

Jazzart and Amoyo: Performing Arts Education as a Foundation for Youth Empowerment

Erita Lee Acham Chen

Author Note

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to the email:

erita.acham@gmail.com

Abstract:

This paper investigates the role performing arts education non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in empowering impoverished youths in South Africa. Due to underfunding in township schools, the NGO sector is the best viable avenue to provide arts education in underserved communities. By closely examining two highly impactful performing arts NGOs, Jazzart Dance Theatre and the Amoyo Performing Arts Foundation, this paper finds that these organizations' students are more effectively able to engage in school, find meaningful employment, and reject criminality than average township youths. Among other factors, the South African NGOs achieve these results by providing high-quality performing arts classes to encourage self-expression. The safe environment established in lessons builds trust between students and the organizations; the NGOs then leverage this trust to teach life skills and provide resources targeted towards community-specific issues like truancy, teen pregnancy, and drug use. Together, this methodology forms a three-pronged approach to the NGOs' programming—teaching the arts, communication, and health—and successfully deters students from high-risk behavior. This paper ultimately argues that performing arts education is a unique and necessary tool for youth empowerment, especially in underserved areas.

Keywords: performing arts education, youth empowerment, South Africa, townships, dance NGOs

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Arts education has been recognised as a significant vehicle for youth empowerment in post-apartheid South Africa. While numerous studies have explored the impact of arts programmes in schools, surprisingly little attention has been paid to arts education NGOs that offer extracurricular programming. These NGOs are often the only arts resources available to South African students living in underserved communities and attending underfunded educational institutions.

Beyond traditional arts training, many South African arts NGOs provide a holistic combination of social and psychological initiatives, which prove to be equally important for improving student well-being. The organizations build strong reputations within their student communities through arts education programming, which ideally positions them to be well-received by youths in their other pursuits. At the NGO Jazzart Dance Theatre, interview training, writing practice, and stress-relief methods are all taught to prepare matriculated trainees for future employment and enhance students' mental health. At another NGO, the Amoyo Performing Arts Foundation, public speech exercises, counselling, and workshops on prevalent issues like substance abuse and sexual education are used to deter students from engaging in high-risk behaviours. Both NGOs use the performing arts as a means to build trust with underprivileged youths, and this relationship uniquely enables the organizations to incite change in the childrens' lives. In addition to improvements in school engagement and employment, these NGOs succeed in motivating youths towards positive life choices.

This paper will proceed in three parts. First, I will evaluate the benefits of performing arts lessons in the established literature and the arts' role in South African education. Second, I will introduce two South African NGOs that will serve as this paper's case studies, Jazzart and

Amoyo, and demonstrate their successes through students' academic results and employment rates. Third, I will compare the two NGOs' pedagogical methodologies to extrapolate effective teaching strategies that can be used to empower students. Using this method, I will argue that the NGOs' arts education techniques successfully build trust between students and teachers. This trust enables the organizations to provide explicit forms of life skills training and resources directed towards alleviating environment-distinct issues. Ultimately, I will conclude that these NGOs' combinations of arts education, practical training, and community-specific services ensure the efficacy of their programmes. I will suggest that these best practices could be transplanted into other contexts as valuable extracurricular and tertiary support systems for other youths living in underserved communities.

Literature Review: Arts Education's Impact on Student Development

The literature on arts education strongly links access to the arts with youth empowerment. Youth empowerment here is defined as the improvement in a youth's overall well-being, encompassing their mental health, school or extracurricular engagement, and self-image. Researchers purport the central role arts education plays in fostering socioemotional skills that contribute to school and life success, with reports finding that participation in arts programs by children in poverty is correlated with stronger measures of perseverance and academic motivation (Holochwost et al., 2016; Zimmerman, 2002).

Previous research also suggests that adolescents experience positive developmental benefits from studying the arts that span into adulthood. For example, there is a relatively large literature connecting participation in arts programs with higher rates of self-concept and self-esteem, an individual's personal perception of their behavior and abilities. Across the globe, single-group (Kander, 2009; Kaufman et al., 2014), correlational (Respress & Lufti, 2006;

Wright et al., 2006), and experimental (Costa-Giomi, 2004; Minton, 2001) studies, especially those focused on students from low-income families (Costa-Giomi, 2004; Respress & Lufti, 2006), concur that arts education is associated with greater mental well-being.

