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Enacting curriculum ‘in a good way’: Indigenous knowledge, pedagogy, and worldviews in British Columbia music education classes

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ABSTRACT

In 2015, the British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education mandated that local Indigenous knowledge, pedagogy, and worldviews be embedded in all K-12 curricula, but most BC music teachers have been unable to fulfill this directive because they are unfamiliar with Indigenous cultural practices. We designed this multiple case study, informed by Indigenous Protocols and worldviews, to address this gap of knowledge and understanding, so educators might learn how to enact the new curriculum ‘in a good way’ (i.e. in a way that aligns with Indigenous peoples’ ways of knowing). We used document analysis and surveys to identify music educators and Indigenous community members who together had already been successful in embedding local Indigenous knowledge in music classes. We interviewed 51 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. Participants reported that singing and drumming, taught orally in tandem with related stories, were the most prevalent forms of cultural practice, and that establishing relationships and following local Protocols led to greater cross-cultural understanding and respect.

KEYWORDS

Music curriculum; culturally revitalizing music education; Indigenous music education; rural music education; British Columbia curriculum

Introduction

In 2015, the British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education mandated that local Indigenous¹ knowledge, pedagogy, and worldviews be embedded incrementally in all new K–9 and 10–12 curricula over a period of four years (British Columbia Ministry of Education. Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch, 2015a, 2015c, 2015d) in order that all students would henceforth be introduced to these perspectives during the course of their studies (British Columbia Ministry of Education. Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch, 2015b). The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation participated extensively in this massive initiative (Miles, 2020). During this period, Ministry of Education officials have consistently communicated their ongoing expectations that educational decisions and activities in BC’s 60 school districts facilitate the comprehensive implementation of this mandate. However, officials have not prescribed the amount of curriculum time dedicated to embedding local Indigenous knowledge, as they recognize that such decisions are contingent on local context.

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Lamb and Godlewska (2020) have documented previous efforts at curricular reform in BC from 1995–2010 that also sought to introduce Indigenous knowledge in schools, albeit on a voluntary basis and less comprehensively. They noted that during this time period, most teachers across content areas were unprepared to teach local Indigenous knowledge using culturally appropriate forms of pedagogy or take into account the ways of knowing and being that inform that knowledge. They also observed that Ministry efforts to increase content knowledge from the 'local context, while downloading responsibility for such content . . . reduced the likelihood of the integration of local or Indigenous content' (p. 15), and that 'local content development and delivery [i]s absolutely essential but must be paired with adequate access to training for teachers and truly meaningful consultation' (p. 16).

Most BC music teachers, having received academic preparation largely in the European classical music tradition and/or in jazz (British Columbia Music Teachers Association, 2016), remain largely unfamiliar with Indigenous knowledge, so they have little idea how to embed Indigenous cultural practices in their classes appropriately and respectfully; they have thus been unable to fulfill the Ministry's current mandate, which is much more directive and wide-ranging in scope than the previous curriculum. In 2015, when we conceived the study described in this paper, we anticipated that access to training for practicing music teachers to implement this aspect of the new curriculum might be as sporadic as it was from 1995 to 2010 for the previous curricular reform.² Thus, we designed this study to support music teachers in their learning, thereby increasing the likelihood that they might meaningfully embed Indigenous content, pedagogies, and worldviews in their classes.

The aim of our *Indigenist*³ music education research was to identify public school music educators in rural BC who, working together with Indigenous community members,⁴ had already been successful in facilitating the embedding of local Indigenous knowledge in their music classes and schools, and to examine the ways they did so. Moreover, we sought to investigate whether participants found that these culturally revitalizing music education practices (McCarty & Lee, 2014) contributed to fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect. We concur with Lamb and Godlewska (2020) that 'educating all students not only about Indigenous content, but also from Indigenous perspectives and with Indigenous ways of knowing, is a key part of transforming Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations' (p. 15). Thus, our primary research question was this:

Have the efforts of public school music educators in rural British Columbia, working in collaboration with Indigenous community members to embed⁵ local Indigenous knowledge, pedagogy, and cultural practices into their music classes and schools been effective in fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect?

Our sub-questions were these:

- (1) *What specific curricular and pedagogical practices have music educators and/or Indigenous community members in each community introduced and employed in their music classes and schools?*
- (2) *Did teachers', Indigenous community members', and students' reflections on classes in which Indigenous cultural practices were embedded indicate that the embedding and its facilitation had contributed to fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect, and, if so, what did they report?*

We chose to study the promotion of Indigenous cultural traditions and knowledge in public schools in rural BC⁶ for three reasons: (1) the majority of BC Indigenous people live in rural areas (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2011); (2) schools with the highest percentage of Indigenous students are located there; and (3) teachers with experience in working to foster cross-cultural understanding can be found there. Our study took place on Nisga'a land and on the unceded⁷ territories of the Gitksan, Nuu-chah-nulth, and Hul'qumi'num First Peoples of British Columbia, with their official consent.⁸

We begin this paper with a literature review, an account of the historical, legal, and political contexts of our investigation, and a description of the philosophical underpinnings that guided our thinking. Next, we present our methodology, also showing how it aligns with our Indigenous research participants' concerns; we endeavoured to undertake this inquiry 'in a good way'—i.e. to ensure 'that topics under investigation are identified as priorities by Indigenous people, reinforce Indigenous values, are informed by Indigenous frames of reference, and yield benefits to Indigenous individuals and groups' (Ball. & Janyst, 2008, p. 48). Finally, we present our results, discuss their implications, and suggest directions for further research.

