

EXPLORATION OF WATERCOLOR PAINTING ON LOCAL CULTURE THEMES TO IMPROVE CREATIVITY AND ART SKILLS

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Abstract. The purpose of this research is to improve children's creativity and art skills through the exploration of watercolor painting based on local culture in the Omah Sinau Puntan Community, Ngijo, Semarang. The activity was motivated by the low ability of children to use watercolor as a painting medium and the high dependence on gadgets which reduced creative activities. The method used is a practice-based participatory approach through exploratory training using alternative media such as skewers, salt, candles, soap, tissues, and alcohol. The results showed a significant improvement in the aspects of technical skills, visual expression, and understanding of local cultural values. Children are more daring to experiment with colors, create unique visual effects, and understand the local story philosophy of "Bale Kambang". This program also has positive implications for improving cultural literacy and strengthening children's character through art media.

Keywords: exploration, painting, watercolor, local culture, creativity

1. Introduction

Amaludin (2024) informed that 3000 children and adolescents had to undergo therapy at a mental hospital because they had mental disorders due to gadget addiction. The use of gadgets for a long time for children can cause speech and language disorders in children (Wati, 2021). Children tend to have difficulty interacting with the social environment so that it affects the child's association with his immediate environment (Putri, 2017).

This is one of the goals of the flagship program of the learning community, Omah Sinau Puntan in the form of creative activities to paint together with the theme of preserving Indonesian folklore. Through painting, children are free to express their imagination in the form of doodles, which cannot be expressed through words (Fatmawati et. al, 2022; Nurramadhani, 2022). In fact, it is not uncommon for painting to be used as art therapy whose visualization is done using hands or finger painting (Supriyadi, 2025; Winata, 2023). To develop skills in painting, exploration is needed that is able to facilitate the process of painting, so that children are able to grow and develop creativity which is defined as the ability to combine something new based on existing materials and experiences that have been experienced into something meaningful (Matroji, 2000; Sa'adah, 2025).

Without creative activities, art will seem very boring (Junaedi, 2020). One of the characteristics of the birth of creativity is the factor of a healthy psychological condition and good thinking skills (Syafi'i, 2019). A creative person's way of thinking is to have curiosity, imagination, experimentation, and exploration (Mulyasa, 2012). Exploration in watercolor painting is applied to generate creativity in work (Duane, 1984). The form of creativity can be done by exploring several parts such as techniques, media and tools, or the process of making paintings. One of the applications in this study is media exploration, namely by replacing the function of the brush by using other supporting materials in the residential environment.

The main purpose of this research is to make it easier for children to learn painting in a fun way, so that children do not have trouble making their paintings. This project is also an effort to preserve regional cultural literacy carried out by Omah Sinau Puntan, and every work produced is more productive and has positive benefits for children's growth and development.

The urgency of the research is that the researcher seeks to answer the challenge of preserving local culture in Indonesia, especially in Central Java through a watercolor painting exploration program with the theme of local wisdom by empowering the Omah Sinau Puntan community so that it has an impact on children's productive activities by improving skills and creativity through watercolor painting activities.

2. Approach Method

This study uses a **practice-based participatory approach**. All participants are members of the Omah Sinau Puntan Community between the ages of 5-15 years. The activity is carried out through four main stages:

2.1. Pre-Activity:

The pre-activity was carried out by identifying the theme of local folklore that would be illustrated by the children in the Omah Sinau Puntan community. Furthermore, socialization was carried out to find out the competence of children in mastering knowledge and practice, as well as introducing the concept of watercolor painting exploration with various supporting media.

2.2. Exploration Implementation

The implementation of watercolor painting exploration activities is carried out including the exploration stage of various supporting media, the detail stage, and the finishing stage.

The first step is to create a watercolor artwork using the exploration method of various non-conventional supporting media including skewers, salt, tissues, wax, spray, soap, and alcohol to create a distinctive visual effect of watercolor.



