

Independent Project Report:

Attitude Scale for Making Opera in a Dual Language Setting: China

Anthony DiTaranto

A&HM 5002: Assessment Strategies for the Arts

Dr. Harold Abeles

Teachers College, Columbia University

Introduction

This assessment was designed to investigate affective reactions to the Teachers College Special Topics course *Making Opera in a Dual Language Setting: China* (A&H 5199, Dr. Randall Allsup). The attitude scale was distributed to all student participants in the course. A translated Mandarin version was created for and distributed to all the Xiamen University students and all the Teachers College students completed the original version in English, however this report focuses on the responses of the Teachers College students. A wide range of factors were considered in the design of the survey. The data revealed a positive experience overall but with some areas needing improvement. More focused investigation would be necessary to develop explicit and actionable changes for implementation in the course.

Factors Considered in Designing the Test

Attempting to capture a month-long experience in a foreign culture within an approximately 30 point likert scale proved to be very challenging. This was a complex cultural immersion event in addition to an advanced course in creative music education. As such, there was a multiplicity of factors to consider when designing the attitude scale. The relevant information reaches beyond the events during class time, including group work outside of class, supplemental cultural immersion classes, cultural interactions outside of the class entirely, and the organization of preparations required before the trip began. Therefore, the questions asked were created to cover a large expanse of time and academic, personal, and social aspects of the journey. The stated purpose of the course was used as a starting point, and questions were further developed based on events from the experience.

Course purpose: *The aim of this course is to provide an experience for TC students to explore the ways in which language and the arts (particularly music) provide an expressive platform for notions of self and community. The idea of opera will be treated openly, drawing on Western and Chinese*

traditions, but also popular, jazz, and electronic styles. Connections to teaching in an increasingly diverse and polyglot world will be explored through readings and group discussion.

–Dr. Randall Allsup, course syllabus for A&H5199

Description of Student Sample

Eleven student participants in the course *Making Opera in a Dual Language Setting: China* submitted completed surveys. The sample represents a combination of masters and doctoral level students from Teachers College. All participants completed the course concurrently in June 2016 and submitted surveys over the month of July.

Summary of Analysis

Following is the data collected from the assessment. The assessment was evaluated by first scoring all the responses and then calculating the average score and DMax for each item.

TC Student Survey Responses

Item Number	Pos./ Neg	Participant Number											Item Mean	DMAX
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
1	Neg.	4	3	3	2	4	2	2	5	5	4	2	3.27	0.50
2	Neg.	4	4	4	3	2	2	5	5	5	4	2	3.64	0.42
3	Neg.	3	3	4	5	5	3	4	5	5	4	4	4.09	0.08
4	Pos.	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	4	4.36	0.08
5	Pos.	2	1	3	4	4	4	4	5	5	3	4	3.55	0.08
6	Neg.	4	4	2	4	2	2	3	5	5	2	5	3.45	0.50
7	Pos.	2	4	4	5	4	5	1	2	4	2	4	3.36	-0.33
8	Pos.	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	4.45	0.00
9	Neg.	4	4	3	3	4	2	3	5	5	4	4	3.73	0.42
10	Neg.	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	4.36	0.00
11	Neg.	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	4.55	0.17

Item Number	Pos./ Neg												Item Mean	DMAX
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
12	Neg.	5	3	5	2	5	5	4	1	3	4	4	3.73	-0.17
13	Neg.	4	4	4	2	2	4	4	5	3	4	4	3.64	0.17
14	Pos.	4	4	2	3	2	2	5	5	4	4	4	3.55	0.33
15	Pos.	4	4	4	4	4	3	5	5	5	4	4	4.18	0.25
16	Pos.	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	3	3	4	4.09	0.00
17	Neg.	5	4	4	5	1	4	4	5	3	3	4	3.82	0.08
18	Pos.	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	3	4	5	4.27	-0.08
19	Pos.	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	5	3	4	5	4.45	0.08
20	Neg.	4	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	1	1.73	0.33
21	Pos.	4	4	4	3	5	3	5	5	4	4	4	4.09	0.25
22	Neg.	4	3	4	1	3	3	4	5	5	3	3	3.45	0.58
23	Pos.	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	5	4	2	5	3.91	0.33
24	Pos.	4	4	4	4	4	3	5	5	4	3	5	4.09	0.25
25	Neg.	4	2	4	2	4	3	3	5	5	4	5	3.73	0.42
26	Pos.	4	4	2	4	4	3	2	5	5	2	5	3.64	0.42
27	Neg.	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	5	5	3	4	4.00	0.33
28	Neg.	4	4	3	2	4	3	2	5	5	4	3	3.55	0.42
29	Pos.	3	4	4	5	4	3	4	5	4	4	5	4.09	0.00
30	Neg.	5	5	5	4	5	3	5	5	5	2	2	4.18	0.50
31	Pos.	4	2	5	4	4	3	5	5	5	4	4	4.09	0.25
32	Pos.	4	2	4	4	2	3	2	5	5	3	1	3.18	0.33
SCORE		127	114	122	113	118	107	124	149	138	110	123	122.27	

High group scores are highlighted in green and low group scores are highlighted in red.

Interestingly, only one participant, number 8, chose to respond entirely using 5 and 1 scores (with the exception of a 2 for item 7). No other participant was more polarized, or more positive (this person scored the highest by 11 points). This outlier response behavior is notable, and the reasoning behind it is outside the scope of this assessment.

