



A STUDY ON TOY BASED PEDAGOGY AS AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO PROMOTE LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATIONAL YEARS

Priyanka Koch, Ph.D. Research Scholar,

Dr. Hitesh Sharma, Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Tezpur University

ABSTRACT

Childhood is considered to be the golden period of our lives. Beautiful memories are associated with every person's childhood days. Children are engaged in different sort of play during the childhood days like making paper boats, hand fans and other products made of paper. There are different ways through which children learn in the foundational years. They are naturally attracted to different types of toys. There has been many changes in the way children play over a period of time. Civilizations across the world finds the notable mention of different types of toys being used by children. In recent times it is seen that most of the toys available for children are made out of plastics which is not environmentally sustainable.

Keywords: Toy Based Pedagogy, foundational learning, foundational literacy and numeracy

INTRODUCTION

“When I bring to you coloured toys my child I understand why there is such a play of colours on clouds, on water and why flowers are painted in tints---when I give coloured toys to you my child.”

Rabindranath Tagore

Childhood is beautiful. India is a country which is full of festivals all across the year. Often children are seen to visit with their parents to Mina Bazaars where they buy different sort of play materials. In states like Assam during winds it is not uncommon to see a little one running with a jackfruit tree leaf in the form of a fan. Sometimes it is seen that the mid rib of the banana leaf becomes a toy material and yet at another you get to hear the sweet sound of the stalk of paddy coming from the distant fields. There are some of the lived experiences of childhood which brings smiles to the faces of children during adulthood. So many concepts related to language, mathematics and other subjects in the curriculum are available in these indigenous toy materials being used by children for fun. With adequate teacher involvement these indigenous toy materials

can be used as an effective material to promote learning in the early years of schooling and in the later years of life.

It has been with us since our childhood days. The best thing that we can as parents give to our children is quality time. We can at best explore the best toys that has been so much associated with our culture. There was one point of time when children grew among large families with adequate sharing, family time but with changing times this has seemed to be so distant. At best we can as parents try our best to play for sometimes with the kids, learn their ways of interaction. Anything which attracts our undivided attention takes us to the world of dream and fantasy is a toy. We like colors, we like the tenderness of materials. Toys have been an integral part of the Indian culture since ancient times. The prevalence of toys has been since the time of the Harappa civilization where mention can be made in reference to the Mother Goddess, dancing girl etc. Over a period of time it is seen that the indigenous toys made across the states of India has somehow been replaced with the replica of toys made of plastic and electronic toys. Some groups of artisans have tried their best to keep the toy industry alive. In the National Education Policy 2020 and the ideas expressed towards the introduction of play and toy based pedagogy, the entire process rooted at the making of toys to promote children's learning has gained importance.

Different toy cultures across India has been mentioned with the representation of different set of toys made of terracotta etc. Indigenous toys from an important part of the Indian rootedness and the cultural connect that we talk about, These indigenous toys can be effectively used as a pedagogical resources in our classrooms to promote early learning. The indigenous toys being made represent the different mythological characters that has a religious significance associated to it. Different set of indigenous toys made can be used to help the child understand the values present in different societies. We talk about value degradation in our societies but we fail to understand that through different toys with the depiction of different mythological characters we can so well let the children connect to the principles showcased by individual characters.

When it comes to the use of toys as an effective learning resources for our children there are certain questions that we as researchers and as people associated with children's learning by making them more assessable and an enjoyable process need to ask ourselves. These questions are for our own self introspection in the way to using toy based pedagogy and its effectiveness like - What pedagogy is all about? How toys can be used as a pedagogical resources to promote early learning like developing reading and writing habits in children along with phonological awareness, oral competency, print awareness and concepts related to early literacy and any other related competencies we talk about promoting in small children? How the community and the parents can support the early learning of children? How can the children's holistic development happen through toy based pedagogy? How toys can help children to connect with their roots-the cultural connect? Why the use of indigenous toy materials is to be promoted in the foundational years? What is the importance of toy corner in school? Can we promote the psychomotor development of children through toy based pedagogy? Can the toy based pedagogy be connected with the three developmental goals? What teacher training is required for promotion of toy based pedagogy? What is the importance of local artisans in promotion of toy based pedagogy? Can toys promote creativity in small children? Can the process of

exploration and absolute engagement be ensured through the use of toy based pedagogy? How can toys promote literacy and numeracy skills in children? What connection can be drawn between Foundational literacy and Numeracy and toy based pedagogy? Should toy based pedagogy be a priority?

Anything and everything can be a toy if the teacher is creative and is capable of utilizing the resources well. The toys can be used to teach different concepts to children in the foundational years. There is nothing called scratch when teachers are trained to make use of anything available in their immediate environment as a toy for effective learning among children. An interesting classroom is all about children's engagement and the teachers ability to leave a space where there is adequate space for open exploration and no fear, anxiety in the mind of the children.



