

REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE | PEER REVIEWED

## Decolonise This Space: Centring Indigenous Peoples in Music Therapy Practice

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### Abstract

The 15<sup>th</sup> April 2016 marked the 25-year anniversary since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) in Australia handed down its Final Report. The report signified a landmark in the relationships between Indigenous Australians and the post-colonial State and Federal governments. Established by the Hawke Labor Government in 1987, the Commission examined 99 Indigenous deaths. Most significant was the finding that the deaths were due to the combination of police and prisons failing their duty of care, and the high numbers of Indigenous people being arrested and incarcerated.

In the wake of the RCIADIC, cross-cultural sessions and cultural competency workshops have become ubiquitous for public servants, therapists, and legal and welfare employees, in attempts to bridge gaps in cultural knowledge between agents of the welfare state and Indigenous clients. Using Indigenous Knowledges theory, this chapter assesses how cultural misalignments between Indigenous clients and those who work with them in the name of therapies designed to improve Indigenous lives, dominate cross-cultural interactions. In so doing the questions are posed: how do good intentions become part of the discourses and practices of on-going colonialism for Indigenous Australians, and what can be done to change the balance of power in favour of therapies of relevance to Indigenous people?

**Keywords:** *Royal Commission, Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Indigenous Australians, Indigenous Knowledges theory, therapy, cross-cultural*

### Introduction

2021 marks the 30-year anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) in Australia<sup>1</sup> handing down its Final Report. Tabled on 15 April 1991<sup>2</sup>, the Final Report signified a landmark in the relationships between Indigenous Australians and the post-colonial State and Federal governments (Johnston, 1991). Established by the Hawke Labor Government in 1987, the Commission examined 99 Indigenous deaths. Notably, the Commission was set up as a direct result of activism from Aboriginal organisations across Australia, including Aboriginal legal services, and

the families and supporters of those who had died in custody (Cunneen, 2006). Most striking was the finding by the Commission that the deaths were due to police and prisons failing their duty of care, combined with the high numbers of Indigenous people being arrested and incarcerated (Johnston, 1991). One of most significant contributing factors that the Commission found brought Aboriginal people in contact with the criminal justice system was ‘their disadvantage and unequal position within wider society’ (Cunneen, 2006, p. 38).

As a result, key RCIADIC recommendations focussed on the need to address and change the relations between Australian Indigenous peoples and the police. This change was to happen through the implementation of cultural awareness education within established recruitment programs and in-service police training. Recommendation 228 states:

That police training courses be reviewed to ensure that a substantial component of training both for recruits and as in-service training relates to interaction between police and Aboriginal people. It is important that police training provide practical advice as to the conduct which is appropriate for such interactions. Furthermore, such training should incorporate information as to:

- a. The social and historical factors which have contributed to the disadvantaged position in society of many Aboriginal people;
- b. The social and historical factors which explain the nature of contemporary Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations in society today; and
- c. The history of Aboriginal police relations and the role of police as enforcement agents of previous policies of expropriation, protection, and assimilation. (Johnston, 1991, p. 150)

Various reviews and evaluations of the implementation of all of the recommendations of the RCIADIC have been conducted in the intervening years (Beacroft et al., 2011). Some commentators have queried the efficacy of the implementation of the Commission’s proposals, or indeed whether the recommendations were even taken on board by subsequent governments and police authorities (e.g., Cunneen, 2001; Williams, 2001; Wildman, 2002). The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service for instance, has argued that recommendation 228 was only “partially implemented at best” (Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, 2011, p. 107).

The RCIADIC recommendations, which were specifically designed to introduce Indigenous cultural awareness within police recruitment programs and training, also influenced the subsequent introduction of cultural competency training across education and government sectors more broadly, including in the health care system. This was reinforced by recommendations that specifically targeted *custodial health and safety* calling for the involvement of Aboriginal Health Services to ensure appropriate care of Aboriginal detainees in custody (e.g., recommendation 127); and the design of better health systems that take account of Aboriginal cultural difference through the introduction of cultural training (e.g., recommendation 247 (a)).

