

Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in your landscape

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) in consultation with Charles Solomon

Many education and care services are looking to create spaces that honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. In outdoor areas, this can mean incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, design and visual storytelling, and of course, Indigenous plants. Here, VAEAI shares three key insights for success in transforming the landscape of your children's service.

Australia has some of the most unique plant life in the world and Indigenous plant knowledge stretches back tens of thousands of years. Landscape design provides us with the ability to communicate our ideas in the

physical environment while interacting with nature. From the texture of a path to the different colours of wood and steel, options for the 'hardscape' are endless. The selection of trees, shrubs and grasses can also bring an area to life.

As early and middle childhood educators, you may be wondering where to start. Maybe you're asking yourself, how can I assist children to learn and engage with Aboriginal culture in the landscape? Who do I approach? How do I find local plants and stories? These questions might seem a bit daunting, but there are excellent resources already available to help you.

1

Involve local Aboriginal people and Traditional Owners from the get-go

Co-designing with local Aboriginal people and Traditional Owners, through community-controlled organisations such as VAEAI, is key. Involve them from the start. This allows their stories and ideas to shape the project and to embed their culture into the landscape.

Monero/Ngarigo Gooreng Gooreng man and landscape designer, Charles Solomon, says consulting with your local Aboriginal community from the very beginning prevents a "bolt-on approach, where spaces are designed and built and 70 per cent of the way through a project, we realise that we probably should involve Aboriginal people. Avoid this at all costs."

Your budget may not allow you to do everything, but pacing, planning and staging your ideas will give you more success. To gain some inspiration, make sure you visit the Children's Garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens. It's a great balance between sensory experience and learning for children.

The Australian Indigenous Design Charter (bit.ly/3dd5erS) is a great starting place in auditing your space to identify current gaps and opportunities.

2

Balance your ambition with realistic outcomes

3

Recruit experts to help in the construction

Lastly, building a garden, like any construction project, can be stressful. Make sure you access experts where you can – there are people out there who can help you!