Suggestions for Revisions

Several items would need further consideration and revision due to low DMax (items 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, & 29) or even negative DMax findings (items 7, 12, & 18). These unfortunately represent about 38% of the total items, indicating there is much room for improvement. The great amount of agreement on the low DMax items makes the attitude scale a less reliable depiction of the differences between students who had a more positive or more negative experience overall.

It is possible that the phrasing of those items were too similar to stated course objectives. There was (as referenced in item 30) a significant financial investment in the course, and therefore there could be an underlying inclination to demonstrate value obtained from its primary aspects. If this is the case, then participants may be tempted to mark what they feel is the “right” answer instead of expressing honest feelings. Another possibility is that these items refer to factors pertaining simply to the effects of an international cultural experience and have little relevance to how the class was conducted. Of course it could also be possible the course was very effective in certain intentions and all the students in this relatively small sample size truly agree, but this ambiguity could be avoided if the items were reworded and refocused.

Conclusions

Despite the stated issues with this attitude scale, there are several interesting observations to be made. Two of the three items (7 & 18) that returned negative DMax scores were questions relating to personal growth from the process. This implies those who had an overall negative experience were more likely to say they grew in improvisation and through risk taking; those who were overall more positive more strongly disagreed with feeling they grew in those areas. It calls into question the relationship of growth and struggle as a student. If afforded the opportunity, it would be an interesting factor to investigate in this context.

Item 20 had an acceptable DMax but has the lowest average of any item by far. The positive expression of one participant were far outweighed by the negative reactions of the rest pertaining to the ocarina class. This was unfortunately the only item on the attitude scale pertaining to the ocarina class, but that aspect of the experience must receive additional consideration in the future.

This analysis leaves room for more focused investigation of attitudes toward particular facets of the course. There were many elements that were outside the scope of a survey this brief. Not only is this a suggestion for improvement of this attitude scale, but also an invitation for a new, more extensive investigation overall. However, this assessment can give an overall impression of the process. The mean distribution is generally positive, ranging from 3.18 (item 32) to 4.55 (item 11) with the exception of the one 1.73 (item 20). This implies an overall positive response from the group toward the experience as a whole.

Making Opera in a Dual Language Setting: China - Exit Survey

Item No.	Please indicate your answer by circling the appropriate response.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	The use of the word "opera" in the course's title felt limiting.	SD	D	U	A	SA
2	The concepts taught in Mandarin lessons were not applicable in my day-to-day experiences.	SD	D	U	A	SA
3	Language barriers negatively affected my group's ability to create music.	SD	D	U	A	SA
4	The course readings provided profound perspectives that affect my views on multilingual and multicultural education.	SD	D	U	A	SA
5	I felt comfortable presenting and defending my point of view in class discussions.	SD	D	U	A	SA
6	It was difficult to manage my responsibilities within the required class schedule.	SD	D	U	A	SA
7	I am more comfortable with improvisation than I was before taking this course.	SD	D	U	A	SA
8	The creative strategies I employed for class assignments have given me a new perspective on creativity-based learning strategies.	SD	D	U	A	SA
9	The goals of the course listed in the syllabus were not adequately covered.	SD	D	U	A	SA
10	It was difficult to work with the Xiamen University students due to differences in compositional philosophies.	SD	D	U	A	SA
11	A lack of clarity in assignment goals lead to difficulty in completing those assignments.	SD	D	U	A	SA
12	I see students' diverse funds of knowledge as obstacles for learning.	SD	D	U	A	SA
13	My group struggled to fit our compositions into a cohesive final presentation.	SD	D	U	A	SA
14	Folk music classes served as a source of inspiration for group composition.	SD	D	U	A	SA
15	Xiamen University students were comfortable presenting ideas.	SD	D	U	A	SA
16	Teachers College students were comfortable presenting ideas.	SD	D	U	A	SA
17	Shallow relationships between my group members negatively affected our work.	SD	D	U	A	SA
18	I have benefited from taking risks during this course that I would not have normally taken.	SD	D	U	A	SA
19	Exploring Xiamen and the surrounding areas was an enriching experience.	SD	D	U	A	SA
20	Ocarina lessons did not seem to take the skills of my classmates into account during lesson planning.	SD	D	U	A	SA

21	I feel I have a greater understanding of the intersection of culture and musical composition.	SD	D	U	A	SA
22	Overall, the trip was too expensive.	SD	D	U	A	SA
23	Having the concrete goal of putting together an "opera" helped focus my group's work.	SD	D	U	A	SA
24	I am happy with the music that I made.	SD	D	U	A	SA
25	I felt intimidated by the very serious nature of class discussions.	SD	D	U	A	SA
26	The amount of songwriting assignments and the rate at which they were given felt appropriate.	SD	D	U	A	SA
27	Assignments had too great an emphasis on Western-style music	SD	D	U	A	SA
28	Inconsistency in the schedule for class discussions made it difficult to prepare myself for them.	SD	D	U	A	SA
29	Performing on instruments other than my primary instrument was freeing.	SD	D	U	A	SA
30	I do not believe my experience in Xiamen to be worth the undertaken fiscal, mental, and physical costs.	SD	D	U	A	SA
31	I believe that I will be able to use the strategies I employed in the given assignments to create effective lessons in my future classrooms.	SD	D	U	A	SA
32	I felt I was adequately prepared for this experience before travel commenced.	SD	D	U	A	SA