



**More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Teachers Initiative (MATSITI)**

Final Report

**Leadership for Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander Teachers & Koorie
Education Workers**

Catholic Education Commission Victoria

30th October 2015



**University of
South Australia**



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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Services description from *Schedule of Subcontract Agreement*.

The desired outcome of this project will be that there will be an increased number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers who aspire to leadership positions in their schools. This will have a lasting impact as they will also encourage other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers to aspire to leadership. They will also be able to play a role within their schools to promote teaching as career of choice. There are currently 6 secondary and 9 primary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in the Victorian Catholic teaching system. They have been identified through the CECV Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey. There is a belief within the working party that there are more than 15 teachers in the Victorian Catholic system.

Reference Group

- Ms Catherine Henbest –Team Leader – Catholic Education Melbourne
- Ms Delsie Lillyst (Gunditjmara, Bunitj) - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer – Catholic Education Melbourne
- Mrs Helen Christensen (Tiwi) - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer – Catholic Education Melbourne
- Ms Jeanette Morris (Buandig) - (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer) - Ballarat
- Mr Paul Munday/Mr Barry Soraghan - Education Officer (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education) - Sale
- Ms Bernadette McPherson - Senior Education Officer (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education) – Sandhurst
- Ms Louise Levy – Education Officer (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education)
- Professor Wendy Brabham (Wemba Wemba, Wergaia) - External Consultant

Process:

- Potential participants were identified through the CECV census data and the annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surveys that are completed by schools.
- Contact was made individually with each principal to explain the focus of the program and to seek their endorsement of the program.
- Gauged teacher interest in being involved in the project.
- Contact was made with 15 participants.
- Two teachers explained that they were not interested, one was resigning at the end of 2014 and another had left on maternity leave in November 2014.

Teachers who expressed interest completed a survey which gathered the following information:

- Years of service
- Positions of leadership currently or previously held
- What they hoped to gain from the program

Some participant's responses:

- "Information on how we can make students more aware of Indigenous culture"
- "Visible leadership"
- "To develop the skills required to be a positive leader within a school community"
- "To use my leadership skills through an Aboriginal perspective"
- "To possibly gain some skills related to leadership positions and to network with other teachers"

- “I’m hoping that I might gain insights into how disadvantaged children can be assisted to access a good standard of education. I might then be able to assist others in this field to further improve those opportunities.”
- “Further leadership skills.”
- “Clarity around my identity and sharing my experience.”
- “Many new skills and potential to look at different avenues for me in my teaching career”
- “I have never entertained taking on a position of leadership because I have focussed on my classes and not wanted the extra stress. However being a wood metal teacher I have got all practical classes where I have taught one visual communications class in five years which was a great break due to the demand of woodwork teachers it is very hard from my wood classes to get replaces which brings opportunities few and far.”

1.2 Ethics

Statement on human research ethics if applicable.

2 Reform and Innovation

- **Degree of reform and innovation of the initiative.**
 - Established a partnership between Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and the Australian Catholic University (ACU) in establishing accreditation status for this and future Aboriginal education professional learning activities.
 - Four of the participants have enrolled at a Masters level to complete one unit of study.
 - On day five they each delivered a presentation as one of their assessment tasks.
 - CECV leadership network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and Koorie Education Workers
- **Description of progress against original project outcomes, deliverables and milestones.**

Progress:

 - to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and Koorie Education Workers (project participants) with the opportunities and skills to apply for leadership positions in their schools;
 - that the project participants will encourage other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers to aspire to leadership positions;
 - that the project participants will become promoters of teaching as career of choice.
- Statistical analysis of improvements (during life of project).

3 Capability

- **Quality of partnerships, Indigenous leaders and engagement during life of project.**

Day 1

- a) Welcome to Country – Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Bill Nicholson
- b) Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) Guest Speakers
 - Very Rev Anthony Kerin JCL EV
 - Mr Stephen Elder, Executive Director Catholic Education Melbourne

