

# Exploring the Implementation Pathways of "Singing Game" Activities in Lower Primary Music Education

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**Abstract.** The "singing game" activity holds a significant place in lower primary music classes. Its introduction can change traditional didactic teaching methods. However, some novice teachers lack a thorough understanding of the pedagogical philosophy behind the "singing game" activity. This paper, from the perspective of embodied cognition theory, analyzes the essence of the "singing game" activity and its four key characteristics - movement, play, performance, and creativity. It also examines the current status of these activities and proposes more detailed teaching methods, including rhythmic movement, gaming, role-playing, and group activities.

**Keywords:** Singing Game Activity, Lower Primary Music Class, Implementation of Singing Game Activity.

## 1. Introduction

As China continuously revises and improves its compulsory education curriculum standards, the 2022 edition has introduced more detailed and rational segmentations and requirements for middle and elementary school music classes. It emphasizes a curriculum designed to foster the holistic development of students [1]. In lower primary standards, it is suggested that the curriculum for grades 1 and 2 should focus on activity-based and gamified learning experiences. To address this direction, the Ministry of Education has proposed the "singing game" activity as a teaching concept for lower primary music classes [2], ensuring not only the appropriate arrangement of content across different educational stages but also preparing students for their subsequent educational phases.

Currently, the teaching model in Chinese music classes is diverse. However, fundamentally, they are quite similar, as teachers often develop their teaching strategies and methods based on the elements of the songs themselves [3]. This is a common and persistent phenomenon of didactic teaching in education. Such methods in primary music classes can make learning feel rigid and dull, neglecting the cultivation of students' agency and significantly reducing their interest in exploring music [4].

While an increasing number of educators recognize the problems of the traditional educational model and are actively joining the movement to change teaching methods and educational thinking, there is still a lack of efficient and adaptable methodologies and practical experiences. However, following the release of the curriculum standards for "singing game" activities, these activities will not only satisfy the pure physiological needs of children for play at this stage. Most importantly, they allow students to actively participate in learning through the form of games, making the classroom student-centered, combining learning with entertainment, and enhancing the students' core competencies [5]. This approach embodies true attention to the students, focusing on their development and education through enjoyment.

In sum, to meet the requirements of the new curriculum standards, teachers need to improve their classroom teaching models and philosophies, and implement a comprehensive understanding of the objectives of "singing game" activities. Every new teacher should be able to clearly define their teaching content and find their own teaching methods, enhancing their professional development. From the perspective of the theory of "embodied cognition," this paper analyzes the essence and characteristics of "singing game" activities, and then proposes an implementation pathway for "singing game" activities in the first educational stage (grades 1-2).

## 2. Theoretical Foundation

"Embodied Cognition" posits that "cognition is formed through the body's experiences and its modes of action [6]." In "singing game" activities, students personally experience the essence of music, forming a multifaceted cognition of it. "Embodied cognition" emphasizes the importance of physical engagement and practice [7]. The American philosopher and educator John Dewey also advocated the viewpoint of using the body to feel, explore, and experience.

## 3. Overview of "Singing Game" Activities

### 3.1. The Essence of "Singing Game"

In 1936, the Ministry of Education of China published the *Singing Game Curriculum Standards for Lower Primary Grades*. These standards aimed to provide children with age-appropriate music and game courses, catering to their love and interest in games [8]. From August 1950 to February 1982, China formulated four primary music education syllabi. Except for the 1956 version, which focused on vocal teaching due to the influence of the Soviet Union's educational model, the other three included requirements for "singing games." Particularly, the "Nine-Year Compulsory Education Full-time Primary School Music Teaching Syllabus (Trial)" issued by the National Education Commission in June 1992, listed "singing game" as a crucial component of lower primary music education [9]. This document detailed the contents and training directions of "singing games," proposing them as a necessary form of primary music education.

With the release of the new 2022 curriculum standards, there are targeted and explicit requirements for "singing game" classes in lower primary education. However, many teachers still lack maturity in teaching modes and methods. They have an insufficient understanding of specific teaching models, and their teaching methods are not diverse enough, leading to minimal educational impact. The new compulsory education art curriculum standards (2022) reemphasize the learning tasks of "singing games," meticulously planning their forms of expression. These activities are required to integrate singing with playing instruments, performing, sound effects, rhythmic movement, and dance, emphasizing an engaging and varied gaming approach. Thus, this curriculum reform also transformed the "singing game" into a "fun singing game," [10] endowing this teaching model with a more comprehensive meaning.

