

# Solah Bawa Free Movement as a Whole Person Art Practice

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## ABSTRACT

**Keywords:**

*Solah Bawa*,  
Whole-Person Development.

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*Solah bawa*, a meditative free movement dance, was developed by Sitras Anjilin (the head of *Padepokan Seni* (art center and workshop) *Tjipta Boedaja*, Tutup Ngisor, Kabupaten Magelang, Central Java). A participatory observation towards a group named Komunitas Sabtuan, guided by Sitras Anjilin, and an etic interpretive analysis of the activity's details found that *solah bawa* free movement reflects whole person aspects of human quality development. This article explicates how such art activity as free movement dance can be done by individuals to enhance whole person development. It argues that regular art practice can help individuals develop themselves holistically, and thus, it can promote balanced life.

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## INTRODUCTION

Whole person approach has been implemented in health care and medical services, business management, and education (Hayes et al., 2012; Kwak, 2020; Mills et al., 2020; Stolee et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2020; Vaid & Walker, 2022). Its main agenda is the accommodation and enhancement of human multidimensional aspects of life to develop and improve their quality of life. Researches have been conducted to argue about the importance of whole person approach in the areas as well as the possible attitudes and actions for the relevant caregivers, nurses, doctors, managers, educators, administrators, and policy makers can possibly do (Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Kemp & Fisher, 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Mahoromsalic, 2020; Pelonio-Golvin, 2020; Reddy & Wisneski, 2022). It becomes significant, then, to look at the possible contribution that arts can give to the development of whole person development. A participatory observation among Komunitas Sabtuan, led by Sitras Anjilin, the head of *Padepokan Seni Tjipta Boedaja*, Dusun Tutup Ngisor, Desa Sumber, Kecamatan Dukun, Kabupaten Magelang, Central Java, it attempts to show that the practice of meditative free movement dance, named *solah bawa*, has its potential to enhance whole person development through arts and even more individual daily routine. This article describes what *solah bawa* is and what components of whole person it has to promote human holistic development.

## METHOD

Data collection about *solah bawa* dance or free movement meditation has been conducted initially with a short stay in *Padepokan Seni Tjipta Boedaja*, Tutup Ngisor, Desa Sumber, Kecamatan Dukun, Kabupaten Magelang. During the seven-day live in, a four-time introductory sessions of free movement dance meditation workshops

were held. In the last session, the researcher was introduced to *Komunitas Sabtuan*, which conducts *solah bawa* practice every Saturdays. Data collection was done through regular participations of the weekly *solah bawa* practices every Saturdays, in Magelang. The pattern of the regular activity has been helpful to the data collection as it contains oral sharing of the individuals' experiences after they practice. The activity guide, Sitras Anjilin, and the community's members and participants become the resource people whose stories have helped understand and make sense this free movement dance as a way to develop whole person individuals. The themes that emerged from the recorded data were clustered and analyzed with etic interpretive method to give meanings to what they reflect.

Data interpretation was made following the Whole Person Development Inventory (WPDI) which was a development of Hong Kong Baptist University's WPDI to monitor their students' holistic development. It comprises six domains, covering the intellectual, physical, professional, psychological, social and spiritual capacities, with 15 factors to pay attention to (*Whole Person Development Inventory*, 2022) as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Hong Kong Baptist University's WPDI

Domain	Factors
1. Social	A. civic responsibility B. community care C. cultural engagement D. family relationship E. peer relationship
2. Spiritual	F. spiritual quest G. moral commitment H. art appreciation
3. Psychological	I. emotional health self-appreciation
4. Intellectual	J. intellectual capability (cognition)
5. Professional	K. professionalism L. leadership
6. Body (Physical)	M. health maintenance N. physical fitness (sensual awareness)

**Table 2.** WPDI for *solah bawa*

Domain	Factors
1. Body (Physical)	A. physical fitness (sensual awareness) B. health maintenance
2. Intellectual	C. intellectual capability (cognition)
3. Psychological	D. emotional health E. self-appreciation
4. Spiritual	F. spiritual quest G. moral commitment H. art appreciation
5. Social	I. civic responsibility J. community care K. cultural engagement L. family relationship M. peer relationship
6. Professional	N. professionalism O. leadership
7. Environmental	P. ecological awareness
8. Material	Q. financial & wealth

