

Centres for Cultural Learning

Introduction

As the peak body for Koorie education and training in Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) has always promoted the provision of education and training which is culturally relevant, reinforces cultural identity and provides supportive learning environments for Aboriginal people. VAEAI has also strongly supported and promoted the provision of education to the wider community, which increases awareness of Aboriginal culture, communities and aspirations.

In 1990, the Victorian Government and VAEAI formalised their roles regarding the education of Koorie people by entering into a partnership - *Partnership in Education: Koorie Education Policy*, and again in 2001 with *Yalca: A Partnership in Education and Training in the New Millennium*. In 2008, as a result of this partnership and essential education reforms in Victoria, a strategy for the education of Koorie students in government schools was developed between VAEAI and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).

Wannik – the Education strategy for Koorie students in Victoria is designed to improve educational outcomes for all Koorie students, to foster a new culture of high expectations for Koorie students and to systemic reforms across government schools to deliver the best education, so as to meet these expectations. These reforms include an increased emphasis on accountability at schools' regional and system levels, strong leadership, and better engagement with Koorie parents, caregivers and community. Most importantly, it is a pledge by the State government "to work in partnership with Koorie parents and the community to create an education system that respects, recognises and celebrates cultural identity."¹

The Wannik Strategy was developed in close partnership with VAEAI, following the most comprehensive review of education provision for Koorie students ever undertaken in Victoria.² A range of targeted strategies and actions have been developed and are currently being implemented, in order to improve educational outcomes for Koorie learners, foster a culture of high expectations and to reform the government schools systems as mentioned.

¹ DEECD [2008] Wannik: Learning Together – Journey to Our Future: Education Strategy for Koorie Students, DEECD, Victoria.

² See: Sarra, Chris [2007] *DEECD Review of Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Students: Culturally Inclusive Education*, DEECD Victoria and
McRae, David [2007] *DEECD Review of Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Students: Education success for Koorie students: Leads from Research, Policy and Practice*. DEECD, Victoria

Among the Wannik strategies, and in partnership with VAEAI, the State government proposes to:

- Require school principals with Koorie students at their schools to undertake professional development in consultation with the Koorie Community and VAEAI in order to develop a culturally inclusive school;
- In partnership with the Koorie Community, deliver cultural awareness training for teachers and support staff in Victorian schools;
- Improve Koorie learning outcomes and community engagement;
- Develop a professional learning package which supports pre-service and in-service training for teachers in the history and contemporary culture of Victoria's Koorie Community;
- Develop a culturally inclusive curriculum within VELS;
- Develop school community partnership agreements in schools with Koorie students enrolled;
- Work with parents and community to build their confidence in the school system.

To support the Wannik strategies, VAEAI has developed a larger framework document for embedding Koorie cultures, histories and perspectives in Victorian schools³. The following proposal to establish Centres for Cultural Learning (the cultural hub model) will facilitate the implementation of strategies recommended through the VAEAI Framework.

Centres for Cultural Learning

With regards to Aboriginal Studies and Koorie education, VAEAI's prevailing philosophy is that:

- Aboriginal Studies is an essential part of the education of *all* students in Australia, and that
- Aboriginal Education (Community Cultural Programs) should be *by* Koorie people *for* Koorie people.

The delivery of a strong, inclusive cultural education programme involves the development of a cultural curriculum incorporating local, regional and national perspectives, consistent with VAEAI's position on cultural training and education,⁴ and Koorie Community protocols.

VAEAI proposes that to successfully support Wannik objectives and strategies, schools should consider developing Centres for Cultural Learning in partnership with local Koorie communities, via Local Aboriginal Education Consultative groups (LAECGs). In Victoria there

³ VAEAI [2011] Draft Framework for Embedding Koorie Cultures, Histories and Perspectives in Victorian schools.

