The implications of South African children's multimodal musical games for music education.

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In this paper, I present some of my research and documentation of township children's musical games in South Africa and their connection with music education. This paper is based on my work training music educators, teaching in community music projects and my research in three Soweto primary schools. The research investigates how music education could be more relevant and appropriate to South African children and their learning environments, with possible broader implications for music teaching and learning.

The context of this presentation was a teacher training project where I worked with three primary school teachers. The project aimed to address the challenges of implementing South Africa's current Arts and Culture curriculum (of which music is part), particularly for teachers who are not formally trained.

South Africa's education curriculum was reconceptualised after the first democratic elections in 1994. It attempts to redress the huge inequalities and racism of apartheid education by replacing it with an outcomes based curriculum, built on the principles enshrined in SA's new democratic constitution (South African Department of Education 1995). Music education is included in one "learning area" that combines visual arts, drama, dance and music; teachers are expected to teach and integrate all four subjects. Although the vision of the arts and culture curriculum is laudable, its meaningful implementation and the ideal of learner-, rather than teacher-centred education has yet to be achieved. In South African music education, there are few formally trained public school teachers and a tendency for government officialdom to interpret music education as learning staff notation.[1] The other way music education manifests (mainly in township and rural public schools), is reiterating so-called cultural songs and dances in the classroom. Coupled with teachers' own poor education and training (under apartheid Bantu education), there are huge disparities between policy and practice; between curriculum rhetoric and the realities of government school environments; and in music particularly, a disconnection between classroom learning and "music in everyday life" (De Nora 2000).

My research developed as a response to the disparities: between the formal, often rote learning of the classroom and learners' musical practices. I asked how educators could begin connecting these two seemingly separate domains, attempting to address some of the present contradictions methodologically. I worked with teachers who had little formal music training, in under privileged, under resourced township schools, where teachers often have to teach classes of over eighty learners. Visiting Soweto primary schools, the differences between classroom and playground activities and learning was striking. Some

[1] In South Africa, music education is generally very good in resourced schools, particularly private institutions where there are trained and experienced music teachers. My focus here is on Arts and Culture teachers in previously disadvantaged areas, where there is generally little capacity in music education.

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music lessons I observed had no sound and consisted of writing down facts about music, contrasted with children's vibrant "musicking" on the playground (Small 1998).

I propose two ways in which learners musical games are significant. The first is ethnomusicological: the games' richness as cultural practices warrants ethnographic documentation and study; the second is pedagogical, because the games embody children's musical identities, prior knowledge and potential. As such, I propose that the games have implications for teaching and learning. The question is how music teaching can develop the musicality already demonstrated in children's musical play.

Hence the central questions are methodological. How can teaching incorporate children's musical games in the classrooms without just repeating them? How does musical play connect to curriculum or pedagogy; and does playing games in a formal setting change or alter them? Finally, how can children's musical games be used to promote transformative, new musical learning?

In order to begin addressing these questions, the first step was to study and analyse the games as musical practices to gain insight into the different kinds of musical skills and capacities they embody. Documenting and studying the games with the three teachers, it was important to understand how they operate as a "community of practice" (Lave and Venger 1991). Understanding children's musical games in this way implies that the rules and motivation for playing each game, their learning, actions and musical content operate internally within children's playground cultures. The meaningfulness of children's musical play is also situated and specific to these children, at this time, in this place. Much of the semantic meaning and references in Soweto children's games were inaccessible to me. I had triple outsider status in this research: as an adult, as white and English speaking. However, even the teachers struggled to grasp the meanings of their children's local slang, their invented words or the origins of their appropriated musical ideas. Thus, the meanings I attribute to the games are gained through multiple interpretations and analyses by adults who played similar games as children and acted as co-interpreters in this research.

Like children's communicative and expressive practices, their musical games are closely connected to the social context of urban township culture. Besides its political, historical significance as a site of struggle, Soweto and other urban townships are fascinating for their vibrant, mixed cultures, cross-over styles and hybrid music-dance practices. This is not the milieu of pure forms but rather a melting pot of languages, musics, social and spiritual practices. Soweto has produced its own slang language of *scamto*[2] and its own music, particularly the local house dance music called *kwaito*.[3] Soweto is full of fluid, changing artistic expression and re-imagining of existing music and dance forms. The urban township culture is incorporated, expressed and explored in children's musical play, which not only reflects but creates new music-dance practices integral to children's sociality.