This paper is based within my professional discipline of social anthropology. Social anthropology understands culture to be intrinsic to a person’s social world; a person’s understanding of their social world; and how a person navigates their way within their social world. Drawing on Indigenous Knowledges theory, I assess how cultural misalignments between Indigenous clients and those who work with them in the name of therapies designed to improve Indigenous lives, dominate new forms of cross-cultural interactions. In so doing the questions are posed: how do good intentions become part of the discourses and practices of ongoing colonialism for Indigenous Australians, and what can be done to change the balance of power in favour of therapies of relevance to Indigenous people?

## The Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

Significantly, the RCIADIC also remarked upon the inadequacy of broader service delivery under Australian policing and welfare policy regimes, which it found have historically been a factor leading to increased incarceration of Aboriginal people (Johnston, 1991). One of the most poignant cases examined by the Commission was that of the historical circumstances leading to the suicide death in prison on 29 December 1982 of Malcolm Charles Smith. This case came to epitomize the central issues surrounding the impacts of welfare surveillance and incarceration for Indigenous Australians since colonisation. The death of Smith was memorialised in the 1992 documentary “Who Killed Malcolm Smith?” where Indigenous filmmaker Richard Franklin<sup>3</sup> revisited the case by undertaking interviews with members of Smith’s family and friends (Adler & Sherwood, 1992). It was reported by the Commission that Smith spent a significant part of his life in custody after a childhood of living in welfare placements. Commissioner Wootton commented in relation to this case:

This report has dealt with the taking away of Malcolm Smith from his family and its catastrophic effect on his life and ultimately his death. But this was not some isolated incident. Peter Read<sup>4</sup> has calculated that 5,625 Aboriginal children were taken away from their families in New South Wales up to 1969 under the Aborigines Protection Act, the Aborigines Welfare Act, and the Child Welfare Act. (Wootton, 1989).

What has occurred since the RCIADIC, and as a result of its endorsement of cultural awareness training for police, has been the uptake of cultural awareness training within government departments and NGOs servicing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities more broadly across Australia, including welfare and health organisations. Ostensibly, such training has been introduced in order to improve competency among non-Indigenous staff as to their understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and the issues impacting Indigenous Australians since invasion. However, as is discussed further in this paper, while the introduction of cultural awareness training may be based within good intentions, many commentators and academics have loudly critiqued this movement.

Importantly, in the wake of the RCIADIC, cross-cultural sessions and cultural competency workshops have become ubiquitous for public servants, therapists, and legal and welfare employees, in attempts to bridge gaps in cultural knowledge between agents of the welfare state and Indigenous clients. In this paper I shift attention from an analysis of the outcomes of the RCIADIC to a critical examination of the development and implementation of cross-cultural education across government and organisational service delivery to Indigenous clients that have resulted from the findings and recommendations of the RCIADIC. I explicitly examine some of the implications of cross-cultural and cultural competency workshops as a panacea to improve relations between Indigenous clients and those who work for the organisations Indigenous people access as part of their daily lives. Indigenous academic, Mark Rose has pointed out that:

In fact[,] it was the original Royal Commission that referred to a notion of “underlying issues” that permeated service delivery. Translated this refers to a more general paradigm and mindset in the broader population that was fed by a chronic ignorance around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. (Rose, 2013, p. 22).

Rose calls this “The Great Silent Apartheid”<sup>5</sup>. He argues that cultural awareness can be “quantified as a competency and immersed industrially as a requirement and on-going KPI” (Key Performance Indicator) across schools, teachers and systems (Rose, 2013, p. 22). The silence produced is professional ineptitude built on the back of organisations and departments achieving KPI targets at the expense of rigorous knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the people who live within them. Cynically, Rose concludes that:

The downstream result of this professional ineptitude can be measured in many ways but none as poignant as incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who found

the surrealism of the criminal justice system more attractive than the realism of their life. (Rose, 2013, p. 15).

## Cultural Awareness, Cross-cultural Workshops and Cultural Competence

This paper draws specifically on the Australian literature critiquing cross-cultural training and cultural competency, as well as other sources, to provide insights into how music therapy practice might benefit when working with Indigenous Australians.