- Ms Delsie Lillyst (Gunditjmara, Bunitj) – Senior CECV Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representative
- c) Aboriginal Guest Speakers
 - Ms Lisa Thorpe (Gunai/Kurnai, Gunditjmara) - Chief Executive Officer Bubup Wilam for Early Learning Inc
 - Mr James Atkinson (Yorta Yorta, Bangerang) – Manager, Koorie Education, Department of Education.
 - Professor Wendy Brabham (Wemba Wemba, Wergaia) – University of Melbourne
- d) Aboriginal Catholic Ministry
 - Ms Sherry Balcombe (Yalanji, Djabaguy, Okla) - Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Victoria
- e) Catholic Education Staff:
 - Ms Jeanette Morris (Buandig) – Catholic Education Office Ballarat
 - Mr Paul Munday – Catholic Education Office Sale
 - Mrs Helen Christensen (Tiwi) – Catholic Education Melbourne
 - Ms Catherine Henbest – Catholic Education Melbourne
 - Ms Delsie Lillyst (Gunditjmara, Bunitj) – Catholic Education Melbourne
 - Mr Barry Soraghan – Catholic Education Office Sale
 - Ms Louise Levy – Catholic Education Office Sandhurst
 - Ms Bernadette McPherson – Catholic Education Office Sandhurst

Day 2

Elders:

- Aunty Melva Johnson (Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba)
- Aunty Lorraine Sellings (Gunai/Kurnai)
- Uncle Bill Tregonning (Gunai/Kurnai)

Koorie Heritage Trust

- Ms Jennifer Bates - Koorie Family History Services Manager
- Mr Bamblett

Day 3

Guest Speakers:

Professional Learning Leadership Program

- Professor Wendy Brabham (Wemba Wemba, Wergaia)

Country and Community

- Mr Gary Murray (Dja Dja Wurrung, Dhudhuroa, Wemba Wemba)
- Ms Dotty Bamblett (Yorta Yorta)

Day 4

Guest Speaker

- Dr Nerida Blair (Wakka Wakka) – Associate Professor and the National Director of Indigenous Education for the Faculty of Education and Arts at the Australian Catholic University.

Day 5

Guest Speakers

Educational Leadership and Future Directions

- Mr Daryl Rose (Gunditjmara) – Koorie Engagement Strategy Officer (KESO) Department of Education
- Ms Delsie Lillyst (Gunditjmara, Bunitj) – Catholic Education Melbourne

- Mrs Helen Christensen (Tiwi) – Catholic Education Melbourne
- Ms Catherine Henbest – Catholic Education Melbourne

4 Project Outcomes and Benefits

For final reports, provide commentary on the following. Note that the 2015 external evaluation of MATSITI projects will review projects against these criteria.

- Numbers of current or prospective Indigenous teachers supported.
 - Findings of the survey:
 - Total of 15 Teachers in Catholic schools across Victoria
 - 8 Koorie Education Workers
 - Teaching range: 2 years – 35 years
 - 5 are in current leadership positions
 - Highest level – Deputy Principal
 - Leadership & professional learning programs undertaken
 - Reasons for doing the program
 - Specific areas of leadership

- Alignment with MATSITI Scoping Plan Strategic Actions (if applicable).
 - Professional learning on leadership for current teachers.
 - Mentorship of teachers – building on the relationships established over the 5 day program.
 - Future Directions will be the establishment of a CECV Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teacher Network

- **Achievements against success measures provided in project proposal.**
 - The intended outcomes of the Project are:
 - to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and Koorie Education Workers (project participants) with the opportunities and skills to apply for leadership positions in their schools;
 - that the project participants will encourage other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers to aspire to leadership positions;
 - that the project participants will become promoters of teaching as career of choice.

Achievements:

- Some teachers with their new learnings and confidence became advocates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their schools.
- Connected through social media
- “This team can grow and expand into a statewide educational body that can impact on policy development, curriculum development, capacity building, research outcomes and more importantly forging networks and cultural connections with first nations and community groups across this state to inform future educational directions in Catholic Education.” – participant evaluation

- **Sharing of project successes and challenges within and beyond the organisation.**

Participant's Responses:

Successes:

- bringing communities and individuals together
- Connecting people who were journeying alone and giving us understandings, inspiration, knowledge and a network to work with and people to share with.
- A greater understanding of the challenges facing teachers and support workers
- “I feel the program provided a very important connection for a lot of us. Many would've felt connected as teachers, but that doesn't quite nurture the cultural nature of an Aboriginal Educator.
- Getting successful education mob together helps them solidify 'successful Aboriginal educator' as part of THEIR identity as Aboriginal Educators.
- I think MATSITI provided more than just a network for some. I feel it's provided a much needed conversation and safe space for all participants.”
- “This program has sent me on a journey of discovery, similar to my Aunty who 40 years ago did a 'Sally Morgan - My Place' trip of discovery to find kin and trace our extensive history in the NT.
- I have now felt proud to get up and run a whole school assembly during reconciliation week, and share mine and my grandmother's story.
- To explain to everyone on why we say “Sorry”.

