Decolonising the music classroom: Five ways forward

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Abstract

Every aspect of the Australian education system is a colonial construct, which was established across the continent and adjacent islands as part of the ongoing British colonisation process. As such, in contemporary music classrooms in Australia, there are decisions made every day that perpetuate settler futurity. This paper explores five ways forward, beginning with a critical evaluation and implementation of education policy, and extending to decisions around curriculum, pedagogy, place and space, and community engagement that can support the decolonising of the music classroom in order to support all students, regardless of their cultural contexts.

Key words: Decolonising, Indigenous, music teaching

Introduction

With the failed referendum on an enshrined First Nations voice in the Australian constitution, the nation was at an important crossroads in our shared Indigenous and non-Indigenous history. The vote on the Voice to Parliament was but one step in the achievement of reconciliation, justice and treaty for First Nations people and would only have been successful with a non-Indigenous commitment to decolonisation. For this aim to be realised, one of the first places that needs to be decolonised is the school classroom. A key challenge to achieving this is providing the resources, knowledge, processes and confidence to the majority non-Indigenous teachers in schools around Australia (Thrupp, Hunt, Cowell, Crowley, & Whittaker, 2015).

One subject area, often overlooked in this regard, is that of music teaching. Given the number of music radio and television stations broadcasting throughout the world today, as well as the large number of musicians performing in bands, orchestras and music theatre productions, in addition to various social media platforms, there can be little doubt that music occupies a prominent

'…we saying that theory's cool, but theory with no practice ain't shit.' - Fred Hampton 1969

position in the lives of many people. Music, in one form or another, has had a greater or lesser impact on the lives of peoples and cultures worldwide since before written records began. As such, it is appropriate to consider ways that the music classroom can be decolonised to support not just First Nations student outcomes, but the outcomes of all students, regardless of their cultural contexts.

This paper discusses how the music classroom can begin to be decolonised to ensure that all students gain the benefits of engaging with First Nations music-making in authentic and appropriate ways.

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Content Warning: This paper contains the name of a First Nations person who has passed away.

capacity to engage with First Nations contexts in the classroom. His research focus is on decolonising education in Australia to support the outcomes of all students regardless of their cultural contexts.

The second author also is a proud Dja Dja Wurrung man, having had a diverse working life, including having been a professional musician and now also working in the NIKERI Institute in an academic capacity. He teaches Indigenous Knowledges subjects at both an undergraduate and postgraduate level. His research focus is on the power of word-choice to influence societal thinking and attitudes.

The role of music in contemporary Australian society

For many of us, from the time we awaken, to the time we arrive at work, we are exposed to music in one form or another via personal music players, radio and/or television. The power of music can be seen by the simple observation that it accompanies almost all radio and television advertising (Morris & Boone, 1998). There are many other arenas in which music plays an important part in life. It is used in celebration, like weddings and birthdays, solemn occasions, such as funerals, and more generally, at gatherings, in many workplaces, and as a form of 'company' or mood regulation for those finding themselves alone (Karapetsas & Laskaraki, 2015). In many places, music could be regarded as all-pervading, as in lifts or in shopping centres, where classical music is held to reduce antisocial behaviour (Hirsch, 2012), whilst other types of music promote shopping behaviour (Yalch & Spangenberg, 1990). Further to this, research indicates that music also can be used to promote antisocial behaviour, and the use of antisocial products (Ziv, Hoftman & Geyer, 2012)

It could be argued that music's power stems from the fact that music itself has become a global commodity. As such, it is the rise of consumerism that has enabled the consumption and commodification of music.

Consumerism in general had its roots in 18th and 19th century Britain (Lemire, 2013), and followed suit in America prior to the First World War, becoming more prevalent thereafter (Higgs, 2016). With the advent of recording techniques, and the concomitant wider availability of recorded music to the general population by means of music on commercial, government, and public radio and television stations, music has inevitably become a commodity, as well as an artform and cultural practice (Taylor, 2015).

