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True Justice through deep listening on Country: decolonising legal education in Australia

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of True Justice, a unique continuing legal education programme introduced in 2022 to increase cultural competency in legal practitioners. The programme achieves its purpose via the incorporation of First Nations principles and pedagogies, taking participants beyond the university classroom to learn deep listening on Country. The feedback from participants in the programme in April and May 2022 reveals the powerful experiences that are possible when the university classroom is abandoned in favour of place-based, trauma-informed learning. Incorporating not only First Nations perspectives but also pedagogies is particularly important in the legal profession, where, if these are ignored, practitioners and educators risk reproducing colonial models.

Keywords

Australia, decolonisation, education, legal practice, tertiary

Introduction

Anglo-Australian law is an apparatus of colonisation, complicit in the disempowerment of First Nations Peoples. Law has been described as "the West's most vital and effective instrument of empire" (Williams, 1990, p. 6). The colonial project has not ceased, but continues to inflict violence on First Nations Peoples, including through white or *mainstream* law which denies First Nations Australians' unceded sovereignty.

The way law is taught in Australian universities as part of the Bachelor of Law Degree impacts on how it is practised. Without embracing First Nations understandings, teaching can entrench unproblematic perceptions of the law. Educators must work to decolonise the curriculum, or risk perpetuating systems of oppression (Harvey & Russell-Mundine, 2019). Decolonisation of curriculum involves more than introducing Indigenous perspectives as electives or add-on topics in existing timetables. Teaching in this space must be transformative: it must be "productive, radical and disruptive" (Adébísí, 2020, p. 472) and it must be led by First Nations Peoples.

This article discusses the *True Justice* programme, a ground-breaking new First Nations-led project. True Justice is the creation of John Rawnsley, co-author of this article, a Larrakia (Aboriginal Peoples of the lands and waters in and surrounding Darwin, Northern Territory) and Anmetjerre (Aboriginal Peoples and language group of Central Australia, north of Alice Springs, Northern Territory) man who was working at the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) at the time. The programme takes learning outside of the traditional Anglo-Australian educational space of the classroom. It involves on Country visits where participants have the opportunity to engage in deep listening with First Nations community leaders and transmitters of traditional legal knowledges. Deep listening is important to First Nations Knowledge communication and ideally takes place on Country, with Country as an active participant (Haynes et al., 2022; Mulholland, 2022). The True Justice programme is designed to be run with either law students or members of the legal profession as a professional development programme. The iteration that this article explores was run with graduates who are already working at the coalface where Anglo-Australian law directly impacts First Nations Peoples. In this face-paced environment, it is not always possible to stop and reflect on the bigger picture, in terms of how legal structures impact First Nations Peoples. This deficiency has long been identified in the Australian Legal Education system, where "cultural competency" has been listed as a core graduate attribute (Universities Australia [UA], 2017), but

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is rarely implemented in meaningful ways at universities (Burns, 2018a, 2018b). Working in the legal system in the Northern Territory, Australia, where First Nations Peoples are over a quarter (26.3%) of the population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022), means working with Aboriginal Peoples. First Nations Peoples are particularly overrepresented in the criminal justice system, with and more than 80% of the prison population in the Northern Territory being from a First Nations background (Department of the Attorney General and Justice, 2021). The True Justice programme is important for all people working within this system, whether they identify as First Nations or non-Indigenous. A deeper understanding of First Nations law and trauma-informed practice means that there is less likelihood of legal professionals adding to negative experiences of First Nations Peoples with the Anglo-Australian legal system.

The article will argue that successful decolonisation of education involves First Nations-led learning experiences (Bowrey et al., 2022). While some working in this space argue that decolonisation may be impossible (Adébísí, 2020), and the difficulty of escaping the "colonial matrix" (Watson, 2014a, p. 149), it is still important that educators reflect on the ways that their practice can either contribute to or begin to deconstruct the trauma inflicted by the Anglo-centric legal system, and begin to create a more inclusive legal system (Dodson, 1995).