Review of related research

In the field of music education, researchers (Bradley, 2006; Campbell, 2005; Goble, 2010; Schippers, 2010) have urged music educators to move beyond shallow attempts at multiculturalism (e.g. singing a 'West African' song), and instead work to foster students' intercultural and cross-cultural learning via the experience of making local musics with those for whom those musics have personal and cultural meaning. Researchers in other settler-colonial nations (e.g. the United States, Australia, and New Zealand) have specifically supported the embedding of Indigenous cultural practices in music classes using pedagogies associated with those practices (Boyea, 1999; Burton & Dunbar-Hall, 2002; Costigan & Neuenfeldt, 2002; Dunbar-Hall, 2009; Fraser, 2009; Mackinlay, 2008).⁹ While Indigenous education scholars in Canada have called for the embedding of Indigenous knowledge, values, and visions in schools (Battiste, 2013; Faircloth, 2009; Hare, 2011; Ledoux, 2006), few researchers have examined culturally informed education in music in Canadian settings (Archibald, 2011; Kennedy, 2009; Piercey, 2012; Prest, 2020; Russell, 2006; Wasiak, 2009). No researchers have previously examined what K-12 music educators and Indigenous knowledge holders working in partnership in BC have done to embed local Indigenous knowledge, pedagogy, and cultural practices into their music classes, schools, and communities, or explored the effectiveness of their efforts for fostering students' cross-cultural understanding and respect.

Contexts

In preparing to undertake this research, we studied the work of numerous Indigenous scholars and explored the history of First Nations' relations with the Canadian federal government and the BC provincial government. We found it would be essential to take into account the political and cultural factors that inform Indigenous musical and cultural collaborations and decisions in the province, and for local Indigenous worldviews to guide our inquiry. In the following section, we discuss how learning about the related concepts of *reconciliation*, *resurgence*, *decolonization*, and *land* informed our approach.

Reconciliation

Between the years 1876 and 1996, the federal government of Canada enacted a 'coherent policy to eliminate Aboriginal people as distinct peoples and to assimilate them into the Canadian mainstream against their will' (Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, 2015, p. 3). These measures included outlawing spiritual practices, jailing Aboriginal spiritual leaders, confiscating sacred objects, and separating children from their families by sending them to residential schools (Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, 2015, p. 2). Parties of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement signed in 2006 established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) in 2008, and, in an extraordinary historical reversal, the federal government subsequently initiated a public process of reconciliation in order that all Canadians might learn about and come to terms with these coercive measures. The TRC defined *reconciliation* as the process of 'establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples' (Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, 2015, p. 6). In 2015, the TRC issued 94 calls to action, urging all Canadians to transform society in ways that will enable everyone to live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on the lands that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people currently share.

Resurgence

Critical Indigenous scholars in the fields of governance, law, education, and Indigenous studies, along with some Indigenous activists, have questioned the notion of reconciliation as a basis for moving Canadian society forward from its legacy of assimilationist and genocidal practices. In their view, reconciliation, as it has been put to use by the Canadian government to date, is actually 'about rescuing settler normalcy, about rescuing a settler future' (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 35). Rather than accepting what they regard as shallow acts of recognition, critical Indigenous scholars and activists contend that 'reconciliation must come to mean a collective rebalancing of the playing field' (Simpson, 2011, p. 22), in part via recognition, affirmation, and implementation of Aboriginal title and treaty rights (Manuel & Derrickson, 2015).

In order to move Canadian society forward in a significant way, these scholars believe Indigenous peoples and Settler allies should focus on *resurgence*, or dedication to 'recasting Indigenous people in terms that are authentic and meaningful, to regenerating and organizing a radical political consciousness, to reoccupying land and gaining restitution, to protecting the natural environment, and to restoring the Nation-to-Nation relationship between Indigenous Nations and Settlers' (Alfred, 2013, para. 5). Moreover, as Coulthard (2014) has explained, such resurgence must be based on practices and knowledge that are inextricably tied to and emanate from the land, which is central to Indigenous wellbeing.

Decolonization

Tuck and Yang (2012) also call attention to the centrality of land for Indigenous peoples, specifically as it pertains to education. Although many writers and thinkers have discussed the need to decolonize institutions, processes, and people, these two authors have argued further that 'decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools' (p. 1). In their view, decolonization 'must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to the land have always already been differently understood and enacted' (p. 7). Following this logic, the notion of *decolonizing education*, because it is metaphorical and does not explicitly concern repatriation of land, has been construed as an 'attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all' (p. 10).

Land

Notwithstanding their cogent argument, in this paper we contend that in the context of British Columbia, the phrase *decolonizing education* is fitting. Schools and education in BC are inexorably tied to and implicated in relationships to land because—unlike most of Canada—much of British Columbia is unceded territory; that is, by treaty, the land was never surrendered to or acquired by the crown.¹⁰ In recent years, the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that Aboriginal title or right to territory existed prior to Confederation (*Calder v. British Columbia (AG)*, 1973), that it continues to exist and is protected by the Constitution Act of 1982 (e.g. *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia*, 2014), that oral traditions can be used to determine the size of those traditional territories (*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, 1997), and that logging, mineral extraction, and other land uses in most cases require the consent of those who hold Aboriginal title on those territories (*Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia*, 2014). Several Indigenous scholars and activists have noted the irony of

having to rely on settler judiciary systems and institutions to affirm their already existing sovereignty (Coulthard, 2014; Manuel & Derrickson, 2015, 2017).