Colonisation has enabled a global music industry constructed from a western cultural concept of music and has come to dominate the global music scene. Pop groups have been 'constructed' by music promoters since at least the 1960s. An example of this, which garnered wide media coverage, is the pop group, The Monkees, which was assembled as part of a television show of the same name in 1966. A more recent example, which also attracted comprehensive media coverage, was an act called Milli Vanilli, from Europe. This duo was the epitome of 'manufactured' music, in that they did not even sing in their own concerts, relying instead on lip-synching to a soundtrack performed by studio singers. The ruse was revealed in 1989, when the track to which they were miming failed during a live Grammy Award performance.

This commodification of music has also manifested the arena of Japanese pop music (J-Pop), which arose following the wide embracing of mainly American western music after World War Two (Bourdaghs, 2012). In the J-Pop industry the artists and performers are also commodified, in that their repertoire, performance, appearance, advertising and promotional activities are all highly regulated, to the extent that the performers themselves work for wages, with the profits going to the promoters. In fact, the performers become virtually interchangeable components of any particular group (Keith & Hughes, 2016).

Given the pervasiveness of western music mentioned above, and the fact that 'pop' music stations vastly outnumber 'classical' music stations, it is arguable that most of the population will

be exposed to more modern music genres. That said, western culture has a long history of what is termed 'classical' music. Although there are composers writing in what would be considered the 'classical style', even a cursory examination of the programmes offered on classical radio stations reveals that the overwhelming majority of classical music played remains that created by a relatively unchanging stable of deceased, white, largely male composers from some hundreds of years ago. Also, since classical music is usually valued by those seeking to engage with 'high culture', it seems probable that many would regard classical music as a pursuit of the elite, rather than the common person.

All that said, both classical and modern music conform to western music formulae and protocols regarding the acceptable construction of musical pieces. These musical rules are both comprehensive and complicated, and beyond the scope of this paper.

As one is brought up with one's language(s) and becomes used to what is acceptable or 'legal' in those languages, so one's ear becomes accustomed to what is acceptable with regard to the construction of a piece of music. This varies from culture to culture, with Middle Eastern music, for instance, making use of what are termed 'quarter tones', which are largely unacceptable in western music, which is based on 'semi tones' (Bake, Simon, & Near Eastern Music Ensemble, 2003).

Whilst the above description of western, and Middle Eastern music, involves musical instruments capable of producing higher and lower notes, traditional First Nations musical instruments in Australia are largely monotonal like the yidaki, or percussive, including clap sticks, and boomerangs. The melody, which occupies a small tonal range especially in pre-colonial musical styles is carried by the voice (Watarrka Foundation Ltd, 2023). As such, it is arguable that, to an ear trained, or at least familiarised, in the western tradition, First Nations music might not even be recognised as music.

This marked difference in what is considered music, combined with the privilege accorded to western culture in Australian schools, and society in general, arguably has led to traditional First Nations music being largely ignored. This is further exacerbated by the fact that playing the Yidaki properly can be exceedingly difficult.

Music, no matter from which culture, has served many functions. As mentioned above, it can be used for both celebratory and solemn occasions, and it also can be used as a vehicle for teaching. One needs only to think of the moral messages conveyed by western church music, and to a certain extent, folk music, for example the traditional British folk song, Matty Groves, as well as the chants used in primary schools in the 1950s and 1960s to teach children their arithmetic tables.

As First Nations societies were non-literate, music and song were used to convey both practical and moral knowledge. For instance, the 'Baykeepers Songline' tells of a time when there was disputation in the Port Phillip area, which led to neglect of Country and wastage. The story goes on to tell of the solution to the problems and gives advice on proper maintenance of resources. Other Songlines act as virtual maps, allowing journeys of many thousands of kilometres to take place safely. One would learn the Songline, and sing oneself from one track or place of safety to the next. Many Songlines were used by the colonists to guide their tracks as these were already clear from usage and maintenance by First Nations people (Norris & Harney, 2014).

