Extracurricular arts: poverty, inequality and indigenous musical arts education in post-apartheid South Africa

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To cite this article: Thomas M. Pooley (2016) Extracurricular arts: poverty, inequality and indigenous musical arts education in post-apartheid South Africa, Critical Arts, 30:5, 639-654, DOI: 10.1080/02560046.2016.1262438

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2016.1262438

Published online: 14 Mar 2017.

Article views: 142
Research article
Extracurricular arts: poverty, inequality and indigenous musical arts education in post-apartheid South Africa

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Abstract
The bifurcation of the musical arts education sector in South Africa into its public and private dimensions reproduces inequality along lines of class, race and geography. This article reviews policy and practice in the post-apartheid era to provide new insight into the crisis unfolding in public schools. An ethnographic case study of school musicking in the Ingwavuma district of KwaZulu-Natal describes some of the strengths and challenges associated with music education in rural areas. Indigenous musics are thriving, but teachers lack training in music literacy and have limited resources at their disposal. The 2012 National Curriculum Statement accords music a peripheral (and in some cases, optional) position in South Africa’s Basic Education syllabus (DBE 2012). Music is widely practised as an extracurricular activity that does not develop the skills in music literacy required for entry into tertiary education or the music industry. By contrast, students at private schools benefit from high-quality education in Western musics through independent examination boards. It is argued that an egalitarian approach to music education would return the study of music to the school curriculum in revised form.

Keywords: class, extracurricular, inequality, musical arts education, post-apartheid, poverty, race, South Africa

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Introduction

Growing inequality – of income, wealth, and opportunity – is the economic, political, and moral issue of our time.
(Isaacson 2008)

South Africa is one of the most unequal societies on earth.
(Hamilton 2014: 47)

Education is the most powerful tool we have to change the world.
(Mandela 2003)

I clink two rand into a margarine tin brimful of coin as we surge through the doors. This is the community event of the season: the Ingwavuma circuit schools championships. Inside, enthused supporters have packed out the Skhemelele town hall. Fashioned on plastic chairs they brandish sloganed placards of support. Ululation rings out in choruses. Outside, the tarmac is a chaotic stretch of overloaded taxis, emptied bakkies (pickup trucks), arrivals and departures. The adjacent patchwork field is littered with broken glass, squashed Coca-Cola tins, and crumpled candy wrappers. Bare-footed bodies are matched in short skirts and beshus (skins), plastic-beaded outfits, smart waistcoats and ties. Bare-backed dancers congregate in long, shivering lines, covering their naked breasts with arms and shawls, waiting. Parents and friends pose animated in conversation. Inside, a raucous throng of song bursts out with joyous energy. The steel-corrugated roof is the diaphragm for a sweep of sound punctuated only by ear-splittingly amped announcements on the PA system. A sparkling array of plastic trophies fronts the leopard-print of the stage drapes. Light pours in from a cavity above, illuminating a dusty halo over the dancers who kick their feet high into the air before thudding down in concrete cadence. Boys wave sjamboks to discipline their troupes. Girls assemble with long Shembe trumpets that splutter in guttural bursts. The quiet, close harmonies of isicathamiya are followed by izibongo praise poetry, the reverent hymnody of amahubo anthems, bright gospel, and frenetic disco dancing. Excitement builds to crescendo with the crowd favourite: ingoma dance! The MC’s pleas for order are drowned out in the delirium. Adjudicators sit, brows furrowed, isolated at discrete intervals along white-bedecked trestle tables, now, to deliver the winners. Keyboards, mixing desks, DJs and dignitaries line the walls. Children disappear, reappear leaping, peering in through tightly shut windows above, anxious to see all that transpires. Unionists look on. Today’s winners will take home the glory, respect, and story for many a year to come.

Inequality defines the post-apartheid condition. Twenty-one years after South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994, the nation has moved to radical levels of
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socioeconomic polarisation. Poverty, unemployment and lack of opportunity are the consuming reality for millions of South Africans. The education sector was early on identified as key to socioeconomic empowerment for the poor and working class. Expenditure on education now amounts to nearly 20 per cent of the national budget. But the impact of policy reforms and broad spending has been blunted by poor service delivery, inefficiency, corruption, and limited skills and capacity in government. The financial constraints on poor families continue to limit access to quality education at all levels. The crisis reached breaking point with the ‘Fees Must Fall’ campaigns at universities across South Africa in 2015. These protests were a long time coming and reflect on a myriad of challenges in the higher education sector, including the unequal status of students from poor communities.