Furthermore, exposure to arts education has been shown to help facilitate critical thinking and communication skills. Galeet Westreich, Director of the Washington Center for Learning, conducted a study on how dance assisted kinesthetic learners in verbally communicating their mathematical-thinking processes. Westreich found that participants increased their capacity to "engage in productive verbal communication, communicate their questions, and express their thought process as they worked towards a solution," claiming that these benefits were due to dance's ability to cultivate reflective thinking (2002, p. 89). Though the study was tailored for kinesthetic learners to better understand math concepts, rather than underprivileged youths for critical thinking and communication skills, Westreich does suggest that dance has an effect on one's overall ability to convey their ideas to others (p. 90). Such reports demonstrate the arts' ability to improve students' academic skills and provide them with abilities applicable to other sectors of life.

Finally, it is worth noting that dance and performing arts education is correlated with reducing high-risk behavior. For example, in one study at a low-income, American secondary school, performing arts students were significantly less likely than non-arts students to be engaged in delinquent behaviors (Elpus, 2013). The comparative study also found that American dance students are 47% less likely to have used marijuana and 26% less likely to have a criminal history (2013, p. 3). Furthermore, both correlational (Heath et al., 1998) and experimental (Walker et al., 2011) studies indicate that arts instruction predicts fewer absences from schools in underserved communities, even among those deemed at-risk for dropping out. Together, these

studies suggest that performing arts education can reduce criminality and advance school engagement.

With the multidisciplinary literature pointing to a significant correlation between arts education and prosocial behavior, it seems arts education is a worthwhile investment for child empowerment, particularly in underserved communities.

South African Township Context

The literature about South African arts education focuses on the lack of arts programs in government-funded schools in low-income areas. Schools for youths in the townships are often overcrowded and lack substantive arts programmes. Townships are underdeveloped urban areas, which were used to segregate non-white people (those of Indian, African, and multi-racial descent) from white people during Apartheid. Post-apartheid, township communities continue to be composed of informal settlements and grapple with issues like poor infrastructure, sanitation issues, and crime (Letseka, 2013, p. 3). Township schools are provided with notably fewer resources than the schools studied in the aforementioned art advocates' research; almost 80% lack clean running water, electricity, and textbooks (Letseka, 2013, p. 2). In areas where funds are limited, South African schools consider arts education as less important than STEM subjects or languages, despite the overall literature speaking for their significance in youth development (Letseka, 2013, p. 1). Furthermore, as the teacher-pupil ratio of South African township schools nation-wide is around 1:37, teachers are forced to focus more on presenting information than ensuring individual student engagement ("Education Challenges," 2014, para. 3). Even where arts programmes do exist, overcrowding impacts class effectiveness, lessening teachers' abilities to encourage the creative participation of all their students ("Education Challenges," 2014, para. 5). Such overcrowding also prevents teachers from focusing on their students' well-being, such

as noticing issues like behavior changes or drug abuse. In turn, students are also less likely to express their problems. These limitations contribute to the prevalence of poor mental health and dangerous behaviors in township youths, and result in an overall nation-wide drop-out rate of 60% (Hartnack, 2017, para. 1). Hence, the need for strong, effective arts programming in these institutions to support the school system cannot be overemphasized.

Researchers argue that the absence of arts classes in school limits the creative potential and development of students (Cowan, 2000; Nonpula, 2013). Other studies purport that the development of artistic potential is perceived as the "missing link" between innovation and generating new businesses ("Are the Arts the missing link," 2018; Gaalen, 2020). These studies support arts education in a school setting, especially as it relates to rejuvenating the South African economy. The literature so far emphasizes important factors of the arts, and their potential in schools to develop well-rounded children ready for the workforce.

However, few pieces examine the capabilities of extracurricular arts programmes in South Africa. The National Arts Council, for example, aptly points out the current lack of arts education in schools catering to the townships (National Arts Council, 2016, p. 3). The Council does not mention the role arts NGOs in general have also played in promoting dance, music, and drama in these same areas. Thus, the impact of arts NGOs on youth development, especially in filling the void of arts education left by underfunded schools, tends to be overlooked. This gap could be remedied by assessing the roles, techniques, and results of NGOs that aim to empower underserved youths through performing arts education.

