

# But can they paint dots?

**This question comes up often, both in Early Years education settings and schools. So, we thought we might address it and talk about some of the protocols in place and matters to consider. There is some confusion and fear out there, so let's try and clear some of this up.**



In a culturally inclusive and stimulating education program, The Arts offer huge opportunities to learn, engage, connect with and share culture. The Early Years play-based curriculum, the P-10 Victorian Curriculum and the Australian Curriculum all offer a myriad of opportunities to engage in, learn and build a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts. See the [VCAA Guide](#), for more.

But to dots... The short answer, and good news is "Yes!"

However, given that we are trying to clear things up, art-forms and other cultural expressions need to be put into context, as well as taught and understood in that context.



Blak Design Matters - Interview with CEO of the Koorie Heritage Trust, Tom Mosby, on the exhibition Blak Design Matters, 2018, filmed by ABC.

Dots and dot painting, on body, bark or canvas *is not* a traditional form of Victorian Koorie artistic expression, ceremonial or otherwise. In Victoria, techniques using cross-hatching, line-work and wood-burning feature as artistic expressions.



Music Sticks. By Monaro artists Peter and Alex Mongta 1990s

We know the first thing that comes to mind for most people when thinking about Aboriginal art both here and overseas, features dot painting. This is not surprising given its popularity, popularised styles and designs, famous artistic works and wide exposure. So popular is this form that contemporary Victorian artists *also* use dots in their works, as to do other Aboriginal artists across the country. The influence of dots as a design feature has spread across the nation, is very popular and prolific, and employed by many contemporary artists. So, while it is not a

*traditional* Victorian form, it is a *contemporary influence* in Victorian Aboriginal art today.



Dot designs themselves, originate in Central Australia. Dot design was and continues to be used in bodypainting for dance ceremonies and ground-paintings. But these designs were first transferred to canvas only recently, in the 1970s under the influence of an art teacher. Geoffrey Bardon was assigned as an art teacher for the children of the Aboriginal people in Papunya, near Alice Springs. He noticed whilst the Aboriginal men were telling stories they would draw symbols in the sand.

Bardon encouraged his students to paint a mural based on traditional Dreamings on the school walls. The murals sparked incredible interest in the community. He encouraged his students to paint the stories onto canvas and board. Soon many of the men began painting as well. Artists at first used cardboard or pieces of wood, which they later replaced with canvas.

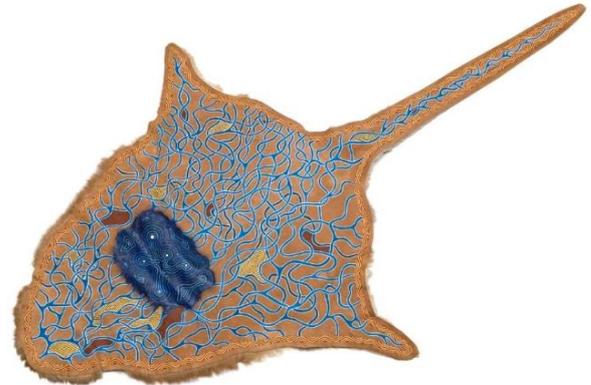
That was the start of the **Papunya Tula Art Movement**. Dots therefore are a Central Australian traditional and contemporary form of expression.

**Click on the Papunya sign below to read more about the use and history of the dots.**



which focuses at the local level first (ask yourself whose land or Country the school is situated on), followed by regional, state, national and international indigenous perspectives. (p.17)

Watch this 3-min interview with Paul Sweeney, Manager of Papunya Tula to learn more about the Papunya Tula art movement, its importance to the community and the place of this art movement 40 years on.



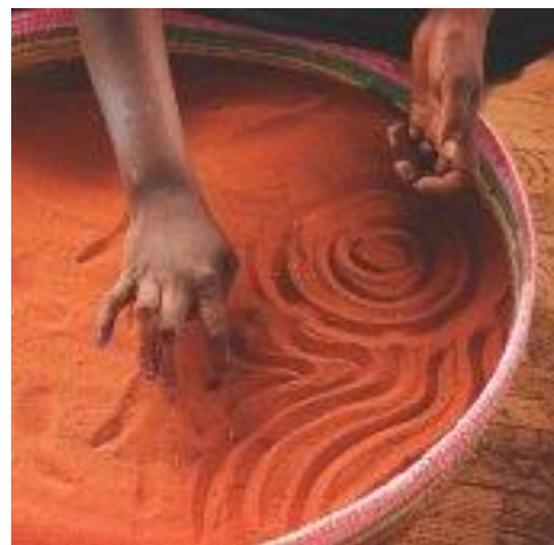
This is part three in the [Ronnie Tjampitjinpa series](#), 'Papunya Tula Stories; History of Papunya Tula', filmed on location in the Northern Territory, marking the 40th anniversary of the Papunya Tula movement.

