THE EMPOWERMENT OF PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT IN INNOVATING CHILDREN DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY ON PERMATA CHILDCARE CENTRE.

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Abstract- Children from age of four to six years old ages are in the period of immense chance in all areas of development and physical changes are very visible. In order to achieve this matter, the concept of physical environment in the childcare are needed to suit with their needs. Theis paper focus on finding information in current status to be suited into PERMATA childcare's physical environment to innovate children development. PERMATA is an organization was set up to promote and develop early childhood education and care. From there, the data will be analysed to identify the terms of their conduciveness and effectiveness in stimulating the physical environment with the children needs in evolving their development. Finally, the paper concludes with deliberation on key findings and their connection to the existing theory and recommendations.

Keywords- Childcare Centre, PERMATA, Children Development, Physical Environment.

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of the first five years of a child's life has long been acknowledged by psychologists who term this period as the formative years. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a strongly held view that whenever possible children should be at home with their mothers to teach them. At the end of the 20th century, more women are working because of the high life maintenance. Moreover, there are increasing demands for full time provision. Many kindergartens have grown out of socioeconomic needs. The kindergarten children are the stage whereby the development of the physical, intellectual and social skills of the human is happen.

They are mostly active because they enjoy testing and practicing their psychomotor, communication, intellect skills with more challenging experiments. Recognizing the impact the child's experiences have on his or her development, psychologists, such as Edward Ziegler who is known as the Father of Head Start, have advocated passionately for quality early childhood care and education. In spite of the research findings and advocacy for quality early child care and education, many governments, communities, and parents are not convinced of its importance. To many of them, childcare centre is a service to enable parents with young children to work. If the child care service provides an environment for children to grow and develop, it is a bonus and not the compulsory requirement.

However, neuroscience research had proved that a child during the early years, especially the first three years of life, are extremely important not only the intellectual development but it is also much more vulnerable to environmental influences than we ever suspected (Carnegie Corporation, 1994).

Childcare Centre in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the childcare centre is divided into two, Tadika (Tadika Didikan Kanak-kanak) for four to six years old and Tabika (Taman Bimbingan Kanak-kanak) for two to four years old. The former must be registered with the Ministry of Education, and the latter with the Ministry of Welfare Services (Education Act 1961; Akta Taman Asuhan Kanak-kanak 1984). Most of the child centre which is for four to six years old are also taking younger children age two to three years old, especially in private sector. The development of early childhood education in Malaysia started in the late 1950s and early 1960s, particularly in the urban areas. During that time, only children who come from higher socio-economic status background can get the early childhood education. In this period, especially prior to the independence of the country from Britain, early childhood education was organized by the voluntary sector, church organization, the private sectors and individuals. The early childhood education that time was influenced by the British education systems (Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1963; 3). Since then, the influences such as Montessori and Froebel teaching have been introduced.

The year of 1969 can be considered a brightness era of early childhood education development in Malaysia, as the Asia Foundation in that year provided a grant to the Malaysian's Workers' Corporation to establish model early childhood centre (identical to the Head-Start project in America) in three villages in Selangor. The target group of the project was the unfavourable children of all races in Malaysia (Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1986; 3). From this scenario, the early childhood education had

received the greater attention from the public. This study showed about 90% of children who got the opportunity to get in the express classes in primary school was the children who had the early childhood education. It shows that the parents already had the awareness about the importance of this matter for their children. The majority of these parents is from the higher socioeconomic and is educated. However, the growth of the early childhood education in rural areas was extremely slow. The opportunity for the children from the rural backgrounds to experience the school environment is very limited. Therefore the government and quasi-government agencies really concern with this matter and become involved in the provision of pre-school education. The involvement of these agencies had increased the number of pre-school centre and more important is it widened the opportunity for the rural children to benefit from preschool education, which is one objective of the Third Malaysia Plan (1976-1980).

