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# Injecting the African spirit of humanity into teaching, learning and assessment of musical arts in the modern classroom

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## *Abstract*

African music scholars are currently grappling with the challenges of refocusing musical arts based on indigenous knowledge for classroom practice as well as developing Africa-sensed musical arts curricula that use culturally appropriate pedagogies derived from viable theoretical, philosophical and performance practices of indigenous music. The African spirit of humanity encourages all-inclusive participation that bonds participants in performance-based learning situations. The philosophy framing an assessment model should derive from the ideology of humanity (grounded in humane qualities and aspirations) embedded in musical arts education indigenous to the area of a culture. This model should enable and acknowledge demonstration of differentiated innate attributes and take into account the compatible skills of every participant in the learning activity. Rigid assessment yardsticks are often transferred from Western elitist music education practice and used in the assessment of the musical arts in Africa, thus compromising innate musicality. In this article we advocate for assessment initiatives that should enhance the humanity virtues of indigenous intellectual and praxial paradigms, as well as taking note of epistemological logic embedded in contemporary realities. Two different examples from two African countries are used to illustrate our argument.

## *Introduction: position statement*

The rationale of musical arts<sup>1</sup> education should inform curricular development, teaching methodology and evaluation criteria. Similarly, assessment designs should ideally derive from the objectives of musical arts education indigenous to a culture and related society.

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1 'Musical arts' is treated as a collective term and is therefore used in the singular throughout this article.

Indigenous African education prioritise ‘humanity conscience’<sup>2</sup> in knowledge creation, practice and transmission as well as assessment practices, calling for a need to understand indigenous ideology, purposes and epistemology that underpin the performance ideology and assessment of musical arts practices in Africa. Such an understanding commands a grasp of the deep (inward) and outward reasoning and conceptualisation of cultural knowledge of indigenous Africa. Attempts to reinstate and reincorporate original indigenous theoretical, philosophical and creative principles of the musical arts, as well as their associated assessment norms, still prove to be problematic in contemporary classroom-based education. Re-energising of African-derived policies and their execution will instil virtuous creative dispositions and initiatives in learners, while affirming their cultural integrity alongside meeting with worldwide demands for demonstration of creative and performance-based competencies. Two case studies of incorporating and assessing indigenous principles of knowledge acquisition in contemporary musical arts education are outlined in this position statement. In the Kenyan case study indigenous expert-instructors were excluded in assessment practices, while the South African case study illustrates an interactive group assessment paradigm where students from different cultural backgrounds relied on their innate creative aptitudes and acquired knowledge during the evaluation process.

### *Indigenous knowledge epistemology related to musical arts education*

At a sub-structural level, almost all sub-Saharan African culture groups show manifestations of shared philosophical tenets, humanity foundations and theoretical frameworks of musical arts logic and practice (Mudimbe 1988; Said 1993; Mazrui 2005).<sup>3</sup> A common philosophical notion is for a community to experience and portray or reflect the cosmos. An example of generic African creative and performance-oriented philosophy that determines compositional structures can be found in the ensemble principle of individuality in conformity, which derives from life and nature. Uniquely thematic components (representing individuality) are combined to constitute the basic sound framework (the structural identifier) of a piece. Every performance of a known piece must be a re-composition of its standard format and not an exact repetition in length and

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2 The term ‘humanity’ is used in this article as an overarching concept referring to humane qualities and aspirations. ‘Humanity conscience’ refers to acute consciousness for the good interest of any and all humanity.

3 Editor’s note: This article presents a unique insight into the sub-Saharan philosophies that inform musical art practices. It deliberately refrains from comparing the discussed philosophies as reflected in the musical arts with Western-based philosophies. Because of the life-long insider-participant observation of the first author, Meki Nzewi, the philosophical section does not include references to numerous authors. While this could be seen as a weakness by some, formulating a musical arts-based philosophy based on lived experiences for almost 80 years could, on the contrary, be seen as a strength and unique contribution in an academic world where citation at times becomes a ‘show-off goal’ in itself and not the means to reach a goal (cf. Agawu 2007). This being said, publishing this article as recommended by three impartial peer reviewers with its sparse referencing in the philosophical section, is not a *cart blanche* modus operandi that less experienced authors should blindly follow. Very few scholars from an older generation on the African continent have earned this position.

content, unless for an exceptional effect, emotive or formulaic purpose. The capability for creative originality and spontaneity, that is, demonstrating personal attributes in expressing commonality, are deeply cherished. Cultural peculiarities or differences that distinguish the musical sounds, dances and visual-dramatic manifestations of human groups in Africa then derive from factors of geographical location that provide ecologically tangible resources and an intangible spiritually sensitive mindfulness. The identification of cultural provenance is also apparent in the use of language in songs.