Decolonisation itself is a complex term which has different meanings and is place-dependent (Bell et al., 2021). Bell et al. (2021) argue that any discussion of decolonisation must first locate what is meant by colonisation. In Australia, colonisation involved the illegal acquisition of the continent by the British in 1788 and the imposition of British law on First Nations Peoples. Decolonisation seeks to *unravel* dominant discourses, such as law (Harvey & Russell-Mundine, 2019). Watson asserts that decolonisation involves the decentring of western political theories, and recentring First Nations Knowledges (Watson, 2014a). For Watson (2014a), this project is an urgent one, where

> all human life on earth is at stake . . . . The challenge [of decolonisation] would be to think outside of the colonial matrix of power . . . it requires transformative renewal to begin again and move away from what is still considered a "normal" [colonised] way of being. (p. 149)

The programme that this article discusses takes place in the Northern Territory, Australia. The Northern Territory is arguably Australia's frontier of continuing disadvantage of First Nations Peoples compared to non-Indigenous people (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2020). The First Nations of Australia have never entered into a treaty with any colonial government and have never ceded their sovereignty. While there has been some recent progress towards treaty making in the Northern Territory, Australia is still a constitutional monarchy (Northern Territory Treaty Commission, 2022). While the legal system has detached to some extent from Britain, the lack of recognition of First Nations Peoples and their laws means that Australia is still mired in its colonial history.

There is "no one strategy or blueprint for decolonisation" (Bell et al., 2021, p. 606); however, education holds the possibility of dismantling entrenched colonial thinking. In this article, the university is critiqued as a site of colonisation. The True Justice programme was not designed nor run inside the walls of a university, but on Country, and was undertaken by graduates rather than students. As university graduates, the participants had previously been exposed to university courses which supposedly embed First Nations perspectives; however, the surveys conducted at the end of the programme reveal that there are deficiencies in current *indigenisation* models. Programmes such as True Justice, therefore, are vital for all people who are working or plan to work as legal professionals, in particular, in places such as the Northern Territory.

What is a university and why do we assume it is a good place to learn?

A university is a tertiary teaching institution where students study for qualifications beyond a high school certificate. Universities also conduct research or risk losing their accreditation. While this research keeps staff knowledge up to date, methods used in teaching and research are not always so innovative. As Alvares (2012) explains,

> There has been no fundamental change in the structure of teaching and research at universities all over the world since the first university in the West was set up at Bologna around the year 1155 CE. (p. 268)

While there have been some developments in the way we teach, in particular post-COVID, it is surprising how little has changed. Study is still largely siloed into different disciplines that rarely engage with one another. This includes law schools, some of which, like the one at Charles Darwin University, disallow electives from outside of law being counted towards a law degree. This is despite repeated calls from within universities and their peak bodies to be more inclusive of First Nations perspectives (UA, 2022). It is frequently the case that students can make their way through an entire law degree without being exposed to First Nations systems of law.

The university structure itself can be identified as holding and promoting views that are antithetical to dismantling a colonial mind-set. As Yuself Progler (2012) writes,

> The university itself is a colonised space in terms of curriculum being oriented towards White studies at the expense of other knowledges . . . . the university becomes a space for the upper social classes to reproduce themselves. (p. 50)

Further to this argument, the university space can be experienced a site of violence for First Nations Peoples (Cormier & Ray, 2018). As McGregor et al. (2018) explain, "The academy is created by, and in turn helps to create, a colonial system that has dehumanised Indigenous Peoples. It is no surprise that universities remain mostly inhospitable to Indigenous scholars and scholarship" (p. 81).

Legal education

It can be argued that legal education, if anything, amplifies the already colonial aspects of the university. The law is a colonising discipline and inflicts violence on Indigenous Peoples in multiple ways. On a practical level, law enforces the colonial project. Legal concepts such as *terra nullius* justified genocide and dispossession, and law continues to impact Indigenous Peoples by denying their unceded sovereignty. The impact of law's colonising power works both practically and symbolically, by reinforcing colonial structures as the norm.