South African NGOs

Post-apartheid South Africa has a robust NGO landscape. According to the South African Department of Higher Education, there were over 200,000 registered NGOs in South Africa as of

2020. Generally speaking, there are two types of organizations: (1) initiatives centered on human rights and government monitoring, and (2) service-driven NGOs, which are highly localized and serve particular underprivileged communities in South African townships. The latter NGOs aim to supplement government programs targeting these issues on a grassroots level, and more than 9,000 aim to supplement the country's current education system. Organizations within the NGO subtype provide vocational training, tutoring programs, and, as this paper will discuss, arts education initiatives (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020, p. 15 - 17).

To identify suitable arts program strategies, I will utilize a comparative approach to describe the different methods of empowerment arts adopted by two successful NGOs: Jazzart and Amoyo. I have chosen the South African NGOs Jazzart and Amoyo because of their successes in improving the well-being of township youths, guiding students towards brighter futures. Their case studies highlight the differing contexts, methods, and techniques that have been effectively used to uplift students and serve as a model to bring the arts to underserved youths in South Africa and beyond.

Jazzart Dance Theatre

Jazzart Dance Theatre was established in 1973 as a professional youth studio specializing in modern Jazz dance and advocating for social justice. Despite Apartheid, the studio's founder, Sonje Mayo, "welcomed dancers from across the racial spectrum." This made Jazzart the first multi-racial modern dance company in South Africa ("History," 2017, para. 3). Creating dances with contemporary choreography based on indigenous traditions, the company focused on the socio-political and economic context of their dancers and audiences, enhancing its themes of racial and political struggle ("History," 2017, para. 2). Even after Apartheid's end in 1994, Jazzart continued its commitment to social justice, becoming a non-profit company and

establishing a youth trainee programme in 1998. Today, Jazzart's mission statement is to "challenge the dance status quo and social stereotypes through training and performances that celebrate uniqueness" ("Training" 2017, para. 1).

Jazzart's training programme aims to provide professional-level training for approximately fifteen matriculated youths (aged 17 to 21), preparing them for careers in the arts sector. Based on Jazzart's values in social justice, trainees are actively recruited from township communities, with auditions seeking out raw talent as much as technical prowess to account for recruits with fewer financial resources for previous training. According to Managing Director Averil Barry-Hughes, all of Jazzart's 2019-2022 trainees are from disadvantaged backgrounds or the townships, with 95% being of non-white ethnicities marginalised under Apartheid (personal communication, July 12, 2020). To ensure accessibility, students from the townships are provided their training for free. From Monday to Friday, trainees are put through a rigorous dance training programme, combined with courses on interview etiquette, resume writing, cold calling and more (A. Barry-Hughes, personal communication, July 12, 2020). Their classes do not just address technical skills in contemporary dance and choreography, but also professionalism, commitment and communication. These multifaceted lessons exceed traditional dance coaching to help their trainees prepare for employment and empower them to rise above their circumstances.

Jazzart's successes are exemplified in the employment statistics of its graduates. As of 2020, Jazzart has reached 100% employment for all former students. About 96% have entered work in the dance industry, with 87% becoming dancers, teachers, and choreographers (A. Barry-Hughes, personal communication, June 12, 2020). These statistics are particularly impressive considering that South Africa's overall unemployment rate for youths in the same

demographic was 31% in 2019 (Statistics South Africa, 2019, para. 2). The fact that Jazzart has bucked South Africa's increasing trend of unemployment (Reuters, 2021) points to the effectiveness of their methods in empowering students to prepare for their futures and avoid negative influences that can hinder employment.

Amoyo Performing Arts Foundation

Alternatively, the Amoyo Performing Arts Foundation prioritizes the performing arts as a vehicle to promote positive skills and practices in school-aged township students. Amoyo's creator, Kim Conley, founded the organization in 2015 while volunteering in the victim support center at a Hout Bay police station. During her volunteer work, Conley became increasingly aware of the lack of self-worth experienced by underprivileged children in the area ("Half a Million Needed," 2018). Conley found that the impoverished status of families caused parents to be preoccupied with work, meaning children lacked adequate encouragement to engage in school. The children would often drop out and succumb to dangerous behaviors like drugs and gangs, causing run-ins with the justice system where Conley encountered them. In March 2015, she teamed up with two dance teachers to create Amoyo ("Backstory," 2016).