As I have pointed out in introducing this paper, cultural awareness training for those working with Indigenous peoples in Australia has come out of very specific contexts unique to this country. The findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) was a prime motivator for its introduction. Significantly, however, such training has also inevitably been influenced by the development and design of cultural competency instruction in North America, and in other countries where colonialism was, and remains, a crucial factor dictating on-going relationships between Indigenous and Settler communities including in parts of Africa and South America (see for example: Dean, 2001; Pon, 2009; Almeida et al., 2011; and Muaygil, 2018 among others). In the United States, cultural training emerged primarily within the welfare, health and education sectors among dominant society professionals working with African American clients (Dean, 2001). As a result of the establishment of specialised programs in these areas, similar ideas for working with other ethnic minorities including Indigenous peoples were introduced (Cross et al., 1989; Hodge et al., 2009).

Downing et al. (2011) have noted that the concept of 'cultural competence' has been used widely in the United States in particular, and to a lesser extent in the United Kingdom and Australia as a result of the popularisation of Terry Cross's cultural competency continuum in 1988<sup>6</sup>. Over the past 10 years or so, analyses have looked at the inadequacies of cultural competency or cross-cultural competence training in the health and social work sectors, which are designed to understand cultural difference in order to facilitate better, more productive relationships with clients. Rather than providing an avenue of genuine empathy with the culture of the 'other', some have argued that such training has actually become a form of 'new racism' by othering non-whites and perpetuating stereotypes by promoting absolutism (e.g., Dean, 2001; Pon, 2009; Almeida et al., 2011; Hollinsworth, 2013). Most significantly, Pon contends in relation to social work settings, cultural competency "seldom analyses the role of whiteness" (Pon 2009, p. 59). Further, Hollinsworth has pointed out that cultural competence as a form of training, and as a term, "lacks definitional clarity" because it confounds related concepts such as cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, cultural safety, cross-cultural communication and cultural proficiency (Hollinsworth, 2013, p. 1049).

Critiques coming out of the North American context over the past 20 years have turned cultural competency on its head. In so doing they ask the question of whether it is really possible for a social worker or a health worker raised within the privileges of a dominant white culture, to ever become expert in the culture of those they are servicing, especially when the power relationships between clinician and client remain integral to, and unquestioned, in that relationship. Instead, Dean raises the issue of whether it is more productive to work with clients through an appreciation of "one's lack of competence" in the culture of the Other (Dean, 2001, p. 628). Applying this logic, it is argued in the literature that critical reflection and recognising white privilege is more likely to lead to the appreciation that one can never really know the life circumstance and culture of those they are working with, but can understand their own positionality and privilege in relation to their client and develop therapies or strategies in conjunction with their client accordingly (Dean, 2001; Hollinsworth, 2013; Muaygil, 2018).

It would appear that the discipline of music therapy has come to these conclusions relatively recently. Hiller and Gardstrom (2018) for instance, have identified the importance of integrating an awareness of culture in music therapy, through embracing

the principles of *cultural humility*<sup>7</sup>. While not specifically focussing on Indigenous cultures, the term Culture-Centred Music Therapy (coined by Brynjulf Stige in 2002) “describes culture as an integrated part of one’s biological, person and social life” (Hiller & Gardstrom, 2018, p. 84). These authors have gone on to identify a proliferation in the development of ‘culture-related standards’ and explorations of the importance of introducing cultural awareness, respect and sensitivity into the development of the field of music therapy (Hiller & Gardstrom, 2018, p.84). However, I argue that what is of importance in recognising the role of white privilege in music therapy practice, is to heed the warning espoused by Hiller and Garstrom that even though cultural competence is “an admirable aspiration”, a music therapist,

“... cannot possibly understand all that there is to comprehend about a client’s cultural identities, even when these identities are similar to their own and a comprehensive assessment has been conducted.” (Hiller & Gardstrom, 2018, p.84).

Regardless, one of the fundamental areas in which such training has taken hold in Australia has been in the health sector. Most recently the models adapted in the Indigenous health care sector have mirrored those of cultural safety as developed in Aotearoa (New Zealand). This model is client centred in that it focuses on how ‘safe’ a person feels in terms of their own culture when seeking health services (cf. Downing et al., 2011; Dudgeon & Walker, 2015, p. 279). The model has since been adapted or recommended for other contexts including the Higher Education sector (cf. Bin-Salik, 2003; Behrendt et al., 2012). The motivations to include cultural training in its variant models—cultural awareness, cultural competence, cultural safety, cultural security, cultural respect (Downing et al., 2011)—have been further driven by Federal government policies around ‘Closing the Gap’ in health outcomes between Indigenous and other Australians (Downing & Kowal, 2011; Downing et al., 2011), and in attempts to redress the psychological impacts of colonisation for Indigenous peoples (Dudgeon & Walker, 2015). Markedly, there has been relatively little attention given to how music therapists, and those who work in the professional space of music therapy, can implement culturally relevant and competent programs for Indigenous clients in Australia. This dearth of literature in the music therapy field has been taken up by Truasheim (2014). She champions the cultural safety model borrowed from models adapted within the health sector more broadly, and argues that an important first step to redress the imbalance in the literature, and in programs delivered within music therapy contexts is to “ensure that programs are culturally safe so that effective therapy services value the client’s own cultural identity” (Truasheim, 2014, p. 135).

