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Teacher Attitudes And Perceptions Of Primary School Music Education At Independent Schools In South Africa

Dawn Joseph, Deakin University

Abstract

As South Africa enters the new millennium and is currently in its second term of democracy, the question remains: is outcomes-based education preliminary the way forward for learners in South Africa. The new education system recognises the importance of arts education and specifically music education at the primary school level. This article focuses on music education at independent schools in Gauteng, South Africa. The reporting of this article is based on the author's doctoral thesis entitled "Outcomes-based music education in the foundation phase at independent schools in Gauteng, South Africa". The principal form of research was a questionnaire sent to music teachers at primary schools registered with the Independent Schools Council (ISC). The purpose of the questionnaires was to contribute to a study on teachers' perceptions, attitudes and opinions regarding music education and outcomes-based education. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections, namely: personal and professional details, outcomes-based education and general information. Both open and closed types of questions were employed. The questionnaire yielded both ambivalent views about the change of the education system as well as the inclusion of music as an area of learning within "Arts and Culture". It also identified current teaching trends and exposed areas of weakness that call for attention.

Background

After a long history of disparate and unequal education, the South African government is still faced with the challenge of transforming education and addressing the imbalances created by apartheid. Curriculum2005 (C2005) is probably the most significant reform in South African education of the last century. It is directed towards achieving a prosperous, truly united, democratic and internationally competitive country with literate, creative and critical citizens leading productive, self-fulfilled lives in a country free of violence, discrimination and prejudice (DOE, 1997). Outcomes-based education (OBE) is seen as an approach to education while C2005 is seen as the curriculum that has been developed within an outcomes-based framework. OBE aims at what (outcome) and whether learners are learning as more important than when and how they learn it. The progressive, learner-centred principles of OBE in C2005 were not new in South Africa, especially to teachers at independent schools. The new curriculum collapsed subject areas and formed eight learning areas. The inclusion of Arts and Culture as a learning area still poses problems for most state-funded schools because many do not have specialist arts teachers. Independent schools to a large extent maintain separate subjects with specialist teachers, enhancing the attractiveness of independent over state-funded schooling.

1 Curriculum 2005 arose out of coalition processes designed to ensure the integration of education and training through the National Qualifications framework (NQF). As an assessment, qualifications, competency and skills based frameworks, it encouraged the development of a curriculum model aligned to the NQF in theory and practice.
Independent Schools in Johannesburg

All independent schools in South Africa fall under one controlling body, the Independent Schools Council (ISC). This paper presents an overview of music teachers’ attitudes, perceptions and classroom practise at Independent Schools in Johannesburg, the capital city of the Gauteng Province. This province occupies the smallest area (in square kilometres) of all of the South African provinces, but has the highest population density. The situation reported here only takes into account that of music teachers and may or may not be representative of other Independent Schools in the remaining eight provinces.

The Research Problem

This paper reports educational changes taking place in South African Independent Schools and is part of a larger study (see Joseph 1999). Given this context, this paper only reports on:
- whether teachers were confident to implement the new OBE system of education for music in primary schools
- teachers attitudes and perceptions about integration, the types of music and activities taught and approaches to class music teaching
- the importance of music in relation to arts and culture and teaching across the arts

Structure of the Questionnaires

Every school listed under the central Gauteng region at the pre-primary and primary level was requested to complete the questionnaire. A variety of question types was employed including “yes”, “no”, “don’t know”, open-and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: Section A - personal and professional profiles of teachers; Section B – teachers’ attitudes and opinions regarding OBE and Section C - issues of class music. Table 1 indicates the return rate (63%).

Table 1: Independent Schools Responding to the Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF SCHOOL</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SCHOOLS</th>
<th>NO CLASS MUSIC</th>
<th>SENIOR SCHOOL</th>
<th>NUMBERS SENT OUT</th>
<th>NUMBERS RETURNED</th>
<th>NO REPLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GIRLS</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOYS</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO-ED</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>32 (63%)</td>
<td>19 (37%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section A: Personal and Professional Profiles

An age analysis of respondents revealed that 9% fell into the age group 20-30, 31% between the ages 31-40, and 60% were 41 and over. 41% of the respondents held the position of Director of Music or Head of the Music Department (which including a strong teaching component) while the other 59% fell into the category of class music teacher. Class music teachers’ duties included choir training, instrumental lessons and ensemble groups to make up a full timetable. 99% of the respondents were female reflecting a shortage of male teachers at the primary school level.
Reasons for Current Positions

From the eleven attitudes to teaching (see Figure 1), "enjoyment" was the main reason for teaching. 15 respondents preferred smaller teacher/pupil ratios and 6 respondents indicated that their jobs provided a steady income. Teachers in South Africa, like most civil servants, are not highly paid. Location, school holidays, convenient hours or part-time positions were interestingly not given as prominent reasons for holding a position.