The detailed breakdown of *solah bawa* practices with the stories collected from the participants revealed that it covered eight domains, including physical, cognitive or intellectual, psychological, spiritual, social, professional, environmental, and material areas. Besides the additional domains, the environmental and material, the order is rearranged to meet the order of *solah bawa* practice, which begins with the physical. Each domain has its detail factors to place. Those factors and domains apply as intersectional one to the others as to show them as integrated parts of a holistic state. Those parts of the whole-person is shown in Table 2.

The findings and discussion below elaborate that *solah bawa* contains those factors as a whole person practice to develop good qualities of life.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### **Solah Bawa: Meditative Free Movement Dance**

*Solah bawa*, which means movements and acts, has been developed by Sitras Anjilin after his guru's *joged* free movement dance Amerta movement. A Javanese dancer-guru, Suprapto Suryodarmo, or known as *Mbah Prapto*, found Amerta movement with its three-field expressions, including Human, Sacred, and Nature (Lise Lavelle, 2021, p. 15). Unlike his guru, Sitras developed his *solah bawa* free movement or *olah rasa* (the cultivation of inner being) based on the symbolical concept of *hasta brata* or the eight elements of the Universe. They are the elements of sun, moon, stars, sky, wind, water, fire, and soil. People can relate those elements to human characteristics and personalities, and they also can explore them for creative works, including dances (Kusumaningtyas, 2022). The term "dance" in this meditative practice refers to Javanese *joged* which means free dancing movement as being distinguished from *beksan* which means dance performance or art. Therefore, in this paper the term free dancing movement and free movement dance may be used interchangeably to refer to *solah bawa*.

*Solah bawa* can be conducted in such various places as the Hindu or Buddhist temples, Catholic prayer caves and gardens, even one's yards, rice fields, open grass field or the amusement part or market. The open hall or *pendopo Padepokan Seni Tjipta Boedaja*, becomes the readily available place for it, especially for specific workshop and when the weather disabled people to make a short walk or travel to a certain location. In certain occasion such as in *Suran* ritual, *solah bawa* may be conducted in Romo Yoso Sudarmo's cemetery, behind the *Padepokan*, to pay respect to the late founder of *padepokan*. There is no specific requirement regarding the place because the free movement dance may be practiced for various purposes, including rituals, performance, and even various practices.

In Saturday's practices, *solah bawa* follows the pattern of free movement practice, sharing, and the creation of silence. The participants are free to move their bodies, following what the parts of the bodies seem to want, in a meditative way. There is no specific instruction, even for the new comers. The participants can just move their bodies, observing every movement, and recognizing every part of their own bodies, while keeping aware of the presence. In this full awareness of themselves, they are to be open and responsive to the others' presence and movements, so that they can respond them accordingly. Awareness is fundamental during the meditative free movement activities as it makes the participants stay connected with the present time and environment. They are encouraged to "read" their body as the microcosmos with its patterns and complexity that reflect the macro cosmos. This view is like what Mulder (2005) describes as Javanism. In the weekly practice, the free movement may last between 30 and 60 minutes. Then, all practitioners will sit in circle on the floor or ground to share their free movement meditation previously.

The free movement meditation session is followed with a sharing session, when everybody is invited to share their unique experiences of the free dancing movement meditation practice. This is simply a sharing moment, without judgement, evaluation, or correction of anything related to the free movement dance meditation. Very often, it is more on exploring the experiences which may be labelled and are valued as meaningful. The whole session is closed with the activity named *menciptakan hening* or “creating silence.” According to Sitras Anjilin, it is different from what the other meditation is doing as *mengheningkan cipta* or “silencing creation.” It means that with the freedom of the body and full awareness, a *solah bawa* practitioner creates silence to enter the microcosmos and relate to macro cosmos. Again, awareness is vital in this part of practice.