### 3.2. Characteristics of Singing Games

As a primary method for lower primary students to learn music and the most accessible form for them, the "singing game" teaching model has a positive impact on stimulating students' interest in music and promoting their physical and mental health. To fully understand the significance of "singing game" in educational activities, it is essential to grasp the core elements of movement, play, performance, and creativity within the "singing game" model [11]. These four elements are the keystones for children's music learning and the conveyor belt of knowledge, indispensable in their educational journey.

#### 3.2.1 Movement

Movement refers to learning through physical actions. Students in the lower primary grades, particularly in grades 1 and 2, often exhibit behaviors in the classroom such as restlessness, limited attention span, and restricted comprehension abilities. These behaviors, which can impact teaching quality and progress, are natural characteristics of children's physical and mental developmental stages. Expecting students, especially those transitioning from kindergarten to primary school, to immediately adopt self-regulatory behavior is nearly impossible. Moreover, the content of music classes at this stage is unique, fresh, exciting, and relaxing for students. Therefore, enforcing a rigid order to keep students still or quiet for absorbing musical knowledge contradicts the natural laws of child development and is an inefficient educational method. Unscientific teaching methods not only

risk students losing interest in exploring music as a discipline but can also lead to classroom anxiety and reluctance to participate in teaching activities.

Learning through movement involves teachers incorporating body language while imparting knowledge, and engaging students dynamically. Movement can be concretely categorized into various emotional changes, such as melodies with different emotions, intensity with varying dynamics, clear rhythmic changes, and perceptible speeds. These elements stimulate students to produce different rhythmic movements in various parts of their bodies, allowing them to move naturally and spontaneously with the music [12]. Guided by the teacher, students can actively coordinate their bodies in an orderly, planned, and unified rhythmic movement within a piece of music. This approach does not restrict children's natural tendency to be active. In such interactions between teachers and students, the student's role invariably shifts from a passive recipient to an actively participating subject.

### 3.2.2 Play

Play signifies learning through games. At this particular stage, the motivation for all learning should always consider the development of children. Children are inseparable from games, and in essence, no one ever truly outgrows games. Jean Piaget [13] once proposed the concept of "learning through play and playing while learning." Its specific meaning is to facilitate learning in children through the act of playing games. Learning through games allows students to absorb unfamiliar and dry musical basics without pressure, reduces resistance to understanding complex professional language, and significantly boosts their enthusiasm for learning.

Therefore, by integrating games with learning, abstract musical terms become tangible and easier for students to comprehend and absorb. This approach maintains children's interest in learning and exploration and promotes their physical and mental development. Especially since students in the lower primary stage are still in their early childhood in terms of cognition and behavior, and their lives are centered around games, incorporating fun gaming elements into the learning process allows children to learn unconsciously. This method focuses on suiting the playful developmental characteristics of children, achieving learning in the most genuine and natural way.

### 3.2.3 Performance

Performance entails acting within a role. Initially, performance leans more towards imitating selected characters. Role-playing in children's activities usually takes the form of games. The concept of role imitation in games was proposed by psychologist Sully, who believed that the essence of children's games lies in performing a specific role and attaining a new sense of status. This theory essentially describes a type of children's game, one of the most frequently chosen in the category of play, often named and manifested in various forms but generally falling under the category of role-playing games like "playing house." Children typically enact roles they aspire to be in imaginatively constructed scenarios, engaging in context-rich and story-driven interactions.

In the teaching module, students are encouraged to join and imitate known characters in games, giving these roles the characteristic of singing while acting. Through songs with lyrics or purely instrumental music, appropriate roles are assigned. This continuous renewal of children's aspirations towards new roles fulfills their social desires, brings musical knowledge and skills closer to their lives, lets them experience the charm of music, and recognize the fun of music classes. Prioritizing songs with supportive actions, the lyrics, emotions, and meanings are conveyed through singing and movement.