Challenges:

- Going it alone if others are not nearby to support and facilitate further personal and professional growth.
- Connecting into our local communities may be more challenging than we think.
- Facing the white fragility that exists everywhere in our education system and going gently through the process of re-educating.
- Indigenous knowings about leadership being married with the current infrastructures that we work in in schools.
- How we can build knowledge with our staff, schools and parish as well as communities to celebrate and recognise First Nations Peoples'
- The call to connect with community is by far the greatest challenge apart from the personal challenge of accepting my responsibility in owning my heritage.
- Within the group there has been a general consensus of not knowing where to go with this new information and sense of commitment to build the educational standards for Indigenous teachers and students.

• **Differentiation from existing programs (i.e. Uniqueness).**

The exceptional aspect of this project is that the reference group focussed on the cultural identity of teachers and Koorie Educations Workers

- The project will focus on employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leaders and teachers to provide this leadership program – Elders, academics, community members, CECV Aboriginal personnel
- ➔ Listening to Aboriginal voices, perspectives and experiences
 - Our teachers and Koorie Education Workers are survivors of a past and ever-changing present landscape that is Aboriginal Victoria/Australia. Many have been disconnected from their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander story and were unsure about “how to be Aboriginal”.
 - In order for participants encourage other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders into the profession they had to be confident about their own story and undertake a journey that had the power to hurt and heal at the same time.

Survey responses lead to the development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander working party that identified key themes and determined relevant speakers for the first day of the program.

The reference group had to:

- walk slowly with most of the teachers in this project.
- acknowledge the teachers' identity was expressed through the ticking of the box.
- unpack their connections to family, community and land.

Why? Significant understanding - the cohort consisted of:

- Aboriginal teachers
- Teachers who are Aboriginal
- Koorie Education Workers
- What is the difference between an Aboriginal teacher and a teacher who is Aboriginal?
 - The answer is complex, as there is not one single answer. This complexity helped us design a program that was responsive to their individual journeys.
 - This is closely linked to what Stephen Elder, the Director of Catholic Education Melbourne said on day one of the program. "This is important business. This is your business. Your presence as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples offers something to Australian society that is *difficult to define, but invaluable to learning*. You have put up your hand to go into unfamiliar territory and make new commitments to enrich your own learning. MATSITI recognises this and we will wholeheartedly contribute to such an important endeavour."
 - There are limitless opportunities to what they can offer the profession.

The reference group focussed on 3 key themes:

1. Aboriginal and Catholic Culture
2. Aboriginal and Catholic Leadership Attributes
3. Aboriginal and Catholic Voices
 - ➔ Offer dynamic workshops not just "training"

- **Clear success and measures against original Project Outcomes.**

- Establish a CECV Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teacher Network in 2016
- Connections - a desire by people to remain connected and to be able to share their journey more openly.
- Further professional learning.
- Teachers stepping forward identifying that they are Indigenous.
- Learning to listen with different ears.
- To stop using ignorance as a reason to not acknowledge First Nations Peoples.
- Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, history and culture in our curriculum.
- Taking chances and possibly making mistakes. Being prepared to have a go and apologise if we/they get it wrong.

- **Description of progress against original project outcomes, deliverables and milestones.**

- Established a partnership between Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and the Australian Catholic University (ACU) in establishing accreditation status for this and future Aboriginal education professional learning activities.
- Four of the participants have enrolled at a Masters level to complete one unit of study.
- On day five they each delivered a presentation as one of their assessment tasks.

- **Statistical analysis of improvements (during life of project).**

5 Financial

The MATSITI funding has provided a wonderful opportunity for the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria to provide a leadership program for our teachers. It has initiated a very important opportunity for networking and sharing of stories. There has been extensive in kind support in designing and delivering the program. Also in completing a range of administrative tasks by CECV staff.

6 Sustainability

As outlined in the report there has been a range of benefits from this program. Some of these were planned and some have happened unexpectedly. We will continue to foster this network and expand on the initial membership that was developed in 2015.

7 Report recommendations

We will continue to provide opportunities to meet and share experiences in the future.

We will continue to engage with the range of social media connections that have been established by the 2015 group.

We will provide opportunities for mentoring of new Aboriginal teachers.

This has started a very valuable network and the staff involved will continue to explore all possibilities to continue to grow the connections that have been made.