We posit that indigenous African intellectual authority, which manifests in indigenous knowledge constructs and practices, predates hegemonic scholarly interpretations, revisions and/or sophistications, and often outsider inventions of Africa. The integrity and expressions of indigenous African knowledge should take centre stage in classroom education, affirming an awareness of intellect in, and knowledge about Africa. African knowledge lore must be explicated primarily through applying the following authentic intellectual lenses: theoretical logic, humanity intentions as well as discursive voice, grammar and terminology. Modern literacy scholarship often perceives and portrays only superficial impressions of the indigenous collective and singular, non-scripted African wisdoms. These impressions often result from applying exogenous mindsets to researching, perceiving and interpreting data, using vocabulary and grammar situated in human experiences foreign to indigenous Africa. However, the depth of indigenous musical arts in Africa is often considered to be the intangible but effectual raw and rough potency of natural instrument timbres, energetic activities and unbiased messages, which generate remarkable outcomes in personal and public experiences.

The indigenous intellectual 'fountains' remain valid in the contemporary context and crucial for re-strengthening humanity conscience as well as consciousness in the global milieu. The epistemology of indigenous knowledge productions is preserved in memory and is symbolically coded. Hence some music instruments encode extra-musical data. For instance, the membrane drum was not played by women who have not attained menopausal age, because the drum symbolised in metaphoric fashion the process of procreation in which the drum membrane must be 'acted' upon by the male drummer 'to give birth' to a proactive (life-force) sonic phenomenon. When knowledge is transmitted, specific reference to symbolic coding embedded in creative re-enactments contribute to the advancement of knowledge legacy. It is crucial to use culture-specific respectful ways of literacy exploration, interpretation, explication and transmission in the modern classroom. Knowledge inculcation must prioritise an indigenous intellectual perspective, which we argue, is the mother of any elitist academic knowledge progress, re-inventions and refinements.

In indigenous Africa, the musical arts is by nature a 'soft science' (such as intangible sun energy that effects tangible changes in matter) that helps to nurture wellness of mind as well as the management of human eco systems. The synergy of performance-based music, dance and drama operate as a singular spirit force. The scientific aspect of reasoning informs the unique features of a presentation, the effective outcomes and performance

validation. The original divinely inspired directives of some types of musical arts and sciences in indigenous culture groups, at least of Africa, adopt a design that effectively publicly demonstrates, monitors, manages, sanctions and validates cultural, political, social, economic, religious, educational and attitudinal systems. The medical science aspects of structural-formal conformations and expressions subtly maintain psycho-physiological wellness. As such aspects of Africa's indigenous musical arts formulations through performance instil normative social and moral dispositions as well as induce mass routine mental and physical fitness. The societal creative aspirations then inform a structural and formal logic, as well as the various mediums of expression. Academic study of the musical arts and sciences in Africa must therefore reckon with the extra-artistic (sub-structural) intentions that underscore indigenous theoretical rationales. From an indigenous African perspective, therefore, *assessment of a public performance was primarily objective, prioritising efficacy in accomplishing the prescribed creative and performative<sup>4</sup> intentions significant to humanity.* Nevertheless, evaluation of aesthetic merits and above-average creative capabilities also took place. This was expressed mostly as spontaneous practical appreciation that also reflects 'extra-artistic' accomplishments.

Deriving from the theoretical explications by indigenous musical arts knowledge experts, some key philosophical and theoretical principles, which underpin indigenous African creative and performative expressions, have been elicited in the above section. These indigenous creative and performative principles listed below should underlie classroom transmission of knowledge and determination of appropriate assessment criteria.

- The philosophy of inclusivity, often coerced, underpins structural and formal logic, and derives from indigenous humanity ideology. Hence the use of concise structural features to accommodate modest capabilities.
- The philosophy of duality informs tonal level concepts of the melodic and the melorhythmic. Melorhythmic instruments such as the drum or bell resonate as rough timbres, providing rough sonic energy that subtly 'massages' body and brain tissues. In melorhythmic instruments the precise fundamental pitches are 'camouflaged', for example, in the drum there are high, medium and low pitches that can be created using certain playing techniques. The voice or melody instrument can articulate these pitches in more detailed fashion. Also the complementary duality of tense and calm passages is therapeutic by achieving psychological equilibrium while imbuing physiological wellness. Assessment of a performance does not, therefore, generate unhealthy psychological tension in a performer.
- The developmental principle of 'recycling' a thematic statement during a performance (internal variation technique) regenerates the potent ('psycho-active') energy of a theme. Such constant fission and fusion of structural impulses (pitch, tonal and rhythmic) generate proactive, motive and 'psychic' energy that induces profound effects

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4 'Performative' in this context refers to principles rooted in performance.

and outcomes with the use of minimal creative elements, which could be explained as the philosophy of 'profundity in minimality'.