For law students, being inculcated into colonial thinking begins with the way that law is conceptualised by their teachers. Law students are told that they are being taught to *think like a lawyer* (Sanson & Anthony, 2019). Thinking like a lawyer goes not only to the practice of legal problem-solving, but is also based on theories of law, which are frequently positivist. These perspectives present *the law* as unproblematic and unitary. In the words of Australian legal theorist Margaret Davies (2023),

> Western legal theory, while purporting to theorise the (universal) concept of law, has singularly failed to consider non-Western concepts of law: it tells its own story of origins and progress, without reflecting upon whether this experience of law is shared by all. Indeed, we (white Westerners) are quite accustomed to speak unreflectively about the law, as though it is perfectly obvious what we mean. The Western concept of law—essentially legal positivism—admits only one law, and it is the dominant institutionalised state-based version. This linguistic act of exclusion obliterates other laws: in the case of Australia, for example, it obliterates consciousness and recognition of Indigenous laws. (p. 327)

The key understandings of the law that underpin legal education in Australia, therefore, contribute to systemic racism, by not presenting alternative perspectives. There is little opportunity for students to reflect on the closure of the law as a discipline. This creates an environment that is not conducive to learning and teaching from a First Nations perspective or utilising these pedagogies. As First Nations legal academic Nicole Watson (2005) writes, "legal education that consists almost entirely of black-letter law unavoidably propagates racism. It is manifest in the erasure of Indigenous voices from both the makeup of law faculties and the curriculum" (p. 4).

This lack of First Nations perspectives in law schools has been recognised in the Canadian context, where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called for First Nations laws to be revitalised (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The momentum to recognise First Nations Laws has come with a movement which is seeking practical answers to how these traditions can become a part of mainstream law teaching, so that the goals of reconciliation can be realised (Napoleon & Friedland, 2016, p. 739). Work is also being undertaken in Aotearoa (New Zealand), where a multi-year project is being undertaken to explore the possibilities for including Māori (Indigenous Peoples of New Zealand) law in the mainstream legal system, and the changes in education that need to occur for this to happen (Ruru, 2020). In the context of international legal education, Australia has a long way to go.

Universities Australia: a commitment to *indigenising the curriculum*

UA (n.d.) describes itself as the voice of Australia's universities and is the peak body for the sector. In 2017, UA outlined its commitment to creating universities that advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. This was followed, in 2022, by a strategy that "shift[s] gears from aspiration to implementation" (UA, 2022, p. 7). The Strategy seeks to advance several values, including:

- Truth-telling about our shared history as an essential step forward in addressing racism and improving the safety and advancing the prosperity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in and through universities.
- Commitment to cultural safety for Indigenous students and staff and all Indigenous people.
- Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique knowledge and knowledge systems which are foundational to Australia's intellectual, social and cultural capital. (UA, 2022, p. 14)

While UA's commitment to First Nations Peoples is encouraging, ensuring that these principals are put into practice is more challenging. If this strategy is to be more than aspiration, time, energy and financial commitment must be made. Being able to implement programmes that address systemic racism involves a radical rethink of the way that education is delivered, including a close examination of the ways that universities are structured and run. This involves not only promoting First Nations staff based on intrinsic knowledges, but also recognising that current university systems of teaching and learning are built on colonial principles. Addressing these issues will not be a cheap and quick fix. Universities must commit to putting time and money into implementing the necessary changes, something UA has recognised (UA, 2022).

The Council of Australian Law Deans' commitment to First Nations Peoples

In the Australian legal education space, the Council of Australian Law Deans (CALD) has also released statements that recognise the systemic racism embedded in the legal system, and committing to working with First Nations Peoples to create culturally safe spaces within law schools. CALD (2020) "condemns the systemic discrimination that permeates the Australian legal system with respect to First Nations peoples" (para. 1). Further,

> CALD urges all Australian law schools to work in partnership with First Nations peoples to give priority to the creation of culturally competent and culturally safe courses and programs. In so doing, CALD acknowledges the part that Australian legal education has played in supporting, either tacitly or openly, the law's systemic discrimination and structural bias against First Nations peoples. At the same time, CALD affirms the positive contribution Australian law schools can, should and will make, in full partnership with First Nations peoples, in exposing, critiquing and remedying all forms of institutionalised injustice. (CALD, 2020, para. 2)

Given this strong recognition of the systemic discrimination within the law, and commitment to addressing this via education, CALD's statement could be seen as a call to action for Australian law schools. Despite this, law is still taught mostly from Anglo-Australian perspectives. There are various attempts to *indigenise* curriculum, but this usually just means insuring that First Nations Peoples are no longer invisible in the curriculum, it does not mean incorporating First Nations law or pedagogies.