First Nations in BC are divided about whether to, on one hand, negotiate modern treaties that provide stability, in the form of money, lands, some control of natural resources, and a degree of self-government, while concomitantly extinguishing their Aboriginal title through the 'language of certainty' (Manuel & Derrickson, 2015), or, on the other hand, engage in litigation to ensure that the government of Canada follows its constitutional responsibilities in its dealings with them. Of the territories that we visited for our study, Nisga'a was the first to sign a modern treaty in 1998, and the Gitksan, Hul'qumi'num, and most Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations are presently in Stage 4 or 5 of a 6-stage negotiation process.¹¹

Nuu-chah-nulth worldview

What we learned about reconciliation, Indigenous resurgence, decolonization, and relationship to land in BC led us to realize that our inquiry would need to take into account and align with local Indigenous worldviews. In traditional Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations culture, daily thinking and acting are guided by the principle of *tsawalk*,¹² the concept that all phenomena are interrelated and interconnected¹³ (Atleo, 2011). Thinking and acting in accordance with *tsawalk* means to engage with recognition, consent, and respect in order to 'promote balance and harmony between beings' (p. 80) and to help disparate life forms 'co-manage their common reality' (Atleo, 2011, p. 122). The principle of *tsawalk* thus prioritizes relationships and is reflected in Nuu-chah-nulth and other Indigenous verb-based languages 'that express being and dynamic relations among entities in flux' (Ignace & Ignace, 2008, p. 422). In European cultures, by contrast, where languages are noun-rather than verb-based, precedence is generally given to objectifying, classifying, and categorizing aspects of reality, and thinking tends to be more oriented towards comparison and competition (Styres, 2017). Acknowledging the ubiquity of *tsawalk* and similar concepts in different Indigenous cultures (Alfred, 1998; Armstrong, 2007), we endeavoured to be guided by this principle as we undertook our research with teachers, culture bearers,¹⁴ cultural workers,¹⁵ and students. Accordingly, we consulted with Dr. Onowa McIvor (our research collaborator and the former Head of Indigenous Education at the University of Victoria) and Chaw-win-is (the Indigenous Resurgence Coordinator at the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria) to ensure that our research design would effectively enact recognition, consent, and respect.

Methodology

Indigenist research

As we acquired this historical, cultural, and contextual knowledge, we effectively reoriented our inquiry towards what Wilson (2007) has termed *Indigenist research*. In an Indigenist approach, researchers and educators work together to 'develop missions and purposes that carve out time and space to connect with the wisdom and traditions of Indigenous knowledge' (Battiste, 2013, p. 66). This involved 'questioning [of our own] ... motives and methods [to ensure] that the negative legacy of research history was addressed' (Archibald, p. 36).

Archibald (2008), Kovach (2010), and Wilson (2007) have recommended that researchers follow certain Protocols to demonstrate recognition, consent, and respect.¹⁶ Specifically, these involve identifying participants and acknowledging their locations with their consent (rather than imposing anonymity); providing culture bearers with a monetary gift; writing up research in the first person; focusing on long-term relations with participants; taking steps to benefit the Indigenous communities on whose territories one conducts research; and emphasizing process over outcomes.

We initially experienced a state of *cwelelep*, a Lil'wat principle central to learning, meaning uncertainty and dissonance (Sanford et al., 2012). But, over time, our reflections on the reasoning behind the Protocols influenced our understanding of key terms, our choice of words to describe our work, the content of our interview questions and ways of asking them, and they broadened our motivations for conducting the study. For example, we knew at the outset that we were accountable to our research participants, but it took some time for us to realize that we were also accountable to the Indigenous communities with whom we conducted our study.

Further, although many qualitative approaches and Indigenous methodologies use the language of credibility and authenticity, Indigenous meanings of these terms differ from those associated with qualitative methodologies. (Wilson, 2007). For example, O'Leary (2014) offers saturation, crystallization, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, broad representation, and peer review as 'strategies for achieving credibility in qualitative studies' (p. 132). However, in Indigenous approaches, credibility exists when participants identify themselves, stand behind the information they share, and name the person or persons from whom they obtained the knowledge, thereby establishing its oral lineage. Authenticity and credibility derive from the relationships that researchers and participants develop over time, requiring 'forming a relationship that goes beyond the informant-researcher duality to become co-learners' (Wilson, 2007, p. 113). All participants in the seven communities included in our study chose not to remain anonymous and urged that we situate the knowledge they shared in its historical and cultural context wherever possible.

Methods

Although we initially designed our study and formulated interview questions without input from the Indigenous communities on whose territories we conducted the study, we ultimately adopted an Indigenist approach in our research and embraced the decolonizing intent of Indigenous methodology in order to identify context-specific 'wise practices' (Davis, 1997) that would 'support sound policy making and program implementation' (Kroes, 2009). We collected data via document analysis, surveys, interviews, and focus groups. We first examined the Indigenous Education Enhancement Agreement¹⁷ frameworks, Memoranda of Understanding, and annual reports of 40 rural school districts to determine the specific cultural activities that individual districts promoted and to identify the Indigenous coordinators, education councils, and liaisons working in each district. We then created and sent (via our previously established rural and Indigenous networks of introduction) a survey to all rural school district Indigenous education coordinators; we sought to identify partnerships between music educators and Indigenous communities, the activities these partnerships promote, and the ways in which Indigenous community members were involved, and to ask whether we might converse with them about these partnerships. We distributed a similar survey to BC music educators via the provincial music specialist association newsletter and during their annual conference.

Twelve individuals—music teachers, district Aboriginal principals, non-music teachers, and cultural workers—initially contacted us, indicating that they were already involved in embedding local Indigenous knowledge, pedagogy, and cultural practices in their music classes and schools. We communicated directly with them to learn more about their teaching, and mutually determined if their experiences aligned with the spirit of our research question and if they were available to participate in our study according to the timeline we had established. We then asked school districts for permission to complete the study.¹⁸ We also initiated an engagement process with 11 Indigenous territorial governments, following local Protocols, to request their support for our study in their respective territories (see endnote 7). We ultimately worked with seven rural music educators; four teachers we recruited for the study are non-Indigenous, two are Indigenous and work in their own territories, and one is Indigenous and was employed by a school district in another territory.