- Repetition or 're-circling' of a topos (a distinctive and memorable rhythmic and/or melorhythmic pattern), in contrast to regeneration can also be applied as an anaesthetic, presenting a calmness or sleep-inducing therapy in self or group as a form of indigenous 'medi-care'. Re-circling of a topos (the constant phrasing reference theme) also acts to cohere creative individualities in composite ensemble creativities.
- The component thematic structures that constitute an ensemble texture sonically translate and sensitise functional relationships in a nuclear family. The social-musical roles and terminology include the mother, father, co-acting siblings, baby, and occasionally the complementary 'obligato' role of a visiting relative in family affairs. Assessment tasks should accordingly prioritise, engender and instil consciousness of the group more than individual egotistical interests in life orientation.
- Ensemble Thematic Cycle (ETC) is the temporal aggregate of the differentiated lengths and musico-social roles that furnish a known ensemble theme. The composite textural theme constitutes the re-cycled basic performance form and identity of a piece in indigenous African compositional theory.
- Some indigenous structural idioms and features are signifiers, such as the cadential topoi, alert figures, etc.
- External elaboration (development) of a theme in indigenous performance theory commands sensitivity to activities and emotions transpiring in a performance context. It also entrains acuity of creative acumen for spontaneously integrating and interpreting contingent stimulations in composing the final performance outcome (form and content) of a standard format. This is the (humanity) 'purposive' principle of Performance Composition (context-guided development) – a developmental theory and philosophy of creative alertness that marks the indigenous African exercise of creative genius. The performance composition canon curbs tendencies to egotistic demonstration of superficial fanciful creative skills. As such a transcription of an indigenous piece is only a framework for re-compositions that elicit and develop original creative genius, which performance assessment should take into account.
- Indigenous Sub-Saharan African cultures exhibit a common characteristic harmonic theory: a theme is given holistic harmonic complementation in horizontal axis, and not by vertical note-by-note chordal harmony. The outcome is layers of independent but compatible, inter-complementary melodic and melorhythmic themes. Each component theme thus makes independent musical sense if isolated (humanity philosophy of complementation of individualities). Such horizontal harmonisation (matching of individualised themes) is still commonly encountered in contemporary communal vocal music outside classrooms all over Africa. Every learner at any level of Africa-sensed musical arts education should demonstrate capability to intuitively and spontaneously harmonise any melodic theme as per its holistic logic, exercising its own cultural theme-

- matching idiom. The intuitive consciousness of cultural concord that underlies the African horizontal harmonic concept leads to spiritual bonding among co-participants.
- Indigenous choreographic vocabulary contributes to physiological health along the peculiarities of gender emotions (Nzewi 1999b) and physiology. Womanly dances routinely massage and 'tune' reproductive organs from early age, hence maternity dances (now perverted into ubiquitous sensual-entertainment dancing). Manly muscle-vibration dances stimulate body parts and tissues that are utilised in the strenuous physical activities of subsistence labour that could otherwise induce muscle stress. Such exercises in a playful manner assisted men to effectively cope with routine deployments. These dances are also poetic expressions (Agawu 2003; Nzewi 2007a).
  - African spirit-manifest theatre, commonly misperceived and discussed with the English terminology of masquerading (make belief), enacts mystical and mythical science, symbolically interacting cosmic and nature forces (Nzewi 2007b). Spirit manifest theatre depicts object lessons, life ideals, community mores and ethos, in other words, total theatre enactment of a community group's worldview. Children's autonomous musical arts types (Campbell 2007) including spirit manifest species, sparked creative imagination and transacted life education as well as modelled social-religious dispositions from an early age.
  - Overall, the soft science of musical arts serves as a proactive spirit force that binds and bonds, accords psycho-physiological wellness, and also effectually executes diplomatic agendas, sanctions policies, good governance and normative morality. Hence Israel Anyahuru, a male Igbo 'mother-musician', asserted that 'all specialist musicians are sacrosanct' (Nzewi *et al.* 2011:77).

Theoretical features and related societal rationales of the musical arts as sampled above command deep cognitive considerations that go beyond surface impressions. For instance, the structural and formal ramifications of mind-soothing solo music types such as flute tunes played by a cow herder in the field (Nzewi 2007b), or solo bow music played for solace in the privacy of the home, implicate and/or evoke a sense of community and interaction with community in inevitable situations of being alone. As such the player experiences psychological equilibrium.

The indigenous theoretical-philosophical rationale sketched above should inform curriculum orientation, design and content, also assessment criteria and objectives in modern musical arts education in Africa. Suitable indigenous language and acts of assessment could be explicit, metaphorical or motivational, inspiring and approving of every effort, including overcoming a natural disability or a participatory attempt by a cultural outsider. This interactive assessment paradigm promotes group spirit.

