

Character Education Values in the Mundong Dance: An Arts-Based Model for Strengthening Student Character at Sanggar Seni Solah Bawa, Sukoharjo Regency

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Abstract

Purpose – This study analyzes the character education values embedded in the Mundong Dance choreographed by Christina Sri Asih Handayani at Sanggar Seni Solah Bawa, Sukoharjo Regency, and examines how those values can function as an arts-based medium for character formation. The study focuses on the dance accompaniment, movement, function, and meaning, and the character values these dimensions convey.

Design/Methodology/Approach – The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using a single instrumental case-study design. Data were gathered through participant observation, semi-structured interviews with four purposively selected key informants (the choreographer, the accompaniment composer, a studio trainer, and the studio owner), and documentation. Data were analyzed following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing), with Lickona's tripartite framework of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action used as the analytical lens. Trustworthiness was established through source and technique triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail.

Findings – The analysis identifies four interrelated character education values in the Mundong Dance—skill, religiosity, cooperation, and simplicity—each of which can be traced across Lickona's moral knowing, feeling, and action components. The findings indicate that a structured and continuous arts-learning process at the studio mediates the internalization of these values, positioning the dance as more than entertainment.

Originality/Value – The study contributes an explicit, framework-based mapping of how a locally rooted creative dance operationalizes character education, offering a transferable arts-based pedagogical model relevant beyond its immediate cultural setting.

Keywords: Arts-Based Education; Character Education; Javanese Culture; Mundong Dance; Qualitative Case Study

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I. INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a global educational priority, reflecting a shared concern that academic achievement alone is insufficient to prepare young people for ethical and responsible citizenship. In Indonesia, this concern is institutionalized in the national policy on Strengthening Character Education (Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter), which mandates the cultivation of core values such as religiosity, integrity, mutual cooperation, and independence across all learning environments (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017). Internationally, scholars have long argued that effective character formation requires not merely the transmission of moral knowledge but also the cultivation of moral feeling and moral action (Lickona, 1991, 2020; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Within this paradigm, the arts—and dance in particular—offer a powerful, embodied medium through which values are not only explained but also felt and enacted.

A growing body of research has examined the educational potential of traditional and creative dance. Yulianti, Syaidah, Desyandri, and Mayar (2020) demonstrated that learning dance helps shape the mental resilience of primary-school students, while Restiana and Arsih (2019) and Syefriani (2019) documented the creative processes behind newly composed regional dances. More recently, Kurniati and Kuswarsantyo (2024) analyzed the philosophical meaning of a regional dance and its relevance to community character. While these studies establish that dance carries educational and philosophical

significance, most concentrate either on the aesthetic creation process or on a single dimension of meaning. Comparatively few studies systematically map the character education values embedded in a locally rooted creative dance using an explicit, internationally recognized analytical framework, and fewer still articulate how such values are pedagogically internalized within a studio learning environment.

This study addresses that gap by examining the Mundong Dance, a contemporary creative dance rooted in Javanese tradition, choreographed by Christina Sri Asih Handayani in 2011 at Sanggar Seni Solah Bawa, Sukoharjo Regency. The Mundong Dance narrates the perseverance of traditional herbal-medicine (jamu) makers, a livelihood emblematic of Sukoharjo as the “City of Jamu.” Beyond its function as identity and entertainment, the dance encodes values that are potentially relevant to character formation. Accordingly, this study is guided by three research questions: (1) How are the accompaniment, movement, function, and meaning of the Mundong Dance constructed? (2) What character education values are embedded within these dimensions? (3) How can these values function as an arts-based medium for character formation? By analyzing the dance through Lickona’s tripartite model and relating the findings to the existing literature, this study contributes a transferable, framework-based model of arts-based character education that may inform practice beyond its immediate cultural setting.

II. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a single instrumental case-study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018), in which the Mundong Dance serves as a bounded case through which the broader phenomenon of arts-based character education is examined. A qualitative approach was chosen because it explains conditions narratively through non-numeric data and focuses on the social context and directly observed phenomena (Furidha, 2025). The research site was Sanggar Seni Solah Bawa, Sukoharjo Regency, and the object of analysis was the Mundong Dance choreographed by Christina Sri Asih Handayani.