Unfortunately, many Songlines have been lost as a result of the language and cultural destruction that ensued with the expansion of the colonists across the continent (Jalata, 2013).

As could be expected from the above, music is an integral part of First Nations societies, with actual life-or-death implications for those on long journeys. In fact, it could be argued that the societal structure was underpinned by the music, which was learned and embraced throughout one's life.

Disappointingly, even a cursory examination of school curricula reveals that music in contemporary

schools occupies nowhere near the prominence and importance that it did in traditional First Nations societies. For instance, music is almost always an elective subject, and the author was not even able to access a music subject at school past year eight. This is in addition to the oft-prohibitive costs associated with instrument purchase or rental for many students and their families.

First Nations music has evolved in line with the position of Indigenous people in contemporary society. Given that traditional First Nations music does not conform to western ideas of what music 'should' be, it is, as mentioned, not considered to be music by a large part of the broader population.

That said, there are many First Nations artists, who have embraced more western forms of music. For instance, the duo of Briggs and Trials, who go by the name of A. B. Original, use a combination of Hip-Hop and Rap to promulgate their messages about the state of First Nations affairs. Other artists, like Thelma Plum and the late Uncle Archie Roach, also use recognisable western formats, and still convey messages of protest.

This all demonstrates that, far from being a dead or dying cultural practice, First Nations music is an evolving, vibrant and disparate grouping of genres and artists, with important messages to impart. Just as traditional Songlines contained the information that kept travellers safe, modern First Nations music contains the seeds of protest, which will, hopefully, lead to more equitable treatment of this county's original inhabitants.

Over the last few decades, there has been a steady increase in the awareness and consideration of decolonisation as a process that should be enacted in reforming music education (Bradley, 2012; Herbst, Nzewi, & Agawu, 2003; Hess, 2018; Rostabal-Coto, 2014; Kallio, 2020). However, much of this research into decolonising music education has been focused on international contexts, including African (Herbst, Nzewi, & Agawu, 2003; Watkins, Madiba, McConnachie, 2021), Canadian (Hess, 2015), British (Douglas, 2021), South American (Romero, 2021), and Scandinavian (Kallio, 2020). In the Australian context, there has been little research conducted into how the Music classroom perpetuates settler-colonialism through 'ways that foreclose dialogue rather than exploring questions' (Bradley, 2012, p. 411), or how Music classrooms can 'contribute to radical social change, to economic justice, to a utopian cultural politics' (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008 p. xi).

The concept of decolonisation, as it has been applied in this paper, is based on the seminal work of Tuck and Yang (2012), *Decolonisation is not a metaphor*. Tuck and Yang (2012) define decolonisation as a 'distinct project from other civil and human rights-based social justice projects' (p. 2). They also discuss how the centre of decolonisation is the 'unsettling nature' of the process and that any attempt to co-opt decolonisation into more palatable forms, they refer to as 'moves to innocence' (2012, p. 1), changes its very nature to render it ineffective.

This is especially important considering the Australian context of decolonisation. Tuck and Yang (2012) state that the process of decolonisation 'brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life' (p. 1). Given the current push in Australia for Voice, Treaty, Truth as part of the Uluru Statement from the Heart (National Constitutional Convention, 2017), the end point of this process is, at least for many First Nations people, the reassertion of our sovereign rights as First Peoples, for access to, and ownership of our land, and direct control over the political, social, and economic decisions and policies that directly impact our lives.

Furthermore, Tuck and Yang (2012) hold that decolonisation also relates to 'the recognition of how land, and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, *all* of the land, and not just symbolically (p. 7). Beyond the connection to land however, they argue that the process of decolonisation will look different based on the geographical and cultural contexts of where it is occurring, noting that it is 'accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity', and that what it looks like can only emerge from 'a

dangerous understanding of uncommonality that un-coalesces coalition politics – a move that may feel very unfriendly' (p. 35).