Figure 1. Watercolor painting exploration tools and materials

Source: Author, 2025

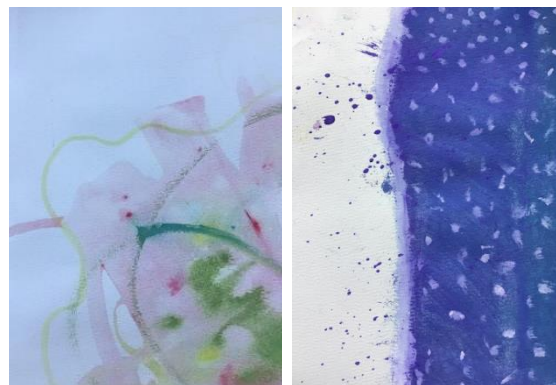


Figure 2. One of the results of the exploration of watercolor painting media

Source: Author, 2025

The next step is the detail creation stage, which refers to the prepared manuscript. In this case, the manuscript used is a manuscript entitled "Bale Kambang" by Panca Utami Dewi, a writer from the city of Semarang.

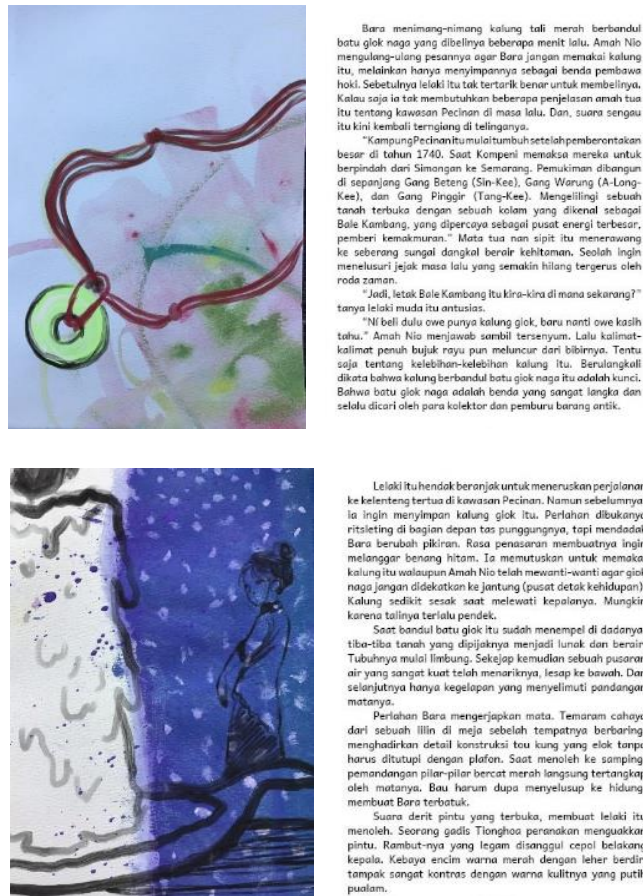


Figure 3. Detailed illustration results according to the script
Source: Author, 2025

The final stage in the process of implementing this watercolor painting exploration is the finishing stage. At this stage, the process of editing and filing each image produced with a script that is in harmony with the illustrations that have been made is carried out. At this stage, the mapping process or layout arrangement uses *the Adobe Indesign application* which produces visualizations in the form of a print-ready book view.

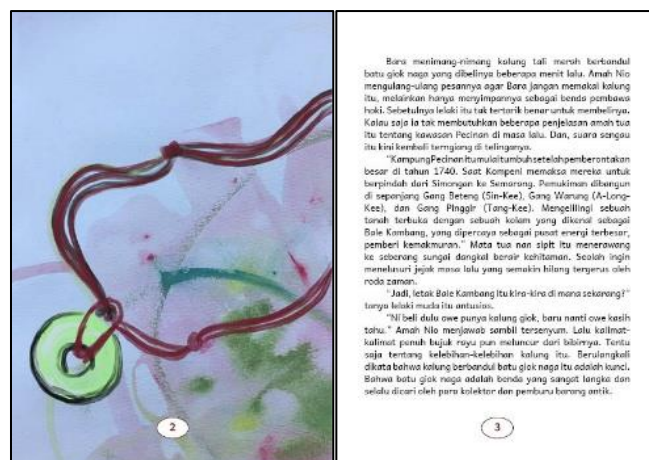


Figure 4. Edited results using the Adobe Indesign application
Source: Author, 2025

2.3. Documentation and Publications

The activities carried out after the work is completed are assembled into one book that is ready to be printed, then the work is documented as the work of the Omah Sinau Puntan community and the plan is to be published in the Omah Sinau Puntan community gallery.

