

ISSN 0854-3461



*Selected Articles*

# MUDRA

JOURNAL OF ART AND CULTURE  
2004 - 2011



INDONESIA INSTITUTE OF THE ARTS DENPASAR  
UPT. PENERBITAN  
2012

# MUDRA

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## “Approaching Peace through the Performing Arts”

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This paper examines case studies from Indonesia and the United States of formal and informal performing arts education initiatives that have achieved constructive community change in an effort toward realizing peace. Through this examination I demonstrate that active participants in the performing arts become active contributors to the improvement of self-image, community, and nation. Producing a performance is necessarily a cooperative, collaborative effort. Consequently, participants learn how to accomplish positive change through reciprocal cooperation more broadly within their communities. Performing arts education is not a means to an end—that is, a final performance—but, rather, a strategy to communicate cultural values ranging from religion to society and ethics. It is a tool to realize both intracomunal and cross-cultural mutual understanding and respect. Finally, for participants, performing arts education is an enjoyable activity and thus, demonstrates that the most successful and sustainable peace education initiatives are those that are personally gratifying for participants.

### Example 1: Ubud Village

For Balinese society, globalization and modernization have provided opportunities for, as well as threats to Balinese traditions. On the one hand, we have more opportunities to appreciate the multiculturalism of our world and, in turn, to realize peaceful coexistence with other cultures. On the other hand, we are concerned that the communication possibilities of globalization may lead to a global uniformity of culture. If this happens, we worry that a number of aspects of our cultural heritage will be lost. We can imagine how great that loss would be. My first case study is an example of nonformal performing arts education that began in the 1980s in the village of Ubud in Bali. This is a village in which cultural tourism is very important. Tourists come here to see performances

and religious ceremonies as well as to purchase visual arts. At that time, the media in Indonesia devoted many broadcasts to concerns about globalization and its threats. But in Ubud parents witnessed the real effects of outside and negative influence on young people. Most of the youth in the area had turned their backs on traditional aspects of their culture in favor of western clothing, street racing with motorbikes, and hanging out and making trouble in the streets. They weren't interested in their studies, and their parents were very worried about them. I was involved with an initiative which began with a meeting with head of the village. I proposed that since Ubud is an art centre, perhaps the children in the area could undergo training in the performing arts. I knew that this would keep them busy after school so they did not have time to hang out on the street, but I also suspected that what these children really craved was positive attention. I thought performing arts could give them that.

The initiative started by gathering the students together for rehearsals, but also for other activities that are important to Balinese Hindu culture, such as going to temple together. We prayed together, wore traditional Balinese costume to practice, and rehearsed together four or five times per week at the royal palace in Ubud. The training was a long process, but very rewarding for everyone involved. Eventually the children wanted to prepare for an actual performance, so went into a competition for Independence Day, August 17. We invite a performing arts group from each banjar, or community, to participate. All the youth around Ubud were involved. I selected the naughtiest students to be the group leaders so that they were so busy preparing for the competition that there was no time to go to the street for racing. But everyone was proud: the students were proud because they were receiving positive attention from everyone: their parents, teachers, community, and

even the government. The parents were proud because their children were becoming positive representatives of their community. After the competition had concluded, the children continued to perform for local temple festivals. They continued to seek new performance opportunities, and eventually developed a group to perform for the tourists. This group, called *Jaya Suara* (Victorious Sounds), performs to this day for tourists every Sunday night.

The program was an immense success. By using the arts to educate, we were actually able to positively influence the children's character. We provided them not only with new skills in terms of dance and music, but we also transformed the way in which they valued their culture through art. So the program had two benefits: the children learned a new skill and they learned new values. This happened not by demanding certain behavior but by implicitly encouraging better behavior through the arts. This example of an informal, community-based education initiative turned the naughtiest students in Ubud into real community leaders. Further, by becoming a part of a performing arts group, the children learned mutual tolerance and respect for other and a renewed interest in their own heritage. So in order to preserve but simultaneously develop our cultural heritage we must instill in our children important universal ethics of humanity. We can do this by pursuing efforts such as the preceding example of nonformal peace education through the performing arts.

#### **Example 2: Indonesian Art Festival**

The second example comes from a formal music education initiative that culminated with the Indonesian Art Festival in 2007. All seven Indonesian Institutes for the Arts were scheduled to participate in an immense collaborative performance event. In addition to students and faculty in Indonesian higher education, the event featured international participants from the United States, Canada, Europe, and Asia. The idea was to bring together many types of Indonesian performing arts for one event.