Decolonising education

To produce lawyers who are capable of working in culturally meaningful ways, legal educators have to consciously resist reproducing a colonial mindset on multiple fronts. They must be aware of the colonial structures of the university both as a physical space and as "training for . . . hierarchy" (Kennedy, 1982, p. 606). They must also resist teaching the law in non-critical ways that reinforce the colonial or *terra nullius* thinking that embeds racism (Cronin, 2021). These ideas may be simple to state, but not so easy to implement. Not only is it a challenge to incorporate critical perspectives in an already crowded curriculum, but there can also be pushback from management, other academics, and students. Also, introducing First Nations pedagogies may mean leaving the classroom for a more experiential style of learning. This can be difficult in a risk-averse institution, such as a university.

Universities both in Australia and in other colonial jurisdictions have committed to recognising First Nations perspectives and methods; however, this can sometimes be little more than a box-ticking exercise. A Canadian article outlines three types of Indigenisation: Inclusion, Reconciliation and Decolonisation (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Many Australian universities have gone some way to implementing the first two of these, by creating identified positions, and mandating that Indigenous perspectives be included in the curriculum. This often means that First Nations academics are expected to assist other staff members, often in unrecognised or unpaid roles, as well-meaning white allies constantly seek their assistance (Thunig, 2022; Wood & Watson, 2018). A reconciliation approach to indigenisation involves some shifts in thinking for existing staff members, who are encouraged to examine Indigenous perspectives, and "adjust how they think of and work with Aboriginal Peoples" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p. 222). However, many staff argue there is not the space in a crowded curriculum to deeply engage with First Nations perspectives (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Decolonial indigenisation holds the greatest potential for change and involves an overhaul of the university, not just teaching practice. Decolonial indigenisation involves decentring western knowledge systems and this sometimes means moving away from the classroom so that learning can take place on Country (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Decolonisation of education must be "productive, radical and disruptive" (Adébísí, 2020, p. 472). To promote a model that can produce transformational shifts in thinking, the methodologies and pedagogies of Indigenous knowledge transference must be incorporated into the ways that units are designed. Successfully decolonising education also involves a radical rethink of the way knowledge is transmitted, including a close examination of the ways that universities are structured and run.

This may seem like an impossible task, given the resistance to change which is entrenched in the neo-mediaeval university structure. However, the starting point for this shift may exist outside of the University itself, with Aboriginal-led agencies working in partnership with universities. The True Justice program is an example and is the inspiration for this article.

True Justice

The design of the True Justice programme, the subject of this article, was led by John Rawnsley and run by NAAJA. It is a week-long, intensive programme that provides participants with the knowledge to assess and critique Anglo-Australian law from a First Nations perspective. It is designed to arouse questions about the adequacy of Anglo-Australian law and legal education to provide justice for First Nations Peoples. Participants in this programme are encouraged to develop ideas to address problems inherent in the current systems. Law is explored as a multifaceted concept, which includes both the Anglo-Australian legal system and the First Nations legal systems. First Nations legal systems are not presented as historical but as lived experience for First Nations Peoples. First Nations' knowledge frameworks are used to explore notions of law and Country (Borrows, 2016; Haynes et al., 2022; Ungunmerr-Baumann et al., 2022).

In April and May 2022, a group of 20 employees from NAAJA, plus one law academic from Charles Darwin University, took part in the True Justice programme. The participants were mostly non-Indigenous law graduates and practitioners within the civil or law and justice teams, although there were also Aboriginal participants, who were also NAAJA employees. The on-Country components of the programme included walking in the Mangroves of Ludmilla, a suburb of Darwin; visiting significant cultural sites in Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory; and speaking with community leaders in the small First Nations community of Gunbalanya, North West Arnhem, Northern Territory. Surveys were conducted with participants during the week following the programme, in May 2022.

