

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

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Indigenizing vocal/choral music education: Towards an ethos of resurgence, reconciliation, and bridging

What you need to know:

The British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education established educational policies to embed local Indigenous knowledge, worldviews and pedagogies in all grades from Kindergarten to Grade 12. As part of this policy, all music curriculum documents were revised between 2015–2019 to embrace Indigenous perspectives in classrooms. Accordingly, teachers have faced the need for support and resources for implementing the curriculum in a good way.

What is this research about?

In response to the aforementioned educational policy, this SSHRC federally funded research project aimed to bring together Indigenous Elders, musicians, educators, cultural workers, and researchers, plus interested non-Indigenous people, in order to envision a respectful and culturally appropriate way towards Indigenizing music education.

What did the researchers do?

In order to gather the ideas and perspectives from all participants, researchers conducted a total of four Sharing Circles ([Wilson, 2008](#)) between April 2018 and April 2019. Sharing Circles followed local Indigenous protocols (including a Territorial acknowledgement/welcome, smudging, and providing honoraria and gifts to Elders).

The numbers of participants ranged from 18–40 at each of the four Sharing Circles. Forty Indigenous people, representing 19 First Nations and Métis Nations, voiced their opinions. Sharing Circles took place at the University of Victoria (UVic) and the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC).



At the Sharing Circles, Indigenous people shared their perspectives on indigenizing music education (Photo credit: Hyo Jung Jung).



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What did the researchers find?

- Participants highlighted the need to create new songs for use in schools and to teach songs along with drumming, Indigenous language, and worldviews.
- Prior to teaching Indigenous songs, music educators should be trained and guided by Indigenous cultural bearers and composers of the songs.
- While western-style music education seeks musically excellent outcomes in performance, Indigenous perspectives highlight the learning process itself (learning journey) and a value-centred education in which students cultivate respect and humility.
- It is important to adopt Indigenous pedagogies in music teaching and learning. It is necessary to monitor the way in which technology is included in teaching Indigenous songs in order to prevent misrepresentation or cultural appropriation of Indigenous perspectives.
- It is necessary to engage in a deeper conversation that follows Indigenous local protocols regarding the meaning of “copyright” and ownership from both Canadian law and Indigenous legal orders perspectives.
- Current music education curriculum centres Western European music making in the classrooms. It is important for music educators to embed music making that centres Indigenous perspectives in the classroom.
- It is essential to foster trust among music educators, administrators, and cultural bearers in order to create and enhance long-lasting personal and collaborative relationships. These relationships can lead to meaningful efforts towards reconciliation.

How can you use this research?

This research contributes to an ongoing effort to decolonize and Indigenize research at the university level. Indigenist research ([Wilson, 2008](#)) is rooted in part in the methods to acquire information (e.g., using Sharing Circles), which are framed by local Indigenous worldviews. The results of this research

can be useful for educators who seek a way to embed local Indigenous peoples’ worldviews and cultural practices in their teaching and learning practices.

About the researchers

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Keywords

Music education; Indigenous education; vocal/choral music education; sharing circle; and Indigenous research methodologies.

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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.