No person is born a failure. Humanity conscience requires that the design and assessment of any education process should not programme to produce or designate failures; accordingly structural interactions are designed to prevent failure and thereby

correct anti-social inclinations. Performing in a circle for collective other-consciousness, a formal and procedural principle, identifies and dispels antisocial dispositions. Coerced acts of taking turns to enact one's self while enclosed in the intangible spirit force of the circle, dispels self-inhibitions and tempers obnoxious over-enthusiastic tendencies. Thus indigenous knowledge transmission and assessment in the musical arts command an *inclusive, intellectual and participatory (IIP)* paradigm that accommodates all able and disabled recipients, and an ideology of emancipation of personhood. Assessment ranks 'effectivity' (in accomplishing deep-level musical arts rationalisations) above 'affectivity' (in offering surface-level aesthetic joy). These factors apply to the skill and personhood development valuation and evaluation of children's autonomous musical arts intentions, creations and exhibitions.

African indigenous knowledge paradigms in relation to musical arts education have slowly entered the scholarly realm in the last decade. With respect to the potential of indigenous music to enable contemporary issues of nation building in Africa, Onyeji (2012:52) posits that: 'The impact of indigenous music in shaping the social and cultural integrity of the nation is significant to the overall image of the nation'. With this statement he echoes viewpoints expressed by Western scholars such as Stokes and DeNora about the general capacity of music to impact on the social and cultural integrity and cultural living in societies. This socio-cultural capacity refers to music's powers as a device for social ordering, influencing people's conduct and expressing feelings about themselves, others and situations, as well as expressing inter-human emotions, soul connections and community belonging (Stokes 1994; DeNora 2000). Musical arts practices furthermore facilitate social integration, conflict transformation, resolution and act as an exercise in cooperative learning that promotes positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation and simultaneous interaction (Skylstad 2007). Valuable information is communicated through song texts, dance features and dramatic enactments (Hanna 1977; Nzewi 1980; Kruger 1999). Indigenous musical arts is a medium for constructing new identities, shifting existing ones, and also building self-confidence and self-worth of learners (MacDonald *et al.* 2002; Smith 2006) and provides a platform for promoting positive social identity (Dibben 2002; North, Hargreaves & Tarrant 2002). It furthermore contributes to the development of human cognitive processes and capacities and social adaptability (Blacking 1977, 1995). Specifically with respect to Africa, some scholars have discussed music frequently as means to an end (Wells 1994). It is woven into a web of domestic, social and political activities (Gunther Schuller cited in Wells 1994) and opens the gate to spiritual, mental, emotional, psychological, social and mystic realms (Okafor 2005). Music is seen as 'a living spirit working in those who dance and sing' (Hornbostel 1928:59), as communal therapy, humanising communion, and sharing of emotions of human-being-ness as well as a communion of both the living and the dead (Nzewi 1999a, 1980).



### *Musical arts education in the current modern African school system*

In 'Musical arts education in Africa: a philosophical discourse' Herbst provocatively prefaces her collation of Pasmae conferee voices as follows:

Teaching music in classrooms is a superficial way of handling a field as complex and lively as the musical arts. Structuring the musical arts as part of school curriculum ultimately kills the arts' relevance to society and fails to do justice to its [the musical arts] intrinsic aesthetic qualities. (Herbst 2005:11)

Deriving from that Pasmae conference discourse (in Kisumu, Kenya 2003) we recognise that the school currently becomes the inevitable modern common ground for children (particularly in urban locations) to congregate and collectively share humanity-bonding communion in learning and positive recreation between classes. The task of education policy and practitioners then becomes how to make the school a socialisation environment, a task that the musical arts accomplished in indigenous African communities. This warrants a brief overview of the contemporary perceptions of the current state of musical arts necessary for proposing changes in classroom attitudes and methods that would accord with indigenous knowledge systems for learning and assessment.

The following example of a recent experience in curricula policy and design illustrates the persisting bureaucratic mentality that characterises contemporary national leadership in Africa. In a recent Center for Indigenous Instrumental Music and Dance Practices (CIIMDA)<sup>5</sup> field course interaction with musical arts education practitioners, a curriculum specialist in a southern African country lamented his frustration in his job. In 2010 his country had decided to revise the curriculum for arts education, which had so far evidenced tokenistic inclusion of African indigenous musical arts knowledge. The top education policy-making bureaucrats in his country preferred to import a European music scholar as the expert to pontificate on the revision of the country's music curricula. The foreign 'expert' scholar arrogantly accepted, although lacking any research, emotional, intellectual or experiential contact with the authoritatively unique musical arts philosophy, conceptualisations, theory and practices of the country's indigenous cultures – a typical case of the 'ignorant expert' (Nzewi 2006). His exogenous curricula, which did not take account of the cultural musical arts genetics, sensibility, experiences and future of the learners ensured the perpetuation of cultural knowledge estrangement in the country.