Based on Conley's experiences at the victim support center, Amoyo's mission is to use dance education as a means of transmitting messages of encouragement, self-respect, and discipline—which she considered necessary to counteract negative influences in the townships (K. Conley, personal communication, June 29, 2020). In Cape Town's townships, Amoyo has over 200 students of ages five to 17. The organization offers free after-school classes in dance, drama, public speaking and singing, as well as hosting community support initiatives and mentorship programs. As of 2022, classes are conducted from Monday to Friday for around two hours each. Students typically join the program due to their interest in the arts, and Amoyo uses

that interest to mentally prepare youths for future challenges. Classes aim to support and care for their choices and actions, filling the absence left by overwhelmed teachers and overworked parents to develop youths into successful, employable adults.

Amoyo's ability to encourage positive development can be seen through students' academic achievements and school engagement. School engagement is a multi-faceted construct that includes students' feelings about school, academic motivation, and valuation of learning (Holochwost et al., 2016, p. 10). This metric appears to be correlated with Amoyo attendance. For example, the eight students of Amoyo's 2019 graduating class all began the program at the beginning of high school, and were described as "shy followers" with low to average grades. Four years later, all eight youths received a total of 15 academic awards from their school (K. Conley, personal communication, January 19, 2021). With the awards being provided for "leadership," "most improvement," and "academic excellence," attending Amoyo seems to have helped these students succeed in school. Amoyo's positive, supportive teaching philosophy and environment does seem to positively impact their students' futures, equipping them with skills relevant to their daily lives.

Jazzart's and Amoyo's successes can also be seen in how their beneficiaries are less likely to fall to the destructive behaviors often seen in township youths. South African crime statistics reveal pervasive violence and criminality in lower-income areas, especially among adolescents and young adults of 18 and 25 years of age (Jonck et al., 2018, p. 1). One may assume that Jazzart and Amoyo's graduates have likely participated in similar behaviors, considering the demographics of their neighborhoods. However, all of their students have yet to be arrested, and in some cases, they have actually actively renounced delinquent practices (K. Conley and A. Barry-Hughes, personal communication, February 3, 2021). As such, Jazzart and Amoyo have

both empowered their students to rise above their circumstances, and merit deeper analysis on how their programmes have created these powerful track records.

Comparative Study of Jazzart's and Amoyo's Pedagogical Approaches

Jazzart and Amoyo each use a three-pronged approach to empower underserved youths: arts education, life skills training, and programming that address township-specific stressors. While Jazzart trains young adults to be professional dancers and Amoyo engages with primary and secondary students to keep them from dangerous influences, the NGOs' methodologies do share a common structure. Through implicit and explicit means of arts education catered to their specific student demographics, Jazzart and Amoyo boost youths' well-being and confidence, laying the groundwork for the higher rates of school engagement and employment included above.

Arts Education as a Vehicle for Teaching Self-Expression and Discipline

Arts education is a noted tool for self-expression, as aesthetic activities provide for more freedom and a greater scope for creativity (Arnold, 1986; Kaeppler, 2000). Self-expression is encouraged within artistic subjects like dance, because they demand the ability to find possibilities in "expressing ideas, moods, (and) emotions" in an aesthetic way (Arnold, 1986, p. 4). Thus, the NGOs' arts classes offer a rare opportunity for students to present themselves in a formal environment, improving their employment prospects and school successes.