Figure 1: Respondent's reasons for holding current positions

Respondents' reasons for holding current positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Options</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Time</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Pupil Ratio</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Holidays</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient Hours</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Security</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Gain</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Qualifications

Most teachers were well qualified and held both academic and professional qualifications including diplomas, licentiates and university degrees (BA, BMus, BMus(Ed), BMus(Hon), MA and MMus). Those holding licentiates had predominantly qualified through the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (London) and Unisa (University of South Africa). Many of these teachers entered students for examinations through those bodies. Even though teachers were well qualified they requested more professional development and collaboration with state-funded schools.

Section B: Outcomes-Based Education

Given that these schools have adopted some principles of OBE, respondents defined an outcome in the following way:

- 62% defined an outcome as an end result; they saw it as what the child is able to demonstrate at the end of the lesson.
- 28% defined OBE as an approach that promotes creativity and participation.
- 5% chose not to answer the question.
- 5% gave illogical information which had to be discarded (for example an outcome can be linked to school subjects, more creativity, more examinations).
In view of the overall educational changes 93% of respondents saw OBE as a promising approach to classroom practice. The following reasons were given:

- 46% felt that OBE promotes creativity and participation, thus a move away from a teacher-centred approach.
- 18% felt that the OBE promotes subject integration; thus music would not be taught in isolation.
- 8% found OBE to be a promising approach which warrants more emphasis in teacher training and the need for updated resources in music education.

Only 7% of respondents preferred the old system of education (which promoted passive learners, rote-learning, a more content-driven syllabus, separate subjects) and were not enthusiastic about OBE. In relation to classroom practise, 87% of respondents stated that OBE would still be a challenge to both learners and teachers whereas 13% were of the opinion that it would not. The latter grouping of teachers fell into the age group 41 years and over. 69% of respondents said that OBE would make very little difference to their teaching as their current teaching was in line with the new system however 31% reported that it would make some difference.

The questionnaire also considered teachers' competencies in relation to OBE. 55% of respondents felt that OBE would certainly increase their teaching competence. These teachers indicated that they are open to change and are receptive to new ideas provided they received ongoing training. Curriculum development is not static and should therefore be a process whereby ongoing revision and development takes place.

Section C: General information on Music Education
This section of the questionnaire covered a wide range of questions; only a few will be addressed here. Teachers aged between 20 and 40 years preferred an integrated approach, whereas those over 41 years preferred the discipline-based approach. Given this, the figures below indicate respondents' attitudes towards integration:

- 64% wanted to integrate music into the curriculum, thus keeping a broad and open mind about the subject.
- 36% did not want to integrate music thus keeping their views and subject within a closed boundary.

Planning and communication were recorded as key elements and features of integration. A concern for teachers was that each school was responsible for its own curriculum however, they indicated that a standard curriculum for subject integration across the “arts” would be preferred.

Teaching Across the Arts
All teachers saw their classes twice a week for a 30 minute music lesson. Table 2 presents respondents' choices of approaches to teaching across the arts. Theme-teaching achieved the highest percentage, followed by integrated subjects and integrated projects. Although respondents also chose to team-teach (60%) they indicated that it required much planning, discussion and amicable rapport. The use of outside experts could present administration and logistical problems though 57% approved of their inclusion. 90% of teachers found them-teaching to be more demanding than traditional methods. By integrating the curriculum, it would seem that teachers are beginning to acknowledge that making such connections with young people may actually reinforce skills and understanding more effectively than teaching in
insular content areas (Burnaford, 1993, p. 44). Although teachers were supportive of a variety of teaching approaches in the classroom they did indicate a concern that music may lose its identity within the arts.

Table 2: Respondent’s choice of Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPROACH</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>DON'T KNOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme-teaching</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated subjects</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated projects</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team-teaching</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside experts</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modular system</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate subjects</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Types of Music and Activities

This section of the questionnaire yielded insightful information into what teachers were mainly focusing on and exposed areas that were neglected. From Figure 2, 94% of respondents taught classical music. This is reflective of the type of training these teachers received. Though South Africa is a multicultural society, many teachers in this study have not been exposed to nor are they qualified to teach African or other types of music. All respondents were white and western trained teachers, who predominantly taught white children. Teachers requested that the “arts” develop either weekly, monthly, or term-based programmes that would meet the demands of the learners and expose them to various types of music. This view is supported by Campbell and Scott-Kassner, (1995, 314) who states that “in a collaborative and thorough way, music teachers can join together with others to enlighten children about ‘worlds’ of people and their cultural expressions”. Music and the arts is a vehicle through which nation building “Masakane” can be developed.
Types of Music