In explaining the impact of the programme on participants, the authors will utilise responses to the

anonymous surveys collected at NAAJA from members of the civil, and law and justice teams. Ethics approval to draw on these data has been provided by Charles Darwin University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

The survey

Of 20 participants, 12 responded to a voluntary, anonymous survey delivered through SurveyMonkey that sought feedback on the programme. Questions were designed by John Rawnsley and appear below:

1. What was your most important/powerful learning experience? (please describe)
2. Did the course shift/transform the way you view the Australian legal system? If yes, how?
3. Did the course make you think differently about deep listening and True Justice? If yes, how?
4. Do you feel the course experience will change the way you engage clients or community? If yes, how?
5. What aspects of the course in terms of course design do you think were the strongest?
6. What aspects of the course in terms of course design do you think we should do differently?
7. Co-facilitators are reaching out to other legal service providers and the profession to impress upon them the importance of the course and making it available for their staff, do you have any messages for them about this? (and drawing on your insights and experience).
8. Whether you are a lawyer or support staff, do you think this course should be available for law students? If yes, do you have messages for law schools as to why this course is important (and drawing on your experience, if relevant).
9. Reflecting on the experiences of the course, do you have a message for NAAJA's senior management or board that you would like us to pass on?
10. An important principle of this course is that it was Aboriginal-led. Do you have a message you would like us to pass onto all the co-facilitators of the course?

While the group was not large enough for results to be statistically significant, responses add depth to the points raised in this article. Qualitative analysis revealed there were several themes that recurred throughout the responses—most prominently, the theme of Country. This and other recurring themes will be explored below. A code has been used to identify the question answered and the respondents by number only to maintain anonymity: Q relates to question number, and R to the number of the participant. Names were not collected by the survey.

University as a colonising space: taking the classroom on Country

The space of the university itself can be considered one of the most intense sites for the reproduction of colonial thought, as noted earlier in this article. The space and presence of the university in teaching can also be violent and colonising. As First Nations scholar Kim Mulholland (2022) explains, place is always the third person in the conversation. When it comes to the university environment, gaining attachment to the campus can be particularly hard for First Nations students, who are frequently the first in their family to attend university (Carter et al., 2018). The *campus racial climate*, which includes how teaching staff and students interact, can affect whether the university environment is perceived as hostile or comfortable for racial minorities (Carter et al., 2018; N. Watson, 2005; Wood & Watson, 2018). Teaching facilitators need to manage interactions between racial groups and about hot button topics, such as racism, in the classroom. Recognising that the classroom is already a colonial space should impact on the ways that academics do this. Positive and ongoing relationships between staff and students can ameliorate some of the negative aspects of the campus environment, but where there are large class numbers, it is almost impossible for unit coordinators to provide what is needed in the traditional classroom space (Carter et al., 2018). Taking teaching outside of the classroom is one way to mitigate these impacts. As noted by Gaudry and Lorenz (2018), "[o]n-the-land [or on Country] learning is an important starting point for . . . decolonial indigenization" (p. 225).

Responses to the survey questions reveal that moving the site of learning from the campus and onto Country can be particularly powerful for participants. When asked what were the most important learning experiences of the course, most participants stated that being *on Country* was very important to their learning experience. Eleven participants of 12 used the phrase "on Country" or "on country" in their responses. Some examples are as follows:

> Be aware of being on others' country (at all times and in Darwin but particularly when in community) and show respect by being quieter. Take less charge. (Q4, R2)

> Being on country in Gunbalanya and hearing and seeing how things used to be when people were given control to manage their own affairs and businesses. (Q1, R1)

> And simply, "being on country" (Q1, R3).

There were also other references to learning in alternative spaces, such as the Darwin mangroves, that resonated deeply with the students. This included being in these spaces and practicing deep listening with Larrakia educator, Mililma May and her dads. Both father and grandfather in western family structure are identified as fathers in Mililma's kinship system.

> I really appreciated the tour of Ludmilla [Darwin suburb] mangroves and associated talks with Mili[lma]'s dads. It was a really special experience to hear about their lives growing up in the area, and also their thoughts on contemporary issues. (Q1, R4)

> the Larrakia-led tour of the mangroves in Ludmilla was very special. It brought together some many different things in a seemingly simple exercise of going on a walk—telling stories about Ludmilla and growing up in Darwin, telling stories about the natural environment, telling stories of oppression. (Q1, R9)

The on-Country experiences in Darwin were particularly powerful for the participants, and this was "an important reminder that we are always on country everywhere we go" (Q1, R9). This programme was the first opportunity for participants to experience this kind of deep listening both in Darwin and remote areas, and hear stories of Aboriginal people speaking with their own authority in both locations. Darwin is the capital of the Northern Territory, and is the site of many bureaucratic, colonial structures and institutions which are largely run and controlled by non-Indigenous people, such as courts, Parliament and government departments. The True Justice programme drew attention to the multiplicity of layers in city spaces, making visible the stories, meanings and laws of First Nations Peoples. The programme promotes the importance of place and Country reminding participants of the continuous presence of Country.