According to student accounts, Jazzart's dance training augments their trainees' development of communication skills and self-expression. One student, who will be referred to as "Samantha," was once a self-proclaimed introvert. However, after working with Jazzart for two years, she now finds it easy to communicate with large groups, and is considered by her teachers as one of the most outgoing students of the dance troupe. In a personal interview,

"Samantha" shared how Jazzart "helped me in life... it gave me the courage to speak." There is no one reason for her sudden boost in confidence, she stated, but "Samantha" does consider Jazzart's creativity-stimulating dance training as a major factor (personal communication, July 17, 2020). Because a majority of their students rarely received praise and encouragement under government schooling, Jazzart's encouragement of self-expression and trust provides a supportive environment where students can better their communication ability. Improvisation classes, for example, teach spontaneity and inspire creativity, as trainees can move beyond the choreography and instruction of others. With teacher encouragement and the enthusiasm of peers for her personal creation, "Samantha" credits these classes as "all a major booster of confidence." And, by compelling her to think outside the box and engage audiences in her work, the class's teachings are also applied by "Samantha" to her outside life; as with dance, she "can't simply drop away from (her) conversations when (she) can't think of what to say next"—she must bring up something unique or odd to prompt a fruitful discussion (personal communication, July 17, 2020). The story of "Samatha" suggests that Jazzart's methods of dance coaching within a supportive community have been able to improve students' communication skills both inside and outside of the studio.

Anecdotal evidence from Amoyo's students similarly suggests that the organization's method of arts training holistically develops life skills. Amoyo's teachings align skill development with core values of discipline, communication, and creativity. These characteristics emphasized in Amoyo's arts programme are also essential to succeeding in school. Consider the case of "Tara," who has become head girl at her school after enrolling at Amoyo. Before joining, she says, "Tara" doubted she would ever have been chosen for this coveted leadership position, as she was "shy" and "slacked off." But, her dance teachers forced her to "focus and remember

exercises," which "Tara" credits with benefitting her overall concentration, memory, and discipline. "Tara" also speaks of dance as an especially powerful means of communication, that "putting (her) emotions into dance lets (her) speak in ways (her) mouth cannot." And, she is grateful towards the organization for understanding her; that "when (she) does speak, (she) knows people are listening" (personal communication, March 19, 2020). Feeling like a valued community member made her more confident in school, more willing to speak up in class, and more engaged in her school community. With the incorporation of these abilities to her daily life, "Tara" offered that she will "be looking at colleges soon," as she now has the confidence that she "will succeed in life" (personal communication, March 19, 2020). "Tara's" case demonstrates how Amoyo's approach to arts education, coupled with firm yet compassionate teachers that emphasize hard work, equips students with the skills necessary for success in their artistic and everyday lives.

Thus, both Jazzart and Amoyo students credit the NGOs' emphasis on life skills as a major reason for their newfound abilities in communication, responsibility, teamwork, and professionalism. The NGOs' arts education methods implicitly enhance abilities that facilitate students' overall development and life improvement.

Non-Arts Curriculum

The encouragement of self-expression in Amoyo's and Jazzarts' arts classes also makes students more willing to learn the NGOs' non-arts curricula. By being in a more expressive state and having established trust with their instructors, the students are open to skills training and resources. The arts lessons draw youths into the NGO programmes where other practical classes help students develop life skills and refute negative township stressors.

Apart from the holistic integration of life skills into arts education, one of Jazzart's main

objectives is to cultivate young artists into competent young professionals. Hence, unlike many traditional dance schools, Jazzart offers concrete career training. For example, interview preparation and professional attitude training are essential aspects of the Jazzart programme. Not only do classes teach the importance of clear, concise speech, eye contact, and other aspects of communication, they also aim to improve students' English. Most dance organizations and contractors in South Africa use English as their main language. Students from townships are less exposed to the language, making it more difficult for them to enter the workforce as skilled laborers (A. Barry-Hughes, personal communication, June 12, 2020). Jazzart student "Sarah" testified to the power of this interview training, viewing it as an essential component for her newfound ability to engage with others. To "Sarah" and her teachers, the preparation courses were immensely beneficial to her assertiveness, as she could practice her communication and English skills in a safe environment, with instructors she trusted. For "Sarah," the classes allowed her to recognise how simple it was to engage with others, giving her the confidence to express herself artistically and verbally (personal communication, July 17, 2020). "Sarah's" experience demonstrates how, aside from Jazzart's arts classes, the NGO's non-dance lessons also combine professionalism and artistry to develop abilities that prepare students for successful futures.