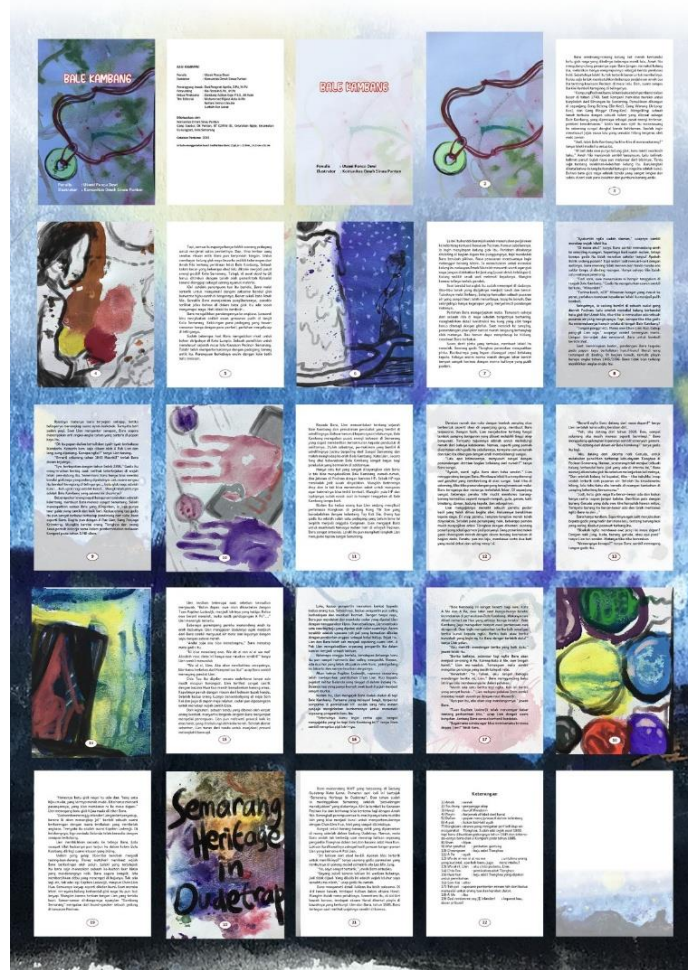


Figure 5. The final documentation results and are ready to be printed into a book

Source: Author, 2025

3. Results and Discussion

Based on research data from observations and interviews, this program has produced data described as follows.

3.1. Watercolor Painting Knowledge and Skill Development

Based on the results of observations, as many as 50% (out of a total of 34 children) stated that they liked watercolor painting. The answer is not liking because children find it difficult to use watercolors, because of their thin nature and faster drying power making the color difficult to overwrite with other colors. This data is strengthened by the results of children's interviews directly related to children's difficulties when painting watercolors.

After participating in the watercolor painting exploration program with various media, it turns out that children's interest in watercolor painting has changed. There was a high increase in results, namely 94% (32 out of 34 children) expressed interest in trying paint painting. This statement is directly proportional to the results of an interview with Omah Sinau Puntan who said that this exploration activity is the first experience for children to try to use watercolors without being required to use a brush when sketching the colors on paper.

Exploration activities were carried out through demonstrations by introducing basic techniques for painting watercolors, such as *wet on wet* and *dry on wet* techniques. Children are shown the process gradually and practice independently in their respective works.

Furthermore, children are invited to experiment with surrounding materials, namely experimenting using non-conventional media such as wax, salt, spray, tissues, skewers, liquid soap, and alcohol. The use of such media can encourage the appearance of unique and unexpected visual effects. The following are the results of documentation of some of the effects that have been successfully raised in the process of creation.

Table 1. Experimental activities

Ingredients and effects	Visualization results		
Candle The effect of using wax that leaves traces that cannot be mixed with the basic color that is sketched			
Salt The salt effect gives rise to a texture that absorbs the surrounding colors and fluids			
Spray Air Water-filled spray effect spreads the color liquid in all directions			
Tissue Tissue effect that visually displays the texture of the fabric			
Liquid Soap The effect of liquid soap that leaves the final effect is a bubble texture			
Slingshot Skewer effect that looks like grass or a pile of textured lines			
Alcohol Alcohol effects that have a unique visual and are different from other object effects. Alcohol is able to give rise to a cracked texture in the middle of the color mixture.			