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[2] Lara Allen describes *scamto* as "a township lingua-franca or slang, concocted from Zulu and Sotho with smatterings of English and Afrikaans" (2004, 86)

[3] *Kwaito* is a South African form of township electronic dance music that emerged post-1994, which "expressed the aspirations and experience of urban black youth, particularly in Gauteng" (Allen 2004, 85). In its early years, *kwaito* was a South Africanised blend of hip-hop with European and American dance music, especially house and techno …" (Ibid.) Musically, *kwaito* is "composed of slowed-down house tracks and repetitive 'chanted' lyrics in Zulu, English or *scamto*" (Steingo 2007, 23).

When visiting a township school during recess, I was struck by the number and variety of children's games being played: performances of popular music and dance styles; marbles, skipping, stone and card games; board games played in the sand and pair or group clapping games.

I first show and describe some typical township musical games, then discuss their implications for pedagogy and how the games were used by teachers to promote new learning in the classroom. These games were video recorded during one recess in a primary school in Jabavu, Soweto and are only a few of those played that day. The children are in 4th grade, aged between nine and eleven years.

The first game - called '*Chocolatey*'- is a version of musical statues that boys have adapted to fit in with a local *kwaito* dance music rhythm. They create beautiful, distilled body sculptures on the words "stop – don't move!" These contrast with their bouncy dance movements that match the syncopated rhythm of the repeated chant "*chocolatey*". The boys love commenting on each others' poses and catching out the one who moves. The way they match jerky dance movements to word-sounds demonstrates children's ability to work across sound, kinaesthetic and linguistic modes, for their own performance and play purposes.

The second game played by the same group of boys ('*Tamatie So*') is an example of an old Sotho game that children have passed down in township schools for years, but which they adapt and change to suit their musical interests and motivation for playing the game. The boys in the video recording have added a *kwaito*-type dance beat and overlapping call-and-response vocal chants to the original song, resulting in interesting overlapping cross rhythms. Two groups shout out the question and answer, while they all dance to the game's rhythms (and eat their apples at the same time!)

Tamatie So, (*so*?), *So* (*so*?), *so so so* (repeated)

O bitsa mang? (Who are you calling?)

Nna, ha ke batle (I don't want to)

O nkisa kae? (Where are you taking me?) *Shopong*! (To the shop!)

Nna, ha ke battle. Elisa ke, a ke, a ke ke ke ….

'*Tamatie So*' frames a kind of dialogue and loose narrative, in which one boy shouts to the other to go the shop and others respond, "no!" The game connects vocal sounds to jerky, break-dance-like movements typical of a township dance style called *pantsula*. Children's use of rhythm, intonation, words and dance demonstrates their ability to work across expressive modes and use these modes for the purposes of playing a game. What is also clear is the boys' enjoyment of in the interaction inherent in the games' call and response vocal form.

Games on township playgrounds are usually separated along gender lines. However, boys and girls came together at this school to play three games that provided insight into their sociality. '*Sibidiphephe'* is a circle game that is interesting in terms of the way children relate to each other through sound, gesture and performance. The game's framework enables children to "choose the one they like" in an indirect way, to comment on each other's preferences and communicate how they feel about each other through gestures. Clapping to the rapid pulse of the chant, children shout out "*Sibidiphephe, a ye ye, Sibidiphephe, a ye ye*"

while the person who is 'on' dances inside a circle of friends. She chooses someone in the circle and comments: "You, when you see [Fifi], you disregard me", implying "you prefer her to me!" The choice here is significant as it is public. Thus the game frames friendship choice and commenting on who other people like; boy-girl preferences elicit strong reactions from the rest of the group. The game has further layers communicated through gestures. The child in the middle either crosses her arms across her chest or does a 'brushing off' gesture that has a double meaning in township gestural language – either indicating showing off, or dismissing someone. This kind of ambiguity is a typical feature of township gestural language, of *scamto* slang, and popular music lyrics. Last, the game's name (the made up word *sibidiphephe*) is chose, I suggest, because its sound suggests syncopated rhythms and movements. Like many others, this game highlights children's "multimodal literacy" – their ability to explore movement, sound and word relationships to play, express and communicate (Jewitt and Kress 2003).