The learners in the country thus became destined to mental frustration in their efforts to assimilate the strange, exotic logic and grammar of musical arts expressions foreign to their innate cultural mentality and knowledge heritage. To add to the educational policy debacle, the teachers are inadequately trained to deliver the foreign

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5 CIIMDA Centre for Indigenous Instrumental Music and Dance Practices of Africa – Education, Research and Performance – for Southern African Development Countries (SADC). The report here is part of the field research findings during culture-sensed education empowerment activities carried out in the Centre, funded by the Norwegian Foreign Office from 2004 to 2011.

knowledge principles. They are constrained to parrot the curricula content and assessment prescriptions as per extrinsic and ill-understood prescribed textbooks.

### *Assessment design for the musical arts in Africa: two case studies*

The following are two illustrative reports on the nature and experiences of assessment designs in two unrelated contemporary educational sites in Africa. The two examples discuss teaching and assessment of musical arts in Africa in tertiary education sites where teachers who are expected to drive Africa-sensed education and assessment ideology are groomed. The two contrasting but complementary experiences reported below argue for adapting African indigenous paradigms in assessment philosophy, design and implementation in contemporary classroom knowledge transmission and assessment sites.

#### **Musical arts education assessment: a Kenyan case**

The discussion in this section is drawn from my, Rose Omolo-Ongati's, personal experiences and observations as a postgraduate student at Kenyatta University, music lecturer at Maseno University, an assessor of practical music examinations at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination board, and the Head of the Music Department at Maseno University (in this order).

In Kenya two public universities offer music as an academic study: Kenyatta University and Maseno University. The students at these institutions come from various Kenyan cultural backgrounds. The Department of Music at Kenyatta University employed traditional cultural experts from different ethnic groups in Kenya to instruct and mentor students in the performing of indigenous Kenya instruments and dances. As a postgraduate student at Kenyatta University, I received instruction on how to play a fiddle from these traditional experts who are the specialised custodians of this particular knowledge and practice. The overall course grade consisted of a continuous assessment test (CAT) and the final examination. However, the traditional experts were conspicuously excluded in the panel of assessors and the assessment panel constituted of 'modern' music professors who were assigned to teach African music content in the classroom, but who lacked knowledge about the creative and performative paradigms taught by the traditional experts. During the assessment, the traditional experts were either involved as co-performers in the dance and ensemble, or they were merely relegated to the role of spectators. I always wondered why my knowledgeable indigenous instructor was not included in the panel, as at the back of my mind I strongly suspected that the panel of academic assessors could not be familiar with the indigenous indicators for determining my competence as well as the competence of other individual students. The assessors did never participate in the mentorship process of the students. At that point in time I could not do much as a student but to comply, or else I risked failing for interrogating the assessment morality of my lecturers.

After completing my degree, I was employed as a lecturer at Maseno University. At this stage I felt compelled to undertake research on the assessment policy of musical arts in Africa at Kenyatta University, trying to establish why the traditional experts/instructors were not involved in the assessment of their students during the practical performance examinations. The responses I received during interviews with the lecturers of African music can be summarised as follow:

- The traditional experts and specialists are not trained in modern pedagogical and testing skills;
- The traditional experts and specialists are not involved in the development of the curriculum and syllabus, which are developed by the African music professors in the department;
- The traditional experts and specialists' opinions were deemed not relevant in determining criteria and scheduling of the CATs and the final examination assessments.

These answers raised several questions: if the 'unspecialised' (but knowledge competent) artists and instructors could interpret the curriculum developed by professors and apply unique systematic procedures to teach, mentor and instruct its contents to the point of some students being awarded an 'A' grade by the examination panel, why the assumption that traditional experts would be limited in assessment skills? What were the limited pedagogical skills and approaches that the non-practising scholars referred to? Were the scholars measuring the so-called limitation by using extraneous yardsticks of Western classical pedagogical approaches and skills? Based on my own experience, the traditional specialist practitioners were adequately trained by cultural standards. They were adept in African theoretical and pedagogical approaches, having acquired these through group heuristic skills through apprenticeship and mentorship systems instituted by their authoritative traditional knowledge system. They were therefore well grounded in the cultural practice of the music they transmit systematically and effectively. The department must have employed these traditional expert knowledge exponents because the academically trained lecturers lacked knowledge in these areas. Furthermore, employing them was to provide a link between the classroom music practice and the practice of music in culture, thereby preserving and transmitting the indigenous practice in institutions of higher learning. Against this background non-practising academic assessors could be regarded as 'ignorant experts' who pose as authoritative experts and assessors in indigenous knowledge lore that could be seen as being beyond their intellectual and practical competence and exposure, else they would have been teaching the particular subject component. In employing an extraneous, sophisticated marking scheme assessment convention, isolated individual marks were given for team production outputs in dances and ensemble performances. Indigenous assessment ideology of overall group achievement (score) to be equally shared by all collaborating participants would have been ideal according to indigenous practices.