The limited number of black students who are able to secure scholarships, are the privileged ones with good matriculation results from advantaged schools where parents are able to afford high fees. The opportunities for poor and working-class students from townships, informal settlements and dysfunctional schools, who are in far greater financial need, are limited when the key factor for funding is merit, as opposed to poverty, class and need. The interests of the poor and marginalized are unfortunately not the foundation on which the post-apartheid educational system is built (since the advent of democracy in 1994), although there are constitutional and other imperatives to achieve a just, fair, equitable and humane social order with the mélange of official policy that only looks impressive at face value. (Chetty 2014: 89)

The bifurcation of the education sector in South Africa into its public and private dimensions has only exacerbated inequality, and this trend shows no sign of abating. Over the past two decades, quality education has become increasingly unaffordable to all but the middle class and rich. Those who can afford it opt for well-resourced private and public schools with skilled teachers. By contrast, many of the public schools to which the working class and poor are sent must make do with limited resources for teaching and learning. In rural areas there are still schools without basic services like electricity, running water and functional ablutions. These straitened conditions are compounded by other factors, including a shortage of teachers, regular and protracted strike action by teachers, minimal oversight or regulation of teaching and administration, a paucity of textbooks and specialised learning materials, overcrowded classrooms and a curriculum that is complexly ordered and difficult to implement. In a specialised field like music there is inadequate training of teachers and little to no funding for materials, instruments, and venues. How are teachers and students in rural areas managing these challenges? Where do indigenous music traditions fit into spaces such as these?

The purpose of this article is to highlight the nature of inequality in music education in South Africa, by calling attention to the differences between public and private education, and to weigh these challenges against discrepancies in state
policy and practice, as well as the distinctive regimes that perpetuate them. A case study of schools in the Ingwavuma district, KwaZulu-Natal, provides evidence for the teaching of music outside of the curriculum. Comparing this rural practice to the graded music examinations prevalent in more affluent schools, we may ask: Why is it that inequalities in musical arts education persist despite radical post-apartheid policy reforms and interventions? The internal dynamics of the field as well as the larger social factors impinging on its autonomy, bear scrutiny.

Post-apartheid policy and practice

In 1994, the priorities of the newly elected Government of National Unity were to address issues of poverty and inequality through the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP 1994). The RDP became the rationale for policy reforms right across the post-apartheid landscape and was first applied to the education sector with the White Paper published in 1995 (DoE 1995). Recognising imbalances in access to and quality of education, government promoted democratic ideals in the ‘national interest’:

Our message is that education and training must change. It cannot be business as usual in our schools, colleges, technikons and universities. The national project of reconstruction and development compels everyone in education and training to accept the challenge of creating a system which cultivates and liberates the talents of all our people without exception. (Bengu in DoE 1995: n.p.)

The immediate challenge was to dismantle the existing segregationist architecture, and to rebuild and revitalise it with new ways of thinking and doing, to ‘liberate the talent’ of all South Africans.

The denigration of non-Western values and indigenous knowledge systems under apartheid had to be addressed and reconciled with the experiences and expertise of the majority of the population. On a grand scale, government was tasked with decommissioning the system of ‘Bantu Education’ implemented by the apartheid government in the 1950s – a system that had stratified education as ideology (see Johnson 1982). The Bantu Education Act, 1953, and a slew of legislation thereafter, segregated education according to racial and ethnic classifications. A system of Christian National Education was implemented for whites, while blacks were taught a sub-standard set of skills to prepare them only for service to their ‘own communities’. Access to higher education for blacks was curtailed, and the training of teachers controlled. These measures were designed to ensure the superiority of whites in the workforce, and their culture in society. In the process, black South Africans were denuded of their culture and identity, their indigeneity exoticised and stigmatised as inferior and ‘primitive’.
The White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage of 1996 (DACST 1996) outlined how the arts would be funded for a multiracial South Africa founded on democratic principles. The arts had to contribute to the alleviation of poverty and to nation building (reconciliation). As Doreen Nteta (1999: 2), Chairperson of the National Arts Council, explained,

the majority of South Africans did not until 1994 have the freedom to study where and what they wanted. As a result not many of them studied the arts such as music, dance, theatre, and visual arts. They could not find employment through these disciplines. This has resulted in museums and galleries, theatres and orchestras having no professional black employees. Policies drafted in the early post-apartheid era insisted on redress and access. Schools and universities were encouraged to rethink their admission policies, and to introduce bridging programmes for disadvantaged learners.