As required by our funding agency and university research ethics boards, we documented all our consultations with First Nations (i.e. formal research agreements, letters of consent, email

communications). We also consulted with the Indigenous education coordinators of the 11 First Nations to confirm our compliance with 'the relevant customs and codes of research practice that apply in [each Indigenous] . . . community' (Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada, Article 9.8, 2019). This entailed learning how we could demonstrate respect and reciprocity with knowledge holders to convey our appreciation for their participation in the study (Battiste, 2008). Some participants asked that, as a demonstration of reciprocity, we return to their communities when the study was completed to share our findings. Since some of the communities are located more than 1000 kilometres from our respective universities, participants viewed our commitment to return as a significant indication of our sincerity and appreciation.

We revised our research questions based on what we had learned up to that point (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and then visited each community. There, we conducted and recorded individual semi-structured interviews with music teachers and Indigenous partners to determine the specific curriculum (content and Grade level) and pedagogical practices they employed in their classes and schools. During these recorded conversations, we inquired about their challenges and successes in devising and carrying out their activities. Following suggestions of Battiste (2013), Smith (2012), and Wilson (2007), we offered modest compensation to Indigenous culture bearers and cultural workers in each location for their time and expertise. We also provided all participants with refreshments, plus reimbursement for transportation costs.

Finally, we conducted focus groups at each site (Goodsell et al., 2009) with three to six students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who had participated in music classes. In this way, we were able to learn whether they found the embedding of local Indigenous knowledge, pedagogy, and cultural practices had helped them to grasp diverse conceptions of music, purposes of musical practices, and worldviews, and thus contributed to fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect among them.

We subsequently transcribed interviews and focus group conversations, also consulting with study participants to ensure that our transcriptions represented their ideas correctly and comprehensively. For each transcription, at least two authors independently coded the material, then met to discuss the categories they had created and their congruence or non-congruence. After analysing our data and finalizing our findings, we communicated with representatives at our research sites and returned to the communities that had asked us to share them. One community also expressed interest in providing input on a draft of this article, and we honoured that interest.

Findings

What specific curricular and pedagogical practices have music educators and/or Indigenous community members in each community introduced and employed in their music classes and schools?

Not surprisingly, learning and singing songs were the most prevalent ways in which local Indigenous knowledge was introduced and embedded into music classes in the rural BC schools we visited. However, introducing songs of the local Indigenous community required more effort than many music teachers had anticipated for two reasons. First, teaching songs in ways the culture bearers deemed appropriate entailed also teaching the drumming, dances, and stories traditionally associated with them and teaching them in their original languages. Second, the culture bearers and cultural workers emphasized that it was important for the teachers to recognize and follow local Protocols, with their guidance, in order to foster trust with the Indigenous students and the local Indigenous community. Acting in accordance with local Protocols is tantamount to embodying *tsawalk* (or similar concept, depending on the particular community); through such conscious, deliberate action, the parties involved in social interactions demonstrate recognition, consent, and respect. It is important to note that protocols differ among First Nations, and they may vary according to the context of an activity (e.g. community, school).

Learning and singing songs

In all the places we visited, most of the songs introduced in music classes came from the local Indigenous community; these songs were sung in the local language or employed vocables. Although the texts of some had been set to the melodies of well-known American folksongs and a few others were translations of children's songs originally in English, the majority were either songs with a long history in their communities or songs that had been newly created specifically for educational settings according to the customary practice of that First Nation.¹⁹ In addition, teachers and culture bearers had chosen their pedagogical approaches to align with cultural principles, including teaching students to sing and drum via oral, rather than written, instruction (i.e. with no written score). Missy, a Gitksan music teacher teaching on Nuu-chah-nulth territory, explained, '... There's never a written down copy, and it's all done orally, which speaks to how we were taught and how it should be taught.' Likewise, Jeremy, a non-Indigenous music teacher in Nisga'a territory, observed, 'I felt like the true learning came from modelling [of] it and ... speaking to the oral tradition ... a lot of call and response.'

Some culture bearers shared songs they owned or had composed, but only after explaining to teachers the Protocols to follow when teaching or performing them did they give permission for the songs to be used in classes. They emphasized that each song introduced could be used only with permission from the one who 'owns' it, that ownership must be acknowledged whenever the song is sung, and that it must be made clear that permission has been granted whenever that song is used in a class or for other purposes. Accordingly, cultural workers sought permission from relatives to sing a song owned by that relative for a single in-class performance. Further, only if a song's owner grants permission to do so is it appropriate to tell the story of the song, and then the story *must* be told when the song is introduced, in order that those who are present can understand the song's context and meaning. According to some traditions, the story of some songs may be told only by one who has permission to tell it, such as the chief or a member of the family to whom the song belongs, so those individuals must then be involved.

Drumming and making drums

Music teachers and culture bearers also embedded Indigenous knowledge through drumming and drum making, both of which were also done via oral, rather than written, instruction, and they too were invariably accompanied with stories. (Less often, students were taught to play traditional melodies on Western instruments.) Stuart, a Hul'qumi'num cultural worker, explained:

The drum is the circle of life, there's no end and no beginning. We have the deerskin to remind us of all the animals and the birds that are around us. Then I flip over the drum and I have red cedar frame, and the cedar is also the tree of life; it has everything that we have here – of homes, of clothes, of spiritual significance. We use the drum to sing to our children. It is very much a healing process. It is very much of sharing stories, of teaching lessons.