In the following girls clapping game medley observed at the same Soweto primary school, a group of grade four girls drew on a range of local and global musical and dance resources to invent their own game. The medley is particularly rich as it comprises layers of musical invention, adaptation and meaning.[4]

The girls appropriate melodic fragments, dances elements, gestures and words, integrating them into their invented clapping games. Soweto children's linguistic code-switching is mirrored in the way they switch between different musical styles that communicate their musical interests. Here, the girls sing the first lines of the Aqua pop song 'I'm a Barbie girl', changing the words to suit the local context: "I'm a Barbie girl, in a Barbie world; I have a boyfriend, my boyfriend is a *tsotsi*. A *tsotsi* is a gangster, but the image carries semiotic weight as a risky, though attractive and stylish man. The girls gesture to their chins, indicating a man as they sing "*tsotsi*". Their finger wagging that accompanies the retort "*angifuni*" (I don't want to) communicates the girl's defiance in not wanting to "go to the shop to steal some sweets" in the songs' words. Some of the dance moves are drawn from *kwaito* and hip-hop music – but include strands of traditional dance and steps from the South African musical, *Sarafina*. All this is accompanied by rapid back and forth clapping patterns.

In the next part of the game, the word and movements reference township minibus taxi travel, while incorporating complex pair clapping. Onomatopoeic words (*sampiripiri*, *sampolopolo*) emulate sounds like a car hooters that signal difference locations in Soweto. The girls synchronise their actions, gestures and clapping so that the action fits in exactly with the chant rhythm, and claps are replaced by different movements associated with township taxi travelling. The timing of the movements is crucial in order to keep the rhythm going and there is evidence of careful practice, listening and physical co-operation in the group.

The game changes quickly to an older one, called '*Mokop*' ("pumpkin"). Here, the meaning of the words is less important than the girls' ability to synchronies complex 'flip-flop' partner clapping patterns that require careful physical co-ordination and co-operation. The vocalised instrumental section (*tu tu lu*) is matched with crossed over leg movements, representing a synaesthetic translation of sound into movement.

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[4] The girls' clapping game medley shown here is described and analysed more fully in my chapter in Lucy Green's recent book called *Learning, Teaching and Musical Identity: Voices across Cultures* (2011).

I heard at least three versions of the meaning of the last game, called '*Poppie Yaka*', literally meaning "my baby girl". The ambiguous metaphorical language of the games' words represents an interesting narrative about girls' and women's roles, children and possibly a threatening man indicated by "*sharpa step*" in the games' words. Combined with pair clapping, the movement of each line back and forth suggests a shunting train, while the "*poppie*" (loosely translated from Afrikaans as a doll, but it could mean a girlfriend) waits at the station. The suggestive movements and words "Get down, ooh ooh" at the end of the game are copied from a *kwaito* dance video. Disparate resources are combined in this game, demonstrating how children pull together cultural and musical strands from different sources. These are reworked and integrated into an existing clapping and movement game that both challenges and satisfies children.

From a multimodal perspective, the games described here are significant in terms of the ways that children combine modes, affording them opportunities for self-expression, creating musical and cultural collages, playing with rhythm, with each other and the satisfaction of successful participation through group cohesion. Township children's musical games are rich and layered - whether approached musically, linguistically, socially or culturally – and there is much ethnographic documentation still to be done. But what of their pedagogical significance?

The second way in which the games are significant are as potential resources for Arts and Culture teaching and learning. In my research with teachers, we explored how to develop the music and dance capacities these games demonstrate in the classroom. Based on the key concepts of the Multiliteracies Pedagogy (New London Group 1996; Cope and Kalantzis 2000), I proposed in my research that by accessing children's musical repertoires, teaching could begin to connect children's life worlds.

The first step was to encourage the teachers to observe and recognise the games as musical practices and then to identify what these games demonstrate about children's musicality. From there, we could work out what they still needed to learn. Thus the games become a source of information about children's prior musical knowledges, skills and experiences and the nature of their musical identities.

I then asked how to integrate children's games into the curriculum in a way that would develop their richness and complexity. The Multiliteracies approach emerged as an appropriate methodology for incorporating and then developing children's musical practices into the classroom in order to deepen learning in Arts and Culture. Based on conceptions of multimodal communication and representation, the Multiliteracies Pedagogy was developed by the New London Group as a literacy pedagogy, but has much broader application and relevance for all teaching and learning.[5] In my research I applied this pedagogy to music education. Representing different orientations to teaching and learning, rather than sequential steps, the four components of the Multiliteracies Pedagogy (Situated Practice; Overt Instruction; Critical Reflection and Transformed Practice) provide a model for working from what was already present musically in a community of learners, to encouraging the creation of new musical knowledge and learning (Ibid.).

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[5] According to Carey Jewitt, "multimodality is concerned with signs and starts from the position that, like speech and writing, all modes consist of sets of semiotic resources – resources that people draw on and configure in specific moments and places to represent events and relations" (2008, 1).

For music education, "recruiting the musical games as resources for teaching and learning" (Harrop-Allin 2010) occurred through a process of acknowledging, incorporating and changing aspects of the games. We do this to reach "transformed practice", which means applying existing and new musical skills in different creative contexts to produce new learning. For each learning situation, and for each group of learners, this process will be different because children's musical practices are contextually situated.

