Structure and Fragmentation: The Current Tensions and Possible Transformation of Intercultural Music Teacher Education in South Africa

Albi Odendaal

Abstract The issues of multiculturalism and interculturalism are part of the daily discourse and painful history of South Africa. As such, South African music teacher educators have a unique contribution to make to the international discourse on diversity in music education. This chapter draws on Activity Theory to conceptually position the practices of music teacher education in South Africa, and to place the practices in a wider socio-political environment. Interviews were conducted with four music teacher educators in this interpretative descriptive study, in order to understand their conceptions of multicultural and intercultural music teacher education. Three common practices that are critically framed by the teachers are identified: immersion, interaction and documentation. These practices are then considered in the broader contexts of the structure of the university and the fragmentation of society. The chapter argues on the basis of this analysis that the historically accumulating structural tensions inherent in music teacher education in South Africa should lead to transformation of the activity, but only if music teachers themselves become cognisant of the contradictions inherent in the current practices and collaboratively and creatively expand beyond them.

Keywords Intercultural · Music · Teacher education · South Africa · Activity theory · Transformation · Diversity

1 Introduction

Diversity is a national hallmark that most South Africans are proud of. The appellation “Rainbow Nation” was apparently coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and has until recently been widely used to describe the country (Buqa 2015). South African music teacher educators are typically faced with diverse languages, musical

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practices and social norms in their classrooms. This chapter explores how a group of expert music teacher educators in South Africa think about cultural diversity in their classrooms and in the future classrooms of the music teachers they are preparing. It is a relevant topic to consider, given the various diversities present in South Africa, and the various attempts at dealing with those diversities in the history of the country. The aim of this chapter is to conceptually position the practices that are commonly used in music teacher education in South Africa, both in the ways that the music teacher educators themselves describe them and within the country's broader socio-political environment.

In order to point to the complexity of decision making that music teacher educators face, some central concepts of Cultural Historical Activity Theory are employed (Engeström 2001; Engeström and Sannino 2011). Expansive learning is understood by these scholars as the process where an entire activity, in this case music teacher education, is transformed, developing "culturally new patterns of activity" (Engeström 2001, p. 139). Such expansive learning is theorized to happen as a result of contradictions that exist or are formed between elements of the activity system, resulting in double-bind situations where the activity has to transform in order to keep on existing (Engeström and Sannino 2011). Before discussing the transformation of music teacher education in South Africa, however, the chapter will first give some general background to the idea of cultural diversity in South Africa and how this relates to music, and also briefly discuss how diversity is addressed in the current school curricula. The chapter will then provide conceptualization of current intercultural music teacher education practices and attempt to locate such practices within two main streams of current socio-political activity in the country.

The chapter takes its methodological cue from Interpretative Description (Thorne 2016), an approach which aims to better understand "observable patterns of human subjective experience and behaviour" and to locate that understanding between "theoretical integrity and real-world utility" (p. 37). Interpretative Description is a qualitative research approach which draws on the existing approaches of Ethnography, Phenomenology, and Grounded Theory to address real-world questions through empirical investigation in order to provide theoretically sound ways of addressing the practical issues involved. Although the approach was developed and is used in health disciplines, it is suitable for research in other applied disciplines (e.g. Buissink-Smith and McIntosh 1999), of which education is one. Semi-structured interviews were conducted (Thorne 2016, p. 86) with four music teacher educators, each from a different cultural-linguistic group and each teaching at a different university, in order to discuss and explore their conceptions of multicultural and intercultural music teacher education and the practical ways that they prepare future music educators. As an active music teacher educator, I brought my own understandings to these discussions and the subsequent analysis and also sought to learn from and engage with the views of the colleagues with whom I was interacting; in this way I acted as both a fifth participant and an author. The recorded interviews were analyzed by identifying strategies that teachers employ, and tensions that they experience in attempting to employ the strategies. Because the four music

teacher educators are experts in the topic under investigation, they were each provided with early drafts of the chapter and given the opportunity to comment (Thorne 2016, p. 174); in this way the chapter is to some extent a co-construction although filtered by my own understanding of the work of the music teacher educators and the socio-political milieu.