Rather than offering professional development courses, Amoyo targets the needs of their school-age students by offering workshops on discipline and communication. The trusting relationship between the youths and the NGO acts as the basis from which the students become receptive to their life skills training. For example, Amoyo's classes include public speaking, an activity where students are directed to prepare or improvise a speech about a given topic. Though most students may not have expected such tasks when joining, these classes are geared towards

giving students much-needed practice in communication. For example, though "Tara" "hadn't enjoyed public speech at first," Amoyo's workshops taught her "how to talk respectfully to all (her) classmates, and it helped (her) with (her) presentations" for school. These public speaking skills not only helped "Tara" in school, but also allowed her to become a more confident student, reflecting another factor in the Amoyo trainees' impressive school engagement rates. Both Jazzart and Amoyo use the trust built with youths to provide explicit life skills training in addition to their performing arts curriculums. The cases of "Sarah" and "Tara" attest the power of these offerings in ways that are age appropriate: procuring employment for young professionals and staying in school for students.

Addressing Community-Specific Needs

Apart from using their arts education platforms to teach life skills, Amoyo and Jazzart have also focused on tackling issues students face in their township environments. For Jazzart, this includes teaching coping mechanisms for the stressors of economic insecurity and rigorous training. For Amoyo, this means providing the sex and drug education that their students do not receive in underfunded township schools. In township schools, underprivileged children are cited as largely refusing to open up to teachers (Standing Committee on Education, 2020, para. 1). According to the Western Cape's Committee on Education, this is due to large teacher-student ratios that make it hard for teachers to focus on a single student (Standing Committee on Education, 2020, para. 2). The collective trust built within Amoyo and Jazzart make these institutions viable venues for students to become more receptive towards efforts to improve their well-being.

Three years ago, Jazzart incorporated new resources to bolster their trainees' mental health, positively impacting student mental health and programme performance. Jazzart had

provided students with free counseling resources for their students in 2013, recognising that shifting from extracurricular dancing to an intensive professional training programme was physically and emotionally challenging. In 2016, however, five students—around 15% of Jazzart's then trainee class—withdrawed from the programme. Several students who left cited the rigorous workload of the 8-hour weekday program as a motivating factor in their departure, along with anxiety about the financial insecurity of pursuing a life in the arts (A. Barry-Hughes, personal communication, June 12, 2020). Furthermore, Jazzart's faculty became concerned that the stress of the programme had made students susceptible to negative township influences like substance abuse. As lacking mental health support hindered Jazzart's curriculum, the NGO integrated stress-relief resources into their programme (A. Barry-Hughes, personal communication, June 12, 2020).

Specifically, since 2018, Jazzart has incorporated Trauma Release Exercises (TRE) into its curriculum to help students manage stress. Meant to activate the psoas muscles and unleash neurogenic tremors, TRE aims to release "deep tension, stress, and trauma, helping the body return to a calmer state" (Chua, 2018, para. 2). These exercises include stretches that follow the traditions of meditation, mindfulness, and yoga to soothe the nervous system. The technique is mostly supported through anecdotal evidence and pilot clinical outcome studies (Berceli, 2010; Harrison et al., 2018). A South African study did previously associate TRE programs with decreased stress levels in underprivileged youths, as the study participants improved their ratings of life enjoyment, mental stability, and emotional health at a statistically significant level (Berceli et al., 2014, p.3). Although this experiment used a small sample size of teenaged youths and relied on personal reflections when evaluating success, the strength of these attestations inspired Jazzart's adoption of the practice for their own students.

Jazzart students credit TRE for helping them relieve stress and feel more relaxed in and outside of class. Jazzart student "Ryan" states:

"I didn't think TRE would work, but I trusted that Jazzart knew what it was doing. And after having a TRE session, I feel more at peace before I started dancing. If I have a bad day, or start feeling anxious about my class or issues at home, practicing keeps me from panicking." (personal communication, February 9, 2020)

The success of this initiative is also evident in the fact that after TRE has been introduced, no students have dropped out (A. Barry-Hughes, personal communication, June 12, 2020). Though there were likely other factors for this improvement, it seems that Jazzart's efforts to improve student mental health through TRE were successful, meeting students' immediate needs.