### 3.2.4 Creativity

Creativity in this context means creating within the realm of music. The adage "Every moment is a time for creation, every place a space for creation, everyone a creator," [14] encourages and emphasizes the importance of creativity at all times, places, and by all people. In the music classroom, this can manifest as the creation of melodies, movements, or rhythms. Everyone possesses the capacity and potential for creation, a distinctive feature of human intelligence.

The forms of art are diverse, and creativity within these forms can significantly enhance children's development. Meaningful creation enables students to learn discovery and critical thinking, fully exercising their subjective initiative. Guiding children to create during learning not only allows them to think beyond the teacher's specified directions but also strengthens their sense of group cooperation. Cultivating students' creativity in music and stimulating their creative thinking is achieved through integrating creative games with teaching content. In "singing game" teaching, students are encouraged to freely imagine, using music to express inexpressible thoughts and emotions, and to better appreciate music's abstract qualities. In the process of creation, they develop an aesthetic appreciation of art and learn how to discover beauty.

### **3.3. Types of Games in "Singing Game" Activities**

The games in "singing games" must primarily aim to develop children's musical abilities, with rules established on the objectives of music education. These can be categorized into emotional, situational, and creative games. Implementing these in primary school music teaching not only improves the efficiency of the curriculum but also does not neglect the cultivation of students' musical aesthetics and comprehensive practical skills [15]. Emotional games require students to perceive the tempo and the fluctuations of melodies, assigning corresponding emotions under the teacher's guidance and combining body movements to depict the melody's contours [16]. Situational games involve role immersion or integrating storylines, allowing for solo or interactive performances similar to a musical. Creative games awaken students' imagination, offering opportunities for lyric writing, choreography, and design.

## **4. The Value of Implementing "Singing Game" Activities in Lower Primary Music Classes**

### **4.1. Benefits for Efficient Teaching**

For teachers, implementing the "singing game" teaching model in lower primary education signifies a personal experience of growth, innovation, and a revolution in thought. It is essential for teachers to abandon traditional didactic teaching philosophies and advance their understanding of the "singing game" approach through observation, study, and discussion. The reform of curriculum standards signifies not only a more comprehensive awareness of educational development in China but also demands that teachers' professional growth keeps pace with the times. All teaching content should primarily focus on China's excellent traditional culture and center on student development, emphasizing students' experiences and utilizing the holistic educational functions of music.

### **4.2. "Singing Game" Activities Enhance Students' Understanding of Music**

Educators should pay close attention to the physical and mental developmental laws of students. The primary characteristics of students at this age include a love for games, exploration, imitation, and self-expression. Teachers should conform to the psychological and physical characteristics of children at this developmental stage in terms of educational content and methods. Through the rich teaching modes of "singing games," students can gradually approach the core competency of "educating through aesthetics." Aesthetic perception helps students discover and feel beauty, and the artistic images shaped in music allow students to realize the close relationship between music and life. In "singing game" activities, students exhibit high levels of organization and collaboration, thereby enhancing their sense of community. Understanding world music cultures, and respecting cultural diversity, while also strengthening the self-confidence and pride of the Chinese nation, students enhance their creative and practical abilities in practice. This approach cultivates students' innovative spirit, achieving comprehensive development in both physical and mental health.

### **4.3. Diversifying Music Teaching Forms in Elementary and Middle Schools**

Throughout the series of curriculum standards issued by the Ministry of Education of China for elementary and middle schools, the discipline of music has evolved with updated philosophies and continuous pursuit, fully integrating into the system of quality education. This addresses the issue of previous curriculum standards not fully realizing the concept of comprehensive development in quality education. The significance of this curriculum reform is substantial, as it further refines and improves the previous curriculum structure centered on academic disciplines. Unlike traditional education, the content is not cumbersome, overly difficult, or outdated but reflects the continuously updated content of modern technology and social development. The teaching process has shifted from the traditional education paradigm centered on textbooks, teachers, and classrooms to a student-centered approach, focusing on cultivating students' autonomy, choice, and creative abilities. (The implementation of "singing games" for students of higher grade levels is hoped to be explored further.)