⁴ VAEAI [2010], *Position Paper – Koorie/Aboriginal Studies and Education*

are currently 33 LAECGs across the State, with numbers rising.⁵ Many schools in Victoria are in the process of establishing school community partnerships with their local Koorie Communities. These formalised partnership agreements are in line with both federal and state policies and strategies under the National *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010-2014)*. 'Focus Schools' highlighted in the Plan, are identified schools - both Government and non-Government - with more than 10 Aboriginal students. In Victoria there are currently 122 such identified Focus Schools. The Plan contains a range of local, systemic and national actions which support local level engagement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and their schools. One of the primary local level actions is focused on school-community partnerships, namely:

Local action 19: [that] *Focus schools will commence negotiating a formal school – community partnership agreement between the school, families and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in 2011, which sets out the respective responsibilities of each party and the ways in which they will **work together to create a culture of high expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and support improvements in their engagement, wellbeing and educational outcomes.***⁶

The Cultural Hub model

At the state level, the Victorian Government has committed to working in partnership with Koorie parents and Communities to create an education system that respects, recognises and celebrates cultural identity, through practice and curriculum, to ensure a culturally inclusive education system for *all* Victorian students⁷.

In developing the *Draft Framework for Embedding Koorie Cultures, Histories and Perspectives in Victorian Schools*, VAEAI has targeted four areas for action:

- Pre-service teacher training
- Professional learning for current education staff
- Aboriginal/Koorie studies in the classroom, and
- Community Cultural Education programmes.

While all four areas are clearly distinguishable with defined objectives, they are also closely linked in their shared aim of embedding Koorie culture, history and perspectives into the

⁵ For more information about LAECGs contact VAEAI.

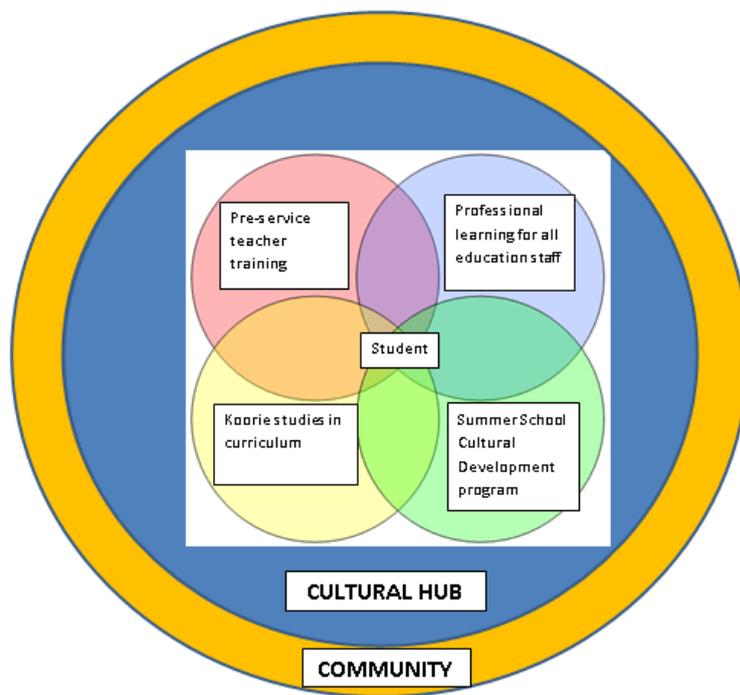
⁶ MCEECDYA [2011] *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010-2014)*, p. 15

⁷ Reference Wannik

Victorian education sector. The framework provides a proposal for a shared 'Cultural Hub' that can provide resources and supports for each area.

The Hub would be at the centre of the school's education practice and actively engage the Koorie community in the development, delivery, assessment and monitoring of the syllabus. Physically, the Cultural Hub could provide a learning space for classes and ongoing training, and a store-house for cultural material resources such as books, articles, recordings, DVDs, artefacts and artworks. The Hub would provide a physical space for Community members, parents and artists to meet, and for the development of cultural resources. As a Centre for Cultural **Learning**, these resources would be available for use by other schools and teachers in the region, as well as the local Koorie Community.

