

Indigenous methodologies in music education: Towards a meaningful collaboration with Indigenous culture bearers*

Hector Vazquez (University of Victoria)

*Text for the Pechakucha included at the Decolonizing The Musical University, virtual event hosted at the University of Edinburg.

1 When I started to consider whether I should use an Indigenous approach to conduct my research, certain challenges arose. The Indigenous authors I read gave a clear set of principles for Indigenous methodologies (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009, 2010; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). I could see several similarities in the arguments presented by those authors, but still, I could not see how their perspectives completely fit my research path.

2 Then, I came to understand that the term Indigenous methodologies is plural. Through reflection, I understood that the experiences of those authors did not fully resonate with me because the particular contexts from which they were writing and deriving their methodologies address the realities of countries such as Canada, the United States, and New Zealand, where the colonization process was different from that of Mexico.

3 Historically, research has been conducted *on* rather than *with* Indigenous peoples, addressing subjects that are not necessarily in line with Indigenous peoples' needs and desires. According to Smith (2012), the word research "is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (p. 1).

4 According to Kovach (2010) Indigenous methodologies are a paradigmatic approach. She states "Within a paradigmatic approach to research, the paradigm influences the choice of methods, how those methods are employed and how the data will be analyzed and interpreted.

5 A research paradigm has four main components: Ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. For Wilson (2008), a strong Indigenous research paradigm is one that celebrates the uniqueness, history, and worldviews of Indigenous cultures, one that centres acknowledgement of the past, the present, and the future of Indigenous peoples, while “neither demonizing nor romanticizing the past” (p. 19).

6 Wilson (2008) describes three Rs that must guide Indigenous research: Respect, Reciprocity and Relationality. Adopting Indigenous principles in methodologies can help to disrupt the historical misrepresentations that have been put upon groups who have been marginalized, have played the passive role of the object, and have been analyzed without having their voice in the research.

7 The element of active participation from the researcher and participants allows for fostering stronger relationships with the community or communities in which the research is taking place. These relationships are necessary for the researcher in order to be considered trustworthy by the people who are participating in the research; therefore, relationships developed with people in the community are key to researchers being able to access the necessary information while also being accountable for the relationships made.

8 Within Indigenous methodologies, Indigenous methods acknowledge oral tradition as fundamental to research. When Indigenous people share their stories in research, it facilitates ways for healing associated with decolonization. According to Kovach (2019), “[W]hen asking Indigenous people for their stories in research, a researcher must be aware that the choice of this method opens a door for healing associated with decolonization”.

9 Nevertheless, the use of stories from Indigenous peoples as a methodology has been challenged for lacking legitimacy and verifiable truth. An important part of the validity in oral tradition from Indigenous perspectives is based on naming where the knowledge came from and who shared that knowledge.

10 From the moment that I decided to place *Huasteco* music making at the core of my study, I have been familiarizing myself with Huasteco worldview and ways of knowing and being, as well as getting familiar with Huasteco music making through listening, learning how to play it, and learning about the context in which this music is produced.

11 The Huasteco region has developed its own identity over time and music has played an important part of Huasteco daily life and worldview. The most well-known and representative expression of Huasteco music is *son Huasteco*¹. *Son Huasteco* is a fusion that incorporates the influence of Indigenous, Spanish, African, and Arabic music.

12 For the purpose of this study, I used the story and ritual of Chikomexochitl as an Indigenous research conceptual framework. The word Chikomexochitl is a word in Nahuatl Language, Chikomexochitl is constructed from *Chikome* “seven” and *Xochitl* “flower”.

13 The aim of using a visual, allegorical, and a metaphorical representation in an Indigenous framework is to provide a base that acknowledges Indigenous ways of relating to the world. In this case, I am using corn as a way to centre Huasteco culture at the core of my research.

14 According to Nava (2009), the ritual in honour of Chikomexochitl has five moments that are linked to the five stages of the development of the corn, from seed until

¹ Some people use the term Huapango to refer to *son Huasteco*. People use the terms interchangeably (García, 2016; Hernández, 2010; Sánchez, 2002).

the harvest is completed. The aforementioned author describes the five moments of the ritual as:

1. *Sintokistli*: The time when the corn is planted.
2. *Mitlakualtilistli*: The moment when the plant is growing but the spike has not emerged yet.
3. *Miyawakalakilistli*: When the plant is blooming.
4. *Elotlamalistli*: When the corn cob is ready to be picked and offered for the ritual.
5. *Sintlakualtilistli*: The time when the harvest has concluded.

I relate these five moments to the five stages of my dissertation: each moment is connected with each one of the five chapters.

15 As it is possible to see in figure that both knowledge production and corn production, are a cyclical process. It never ends: It is necessary to “plant” once more in order to keep seeking knowledge, and the process repeats again.

16 I acknowledge that these seven layers are not rigid, but they definitely reflect my understanding of the Huasteco worldview at this point. It is possible that these layers might evolve or change in the future—this evolution will depend on my ongoing and future interactions with readings and with people.

17 According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), methods are “techniques and procedures for gathering and analysing data” (p. 1). For this study, I used individual interviews, Sharing Circles, and a journal for field notes. Kovach (2010) posits that particularly when using Indigenous perspectives, the methods used need to complement the Indigenous paradigm.

18 In order to honour that important part of Huasteco culture, the methods used for this study have in common a focus on the narratives of the participants, which is in line

with what an Indigenous framework advocates: The centrality of the voices of participants in order for them to present their perspectives in a meaningful way.

19 If one aims to use Indigenous methodologies in their research, it is necessary to acknowledge that in many cases, there is not a prescribed way to engage in the process in terms of methods of gathering data and the way in which it will be analyzed. This is simply due to the very essence of Indigenous methodologies, as they are informed by the unique particularities of a given Indigenous group or Nation. Nevertheless, the current literature available offers a starting point for those who aim to use Indigenous methodologies in their research.

20 The journey of my research has taught me that Indigenous methodologies are more than just choosing the right methods to gather the necessary information. It requires the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the culture where the study will take place in order to address not just their own expectations in their research. Rather, the perspectives and needs of participants should play a central role in how the research is framed and what goals are achieved.

References

- Chilisa, B. (2012). *Indigenous research methodologies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Corbin & Strauss (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations and contexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kovach, M. (2010). Conversational method in Indigenous research. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 5, 40-45.

Nava, R. (2009). "El Costrumbre": ofrendas y música a Chicomexóchitl en Ixhuatlán de Madero, Veracruz. *Revista EnreVerAndo* (Octubre 2009). 34-52.

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). London;New York;: Zed Books.

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony. Indigenous research methods*. Winnipeg, CA: Fernwood Publishing.