In 1997 the Department of Education (DoE) implemented a system of ‘outcomes-based education’ or OBE (DoE 1997). ‘[T]he broad imperative for the main policy shifts in education was driven by a political agenda of social transformation and reconciliation and music education [was] thus being shaped more by values [...] than content’ (Drummond 2015: 14). The emphasis on values added a new dimension to the nation-building project, but African musical arts remained peripheral in the curriculum. In OBE, citizens were taught not only the mechanical skills to build a nation, but also the democratic principles enshrined in the constitution of 1996.

The policy expressed specific aims: massification of music education through the inclusion of many more learners in the music classroom; promoting the study of diverse musics that were previously marginalized; removing ‘artificial barriers’ to learning and providing a framework for music education that allowed learners to progress at their own pace and placing an emphasis on the group over the individual. (ibid.)

Not all of these ideals were practical. For instance, massification leads directly to the overburdening of educators, and diversity can only be implemented where sufficient resources and training are available to teachers. This did not happen even after the initial policy document was reviewed in 2000, resulting in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (NDE 2002a, NDE 2002b). In this policy, music was contained within the Arts and Culture learning area in a curriculum that also included dance, drama and visual arts, the same basic blueprint in use today.

The implementation of OBE was not successful. One major problem involved the government’s decision to shut teacher training colleges. The integrated approach to teaching through music, rather than specialised teaching of music, was impractical. The DoE ‘expects general class teachers, who have no or little specialized music training, not only to teach musical concepts to their classes but also to integrate the expressive arts into other non-music learning areas such as “numeracy” and “literacy”’ (Herbst, De Wet and Rijsdijk 2005: 261). A survey of teachers in the
Western Cape province, by Anri Herbst and colleagues, demonstrated that many teachers – especially those without prior training – had considerable difficulty implementing music as part of this new, integrated curriculum.

Our research shows that the teacher training that is provided is inadequate and cannot support the expectations of the curriculum now in use. Since 1994, the Department of Education’s rationalization scheme has severely reduced the number of teachers training colleges. Many colleges have been closed completely, while others have been amalgamated with either universities or technikons. Where there were once fairly large music departments, now there remain one or two lecturers who are expected to implement the entire syllabus for Arts and Culture. (Herbst et al. 2005: 273)

The entire music education system had been stripped bare. New graduates entered the profession without even elementary knowledge of music. Considering the fact that music literacy is of a highly technical nature and takes years to acquire, it comes as no surprise to learn that musical arts education is today in disarray. Teachers cannot be expected to learn advanced musical skills and knowledge on their own and without support.

The new syllabus sought to counteract the accent on notated traditions prior to 1994, and the exclusion of African indigenous knowledge in particular. This was in theory a welcome move, but its implementation proved difficult.

The lack of performance-based skills has a disastrous impact on promoting the praxial philosophy of indigenous Africa. Apart from this, very few teachers are able to improvise and compose music – a core characteristic of the performance-based musical arts in sub-Saharan Africa. (ibid: 274)

Genuine epistemological and pedagogical challenges could not be ignored. Meki Nzewi (2003) points out that musical arts education in Africa is holistic and communal, rather than individualistic. How are such African musical arts to be taught and examined in a system that privileges individual skill and assessment? The shift from focused instrumental or vocal practice to music as dance, song and movement requires an entirely different skill set, especially where teachers now have to think in terms of larger groups and troupes. With limited training and teaching materials to hand, even experienced teachers were not ready to implement the new curriculum. By the time OBE was jettisoned the damage had already been done.