Isolated assessment of individuals based on the abstracted major or minor roles played and performed within a group also occurs in practical assessment of Kenya Certificate of

Secondary Education Examinations. The practice is contrary to the African philosophical rationalisation, where approval is primarily based on holistic presentation and evaluation of collective merit before recognising any individual extras. As already posited, 'all fingers are not equal' (African adage), but each finger contributes its unique capability to enable a holistic achievement of the hand (group).

An assessment design should be derived from the original practice of a music tradition. If the practice of the music involves group participation then every participant within the group is entitled to the awarded group score in classroom education. Such indigenous design inculcates collaborative group spirit and bonding that enhance socialisation as well as other African humanity virtues. We strongly propose that those who should participate in the assessment of a creative performative 'product' must be those who have credible knowledge, and are involved in the 'process' of mentoring in the knowledge specialty they are to assess. Assessing competency does not only mean assessing the end product, but also the production process.

#### **Africa-sensed assessment: a South African case**

The African philosophy of life education generates self-confidence. It eschews a stringent control mentality, recognising that everybody is uniquely capable and creative, given the opportunity and an enabling environment. Since 2001 this philosophy has guided the delivery of the modules in African music at the Music Department of the University of Pretoria, South Africa in adopting the practical, African heuristic learning and assessment paradigm in tertiary education.

Students and learners are mobilised to collaborate in groups, peer or otherwise, to independently interact in creating, rehearsing and performing original, holistic musical arts pieces as a practical way of experiencing and implementing the philosophical and theoretical aspects dealt with during lectures. The ensuing productions are performed in public concerts for assessment that emphasises originality and effort, while avoiding elitist conventions and inventions of excellence and perfection, which are subjective ascriptions that are not universally quantifiable or attainable by any human. The lecturer does not preview students' group creativity and production endeavour, although guidelines are provided at the beginning of the courses. Group scores are earned in this practical learning design for all the African music modules.

The first-year, second-semester module introduces the students to conscious study of African music for the first time. The students are primarily Caucasian, with a few black Africans and the occasional student(s) from other ethnic groups. All the students have backgrounds of prior literacy knowledge and training in exclusively Western classical music theory and instrumental practice. The African music class receives initial lessons on playing African music instruments employing oral and modern literacy approaches. The theoretical component explicates some unique generic philosophical and theoretical principles already outlined, which grid indigenous musical arts creativity and performances in all Africa

south of the Sahara. The class is thereafter required to independently organise itself into a production team to rehearse a piece written by the lecturer for an inter-cultural ensemble of African and European classical instruments. The piece, which is informed by indigenous compositional theory and holistic creativity logic, incorporates dance, singing, dramatic gestures and improvisation on instruments as per African norm.

The composition is performed in a concert, and the class gets a group score out of the 70% allocated to the practical component of the semester course. Every participating member of the class is credited with the group score. The humanity objective includes generating other-consciousness and collaborative group spirit among the first-year students from various backgrounds. A written, reflective essay on the individual student's experiences of the rehearsal and performance process, including a personal analysis of the piece, earns a personal score out of the remaining 30%. All first-year students irrespective of background or specialisation aspirations participate. Through applying this process, failure is obviated, and has not occurred so far since 2001.

In the second year the African music module is a full session course. A greater percentage of the year-mark in the course (60%) is allocated to a practical group creativity and production component. The students who have already gone through the first-year module are now, irrespective of specialisation ambitions, required to form themselves into groups of not more than seven members. During the year each group has to independently create, rehearse and perform a musical arts piece incorporating music, dance, drama and costume (when affordable), making use of African and European classical instruments and themes assessed in a public concert. A group mark is earned based on originality in creativity and production. The production processes interact and integrate the emotional, creative and practical competencies of students basic to the indigenous African philosophy that every human is inherently creative, while upbringing shapes the expression of such talent, whether in the musical arts or other life engagements. This course design, apart from liberating original creative potential, is expected to foster socialisation and manage students' respective humanity dispositions for collaborative endeavour. As in the first-year course, the assessment ideology ensures that nobody who participates is expected to fail. Every participant therefore earns the same mark her or his group scores, irrespective of specialist nature or magnitude of in-put. Personal scores out of the remaining 40% in the course are normally allocated to individual reflective essays on the experiences of the group production activity combined with answers to examinations on normal class lecture topics delivered as per official time table through the year. Each group independently organises time to create and rehearse outside class periods. Assessment takes place during a public concert.

Chances of subjective assessment of individuals by teachers and/or lecturers is limited in group assessment. The underlying humanity principle is that in such small group activities it becomes difficult for a student to isolate the self or exhibit any obnoxious social attitudes among peers. Rather, members of a group experience bonding in a spiritually enriching environment of collaborative musical arts creativity and production activities for the common good of all participants. Negative dispositions that may occur become socialised

and purged in the spirit of play generated by egalitarian creativity and performative collaboration. The humanity virtues of self discovery and self-confidence as well as other-recognition and respect also accrue during the discipline of contributing positive in-puts toward equally shared benefit. Slight differences in scores occur only between groups as per the merits of the final products.