In 1972, the role of the Ministry of Education to the content of the early childhood education became more positive. The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) undertook a Remedial Education Project financed by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, which culminated in the production and publication of "A Guide for Pre-school Education" and "A Guide for Nurseries". Further involvement of other government and quasi-government agencies, and the Faculty of Education University Malaya, with financial assistance from various organizations such as Ford Foundation and UNICEF, has contributed in upgrading the standard of the early childhood education. The Kindergarten Association Malaysia which was established in 1973 has also played an importance role. Since December 1991, preschool education in Malaysia has been introduced into primary school. The aim is to help children especially from the rural areas where preschool is limited, the total of preschool by early 1992 was 986 (Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan, Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1992). According to Ministry of Education statistics (1991) on pre- school indicates that there are 6,502 registered preschool centres in operation, a number that almost equals to the amount of primary schools (6,859) in Malaysia. Pre- school enrolment has increased of 209% over a period of 12 years. From this research, the numbers of pre-school centres are likely to experience further growth in the future as demand increases.

The Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010, spells out the Government's mission and direction for growth and development for the intended period, thus indicating the policies of the Government. In this Plan, the Government's thinking is conveyed as five key thrusts and one of them is "to raise the capacity for knowledge and innovation and nurture a first class mentality". There seems to be a positive move towards raising the qualification and status of child care providers. On 4 August 2006, a taskforce was formed to look into three aspects of early childhood care and development, following a 2-day workshop on this topic. The taskforce was to look into three aspects of early childhood care and development, namely (a) to draft a policy on early childhood care and development, (b) to look into the training of child care providers, and (c) to devise a quality improvement accreditation system.

II. PERMATA

Permata means "jewel," "gem" or "precious stone" in Malay. This organization, the brainchild of Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, who is the wife of the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, was set up to promote and develop early childhood education and care. When Datin Seri Rosmah visited Pen Green Centre, Corby in February 2006, she was so impressed by the programme that she immediately established the Permata Negara programmed to adapt the Pen Green Programmed for children of five years of age and below. The first pilot Permata Child Centre was launched in May 2007. There are 13 Permata Negara centres have been established under the Permata Council in the Prime Minister Department with the Deputy Prime Minister as the Chairman of the Council. Permata is in the process of designing a uniform curriculum for all children of ages five years and below by incorporating elements of the Basic Child Care Course and those of the other early childhood programmes conducted by the various government agencies into the Permata Curriculum. The main intention from PERMATA is to develop children with five major aspects, patriotic and well behavior, and communication skills, build self-confidence and independence, creative and innovative and also enhance intellectual capabilities.

III. DEFINING CHILDREN DEVELOPMENT

Physical Development

Children from one to four years old are in the period of immense change in all areas of development and the physical changes are very visible. The overall body shape and the relative proportions of their body and their increased mobility require a lot of adjustment of their lifestyle. The physical development have the linked with mental alertness and emotional well being. The children in this range of ages are mostly active, adventurous and playful and love to explore new. Physically, active children burn up their calories in an enjoyable way. Therefore, they love to test and practice their motor skills with more challenging experiments when they are doing something. (Morris & Taylor, 1996). Physical stimulation should be of two kinds; sensory and motor. Sensory stimulation includes impressions received through senses touching and being touched,

seeing colors and forms, and hearing sounds. All developments begin with sensory response; an environment rich in sights and sounds will contribute immensely to the child's development. Motor stimulation, which includes large and small muscle play activities that support eye-hand and eye-foot coordination. More physical activities children are allowed to experience more objects they handle, more running, climbing, crawling and balancing they do. More movement of the muscle, children will be healthier, livelier and happier. Physical development helps children develop coordination, balance and strength. As they grow up, children improve coordination simply through practice. Physical play teaches children to judge distances understand scale and become aware of the space they and others occupy. It also enables children to develop their own inbuilt safety code.

IV. INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Children also develop their power of thinking. They work to make sense of what they hear and observe in their daily life and sometimes they are confuse to understand what the adults is asking because of the children capability of thinking is still limited but it can be developed to help them to be more productive. The intellectual development is important because it may affect every single thing that children will do. It may affect their reaction, their communication skills and ideas development. The preschool children begin to understand and show that they understand abstract ideas such as the ways they describe people, objects and situations. From age of five, children have started to produce a lot of ideas. Therefore, the education will help them to be able to feel the differences in texture of soft and rough, heard the differences between loud, quiet and silent and see the differences of red and green. Four years old children usually have some grasp of shape, number, size or colour and some of the simple words to accompany their ideas. Activities that are important for the development of intelligence are; exploring, working on one's own, communicating, using new materials, fantasizing and undergoing new experiences. Frver (1996) suggests that children's working in a group might reduce aggressive behavior. Creativity enables children to express themselves artistically. It helps children develop their senses by exploring colour, texture, shape and form. Creative development enables self expression, encourage creative thinking and help boost imagination.

V. SOCIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Social skills enable children to express their needs and wants. Preschool children understand the language and learn to communicate with their friends. They learn to develop their friendship so that they can share and do a lot of things together. They also learn that others have feelings that are similar to their own. Children learn how to cooperate and get along with control and role definition (Aroson, 1998). Good communication helps children to express their feelings, enjoy making friends, develop good relationship and express love and have fun together. Children are often planning their play together. They spend a maximum of time and energy planning and negotiating what and how to play. The important factor in social growth in mixing children of different ages, the older children learn to care for and understand the small children will assume the older one as their role model. Group activities will encourage children to involve with sharing of roles and play equipment through verbal and physical interactions. Children will involve in give and take situations. Social development also includes the interactions through conflicts, compromise and negotiations during activities. According to Fromberg (2002), children get opportunities to expand their knowledge as well as refine their language skills in the class. Isenberg & Jolongo (2001) describe the language development in four categories:

Communication – children use language to maintain the play episode and assign roles. They pretending to be someone else enable children to use voice inflections and language in the situations they may or may not have ever encountered. It also helps children to generate their thinking

Forms and function – children learn to use language for different purposes in a variety of settings and with different people. This process "learning how to mean" as children discover that what they say translates to what can be done. Talking allows children to practice the necessary forms and function of language and helps them think about ways to communicate.

Purposeful verbal interaction – children often use language to ask for materials, ask a question, express ideas, explore language and maintain the activities. Verbal give and take needs to be highly developed because children plan, manage, problem solving and maintain the play by verbal explanations, discussions or command.

Play with language – Play is the arena for children experimenting with and coming to understand words and sounds. Children enjoy playing with language because, with doing it, they feel in control.

VI. DISCUSSION ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Regarding to the studies on children development, they are learning in such a very fast way. Even though only in one activity, their communication skills, psycho motor abilities and creative thinking

can be developed in one time. Effectiveness of special education services depends on teacher's abilities to meet the instructional needs of young children with disabilities by planning for and embedding naturalistic teaching strategies within daily routines and activities (Halle, 1998; Odom, 2000; Warren, 1998). We admit that the module that had been formulated in PERMATA will support the children development. However, was that enough? How about the environment itself. Children learn from what they see directly in front of them and also from where they hear those new things. By providing the space for learning without any encouragement of new ideas throughout the space would not motivate a lot for children development. Regarding to Satoru Nagasawa, 2010, the curriculum which had been formulated for children itself is not enough to accommodate the children development alone. The environment of space provided need to be designed according to the kindergarten education yet encouraged children to have various experiences while spending time in the childcare centre. Furthermore, by empowering the role of the physical environment itself would help the teaching process will be more conducive and productive. The variety of spaces will stimulate children's curiosity and imagination.

The physical environment needs to fulfill the requirement below:

1) The understanding of the education curriculum or module which had been provided in PERMATA
2) By analyzing on children development which includes physical development, intellectual development, and social skills development, to suit with those needs.
3) The safety aspects need to be considered as well to avoid for any injuries, for the material selection specifically.
4) Considering sustainability in terms of the environment.
5) An environment that provides activities based on children's interests
6) Aiming for smooth transition from kindergarten education to elementary education.

The excellent achievement on empowering physical environment is to design an environment that cultivates a zest for living through various activities for playing and learning, and to provide children with the opportunity to enjoy playing anywhere in the kindergarten. Safety and security are the first priority for considering the design for early years. The use of shape and form which are familiar with children and add it with the vibrant colours will encourage them to learn about all those things yet at the same time will stimulate the element of fun and enjoyable ambiance in the space. Conscious of the reality, designers undertaking the realization of childcare project have sought the advice of experts in child psychology and other related fields, to ensure that their ideas (Mostaedi, 2006). Children in this period particularly as the period that the individual's environment is perceived with the greatest intensity and every stimulus becomes a discovery, a learning experience and consequently, a lifelong event.

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