The revised and almost entirely new National Curriculum Statement for grades R–12 (CAPS) was published in 2012 (DBE 2012). The CAPS document emphasises diversity and allows students specialising in music the option of three streams: ‘Western Art Music’, ‘Indigenous African Music’ and ‘Jazz’. The goal is to make music education more accessible and relevant in schools, and to preserve and revitalise indigenous knowledge systems. The democratic values of earlier policies are reiterated: ‘This curriculum aims to ensure that children acquire and apply
Extracurricular arts knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives. In this regard, the curriculum promotes knowledge in local contexts, while being sensitive to global imperatives’ (DBE 2012: 4; emphasis added). The need for ‘social transformation’ is also recognised in an attempt to redress the educational imbalances of the past. The validation of ‘indigenous knowledge systems’ and the values of the constitution are prioritised and given expression in various ways in the curriculum for Creative Arts (grades R–9) and Music (grades 10–12).

In the Foundation Phase (grades R–3), music is taught under Creative Arts (one of four components to the curriculum that also includes ‘beginning knowledge’, ‘physical education’ and ‘personal and social well-being’). In the Foundation, Intermediate (grades 4–7) and Senior Phases (grades 7–9), teachers may choose two arts from four options: music, dance, drama and visual arts. Two hours per week are allocated to Creative Arts in the Foundation Phase, and so a maximum of one hour per week is to be devoted to music. In the Intermediate Phase, Creative Arts are accorded 1.5 hours per week or 45 minutes per subject. In the Senior Phase, Creative Arts is again afforded two hours per week, with a choice of two arts. For a subject such as music that requires continuous assessment and the incremental learning of concepts, the time afforded its instruction is woefully inadequate. That it is only ever optional for teachers to choose music, and that learners have no real choice in which creative art they have access to, speaks to the awkward limitations of a fractured curriculum. In schools where drama, dance or visual arts are preferred by teachers, there will be no music at all.

In a study of post-apartheid music education, Urvi Drummond (2015: 8) argues that ‘there exists a lack of collective outlook, particularly amongst South African music teachers, music teacher-training institutions and the Departments of Education with relation to reform initiatives taking place in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for Music’. A piecemeal approach to educational reform will not do. Even in ideal conditions, the implementation of new measures to introduce indigenous African musics and jazz cannot succeed without practical application on the ground. There needs to be articulation between music in Creative Arts, music as a matriculation subject in the Further Education and Training Phase, and entrance into tertiary education. University music departments will only admit students who meet their ‘prerequisites’ for music theory and practical study. These benchmarks are generally equated with the graded music examinations taught outside of the school system, or with specialised instruction on instruments that most classrooms do not have and most teachers are not qualified to teach. Without a solid grounding in the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior phases it will be impossible for students to reach the standard required in grade 12 for entry into tertiary education.

It is with these factors in mind that I now turn to a case study that highlights both the opportunities and the challenges associated with teaching indigenous African
music in schools. I have experienced first hand the difficulties encountered by teachers and students. This case study of music education in the Ingwavuma district highlights both the vitality of indigenous music practices and the shortcomings of the Creative Arts system in finding a place for them.

**Case study: rural music making in KwaZulu-Natal**

A survey was conducted of community musicking in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng from late 2011 to 2015. Research took place in ten districts of KwaZulu-Natal, including Amazizi, Mweni, Msinga, Weenen, Himeville, Dakeni, eShowe, Ndumo, Nongoma and Tembe, along with Johannesburg and Pretoria. Here I focus on research conducted in the Ingwavuma district of northern KwaZulu-Natal, inclusive of Ndumo and Tembe, that was begun in January 2012 and has continued intermittently since. The start of this research coincided with the publication of the National Curriculum Statement for grades R–12.