Map of Port Phillip Bay c. 2000 by Wurundjeri artist Mandy Nicholson; painted on kangaroo skin.



We strongly recommend that as educators in early education settings and schools you include Aboriginal Arts content, commencing with local Aboriginal perspectives, following the model above. By exploring Victorian art forms such as cross hatching, line drawing and wood-burning, the use of textiles and design in the production of possum skin cloaks, tools, weapons and jewellery etc., and elements of history and identity expressed through art and design. BY exploring the works and lives of Victorian artists past and present and inviting Victorian artists to support your program.

**That means that in an education context, in kindergartens, classrooms and art workshops students *can* paint dots, but the activity needs to be put into and understood in context.**



The preferred model for teaching Aboriginal perspectives is starting with local Koorie perspectives and continuing to regional, state, national and then international perspectives. This is published in the VAEAI [Protocols for Koorie Education in Victorian Primary and Secondary Schools](#):

Symbols in the sand. Credit Tourism NT

*Local Koorie cultural and historical content should be a priority focus and tapped into wherever possible and appropriate, following a Koorie community-preferred education model*

However, education is about broadening everyone’s cultural understanding and keeping in mind that there are many Aboriginal students from all parts of Australia, the protocols support going beyond local perspectives.

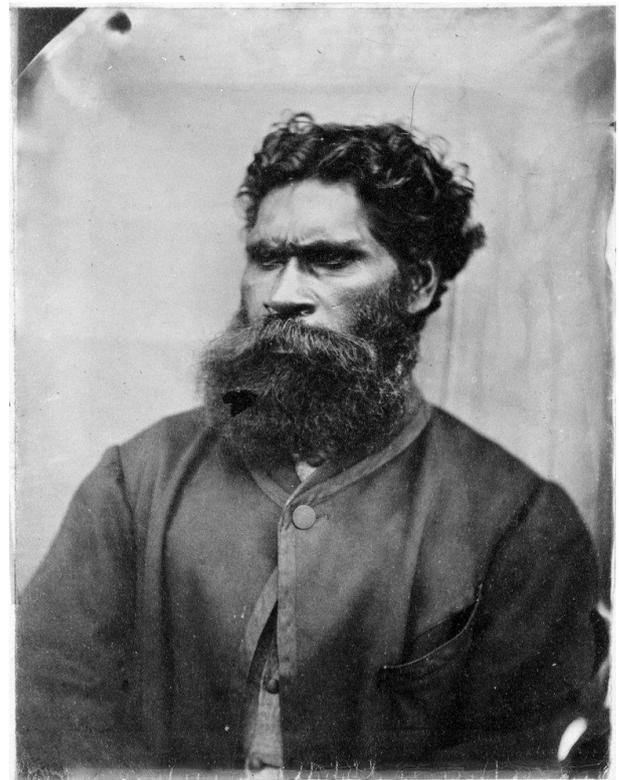
*Having said this, schools need to appreciate and acknowledge that this local content may not be representative of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the school, whose families may have moved to the area from other parts of the state or country. It is therefore also important to include material about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and histories from other regions of the state, and parts of the country - not only for these students, but for all students at the school, following the Koorie community-preferred model. It is best practice to identify where each teaching resource comes from, for example “this is a creation story told by the Gunditjmara people of south-west Victoria” or “we’re about to watch a dance performed by Yolngu women from East Arnhem Land.” (p.18)*

So, in the context of art and dot paintings VAEAI’s position is that:

**Teachers can teach, talk about and engage with dot paintings in Victoria. However, they should know about and explain the context for this style of design. This is the cultural respect.**

*E.g. dot design is not a traditional form in Victoria but traditionally a form originating in Central Australia, with details such as those mentioned above, as appropriate.*

Ideally, dot style would be explored after a local-focused exploration, following the preferred model and protocols because we promote learning with a sense of belonging, identity and respect. But educators need the freedom to be creative and to plan their programs as they feel best. Go ahead and explore dots, while planning Victorian art-focused activities like exhibitions and workshops with guest artists.



*The Road to Civilization* by Howard Talgum Edwards [Palawa – Boonwerung – Taungerung - Yorta Yorta - Muthi Muthi] (KHT); *Emu Feathered Necklace and Parrot Feather Necklace* by 2018 Winner of the Koorie Art Show Marilyne Nicholls [Wadi Wadi - Yorta Yorta - Dja Dja Wurrung – Ngarrindjeri - Ladjji Latji – Yulpagulp - Barrappa Barrappa]; Portrait of Wurundjeri Artist William Barak, by photographer Carl Walter (1886)

### Linking to the Early Years Learning Framework

1.3: Children develop knowledgeable and confident self – identities.

