

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission**From: Bek****Dated: 22 November 2024****Submission:**

I make this submission as a non-indigenous educator who has worked in the schools, universities and the cultural sector (museums) for the past 18 years. I recognise that I am part of an education system that continues to perpetrate racism, mistruths and injustice for First Nations people.

As First Nations content continues to be embedded across the Victorian Curriculum, teachers and education providers are scrambling to create education experiences to meet the demands of schools. This has seen an increase in cultural appropriation and the monetising of First Nations history and knowledges.

During my time working in schools, I received no professional learning about cultural appropriation, white bias or the systematic racism written into in our history books. Like most teachers I was expected to just do my best, with near enough being good enough. At the time, I didn't understand the role that stereotypes and the omission of truth plays in maintaining ongoing systems of colonisation. In the tertiary and cultural sector I have witness and participated in the horrid business of monetising First Peoples knowledges, experiences and culture.

There is A LOT of money to be made from First Nations curriculum aligned excursions and resources for teachers and schools. Often it is non-indigenous people (like myself) who develop First Nations education resources. We are told that it's okay to do so with 'consultation', but too often the consultants who are selected to do this work actually lack the cultural authority to be speaking to specific cultural knowledge. It is a box ticking process, to get on with the business of selling First Nations education.

In my experience of education institutions (including the Department of Education), I have witnessed very little regard for First Nations processes, self-determination, including if or how they would like to share their cultural knowledge and experiences. For me personally, the most heartbreaking and distressing part of working in First Nations education spaces is witnessing the psychological harm and burnout inflicted upon my First Nations colleagues.

Time and time again, I have seen smart, hard working and generous people over worked, under paid and left unsupported as they face the cultural load and personal burdens of sharing their knowledge, experiences, as well as their family's stories with ignorant education audiences. Too often when this cultural load becomes too much, the only option they have left is to quit their jobs. The next First Nations person is then hired, only to face the same experiences and the same outcome.

It is a vicious cycle, it is the beating heart of colonial violence and the same outcome. It is a vicious cycle, it is the beating heart of colonial violence and systematic racism. For First Nations people - it is just another day in the colony. I recognise that education is only one of many ways in which colonisation continues to be perpetuated on First Nations peoples. I also acknowledge that that I play a part in maintaining these systems of injustice by working within them. I believe that truth-telling is the only way forward.

END OF SUBMISSION