A remarkable feature of music in Ingwavuma is the extent to which local communities have integrated their indigenous practices into school music. The conditioning of the body and mind from an early age is what enables the expression of advanced musical skills in all cultures. At Ingwavuma the indigenous musical practices range from *ingoma* dance to *indlamu*, *amahubo*, *amakhwaya*, Afro-gospel and *isicathamiya*, amongst several others. *Ingoma* (danced by girls) and *indlamu* (danced by boys) are arguably the least syncretic of these dances, and are often the highlight of music competitions and festivals. The terms *ingoma* and *indlamu* are inclusive of a wide range of dance styles, with their associated rhythms and songs. How to integrate these forms as music and/or dance is a challenge for teachers of the Creative Arts curriculum. This is because the music/dance distinction is borne of epistemologies of sound and meaning into which these indigenous arts arguably do not cohere. The dissociation of the body from sound and event is evident most tellingly in the primacy afforded literacy as a measure of value. Movement is intrinsic to the practice of indigenous song. Dancers are singers and circuits to the musical pulse, moving in relation to and against the beat, and creating rhythm with their bodies through clapping, stamping, striking and gesticulating. The aestheticisation of indigenous music and dance through the imposition of ‘universal’ concepts and literacies, or its shift to the autonomous sphere of ‘theory’, results in a conceptual dissonance the music curriculum has yet to resolve. For as long as these tensions remain unresolved, the practice of musical arts inside and outside of schools will struggle to take root because it does not speak to and for the cultures it performs.

Despite the variety and intensity of indigenous musical arts practices in Ingwavuma it is no surprise, then, that the nine schools I visited did not teach ‘music literacy’. Here, music literacy is defined as the practice of reading and writing music
using tonic solfa and staff notation. Of course, literacy need not be defined in such exclusive terms, but these are the terms that colonial music theory has imposed on our system of education as the sine qua non of musicianship. In the schools I visited in Ingwavuma there were no textbooks on staff notation, no ruled staves on classroom walls, or chromatic marimbas, pianos and organs in assembly room stalls. None. In fact, most schools had only cow-hide drums used for *ingoma* and *indlamu*. These are not instruments designed for the teaching of tonic solfa or the grand staff.

Interviews with teachers and principals made clear to me that very few students are directly involved in music activities. These activities usually take place after hours or as clubs and societies. Creative Arts teachers are few and far between, and none that I encountered had been trained in music literacy. This was a shock to me, but it has since transpired that very similar conditions obtain right across the province of Gauteng where music is taught in only a small proportion of schools.11 At Ingwavuma this reflects a shortage of skills rather than enthusiasm. Music and dance are popular ‘extracurricular’ activities performed in the build-up to Heritage Month (September). In fact, I was dissuaded from visiting schools outside of the period July to September, because these are the months of the competition season during which learners practise, perform and compete.

The competitions that begin mid-year are a major source of interest for schools across KwaZulu-Natal. Choirs and dance troupes prepare prescribed and original songs that include all of the indigenous items discussed above, as well as modern dance (disco) and *izibongo* (praise poetry). I interviewed principals and teachers involved with music to learn more about these events, and discovered a vibrant community of song and dance. Schools prepared performances for me to record on video and audio, and I later attended a two-day circuit competition at Skhemelele Community Hall on July 28 and 29, 2012.12 Primary and high schools from the circuit competed from early in the morning through to the evening. These school competitions are supported by the Department of Arts and Culture, and their vibrancy should continue to be supported and celebrated because it marks an exceptional display of skill and flair in indigenous idioms that should lead to further education and training at the tertiary level, and should feed into the cultural industries thereafter. The reinvigoration of African creative arts is only possible if the logistical and epistemological challenges of forging an inclusive, holistic and pragmatic curriculum can be achieved. This means addressing the problem of ‘music literacy’ in the African context, rather than returning to a concept of literacy based only on Western notations.

At the rural schools I visited, teachers show exemplary commitment by volunteering to conduct and instruct choirs and troupes after hours and on weekends. Sometimes community members step in to assist. At Entokozweni Primary School in Skhemelele, for instance, Sibusiso Khumalo coached the *indlamu* team to a provincial victory at the 2011 KwaZulu-Natal championships. I observed him instructing youngsters who
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practised for long hours, working on choreography and song. Khumalo, unemployed at the time, would walk many kilometres to work with his enthusiastic young dancers after hours, and the efforts of his young troupe became widely known. Their victory was a major source of pride for the school, not least as a result of the large cash prize that came with the title of provincial champions. This shows how there are both material and symbolic interests at stake in the performance of musical arts in schools. Performers, teachers and instructors compete for incentives. Schools attract talented musicians, dancers and instructors to enhance their reputations. Individuals find meaning and fulfillment in practising these arts. The musical arts promote health. This creative space extends the community and provides inclusive linkages with parents and caregivers.

