

Making a collage can be fun. Children collect the natural materials at home and in the kindergarten yard. Once collected, the children have a discussion about the materials and as a group sort according to size, shape, smell, texture etc. It’s important to discuss how the Aboriginal people cared for the land and to explain how they never took more resources than they needed, so there was always plenty for everyone (Dent 2003c).

Nature tables are a great way for children to explore and discover the environment. Children can be provided with books and magnifying glasses and a whole range of bits and pieces to investigate and explore (Dent 2003c).
Resources

References and Further Reading

Aboriginal Resource and Management Support Unit, *Cultural environment checklist*, ARMSU, South Australia.

Aboriginal Resource and Management Support Unit, *Selecting appropriate Indigenous Resources*, South Australia.


Board of Studies 1995a, *Aboriginal literacy resource kit. The way we speak. The nature of the speaker*, NSW.

Board of Studies 1995b, *Aboriginal Literacy Resource Kit. The way we learn. The nature of the learner*. NSW.


Dent, L 2003a, *The three levels of culture*. Handout prepared by Department of Human Services for early childhood services in Gippsland Region.

Dent, L 2003b, ‘Importance of providing a culturally inclusive program’, handout prepared by the Department of Human Services for early childhood services in Gippsland Region.

Dent, L 2003, *Terminology*, handout prepared by the Department of Human Services for early childhood services in Gippsland Region.


Eades, D 1995, *Aboriginal English, Board of Studies*. NSW

McMahon, A 1996. ‘Aboriginal Education in Early Childhood’ Talking Diversity, FKA Children’s Services, Richmond.
Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care 2004, Early Childhood Cases Studies. SNAICC, North Fitzroy, Victoria.
Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated 2003, Review of the Koorie Early Childhood Education Program, Fitzroy.

Additional Sources
YALCA. A Partnership In Education And Training For The New Millennium Koorie Education Policy 2001, VAEAI Office of School Education DEET Victoria.

Yarn Strong Sista
Indigenous Education Consultancy
Annette Sax
203 Mascoma Street
Strathmore 3041
Tel: (03) 9338 3492 (office)
Email: yarnstrongsista@iprimus.com.au
Web: www.yarnstrongsista.com
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agencies and Organisations
Contacts/Resources

Koorie Early Childhood Education Program (KECEP) – Department of Human Services
State coordinator, Koorie early childhood education
1/555 Collins Street
Melbourne 3000
Tel: (03) 9616 8715

Regional Aboriginal Co-Operatives – contact your local KEFCO for contact details

Secretariat of National Aboriginal Islander Child Care (SNAICC)
Suite 8/1st Floor 252–260 St George’s Road
North Fitzroy 3065
Tel: (03) 9482 9380
Email: snacc@vicnet.net.au
Web: www.snaicc.asn.au

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)
Peak body for Aboriginal education in Victoria
49 Brunswick Street
Fitzroy 3065
Tel: (03) 9416 3833 (Early Childhood Unit)
Email: vaeai@vaeai.org.au
Web: www.vaeai.org.au
VAEAI web site has links with a number of Aboriginal sites.
It also has details for the various LAECGs
(Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups)

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
Lead agency in Victorian Aboriginal child care issues
34 Wurruk Ave
Preston 3072
PO Box 400 Vic 3072
Tel: (03) 9471 1855
Email: vacca@vacca.org
VACCA services: Family Support, Lakidjeka Crisis Support,
Link-Up Victoria Extended Care and Permanent Care,
Family Preservation, Kurnai and a Debriefing Officer.

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)
Peak body for Aboriginal health in Victoria
5–7 Smith Street Fitzroy
Melbourne Victoria 3065 Australia
PO Box 1328 Collingwood Victoria 3066
Tel: (03) 9419 3350
Facsimile: (03) 9417 3871
Web: http://www.vachco.org.au/

Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL)
Peak body for Victorian Aboriginal community services programs
171 Smith Street
Fitzroy VIC 3065
Tel: (03) 9416 4266

Koorie Heritage Trust
295 King St
Melbourne 3000
Tel: (03) 8622 2600
Web: http://www.koorieheritagetrust.com

Koorie Connections
155 Victoria Street
Victoria Market
Melbourne 3000
Tel: (03) 9326 9824

The Bookshelf Bookshop
116 Bridge Road Richmond
Victoria 3121
Tel: (03) 9428 2011
Sells children’s books by Aboriginal authors.

Magabala Books – Aboriginal Corporation
P.O. Box 668
Broome, West Australia 6725
Tel: (08) 9192 1991

Web sites
Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Infonet
Web: www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au

Bringing them home: the Stolen Children report

Reconciliation Australia
Web: http://www.reconciliationaustralia.org/

Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
Web: http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car

Message stick website
Web: www.abc.net.au/message
Glossary of terms

Aborigine
The word Aborigine is a noun that refers to an Indigenous group of any country. This word should always be spelt with a capital A when referring to Australian Aboriginal people, since it is being used as a proper noun.

Aboriginal
The word Aboriginal is an adjective used to describe a person who is of Aboriginal descent, who identifies as Aboriginal, and is accepted by an Aboriginal community as such.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is someone who:
- is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent;
- identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander;
- is accepted as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in the community in which he/she lives or has lived.

Aboriginal English
Is the first language or home language of many Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children. This is a distinctive language and is a powerful way Aboriginality is communicated.

Community
Important elements of community are country, members of the family, family ties and shared experience. Community is about belonging and is central to Aboriginality.

Culture
Culture can be described for many groups (large and small) as a defined way of life. It is human behaviours and expectations that from a very early age are learned by group members so they can adapt and belong to their environment.

Dreaming – Dream Time
The Dreaming or Dream Time, has different meanings for different Aboriginal groups. The Dreaming is linked to the past, present and future and is the essence of Aboriginal beliefs about creation, spirituality and existence. The terms ‘Dreaming,’ ‘Dreaming Stories’, ‘Creation Stories’ and ‘Traditional Narratives’ are the correct and preferred description.

Elders
Age does not necessarily determine a person as an Aboriginal Elder, rather, they are nominated/chosen to this position by their community. Traditionally, Elders are highly respected ‘teachers’ and the custodians of culture and knowledge.

Kinship
Is a structure used for social relationships, personal and extended family connections, family responsibility and behavioural expectations?

Koorie
Is a generic term used by many Aboriginal people to describe Victorian and southern NSW Aborigines. The spelling of the word may vary. In Victoria, it is usually spelt with ‘ie’. Since it is from the oral tradition, there is no right or wrong way of spelling it. The term Koorie is not accepted by all Aboriginal people, as some strongly prefer to use their regional or clan name, such as Kurnai, Gunai or Ganai (Gippsland), Gunditjmara (Western District) or Kerrupjmara.

Protocols
Protocols are appropriate ways of behaving, communicating and showing respect for the diversity of history and culture. This involves understanding and appreciating the cultural identity and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in kindergarten
July 2005