

What is ‘Beyond One Tune’?

This resource is a card-based reflective toolkit for primary music teachers, designed to support more inclusive, culturally responsive, and participatory approaches to music education. Intended primarily for generalist teachers, it aligns with national and state curriculum frameworks, including ACARA (2025) and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (n.d.), while remaining flexible across music education and professional development contexts in Australia. Through reflective prompts, provocations, and an accompanying guide, it supports ongoing self-reflection, planning, and professional growth.

Why is this resource needed?

Australia is a culturally rich and diverse nation, creating strong potential for vibrant and inclusive music learning. However, access to music education remains uneven, and there are deeper concerns about whose music is valued, what counts as musical ability, and how students are expected to participate within classrooms.

In many cases, music curricula continue to centre Western musical traditions and European approaches to music education (Kelly-McHale, 2016). This positions Western classical music as a dominant or “universal” standard, often privileging able-bodied, heteronormative, and historically dominant composers and performers. As a result, there is limited representation of First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, disabled, neurodiverse, and gender diverse musicians. Even when attempts are made to include diverse musical traditions, these cultures are often reduced to their ‘exotic’ aspects, falling into the traps of exoticism and tokenism (Ho, 2010) and treated as add-ons rather than integrated as familiar, valued, and ongoing components of the curriculum (Zaffini, 2024). Furthermore, when diverse musical traditions are included, they are often interpreted through Western pedagogical frameworks rather than through culturally grounded approaches or in consultation with cultural knowledge holders. In this process, they can be stripped of their cultural context and political significance, reinforcing rather than challenging existing hierarchies (Knapp, 2025). This can make it difficult for many students to see their identities, experiences, and musical knowledge recognised within the classroom, reinforcing narrow ideas of success, participation, and belonging.

Over recent years, inclusive education has become a key priority across policy frameworks. Internationally, the Incheon Declaration emphasises the right of all learners to access inclusive and equitable quality education (UNESCO, 2016). Nationally, the Australian Curriculum (ACARA) promotes equitable participation and recognises diverse learner strengths across multiple domains, while also prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. At a state level, the Victorian Government’s SHARE principles emphasise strengths-based, flexible, and personalised educational experiences (Victoria State Government, 2024), while the Victorian Curriculum F–10 further supports inclusive practice by recognising diverse ways of participating in arts learning and promoting culturally inclusive environments (VCAA, 2024).

However, despite these policy commitments, a significant gap remains between intention and classroom practice, shaped by low teacher confidence and the pressure of competing administrative demands (Lau, 2022). This gap becomes even more complex when teachers are expected to embed cross-curriculum priorities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, without sufficient guidance on how to do so respectfully and meaningfully. Hogarth (2025) argues that education systems and practitioners often lack the support needed to centre Indigenous voices and perspectives, which can result in Indigenous knowledges being represented through predominantly non-Indigenous or anthropological interpretations rather than through Indigenous-led perspectives.

As a result, teachers may struggle to translate inclusive and culturally responsive principles into everyday teaching. At the same time, when teachers have limited opportunities to critically reflect on their own positionality, assumptions, and unconscious biases, dominant norms may continue to shape classroom practice in ways that unintentionally ‘other’ students or position them through deficit lenses. It is within this gap that this resource is positioned, offering structured support to help connect policy commitments with teacher reflection and more inclusive classroom practices and pedagogical habits.

What are the aims of this resource and how are these aims achieved through theory?

This resource aims to support teachers in shaping an inclusive “musical democracy” in the classroom (Lau, 2022) by developing their discursive agency to question dominant discourses and their reflexivity to critically examine how knowledge, assumptions, and invisible power structures shape their practice.

To achieve these aims, this resource is structured into four interconnected strands ‘Reflect, Respond, Reimagine, and Plan’ supported by the cards and an accompanying guide that are informed by different inclusive theories, tools and pedagogies.

The language used throughout the cards adopts a ‘strength-based approach’, framing provocations and reflection points around what students bring into the classroom rather than what they lack. This encourages teachers to recognise students’ intellectual, cultural, physical, and interpersonal strengths, alongside their skills, capacities, interests, and motivations (Fox, 2026, Week 4 Seminar). In this way, the resource supports teachers to move away from deficit-based interpretations of students and towards more inclusive ways of understanding difference. This is particularly evident in the ‘Music as Access’ Reflect card, where disability is approached through the social model of disability, shifting attention away from individual impairment (medical model) and towards the barriers created by environments, instruments, and instructional practices (Graham, 2020). This is reflected in prompts such as “What barriers might exist in the instruments, environment, or instructions?”, followed by strengthbased reframing through questions like “Are differences being viewed as something to accommodate, or as strengths to build from?”.

In addition, principles of Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2024) are embedded across the card prompts, encouraging teachers to consider multiple ways of engaging, representing, and expressing musical understanding. For instance, the ‘Reimagine Participation, Creativity,

and Collective Learning 'reimagine card promotes play, experimentation, and flexible tools, supporting diverse learners to participate as active contributors to music-making.

The resource is also informed by culturally responsive pedagogies, which recognise and mobilise the cultural repertoires and intelligences students bring to the learning relationship (Morrison et al., n.d.). These ideas are embedded across the cards prompts and made explicit in the guide's 'Dig Deeper' sections. In particular, the 'Music as Culture card' connects this work to decolonising approaches, including Gaztambide-Fernandez's (2015) concept of "browning the curriculum," which challenges the colonial structures embedded within music education.

Furthermore, cards such as 'Music as Identity' engage with concepts of intersectionality, recognising that students' experiences are shaped by multiple, intersecting identities that may expose them to different forms of bias and exclusion. This supports teachers to move beyond broad categorisations and simplified labels and instead recognise students as whole individuals with complex and layered identities (LadsonBillings, 2021). The resource also promotes the creation of safe and brave spaces where discomfort and dialogue can be used productively for critical inquiry and reflection (Zembylas, 2015; Vivienne, 2023).

Overall, the integration of these theoretical frameworks allows the resource to translate complex ideas into accessible, structured prompts that support ongoing professional learning. In doing so, it helps teachers build confidence in engaging with complexity, reflect critically on their practice, and develop more inclusive, culturally responsive, and participatory music learning environments.

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