2 The South African Context

As an indication of the range of cultural practices in South Africa it is worth noting that the country boasts 11 official languages. In addition, the Constitution further recognizes four languages that must be promoted and developed and another 11 that must be promoted and respected; in total, 26 languages (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 1996*) and this total does not count languages of the wide range of people from the rest of Africa and the world who live in South Africa. Each of the people groups who speak these languages have a variety of musical practices that are to a greater or lesser extent unique to the language. Levine (2005), for example, describes the musical practices of the 11 major language groups that were indigenous prior to the arrival of Europeans; albeit with a reified, historical and rural perspective (Harrop-Allin 2005). This plethora of musical practices has coexisted over several centuries and musicians have to a greater or lesser extent appropriated, adapted and exchanged one another's musical ideas, resulting in a variety of modern-day stylistic expressions such as *isicatamiya*, *ghoema* and *boeremusiek* (Coplan 2008; Martin 2013) alongside musical expressions that are considered traditional by the people who practice them, and those imported from outside of South Africa. Such intercultural exchange is understood in this chapter as an opportunity for enrichment of culture, and not a threat to it (Volf 1996, p. 52; see also Westerlund and Karlsen 2017), and differentiates the intercultural perspective from a multicultural one, which often has a stronger emphasis on the maintenance of cultural identities (Morrow 1998).

Although such intercultural musical interaction is understood in this chapter as mutually beneficial to the parties involved, one should also consider the centuries-long history of violence and oppressive legislation that forms the context for these musical interactions. South Africa is still in many places divided as a result of the long history of colonialism (which started in 1652) and Apartheid (which legally occurred between 1948 and 1994, but is still in many ways ingrained in society). Surprisingly, Morrow (1998, p. 167) points out that the societal divisions and the attendant history is predicated, in the case of Apartheid, upon a multicultural philosophy that argued for the need to “recognise and respect the differences between the different groups that compose the society, and to protect and perpetuate group integrity” by keeping cultural or linguistic groups separate. Although the differences between interculturalism and multiculturalism has been starkly drawn here, and in the history of South Africa, the tension between preservation of my (or our)

identity and the embrace of the other is a fluid and perplexing problem, requiring constant negotiation and reevaluation.

The divisions in society that were based on racial, cultural and linguistic classifications have not yet disappeared from the discourses of modern-day South Africa, and are exacerbated by massive class differences resultant from Apartheid and colonial policies – South Africa is currently one of the most unequal societies in the world in terms of income distribution (*Poverty trends in South Africa: An examination of absolute poverty between 2006 and 2011* 2014). The complex issues of race, culture and class intersect in various ways, and are ever present in power negotiations between individuals and groups, resulting in an intricately tangled social environment (Soudien and McKinney 2016) within which music education has to find a suitable approach (see Thorsén 1997 for a dated overview of some of the issues). Due to the ways that culture has been used in the political arena in South Africa, intercultural education has a distinct position in South Africa that should be somewhat differentiated from discourses in the rest of the world.

Prominent topics globally include both the issues of immigration (e.g. Karlsen 2013) and of “infusing the curriculum” with musics from around the globe (e.g. Campbell and Wade 2004, p. 12), neither of which are current topics in South African educational thought. As a result of the multicultural emphasis of the Apartheid policies, curriculum developers since 1994 were wary of multiculturalism, and have instead chosen social cohesion and human rights as bases for curricular development (Soudien and McKinney 2016). Social cohesion is here understood as “a situation where citizens of the state share feelings of solidarity with their compatriots, and act on the basis of these feelings” (Chipkin and Ngqulunga 2008, p. 61). This approach is located in a tension between recognizing the equality and rights of cultural groupings while pursuing the formation of a strong communal identity and cooperation among people in the country (Soudien and McKinney 2016), and is allied to the ways that interculturalism has been described so far in the paper.