There were rare cases of unwarranted absenteeism or blatant demonstration of unpleasant attitudes that a voluntarily formed group could not manage. Assessment of these group artistic productions also deals strongly with the societal and humanity values of themes handled as well as the degree of integration of cultural and artistic components. The assessment pointers do not focus solely on the refinements or otherwise of the singing, dramatic, choreographic or performance skills exhibited. As per African humanity spirit, individuals or group members who have demonstrated original creative aptitude and genuine effort are automatically considered as successful, as no human assessor can claim to be omniscient in creative and performative genius. The independent and original collaborative productions (recorded on DVD during public presentations) by the students over the years have been astounding in terms of the originality of themes and the production industry as well as interrogation of relevant topical societal and humanity issues. The original productions are proof of every human's latent capability in the performative arts irrespective of age, race, culture or life orientation.

A few third- and fourth-year students selecting the African music specialisation module have preferred to embark on an independent original, holistic musical arts theatre production instead of field research work, or a library research study. Students who opted for the musical arts theatre production capably originated, scripted, composed, choreographed, rehearsed and successfully produced on stage, their own-created total theatre works of about one hour duration. Following the production they submitted the required production essay. The students competently activated latent holistic creative and expressive capabilities, and in doing so query academic micro-specialisations that so often play a major role in the academic transmission of musical arts knowledge.

Assessment takes into account the overall creative, direction and management roles and industry entailed in independently producing the holistic theatre work. Independent opinions of members of the audience who watched the students' staged works indicated the finished musical arts theatre products as of impressive merits. Yet the students had no previous specialist studies or experiences in scripting, composing, choreographing, acting, directing or producing, apart from sensitisations in the second-year group creations and by tacit knowledge obtained through occasional attendance of musical productions at their schools or in theatres in their environment.

In the literacy aspects of the above learning and assessment designs, preference is given to 'narrative scholarship', which prompts a genuine and unpretentious expression of a person's original thoughts and experiences without scholarship artifice. A captivating story, stronger if dramatically enacted, captures the imagination of an audience and/or a reader. The desired knowledge in any discipline including the hard sciences becomes deeply

ingrained in the mind of the learner and audience, whether in the classroom or public space. Narrative or dramatised transmission of knowledge elucidates themes that could be wrongly perceived as boring. This kind of literal or oral transmission is mentally engaging, especially for young learners. Hence folktale narratives constituted a primary medium of abiding education in morality, societal conscience, consciousness and virtues, as well as in acquisition of indigenous cultural life skills.

### *Repositioning the African spirit of assessment in contemporary practice models*

Our indigenous knowledge approach to culture-sensitive classroom education enables us strive to include innovative approaches and adaptations of indigenous African philosophy of education and assessment of the musical arts. Such an approach advocates all-inclusivity as well as a collaborative spirit in contemporary education practice. Assessment strategies based on the indigenous epistemologies related to the musical arts as outlined earlier in this article counter a conscious or subconscious failure pre-disposition by coercing positive participation, and in this way preventing an insecure sense of self from developing.

The 'enthronement' of competitive achievement-based performance observed in modern thought and life deserve interrogation when addressing educational assessment issues. Competition aiming solely to choose winners to award material prizes based solely on 'best' performance at the time, while ignoring evidence of genuine effort and hard work goes against the sublime humanity spirit, and leads to intimidation or undervaluing an individual's or group's expressive integrity. Hence festivals, not competitions, aimed to interact, test, compare, rate, approve, exchange and advance skills as well as special genius, and also bond participants and audience in the spirit of collaborative play (Mans 2003), represent an indigenous African assessment norm. Because of the concentrated focus on socialisation, the ego is tamed and anti-social dispositions dispelled. With the absence of the handing out of prizes, which are often the underlying motive used as incentives for participation, prestige could be accumulated in festival participation for enhanced inter-personal or inter-communal relationships. This kind of participation would include inter-borrowing of remarkable musical arts types for diplomatic reasons, as well as recognising, exchanging or interacting with others' levels of competencies to enhance skill.

An indigenous sub-Saharan African education and assessment philosophy does not ordinarily condemn or designate unexpected outcomes or 'chance happenings' as a mistake, a sign of ignorance or poor creative and/or performative capability (see Agawu 2003:108–110). It is not seen as a defeating or fear-generating occurrence. The unexpected occurrence could spark spontaneous exploration of intellect, creatively accommodating the unintended change happening as a possible supra-human sign. Exploring the possibilities of such an unexpected happening, otherwise termed 'mistake', is a positive mark of creative presence and genius that could result in innovative outcomes.

## *Reflections*

The 'foreign' colonial-based models of theoretical content and practice as well as assessment design that currently furnish school curricula statements, content and education practice in the musical arts in Africa need urgent revision for reasons outlined in the previous sections. Ill-fitting elitist assessment templates construed for non-Western paradigms frustrate teachers who thereby often opt for unsuitable evaluation strategies in an attempt to cope with top-down demands.

