Approaches to African Sonic Pedagogies

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PROJECT TEAM

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Summary

Addressing transformation, integration and the decolonisation of the curriculum on several levels, the universities involved in this study group have developed courses to re-value and promote African ways of making and interacting with music. Approaching decoloniality as contextual, relational, practice based, and lived, each institution has actively engaged in establishing practical indigenous African music making courses that students have access to whilst completing an undergraduate degree (Walsh 2018, 19). The courses are based on an interactive 'call and response' methodology which highlights the individual, communal and collective learning of a diverse group of change drivers in what can be a very polarised African society (Kulundu 2018). Each contribution is designed to generate future teachers, culture-bearers and music fans/connoisseurs who will possess a deeper understanding of, and feeling for, indigenous African musics and who, as a result, will be able to engage with African musics through teaching, learning and appreciation at all levels.

This type of intervention, referred to as transmission and acquisition in Ethnomusicology, is being practised at universities globally (Kruger 2009; Schippers 2010; Campbell & Higgins 2015), where ethnomusicologists and community musicians teach students about music from around the world. However, in our collective situation, African musical material is being taught to predominantly African students who, for many different reasons, have previously been denied the opportunity to fully engage with music from their own cultures. Students are not learning about music from another country or continent, but rather from their own continent and even their own cultures. Thus, this research is of a critical nature, with the intention being to create knowledge for policy and curriculum change at tertiary level and to highlight the importance of indigenous knowledge as a pathway for identity formation and knowledge production and dissemination. It will encourage a form of transcultural education which will develop avenues for the students to interact with unfamiliar music traditions which will consequently lead to self-examination and an autonomous reconceptualisation of their own relationships, assumptions and preferences (Elliot, 2005, 9–11). This research promotes the musical arts and cultural heritage on the African continent as deeply intertwined and connected, with transgenerational knowledge sharing at its core. It entails inquiry into the teleology of African music pedagogy, looking to establish an understanding of the goals of the institutions whilst locating each epistemological approach. In addition, as traditional modes of learning African musical arts rarely encompass evaluation, assessment as emphasised in current tertiary education models, this study will evaluate the efficacy of each university's strategy. The pedagogy envisaged should implicate assessment strategies as learning, of learning and for learning.

Key Questions

Specific Pedagogical Research Questions:
■ How can we develop new perspectives on and (de)/constructions of African musical arts teaching and learning?
■ How can African musical arts performance and cultural heritage gain educative significance?
■ How can sonic-based indigenous learning inform pedagogical responses to transformation in higher education?
■ In what ways can ICT advance an agenda for a decolonised African music pedagogy?

Overarching Theoretical Research Questions:
■ What is the nature of the knowledge produced in African music pedagogy? What form does it take? Is it hierarchically structured? Is it rhizomatic? Or entangled?
■ Does African music pedagogy subsist on dominance of an empowered instructor? Is it built around submission, cooperation, conflict, collaboration?
■ How do teachers and learners relate in transgressive education?
■ How does African music pedagogy relate to and with the public?

Methods and Concepts

Members of the epistemic team have been taking up one month residencies at the International Library of African music (ILAM), an ethnomusicology centre based at Rhodes University in South Africa. Here they have been writing about their transgressive pedagogical experiences whilst interacting with other scholars from the continent through workshops and presentations. Building on work already in progress at ILAM, the goal is that we gather an epistemic community of music culture-bearers; students; lecturers; academics and other interested parties who contribute to the rigorous analysis of current African musical arts intervention.

Owiny et. al. (2014, 238) write that the main task facing Africa is the creation of sustainable strategies to preserve and disseminate indigenous knowledge. This study proposes to use an arts-based research (ABR) methodology, which is a form of qualita-

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tive research. It is known to 'umbrella' several arts-related methodologies including practice-led research, ethnography and A/r/tography (Vist, 2015, 260). This type of research uses artistic forms and expressions to explore, understand, represent, and even challenge human experiences. Focusing specifically on A/r/tography as a methodological framework this research hopes to highlight the research inquiry, the pedagogical strategies and creative engagement of each participant as it relates to their musical arts curriculum intervention (Irwin 2013, 201). Thus, these curriculum 'inventions or creations' are seen as products of the social, cultural, economic, and political processes that each contributor (seen here as the combined Artist/Research/Teacher) has navigated in order to produce their course (Irwin 2013, 200). In addition, each contributor will be guided through the process of subjecting their empirical data and postulations to axiological investigations.

Contribution or Relation to the Cluster's Aims and Goals

Using the lens of music through an A/r/tographic approach, this project speaks to issues of power structures and imbalance and colonial influences on diversity politics in African contexts. A task facing artists, researchers and teachers of African performance arts is the creation of sustainable strategies to preserve, promote and disseminate existing approaches to indigenous ways of teaching and learning at tertiary level. The reconceptualisation of Indigenous Knowledge offers the decolonial approach an alternative to understanding the ways in which we frame and understand pedagogical approaches in music practices in Africa. Owusu-Ansah and Mji (2013) argue for a shift away from treating African ways of knowing as being solely grounded in interpersonal community relations that are lacking in cognitive academic intelligence. A goal of this project is to challenge established eurocentric norms of performance teaching and learning through critical reflection on empirical data. The vision for inclusive perspectives of African musical arts pedagogies, with reference to innovation and sustainability, builds on transgressive learning which empowers instructors with tools to reveal, mitigate, and challenge domineering structures in higher education (Drane et al. 2019). Fourie (2020, 3) argues that a key aspect of decolonial analysis is the shifting of what he terms the critical nexus to the former colonies. Such a move encourages those who practise in these former colonies, or on the periphery, to reconceptualise the ways which eurocentric epistemologies are put to work in an evolving global geopolitics of knowledge production. The active subordinating of colonial hierarchies of knowledge, knowledge production and dissemination is a key aspect of this research.

Bouventura de Sousa Santos (2012, 43) argues for the development of epistemologies wherein the new theories are not governed by the European theoretical and cultural presuppositions. Therefore, the Indigenous Knowledge we seek to develop should stand on its own merits and intellectual integrity rather than depend on European affirmation. This includes changes to the ways in which we see and understand indigenous ways of knowing and teaching and working towards an Afrocentric methodology for qualitative approaches (Owusu-Ansah and Mji, 2013).

Further Links / Key References

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