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General Music Today published online 17 October 2014

DOI: 10.1177/1048371314551412

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General Music Today

1–8

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DOI: 10.1177/1048371314551412

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Abstract

Educated in a digital world, millennial children lack social interaction and actual hands-on activities involving tactile and kinesthetic training. To counteract this educational trend, traditional singing games that allow children to explore and make sense of their world physically can be valuable. This article introduces the traditional Javanese children's singing games, *dolanan anak*, and their function in developing children's cognitive and social skills. Children learn to follow rules and commands; acquire general information about themselves, their family, and their natural environment; and internalize sociocultural values, such as collaboration. The article also highlights the culturally specific musical characteristics of the songs, *tembang dolanan anak*, for example, the traditional Indonesian gamelan principles, such as tuning systems and the concept of stratified polyphony. In addition, it presents teaching strategies and ideas modified for music teachers to incorporate *dolanan anak* into their curriculum to meet the national standards and the goal of globalized education.

Keywords

culture, world music, singing, children's literature, language development, elementary general music, music education, early childhood

The majority of children in the Millennial Generation grow up in a digital world full of hyperlinks, worldwide webs, multimedia, and mobile devices. In music education research, many studies exist about the pros of advancing classroom instruction through the use of technology (e.g., Dammers, 2010; Reese, McCord, & Walls, 2001; Webster, 2002; Williams, 2008). Such benefits may include a more engaging learning environment enriched by digital devices with multisensory and multimedia capacities. Inevitably, digital and multimedia tools are prevalent in children's learning environments to stimulate more effective learning. However, potential problems resulting from the overuse of such technology in the classroom have not been widely discussed. Among the disadvantages, the lack of social interaction and actual hands-on activities involving tactile and kinesthetic training is the most significant loss in children's development.

To counteract this digital trend in education, traditional singing games, an important part of children's early lives that allows them to explore and make sense of their world physically, can be valuable. Children play everywhere, and music is universally an integral part of their play. Through interacting with their peers, children are open to the cultural elements of their society within which both cognitive and social development takes place.

As music classrooms in the United States become more and more diverse, it is necessary for music teachers to be introduced to singing games played by children around the world. Through such activities, teachers can better understand "the nature of children, including those who may populate their classrooms" (Lew & Campbell, 2005, p. 58) and take advantage of the multiple benefits these games offer. This article introduces the traditional Javanese children's singing games, *dolanan anak*, and their educational values, such as the development of children's cognitive and social skills when they interact musically with their peers in these games. This article also highlights the musical characteristics of the songs, *tembang dolanan anak*, that accompany the games. In addition, it presents teaching strategies and ideas modified for music teachers to incorporate *dolanan anak* into their curriculum.

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Dolanan Anak

Literally translated as “children’s play” or “game,” *dolanan anak* is a traditional children’s game in Yogyakarta in central Java, Indonesia. It usually involves a group of children who play games and sing *tembang* (“song” in Javanese) *dolanan anak* together to learn about various social and cognitive skills unique to their culture. Until the early 20th century when public school systems were established in Indonesia, such learning was the only education nonprivileged children received.

Not much has been written about the origin of *dolanan anak*, but a systematic survey was conducted by Hans Overbeck in the 1930s when he lived in Yogyakarta. His collection of games, “Javaansche Meisjesspelen en Kinderliedjes” (Javanese Children’s and Girls’ Singing Games) includes 690 games with titles, lyrics, rules of the games, variations of both the games and lyrics, and pictures of various group games played by children (Overbeck, 1939). Although 690 games were collected in this book, Indriasari (2012) noted only 152 games can still be recognized, and because these singing games relied heavily on oral transmission, only 40% of them have survived with recognizable tunes originally sung during the games.

Endraswara (2005) analyzed the lyrics of those existing *dolanan anak* and categorized them into various types, including word-circle songs, lullabies, prophetic songs about human and divine values, play songs, work songs, and humorous songs with witty and satirical lyrics. He further examined the functions of songs and summarized them into three types: songs to accompany games, songs to accompany ritual ceremonies and dance, and songs sung by themselves. Endraswara stated that regardless of the types of games and songs, the ability to memorize rhymes, melodies, movements, and game rules and to collaborate with each other was extremely essential to Javanese children, because it was through such engagement and interaction that social, cognitive, and kinesthetic skills were developed.

Educational Benefits

Examining the content and meaning of the lyrics of *dolanan anak*, Daru Winarti (2010) considers these singing games an art form of verbal communication through which messages related to children’s cognitive development, such as rules and commands, sociocultural values, and general information about themselves, their family, and their natural environment, can be delivered. In addition, the poetic allusiveness of the lyrics often allows room for children to be imaginative.