## **5. Main Implementation Pathways of "Singing Game" Activities in Lower Primary Music Classes**

### **5.1. Postural Rhythm Teaching Method - Movement**

During my teaching tenure, I discovered the Dalcroze method, also known as the gesture teaching method. This approach has a wide range of applications, not only in music learning but also in discipline management, such as commands for adjusting the formation. Before starting a class, a teacher can greet students with a fixed rhythm of clapping, and students respond in the same way. For classroom discipline management, select some physical actions or use objects like a triangle to signal students to comply with classroom order, or combine actions with commands. For example, the teacher says "Quiet" and students respond "Calm," or the teacher says "Posture" and students respond "Upright." This approach constantly leads students to integrate musical rhythms into their daily lives.

Dalcroze believed that music and rhythm are inseparable, and that rhythm is closely related to the human body. Merely teaching music without integrating bodily movement is not comprehensive. In the practice of postural rhythm, students should view their bodies as instruments, embodying the music they hear. Through physical movements, they experience the changes in the speed, intensity, and duration of musical rhythms, thereby developing a relaxed and coordinated sense of rhythm through auditory perception.

Typically, the movements in postural rhythm guide students to use different parts of their body for actions such as tapping, swaying, bending, and other minor movements. Body practice combines these actions to achieve the expression of different rhythms and melodies. During practice, attention should be paid to the totality of the movements, following the teacher's instructions for preparatory actions, rhythmic processes, and concluding steps.

### **5.2. Music Games - Play**

In Piaget's theory of cognitive play, games are an essential method for children to understand objects and are also a way to consolidate existing concepts and skills, as well as to coordinate and balance thoughts and actions. The game elements in "singing game" classes must be closely linked to music. For example, when learning basic music theory notations, the teacher can write the notations on small cards, put them in a box, and have students draw and answer; when using instruments like sand hammers or bells, organize group rhythmic compositions; to train rhythm and response skills, choose spatial movement games like "Red Light, Green Light" or "1, 2, 3, Winnie the Pooh, stop!" along with music, or perform actions in response to pictures with music. In essence, game-based teaching should be endlessly creative. Teachers should maximize the enrichment of curriculum content in each lesson, guiding students to actively acquire the knowledge and skills needed for lower primary education through the process of playing. The challenging and interactive nature of these

activities not only better stimulates students' interest and enthusiasm but also provides a sense of satisfaction and achievement when goals are reached.

### 5.3. Role-Playing - Performance

In music education, embodying song content through roles, akin to the performance style of "role-playing" in musicals, transforms into a teaching model where singing integrates with acting and learning. The psychologist Sully proposed the theory of role imitation in games, which suggests that the essence of children's games lies in enacting a role and experiencing a sense of new status. To maintain the novelty of role-playing, roles among students are interchangeable and can vary according to the song or music. This variation ranges from story-driven and lifelike dialogues to imitating characters, like mimicking an elephant to deep, resonant music or a bird to bright, upbeat tunes.

"Role-playing" in lower primary music education allows students to immerse themselves in and vividly experience the charm of songs. From the moment students step into the song's context with an assumed identity, it re-emphasizes that students are the primary agents of learning. This method actively stimulates students' enthusiasm for learning, teaching them cooperation and the joy of participation in the interactive process of role-playing, fostering a love for music.

### 5.4. Group Dance - Creativity

Group dance is an indispensable component of lower primary music education. Considering students' current perceptual levels and learning abilities, teachers should select music with clear rhythms, distinct melodies, and simple structures, stimulating students' desires to showcase and perform. The tempo should not be too fast or too slow; too fast a tempo hinders students' ability to respond, while too slow diminishes their enthusiasm. An optimal speed gives students ample time to think about their movements. Teachers can also use intros and outros for partner exchanges or changing formations in dance. For example, under the teacher's guidance, students might learn the "Penguin's Game" through changing formations and steps. Initially, with the teacher's demonstration, students can perform simple hand gestures while seated (upper body movements only, using hands to express flying or flowers as described in the lyrics). After mastering basic dance moves, students gradually engage in full-body group dances under the teacher's guidance. This approach fosters creative thinking and stimulates creativity, with small group collaborations to choreograph and showcase movements to other pieces of music.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper, through the analysis of the essence and characteristics of "singing game" activities and in conjunction with the current state of these activities, proposes four pedagogical implementation pathways: rhythmic movement, games, role-playing, and group activities. These offer expansive ideas for practical teaching applications. However, the research process lacks empirical data, and the current study on "singing game" teaching is still not comprehensive, necessitating further exploration in the future.

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