Truasheim reports on a trial program attended by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. She argues the music therapy pilot project showed that music therapy *can* be a culturally safe service, as long as it is implemented strategically and with on-going reflection. Most important is that music therapy programs designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients will be effective if partnered with Indigenous “clients, community and culturally safe organisations” (Truasheim, 2014, p. 144).

Despite the existence of music therapy programs which purport to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, there is a dearth of literature which reviews the effectiveness of such music therapy programs. Training for music therapists, in the main concentrates on those working with migrants and non-Indigenous minorities, and much of it is *not* about the Australian context. Comte (2016) is one exception in that her focus is Australia, but her commentary is limited to a review of the literature which discusses the implementation of music therapy practice and potential benefits for refugee populations in this country, rather than Indigenous peoples.

By contrast, the overseas literature exploring the effectiveness of cultural competence in music therapy, social work, and allied disciplines is more comprehensive (e.g., Rolvsjord, 2004; Travis, 2013; Hadley & Norris, 2016; Whitehead-Pleaux & Tan, 2017), but it does not deal specifically with Indigenous peoples, and certainly not with Indigenous Australians. Nevertheless, a critical analysis of the international literature on how music therapy integrates cultural competency approaches can provide Australian

based music therapists important intellectual tools to better integrate cultural understandings when conducting therapeutic work with Indigenous clients. This is an important discussion, which may assist settler-colonial practitioners avoid the pitfalls of failing to recognise the centrality of their positionality and the dominance of white privilege.

## Personal Reflections

I have a PhD in social anthropology. For over 26 years I have practiced as an academic and as an applied social anthropologist in the fields of native title, Aboriginal heritage and juvenile justice, and in other areas of social justice. However, because I have an Indigenous background, as well as expertise as an academic in the social sciences, I am also regularly called upon to be a member of teams that provide cultural competency training delivered through cross-cultural workshops. Generally, these workshops are designed by a small panel of consultant Indigenous academics. The workshops are provided to non-Indigenous staff of government departments and tertiary education institutions. In my experience, the schema for these workshops has in the main been set by non-Indigenous managers, who provide the Indigenous team with a brief of the type of issues that the organisation believes would most benefit their staff depending on the remit of the organisation.

Attempts by the Indigenous consultancy team hired to embed methods for critical reflection on race relations in Australia, or Indigenous methods of resistance to domination and how these might impact client/provider interaction, have been, in my experience discouraged by the provider organisations. For example, in one workshop I introduced the use of rap and Hip-Hop by Indigenous musicians as an articulation of protest against racism in Australian society, and as a means to empower Indigenous youth more generally. The segment was well received by the non-Indigenous participants and stimulated a lot of discussion about how Indigenous youth deal with racism in their everyday lives. Despite this, I was advised by the section manager to remove this content as there was concern it portrayed a negative side of Indigenous people and did not reflect the lifestyles of 'traditional' Aboriginal culture.

In my experience, the requirements for cultural competency or cross-cultural workshops have invariably been to provide a session of a few hours on generic Aboriginal cultural ways, and how non-Aboriginal staff should work with cultural empathy towards Aboriginal clients and/or students. While such criteria may be well intentioned as meaningful ways to reconcile Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural understandings, ostensibly the focus of such workshops remains *on* Australian Indigenous people as the essential subjects of Australian government education policies<sup>8</sup>. In their 2016 review of cultural awareness and Indigenous cultural competency training in Australia, Fredericks and Bargallie (2016) are critical of the tendency for such programs to avoid addressing racism in case this offends or makes non-Indigenous participants uncomfortable (*cf.* Ahmed, 2008; Hollinsworth, 2013). Rather, they call for programs designed whereby:

People cannot hide the facts and the reality of what happened in Australian history because some people might feel upset or uncomfortable. We made our intention clear, 'up front', that we were there to break 'the great Australian silence'. (Fredericks and Bargallie, 2016, p. 10).