Race, racism and whiteness

Issues about race and racism can be raised in education settings in an uncontroversial manner if they are placed in an historical context. However, students are challenged when they are asked to reflect on systemic examples of racism or how they may be complicit in structures that create racial disadvantage. In the legal education context, Indigenous academic Marcelle Burns and co-author Jennifer Nielsen discuss teaching a tertiary unit *Race and the law* to mostly white students at Southern Cross University in Lismore, New South Wales, Australia (Burns & Nielsen, 2018).Burns and Nielsen (2018) explore how race is a relatively non-controversial issue when taught as a historical artefact or as something that only impacts people of colour. Things change, however, when discussions focus on contemporary racism. This is described by diversity trainer Robin DiAngelo (2019) as "white fragility" (p. 2). Working in the US context:

> we [white people] perceive any attempt to connect us to the system of racism as an unsettling and unfair moral offense. The smallest amount of racial stress is intolerable—the mere suggestion that being white has meaning often triggers a range of defensive responses. These include emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and withdrawal from the stress-inducing situation. (DiAngelo, 2019, p. 2)

The uncomfortableness of discussing racism in a contemporary context means it is often a topic avoided. As DiAngelo (2019) explains, "we [white people] are taught to think about racism only as discrete acts committed by individual people, rather than as a complex, interconnected system" (p. 3). However, while it is an uncomfortable topic for academics and students, it is one that must be explored if cultural competency is to be achieved.

In the legal education context, educators must continually critique the way they present law, being ever vigilant to unpack or reveal any hidden or embedded assumptions about race and racism. Those who lift the veil of white neutrality will face pushback and discomfort. Questioning factual and neutral presentations of the law, as it is usually presented in units such as Contract Law, or other core units, can be unsettling for students, who may then be forced to consider whether they are complicit in these racist systems. It can also make the study of law less mathematical and more complex, as different perspectives are added. Students can resist the complexity of a multi-layered legal system, preferring to not engage with issues that may give rise to an emotional response.

During the True Justice programme, space for discussion of race and racism was opened up. These issues were raised in subtle ways that encouraged participants to generate their own thinking, which is part of deep listening practice. One participant commented that the course:

> Really brought home to me that I am living on and benefiting from stolen land. highlighted to me that perhaps white [A] ustralia don't want to engage with concepts of Aboriginal disadvantage because that involves recognising that you are still part of the ongoing colonisation and this is a very difficult position to grapple with. (Q1, R6)

While there was a mixture of First Nations and non-Indigenous people in the programme, the majority of people who took part were non-Indigenous. Race issues and whiteness were drawn out not through direct reference, but through more subtle techniques, for example, through the locations where the programme was run, outside of the classroom and on Country. The locations chosen were spaces where the speakers felt connected and relaxed, but where participants were less likely to. This alters the teaching and learning paradigms, removing them from the colonial model and traditional hierarchies of the university classroom. Respect in the programme was not garnered through on-paper qualifications but lived experience and traditional knowledges: "On-the-land learning is transformative precisely because of its recognition of authoritative knowledge among community members" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p. 225).