The social cohesion agenda of the whole curriculum has not necessarily filtered through to the content of the Music Curricula (Department of Basic Education 2011a, b), and the curricula uncomfortably positions the relationship between indigenous knowledge and Western music educational traditions. By including options to choose a Western Art Music (WAM), Jazz or Indigenous African Music (IAM) stream in subject music in the Further Education and Training phase (grades 10–12), the curriculum acknowledges some of the musical variety of the country, and there is a nod to integration in the mandate that every learner should partake in at least one term of study of the other streams. However, while there is a strong emphasis on indigenous knowledge and practices in the IAM stream, which is coupled with traditional WAM theory, the same is unfortunately not true of the WAM stream, where indigenous knowledge only features in the mandatory term and is not woven throughout like WAM theory is for IAM. There is a danger that this curriculum forces indigenous musical practices into the mould of WAM by allowing the paradigm of WAM to also set the agenda for IAM. Thus, the curriculum may be attempting (intentionally or unintentionally) to “draw indigenous musical practices into

western musical referents” (Bradley 2006, p. 11), a practice that is often to the detriment of the indigenous musical practices (see Harrop-Allin and Kros 2014 for a similar critique of the intermediate phase curriculum).

Music teacher education in this context has to address a complex of very difficult topics, and prepare student teachers with skills to grapple with issues such as fostering social cohesion while maintaining the identities of various musics and transcending some of the limitations of the curriculum as printed while keeping in mind the histories and lived experiences of both the country and the students in their classes. As if that is not enough they should also be able to do this with minimal resources and sometimes in dire environmental and socio-economic circumstances that are faced by very many schools (see, for example, the report by *Planning to Fail: Summary of findings from Equal Education’s Eastern Cape school visits* 2016).

3 Three Common Practices in Music Teacher Education

The themes discussed in the following section are drawn from the co-created understandings that arose from the interviews with the four music teacher educators and the discussions that took place after the first draft had been distributed. This section identifies three closely related practical approaches that are employed by music teacher educators: immersion, interaction and documentation. These three approaches are perhaps not different from those advocated by European or North American scholars (e.g. Campbell 2002), but differences could include that South Africans are not typically trying to learn about the music of other nations apart from that of the Western Art canon since we have enough musical variety within our borders, and that there is the stated aim of increasing social cohesion on a national level through such interactions (although, see Elliott et al. 2016, p. 4). Further, I briefly discuss the essential element of the critical framing within which these practical approaches are placed, including their contexts and challenges.

3.1 Immersion

Immersion refers to placing future music educators in musical situations that they might not be familiar with for extended periods of time so that they don’t only learn the notes or “how it goes”, but also gain experience in the practices associated with the music. Music teacher education lecturers who participated in this study have drawn on their own expertise and that of “culture bearers” (Participant 1) to help their students engage in practical music making as a way of immersing them in a different musical and cultural world. Culture bearers are expert musicians who specialize in forms of music making that are typically transmitted orally and who are able to help students experience, not only working with the sonic material, but also

with some of the wider practices that surround the songs, dances and accompaniments that they are learning. Future music educators are typically expected to be able to command a variety of musical styles, and also be comfortable in learning and teaching orally and with notational aids. In addition to such learning experiences, students are often involved in community music projects such as UKUSA (Oehrle 2010) or Musikhane¹ where students are expected to teach, not only their own instruments but also a variety of common indigenous instruments such as marimbas and drums together with typical dances and songs.

3.2 *Interaction*

Interaction refers to fostering musical interactions between students, especially drawing on musics in which students have expertise but that may not be mainstream practices. The diversity of the student population on university campuses and in (higher education) music departments mirrors some of the diversity of the country. This is a major change from the time when people who were classified as non-whites had to gain ministerial approval to be allowed to study music at universities historically intended for people who were classified as white. As an example of such diversity, in one of my Music Education classes last year I had students from five linguistic groups within South Africa. Music teacher educators see this diversity as an opportunity and make use of the varied expertise of the students in their classes, drawing them into teaching each other songs that they learned as children, and fostering greater understanding and cooperation in the process (Joseph 2012). In this way, students have the opportunity to sharpen their teaching skills, learn a range of new musical materials, and have the opportunity to engage with the experiences of their classmates with regards to musical heritage.