In so doing, Fredericks and Bargallie explicitly call out white privilege in the cultural competency space. They acknowledge that this work is emotionally exhausting for participants and instructors alike, but go on to point out that this is a price to pay when offering courses from an Indigenous worldview.

In contrast to the scenario I have described above, where I was asked to remove content from cultural competency workshops which discussed racism, in another program in which I was involved, an Indigenous worldview methodology was explicitly employed. This was an innovative, and ultimately very successful, interactive theatre pro-

duction written, produced and performed by a small team of Indigenous actors, screen writers and academics, who came from a diverse range of Indigenous backgrounds and life experiences. The play was commissioned by the Department for the Arts in South Australia in the early 2000s and was called *Embassy*. The production was designed as a theatre piece whereby the Indigenous actors would perform scenarios about issues of relevance to Indigenous people in Australia at that time, including the impacts of Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the relevance and necessity of granting Indigenous people rights to land.

The audiences were made up of government workers in departments such as National Parks and Wildlife, Community Affairs, Aboriginal Affairs and Welfare. The audience for each performance of *Embassy* was invited to be a part of the action of the drama as the play unfolded. In this way the audience was given an opportunity to experience aspects of Indigenous lives firsthand, and in scenarios which attempted to mirror real life situations. The purpose was that through this experience the audience members would come to understand some of the implications of their decisions, as government workers and managers, on Indigenous people. For example, a decision to bulldoze an Aboriginal site of significance can have wide ranging and inadvertent ramifications which impact Indigenous communities far beyond the immediate effect on Indigenous cultural practices and the integrity of mythological places resulting from the original destruction of a site<sup>9</sup>. Such a decision may have further far reaching social consequences that influence Indigenous people to move out of an area of their traditional country, and thus have significant repercussions for where they choose to live, and where they might send their children to school. This may in turn have additional unintended impacts, such as exposing their children to increased police and welfare surveillance in the town to which they have moved, compared with that experienced in their homeland community, ultimately leading to increases in incarceration and welfare intervention for these Aboriginal people.

## The Australian Context

Much of the literature that has critically reflected on the efficacy of cultural competency training in Australia has been generated from within the health sector. Significantly, this literature has identified similar problems, as does the international literature on cultural competency training I discussed earlier in this paper. That is, the tendency for such training models to reinforce stereotypes of the Indigenous Other. This is achieved without a deep questioning of the role of the agents of the dominant society, in this case health workers, medical professionals and creative arts therapists (*cf. Hadley, 2013*), in maintaining inequality and perpetuating existing power relations between settler society and Indigenous peoples.

The important work of First Nations scholar Carolyn Kenny offers potential methods by which to interrogate cultural competency training in Australia at the very sites of its practice (*Kenny, 2014*). Kenny devised the seminal theoretical framework *Field of Play* for music therapy researchers, scholars and practitioners to incorporate a reflexive interplay between therapist and client. This methodology emphasises the integration between the individual, their culture, their profession, and the natural world. By operating within this framework, a practitioner may be able to more fully situate themselves within a space, which necessitates an awareness of the power dynamics existing within their relationships with their clients.

Downing and Kowal comment, relying on an analysis of Paul *et al* (2006, p. 523), that what is notable about how cultural competency occurs in Australia is:

... the emphasis on teaching health workers about Indigenous peoples 'special health care needs' in their 'socio-cultural context', as opposed to considering processes of culture and identity, including those of the health worker themselves or the health system they work in. The ability of existing Indigenous cultural training programs to significantly shift participants' attitudes has been shown to be questionable. (*Downing & Kowal, 2011, pp. 7–8*)

Such critiques have sparked evaluations of cultural training commissioned in other professions such as the Judiciary, Psychology, and Higher Education. Cavanagh and Marchetti, in writing on cross-cultural training in the judicial space, remark for instance that:

The available training programs and bench books appear void in both critical self-reflection and any engagement with white privilege and racism, although one could argue that since the topic is cross-cultural in nature, that this engagement is implied. (Cavanagh & Marchetti, 2015, p. 53).

