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Made Taro: Learning values through old games

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Made Taro: (*JP/Wasti Atmodjo*)

Made Taro promises two things: Total dedication and a lively show.

Even when he is sick – which is often – he rarely fails to show up to tell his stories and educate children at his Kukuruyuk Studio.

The smiles and uproarious laughter of the children strengthens his resolve to keep on preserving all sorts of stories and traditional plays.

Slowly but surely Made Taro, now a white-haired 68, has been digging up stories that long lay hidden in the community. For years, he has been editing them to make them more interesting and more accessible for children, and compiled them into award-winning books.

Since 2001, he has collected more than 200 games and 150 stories – most traditional, some his own – from his own childhood memories and his parents (who became pemangku (spiritual leaders)), and from senior community leaders, children’s magazines, reference books and story books, and stories on lontar (dried palm leaves).

To date, 35 of Made Taro’s works, comprising folk stories, songs and traditional games, have been published. The stories he has published are not restricted to those from Bali or in Balinese; some are published in both Indonesian and English to reach children both here and overseas.

“The local values of Bali don’t apply just to the Balinese,” he says. “And the Balinese also need to know and learn from the values of people outside Bali.”

His work has garnered him several awards related to the preservation of culture, writing, composing and storytelling, including the Adi Karya award from the Indonesian Publishers’ Association and the Bali Award. He has also been honored in education, chosen as an example of a leading teacher at the

provincial level, and teaching at schools in Darwin, Australia, and as an honorary lecturer at Udayana University and at Dwijendra University. The Balinese government also asked him to write some of the school curriculum – material that was used until the government stopped the program.

His research and writing career began as a hobby, during the 35 years when he taught anthropology.

In the 1970s, he formed Teater Sipaku-paku, a student performing arts group. Some shows were broadcast by Denpasar Television under Made Taro's direction; their popularity among viewers – “We got a positive reaction,” he says modestly – inspired him to develop a storytelling studio for children.

It began with the eight children who lived near Made Taro's house. He gathered them together and told them stories, sang songs and taught them games. The children were interested and behaved themselves.

”I told them that they could come to the house after they had eaten, bathed and finished doing their homework. And they always kept their promises. So I added ethics to my other teachings.”

One day, he found himself without a new story to tell. So he started looking, hunting through story books and magazines. Whenever he returned to his hometown, he asked older people about old stories and folktales.

The group of children that he was teaching continued to grow, and on June 15, 1979, Made Taro established the Kukuruyuk Studio, which focuses on children's activities, with the main activities being story telling and playing.

Kukuruyuk Studio has appeared several times on Denpasar Television, with the children playing traditional games and at times displaying their talent in opera performances, some of which used the Balinese language.

Made Taro set himself another goal: To revive traditional children's games and avoid modern consumer games. With his goal strongly supported by a number of parties, he later had the chance to perform on stage at the Ubud Writers' and Readers' Festival and at the Bali Art Festival. He received other invitations from government and private schools and some expatriate communities in Bali.

Also inspiring him was the enthusiasm of parents – mostly well-off and educated – who invited him to perform or who sent their children to his studio. He found their interest indicated the community's desire to entertain their children without the need for all sorts of modern games.

Made Taro said his stories and games were quite simple, making them easy to understand for elementary school children, and are sure to entertain because of his use of singing, storytelling and playing. As long as the children aren't feeling embarrassed or shy, Made Taro finds no problems.

What he believes in certainly are the benefits to be gained from teaching traditional games.

Children must obey the rules so this creates agreement among group members. Each child must also be patient waiting for his or her turn to play and must stay in position in line after finishing their part.

The interaction means the children learn about the spirit of togetherness, and learn to be supporting whether they win or lose. They become honest and responsible individuals; they develop mutual understanding and they grow brave.

Thanks to the work of this one man.

Some of Made Taro's books

- *Bawang dan Kesuna* (Onion and Garlic; Balai Pustaka, 1997)
- *Lagu-Lagu Permainan Tradisional Bali* (Traditional Balinese Games and Songs; Upada Sastra, 1999)
- *Aliih...!* Traditional Balinese Games (Taksu Foundation, 2000),
- *Gita Krida* (Sarad, 2001)

- *Randu dan Sahabatnya* (The Silk-Cotton Tree and its Friends; Kanisius, 2002)
- *Dongeng-Dongeng Pekak Mangku* (Sanggar Kukuruyuk, 2004)
- *Bulan Pejeng and Balingkang* (Grasindo; second edition published 2004)
- *Bebek Punyah* (Balai Bahasa, 2004)
- *Dongeng-Dongeng Karmaphala* (Sanggar Kukuruyuk, 2006)
- *Dongeng Sepanjang Abad* (2007)

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