Informants were selected purposively based on their direct knowledge of the creation and transmission of the dance. Four key informants participated: the choreographer (Christina Sri Asih Handayani), the accompaniment composer (Yohanes Sri Raharjo), a senior studio trainer, and the studio owner. Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, participant observation of rehearsals and performances was used to document movement, accompaniment, costume, and properties. Second, semi-structured interviews explored the informants’ own interpretations of the dance’s function, meaning, and values. Third, documentation was gathered from studio archives and the studio’s social-media channels (Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube), as well as from relevant theoretical and journal literature on character education and dance.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Coding proceeded both deductively and inductively: Lickona’s (2020) tripartite framework of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action provided the deductive analytical lens, while emergent themes were allowed to surface inductively and were subsequently related to the national character-education values (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017). To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied source and technique triangulation, member checking with key informants, and the maintenance of an audit trail, in line with the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Ethically, informants were informed of the purpose of the research and gave their consent for their statements and the studio’s documentation to be used for academic publication.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Research Setting: Sanggar Seni Solah Bawa

Sanggar Seni Solah Bawa was established in 2001 by Christina Sri Asih Handayani in Sukoharjo Regency. Initially based in Jetis Village and later associated with a local Catholic parish, the studio relocated several times and temporarily closed during the COVID-19 pandemic before reopening and finally settling at Taman Budaya Suryani, Sukoharjo. The studio currently enrolls approximately 150 students from kindergarten to senior-secondary level, is open to all genders, and charges only a nominal fee per practice session. It holds biannual dance examinations to build students’ confidence and assess their mastery, and it has represented Sukoharjo Regency in regional arts events such as the Central Java Duta Seni performances. This structured, continuous, and inclusive learning environment is significant for the present analysis because, as discussed below, it is the institutional mechanism through which the values embedded in the dance are internalized by students.



Figure 1. Training venue of Sanggar Seni Solah Bawa, Taman Budaya Suryani, Sukoharjo

2. The Form, Function, and Meaning of the Mundong Dance

The accompaniment of the Mundong Dance was composed by Yohanes Sri Raharjo using Javanese gamelan in the laras pelog tuning system. As the literature notes, musical accompaniment is an integral component that fuses musical and movement elements and conveys aesthetic value through harmony, rhythm, and expression (Hapsari & Naam, 2023). The pelog scale—characterized by wide and narrow intervals—evokes a grand and sacred atmosphere (Risnandar, 2018), which the composer deliberately exploited: the accompaniment combines a fast (lancaran) rhythm depicting jamu makers rising early to harvest empon-empon, a moderate rhythm, and a solemn ketawang rhythm that builds a sacred ambience during the worship sequence. An opening intro orients the audience and sets the dramatic tone (Hadi, 2012). This intentional alignment of rhythm to narrative illustrates how musical structure itself carries meaning rather than merely decorating the movement.

The choreography enacts the daily struggle of a mother who works as a jamu seller, progressing through clearly legible movement motifs: searching for herbs in the field, sorting usable herbs, offering praise and gratitude to God (manembah), grinding the empon-empon, depicting the fatigue of labor, and a concluding pose. According to the choreographer, the dance is typically performed by three to five dancers, a structure that itself embodies cooperation. Functionally, the dance serves as a marker of local identity—reinforcing Sukoharjo’s reputation as the City of Jamu—and as a narrative medium that communicates the traditional process of making and selling herbal medicine (KBBI, 2019). Its meaning, however, is deeper: as Kurniati and Kuswarsantyo (2024) argue, the meaning of a dance is the philosophical and symbolic value expressed through movement, makeup, costume, and floor patterns. In the Mundong Dance, this meaning centers on the perseverance and unyielding struggle of a working mother.



Figure 2. Movement: searching for herbs in the field



Figure 3. Movement: sorting usable herbs



Figure 4. Movement: manembah – offering praise and gratitude to God



Figure 5. Movement: grinding the empon-empon



Figure 6. Movement: depicting the fatigue of working



Figure 7. Final pose as the concluding movement

3. Character Education Values in the Mundong Dance

Building on this descriptive foundation, the analysis identified four interrelated character education values. Following Lickona (2020), each value is examined across three components: moral knowing (the cognitive understanding of the value), moral feeling (the affective attachment to it), and moral action (its behavioral enactment). This framework moves the analysis beyond assertion by specifying how each value is learned, felt, and practiced within the studio.

Skill value

At the level of moral knowing, the precise and intricate movements of the Mundong Dance require students to understand sequence, timing, and bodily control. Affectively, mastering these movements fosters perseverance and a sense of accomplishment. In terms of moral action, students rehearse repeatedly and refine their technique, thereby improving their psychomotor and social skills. As the studio trainer explained, the layered, level-based curriculum compels students to think creatively and meticulously, making the dance highly relevant as a means of developing competence and discipline.