Deb, a Nuu-chah-nulth culture bearer, emphasized the physical aspect of drumming and its relation to *tsawalk*: 'Music, drumming, is in us ... It's all about connection to the earth, and music is a real big part of that. To know that music is in our body, [we] feel it and go with it.'

Learning the meanings of songs, dances, and stories

In some instances, culture bearers and teachers joined forces to create and—together with students—enact a local story with songs and dances at a school concert or music festival; they did so in order to illuminate the meaning the songs hold in the ongoing life of the community. Grace, a Nuu-chah-nulth culture bearer, emphasized that songs, dances, and the stories behind them are interconnected: 'When I teach my kids at the school about a song and dance, I tell them the history of it.' Furthermore, Irene, a Nisga'a culture bearer, stressed, 'Most of our stories have morals attached. They're not just stories for pleasantness. They are stories that have meanings to them.'

Some songs—and the stories associated with them—recalled events that occurred near specific geographic landmarks. Coulthard (2014) has explained that Indigenous peoples' songs and stories emanate from the land and are thus key to resurgence (p. 7). Moreover, they are central to the learning of principles, morals, spirituality, teachings, and the ways in which such knowledge is grounded in time and place (Atleo, 2004). Craig, a Nisga'a culture bearer, highlighted the importance of embedding local Indigenous songs—and the stories and teachings behind them—in primary music classes for Indigenous children:

Include these songs early so they can absorb it [sic] into their heart[s], into their brain[s] ... By instilling this in these young children ... to do the right thing, and to be culturally aware ... You're gonna find a well-balanced child in their formative teen years because they have that structure built in at an early age.

Learning language

In several locations, culture bearers indicated that their promotion of students' song singing was motivated by an interest in revitalizing Indigenous language.

Well, the reason why it's important is ... if you bring some of the culture, the singing into the school, it helps develop the students with their language 'cause then they can hear all the words ... [and] learn how to say the words themselves a little bit better.' (Lyle, Nisga'a culture bearer)

This was not surprising to us, since cultural anthropologists and linguists have long recognized that language manifests the unique worldview of a people, and that, without its language, a culture cannot be said to be alive. Harry, a Nisga'a Elder and culture bearer confirmed, 'If you sing about respect, you're learning how to respect. If you sing in Nisga'a, you're learning how to talk Nisga'a.'

We found that music teachers and culture bearers promoted language revitalization in three ways: by singing songs in the local Indigenous language, by creating recordings for students' use with songs that promote acquisition of the local Indigenous language, and by hanging language posters in their classrooms and hallways to reinforce commonly used words. Notably, the culture bearers who created recordings (in both Gitksan and Hul'qumi'num territories) had set several Gitksan and Hul'qumi'num texts to existing melodies from various Western musical genres. They found that using familiar Western tunes enabled both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners and semi-fluent teachers to feel more comfortable (even when making errors) as they learned new linguistic sounds and words (see also Peter, 2016). Some of the First Nations with whom we undertook this study have long histories of incorporating aspects of other cultural practices into their own (Juniper, 2000; Neylan, 2007), so they were not uncomfortable with the idea of bringing together a melody based on the rhythms of the English language with the words of their Indigenous language. However, some culture bearers noted the difficulty of doing so, since each language has an entirely different cadence.

... I'll be honest, we actually had a hard time taking an ancient ritual and matching it up with contemporary rhyme ... It worked out great ... but we realized: Why do we fit something older into something new when we can just be ourselves? (Stuart)

Stuart's comment reflects the kinds of considerations that were going on as teachers, culture bearers, and students experimented, attempting to find ways to make provision for the various aspects of music and language in the complex undertaking of language revitalization.

Did teachers', Indigenous community members', and students' reflections on classes in which Indigenous cultural practices were embedded indicate that the embedding and its facilitation had contributed to fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect, and, if so, what did they report?

Teachers' reflections

Some of the teachers we spoke with were initially reluctant to include Indigenous songs and practices in their classes for fear of not representing the local Indigenous culture in an appropriate

manner. Megan, a non-Indigenous music teacher, said, 'I was always really hesitant that I would come off as . . . not authentic or not do it justice, and I think for a lot of teachers coming to incorporate First Nations education, it's really intimidating.' But the guidance and support provided by culture bearers helped the teachers, including Megan, overcome those fears:

Deb and I had so much fun teaching this song and dance, and we invited Elders, and it worked really well, actually. So, then it gave me some confidence to keep going with it. . . . I feel appreciative that she trusts me enough to. She's always so encouraging, like, 'You can do this, what are you talking about, of course you can do this.' . . . I think if I do something that's not ok—you've said before, you can't do it that way, or whatever—that's ok for me, and I know she's not saying like, that I'm naughty . . . It's just because she's the culture bearer, and she knows what she's talking about, and I am not. So, I'm kind of like the vessel in which to work with the whole crew.

In at least two instances, teachers' working relationships with local Indigenous partners led to ongoing personal friendships.

When I moved here, Mrs. Amos and one of the Education Assistants that we work with here became second moms to me. They said a lot of things that helped me adjust. And just, over time, just coming into Mrs. Amos' office, cause she's always available, even if she's on the phone, she'll welcome me in, and I'll just sit and wait. And, we have a lot of conversations and a lot of life lessons, I get, and it just always feels like a safe and welcoming place. (Missy)

Mutual trust was cited as an important and ongoing factor in teacher-culture bearer relationships and collaborations. Some teachers even became emotional when describing their work with culture bearers, the teachers emphasizing how much they had learned about Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and admitting how little they had known previously.