Socioeconomic conditions in rural areas need to be factored into any assessment of the education system. Schools are entirely dependent on the state for resources, because many parents and legal guardians do no earn enough to supplement fees. These are areas where most parents work as migrant labour and families must rely on subsistence farming, social grants and informal employment to get by. There are few parents living at home, so grandparents and siblings are often the primary caregivers. With no public transport available, many children walk more than ten kilometres per day to attend school – this, in addition to household chores like fetching drinking water which is fit for consumption. These socioeconomic factors impact on learner support, too, because caregivers may not have the know-how or capacity to assist their children. In South Africa today, teachers cannot carry the responsibility of education without communities of support. In classes that exceed 50 (sometimes 80) learners, it is difficult for teachers to develop close-knit bonds with their students or to nurture those who fall behind. Teachers are in short supply for schools in remote areas and it is a major challenge to recruit them when salaries are low, social activities limited, and communities isolated. This is not a healthy mix for learners living in poverty, whose everyday hardships overshadow academic study. It is difficult to see how policy reforms in the Creative Arts will achieve meaningful change without a broader response to rural socioeconomic development.

There are internal curricular challenges to musical arts education that must also be recognised. It is now the case throughout South Africa that the teaching of Creative Arts is secondary to the mandated focus on literacy, mathematics and science education sanctioned by the provincial and national education departments. There is pressure on principals and teachers to prioritise these learning areas over others, and to dedicate additional teaching time to them. There is also the perception that the Creative Arts are the station of last resort for teachers. The ideology that science and mathematics are progressive and the arts optional, instrumentalises knowledge at the expense of values. The Creative Arts and Music curricula are distinctive in their focus on values, collaboration, communication and creativity. Considering South Africa’s
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long history of discrimination and oppression, and specifically in view of current social ills – including racism, sexism, xenophobia and corruption – it is urgent that we build the social fabric of society through creative education and the performance of indigenous arts. The musical arts contribute to the health of society by developing coordinated social activities to achieve mutually beneficial ends. Communication and cooperation are the measures of success that can only be achieved through rigorous practice, patience and perseverance. The skills, knowledge and values embedded in musical arts education are transferred across learning areas to develop healthy minds and bodies, and to reinforce bonds of respect and dignity in communities.

Private education

The chief alternative to public school education in music is the system of graded music examinations offered by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Trinity College London (TCL) and the University of South Africa (Unisa). These graded examinations continue to set the standard for university entrance and contrast in fundamental ways with the indigenous practices outlined above. Most private schools have used these examinations since the 19th century as benchmarks for their students’ instrumental and vocal training, and thousands of students are enrolled each year in these activities. In fact, despite the much wider reach of music education in government schools, this system of private music education remains the primary route to tertiary education in music in South Africa.

The curricula for the three main examination boards are based on Western art music composition, performance and literacy. The Royal Schools of Music theory syllabi aim to provide students with

knowledge of the notation of western music, including the signs and terminology commonly employed; an understanding of fundamental musical elements such as intervals, keys, scales and chords; skill in constructing balanced rhythmic patterns or completing given melodic or harmonic structures; an ability to apply theoretical knowledge and understanding to score analysis. (ABRSM n.d.)

Similarly for Trinity College London (n.d.): the grade 5 Theory of Music Syllabus focuses on proficiency in Western staff notation, harmony, melody writing, and various other terms and composition techniques. Unisa’s grade 5 curriculum (n.d.) emphasises the same rudiments: clefs; note values and rests; time signatures and grouping; key signatures and scales; intervals; terms and ornaments [Italian and French]; harmony inclusive of four-part writing (SATB on two staves); completion of an eight bar melody; form analysis, including chord progressions, keys, phrases, cadences and structure. There is also a history component that has, to date, focused on the names, dates and musical works of Western composers, but which has recently been expanded to include South African composers and musical genres.
Christine Lucia’s (2007) study of examination boards locates them within the broad colonial project of South African music education.