3.3 *Documentation*

Documentation refers to the practices of notating or describing indigenous musical traditions so that non-practitioners can gain some understanding of what may be involved in these traditions. There is a long history of engagement with issues of multicultural and intercultural education among some music teacher educators, officially starting with the founding of the South African Music Educator Society (SAMES) in 1985 (Oehrle 1994). According to Participant 1, teacher educators realized through the discussions that led to the founding of SAMES that there is an urgent need for documenting the educational practices of every kind of musical style in the country, and this led to the founding of the *Talking Drum*, a periodical

¹ See <http://humanities.nwu.ac.za/music/musikhane>

that ran 40 issues over more than 20 years. Although the periodical is out of print, back issues are still available online.² This magazine had the explicit aim of publishing practical teaching ideas that can be used in classrooms (Oehrle 2013). Music teacher educators still extensively use this resource with their students, as a means of introducing them to lesson ideas drawing on a wide range of musics. Teacher educators also draw on the massive archive of the International Library of African Music,³ and all participants noted a growing number of theoretical and practical books that deal with the performance of various styles of South African musics (e.g. McConnachie n.d.; Herbst et al. 2003; Herbst 2005; Mans 2006; Nzewi 2007; Carver 2014; Agawu 2016; Oehrle 2016).

3.4 *Critical Framing*

The three practices of immersion, interaction and documentation can easily result in the reification and essentialization of culture, where “a single, drastically simplified group identity that is at odds with the complexity of people’s lives, their multiple identities and the intersectionalities of those identities” is imposed or inferred (Gouws 2013, p. 39). The music teacher educators I interviewed are careful to engage in critical dialogue with the students around the issues that are raised by engaging in these practices. They point out the need for their students to challenge the narrative that “assumes that there are separate cultures in the first place [...] and assumes that those cultures are distinct” (Participant 3). This works from an understanding that the South African cultural situation is one where we are “many in conversation, not many in isolation” (Participant 2), and where we have deeply “interconnected histories” (Participant 4). The music teacher educators aim, firstly, to help students see the “problematic consequences of thinking that culture is static” (Participant 3), and, secondly, to focus students’ attention on little cultures (localized practices and participation in communities) rather than big cultures.

This critical work of undoing assumptions about culture that are widespread in South African society stands in tension with the need to equip students with practical skills that they can employ in schools; repertoires of music and repertoires of teaching that the students can draw from when they stand before a class. Music teacher educators have limited hours in which to engage their students in musics that are unfamiliar to the students, and have to both foster students who have integrated musical skills and repertoires in different styles, and who are able to critically reflect on their own learning and the socio-cultural situation in the country.

²http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/TALKING_DRUM

³<http://www.ru.ac.za/ilam/>

4 The Wider Context

The three practices and the tensions in working with these practices do not stand in isolation, and there are wider social forces that impinge on the work that the music teacher educators do. Here I will discuss two inhibiting forces that the music teacher educators pointed out in our conversations: the structure of the university, and the fragmentation of society. Figure 1 is a schematic representation of the three practices and the context within which they occur.

4.1 *The Structure of the University*

Music departments situated at universities previously reserved for people classified as white, are copies of European conservatories and typically offer mainly Western Classical music as a course of study. Some universities have thriving Jazz departments, and there are some small departments that specialize in African musics, but inclusion of musical approaches that differ from the Western mainstream is a rare and recent phenomenon. Thus, while the student body has significantly broadened to include a wide representation of the peoples of South Africa in the past 20 years (Spaull 2016), institutional reform – both in terms of the transformation of staff and the reframing the epistemological narratives of universities (Mamdani 2016) – has not kept pace, neither in the university as a whole, nor in the music departments within these universities. Since 2015 until the time of writing South Africa has seen major, and occasionally violent, disruptions at most of the nation's universities. Students are protesting against a wide range of issues, all related to experienced inequities and the perceived lack of action to remedy these (see Hodes 2017 for a history and discussion of the movements). What these protests show is that injustice

Fig. 1 A schematic representation of three typical practices that teachers employ, together with the forces that impinge on these practices

is still a perceived and experienced part of our society that affects those people who lived through Apartheid as well as the new generations of students who were born after the dawn of democracy in South Africa. It is therefore imperative to consider not only the content of music teacher education as a subject, as many of the music teacher educators have already done, but also the curriculum of the whole degree program within which the subject is taught. If the only intercultural musical contact between students happens in the music education classroom, and there is no further engagement with these issues during the rest of the degree, the kinds of protests that have happened since 2015 are highly likely to continue. There is a tendency among music educators to point out the positive role that music can play in fostering unity (e.g. Joseph 2012), and it is true that music has the potential, if used well, to facilitate this process. One should, however, be careful not to assume that because South Africans are singing each other's songs, the injustices of the past have been resolved.

