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African music, knowledge, and curriculum: applying Bernsteinian and Legitimation Code Theory to South African music curricula

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the recontextualisation of African music in formal South African curricula. The research is situated in South Africa, where post-apartheid education policy promotes the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in the curriculum. The research is motivated by a problem of disjuncture in the national upper secondary curriculum's 'Indigenous African Music' stream. While African music is the focus, the theory of music component is drawn from Western art music and seems to have little relevance to African indigenous music practices. Identifying a fundamental clash of the practical and the theoretical in this curriculum, the thesis sets out to explore what knowledge types are included in this and one tertiary curriculum, how these are articulated, and their potential for integration, coherence and knowledge-building. African music's place in formal curricula is relatively recent, and the literature attests that a clash between 'Western' and 'African' content is a common problem. Yet while this literature critiques Western hegemony and argues for the significance of African knowledge, little scholarly enquiry takes up the question of knowledge integration. Current trends in the philosophy of music education critique text-oriented curricula based on canonical works and promote individual experience and procedural knowledge, resulting in a binary that overlooks the fact that music exists on multiple levels at the same time.

Concepts drawn from Basil Bernstein and Karl Maton highlight what counts as curriculum and make visible the ordering principles of curricula. They allow differentiation between knowledge types, practical knowledge based on performance skill, theoretical content, or axiological meanings focusing on musical significance. When these theories are brought to bear on African music curricula, the conflicts can be understood in terms of knowledge types, their differing structures and their capacity for knowledge-building. This qualitative research explores these issues in two case studies through text-based analysis and empirical research. Data was collected through document analysis, observation and interviews. Bernstein and Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) provided theoretical and analytical lenses for data coding, organisation and analysis.

The study provides much needed theorising about the recontextualisation of African music. It proposes a model, developed from the theoretical implications of the research, to theorise about different knowledge types and their relationships with each other. In the curricularisation of different music practices, the model illustrates the complexity of musical knowledge, demonstrating how different knowledge domains contextualise each other. It shows the dialectic relationship between musical knowing and musical knowledge, and the importance of negotiating boundaries between knowledge types.