2.2: Children respond to diversity with respect.

3.1: Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing.

4.1: Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, co-operation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity.

5.4: Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work.

### The VEYLF Outcomes:

- 1: children have a strong sense of identity
- 2: children are connected with and contribute to their world
- 3: children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- 4: children are confident and involved learners
- 5: children are effective communicators

In particular, the VEYLF recognises and respects Aboriginal cultures and their unique place in the heritage and future of Victoria. Learning about and valuing the place of Aboriginal people will enhance all Victorian children’s sense of place in our community

### Victorian Curriculum:

**VCAVAR024** Respond to visual artworks, including artworks by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, by describing subject matter and ideas. **Visual Arts, Levels 1 and 2, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAVAE025** Explore ideas and artworks from different cultures and times as inspiration to create visual artworks. **Visual Arts, Levels 3 and 4, Explore and Express Ideas.**

**VCAVAR028** Identify and discuss how ideas are expressed in artworks from a range of places, times and cultures, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. **Visual Arts, Levels 3 and 4, Respond and Interpret**

**VCAVAR032** Identify and describe how ideas are expressed in artworks by comparing artworks from different contemporary, historical and cultural contexts, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander peoples. **Visual Arts, Levels 5 and 6, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAVAE034** Explore how artists use materials, techniques, technologies and processes to realize their intentions in art works. **Visual Arts, Levels 7 and 8, Explore and Express Ideas.**

**VCAVAR039** Analyse how ideas and viewpoints are expressed in art works and how they are viewed by audiences. **Visual Arts, Levels 7 and 8, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAVAR038** Identify and connect specific features of visual artworks from different cultures, historical and contemporary times, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. **Visual Arts, Levels 7 and 8, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAVCDR005** Identify and describe the use of methods, media, materials, design elements and design principles in visual communications from different historical, social and cultural contexts. **Visual Communication Design, Levels 7 and 8, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAMAR032** Explain how the elements of media arts and story principles communicate meaning and viewpoints by comparing media artworks from different social, cultural and historical contexts, including media artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. **Media Arts, Levels 5 and 6, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAMAR039** Identify specific features and purposes of media artworks from contemporary and past times to explore viewpoints and enrich their media arts making, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. **Media Arts, Levels 7 and 8, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAMAR045** Analyse and evaluate how technical and symbolic elements are manipulated in media artworks to challenge representations framed by social beliefs and values in different community and institutional contexts. **Media Arts, Levels 9 and 10, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAMAR046** Analyse and evaluate a range of media artworks from contemporary and past times, including the media artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their media arts making. **Media Arts, Levels 9 and 10, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAMUR028** Identify features of the music they listen to, compose and perform, and discuss the purposes it was created for including the music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, using music terminology. **Music, Levels 3 and 4, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAMUR032** Explain how aspects of the elements of music are combined to communicate ideas, concepts and feelings by comparing music from different cultures, times and locations including the music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. **Music, Levels 5 and 6, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAMUR039** Identify and connect specific features and purposes of music from contemporary and past times including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to explore viewpoints and enrich their music making. **Music, Levels 7 and 8, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAMUR046** Analyse a range of music from contemporary and past times, including the music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to explore differing viewpoints, enrich their music making, and develop understanding of music practice in local, national and international contexts. **Music, Levels 9 and 10, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAVAR045** Analyse and interpret artworks to explore the different forms of expression, intentions and viewpoints of artists and how they are viewed by audiences. **Visual Arts, Levels 9 and 10, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAVAR046** Analyse, interpret and evaluate a range of visual artworks from different cultures, historical and contemporary contexts, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to explore differing viewpoints. **Visual Arts, Levels 9 and 10, Respond and Interpret.**

**VCAVCDR011** Analyse and evaluate the use of methods, media, materials, design elements and design principles in visual communications from different historical, social and cultural contexts, including presentations by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. **Visual Communication Design, Levels 9 and 10, Respond and Interpret.**

*And a final word ...*

*Send us any questions around Koorie perspectives in teaching and we'll try and include some suggestions in a new Q&A section. If you're wondering, then so are others ...*

*We are always seeking to improve our Bulletins and Features and to make them useful, relevant and highly readable. We invite you to email through suggestions including how you as educators incorporate Aboriginal perspectives, especially Victorian ones in your teaching and curriculum.*

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*Any enquiries, feedback and suggestions are welcomed, by contacting VAEAI on (03) 94810800 or emailing the editor-curator at [vaso@vaeai.org.au](mailto:vaso@vaeai.org.au).*

For more Koorie Perspectives, see the VAEAI [Koorie Education Calendar](#).