Despite the challenge of defining what decolonisation can look like, as articulated by Kallio (2020), where decolonisation 'in practice, leaves many scholars and educators scratching their heads' (p. 178). We echo Tuck and Yang's (2012) thoughts that education plays a crucial role, not necessarily as the complete embodiment of application of a decolonial process, but certainly as a method of priming Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners for the 'unfriendly' experiences that will invariably come with the reassertion of sovereign rights over land, and political, social, and economic decisions that impact our lives as First Nations people.

In an Australian education context, decolonisation has been described as being a process that 'simultaneously evokes a historical narrative of the end of empire, a particular version of postcolonial theory, a way of knowing that resists Eurocentrism of the West, a moral imperative for righting the wrongs of colonial domination, and an ethical stance in relation to self-determination, social justice, and human rights for Indigenous peoples enslaved and disempowered by imperialism' (Mackinlay & Barney, 2014, p. 55). Furthermore, Smith (1999) also contends that decolonisation empowers Indigenous people to reclaim, rename, rewrite and re-right.

Wilson and Yellow Bird (2005) expand on this earlier interpretation and argue that decolonisation 'is the intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies and lands' (p. 2). On a more personal and psychological context, hooks (1994) argues that decolonisation has a role to 'militantly conform and change the devastating psychological consequences of internalised racism' (p. 205) and this is echoed by Battiste (2000) who argues that decolonisation supports releasing minds from 'cognitive imperialism' of 'our cognitive prisons' (p. xvii).

As such, building on Wolfe's (2006) argument that colonisation is not an event, but is a process, below we discuss a series of applied decolonial processes that can be implemented in Australian Music classrooms to begin the process described by Freire (2000) as conscientisation; the process of the generation of class consciousness. Furthermore, we agree with Freire (2000) that the decolonisation of the Music classroom has the potential to liberate the colonised minds of First Nations and non-Indigenous learners alike. Therefore, the five applied approaches below are a way that teachers can begin the process of conscientisation for the generations of Australian learners, who will inevitably be called upon at some point to vote on policies that will directly impact First Nations people.

Discussion

The genesis of this approach to decolonising classrooms in general was as an outcome of several years of working with pre-service teachers. For many entering this sector, their ideas of how school and teaching and learning should look were shaped by their own experiences as students, and this phenomenon has been documented in international education contexts (Smagorinsky, 2010). In Australia, the current schooling system was imposed across the land and the people as part of the colonisation process, and as such, it is currently a colonial construction that has very specific aims and goals, one of which is to perpetuate the colonial project through, as Wolfe (2006) argues, the elimination of the native.

This manifests in the music classroom, like many other discipline areas in the Australian system, where both the musical content, and the musical teaching pedagogy are shaped by colonial ideals of what music is, and how it should be taught. A brief analysis of the current Australian curriculum for Music finds only 16 instances where the word 'Aboriginal' appears (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2017). Of these instances, only four are found

within elaborations, and averaged out over the Foundation to year 10 curriculum, it is present in the curriculum on average slightly less than once a year, assuming that the teacher and the school choose to engage with these specific sections of the curriculum.

Beyond the content that is present, or largely absent, in the Music curriculum, the prevailing experience of music teaching and learning in Australia is one that has been argued as reinforcing whiteness and colonisation (Mackinlay, 2018), through 'reinforcing prerogatives of white possession' (Moreton-Robinson, 2006, p. 391), that perpetuate a regime of power that prioritises white sovereignty to 'deny and refuse' (Moreton-Robinson, 2011, p. 647) the sounds of First Nations Australian sovereignties (Mackinlay, 2018).