Source: Author, 2025

Based on the results of the implementation, this exploration method creates a fun learning atmosphere, eliminates tension in work, and fosters a child's attitude that is free to express his ideas without worrying about making mistakes in his strokes. Thus, the exploration process not only improves technical skills in painting using watercolors, but also strengthens children's aesthetic experience and creativity in creating watercolor paintings.

3.2. The Effectiveness of Exploration Methods in Improving Creativity and Watercolor Painting Skills

Interest in watercolor painting increased, from 50% to 94%. The development of imagination and creativity, from 50% to 91%, increased the appreciation of stories with local cultural backgrounds from 53% to 94%, and affected the knowledge of local culture in the Semarang City area from 29% to 91%. Through the exploration method, children become more interested and not afraid to experiment using watercolor media, which contributes to an increased desire to continue trying to paint using watercolors.

In addition, the theme of local culture raised is able to provide broader information to children in instilling cultural values and moral values contained in the illustrated story theme. When children illustrate indirectly, children also read the script and learn visual forms in their imagination. This is able to stimulate children's critical thinking in visualizing a story scene into an illustration.

Based on the results of observations, there was a significant improvement in several aspects, including **Color and texture experiments**: participants were able to produce a variety of expressive visual effects. **Self-reliance**: children begin to dare to try new ideas without fear of making mistakes. **Technical skills**: increased control over watercolor media and color composition.

Children's works display personal characteristics and strong visual richness, with the influence of a spontaneous expressionist style. The best works are adapted into digital illustrations of *Bale Kambang's stories*, showing the integration between fine arts and cultural literacy.

3.3. The Impact of Local Cultural Introduction on Cultural and Character Literacy

The illustrated story is "Bale Kambang" by the writer Utami Panca Dewi as an introduction to the local culture of Semarang City to children wrapped in cultural acculturation with a Chinese-Javanese background. This exploratory activity helps children understand each symbol, story, and value of local culture contained both contextually and its implications in understanding cultural literacy that grows meaningfully in a fun way.

Based on the results of interviews with children at Omah Sinau Puntan, they were more interested if they read their own illustrated books. 30 out of 34 or 88% of children expressed their desire to read books made by their own illustrations to be shared with other children, so that they are interested in reading books. 25 out of 34 children or 74% supported that the illustration content came from local cultural elements.

Viewed from the perspective of character formation, this watercolor painting exploration activity encourages the development of children's sense and confidence and courage in expressing their ideas independently on a sheet of *watercolor paper*. This process also trains children's tenacity and sense of responsibility for their work, as well as their ability to make decisions when they understand the dialogue script and ask for it in the form of paintings. Children also learn to appreciate the process and work of their friends in their community, which of course has an impact on the imprint of a tolerant and empathetic character towards fellow members of Omah Sinau Puntan.

The integration of painting with storytelling activities in the final implementation of Bale Kambang's work after it was completed as a book also strengthened character values such as curiosity, honesty, and cooperation with children. Children can not only create a visual artwork, but also convey ideas, listen to stories, and reflect on the meaning of the work they make. Thus, this study shows that the exploration of watercolor painting with various media is a very effective means in building cultural literacy as well as the formation of children's character as a whole in the Omah Sinau Puntan community.

3.4. Obstacles in the Process of Implementing Watercolor Painting Exploration

During the implementation process of the watercolor painting exploration program, there are several challenges including differences in the basic abilities of children in communities whose ages are also relatively variable. In addition, there are also challenges found in the practical process, namely sometimes children experience technical difficulties in controlling the moisture content in the paint so that the visualized effect is not as expected.

Answering each of these challenges, personal mentoring and gradual training have succeeded in overcoming each of these challenges. Exploratory strategies have been shown to increase learning motivation and interest in art.

4. Conclusion

The exploration of watercolor painting with various local media has proven to be effective in increasing children's creativity, skills, and cultural literacy in the Omah Sinau Puntan Community. This activity strengthens the character of children as creative individuals,

appreciative of culture, and has a high spirit of work. The implementation of exploratory methods can be recommended as a model of cultural-based contextual art learning in communities or educational institutions.

Conflict of Interest Declaration

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this article.

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