The hegemony of theory of music’s influence in South Africa relies on the power of the (colonial) system behind it and on that system’s wide dissemination through hundreds of textbooks and workbooks. The latter are overwhelmingly important (as important as, and similar to, bibles and catechisms), presenting a body of knowable facts in various ways and testing that knowledge through exercises. Such texts are almost all from North America and Britain (there are few indigenous examples) and for decades they have found their way to South Africa […]. That such a system has remained critically unchallenged within an educational culture imposed by decades of colonialism and apartheid is perhaps not surprising (although other hegemonic systems, such as Christianity and the English language, have). What is more surprising, and evidence of the success of the system, is that in post-apartheid South Africa the ideological basis of theory of music in the school and university curriculum remains unquestioned, when Outcomes Based Education has challenged most other spheres of educational philosophy. (Lucia 2007: 177–178)

The fact that these systems have ‘remained culturally unchallenged’ speaks to the dominance and elitism of private music education, and its validation of Western art music as music, largely to the exclusion of other musics. ‘The case of the Associated Board and similar external examining bodies in South Africa is an extreme example,’ writes Lucia, ‘of what the Comaroffs have shown as the colonization of consciousness in South Africa, a continuing manifestation of the “signs and practices, the axioms and aesthetics, of an alien culture” as it once operated in the “colonial, and later post-colonial state”’ (Comaroff and Comaroff in Lucia 2007: 183). Education enables social stratification through the promotion of values, beliefs and knowledge. This agenda creates a dissonance with post-apartheid policy, as conceived in the CAPS curriculum, and with the remarkable syncreticism of many post-apartheid music cultures. It is also dissonant to the new generation of students who, after 1994, ‘have not already absorbed certain assumptions of value or systems of control through theory of music. Thus, employing its hegemonic norms uncritically is not only problematic but increasingly anachronistic’ (Lucia 2007: 183–184). Lucia’s study shows how ‘theory of music’ has established itself as the sine qua non of music literacy. To read music is to be literate. But this hegemony does not extend to Ingwavuma, nor to many thousands of schools across South Africa that do not possess the textbooks Lucia cautions against. Her own 2011 textbook, Music notation: a South African guide, possesses many of the same rudiments included in the textbooks she cites, but with transcriptions and arrangements of South African music, and with principles of African musical systems added in separate chapters. This text normalises the practise of music literacy as a South African institution. What other options are there for schools practising indigenous musical arts that do not conform to such literacies?
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In the West, just as in South Africa, musical art works are defined as texted commodities. In education it is through scripture, not performance, that music is validated. Artworks are made manifest through notation. Without its canonical texts the history and theory of Western art music loses its intellectual authority. Indigenous musical arts rely primarily on objects and artefacts made meaningful through co-presence in the present. The commodification of the musical score embodies modernity’s battle with sound, with feeling, and those visceral powers that contorted music’s relationship with modernity. Private musical arts education, and the hegemony of ‘theory of music’ through staff notation, reinforce this dichotomy of sound and feeling by objectifying such experiences as literate acts. The major challenge facing teachers and theorists of African music is to bridge epistemological difference so as to recognise music as performance, and musical acts as irreducible statements, questions and answers, and not to continue to fix sounds and movements as objects determined by properties of inscription, time and space. Indigenous African musics occupy a realm of literacy that is very different from that of Western art music. These musics need to be understood and validated on their own terms, independently, comparatively and coextensively with Western theories of music and music literacy.

Toward the transformation of musical arts education in South Africa

Musical arts education in South Africa contrasts two distinct economies: public and private. In public schools, the quality and availability of music education is constrained by a host of factors. Many lack even basic facilities and musical instruments. Very few teachers are qualified to teach music and little time is allocated to this end. Music is not a compulsory learning area and is practised primarily as an extracurricular activity. Only a small proportion of public school students can afford private lessons, and those who do are usually enrolled in middle-to-upper-income suburban schools. Students at private schools, on the other hand, benefit from instrumental, vocal and music theoretical instruction in-house in purpose-built facilities. They acquire the brand of Western music literacy prescribed by the music examination boards and Unisa. The consequences of this bifurcation between public schools for the majority and private schools for the minority elite is an enduring inequality in the theory and practice of musical arts education, and to a large degree the exclusion of indigenous African music from formal and practical study.