Meanwhile, as an after-school program, Amoyo does not need to help students adapt to intense, full-day, professional training. However, like Jazzart, Amoyo has prioritized institutional offerings that address the community-specific needs of its younger, more impressionable students. Amoyo's primary- and secondary-school beneficiaries are within the demographic most at risk of succumbing to harmful influences in the townships. South Africa is experiencing a rising tide of drug abuse and teenage pregnancy, with the nation's teenage pregnancy rate jumping to 60% in 2021, and the average age of drug experimentation in the townships being 12 years old (van Heerden et al., 2009). Through the trust built with students, Amoyo is ideally positioned to tackle some of the most pressing township social issues, including truancy, substance abuse, and reproductive health.

Amoyo has worked to combat the prevalent issue of teen pregnancy through workshops in sexual education. These sexual health lessons teach youths about their bodies, instructing them on using birth control and initiating safe sexual relations. Issues of intercourse are seen as taboo

in most township families ("South Africa Teen Pregnancy," 2018), so these workshops are one of the few places where students may ask openly about the topic and receive answers from trusted adults. The classes have indeed resonated with several of Amoyo's beneficiaries, who make it a point of pride that they do not succumb to the negative influences plaguing township youths. Amoyo student "Lucy" states: "I listened to my teachers' workshops at Amoyo because they were so supportive of me. Without them, I probably would have gotten pregnant like my friends, and would've dropped out of school." Instead, she is going into the University of Cape Town (personal communication, July 17, 2020). Being able to ask questions about her body, contraception, and the financial realities of childrearing helped "Lucy" make informed decisions about her sexual activity. This targeting of community-specific issues—namely, teen pregnancy—has equipped Amoyo's beneficiaries with the tools to maintain stable lives.

Amoyo's workshops also focus on other topics like drug abuse and gang violence, which are relevant issues township students face today. "Michael" was selling drugs and skipping school for several months before being recruited by Amoyo. He initially only came to Amoyo twice per week for their gumboot dancing classes. However, after hearing his teachers insist that he come every day "because (he) was a valuable member of the class and could be a talented dancer," he felt "very touched and wanted" (personal communication, January 19, 2021). After several weeks of attending the program daily, "Michael's" desire to work hard and perform well in Amoyo led him to stop selling drugs and better focus on the curriculum. As his trust in the organization grew, "Michael" participated in Amoyo's one-on-one counseling and drug prevention workshops. Eventually, he began attending school regularly and even encouraged several male classmates to join Amoyo as well (personal communication, January 19, 2021). For "Michael," Amoyo's holistic arts programme used the performing arts to build trust with an at-

risk youth, enhance his self-esteem, and build his sense of discipline and responsibility. Yet, the institution also took on the specific negative township influences—drug use and dealing—that were thwarting this student's development. Without this community-based education, it is possible that "Michael" might have returned to his previous activities. Thus, these township-specific offerings have also been a necessary component in Amoyo's effective empowerment of its students.

The NGOs' community-specific offerings highlight the importance of addressing community and environmental challenges, whether in the form of Jazzart's high-pressure lifestyle or high-risk behaviors that are prevalent in townships. While methods like TRE and education about sex and substance abuse may not be necessary in other communal contexts, addressing issues relevant to underprivileged students' current circumstances has proved critical for improving student well-being.

Conclusion

Performing arts education NGOs play a crucial role in supplementing the development of South African youths. Yet, the successes of Jazzart and Amoyo are not just because of their arts classes. Rather, they are due to the organizations' encouragement of self-expression, using the arts to form bonds of trust with students and opening trainees up to other forms of practical training and community-specific resources. Though many scholars and activists are now pushing for arts education in schools, recognizing the arts' unique ability to empower youths' futures, we must not discount the work already accomplished by these extracurricular organizations. With overcrowded schools unable to zero in on the needs of individual students, extracurricular arts education is a critical cultural mechanism that enables the NGOs to uplift youths in need. Jazzart and Amoyo may provide alternative models for other arts programmes to follow, enabling

students to gain skills applicable to daily life and learn how to refute negative community influences. By encouraging confidence, self-respect, and communication, Jazzart and Amoyo make sure that students do not just learn how to dance or sing, but how to live better both on and off the stage.

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