An assessment design informed by indigenous paradigms advocated for in this article should cater for purposive creative intention, and should take account of the practical, embodied-knowing methods of musical arts transmission in sub-Saharan Africa. Concepts, contents and skill expectations should enhance rather than estrange the human-cultural locations and actualities of learners. Practical activities should aim at activity-intensive socialisation by means of group involvement in creative performance at any classroom level as a way of nurturing culture-conscious intellectual originality and sublime conscience in posterity without prejudice. It is legitimate to ask if adjudicators and assessors are free from subjective prejudice and in some instances the arrogance of the 'ignorant expert'.

A thoughtful assessment spirit and practice do liberate the intellect while ensuring standards. Standards have always been critically imperative, and particularly marked old knowledge inventions, constructions, transmission and performances. Standards, but not nebulous excellence or perfection, must be maintained as benchmark for extending the state of knowledge and exploring original genius.

## *Conclusion and recommendations*

Updated musical arts education and assessment policies as well as designs infused with humane conscience guided by indigenous African paradigms have potential for redressing and re-instilling thoroughly contemplated dispositions and humanity-based consciousness. A sublime creative intellect in the soft (humanity) science of the musical arts can re-constitute the theory and practice as an intangible spirit force capable of prodigious effective-affective services in a contemporary societal milieu. And purposive education as well as humanity-sensitive assessment practices can effectively regenerate and re-instil social-cultural integrity, virtues as well as the positive life orientation appertaining from a tender age. Installing cultural sensibility in African citizenry should involve indigenous experts in classroom sites as much as possible. A thoughtless embracing of the jargon of hegemonic 'best practices' that could lead to silencing sub-Saharan cultural epistemologies globally should be eschewed.

Assessment ideology and design must essentially respect and elicit noble creative intellect as well as the peculiar capabilities of all learners, while practically inculcating knowledge principles and life virtues. Reflective discourses, oral or/and written, narrative or technical, which explicate theory and practice, are equally important. Critical reflection enhances



and enriches individual perceptual insights and analytical capability in global knowledge encounters.

Cognitive research-based knowledge and literature on African indigenous knowledge lore and epistemology are becoming more available. Three levels of Africa-sensed curricula models for musical arts and meta-science education have been developed at CIIMDA and recognised by the West African regional conference of the Pan African Society for Music Education (Pasmae). These models should be critiqued and adapted to suit national policies and designs. For example, the South African Department of Basic education has adapted the CIIMDA models for the Indigenous African Music stream in its Grades 10–12 stream.

Practice-based, embodied knowledge acquisition that prioritises group creativity and production is advocated. Assessment for group-shared scores becomes imperative. Humanity conscience recommends that no creative outputs, group or individual that demonstrate originality and effort must be deemed or designated as failures.

Contemporary productions should, as much as possible, incorporate indigenous, conventional, inter-cultural, creative and/or performance principles for inter-human enlightenment and respect for global creative ingenuity. Group oral and individual written reflective discourse should be assessed to complement practical performance scores. Oral discourse should include assessment of one's own and other peer productions as learning exercises in analytical and critical capability and language

Teachers, guides or supervisors of a learning venture should be involved in its assessment to ensure that related and applicable assessment competences are taken account of in awarding the final score.

Possibilities of organising festivals of musical arts should be accommodated in national education policy. Such events would provide all-inclusive psychotherapeutic and socialisation activities for learners, teachers and non-teaching staff in a humanity-conscious school environment, while also constituting public assessment of cultural arts transmission in a school.

Effort should be made to perform school learners' musical arts creations on a regular basis in public during school events, and possibly offer them for mass media presentation. Every public performance is an assessment site that could sample audience evaluative opinions.

Classroom musical arts and meta-science periods should as much as possible deploy learners to source local folktales and contemporary life experiences to nurture 'society' awareness and represent how the community interacts with education. These experiences should be discussed, re-created and enacted as theatrical sketches involving the entire class in production duties and artistic roles. The South African case study has shown that it is possible for a class to accomplish a complete total theatre production of a folk tale in two or three class periods. Production process and output should be reflectively analysed and possibly scripted towards a publishable documentation of folktales. It is advisable that all activities, individual and group input and attendance by all class members should be

recorded in a research and production portfolio, and count towards final group as well as individual assessment.

The establishing of clubs for the performing arts in schools should be encouraged to act as nuclei of re-energised indigenous performance practices. Group credits must accrue as incentive for performances. Any generated income between the school and participants could be shared and used for the covering of costs as well as for equipping and managing a club's activities.

Extant African indigenous philosophy and epistemology as discussed in this article bears testimony that musically enacted knowledge is memory embedded-embodied knowledge, which is enduring knowledge that should be assessed in the context of virtue-laden enactments of life.

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