Children playing with different toys



Researcher's interaction with teachers

THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIGENOUS TOYS TO PROMOTE EARLY LEARNING

India is one of the country where the use of toys has been found in civilizations like Harappa and Mohenjodaro. These civilizations have seen the uses of different types of toys found through the excavations where we find the early reference of use of different types of toys. Across the states we find the toy culture prevalent in states like Karnataka. Toys and play are integrally related. We cannot imagine childhood without toys. When we talk about toys we deal with things like kitchen sets for children etc. With the use of different type of toys children's imagination, curiosity and creativity are integrally related. The word indigenous refers to something which is locally produced and the cultural aspect of specific communities are very much associated with it. Indigenous toys are made with different types of local materials like unused clothes etc. Across the states somewhere it is found that an entire village is associated with the production of different toys like the Hatima toy of Assam which is specific to the particular place. With the passage of time and with the boom in online products play materials for children products and markets it is seen that the number of plastic toys has increased. In specific occasions we order toys for our children.

We should see that the cultural connect is kept intact in the preparation process in terms of the design like the clothes being used in the toys so that the reference to particular culture in terms of the dressing pattern and other practices can be made by the teachers while using the toy as a resource. This is in reference to the toy culture which is very essential more so when we take a look at the three developmental goals. There are

different types of play where children are engaged in like-solitary play, free play, guided play etc. Teacher guided activities are done under the supervision of the teacher where teacher plays a very important role. The very essence of play is all about letting the child explore and engage with the focus to work upon his fine motor skills along with different other related aspects of development. Developmental activities planned through toy based pedagogy should be culturally appropriate.

MAKING TOYS FROM UNUSED SCRATCH MATERIALS

The teacher can at best in the classroom prepare the lesson plan and can make use of Toy Based Pedagogy to explain different concepts to students drawing references from the daily life and the immediate surroundings of the children. Mythological characters can be used for this purpose. For this the teachers can take the help of the toy clusters of India like we find that in different states of India local artisans make different toys made of locally available materials and in the state of Odisha toy fair is organized in Berhampur district of Odisha. These references of the toy culture of India needs to be appropriately included in the curriculum so that the children can relate to their roots. Different clothes that are in no longer usable condition can be used by the teachers for the preparation of different toys and let the children explore those. Toys can be used as an effective teaching learning material and let children learn through the concepts of Experiential learning and promote competency based learning among young children. In the state of Assam we find the existence of a village where Hatima toy is being made in the Dhubri district of Assam. Toys can be effectively used to promote creative expression during childhood.

USE OF TOYS IN THE CURRICULUM

For making pedagogy more attractive to small children we can use different types of toys. Often it is seen that children play with different manipulatives in the preschool centres. We can at best bring out the best in our local cultures to help children come in terms to their roots.

There was a time when children use to play in the fields run around which is so very essential for the development of the child that includes social, physical and moral development but in recent years it is seen that with the change seen in the life style of people there has been change in the way rearing of children is being done today with the coming of more preschool facilities for children etc. When children are left alone they try to explore with different types of toys around them like it is seen that a small girl consider a toy to be their baby, cooks for the baby does the daily activities etc. Sometimes litchi seed become the most happiest toy for playing. What is seen here is that the language development of the child is taking place. People from the family can help to boost it by appreciating the activities done by the little one.

THINGS THAT CHILDREN PLAY IN THE EARLY YEARS

There are very simple ways in which different dolls can be made by using socks, different paper materials etc. Essential it is here to ensure the participation of all the students in the classroom. Children are attracted to different types of colorful things and thus colorful socks can be used more particularly on some special occasions where local materials like can be used to make different types of toys.

THE POTENTIAL OF TOYS FOR PROMOTING LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATIONAL YEARS

-Social and emotional development of children.

-Aesthetic sense of life

-Language skills

-Cooperation, empathy, group work etc.

- Researchers can take this as a project to understand how toys can be used to promote learning in the foundational years.
- Mother's association can work together to make different toys.
- Professional learning communities can work to understand how toys can be used to promote learning in the foundational years.
- Community level engagement can be ensured where NGO'S can be asked to make different set of toys for the children.

Across the nation we find the existence of different types of toys. Toys when used by children gives them access to the process of open exploration. Things to be kept in mind while using toy based pedagogy are-

- Focus on the use of different locally available materials.
- See that children are able to connect to their environment keeping in mind the developmental goals.
- Taking into account the cultural connect
- Effectiveness in the making of different set of toys.
- Focus on the process of child centeredness.

In our childhood days we remember playing with different sort of toys. Sometimes we even used a banana leaf as a toy. It is essential to keep in mind the cost effectiveness in using toy based pedagogy. Individual ideas can be shared by teachers across the schools. The cultural touch is so very essential to let the child have a smooth transition to different concepts in the curriculum by being able to relate with the actual surrounding the child comes from.