### ***Solah Bawa as A Whole Person Practice***

#### **Physical Fitness and Health Maintenance**

*Solah bawa*’s free movement allows the practitioners to move their bodies as the body organs want them to do. It is often called as “reading the body” or “listening to the body.” Body parts are acknowledged and given full attention as each is moved freely and slowly. Slowness is necessary to make the reading and listening to the body so thorough that the practitioner will be able to discover the previously unrecognized body parts when they were doing their daily activities and chores in the rushing world. The practitioners can also explore possible movements that their bodies can do. Stretching, walking, running, sitting, bending knees and elbows, bowing down, and even crawling or laying on the ground are some of the common moves that the practitioners made. Those activities become like an exercise for the 30-60-minute session of free movement dance meditation.

Gatot Sunantoro, an etawa goat breed farmer, who is also an active *solah bawa* practitioners, mentioned that one of the things that made *solah bawa* enjoyable for him was its use for the physical exercise (group conversation on January 25, 2022). Sitras Anjilin also explained that in many cases he found, the moves make human blood circulate better (personal conversation, March, 2022). Body moves keeps the organs strong and thus, be able to function accordingly. Body fitness makes the practitioners able to keep aware and concentrate on the activities. Opening eyes during *solah bawa* is aimed to maintain the practitioners’ awareness of their present circumstances. Awareness is a key to concentration exercises. In other words, the activation of mind to keep awake without thinking becomes a practice for the brain and the body. For those whose daily activities are working in the office, thinking, this practice is helpful to maintain the balance of their mind. In addition to that, the movement keeps the body fresh, and therefore, preserves fitness.

A few practitioners found that *solah bawa* had become a way to heal from their illness. For example, Mbilung, from Magelang, who suffered trigger finger, found *solah bawa* very helpful to make his fingers move normally. He said that he practiced moving his fingers slowly during the practice, and also in between his daily activities he took time to move in the dance meditation mode. After some time, he realized that his hands were able to move normally. The testimony came from Novi, a dancer from Boyolali. She mentioned that *solah bawa* was one of her attempts to heal herself after the brain surgery. She found it relaxing and (sharing on January 29 and February 26, 2022). Regular exercise is beneficial not only for the strength of the muscles and body organ, but also for the improvement of cognitive function (<https://www.Verywellhealth.com/the-benefits-of-exercise-1746000>).

Providing space for the body to move freely has hardly been found. This free movement dance meditation provides enough space for every individual to allow their bodies to move following what the body parts intend to move. It allows the physical elements to be activated in the mode of acceptance.

### Cognition (Intellectual Capability)

Feifei and Boros's (2021) experimental research on the benefits of walking as a meditative exercise shows that the activity helped their participants to get better sleep and wake up fresher. The study found that the four-week exercise in the aerobic walking indirectly helped them concentrate better. It means that exercise contributes to the development of cognitive function. Amerta movement practitioners also shared the benefit of the free movement meditation for their creativity (Morein, 2014). Even though nobody did any specific research on the physiological effect of *solah bawa* on cognition, it can be inferred that the free movement meditation was influential to people's intellectual capability. Sitras Anjilin always reminds the practitioners to open their eyes and keep themselves aware of their being in the present place, time, and situation. In the middle of the moves, the practitioners would be instructed to stop in their position and observe the environment with their senses. The activation and even cultivation of sensual functions enhances concentration and cognitive awareness of human body, which eventually lead to the improvement of intellectual capability.