They go on to say:

Therefore, the aims of cross-cultural professional development in the judiciary should not be to learn about the Indigenous court user or colleague, but rather to learn about how, as an active or passive participant, each individual contributes to white privilege. (Cavanagh & Marchetti, 2015, p. 53).

What can be concluded from this analysis of the available literature, is that cultural competency remains trapped within the paradigm of training non-Indigenous workers to a hypothetical level of proficiency in Aboriginal culture, so as to offer better and more culturally relevant services. As already noted, this is done within good intentions and specifically to “address the gap in disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians” (Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016, p. 3). Much of the literature critiquing cultural competency training is written by Indigenous academics, sometimes in collaboration with non-Indigenous writers (e.g., Downing & Kowal, 2011; Downing et al., 2011; Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016; Kwaymullina, 2016). However, despite calls for change over the past decade, cultural competency, in the main, is still taught from settler-colonial standpoints at the expense of Indigenous worldviews on race relations, racism, and white privilege.

This dilemma is compounded within the university sector in Australia via the offering of undergraduate Indigenous studies courses (cf. Hollinsworth, 2013; Rose, 2013; Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016). Many of these courses include a suite of topics designed to provide mostly non-Indigenous students with an introduction to a generic undifferentiated Australian Indigenous society (which does not actually exist), and the issues impacting Indigenous peoples historically.

There is certainly more scope to provide critical reflection and analysis in a semester-long course than a half-day workshop. However, because such courses are invariably introductory there is nevertheless little genuine occasion for in-depth critical review of settler colonial relations with Indigenous peoples. Nor is there the time to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the diversity and complexity of Indigenous cultures and languages in modern Australia. One senior settler academic recently described to me that in their estimation the value of such courses is “better than nothing”, and this I believe epitomizes the problem. It should never be a matter of “better than nothing” if students are to critically assess the interplay of politics, history, and racism in the relations between Indigenous peoples and the settler-colonial state, and their own positioning in the reproduction of such relations. Tuck and Yang (2012) in their influential article have warned against complacency to circumvent the conflation of decolonization as a metaphor for cultural inclusion of the Indigenous by settler society.

When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recentres whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. (Tuck & Yang, 2012 p. 3, emphasis added).

I argue that Indigenous Knowledges theory and Indigenous standpoint theory offer ways out of the dilemma that the unreflective ubiquity of cultural competency training and Indigenous studies courses in Australia present. Others have posited similar arguments. Fredericks and Bargallie (2016) for instance, comment that critical Indigenous

studies provide a way for non-Indigenous participants to interrogate their own cultural positionings and to examine institutional racism (2016, p. 7).

Within the intellectual paradigm that is Indigenous Knowledges, the Indigenous academic and the Indigenous Elder are the holders of expert Indigenous understandings in all fields of knowledge including education, science, language, and law. For the Academy to accept Indigenous Knowledges as academically legitimate is a bridge which can link Indigenous and settler colonial knowledge. From an Indigenous perspective, colonial knowledge systems can only extend upon what Indigenous knowledge systems already explicate about the natural and cosmological realms (Nakata, 2010, p. 56). Importantly, it is vital to recognize that Indigenous knowledge comes from within lived cultural experience. At the forefront of this concept is the groundbreaking writing of Tuhiwai Smith (2021), whose work over the past two decades has called for Indigenous peoples, who are usually the subjects of research to be respected as the Indigenous researcher. This illustrates that the central principle of decolonizing the academy needs to occur from within Indigenous perspectives.

This may address what Hollinsworth has identified as common within Indigenous studies courses in Australia, that there is an expectation that generic knowledge on cultural difference will provide a panacea to cross-cultural understanding, the “better than nothing” approach. Hollingsworth also draws on Dean (2001) in identifying that understanding is emergent within *relationship building*, but only when doing this from the position of an appreciation of one’s *lack* of cultural competence, especially when working with clients “significantly unlike the worker in terms of class, culture, ‘race’, education and lifestyle” (Hollinsworth, 2013, p. 1052). An Indigenous knowledge position explicitly calls for research on and about Indigenous peoples to be *collaborative*, and that the voices of Indigenous people who are central to this process, are required to be clearly visible (cf. Arbon & Rigney, 2014, p. 480).