Benefits of using toy based pedagogy in the classroom-

- Alternative way of teaching concepts to children.
- Easy availability of teaching learning materials.
- Cross cutting across cultures.
- Bridging the gap that might arise due to the unavailability of appropriate teaching learning materials in the classroom.
- Bringing innovations in the teaching approaches.
- Helping children learn by making the concepts easier.

HOW TO USE TOY BASED PEDAGOGY IN OUR CLASSROOMS?

- Through student involvement
- Teachers and parents involvement
- Bringing locally available materials.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE FOR PROMOTION OF TOY BASED PEDAGOGY?

- Policy makers to focus on the importance of toy based pedagogy.
- Adequate emphasis to be given for promotion of toy based pedagogy in the schools of the country.
- A relook into the use of toys across the civilizations to be done.
- Government support is required in terms of more workshops, seminars and conferences on toy based pedagogy.
- People need to understand that learning happens through adequate interaction among teachers and students with adequate students engagement. It will help to reduce the monotony that is often seen in the learning of certain concepts in the textbook. Thus is the essence of toy based pedagogy.
- We should see that the toys are prepared in such a way so that it is environment friendly and that the shelf life of the toy is long so that it could be used all over again.

WAYS TO POPULARIZE THE TOY CULTURE

- Work with local artisans to understand the different ways in which the toys are being made and the different materials used in the making of the ways and working to promote the toy for teaching different concepts to children in the classroom.
- Invitation of local artisans to schools
- Workshops on toy making to be initiative in the educational institutions.
- Adequate funding to be granted by the government to promote the toy culture in the schools.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are-

1. To study how toys can be used to promote learning in the foundational years.
2. To study the different ways in which use of toys can be done to promote learning in the foundational years.
3. To find out the different types of toys that are used to promote learning in the foundational years.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How toys can be used to promote learning in the Foundational years?
2. What are the different ways in which use of toys can be done to promote learning in the Foundational years?

3. What are the different types of toys that are used to promote learning in the Foundational years?

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study follows the descriptive survey method. The population of the study comprise of 100 students of Taksashila Vidyapith located within Tezpur University campus in Play group, L. K. G and U.K .G. and 8 teachers. The tool used for the purpose of the study involved a Semi structured Interview Schedule comprising of 25 questions and a Checklist. The Checklist consisted of 20 questions targeted at finding out the pedagogical resources available in the preschool on Toy based pedagogy. It was also targeted at evaluation of teachers understanding of Toy Based Pedagogy.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study suggest that the teachers of Takshashila Vidyapith make use of different toys to develop the fine motor skills of children. Interest has also been found on the part of the teacher for government initiatives in the form of training on Toy Based Pedagogy. Findings of the checklist brings the researchers to the conclusion about the presence of different type of toys to promote holistic development of children in the preschool. It also brings to light the presence of toy corner in the school and that the toys used to promote childrens learning are age and culturally appropriate and according to the interest of the child. Findings of the Semi structured Interview Schedule reflects teachers believe in the potential of toys to promote learning in the Foundational Years. Some of the significant findings are in regards to teachers willingness to participate in different workshops to learn about the scope of Toy based pedagogy in a way so that it can be used to promote Foundational Literacy and Numeracy among children.

CONCLUSION

Toy based pedagogy is an excellent way through which student involvement in the classrooms can be ensured in the best way possible and the benefits are immense. There is excitement among the children and creativity blossoms when they get to design their own set of toys. Emotional and social development takes place. They learn how to work together in groups. Essential it is to revive the toy culture and bring it in the formal ambit of the curriculum to help children learn more effectively in the early years. This would help children in diverse ways by promoting their physical and mental development. Toys are an integral part of our culture. Several states of India have a rich toy culture. Toys are an essential medium through which children can be introduced to the culture that they belong to and this it can be considered as an essential pedagogical tool to promote learning in the foundational years. There was one point of time when toys like kitchen products, toys made of lac, wood and other materials were very popular among children but today it is seen that with the surge in the number of toys made of plastics and the online market children are seen to play more with plastic made toys. Involvement of the community, parents and different artisans involved could help once again to popularize the toys among little children which is also one of the effective ways through which the physical, mental, and emotional development of children can happen touching all the domains of development which is indeed is the need of the hour. It has been found that India as a country has

a long history of association with toys and in the context of school education different indigenous toys found across the different states of India some made of terracotta, clay, cloth, bark of tree etc. can be taken from the different toy clusters of India. The modules prepared by NISTHA is a very positive step in this regard along with the different initiatives taken by the government for promotion of toy based pedagogy. Undoubtedly this would help to let children develop the cultural connect and celebrate the Indianness by appreciating the Indian culture and it would also help to have a significant share in the global toy market by working towards promotion of indigenous toys and play materials.

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