The structure of the university as a whole and of the offered university music degrees stands in tension with the work that the music teacher educators do, and particularly impinges on the practice of immersion. If immersion only happens once a week in the music education class, it is better than nothing, but true immersion should ideally be a longer and stronger experience than 1 h per week, and should ideally include extended immersive experiences, and reinforcement of similar immersive practices in other subject areas such as theory and aural training.

4.2 *The Fragmentation of Society*

Running parallel to the increasing calls to decolonize the university, is the increasing fragmentation of society as a result of Apartheid legislation, urbanization and globalization that lead to the not-so-slow decline in communal forms of music making, which older generations in rural areas experienced. This leads Huyssen (2012) to draw on Historically Informed Performance Practice (HIPP) as a perspective when working with traditional musicians. One can extend his argument to state that in the same way that HIPP works to understand the music-making practices of previous generations, South Africans will have to work to understand the traditional musics of our country. Students do not only follow in the musical footsteps of their forefathers, but choose their own paths (Strelitz 2004). Many students who arrive at the university are not versed in the older musics of the country, and many not even in the newer musics. Their musical mother tongues are often globally popular rather than historically local.

This societal fragmentation stands in particular tension with the practice of interaction, which assumes diverse musical backgrounds, and particularly assumes that those diversities are “cultural”, and that the students are aware of their musical heritage and able to help others to enjoy it. The fragmentation of society means that the students' cultural heritage is often not of the “traditional” type but rather draws on

popular mass media. As a result, universities also play a role as custodians of the variety of musical expressions of the country, and, by introducing students to a wide range of musics, university lecturers have the opportunity to affect the musical life of the country.

5 Conclusion: Visions for the Future

The three practices described in this paper, and the wider societal pressures that impinge on the work of music teacher educators sets up a number of tensions within which music teacher educators must operate. These are not merely superficial dilemmas, but should rather be understood as “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (Engeström 2001, 137), that have developed out of the country’s history and the historically developed practices of music education. These structural tensions occur *within* the work of music teacher education – some of these have been highlighted above – and also *between* the system of music teacher education and broader societal forces. The tensions between fostering musical practices and developing critical views of those practices within the classroom, and between the work that music teacher educators do and the forces outside the classroom (the calls for decolonization, and the fragmentation of society) is a source of confusion for music teacher educators in South Africa. However, these tensions may also be the seed for the transformation of South Africa’s music teacher education. Such transformation typically only takes place when the problems are no longer understood only as dilemmas (where people express incompatible evaluations) but rather become states of double-bind (when the actors face pressing and equally unacceptable alternatives) (Engeström and Sannino 2011). Engeström (2001, p. 137) argues that such states of double-bind offer the possibility to lead to expansive learning in individuals and, more importantly, in social groupings. Such expansive learning takes place when the activity (especially its object and motive) is reconceptualized to “embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities”. In terms of the argument thus far, this wider horizon of possibilities includes the development of social cohesion through intercultural exchange, both in the music education class and beyond it. This development of social cohesion extends beyond awareness of and respect for the other through engaging with their musical practices, and moves towards embrace of the other as person in radical reconciliation (Volf 1996). Although this is a task beyond what music teacher education could realistically achieve, it is one to which music teacher education may contribute through creating contexts where students may encounter those who are different on an equal footing.

It is possible and likely that such a transformation will occur, but this will only happen to the extent that music teacher educators and their colleagues at the institutions where they work experience the tensions described in this chapter as deeply

rooted contradictions, both in their own being and in their own practice. Expansion may happen through individuals taking up the responsibility to initiate change, but is more likely to happen when a collaborative effort is established to enable change. Once such collaborative effort is implemented, and hopefully even before this, a transformation of music teacher education seems inevitable.

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