I was involved in the creation of new work called *Nusantara* (which means "Indonesia," which was meant to be a collaboration between artists from every major region of Indonesia to combine art from every major region into a single performance. The head of each performing arts institute came to Bali to help put together this experimental work. Our impetus was

to see how, through this project, we could better understand each other in the multicultural context of Indonesia. Student performers were involved, and the performed was premiered next to the sea for an opening ceremony and then, later, performed on campus. Excitingly, more collaborative work followed.

By sharing and learning about each other we developed a mutual understanding and learned the great value of each culture through their performing arts. Through this production, we better understood how rich and valuable each culture is, how to avoid the disintegration of cultural harmony, and we learned to respect each other. It is my contention that respect is the foundation of harmony, the foundation for peace. Our nationality was strengthened through the arts and, in turn our mutual respect for one another taught us to appreciate and uphold our peaceful co-existence.

This example demonstrates how art can be used as a foundation for peace. We can understand more about human relationships through the arts. So through the performing art we come to understand and appreciate other cultures, but we also do something very important for our audiences: we teach them, in turn, to not only accept, but take pride in the multiculturalism of their nation.

#### **Example 3: Washington, DC Cherry Blossom Festival**

The final example comes from my time living in the Washington, D.C. area. The year was 1996. I was actively helping the Indonesian Embassy with performing arts programs, and at that time, Indonesia was scheduled to be one of the participating countries during the annual Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D.C. The Embassy couldn't afford to bring performing artists from Indonesia to participate, so I suggested we try to get Indonesian citizens living around D.C. to participate.

One day, I Gusti Agung Ngurah Supartha, director of performing arts at the Embassy, asked children and adults involved in performing arts to come to the Embassy. The question was what the community members could present there. The students did not think they had anything to perform because at the time they had studied very little about their own culture while living in the United States. Some thought

the best they could do was to wear traditional Indonesian costumes. But as they got involved with the event, they realized how important their culture is, and how many rich traditions it has. They realized they wanted to learn more about their culture, not only to prepare to represent their nation for the Cherry Blossom Festival.

At that time, a group from Baltimore called Genta Semara, led by the late ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood, came to perform. Some group members were from Maryland, but there were also members from all over the world. Yet we all came together—Americans, Europeans, Africans, Asians, not only to represent Indonesia, but to become united as one community through the arts. Through performing traditions that were not their indigenous traditions, non-Indonesians were learning about other cultures. And by participating in the festival, Indonesian citizens in the United States learned to appreciate and take pride in their own culture. Finally, by performing together, we all learned more about each other and learned to respect each other. And this, as I said before, is the road to peace.

Through this example I hope it is clear that in order to encourage communities to take part and play an active role in the preservation of their own culture, it is necessary to create a conducive environment for cultural preservation, both in home environments and through cross-cultural exchange. We see that participation in performing arts is a kind of cultural heritage preservation, and the activities of participants not only sustain our traditions, but keep them alive and vital for the next generation.

## CONCLUSION

These examples of performing arts education initiatives explore the critical and universally shared values of peace, balance, harmony. In Bali, we have a very important concept called Tri Hita Karana which is meant to address these issues. The concept means we should seek a balanced and open relationship between humans and God, humans and humans, and humans and nature. This concept is implemented through each performing arts education initiative presented here. Through the performing arts, we are achieving real change in our society in order to live a

more balanced and peaceful life. We have another important concept called Tri Kaya Parisuda, which means good thinking, good talking, good action. I would like all the conference participants to remember this concept throughout the conference. Here we are, gathered together, to share our ideas about achieving peace—good thinking. The conference provides the opportunity to engage in dialogue about initiatives for achieving peace—good talking. But once we leave this conference we have to implement these ideas. We have to facilitate real change in our home environments—good action. After the conference, how can each contributor strengthen his or her community through action? I suggest one way is to support performing arts education (both formal and nonformal) as part of local curricula. The arts should be supported by local and international governments, as well as NGOs.

Performing arts are a means to communicate culture, and each and every culture adheres to certain values of ethics and peace that are universal. Through the performing arts (especially through examples of cross-cultural exchange in the performing arts), we acknowledge these shared attributes and feel united. We feel pride for our own culture and respect for others.

What we are doing is utilizing human resources in the performing arts to facilitate real, positive change. It is not enough just to theorize about change. To conclude, collaborative performing arts education at the local, national, and international level instills in participants mutual respect for fellow participants as well as community members, and is an effective tactic for approaching tolerance, respect, and peace.

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