EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools

Mildura — 2 May 2013

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Ms R. Gilby, Chairperson, Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.
The CHAIR — Thanks, Rose, for joining us. I have to point out a couple of things to you. Firstly, Hansard is recording the proceedings today and you will get the opportunity at the end of this to have a look at a transcript of the evidence that you give. If there is anything that needs to be corrected, you can suggest changes to it. As is the case with any parliamentary committee, the evidence you give is covered by what we call parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege afforded to members of Parliament. You can say whatever you like here without fear of being prosecuted or whatever else. But you cannot do a doorstep outside afterwards and say how terrible we all were or how fantastic we all were, and it is probably the latter, because we are going to be pretty flash today. That concludes the formalities. As I said before, I know it looks formal in the way that the information is being gathered but today is really a discussion with you to find out what is happening within your community. We have a particular emphasis on music and how we can better ensure that young people are provided with music programs in our schools, and also what is happening currently in schools. We have a number of questions for you, then we will give you an opportunity to raise anything we have not covered at the end, if that is okay. I might kick it off and ask you if you can provide us with an overview of the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and the work that you do in the community, so just a brief introduction.

Ms GILBY — Thank you. First of all I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that I am presenting on today, the Latji Latji people. I pay my respects to elders past and present and to dignitaries around the room here.

With regard to the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, we play a significant role in providing locally based links between the Koori community and educational institutions. You may or may not know that VAEAI, which is our secretariat, was formed in the 70s. Now there are 32 groups of us across Victoria and we are pleased to have a very strong contingent of family and community members that are interested and want to invest in education for community.

We provide advice on all education and training matters that affect Koori students, and preschooling, too. We monitor the current trends within community, and it is only anecdotal. We are a voluntary group, so we do not have money for research. We are interested in research to strengthen what we are saying as a group and a community. We provide an advocate role for Koori students and their families in respect of all education matters, and that is preparing for school. Preparing to go to the next year is quite stressful for our families; we know that anecdotally. We also provide representation at all VAEAI forums. So I guess you could say we are the vehicle through which parents and community members can have a say about matters that affect them individually within schools and within family groups within schools. I guess that is what we do.

We do not have representation in all schools, because there are independent schools and there are Catholic schools that feel that they can support their own cohorts and families. But we are there for those individuals and families in an informal way. We will always push for independent stuff, and those schools. I heard somebody previously mention biases. Our bias is holistic, so we will always try to look for ways that we can endear community to all the things we want to see enacted and embedded in our everyday processes, and education is a big thing. We want to see music, we want to see culture, we want to see ceremony. We want to see these things embedded, and we think there are practical, can-do ways that that can be done now in that sense.

Mr ELASMAR — Rose, could you provide an overview of the importance of both traditional and contemporary music to the local Aboriginal community?

Ms GILBY — As a community we have discussed these matters, and of course traditional music is utmost. We do not have the forum within the context of schools to present these every day, so contemporary is what we must try to endear people to. We believe what we have to give as first Australians can be adopted by all. We believe it can be shared and there is a really big place for it. We are trying. It is hard for us to tell our children at home that these things are important when there are no markers within their day-to-day travels, so when they go to school if we are talking about culture and there is no culture in school, then what does — —
You know, what we are saying is very incongruent to what our kids are experiencing on a day-to-day basis.

**Ms MILLER** — Just before I ask my question, in some cultures they have, after curriculum, language learning. For example, Greeks do not necessarily practise Greek stuff during the school curriculum, but they will have Greek school on either weeknights or weekends. Is that something that could be looked at to ensure that the children of today understand their culture and can continue learning?

**Ms GILBY** — Absolutely. It is mentoring and support that not just Aboriginal kids need. We need to find ways to keep learning; learning is a life thing, not just during certain hours of the day.

**Ms MILLER** — And just to ensure that the kids do not forget their heritage, as you quite rightly pointed out.

**Ms GILBY** — Yes, but that it is also built into the day-to-day practice of being valued. It is how people endear themselves to that. Symbolic things are really powerful — like, if you go overseas and you see the Australian flag, it is great to see a bit of home. For us, if we go into schools it is great to hear a bit of our music, whether it is over the PA or someone just singing around in the quad playing the didgeridoo, or the flags flying — it is great to see the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian flags, all three of them, flying together. Why can we not have all flags flying out the front of schools to show our diversity?

**Ms MILLER** — I think that is starting to happen in a lot of areas. Certainly in my community that is happening. They play the Aboriginal version of the Australian anthem at primary school level, which is really good. It is really kind of boppy, so that is good. That is leading into my next question. Do you believe the musical needs of the Aboriginal students are currently being met by the schools in this region; and if not, how do you think things could be improved?

**Ms GILBY** — It is being met for some, but that is not equitable for learning. It would be good to utilise our Koori workforce in the sense of really structuring their roles to be meaningful within the educational settings, not just truancy, not just the other things. If we have meaningful programs and a meaningful workforce, then that will endear communities to come in. A lot of our members have been subjected to past policies that have not allowed them into schools for certain reasons. I can give you examples from around here. Right up until 1975 principals could say whether Aboriginal people could be in schools. For our parents and our grandparents we are attempting to endear our kids and the grandkids to education. It is hard to bring people to the table who have not been brought to the table before.

**Ms MILLER** — How do you think it could be improved?

**Ms GILBY** — I think by engaging with them and asking. People have perspectives and a lot of skill around these things, and if they are asked in meaningful and poignant ways, then people talk up. We get it all the time because we are asking the questions as the LAECG, such as, ‘What can we do?’, and we run the gauntlet when we ask, ‘Is there anything going wrong?’, because there is, a lot, for our families. It is people’s perceptions — I understand that.

