

Koorie Cross-Curricular Protocols for Victorian Government Schools

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Koorie Cross-Curricular Protocols for Victorian Government Schools

Introduction

Teachers must follow protocols for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. These are known as the Koorie Cross-Curricular Protocols.

The protocols seek to protect the integrity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural expressions in a way in which all Australians can engage respectfully and feel connected to this identity.

Koorie peoples

Aboriginal people whose traditional lands and waters exist within the boundaries that today frame the state of Victoria are often collectively called Koorie peoples or Koories. Koorie is a contemporary collective or group term.

Throughout this document, the term 'Koorie' is used inclusively and refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria.

Principles

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture has existed in this land for around 50,000 years. The uniqueness of these cultures and the wisdom and knowledge embedded in them are things to be highly valued by all Australians.

1. Koorie and all Aboriginal people are entitled to respect for their culture.
2. Exposure to, and engagement with, Koorie and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage will enrich all Australians and strengthen our unique identity.
3. Koorie and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage, including cultural expressions, is the intellectual property of Koorie and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Cultural expressions includes stories, poetry, songs, instrumental music, dances, plays, ceremonies, rituals, performances, symbols, drawings, designs, paintings, body paintings, carvings, sculptures, handicrafts, baskets, needlework, textiles, artefacts and instruments.
4. Koorie people are entitled to protect and manage the use of their cultural heritage and expressions.
5. Koorie people are entitled to benefit from any activities that use their cultural heritage and expressions.
6. Koorie people are entitled to government support in the protection and maintenance of their cultural heritage and expressions.

Guidelines

1. The first step in the development of any school activity involving students' active development of, or production of a replica of, a Koorie cultural expression must be in consultation with the Traditional Owners or Custodians of the land on which the school stands.
2. The Traditional Owners or Custodians remain the owners of the Indigenous cultural and intellectual property (ICIP) rights used in the activity and should be acknowledged as such in any published materials relating to the activity.
3. The activity must not damage Koorie, and more broadly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, cultural integrity.

Using Koorie cultural expressions in the classroom

Meaningful learning about Koorie and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, traditions, histories and experiences is enhanced by consultation with Koorie and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities. No amount of study can substitute for the lived experiences of members of these Communities.

There are some credible resources in the public domain that can be used for activities such as viewing or reading without consultation with the appropriate Koorie or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Community. If resources for these receptive activities are selected from a reputable website, they should provide appropriate material for delivering specific curriculum content. For examples, see [Museum Victoria](#) and [Creative Victoria](#)

If a task or unit will require students to actively develop or produce a replica of a Koorie, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural expression, consultation with the Koorie, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Community that owns the cultural expression is required.

If you are unsure about the need to consult or are seeking advice on appropriate local Koorie Community organisations, contact your local [Koorie Education Coordinator](#) or [Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc \(VAEAI\)](#).

Working with Koorie communities

Before initiating a consultative process, you should familiarise yourself with the principles and guidelines for working with Koorie Communities.

The following resources provide further information relating to working with Koorie and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities:

- Department of Education and Training's [Koorie Learning Resources](#), including a *'Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country guide'*
- [An introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health cultural protocols and perspectives](#)
- [Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guest speakers](#)
- [Sharing knowledge about sacred sites and ceremonies](#)
- [Australia Council for the Arts](#)

- [Oxfam Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols](#)
- [Creative Victoria](#)
- [Artists in the Black: Protocols](#)
- [Drama Australia](#) (see *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Guidelines for Drama/Theatre Education*)
- [Board of Studies NSW](#) – developed comprehensive materials that provide practical advice about authentic involvement of Aboriginal community members in school curriculum development. They take a whole-of-school approach.

Indigenous cultural and intellectual property

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights must be respected. ICIP can cover many different forms of traditional culture and expressions. Some of these are:

- Writing, e.g. a book, poetry
- Music, e.g. a song
- Performances, e.g. dance, ceremonies
- Artistic work, e.g. painting
- Languages
- Tangible cultural property, e.g. sacred sites, burial grounds
- Intangible cultural property, e.g. stories passed on orally
- Documentation of Indigenous peoples' heritage in all forms of media, e.g. reports, films, sound recordings. (Source: Artists in the Black, Arts Law Information Sheet).

For more information, see:

- [Smartcopying: Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights](#)
- [Artists in the Black: ICIP](#)

Preparations for the activity

Teachers and students need to understand the subtleties of Koorie relationships and communication styles and be prepared to be flexible when consulting and/or working with Koorie Communities.

In Victoria, it is appropriate that the content of the activities proposed should follow a Koorie community-preferred education model which focuses at the local level first (local Koorie perspectives), then extends to neighbouring regional Communities, followed by other Victorian

Koorie Communities, and, finally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities from across Australia. For example:

- Koorie art in the community on which the school stands
- Koorie art from neighbouring communities
- Koorie art from other Victorian communities
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art from across Australia.

When bringing in guest speakers who are Koorie Community members, the teacher must consult with the Community member in relation to what will and will not be discussed during their visit, particularly in relation to sensitive issues. The teacher should also advise the Community member of the students' age, likely questions, and any other information relevant to the activity.

Potentially sensitive issues

When bringing in guest speakers who are Koorie Community members, discussions relating to sensitive issues will require the teacher to consult with the Community member beforehand, to ascertain what will and will not be discussed. Some sensitive issues are:

- The Stolen generation
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody
- Reconciliation
- Native Title
- Land Rights
- Social dislocation
- Racism
- Sensitivity of content (secret, sacred)
- Gender
- Taking photographs – permission
- Deceased people
- Personal privacy - permission
- Other local issues

Advice on cross-cultural communication

- Introductory protocols are important. Be prepared to spend time sharing personal background information about yourself and the purpose of your activity.
- Be patient when asking questions. Look, listen and learn, as it may take time for some community people to become involved. Some people may work towards giving their opinions by initially talking about other issues or stories.
- Do not expect every Koorie person (including students in the school) to know about or want to talk publicly about Koorie cultures, families, histories or issues.
- Some Koorie people might not openly express an opinion. They may choose to talk indirectly about an issue if they do not agree with the previous speaker. Not all Koorie people will share the same opinions and feelings. All opinions should be acknowledged and valued.
- The use of silence should not be misunderstood.... It is important that this silence is respected and not interrupted unnecessarily.
- There are different types of knowledge – for example, spiritual knowledge and scientific knowledge – and these may conflict. One should be sensitive to these differences when talking to an Indigenous person about issues and experiences.
- Do not force a point of view.
- Use language that respects the integrity and beliefs of the person or group with whom you're meeting.
- Be prepared to accept that some questions may remain unanswered.
- Family obligations and funerals affect many people in Koorie and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and may impact on previous obligations made to a school. Immediate and extended family obligations will always take first priority.
- Remember that different families have different values and cultural beliefs, even if they are from the same community. Consult with a variety of community people. (Source: Drama Australia)