Given the context of the Australian music classroom being a site of the perpetuation of colonisation, the following section seeks to provide some answers to support teachers in Australia, who may be 'scratching their heads' (Kallio, 2020), and provide opportunities to address the constant desire of the settler to moves to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Below, we detail five ways of applying a decolonising process in a music classroom and in the wider school. We acknowledge that this approach recognises that we are far from the ultimate goals of decolonisation, to return land, but that in the music classroom, like all other classrooms across the continent and adjacent islands of Australia, teachers have the potential to begin the work of decolonisation to build conscientisation in the future Australian voting public.

These five ways build on the work of Fricker (2021a) who conducted research in a remote Central Australian Aboriginal school as part of a PhD research project and theorised an applied approach to address the acute and violent assimilation that the school was imposing on the student body in damaging ways. This was further developed in an article published in an Australian Education Union newsletter (Fricker, 2021b) where the applied process of this approach was articulated, and this will be the basis for the discussion below.

A key point as this discussion is begun is to make the distinction between decolonising versus Indigenising. The distinction made here is that the process of decolonising by non-Indigenous teachers enables the process of Indigenising, a process that can only be done by First Nations people. In essence, through decolonising, the existence of First Nations sovereignty becomes possible, as it is no longer being eliminated, as argued by Wolfe (2006), and in turn, Indigenising can manifest in the classroom through the incorporation and centring of First Nations contexts discussed below.

Five ways of decolonising the classroom

The following section has been theorised in an Australian, specifically Victorian context. This means that the following sections will be referring to Victorian settings when it comes to policy and curriculum contexts, but it is important to note that in Australia, state governments, of which there are six, have direct input into their own school curricula, and also have their own First Nations education policies that prioritise different aspects.

Another consideration in the discussion below is that these aspects have been divided for ease of considering the ways that they can all be applied in the classroom and the wider school, but they should not be engaged independently from each other. We also hope that the areas of crossover between the five aspects will become clearer as each is explored as part of the decolonising process.

Policy

Across Australia, there are several relevant education policies that focus on First Nations education. At a Federal level, Australia has the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (Education Council, 2015). This

strategy is only focused on the outcomes of First Nations students, and problematically seeks to achieve positive culture and identity outcomes 'through the delivery of the Australian Curriculum' (Education Council, 2015, p. 5). This fails to acknowledge the well documented weaknesses and Eurocentrism that have been embedded within this same curriculum (Fricker, 2017; Fozdar & Martin, 2021; Al-Natour, 2022).

Furthermore, this policy also focuses on student attendance, school preparation, and pathways, without giving appropriate regard to the quality of student education experiences within the classroom. The policy does include a small section encouraging teachers to be accountable, and that the teaching staff will be of high quality, but fails to articulate how this manifests in the classroom.

Another policy that has been implemented at a national level is the Professional Standards for Teachers. These standards were endorsed in 2010 (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011) and this was the first time that a teacher accreditation policy specifically mentioned First Nations contexts, and this was in standard 1.4, "Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students" (AITSL, 2011 p. 11) and standard 2.4, "Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" (AITSL, 2011 p. 13). This had the immediate impact of changing initial teacher education in Australia, but was also limited, as there was little detail relating to the two standards, and few resources that teachers could easily access to support their professional development in these standards.

At a state level, the Victorian government released the *Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan* 2016-2026 (Department of Education and Training [DET], 2016) in 2016, and this has been a focus for the last few years. Some of the key aspects of this plan are that it not only focuses on the direct outcomes for First Nations learners, but also articulates the need for non-Indigenous students to be taught about First Nations contexts. This is important, as it directly challenges the common response from many teachers in Victoria, that they do not have any First Nations students in their class and therefore do not need to teach any First Nations content. Additionally, this policy has directly informed the state government initiative of Cultural Understanding and Safety Training that has been rolled out across all government schools in Victoria and led by the Koorie Education workforce (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. [VAEAI], 2019).