The coordination of bodily movements and hand gestures, for example, passing a rock to a steady beat, holding

hands, singing while moving in a circle, forming a line, or imitating animal movements, is always part of the singing games, helping children develop kinesthetically. In most singing games, children are usually required to engage in all these physical activities through which not only kinetic but also spatial and tactile skills develop simultaneously. In such group learning experiences, children need to pay close attention to each other to interact and collaborate intimately.

Collaboration

One important cultural norm highly valued by traditional Javanese is collaboration. Group activities from complex ritual ceremonies to simple agricultural routines are examples of a collaborative life style, or a communal life style, *gotong royong*, that values the group above the individual (Geertz, 1983). In the past, the group participation of children in the singing games reflected this cohesive societal structure that helped the community constitute an essential part of the culture. The structure of the lyrics, especially those in a call-and-response form, illustrates this characteristic.

Through singing and playing games with call-and-response lines, the children naturally learned to take turns, to play, or to sing back and forth to each other. For example, in *Jamuran ya ge gethok* (a full bag of mushrooms), at the end of the song, all the children ask the question, *Jamur apa?* (What kinds of mushrooms?). A selected child then responds to the question with a command telling the rest of the children to act. In this game, Javanese children were able to increase their vocabularies and develop their problem-solving skills and establish a sense of community through *gotong royong*, an important part of Javanese cultural identity (see Figure 1).

Musical Characteristics

Although in the past the songs to accompany the singing games could be sung either with or without *gamelan*, the percussion-dominated ensemble unique to Indonesia, the melodies of these songs were always composed in the two distinctive tuning systems, *slendro* or *pelog* (see Figure 2). *Slendro* is an anhemitonic five-pitch scale with equal-distance intervals, whereas *pelog* is a hemitonic seven-pitch tuning system with two sets of half-step intervals within the scale (Sumarsam; <http://sumarsam.web.wesleyan.edu/Intro.gamelan.pdf>).

Javanese children’s ability to sing in half steps was a result of their immersion in melodies composed in the *pelog* system. Music teachers can use the following two examples in Figure 3 to help students familiarize themselves with *pelog* tuning.

Jamuran

Javanese Children's Song

Ja mu_ ran ya ge_ ge thok Ja_ mu_ a_ pa ya ge_ ge thok Ja

9
mur ga jih mber ji jih sak a ra a ra Sem prat sem prit Ja

17
[all children ask] [child at the center responds]

mur a pa Ja mur a pa Ja mur ? ? Ja mur pa tung

Lyrics with English Translation

<i>Jamuran ya ge gethok</i>	<i>A full bag of mushrooms</i>
<i>Jamur apa, ya ge gethok</i>	<i>What kinds of mushrooms are in the bag?</i>
<i>Jamur gajih mbejjih sakara-ara</i>	<i>Fat mushrooms in the empty garden area</i>
<i>Semprat-semprit jamur apa?</i>	<i>What kinds of mushrooms are out there?</i>
<i>[Ask] Jamur apa?</i>	<i>What kind of mushrooms?</i>
<i>[Answer] Jamur xxx</i>	<i>A kind of mushroom (of the child's selection)</i>
Jamur patung	Mushroom statue *

Figure 1. Jamuran.

Slendro

Pelog

Figure 2. Slendro and pelog tuning systems.

Gundul Pacul

Javanese Children's Song
R.C. Hardjosubroto

Gun dul gundul pa cul cul gem be___ le___ ngan nyung gi nyung gi wa kul kul gem

8
be___ le___ ngan wa kul ngglim pang se ga ne da di sak ra

13
tan wa kul ngglim pang se ga ne da di sak ra tan

Lyrics with English Translation

<i>Gundul gundul pacu cul gembelengan</i>	<i>Baldy baldy, clumsy clumsy!</i>
<i>Nyunggi nyunggi wakul kul gembelengan</i>	<i>He carelessly carries a basket of rice on his head</i>
<i>Wakul ngglimpang segane dadi sak ratan (x2)</i>	<i>The basket falls, the rice spills all over the place. (x2)</i>

Note:

- The circled intervals above are examples of the half-step in *pelog*.
- No specific child is identified as the careless boy carrying the rice because this is only a song, not an accompaniment of a game. Although the satirical lyrics of the song suggest making fun of somebody, the ability to laugh off such humiliation is considered noble in traditional Javanese society. This is why humorous songs with witty and satirical lyrics are popular in their society.

YouTube Links:

- Modern Karaoke version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RaM1pC9rYc>
- Westernized choral arrangement with instrumental accompaniment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLkzNTwXDU>
- Westernized choral arrangement a *cappella*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMecQPFxz9Y>

Figure 3. Children's song in *pelog*: *Gundul Pacul*.