Moreover, some teachers reported that the cross-cultural understanding they acquired had affected their relationships with others, including students and parents. Megan noted that since she had embarked on her learning journey and begun embedding Indigenous cultural practices in her classes, her First Nations students related to her differently, in a more trusting way.

I have that little group around me of these First Nations kids who are telling me about dance practice or [their having] a drum like that. 'I made this with my uncle . . . ' Well, and just that I would be someone that would be interested in what they have to say about that aspect of their lives. That's amazing for me, right? It's just great that they're like, 'Oh, this is a safe person for me to talk to about life as a First Nations kid.'

Teachers' inclusion of local Indigenous knowledge in their classes also had an impact on students' parents.

I had a parent today . . . as I'm walking down with my class, he said, 'That was really great this morning.' But, I'm like, 'Oh, you probably know the words by now' (because he's often there). So, he had a big smile on his face. And he's a non-First Nations person! (Megan)

Teachers thus reported that the encouragement and support of Indigenous partners and the activities they had jointly developed had boosted their confidence, heightened mutual trust, and enhanced their own cross-cultural understanding, which gave rise to personal friendships, enriched relationships with Indigenous students, and increased cross-cultural understanding and respect among them, their students, and others.

Culture bearers' and cultural workers' reflections

Culture bearers and cultural workers affirmed their belief that embedding Indigenous knowledge created a conduit for preserving and promoting culture through music and dancing, simultaneously forestalling cultural misunderstandings. They observed that music teachers' embedding of Indigenous teachings and modelling promoted Indigenous students' self-confidence and instilled in them pride in their heritage. Jane, who is both a Gitksan culture bearer and a teacher, related that through singing, storytelling, and language learning, her students were able to ' . . . get that confidence. They know they are Gitksan, it's something to be proud of.' In Nuu-chah-nulth territory, one of the local First Nations, who had historically forged alliances with other peoples through the

gifting of songs, had recently gifted a song to the school district, which, in turn, formally adopted the song as its official school district song. Deb spoke of the effect these activities had on students and staff:

Pride. A real big one [effect] in the First Nations students, but not just the First Nations students. It's school-wide, right? But, especially in the First Nations students. Coming into school every day, to hear the drum, to hear some words, is fostering that pride in who they are as a Tseshaht or Hupacasath person, or Tla-o-qui-aht, whatever it be.

Geena, a Nuu-chah-nulth culture bearer, spoke of the effects of her work with Dani, a non-Indigenous music teacher, in countering racism and stereotypes in an elementary school where students were mostly non-Indigenous and fairly affluent. She stated, 'enforcing Aboriginal Education in _____ Elementary School, especially through song and dance, is really huge [because] you're creating more tolerant human beings.' Deb noted the benefit that traditional Indigenous music provides for students, different from Western music, because it is grounded in *place* and because the songs have teachings embedded in them: '... [M]ost or all First Nations songs have to do with the land or animals, and it's all about respect.' In her view, the students acquired a deeper understanding and a higher regard for where they live and who they live with by singing Indigenous songs in school. In our conversations, culture bearers and cultural workers also spoke of the need for non-Indigenous teachers to take responsibility for learning to embed Indigenous knowledge, pedagogies, and worldviews in their classrooms, rather than rely solely on them, as they were overwhelmed with requests. Since only 6% of BC's overall population and 12% of all students self-identify as Indigenous, the most effective way for students to learn local Indigenous ways of knowing and being through curricular content and pedagogy is for Elders and culture bearers to work with teachers who can then pass on that knowledge.²⁰²¹

Culture bearers and cultural workers thus reported that they felt their efforts at promoting cross-cultural understanding had been successful, resulting in increased self-esteem and shared respect among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of their school communities.

Indigenous students' reflections

Indigenous students affirmed their sense of pride at having their songs and traditions featured in their school classes. Krista, a Nuu-chah-nulth elementary student affirmed in a reserved way, 'It makes me quite happy to learn more things about our culture [in music class].' But when we visited an elementary school in Nisga'a territory where Jeremy, a non-Indigenous music teacher, had obtained permission to transcribe a Nisga'a song for wind instruments, several students boldly expressed their eagerness to speak with us. Pearl, who played the flute, insisted to her mother that she had to participate in our focus group with the other students, even though she had a cold. After the group meeting, Pearl escorted us to the band room, performed the transcribed song for us on her flute, and invited us to a Nisga'a dance practice that evening. She stated emphatically and with evident pride her belief that learning a Nisga'a song in music class 'helps support our culture.'

Elsa, a Nuu-chah-nulth elementary student, explained that she communicated everything she learned about Indigenous singing and drumming in her music class to her extended family.

I like to share stuff with my parents and my family. If they didn't know, I would mention it. If they do know, and if some things they know, but they don't really know a lot about it – I like to explain lots more about it with them. I [even] share with [members of] my family in faraway places ...

Tyrell, another Nuu-chah-nulth secondary student, reported that involvement in cultural practices through school music class had helped teenagers like himself—who had participated regularly in community events as children, but less in adolescence—to re-engage with their culture. He observed, 'It's pretty important for it [Indigenous cultural practice] to be in schools because ... it definitely helps us get back into it.' Thus, Indigenous students' reflections indicated that embedding local Indigenous knowledge in their music classes had contributed to their appreciation and

understanding of their culture, fostered pride and self-respect in them, and contributed to greater cultural understanding among their family members.

Non-Indigenous students' reflections

Non-Indigenous students in all the areas we visited expressed that they found learning to sing Indigenous songs and especially learning to drum to be both positive and perspective-changing experiences. In addition, Brady, a non-Indigenous elementary student, expressed, 'It's [learning Nuuchah-nulth history through songs] changed the way I think about Nuuchah-nulth people.' Gavin, a fellow classmate, added, 'Once you learn more about the people, it makes you more . . . hyped, and ready . . . to sing the song.'