To explain this enduring inequality we need to factor in class. Enver Motala and Salim Vally (2010: 88–89) point out that many studies focus on the effects of education on class formation, rather than on ‘why such effects or processes of social reproduction are visited on some social classes more than on others in the first place and whether this is related in any way to the even more fundamental structural and
relational attributes of capitalist societies’. South African public school education reproduces inequality as a result of policy failures, practical challenges and class domination by elites. Eurocentric arts and arts epistemologies are resilient sites of domination. Policy reforms have failed in practice and remain hamstrung by theories of music literacy which are alien to African indigenous arts. The policies of transformation instituted post-apartheid will continue to fail for as long as the constraints imposed by the field of production remain structured by the imperatives of a minority elite. The accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital informs the ways in which class validation and aspiration continue to shape policy and practice in education (Bourdieu 1984). Economic factors – inclusive of a deep-rooted network of teachers, schools, retailers and examination bodies – must be understood in relation to the distinctive regimes of the elites for whom ‘classical music’ remains the foundation of musical achievement and status.

Indigenous African musics are set to remain extracurricular activities until teachers are given the educational tools and support needed to teach them effectively; that is, flexibly, and in ways that articulate with the diverse realities of musical communities in contemporary South Africa. If musical arts education is to become an egalitarian practice, then it must reconcile with the full range of indigenous musical practices on offer, and these must be taught in recognised learning areas. We must tackle the continued domination of Western musical arts over African ones, and seek alternatives to music-theoretical paradigms that entrench Western music literacy as normative. The teaching of indigenous African musical arts in theory and practice must render legitimate the surpluses of African musics without contorting their vocabularies to alien literacies.

Notes

1 *Isicathamiya* is a genre of male choral song characterised by quiet, choreographed dance numbers set to call-and-response four-part harmonies. The genre originated in the hostels of migrant workers and has since become popular amongst male groups in both urban and rural areas.

2 According to the Office of the Treasury, ‘Consolidated spending by functional and economic classification, 2014/15’ (National Treasury 2014: xi) will include 190.7 billion rand on basic education, and 52.5 billion on post-school education. This equates to 19.42 per cent of total government expenditure of 1252.3 billion.

3 Statistics South Africa (2014: 31) reports that ‘[t]he relationship between education and poverty appears strong – as the poverty measures reflect, the lower the level of education attained, the more likely adults were to be poor and experience more intense levels of poverty’. The poverty cycle is enabled by the low levels of education in so many parts of South Africa.

4 See Nel and Binns (1999). Angie Motshekga, Minister of Education, attributed the drop in the national examination pass rate and the prevalence of cheating in many schools
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across the country to problems with the implementation of the new CAPS curriculum published in 2012.

5 I use the term ‘musical arts’ to refer to the cluster of music, dance, movement, song and speech that are interlinked and inseparable in many southern African cultures, though the term ‘music’ is used to refer to this cluster in abbreviation.

6 A brief history of the colonial impact on music education in South Africa is offered by Herbst et al. (2005). See also Lucia (2007) and Drummond (2015, Ch. 3).

7 Not all of this research involved schools. Research in KwaZulu-Natal and Johannesburg was focused on recording a wide range of Zulu indigenous and popular musics.

8 Schools in this district number between 250 and 1500 pupils, and enrolments are increasing rapidly. Most of the families I interviewed subsist off government grants or rely on family members who work as migrants.

9 It is not useful to essentialise the features of ‘indigenous practices’ to a set of ideal characteristics. Instead, I consider all musical genres that include features specific to the history and culture of local communities to be indigenous.

10 The Nguni dances practised in KwaZulu-Natal are differentiated by region and include, inter alia, mzansi, isishameni and many others, such as the izingili practised at Ingwavuma.

11 I have since 2013 mentored hundreds of teachers from across Gauteng as part of a community engagement project sponsored by the Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology at the University of South Africa, and run in collaboration with the Gauteng DoE. On average 50 teachers per year attend workshops where they are taught music and visual arts.

12 The performances that I recorded in schools were obtained with signed permission from education officials and legal guardians.

References


Mandela, N. 2003. ‘Lighting your way to a better future.’ Speech delivered at the launch of the Mindset Network, 16 July, Planetarium, University of the Witwatersrand.