**Ms MILLER** — Do you know how many schools in the area offer Aboriginal music in their school curriculum at this point?

**Ms GILBY** — I know of one.

**Ms MILLER** — Which one is that?

**Ms GILBY** — Mildura Primary School. It is the first to kick off within the state for Aboriginal language within the school, and we are so excited about that.

**Ms MILLER** — When did that start, do you know?

**Ms GILBY** — That started this term.
Ms MILLER — Fantastic.

Ms GILBY — The possibilities around that are quite big dreaming for community, to say, ‘How can we harness this, how can we really work on this?’ The precedent is set there, so how do we build on that? It is a primary setting, but it is a setting.

Mr CRISP — I am going to extend your thoughts a little bit more from where you have been going over those Aboriginal culture and perspective issues, Rose. The committee heard that music can be important in the way that schools can teach Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal perspectives to all students. How do you think schools could be using music to do this?

Ms GILBY — Can you read the first part again, Peter? Thanks.

Mr CRISP — Music is an important way in which schools can teach Aboriginal culture. Do you think schools could use this better or could use music as a perspective to teach Aboriginal culture?

Ms GILBY — Yes, I do. I think there needs to be some robust conversation with the teaching workforce. We have to make sure as a community that they see it is doable, if we give the confidence in vouching that, yes, we think you can do this, we will help you do this at a local level. I know our LAECG partners in other areas will work towards embedding this, building it in and not bolting it on as an idea or a little bit of money falling here and there. If we can really embed these things and be a part of it, I think it will happen. Looking at community values around culture, bringing that into the mix would be good, but we need to have a really big yarn about it and how we can do it in a way that we all walk together and not have people being told, ‘This is how it will be’, but also listening to ways too.

Mr ELASMAR — The committee has heard it is important for schools to involve the local Aboriginal community in delivering indigenous music education programs. What strategies can you suggest to improve this collaboration in the Mildura region?

Ms GILBY — I think being involved locally, formalising our relationships with the schools from an LAECG point of view, and really looking at local curriculum and how we can work together and put things in there in the existing curriculum. I do have an appreciation. I have many friends that are teachers and they have got it tough. They are doing a lot, but I am always saying, ‘if we can just put in one more thing’. I come from a health background, so we are always trying to look at ways within population health of how we can engage people.

If we work together — for example, I would love to see a symposium in regional areas on discussion around these issues and how we can work towards and really get some practical solutions on ways forward. A local SWOT analysis would be good. We meet with principals association Australia, so it is good if we can work with them and their friends around working together, even if it is just us knowing one another’s name and having contact people that they can contact to talk to about it if anything is going on. You know, to really get some stakeholders out of the Indigenous community in each school. I would certainly like our membership in each school, and we would work hard to do that. Like I said, we have members in most schools, but not all schools.

Mr CRISP — Rose, I would like to extend some of that thought to what happens in out-of-school-hour programs. I can remember Stamping Ants, the group which was elder men teaching children dance and Aboriginal music. Is there a setting outside of school hours where music and culture is being taught to the younger generation in the community?

Ms GILBY — I would say out of school, full stop — that is where the main points of our learning come from for our kids. They are very informal and are based mainly around social and emotional wellbeing programs within the town and around art projects. It concerns some of community that culture sits under arts in that sense, but we are happy it sits in places where there are little brush fires and hopefully one day they will meet and we will have a great cultural immersion once you hit education. I am not just talking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; we need to celebrate all cultures, but specifically the
out-of-hours is based around informal processes through other programs, and it is not usually education driven.

We would like to see it more education driven, and I think we would get more credence and more engagement with our kids if we married the two. With regards to structured learning, as other people see it, we also have structured learning in a sense that is graduated. So in terms of how we marry those two together: we would like to see that. Dance is certainly the way that instils culture in our kids. We need to build and strengthen identity within our kids, because anecdotally our kids feel that they have to hide their culture within school and just be with everybody else. We are First Australians, and we need to be proud. We only have a continuum of 30 000 years, and to endear our kids to that we need to see these markers.

We thank you for the opportunity of inviting us to this process to have our say, because it is important. It is a lifelong learning in and out of school.

The CHAIR — Rose, we have finished with our questions now so you can relax, but is there anything else that you just wanted to add? Don’t feel you have to, but if there is something that you want to say and for us to capture, you are more than welcome to do that.

Ms GILBY — Something I did not mention was elders-in-residence, which would be really good. Universities do elders-in-residence, and it endears the student community to the values of elders. I think that would be invaluable. I have not mentioned the number of undergraduate students we have here and training for them. How can we sell the concept to these kids of giving back to community within their undergraduate programs — that is, of giving to different groups within the community as being a core component of undergraduate training? We talk about social justice. Why don’t we embed it, so that our undergraduate and postgraduate students give back to our younger ones, such as our preschoolers, or through mentoring students, helping them through science and dance?

We think that what you are talking about is so great, because it endears people to numeracy and literacy and there are so many learning facets in music, so that we can bring about some real pivotal educational opportunities. I think we are missing it, and how do we embed it now with a can-do attitude within the workforce? That is what we are worried about. If the workforce thinks it is a no-can-do situation, then on a day-to-day basis our children who are disenfranchised within classrooms are going to maintain that attitude of ‘Now you see us, now you don’t’. We call it the pedestrian factor, and we want to make Aboriginal and First Australian culture everybody’s business. It is up to all of us; it is a shared history, and we would love to share it at a local level here and regionally. So, yes, thank you.

The CHAIR — Rose, thank you very much for coming along today and sharing with us all the great work that you are doing. We wish you well and wish your organisation well in continuing to do those very things you have mentioned. We really appreciate you taking the time out to be here today with us.

Ms GILBY — Thank you.

Witness withdrew.