Sitras Anjilin testified that body and senses recognition applied for any practitioners regardless their background. For artists, such awareness could be a part of exploration of moves, and often it resulted on the creation of dance performance (sharing on February 26, 2022). In addition to that, Ismanto, a sculptor-artist living in Sengi, the neighboring village of padepokan, also highlighted that *solah bawa* gave opportunities to explore both the body and the environment. It could become the sources of ideas for creating any art works, be it dances, paintings, sculptor, stories, or any other possible performance arts (sharing on April 9, 2022, in Studio Mendut, Magelang) as what Morein (2014, p. 26) stated as "creating is recognizing the moment." Kuntari, a dancer from Prambanan, also shared that she was amazed to find herself able to produce difficult movements when she did *solah bawa* in the special practice for the commemoration of Romo Yososudarmo's passing in 2020. She said that she could not repeat the move outside *solah bawa* practice. However, she realized that she had the capability to create such performative moves when she surrendered and accepted what her body told her to do. With that said, *solah bawa* may become a means of cultivating creativity, which is a fundamental part of cognitive function improvement. The enhancement of creativity is paradoxically within the mode of acceptance to any possibilities that the body may make.

### Emotional Health & Self-Appreciation

Emotional health and self-appreciation summarize what mental health condition is according to WHO. It is "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (2021, p. 1). Hong Kong Baptist University's whole person development inventory describes that emotional health includes one's ability to recognize, manage, and regulate her emotions; while self-appreciation is characterized with the ability to understand, appreciate, and affirm oneself (2022, p. 2). Mental health may be related with physical health problems, within which severe illness such as cancer, cardiovascular disorders, HIV infection, etc. may cause frustration and hopelessness as well as loneliness that led to depression. As previously mentioned, *solah bawa* is beneficial to maintain physical health and fitness, and it also gives the benefit of enhancing self-appreciation and emotional health.

Mbilung, for example, keeps practicing *solah bawa* after he realized that his trigger fingers were cured after practicing the free movement dance. His appreciation to his body increased as he read and listened to his body in the practice (sharing on January 29, 2022). Gatot Sunantoro and Setiyoko shared that *solah bawa* had helped them recognize their inner beings, and so, they could develop their self-appreciation (sharing on January 29, 2022). At the first place, they grew confident with who they were. Their awareness of themselves enabled

them to recognize their rootedness to their cultural identity as they observed themselves in the free movement dance meditation. Gatot Sunantoro claimed that he obtained his confidence to choose to be the only ettawah goat breeder as being partly influenced by the free movement practice. Even though it might be hard to accept by those who did not experience it, phenomenological view of it would validate Gatot's claim of his experience. Setiyoko also admitted that he grew more confident with himself than before as he started learning Amerta movement and now joined the free movement meditation group in *Komunitas Sabtuan*. With that said, this free movement meditation has been an enhancing element to their self-appreciation.

### **Spiritual Quest, Moral Commitment, and Art Appreciation**

Spiritual element is very obvious in *solah bawa* practice. As previously mentioned, it has been developed with the Javanism's view of microcosmos and macrocosmos. It perceives the divine as immanent instead of transcendent. It means that such Javanism, which is more an attitude towards life than a religion, can be applied across religions (Mulder, 2005). *Solah bawa* shapes the practitioners to be ones with awareness of what is happening within themselves, and therefore, they are able to commit to the morality to preserve harmony. The latter will be elaborated further in the next section.

The experience of Ye from Magelang highlights the interference of *solah bawa* into shaping his moral commitment. His craze of dancing and playing in Javanese traditional theater made him choose to be a pimp in order to earn money without too much effort. As he started to do the dancing meditation, he decided to stop being such outcast. He shared that stopping from being a pimp put him in financial troubles. However, he was happy with his decision to live a decent life, away from criminality, because such kind of life gave him inner security. Ye's experience becomes an example of how *solah bawa* may impact people to be loyal to their moral commitment.

### **Civic Responsibility, Community Care, Cultural Engagement, Family Relationship, and Peer Relationship**

It has mentioned previously that harmony is fundamental in Javanism. The spiritual attitude is elaborated to the social relation. *Solah bawa*'s practice to be open and aware of the others' presence provides a practice to cultivate the attitude. Sitras Anjilin, Bambang, Untung, Gatot Sunantoro, Setiyoko, Mbilung and Ye actively involve in their own hamlets and villages' social activities. It shows how they fulfill their civic responsibility, care for their community, engagement to cultural activities, and responsibilities to maintain family and peer relationship. They shared that what they experienced with *solah bawa* had helped them to achieve emotional control and mature spirituality. As the result, they are viewed by their fellow villagers and even visitors as models in conducting social life. Untung, for example, has been the leader of the covid-19 task force in his village. He gave exemplary discipline to help thwart the spread of covid-19 in his village. He shared that he would visit his neighbors one by one to explain the importance of putting on health maskers, while he also showed that he did not forget to conduct the rituals to keep the village's welfare and safety. By doing so, he becomes a model for a responsible citizen. It also shows how he cares about his neighbors and society.