Stella and Anna, non-Indigenous secondary students in Hul'qumi'num territory, remarked on the stories and language learning that were part and parcel of the singing and drumming they had learned. Stella said, 'Their [Hul'qumi'num] stories have taught me so much, and they have influenced many things that I've done.' Anna remarked, 'I think learning about their language [Hul'qumi'num] . . . that's impacted me, too. You can see more into their culture with that.' Further, several non-Indigenous students in Nuuchah-nulth territory discussed and confirmed culture-bearer Craig's point that, by embedding Indigenous music in music classes, music teachers not only 'save . . . these songs for the local groups . . . [they also introduce] the history to non-Indigenous people.'

In sum, teachers, culture bearers, and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students reported that embedding Indigenous cultural practices in music classes had enhanced their cross-cultural understanding and that it had engendered respect among them. None of the research participants reported conflicts or increased tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students or others stemming from the embedding.

Other findings: participants' advice to music teachers

As noted previously, our intention at the outset was that what we learned from this research would help BC music teachers address their lack of knowledge and understanding of local Indigenous knowledge, pedagogy, and worldviews, owing to their having been prepared largely in the European classical music tradition and/or in jazz. Further, we hoped to help them enact the new BC curriculum in a way that aligns with Indigenous peoples' ways of knowing. Our research participants reported that respectful embedding of local Indigenous knowledge in music classes, schools, and surrounding communities—as recommended by the Truth & Reconciliation Commission and required by the new curriculum—had indeed contributed to fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect among the parties involved.

Accordingly, the music teachers, cultural workers, and culture bearers who participated in our study offered specific advice to teachers. Denise, a Hul'qumi'num music teacher, suggested five steps: Reflect (continue to get to know yourself [i.e. your own cultural background]); do your homework; go out into the community and build relationships; have a vision; and be courageous. Others echoed her recommendations. Missy suggested, 'Know the land that you'll be on . . . and learn a bit of history.' 'Doing your homework' might entail going to a local cultural gathering (Stephanie, a Hul'qumi'num community member), or taking a language class (Stuart). Sam, a Nisga'a culture bearer, affirmed that these steps are necessary. He advised, 'Get involved in the local culture . . . you cannot meld together unless you know each other. . . . If you don't know the other people, then you can't relate to them; therefore, you can't teach them.' The non-Indigenous teachers in our study met community members and developed working relationships with them. In their evolving conversations, teachers were able to develop a vision, to 'imagine something different for our future' (Denise). Many participants expressed that it was important to be courageous, because they recognized that decolonizing and Indigenizing²² music education would require time, effort, and learning. Dani, a non-Indigenous music teacher, observed, 'I'm a learner and I'm going to make mistakes 'cause

that's how I'm showing my learning ... I will try not to make the same mistake twice, but that's all I can do, because this isn't my culture.'

Discussion and directions for future research

In all locations, Indigenous partners stressed that teachers should convey to their students the *meanings* of songs, not just the songs themselves. This emphasis is in alignment with Bell and McCuaig (2008) findings in their legal work on behalf of the Ktunaxa/Kinbasket First Nations: '... The importance of material culture lies in its meaning and utility to the community' (p. 316) and that, for Indigenous peoples, it is the values, principles, and beliefs expressed in songs and dance—not the songs and dances in themselves—that constitute cultural property, or that which is worth protecting (p. 355). Two implications arise from Indigenous partners' emphasis on meanings: the magnitude of Indigenous community members' generosity and trust when granting music teachers permission to use specific songs in their classes, and the imperative for music teachers to conceive music not as an object, but as an expression of worldview and relationship. In shifting their conception of music, music teachers embodied bridge building, reciprocity, and respect.

Although none of the teachers or Indigenous partners who participated in our research reported that their efforts to embed and teach Indigenous cultural practices in music classes had engendered conflicts or social tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students or associated others, it is important to note that music is not a neutral or conflict-free medium for communicating culture. Owing to the close association between spiritual practices and religious beliefs, the inclusion in schools of cultural practices through which local Indigenous spiritual values are expressed must be navigated with sensitivity towards all parties. Because of the spiritual nature of some songs, teachers may face challenges as they strive to attend to the various Protocols intended to ensure the respectful use of cultural practice in educational settings, while also following school district policies requiring them to maintain a secular focus in their teaching.²³²⁴

Over the course of our research, we identified numerous directions for further investigation, two of which seem especially promising. First, we wondered if students' and communities' positive reception to music teachers and Indigenous partners' collaborations may have been due to our having conducted the study in rural areas (where Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents are often in frequent contact) and in music classes (which are generally associated with positive emotions) (See, e.g. Hallam, 2010). Efforts at cross-cultural education may be more complex in metropolitan areas or in other subject areas. Studying the conditions under which such efforts are and are not successful would be helpful for teachers and administrators seeking to establish suitable conditions in their schools; notably, music making activities have been found to be particularly effective in facilitating cross-cultural connection and relationship building with Indigenous communities elsewhere (e.g. Bartleet et al., 2016).

Second, several culture bearers noted in our interviews that respectfully constructed curricular resources would help teachers to reinforce and complement orally transmitted cultural practices and teachings. We were unable to find any such published resources for secondary music classes that had been developed with local Indigenous communities, nor studies by researchers who have worked with Indigenous culture bearers, artists, and composers to develop such resources for K-12 music classes. In order for the development of such materials to be successful, it would need to align with the bridge building inherent in the principle of *tsawalk* and take into account the ownership, appropriation, contextual, and holistic concerns of local Indigenous communities. Using such materials with the support of local Indigenous culture bearers, more music teachers may become comfortable with embedding and advancing Indigenous peoples' musics, and may learn how to do so 'imbued with a living principle of reciprocity, and hence moral responsibility for a shared future' (Donald, 2009, pp. 8–9).