The process of recruitment is possible in many different ways and what the teacher chooses to incorporate or develop in teaching depends on what she would like children to learn. Applying the Multiliteracies pedagogy to music education meant interpreting this process on different levels. For example, using and developing the games' narrative content; building on specific musical ideas and elements (like the framework as a game, or melodies, cross rhythms, call and response form, specific clapping rhythms or dance moves); developing the music-movement capacities the games demonstrate or drawing on the co-operative, collaborative ability inherent in children's musical play. The games are very musically compelling in both content and in method – in how children have created and learnt to play them. So there is a wide range of elements and abilities to harness from their games and develop. In the Soweto context, an important element was how the children's games exemplify multimodal practices and demonstrate children's ability to choose and appropriate suitable music, movement and gestural resources for the purposes of their game. These resources indicate children's musical interests and musical identities. Their choice of different multimodal resources, their method of appropriation and adaptation, indicate a tacit awareness of the "affordances" of different modes - an awareness of what sound, movement or language enables them to communicate or express (Kress 2000). This in turn implies using children's ability to "design", which in the Multiliteracies parlance is the ability to choose and use available musical and movement resources effectively for expressive, performative or representational purposes (New London Group 1996; Cope and Kalantzis 2000). Therefore these games not only demonstrate that children are musical, but *how* they are musical. In terms of musical knowledge, musicality within a specific practice concerns knowing how to do something at a particular moment – an embodied "musical knowledge in action" (Elliott 1994). Learners' musical games further demonstrate how their musicianship operates within the context of their musical play.

Hence a further reason why children's musical games are particularly important pedagogically, I suggest, is because they highlight how and why children learn through play. Children's musical play emphasises the pedagogical value in activities they do joyfully and willingly (Campbell 1998a). In a musical play context, learning operates within the meaningful framework created by the games' rules and conventions, giving children reasons to co-operate musically and physically, listen attentively and contribute individually. And they follow the rules of the game because they are co-created and not imposed (as classroom teaching tends to do). Thus, the stress the value of musical play as a means of learning, exploring and expressing that educators need to rediscover and employ.

Primarily, Soweto children's musical games (like those globally) demonstrate that children "bring to school considerable musicianship within a particular community of practice" (Barrett 2005). They provide insights into how children integrate musical knowledges and capacities in a play context, as well as the kinds of learning that can be harnessed for musical pedagogy. The games also indicate what these children have yet to learn: the township children's musical palettes were quite limited (they had never had accesses to instrumental musical resources); hence making their own instruments from waste materials,

and learning how to use them in a new context of creating, represented new learning in the Soweto school context.

When I applied the Multiliteracies pedagogy to music education with the Soweto teachers, learners used the musical capacities inherent in their games; integrated new musical ideas teachers had introduced; and employed new musical resources (self-made instruments) to create new musical designs in "transformed practice". The progression from existing musical designs, to redesigning, became a generative process that fed back into children's original games. The pedagogical innovation represented by applying the Multiliteracies pedagogy to music education demonstrated the potential for working in a spiral process of design and re-design; a process not restricted by pre-determined outcomes but that allows for the growth of artistic imagination. It showed possibilities of music pedagogy becoming a more creative, generative process built on children's agency. The research findings suggest a different kind of music education that takes particular localities, learners and teaching contexts into account. It demonstrated how music teachers with little physical resources, but who were enthusiastic about music, could base their teaching on both the content and informal learning of their children's musical games. Because the Multiliteracies pedagogy proceeds from learners' situated practices, it enables teaching to work with children's musical repertoires in any learning context. And crucially, Multiliteracies provides a methodology for developing children's innate musicality to promote new learning.

The games described here are a few of about forty I observed in only three Soweto primary schools. With over four hundred primary schools in this township alone, we can only wonder at the depth and richness of children's musical cultures. As anthropologies of children's musical games demonstrate, children's musical play reveals how musical children already are without expert guidance (Harwood 1992, 1998a, 1998b; Campbell 1998a, 1998b, 2004; Bishop and Curtis 2001; Factor 2001; Marsh 1995, 2008).[6] This research aims to prompt music education to extend the resourcefulness children's musical games embody, to capitalise on the kinds of agency that children's musical designing suggests, and enable their musicianship, inventiveness, collaboration and personal investment in music to grow.

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[6] See in particular Kathryn Marsh' extensive documentation and analysis of children's musical games in Asia and Australia in *The Musical Playground Global tradition and change in children's songs and games* (2008).

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