Religious value

The religious value is most evident in the *manembah* (worship) movement, in which dancers express reverence and gratitude to God for the smooth progress of their work. Cognitively, students learn that labor and its results are connected to spiritual gratitude; affectively, the sacred *ketawang* accompaniment cultivates a felt sense of devotion; behaviorally, the gesture models an attitude of gratitude that can extend into daily life. This interpretation aligns with Kartika et al. (2023), who define religious value as faith and devotion internalized through education, and it demonstrates that the dance carries spiritual as well as aesthetic meaning.

Cooperation value

Because the Mundong Dance is performed in groups of three to five, it embodies the value of cooperation (*gotong royong*). Students come to understand that a harmonious performance depends on shared responsibility; they develop an affective commitment to the group; and they enact cooperation by coordinating movement, communicating, and supporting one another throughout the performance.

This resonates with Muaziz et al. (2023), who characterize cooperation as mutual help, positive interdependence, and shared responsibility in completing group tasks, and it indirectly trains students to prioritize collective over individual interests.

Simplicity value

The value of simplicity is conveyed through the dance's unadorned movements, modest makeup, lurik-motif costume, and single property—a tenggok. The costume itself is meaning-laden: the lurik motif symbolizes simplicity, balance, perseverance, and harmony, and is believed in Javanese culture to carry protection and good wishes (Suprayitno & Ariesta, 2014), while the parang motif of the jarik fabric symbolizes strength, courage, and the continuity of life. The tenggok—a woven-bamboo basket historically used to carry agricultural produce—embodies, through its neatly interwoven structure, the harmony and interdependence of communal life (Nurjamil et al., 2019; Darmawan & Hidayat, 2018). Cognitively, students learn that beauty does not require luxury; affectively, they come to value modesty; and behaviorally, they perform with restraint and authenticity.



Figure 8. Mundong Dance costume (lurik and parang-motif jarik)



Figure 11. The tenggok property used in the Mundong Dance

4. Discussion: An Arts-Based Model of Character Formation

Read together, the four values and their distribution across Lickona's three components reveal a coherent pattern: the Mundong Dance does not merely display values symbolically but provides a structured pathway for their internalization. This finding extends prior work in two respects. First, whereas Yulianti et al. (2020) established that dance benefits students' mental development in general terms, the present study specifies the mechanism—how particular movements, accompaniment, and properties are mapped onto identifiable character values and how each is cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally cultivated. Second, whereas Kurniati and Kuswarsantyo (2024) emphasized the philosophical meaning of dance, this study links meaning to a pedagogical process situated within a studio whose structured, continuous, and biannually assessed curriculum operationalizes that meaning into practice.

The key analytical insight is that the studio environment functions as the bridge between symbolic meaning and lived character. Repetition, leveling, public examination, and group performance constitute the conditions under which moral knowing matures into moral feeling and moral action. This positions the Mundong Dance as an example of culturally rooted, arts-based pedagogy that aligns closely

with both Lickona's (1991) holistic conception of character and Indonesia's national character-education values (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017; Koesoema, 2010).

Because the study is based on a single instrumental case, its claims are best understood in terms of analytical rather than statistical generalization. The detailed mapping of values to a recognized framework, however, renders the model transferable: educators in other settings can adapt the same approach—identifying the embedded values of a local art form and structuring a learning process around their cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. In this sense, the study offers an internationally relevant contribution, demonstrating how local cultural heritage can be mobilized as a systematic medium for character education.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyze the character education values embedded in the Mundong Dance choreographed by Christina Sri Asih Handayani and to examine how those values function as an arts-based medium for character formation. The findings show that the dance encodes four interrelated values—skill, religiosity, cooperation, and simplicity—that are expressed through its accompaniment, movement, function, meaning, costume, and properties, and that each value can be traced across Lickona's components of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

The principal contribution of the study lies in showing that the Mundong Dance is not merely a symbolic repository of values but part of a structured pedagogical process: the studio's continuous, leveled, and publicly assessed learning environment mediates the internalization of these values by students. Pedagogically, this suggests that local creative dances can be deliberately integrated into schools and studios as vehicles for the national character-education agenda, and that arts educators can design learning around the explicit cognitive, affective, and behavioral cultivation of culturally embedded values.

The study is limited by its single-case, single-choreographer design, which constrains statistical generalization; its contribution is analytical and conceptual rather than representative. Future research could test the transferability of the proposed model across other regional dances and learning contexts, employ longitudinal designs to measure changes in students' character over time, or incorporate students' and parents' perspectives to triangulate the internalization process more fully.

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