When accompanied by the gamelan, the singing Javanese children are embedded in a rich harmonic texture in which multiple layers of the instrumental melodies and the children's voices are closely intertwined into a stratified polyphony. The many interrelated layers of melodies in the gamelan are derived from *balungan*, a skeleton or main melody. The registers of the gamelan instruments determine the density of the layers. When there's no gamelan, such a concept can still be practiced by adding multiple vocal lines as countermelodies to the main melody (Sumarsam). The musical activity in Figure 4 illustrates this practice.

The ability to spontaneously develop countermelodies was unique to Javanese children because they were immersed in such sonority at a very early age by attending social activities such as ritual ceremonies and festivals where gamelan performance was always an important part. Repeatedly singing the songs while playing the games, children learned these musical concepts and educational values, both aurally and orally, as a result of their close interaction and collaboration with their peers and adults. Playgrounds and streets thus became an effective music classroom and the best cultural laboratory where knowledge and skills necessary for children to develop were spontaneously acquired.

Cublak Cublak Suweng

Javanese Children's Song

Cu blak cu blak su weng su weng ge ting ge len ter man bu ke tun dung gu del pak em pong le ra ler_

re sa pa nggu yu ndhe lik a_ ke sir sir pong de le go

song sir sir pong de le go song sir sir pong de le go song

Lyrics with English Translation*Cublak-cublak suweng**Guess where the earrings are?**Suwenge ting gelenter**The earrings are everywhere.**Mambu ketundung gudel**The water buffalo calf can smell them.**Pak Empong lera-ler**Pak Empong is also looking for them with his eyes rolling left and right.**Sapa ngguyu ndele ake**Whoever has them has to hide them and laugh.**Sir-sir pong dele gosong**Sir, sir, pong! Empty soybean shells***Note:**

Pak (Mr.) Empong is a made-up name for a wise elderly person. "Sir, sir, pong" are nonsense syllables.

Meaning:

The poetic allusiveness of such lyrics, which don't necessarily reflect the rules of the game, illustrates the opportunity for children's heuristic learning. Although it seems to be a nonsense song, it symbolically suggests that while foolish people, like the stupid calf, tend to seek the treasure of happiness from valuable material possessions like the earrings, only people like Pak Empong, wise people with pure hearts, can find true happiness.

Game Instructions:**Players:**

- As many as you wish. To make it exciting, there must be five people at least. Then, prepare something, usually a little rock to be passed and to be hidden by one of the players when they finish passing it before the last line of the song.

Procedure:

- "It" has to bend over completely with his/her face and eyes covered with hands. At the end of the game, "It" has to guess who is hiding the rock. To choose "It," play scissors, rock, and paper.
- Meanwhile, while singing the first three lines of the song, "*cublak-cublak suweng, suwenge teng-gelenter, mambu ketundung gudel, pa empo lera lere, sopo ngguyu ndeliake,*" the other players place one hand on "It's" back and with their other hand pass the rock to the steady beat.
- Before the last line of the song, "*sir-sir pong dele gosong,*" is sung, whoever has the rock must keep it, hide it, and laugh. Usually, to trick the person who is "It," all the children laugh.
- "It" has only one opportunity to guess who has the rock while the other children sing the last line of the song with their index fingers pointing to "It."
- After the last line has been sung twice, the person identified as having the rock must open his/her hand to reveal the rock to "It." If "It" fails, he/she has to resume the "guessing" position for the next round. If "It" succeeds, the person caught with the rock has to become "It" for the next round.

Suggested Musical Activity:

Three prominent musical concepts can be taught in this song:

- Various scales: *slendro* and *pelog*
- Polyphony: ostinato and countermelody
- Gamelan: form and texture

Lesson Procedure

- This song is sung in the *slendro* system, pentatonic scale (*do, re, mi, so, la*).
- Teachers can break the song into two parts, [A] and [B].
- Once the students master the song in unison, the teacher can teach the concept of polyphony by having a group of students sing [B] as an ostinato melody to accompany the rest of the group while they sing the entire song.

(continued)

Figure 4. (continued)

Ostinato

sir sir pong de le go song sir sir pong de le go song sir sir pong de le go song

- If students are musically mature, teachers can add another counter melody to reinforce the students' knowledge about polyphony. This counter melody, added by Javanese music educator Paul Widyawan, is to imitate the gamelan accompaniment featuring nonsense-syllable lyrics to onomatopoeically imitate the sounds of various gamelan instruments, such as *saron* (metallophones), *bonang* (kettle gongs), and *gong* and *kempul* (large hanging gongs).
- The first part of the counter melody (mm. 1-8), *buka*, is an introductory phrase or prelude to the song, a musical idiom unique to central Javanese gamelan.
- Note that although the song is in *slendro*, the counter melody is in the *pelog* system in which half-step intervals are featured.