Notes

1. In Canada, the umbrella term *Indigenous* refers to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. According to Manuel and Derrickson (2015), *Indigenous* is the preferred term of Indigenous peoples because the synonymous term *Aboriginal* has colonial overtones. *Aboriginal* is still used by all levels of government in formal documents. We use the term *Aboriginal* only when it is used in a person's job title or in a document.
2. Since 2018, the BC Ministry of Education has facilitated some opportunities for educators to begin the process of embedding Indigenous knowledge in their classes, directing in its School Calendar Regulation that "In each of the 2019/2020, 2020/21, 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 school years, a board must schedule at least one non-instructional day for the purpose of providing teachers with an opportunity to participate in discussions and activities that focus on both of the following: (a) enhancing Indigenous student achievement; (b) integrating Indigenous world views and perspectives into learning environments." See https://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/314_2012
3. 'Indigenist research' is inquiry undertaken by Indigenous people and Settler allies, informed by Indigenous philosophies, theories, and methods (Wilson, 2007).
4. 'Indigenous community members' is the umbrella term we use in this paper to denote a wide variety of people who partnered with music teachers and assisted us in our study. See endnotes 14 and 15 for more detail.
5. *Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives in the classroom: Moving forward* (British Columbia Ministry of Education. Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch, 2015a) uses the word *embed* rather than *integrate* to make clear the Ministry's intention that Indigenous knowledge is to be included in, but not subsumed into, current educational practices in order that the cultural identities and worldviews of the peoples from whom it stems will remain distinct.
6. Recognizing that BC is a vast province and investigation in different rural areas would be costly, we applied for—and were grateful to receive—funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada (Insight Development Grant) to conduct this study.
7. See next paragraph for more detail.
8. Consent was obtained from the following 11 rural First Nation and Métis communities: Nisga'a, Gitxsan, Nuu-chah-nulth (Mowachah Muchalaht, Tla-o-qui-aht, Hesquiaht, Tseshaht), Hul'qumi'num (Malahat, Cowichan Tribes, Hahlah, Penelakut), and Cowichan Métis.
9. According to Oxford bibliographies, settler colonialism 'is an ongoing system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression of indigenous peoples and cultures.' It occurs when 'settlers . . . come to stay, displacing the indigenous peoples and perpetuating systems that continue to erase native lives, cultures, and histories.' See <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0029.xml>
10. Eleven 'Numbered Treaties' between Indigenous peoples in Canada and the Crown (i.e. the reigning monarch: Victoria, Edward VII, or George V) were signed between 1871 and 1921, which enabled the Canadian government to pursue settlement and resource extraction in five provinces and the Northwest Territories. See <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/numbered-treaties>. The Canadian government violated many terms of these agreements, using starvation and other tactics to subdue Indigenous peoples who protested against their treatment (Daschuk, 2019).
11. BC Treaty Commission (2019). See <http://www.bctreaty.ca/negotiation-update>
12. There are 15 Nuu-chah-nulth First Nation communities on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. In Nuu-chah-nulth language, the word *tsawalk* also signifies the number 'one.'
13. See also Ermine (1995). Aboriginal epistemology. In M. Battiste, and J. Barman (Eds.). *The circle unfolds: First Nations education in Canada* (pp. 101–112). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
14. The term *culture bearers* refers to Indigenous people who commit to their communities' cultural teachings, engage in cultural practices (singing, dancing, drumming, storytelling), and are acknowledged by their community for doing so.
15. Cultural workers are Indigenous people hired by school districts who work in schools to support Indigenous students, liaise with their parents, and promote the embedding of Indigenous knowledge for all students in classes by working with teachers on various mutually decided initiatives. In some school districts, cultural workers are recommended by their communities. Some cultural workers (and one teacher) we interviewed are also culture bearers.
16. According to Younging (2018), the word *Protocol* should always be capitalized 'as a way to mark the permanence and significance of these [Indigenous] systems of knowledge as Indigenous institutions' (p. 36).
17. Indigenous Education Enhancement Agreements are working agreements 'between a school district, all local Indigenous communities, and the Ministry of Education designed to enhance the educational achievement of Indigenous students . . . Fundamental to EAs is the requirement that school districts provide strong programs on the culture of local Indigenous peoples on whose traditional territories the districts are located' (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021, paras.1, 2).
18. The Indigenous student population as a percentage of total student population in these school districts ranged from 20–99%. In the province of British Columbia as a whole, 12% of all students self-identify as Indigenous.

19. Examples of children's songs translated from English to Hul'qumi'num are The Hokey Pokey and Happy Birthday to You.
20. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-PR-Eng.cfm?TOPIC = 9&LANG = Eng&GK = PR&GC = 59>
21. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/reports/ab-hawd/ab-hawd-school-district-public.pdf>
22. According to Gaudry and Lorenz (2018), '[I]ndigenization represents a move to expand the academy's still-narrow conceptions of knowledge to include Indigenous perspectives in transformative ways' (p. 218). See also Smith (2012).
23. See <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/indigenous-smudging-debate-canadian-schools-1.3916525>. See also Clarke et al. (2019) for Indigenous, legal, and policy perspectives on the challenges inherent to the inclusion of smudging, a cultural practice linked to spirituality, in schools.
24. Battiste (2002) and Marker (2015) have suggested ways in which educators might distinguish between spiritual and religious practices.

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