Comments that indicated the programme shifted or deepened views about colonisation, and that participants had reflected on their contribution to systemic racism, included:

> it made me think about my work as an agent of that [colonial] system and how I can do less harm. (Q2, R1)

> it made me think even more so how the Australian legal system is made for white people by white people. (Q2, R5)

> It was a timely reminder that we do not have an equality before the law and that the law is weaponised as a tool of oppression. I've never had the space like this before to sit with Indigenous people and hear their stories over the course of a whole week. I think having so much time, including a weekend was critical in this. (Q2, R10)

Issues of race, racism and whiteness also came up when participants were asked about the value of the programme to those working in the profession:

> It highlights to individuals how they may be working in a way that is continuing to oppress their clients by forcing them to fit within the confines of a broken system which is counter to the Aboriginal worldview. Workers need to shift their views to deep listening and deep understanding of lore to ensure they are best placed to empower their [Aboriginal] clients rather than disempower them with ongoing structural racism. (Q7, R6)

True Justice through deep listening

The True Justice programme links the concept of justice to deep listening. This was one of the key aims and objectives of the programme—to allow participants to move from an incredibly fast-paced world of legal practice, into a space where they had the time to listen, reflect and learn. Country teaches to and in its own way for participants and this emerges with deep listening practice. Deep listening is an intrinsic part of many Australian First Nations' methods of knowledge transmission (Andrew & Hibberd, 2022; Harney, 2022; Haynes et al., 2022; Manathunga et al., 2020). In the Daly region of the Northern Territory, deep listening is referred to as "Dadirri" (Ungunmerr-Baumann et al., 2022, p. 94).

> "Dadirri is the art of being present, being still, connecting with yourself and the environment in such a profound way that it creates space for deep relationships. Dadirri encourages cyclical, deep listening, and reflection" and is connected to truth telling. (Ungunmerr-Baumann et al., 2022, p. 94)

Deep listening is similar to the Yolŋu Matha (language of the Yolŋu First Nations People of Arnhem Land, Northern Territory) concept of *relationality*, nhina, nhäma ga ŋäma, which translates to "sit with, listen, and observe" (Haynes et al., 2022, p. 3670). In this conception, deep listening takes on multiple dimensions, which go far beyond just hearing. These more complex aspects on listening were revealed by the participants when they reflected on the impacts of the True Justice programme, in particular, on the ways the team worked with clients, themes included learning to take time, and listening more deeply:

> [the experience] will make me be more open to hearing our clients' stories. Better able to engage with our clients even under challenging circumstances. (Q4, R8)

This deeper listening was also linked to creating better relationships with clients and empowering them:

> I will try to bring a greater calmness to my client engagement and try to work on setting the tone right before we launch into the hard parts of the law I need to communicate. I will focus on relationship building more which will hopefully lead to better communication of the information I need to pass on when the time comes. I will try to let the client direct more of the conversation where appropriate so I can sit back and fully listen. (Q4, R9)

There was overwhelming support for the programme and its importance to people working in the legal system. The participants were adamant that this kind of learning could not take place within a classroom setting, and was essential to all people working in the legal profession:

> This is one of the best things I've ever done. (Q7, R9)

> It is the most transforming learning I have undertaken about how to be the very best culturally sensitive and culturally focused practitioner and relatedly, ensuring cultural safety and minimising re-traumatising clients in my every day practice, which in turn, is critical to advancing [True Justice] for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. (Q7, R11)

> Every person working in the legal sector needs to do this course! (Q7, R1)

This included a critique of traditional legal learning that is completed in the classroom setting. One respondent stated that "you won't learn anything like this in a classroom" (Q8, R3). This reflects not only the novel aspects of the programme but also the enhanced learning that can be achieved by moving off university campuses and onto Country. The fact that the programme was led and run by First Nations Peoples was also a very highly valued aspect of the course:

> As a former law student, there was very little by way of Aboriginal-led courses at uni (though there were some) so we heard a lot through deficit discourse but not much about strength, which this course brought out. A very different way of learning to mainstream university education which broadens minds. (Q8, R2)

> An Aboriginal perspective of history on country is not available anywhere else. To understand the barriers to accessing justice that Aboriginal people face in the context of ongoing colonisation it is essential law students do this training. (Q8, R6)

References were also made to the abstract nature of legal learning in the classroom, and how this does not prepare students for the realities of practice. As Joel Modiri (2016) writes,

> law students generally continue to be subjected to an irrelevant, outmoded and monotonous curriculum and course structure—coursing through a formulaic textbook and learning by rote without serious reflection on the social, economic, ideological and cultural implications of the texts, cases, and legal problems discussed in class. Law schools are generally not up to date with contemporary political contestations, events and dynamics and very few lecturers reflect of the significance of critical political movements and upheavals in the country for the courses they teach and the research they conduct. (p. 508)