Solo buka [mm. 1-8]

rem rem ti dem ring ba wa na a neng gih ma dya_ ning ra tri

9 [all join in from m.9]

rem rem ti dem ring ba wa na a neng gih ma dya_ ning ra

YouTube Links:

- Original song with game: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYo1XphTK1I&index=12&list=PLTzcKQsP_foS27-huuAyaT2_EAfl20rH1
- Westernized choral arrangement imitating the original game and the gamelan accompaniment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=di0CMXMG9nE>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6Jt9udgnqQ>
- Modern karaoke version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6gJV6AN2Bc>

Figure 4. *Cublak Cublak Suweng*.

Beyond Music!

The cultural correlates of child development become an important content of children's spontaneous play as exemplified by their singing games. In his fieldwork examining how Venda children developed musically, John Blacking (1973) pointed out that by interacting with their peers and adults, children absorbed what they heard and saw in their daily lives, made sense of it, and created something new. Despite some "genuine" ideas in children's spontaneous musical practices, one cannot ignore that these practices, including singing games, are always shaped by children's cultural sources. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory also emphasizes this culturally oriented system, in which I believe music and language function as catalysts to efficiently help children acquire cultural values, beliefs, and skills in order to acculturate into their society. The examples of the Javanese singing games explain how traditional cultural values were transmitted via *dolanan anak* in Java.

Consisting of a great variety of games and music, *dolanan anak* covers an extensive body of knowledge,

skills, and values essential to children's acculturation in Javanese society. These games not only enhance the development of children's "language and reasoning skills" but also help "foster [children's] social competence and peer-group interaction" (Lew & Campbell, 2005, p. 58). Especially through interacting with older or mature peers in countless game sessions, Javanese children were able to help each other first break the games into manageable units. The musical structure of call and response, for example, allowed children to repeatedly recite the lines (lyrics and melody) until they had memorized them all. By modeling and imitating, children were able to engage in an unconscious learning process while playing with each other. Furthermore, with the collective efforts of all individuals involved in the games, children as a group acquired mental strategies to increase their social and cultural competence. The ability of Javanese children to privilege the group above the individual (*gotong royong*) or to laugh off personal teasing shows the efficiency of the singing games in delivering messages valued by the society and reinforcing them in children's development at a young age.

Although some musical and educational values of the dolanan anak examples provided in this article are culturally specific, American teachers can wisely adapt this singing game tradition and incorporate it into their curriculum to counteract the disadvantages of the overuse of technology and expand their students' musical horizon and make their classroom more globalized.

Benefits of such incorporation might include the following:

- Through concentrated oral and aural learning, students memorize the lyrics, the music, and the rules of the games.
- Through physical interaction, students develop tactile and kinesthetic skills.
- Through group collaboration, students develop social skills.
- Through polyphonic singing, students learn to be aware of what they sing individually and in relation to others to blend into the total texture.
- Through singing on pelog and/or slendro tuning systems, students develop their ability to appreciate non-European scales and therefore increase their musical vocabularies.

In this article, I introduced dolanan anak and examined its educational benefits to demonstrate the value of music not only in catalyzing children's psychomotor, cognitive, and affective development but also in helping them cultivate their strong cultural identity in the society. By incorporating dolanan anak into classrooms, teachers can take advantage of children's playful nature by using games and music as media to help create an all-encompassing learning environment. Working with students on these Javanese singing games, music teachers can also fulfill the three national standards advocating the inclusion of non-European music: "Singing alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music"; "Listening to, analyzing, and describing music"; and "Understanding music in relation to history and culture" (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994). Moreover, learning various singing games such as dolanan anak allows American children, at an early age, to observe the commonalities and differences between them and their counterparts, to make connections with other cultures, and to appreciate and respect them, the ultimate goal of global education. By returning to "unplugged games," teachers can creatively plan their lessons to help the 21st-century children jump out of the "digital box," for example, iPad or similar devices, and to become singing, moving, playing, listening, and thinking children (Campbell, 2010).

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank Dyah Pandam Mitayani and Silvia Guting, two Fulbright Indonesian teaching assistants, for their assistance in the translation, pronunciation, and explanation of the rules of the game. She would also like to express her gratitude to Professor Daru Winarti of the Faculty of Cultural Science at the University of Gadjad Mada in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, for her expertise in traditional Javanese literature and dolanan anak and for sharing materials from her library.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Jui-Ching Wang, an associate professor at Northern Illinois University, teaches music education and world music courses and coordinates the Chinese music ensemble, the Indonesian gamelan ensemble, and the Middle Eastern music ensemble. Her research interests include the study of musicking in cultural contexts, musical preferences, children's singing games, and world music pedagogy.