The work of Michael Lipsky (2010) is important when considering policy. This is because all teachers, through the accreditation and assessment processes, are acting as agents of the nation-state. As such, they are required to implement government policy as a 'one size fits all' approach. This is at odds with what is considered to be quality teaching that requires teachers to differentiate. Thus, it renders any possibility of uniform application of policy impossible. Teachers are therefore required, as part of good practice, to use their professional judgement and discretion, and make choices as to how, when, and if various government education policies are implemented in the classroom. Even though curriculum is a separate section in this discussion it, too, is an education policy document that should be engaged with critically, to determine how it can be used to achieve the best learning outcomes for the students in the classroom.

There are two considerations in this section when engaging with policy in the music classroom. The first is just being aware of the relevant policies and using them to inform classroom practice. The second is to critically engage with them and recognise that, as good as they are, they do have limitations, and as teachers with professional judgement, it is crucial that the policies do not become barriers to student success. As such, music teachers should become familiar with the policies, and implement the aspects that will support student outcomes. An example of this is

the above-mentioned Marrung policy (DET, 2016) that requires all students to be taught First Nations content, regardless of their own cultural contexts.

Teachers also should consider the weaknesses of the policies and work toward offsetting them in the classroom. A teacher could engage with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (Education Council, 2015), but recognise that attendance is not necessarily an accurate measurement of the quality of education that the students are able to access.

Curriculum

Curriculum is the second area of focus when considering how to begin the process of decolonising the music classroom. There is a wealth of sc holarship that explores how curriculum is a colonial construct and seeks to perpetuate white and settler-colonial supremacy in many nation-states around the world (Watkins, 2001; Winfield, 2007; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2006; Gaztambide-Fernández & Murad, 2011, Peters, 2015; Allen, 1999, Sleeter, 2010). Australia's experience in this space is no different. Beginning with the colonisation in 1788, and through the establishment of various colony, then state and federal curricula, it should be recognised that these have been shaped by the Great Australian Silence (Stanner, 1968) and this has been observed in more recent contexts as still being a factor that perpetuates settler futurism in the curricula (Fricker, 2017).

Decolonising the curriculum begins with an understanding that "traditional school curricula teach the values, beliefs, and knowledge systems that support colonisation" (Sleeter, 2010; Brayboy, 2006), and that this has been done to perpetuate and legitimise settler territorial claims through both the physical and ideological dispossession and erasure of First Nations peoples and cultures through co-option of 'nativeness' by settlers (Coloma, 2013; Wolfe, 2006)

In the music classroom, an approach to challenge the colonial supremacy and Eurocentrism present in the curriculum is to *brown* it. To brown the curriculum is to deliberately seek to uncover and highlight the myriad complicated ways in which white supremacy and colonisation constantly manifest themselves (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2006; Gaztambide-Fernández & Murad, 2011). Browning the curriculum interrupts the dominant narrative and rudely inserts itself to reclaim academic space and call the names of those replaced and forgotten (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). When the curriculum is browned, it shows how it is already dirty and stained and refuses to perpetuate romanticised creation stories and fort pedagogies (Donald, 2012a; 2012b).

To brown the music curriculum is to centre First Nations music where possible. By using this as a starting point to both define music, and help to define non-Indigenous musical styles, the music classroom can be a place that directly challenges the Eurocentrism of the music curriculum, and provide for more universal understandings of what music is. Furthermore, by incorporating more First Nations instruments and musicians in the classroom, students also benefit from the exposure to different instruments, and importantly, their providence and cultural and spiritual contexts.

Pedagogy

In the music classroom, teachers also need to consider how they might be able to brown their pedagogical approach to teaching music. In a western tradition, the phenomenon of the previously-mentioned commercialisation of music has generated the widespread and distorted idea that one cannot be musical unless one is 'good' at music. An example of the Eurocentric pedagogical approach in the music classroom is the focus on reading musical notation. This is clear, especially in the higher levels of music teaching and learning that occurs in conservatoria across Australia. The reality is that First Nations people have been making, and continue to learn how to make, music without the use of notation as it is understood in a western context.

