

Why Are You Waving Your Hands Like That? An Analysis of Musical Meaning-Making and Participation Structures in a Cross-Cultural Music Learning Environment

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Summary of Research:

In the summer of 2016, a group of 18 American music students and teachers travelled to the Indonesian island of Bali to learn and perform Balinese Gamelan music in the company of several Balinese teachers. This research deconstructed the process of constructing meaning from discursive practices used in a cross-cultural music learning context in Bali in order to promote more equitable and inclusive spaces for music learning and teaching. Using Grounded Theory method (Charmaz 2006), data were collected through participant interviews and video recordings of rehearsals and performances.

Research questions:

- How is meaning co-constructed among students and teachers in a cross-cultural music learning environment?
- What are the various components of this meaning-making process?

Results yielded three pertinent findings that can be applied in everyday teaching:

1. **Establishing Meaning: Semiotics** (sign, symbols, gestures) were used during rehearsals to communicate meaning. For music transmission to occur, discursive meaning must be constructed by the social actors present in the environment. This construction can take many forms. Not establishing the meaning of discourses used in the rehearsal process can lead to misinterpretation.
2. **Forming Connections:** In order for students to have meaningful musical experiences, they must feel a sense of connection to the music they are playing and to those around them. Students enjoy feeling successful, and forming connections can help set up students for success.
3. **Everyone Learns Differently:** It is important for teachers to cater to the needs of their students and to scaffold and facilitate knowledge from which students can grow and learn.

Further Research:

There were many advantages to exploring the process of meaning making in the cross-cultural context of Bali, Indonesia; however, one does not need to leave the country to engage in this pedagogy. Future research could explore the discourses that circulate through ensemble settings within the U.S.

Questions Posed for Teachers:

- How does your teaching environment (classroom) affect the learning environment of your students?
- What do you and your students bring to the learning environment, and how can you foster their growth with the qualities they bring?
- How can we create lifelong (music) learners?

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