# Aboriginal Community Leaders Interviews - Transcript

Question 3 – How can Elders be involved?

**Dr Esme Bamblett:** It’s very important for Elders to be involved because they are the keepers of the knowledge and they are the ones who know all the stories and they know all the relevant details that need to be handed down to kids. So you can’t just leave Elders out of the equation.

Elders are a very important part of our community. It’s very important for young people to respect Elders and to have an understanding of where Elders are coming from. I think Charles Perkins says it best: ‘we can’t live in the past, but the past lives with us’, and the Elders are a part of that past.

And they are living with us and when they go, somebody else has to take over. So we need the Elders to come in and tell the stories. We need them to tell about the Language. We need them to tell about the times on the mission, the history. They are living history.

In our community Elders have always been really important people, very highly respected. But they also have a lot of knowledge to pass on. I think in this new age people tend to forget old people. They put them in the homes and there’s no more use for them.

But there’s all that knowledge and experience that we’re missing out on. And you’re gonna have, to, re-learn how to reinvent the wheel yourself, whereas there’s people who know how to do it. So I think we need to, as a community, not only Aboriginal people but the wider community, has to come to terms with how we actually get the best out of our Elders, and also encourage them to participate and be part of community.

I think it’s up to the schools and the teachers to put Elders at ease. Elders have had a very bad experience with institutions, particularly education. Like my grandmother was only allowed to go to grade three on the missions. They weren’t allowed to go any further. So education was out for her, she was very, very, she was one of those people who really valued education highly because you couldn’t get it.

So I think that they’ve had a bad experience and they need to be put at ease and that’s really up to the community and the teachers. It’s up to the schools to have an open door policy where Aboriginal people feel welcome to come into the school. And I think it’s about breaking down barriers, breaking down cultural barriers.

There’s gotta be a connection, there’s gotta be relationships built up. It takes time. In this day and age we don’t have time. We want to do things in a hurry. We want five minutes with somebody and expect a lot of barriers to go. Doesn’t work like that with our mob. So what I think schools need to do is be aware that it will take time. But, if you do build a relationship up, you will get them in. And when you get them in, you’ll get the value out of them.

**Geraldine Atkinson:** Our Elders in community are a part of what, of what we do now within, within some of our schools. Not all of our schools, particularly in early childhood settings we use, we use Elders, and they come in and they’ll, they’ll tell. They may, they may not have Language themselves, ’cause they may need to learn Language.

I know that they would have, they’ve got phrases. They’ve got phrases and things that they’ve learnt and passed down. But they don’t have, they don’t know a full Aboriginal Language.

But what they’re, what they’re able to do, is that they’re able to tell stories about, you know, sort of what they, what they remember as children, and stories that have passed on to them. Because there have been stories that have been passed on. They’ve been passed on in English. What we need to do is, I reckon, we need to, is then pass those stories on into Language.

I think it’s really important that, that Elders are a part of that, of introducing Language into schools. They should be an important component of any Language which is going to be taught in schools. So I think it’s really important.

[Copyright Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Footer/Pages/Copyright.aspx) 2020