### **Professionalism and Leadership**

*Solah bawa* should be done in full awareness, and that means punctuality and discipline matter. Sitras Anjilin shows it whenever he leads *solah bawa* practice. He would start on time, conduct each section with specific time division, and so, the whole regular practice would finish in two hours. He explained that punctuality and discipline was basic to earn people's trust. Being trustworthy is important, and Sitras has proved to be a good leader by becoming a role model for the members of the hermitage. Time awareness as well as carefulness not

to be carried away in the comfort zone caused by the free movement dance meditation is always reminded by Sitras Anjilin. He always reminded that to stay too long in comfort was not the point of *solah bawa*. Instead, *solah bawa* gave a break off the hectic life for the practitioners to be able to face busyness with fresher bodies and minds. *Solah bawa* free movement, in fact, contains systematic ways of arranging time and awareness. With that said, *solah bawa* has the meaningful values of management, that is significant to develop professionalism and leadership.

### **Ecological Awareness**

One of the instructions given in *Solah bawa* practice is to greet the environment. For example, in an introductory practice of *solah bawa* to a few university students from Satya Wacana Christian University, Sitras Anjilin instructed the new practitioners to communicate with the trees. For the new practitioners, to communicate with non-human beings was hardly done. It was their first experience, and some of the points they highlighted in the sharing session were gratitude for the freshness and oxygen the trees provided and sadness for the indecent acts and attitude that human beings had done to plants by cutting them wildly for their own benefits. Another exemplary practice of *solah bawa* that enhances ecological awareness was conducted in the ritual of *sedekah gunung* (thanksgiving to the mountain). In the last ritual, on February 10, 2022, free movement practitioners from different cities and towns joined to conduct the dancing meditation in the open space near the river in the edge of Tutup Ngisor. The practitioners conducted *solah bawa* to send their thanksgiving prayers. It is specifically sent to Mount Merapi because the people in the village perceive the mountain as a part of their community. It has to be understood that as previously mentioned, the concept of microcosmos and macrocosmos in Javanism has a strong influence in *solah bawa* practice. Thus, it can be said that the free movement meditation is rooted to the nature.

### **Financial and Wealth**

Money and material wealth become the least element that *solah bawa* resembles. Its emphasis on the importance of personal, mental, and spiritual development, *solah bawa* places material matters as the last thing to pay attention to. As the practitioners obtain the previously mentioned benefits for their personal development, material issues would be shifted to the building relationship among friends who become like extended families for them through the regular meetings for practice. *Solah bawa* is not for money generating activity, but it helps the practitioners be able to develop a clear perspective of utilizing material wealth in proper ways. Ye's experience above can be an example of how morality outweighed material needs. He chose to live decently, and left the dark side of his life. His wealth may drastically decrease, but his peaceful feelings towards his life was more meaningful for him. The community can be a space for the participants to share and to help each other, even though that is not its main purpose. Again, friendship become the basis for the life they build within the community.

## **CONCLUSION**

The discussion above shows that *solah bowo* enhance the improvement of one's body, cognition, psychology, spirituality, social relationship, environmental awareness, and material wisdom. The interrelatedness of those elements in one practice of free movement dance meditation reinforces whole person development. What Sitras Anjilin and participants of *Komunitas Sabtuan*, which is centered in *Padepokan Seni Tjipta Boedaja*, Tutup Ngisor, Magelang, has developed through *solah bawa* shows that art can be a meaningful means to develop qualified individual with physical and mental health as well as balance of cognitive, spiritual, social, professional, ecological and material aspects of life.

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