

Strengthened cultural identity and pride in Indigenous culture and heritage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Knox Grammar School

Purpose

To foster students' sense of identity and pride in their Indigenous culture and nurture them as strong Aboriginal young men, through employing an Indigenous Cultural Mentor, establishing a cultural mentoring program with an emphasis on wellbeing, and creating a stronger net of cultural safety within the school and with the boys' families and community.

Target group

All 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (boarders and day students). The Program also aimed to target and establish cultural connections with students' families and community and the Knox Staff.

Activities

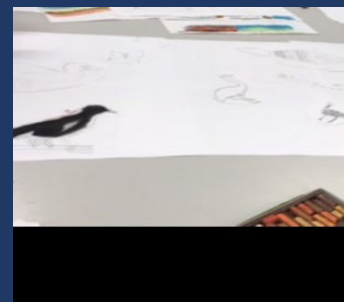
The Indigenous Mentor established relationships with the boys in a structured and familiar manner for a minimum of six hours per week, initially through art workshops and work on the school mural representing the boys' totems. The boys discussed and decided the key cultural areas they wished to learn about, and this informed future activities. The Mentor conducted or organised group cultural learning sessions, cultural dance and group didgeridoo lessons and one-to-one wellbeing mentoring with each student. He also met with staff who cared for the boys as needed. The cultural goals are now working alongside academic and personal goals to give the boys direction. The Mentor also attended ceremonies such as Acknowledgement and Smoking Ceremonies and formal events such as the Induction of the Boarders Leadership Team.

Outcomes

A positive, connected and purposeful relationship has developed through the mentoring program. As a consequence, the boys display an increased sense of cultural safety. For example, they regularly play their didgeridoos in the boarding house and proudly explain to other boarders its story and cultural importance. The students' development is reflected in their connection and pride in developing their totems in the school mural, and their design of the Indigenous jersey artwork. Students are actively participating in school cultural events such as Harmony Day, NAIDOC and Reconciliation including giving Acknowledgements of Country, speeches about their culture and cultural dances – including students who had been too shy to participate even as late as last year (2019).

Learnings

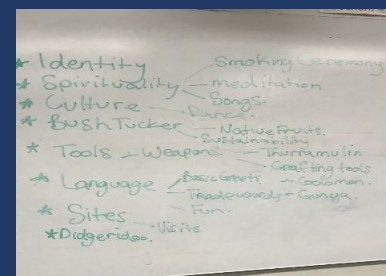
It is important to consult with the AECG regarding employing a cultural mentor from across their network as they know our boys, our context and many of our boys' desires for deep cultural learnings. Establish a routine but be flexible - for the boys and the mentor. Be clear in expectations and sharing of the planning so both school and mentor are aligned. Build the relationship with a wide number of staff who care for the Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander students.



Totems – learning from the Mentor, art work for the mural 'Always Was Always Will Be.'

"The sound of the boys playing the didge in the boarding house brings such excitement to the others and the staff - and J and T playing with such pride....what a great development." (House Master, May, 2020)

"My son could not wait to tell me about the didge and the sacred story attached to it. He must have listened intently to [Indigenous Mentor] as he explained it word for word.... their immense pride in learning their culture makes me so proud too." (Parent, April 2020)



Students' feedback regarding cultural areas they wished to learn about.