Moreton-Robinson (2004) identifies the insidiousness of white privilege in reinforcing coloniality over indigeneity in modern Australia. This is attained via the theft of land from Indigenous peoples in colonised countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand. However, its logics of justification are achieved through ideologies of racism, whereby “the possessive logic” of state control, “of patriarchal white sovereignty is compelled to deny and refuse what it cannot own – the sovereignty of the Indigenous other” (Moreton-Robinson, 2011, p. 647). This logic is reinforced in academic institutions, which are supported by and generated out of the State. Indeed, as Dudgeon and Walker (2015) point out, the very establishment of formal institutions of knowledge, in academic disciplines such as psychology and anthropology, have relied on the construction of paradigms of knowledge which reinforce the Indigenous as Other as a means to legitimate colonisation (Dudgeon & Walker, 2015, p. 282).

It is all the more important therefore, that cultural competency training (in all of the names it is given) within these disciplines, and others discussed in this paper including music therapy, scrutinise how white privilege is created by the dominant society as a means to suppress and control Indigenous peoples. Unsettling the colonial narratives and the colonial structures within which these narratives are embedded as part of the very institutions which create them, is essential. For music therapy to be successful, as coloniality continues to be played out in relations between Indigenous and settler peoples in Australia, it is vital for settler-colonial practitioners to interrogate their inherent positionality of privilege when working with Indigenous clients and Indigenous professionals, to challenge relationships of domination at their core.

Indigenous knowledges provide a framework for doing this, in that they address the contemporary realities for Indigenous peoples in Australia (and in other parts of the world) from *Indigenous perspectives*, while critical race theory offers a methodology for non-Indigenous participants to understand their own cultural positionings, and by implication their roles in perpetuating institutional racism (Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016, pp. 6–7).

## Conclusion

The *Embassy* theatre piece I discussed above was an early attempt to bring the Indigenous researcher (actor and scriptwriter) to the centre of how cultural competency should be taught in order to engage non-Indigenous agents of the State to understand their interactions with Aboriginal clients. It was also a work which explicitly critiqued race relations as these played out in scenarios in Australian society and history (e.g., Aboriginal deaths in custody, police actions, political aspirations of Aboriginal people). The aim was to directly engage a mostly non-Indigenous audience to interact with Aboriginal people in scenarios, which impacted Aboriginal peoples' everyday lives. The intention was to then turn the focus onto the reactions, understandings and existing roles of the participants in ways which assisted them to interrogate how they went about their work with Aboriginal people.

In 2018, the Bundyi Girri program was initiated at RMIT University<sup>10</sup>. Championed by Wiradjuri man from Trangie, New South Wales, Professor Mark McMillan, it was developed to support:

...non-Indigenous people in an awareness of their place, role and ongoing responsibility in their relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>11</sup>

This program explicitly draws on critical race theory as highlighted in particular in the theoretical works of Indigenous Australian academic Moreton-Robinson (e.g., 2004, 2011, 2015). The Bundyi Girri program is relatively recent and its effectiveness is yet to be fully evaluated. However, it has turned cultural competency training inside out by making non-Indigenous academics and administrators the *Other* and thus the focus of interrogation. This is in order to enable "staff and students to form a deeper relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples that is grounded in their sovereignty"<sup>12</sup>.

As I have noted in this paper, there is a dearth of literature on the evaluation of cultural competency within Australian music therapy programs and cultural competency training of music therapists who work with Indigenous Australians. Some insights can be drawn from the music therapy literature that discusses cultural competency training for therapists working with minority peoples and Indigenous peoples in countries other than Australia. This includes the recent article by Norris and Hadley on methods to engage race in music therapy supervision (Norris & Hadley, 2019). Contrastingly, the critiques of cultural competency in Australia for those working with Indigenous Australian clients in other professions is comprehensive, with many recent analyses provided by Indigenous academics as I have discussed in this paper. It is my contention that it is within this literature especially, that music therapists will find value in devising methodologies to implement effective cultural competency in music therapy programs. Specifically, it is imperative to include programs which overtly interrogate institutional racism and white privilege by asking non-Indigenous music therapists to evaluate their relationships with Indigeneity in modern Australia.