Given this, it would be appropriate to consider how a First Nations pedagogical approach like the *8 ways* (Yunkaporta, 2009) could be incorporated into music teaching. This approach would allow for different ways of exploring learning the skills and knowledge of music. For example, story sharing would provide opportunities to discover the origins of particular styles of music that would help to contextualise how and why it is played a particular way with particular instruments. Another example of the *8 ways* being used would be to include the deconstruct/reconstruct aspect. This aspect would aid in the exploration and understanding of the many layers of a song. This would go beyond the simple aspects of the various bass and melodic notation, but could also extend to the socio-cultural aspects of the music as well. Finally, the *8 ways* aspect of symbols and images would also aid students to not only learn musical notation, but also provide more abstract ways of exploring the affective domain of how music can make us feel.

Place and Space

The place and space aspect of decolonising the music classroom also extends beyond and into the wider school environment. In this aspect, decolonising focuses on the built environment of where the teaching and learning is occurring. Classrooms, as they are experienced in Australia today, are a recent invention. Prior to the colonisation of Australia, the landscape, environment, and Country were the classrooms for learners. There were places that were often sacred, where specific teaching, learning and knowledges were engaged with, but for more mundane and everyday learning, it was the immediate environment that would often provide the classroom, learning resources, knowledge, and processes that would support the outcomes of the learner.

Given that school classrooms in contemporary Australia are colonial constructs like the other aspects of the wider education system, these, too, act to reduce the visibility and usability of First Nations contexts in the classroom. As such, it is important to consider the importance of the adage that 'you can't be what you can't see' and seek to increase the visibility of First Nations content. Furthermore, given the differences between learning in a classroom and learning on Country, there are design elements of the classroom that also need to be adjusted in order to enable the implementation of First Nations pedagogical practices.

In the context of the music classroom, this requires music teachers to make visible First Nations music, artists, instruments, and other relevant aspects. These could also include the instruments on display or used in the classroom, exploration of notable First Nations musicians and celebrations of First Nations music awards. In terms of the built environment, it could include holding classes beyond the walls of the classroom or something as simple as ensuring that the furniture is movable to facilitate a yarning circle.

Community Engagement

The final aspect of decolonising the classroom is community engagement. This relates to how the school engages the local First Nations community through bringing people to the school and taking students from the school to excursion destinations. The engagement with First Nations communities has been recognised as an important aspect in student education outcomes, and beyond in the wider school system. This was also demonstrated in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, where recommendations 291*a* and *b* suggested that, in all decisions made by schools relating to First Nations context, the local First Nations community should be involved, and that to recognise their expertise, they should also be paid for this service (Dodson, Wootten, O'Dea, Wyvill, & Johnston, 1991).

In the context of the music classroom, this means that, where possible, schools should be engaging with local First Nations musicians, and that these musicians should be working both with the students directly to run learning activities, as well as

more broadly with the staff to support the ongoing work of decolonisation. Furthermore, schools also need to ensure that there is adequate budget to pay the community members for their time.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Australia has a long way to go when considering how we as a nation can address the injustices of the past and the inequalities of the present. There is also no doubt that teachers, schools, and the education sector as a whole, have crucial roles to play to engage students and enable them to have the capacity to engage with the important national discourse that impacts outcomes in this space. Overall, decolonising the music classroom can only be achieved through an honest and thorough examination of curriculum, pedagogy, policy, place and space, and community engagement with a view to truth-telling and privileging First Nations contexts in the classroom.

We do not propose that we have all the solutions, and we recognise that decolonising the music classroom will be an ongoing process that will hopefully continue well into the future. We also recognise that, in the confines of an academic paper, there is only so much that can be achieved. As such, we hope that this will act as a beginning point for music educators and that it will spark changes in the wider scope of education in Australia, as well as providing some solid ways forward for teachers.

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