This is reflected in comments by students who refer to the *abstract* nature of learning at university that does not educate students about working in cross-cultural situations:

> It brings the abstract academic view taught in university into the practical and emphasises that a student has to look at their own value and belief system before they begin practicing law. Not only does True Justice provide in depth cross cultural training, it creates a space for the development of a student's emotional intelligence which is not facilitated in any other space in the university setting. (Q8, R6)

> I think it contextualises a lot of issues that can be hard to process when you are just taught about it in the abstract . . . . For the next generation of law students, understanding the impact of the law on Indigenous people should be at the forefront, not just an afterthought or an elective. Our understanding of the treatment of Indigenous people and the law ought to inform our entire understanding on the foundations in which our legal system is built. If this critical first step is missed, then we are failing to teach law students what our legal system really is and the reality of how it operates. (Q8, R9)

Overreliance on textbooks in the traditional classroom can discourage creativity and the kinds of learning required to work effectively in a cross-cultural space. As Alvares (2012) writes,

> Since textbooks and creative learning cancel each other out, it stands to reason that if the university desires to promote creative work, then the wholesale reliance on textbooks may have to be considerably reduced in favour of open-ended learning in several areas. (p. 303)

The solitary nature of the usual university experience with a focus on book learning encourages rote rather than life-long, interactive education, something that the participants in the programme recognised:

> There is definitely not enough critical thinking about the underlying values and historical context of the law at universities and how this reinforces systems of oppression. (Q8, R11)

> [The True Justice program] gives a better perspective rather than just reading from a book in a class room. (Q8, R10)

Learning together is also something that is not frequently encouraged in the competitive law school classroom, where students resist teamwork. However, learning relationally is a First Nations practice. A participant reflected that "having this collective experience is also important as a lot of uni is somewhat solitary (reading textbooks, listening to lectures, completing assignments etc)" (Q8 R9). This is in keeping with First Nations approaches to teaching and learning, as renowned Indigenous academic Irene Watson (2014b) explains:

> An Indigenous approach to knowledge is holistic and embraces aspects of life as a whole entity which has its source and meaning in the land. Skills are learned from childhood in a holistic way; teaching and learning are in the living of life, and are not an aspect of life. (p. 512)

This is also about redefining the teacher as a guide, "assisting students when required on how to learn rather than what to learn" (Alvares, 2012, p. 304), and learning by connecting with Country.

Conclusion

This article offers a critique of Anglo-Australian law and the way it is taught in the Eurocentric university. Because of the impacts of the white legal system on First Nations Peoples, this article calls upon law teachers to urgently rethink their pedagogies, and thus create shifts in thinking about the law in the minds of the next generation of law students. Decolonising education needs to go beyond a box-ticking exercise and must include more than hiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples into lecturing roles. Indeed, universities may find it hard to fill such positions without transformations to an outdated, colonial university structure that can be experienced as violent to First Nations Peoples. For law to be taught in a way that conforms with the stated aspirations of universities for indigenising the curriculum and improving cultural competency and cultural safety, it must be done on Country including the places where law schools are situated and other places, and connect with a range of First Nations Peoples who speak with their own authority and expertise. In this way of thinking about decolonisation, it is the university which needs to shift, rather than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples needing to fit into the Eurocentric university.

The True Justice programme has shown what can be achieved if legal practitioners are exposed to First Nations ways of thinking about the law. This programme involved moving outside of the traditional classroom and on to Country, where learning was experienced wholistically. As the survey responses show, these shifts in place and time resulted in equally powerful shifts in thinking. It is now the goal of the authors to increase options for this kind of learning for both law students and practitioners. It is also their hope that the publication of this article will inspire more legal academics to follow this path.

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Glossary

Aotearoa	New Zealand
Anmetjerre	Aboriginal Peoples and language group of Central Australia, north of Alice Springs, Northern Territory
Dadirri	Inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness
Larrakia	Aboriginal Peoples of the lands and waters in and surrounding Darwin, Western Australia
Māori	Indigenous Peoples of New Zealand
nhina, nhäma ga ŋäma	to sit with, listen and observe
Yolŋu Matha	language of the Yolŋu First Nations People of Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

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