Furthermore, the Cultural Hub could act as an *off-campus study area* for pre-service teachers undertaking Aboriginal studies units at their university or higher education institution; a *training centre* for the provision of professional learning to all education staff; a *classroom* for teaching Aboriginal studies curriculum units to all students; and a *summer school* for cultural development programmes for Koorie students. A visual representation of the Cultural Hub model is provided below.



Professional Development opportunities

Whether Aboriginal Studies is taught as a discrete subject, or as part of cross-curricula dimensions, the application of Koorie perspectives in the curriculum means that Aboriginal history, culture, literature, stories, art and knowledge of the land need to be taught

knowledgeably, and with sensitivity. In either case, teachers will be seeking culturally appropriate and relevant resources, guidance and support.

The DEECD has made a commitment that teachers can expect to be supported to gain a greater understanding of Koorie culture, and be provided with professional learning opportunities for delivering a culturally inclusive curriculum. Further to this, DEECD has also made a commitment to Koorie students that they can engage with their culture in day-to-day school work and activities.⁸

The establishment of well supported Centres for Cultural Learning, in partnership with Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups will facilitate the development and delivery of Professional Development (Cross-cultural training) programmes for all Education staff from schools within the Region.

Community Cultural Programme Pilot - Summer School

We propose that in addition to school-based inclusive cultural programmes, that the proposed *Centres for Cultural Learning* also develop community-based cultural programmes specifically for the local Koorie community.

In 2010, VAEAI undertook a series of community consultations to discuss the concept of a 'summer school' programme. A number of Koorie parents had voiced concern that their children were being taken out of ordinary school classes to attend 'cultural programs' with other Koorie students, while their fellow students remained in class for 'normal lessons'. While these activities were educational and enjoyable and obviously led to good bonding with fellow students and strengthening self esteem, parents were concerned that the students were missing out on vital school activities. They wanted both for their children – a good solid education at school and strong cultural activities and learning for their children. As a result of these discussions, the concept of a summer school was floated – a programme offering a community driven complementary cultural programme for Koorie students. VAEAI took up the issue, and further discussions occurred with LAECGs in regional Victoria.

Many schools across the State are attempting to implement Wannik strategies by developing School-Community Partnerships, a more culturally inclusive curriculum and considering the teaching of Language, Culture and Reclamation (Aboriginal LOTE). They are also aware that the National Curriculum will further require their teachers to teach Aboriginal perspectives across the entire curriculum. They see that the development of Centres for Cultural Learning (cultural hubs) would support not only the delivery of a cultural programme to all students, but also the delivery of a summer school programme

⁸ Wannik Strategy (2008)

specifically for Koorie students in the region. The School-Community Partnerships process and the subsequent engagement of both community and students with the school can only improve educational outcomes. Furthermore, as resources would be produced for and by the summer school programme, they would also be used in the Aboriginal perspectives or studies units in the local schools.

The programme would be targeted at all Koorie learners in the region, and ideally involve family groups – ie parents, carers and other family members - as well as the wider Koorie Community.

Importantly, the ‘summer school’ would take place outside school hours, in a combination of after-school, weekends and holidays, ensuring that Koorie learners are not taken out of regular classes to participate in cultural studies programs, as is the practice in some schools. A programme such as this would see Victoria joining many international jurisdictions who “in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.”⁹

The implementation of this programme as a pilot would be documented and monitored in order to develop a best-practice model for its expansion to other communities.

Supporting Documents:

- Wannik: Learning Together – Journey to our Future: Education Strategy for Koorie Students, DEECD (2008).
- VAEAI Position Paper: Koorie/Aboriginal Studies and Education
- Draft Framework for Embedding Koorie Cultures, Histories and Perspectives in Victorian Schools, VAEAI (2011).

⁹ The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008)