## About the Autor

Dr Suzi Hutchings is a Social Anthropologist and member of the Central Arrernte Nation. She is Associate Professor in Criminology and Justice Studies in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at RMIT University. She teaches Indigenous Studies, Indigenous policy and policy design.

Suzi's career is dedicated to working with First Nations peoples and communities throughout Australia. Since 1983, as a social anthropologist and Indigenous scholar of native title and family jurisprudence, Suzi has been consulting on the impacts of criminal justice and welfare intervention on Aboriginal youth and families. Her most recent engagement in this capacity was with the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (SA) providing expert cultural evidence in a child protection matter for a Pitjantjatjara family living in South Australia and the Northern Territory.

Suzi has also worked extensively as a senior anthropologist on native title claims across Australia, including in Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and the ACT. She was the senior anthropologist on the successful Esperance Nyungar native title claim. Suzi also collaborates with First Nations young people exploring innovative ways to maintain and express Indigenous identities, resilience, resistance, sovereignty and indigeneity through music and performance. This has included a highly successful co-production on Indigenous Hip-Hop with Melbourne based Indigenous musicians and Boonwurrung Elders, and the Australian Music Vault, Arts Centre Victoria.

Suzi produces and presents *Subway Sounds* for Community Radio station PBS 106.7FM in Melbourne. Suzi is co-editor with R. Aída Hernández Castillo and Brian Noble, of the 2019 publication: *Transcontinental Dialogues: Activist Alliances with Indigenous Peoples of Canada, Mexico, and Australia*, University of Arizona Press (<https://uapress.arizona.edu/book/transcontinental-dialogues>).

## Notes

1. The author acknowledges that the name Australia is a colonial construct and does not account for the more than 350 First Nations language groups occupying the continent at invasion in the late 18th century.
2. Commonwealth, Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody National Report Vol. 5., 1991.
3. As a researcher Richard Frankland helped investigate Malcolm Smith's death for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.
4. Peter Read is an Australian historian. The first published use of the term 'Stolen Generation' was in 1981 and has been attributed to him (Read, 2006; Thomas, 2010). The term has now become synonymous with all of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were removed from their communities and families as a result of government assimilation policies, as well as those people in succeeding generations who suffer intergenerational trauma because members of their families were removed.
5. This term resonates with the term employed by the anthropologist WEH Stanner in various writings and orations in the 1950s and 1960s to describe the lack of awareness and knowledge among ordinary Australians as to the culture of Indigenous Australians and their continuing plight as a result of British invasion and settlement. Stanner's most famous discussion on these issues was in his Boyer lecture series of 1968, where he argued that the Australian nation had been built on a state of forgetting Aboriginal people in Australian history, and that this was a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale (Stanner, 1969).
6. Cross (1988) argues that cultural competence is part of a process of becoming more culturally competent in order to respond to cultural differences. He maintains that this process consists of a continuum ranging from cultural proficiency to cultural destructiveness and that there are a variety of possibilities between these two extremes. The steps on the continuum are *Cultural Destructiveness*; *Cultural Incapacity*; *Cultural Blindness*; *Cultural Pre-Competence*; and *Advanced Cultural Competence*.
7. This term can be found in literature coming out of the disciplines of counselling and psychology (see for example: Hook et al., 2013).
8. Ahmed posits that self-reflexive declarative speech acts of good intentions expressed in whiteness studies as 'what white people can do', are part of the non-performativity of anti-racism that only serve to reinforce the very racism they allegedly confront (Ahmed, 2004).

9. The destruction of the Juukan Gorge rock shelters in the Pilbara region of Western Australia by mining company Rio Tinto in May 2020 is a very prominent example of the impact on Aboriginal people when sites of significance are demolished. This incident severely impacted the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura peoples and became world news at the time. See for example: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/12/devastated-indigenous-owners-say-rio-tinto-misled-them-ahead-of-juukan-gorge-blast> (accessed 28 October 2021); and <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-56261514> (accessed 28 October 2021).
10. RMIT University was founded in 1887 as the Working Men's College. It is an Australian public research university located in the city of Melbourne in Victoria, Australia.
11. <https://www.rmit.edu.au/careers/applying-with-us/indigenous-applicants> (accessed 2 August 2021).
12. <https://www.rmit.edu.au/careers/applying-with-us/indigenous-applicants> (accessed 2 August 2021).

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