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Enacting curriculum “in a good way”: Indigenous knowledge, pedagogy, and worldview in British Columbia music education classes

What you need to know:

In 2015, the British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education mandated that local Indigenous knowledge, pedagogies, and worldviews be embedded in all subject curriculum documents from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Nevertheless, BC educators, and more specifically music educators, have expressed a lack of confidence to embrace Indigenous principles in the classroom due to a fear of potentially misrepresenting Indigenous cultures.

What is this research about?

In response to the call from the BC Ministry of Education regarding the need for music educators to embed Indigenous perspectives in the classroom, this SSHRC federally funded research project identified public school music educators in rural and urban BC who, together with Indigenous community members, had already been successful in embedding local Indigenous ways of knowing in their classrooms via music.

What did the researchers do?

Using a research approach informed by Indigenous philosophies, theories, and methods, the researchers identified public school music educators and Indigenous community members who together had already been successful in embedding local Indigenous knowledge in music classes in rural and urban areas in BC.

Researchers conducted and recorded individual semi-structured interviews with 51 people, which included music teachers, culture bearers, cultural workers, and students, to learn how they had done this, and whether they found that such embedding had contributed to fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect.



“The Arts are a way that we can change the world and change the way that we interact with each other” (Denise – Research Participant)

(Photo credit: Beth Tuinstra).



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What did the researchers find?

- Building relationships between music educators and Indigenous community members is key to successfully developing collaborative projects that appropriately embed Indigenous perspectives in the classroom.
- Culture bearers encouraged teachers to be sincere, proactive (e.g., learning about the Indigenous culture of the place where they were teaching), and honest when approaching Indigenous community members in order to develop relationships based on mutual trust, appreciation, and support.
- Teachers who developed a positive relationship with culture bearers felt more confident and encouraged to embed Indigenous perspectives in their classrooms.
- Including Indigenous musics in the schools has the potential to foster cross-cultural understanding among Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.
- Embracing and celebrating Indigenous cultures in schools contributes to fostering pride among Indigenous students because they see their culture represented in the schools.
- Music making is an ideal way to learn the language, principles, morals, spirituality, teachings, and worldviews of Indigenous cultures. Culture bearers are a key part of creating safe spaces for all in which it is possible to learn Indigenous perspectives in a responsible and meaningful way.

How can you use this research?

This study is relevant for music educators, educators at large, government officials, administrators, and policy makers to understand how music making can be an important medium to learn, acknowledge, and respect Indigenous cultures.

This research contributes to learning important steps that music educators and culture bearers have taken in order to develop meaningful and culturally responsive learning experiences for

students in public schools. The findings of this research provide meaningful information for music educators (and educators at large) who seek to embed Indigenous perspectives in their classrooms.

About the researchers

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Keywords

Music curriculum; culturally responsive music education; Indigenous music education; rural music education; and British Columbia (BC) curriculum.

Citation

Prest, A., Goble, J. S., Vazquez-Cordoba, H., & Tuinstra, E. (2021). Enacting curriculum 'in a good way:' Indigenous knowledge, pedagogy, and worldview in British Columbia music education classes. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. 53(5), 711-728.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2021.1890836>

Content for this Research Snapshot was co-created by [UVic's Research Partnerships and Knowledge Mobilization unit](#) and Associate Professor of Music Education, Dr. Anita Prest and Research Assistant, Héctor Vázquez-Cordoba.

Territory acknowledgement

We acknowledge and respect the ləkʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.