Figure 2: Types of Music

Though seventeen activities were listed see Figure 3, most teachers indicated that singing, movement, playing instruments and listening were chiefly taught and enjoyed. Improvisation an important aspect to music making is rather neglected. The voice together with body movements is an excellent tool for improvisation at all levels of schooling. Teachers felt that children were too small to play an instrument (melodic and non-melodic) and limited improvisation to body movements at the early levels of schooling (5-7 years). “Given the opportunity, they will reveal a broad spectrum of improvisatory and compositional processes” (Burnard, 1998:84). Burnard (1998) recommends that teachers acknowledge the difference between children’s encounters with improvisation and that of adults. In this way “we give children the opportunity to reflect their own uniqueness as young creators” (p.84). For children at a young age, it is necessary to develop, explore and expand musical ideas. Improvisation can play several roles in the creative process according to Campbell & Scott-Kassner (1995:252):

It can help children attain a sense of structure, form and style;
It can be used to introduce and reinforce concepts and technical skills; At the highest level, it provides an opportunity for the synthesis of these concepts and skills.
Assessment in Class Music
C2005 proposes that learners need to be assessed as part of an ongoing process. Though ten types of assessment were listed, informal assessment (90%) ranked the highest, followed by continuous assessment (89%), memory test (50%) and oral assessment (47%). Respondents indicated that no strict record of assessment was kept for music at the lower grades. Assessment has been a contentious issue and will not form part of this paper.

Conclusion

Given that Gauteng represents a broad cross section of the population in South Africa, the findings only reflect attitudes and perceptions of white music teachers at independent schools and is therefore not representative of all race groups across both independent and state-funded schools. Though OBE has received both positive and negative feedback, any new approach will be met with concerns. Jonathan Jansen (1997) a leading academic in education, is concerned that OBE will fail. He strongly believes that “the three R’s” (reading, writing and arithmetic) will be replaced by “the three P’s” (portfolio, projects and performance) which in turn will result in the three D’s (deliberately dumbed down). Teachers have expressed in section B of the questionnaire that OBE is a threat to traditional values of hard work in a competitive world. Because learners are allowed to work at their own pace and within their own time frame, they no longer have the urge to compete and excel; the intelligent learner is not challenged and the slower paced learner could stagnate.
Responses to questionnaires revealed that teachers were confident to implement OBE and were willing to adapt and change their teaching. Teachers strongly expressed that by integrating subjects and projects or by theme-teaching, every endeavour promotes creativity and much participation from learners and between learners. No longer are lessons teacher-dominated; learners play a leading role in their education, one that prepares them for life, becoming part of a lifelong enterprise (Perelman 1992). Many teachers tend to incorporate Arts and Culture into the music lesson. For these teachers, music as an aspect of Arts and Culture using the OBE approach provides the opportunity for learners to be more active and creative participants in the lesson. Music as a component of the arts, exposes students to lifelong learning and an appreciation of the arts. However, some teachers preferred that the arts be taught through music, in this way music would still maintain its subject identity.

No standard music education or “arts” learning programmes have been produced to date (2001) by either the Gauteng Department of Education or the Independent Schools Council. This makes it very difficult for music educators to integrate and teach across the arts. Hauptfleisch (1998, p.13) maintains that the use of cross-curricula themes and topics could create the false impression that music knowledge was being developed, while in fact learners were merely dabbling in music activities (1998, p.13). As music programmes are currently been formulated, C2005 is currently undergoing revision and is now be called Curriculum of the Twenty First Century (C21).

C21 will prescribe clear content for each learning area (unlike C2005). According to the review committee report of C2005 (May, 2000), it will describe the knowledge, concepts and skills that pupils should acquire in each grade and will define the levels of achievement that pupils should attain in each year thus enabling learner’s progress to be monitored. C21 will have to be supported by good textbooks, learning material and regular professional development in order to succeed. This was a shortfall in C2005 and a area of concern from the questionnaire.

Concerns and Implications for Further Research
Since this study only looked at Independent Schools and one province, this research may provide impetus for further research in terms of:

- cross curricula development and planning in arts education
- curriculum development integrating literacy, numeracy and the arts
- restructuring of tertiary course work to include non-western music
- teacher training for music at “specialised schools”
- teacher development which incorporates computer technology for music education
- teacher development and comparative research between state and independent schools.
- Assessment within the arts especially music in relation to literacy and numeracy
- Updated learning programmes and resources

Currently curriculum is undergoing systemic change and teachers have concerns that music might loose its identity and be “watered down” (Plummeridge, 1991). Given that “arts and culture” are an essential part of South Africa’s heritage, it is essential that this area be represented in the curriculum at all levels of schooling for all types of schools. A comparative study between state and independent schools in South Africa would yield rich data in terms of teachers’ attitudes and perceptions towards music education and changes in education. On a larger scale, a similar study could be undertaken in Australia at Independent Schools and state-funded schools.
References


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