

Isan Children Folk Toys: Application and Development for Appropriate Age-Groups of Child Growth

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Abstract: Traditional folk toys in Northeast Thailand were created from natural materials and easy to find local resources such as branches, leaves, seeds, bamboo, sap, stones, pebbles, dirt and sand. Traditional folk toys were hand made and were modifications and adaptations of natural materials. Each home and community had their own methods and used materials that were generally available. Traditional toys were therefore unique in their own way and reflected the culture of each individual community. The knowledge in making toys would be passed down from generation to generation. One hundred and twenty four Traditional toys and games have been studied and categorized according to scientific principles of supporting Child development in 3 areas, Toys that promote the development of large muscle movements included 44 items. Toys that promote the development of minor muscle movements included 59 items. Toys that support learning process development included 21 items. Modernization and Globalization have brought modern toys in mass quantities and new inventions to societies. Free trade, modern communication and secluded family lifestyles have pushed many traditional toys and customs to extinction. But scientific toys are not perfect and can be harmful to children and adults if not careful. Cost cutting and the lack of responsibility from manufacturers and parents alike have contributed to low standard toys and the use of harmful substances. Accidents caused from the use of toxic materials and the risk of losing cultural heritage are why traditional folk toys should be reconsidered due to their cultural value and use of safe materials.

Key words: Isan, toys, traditional, folk, child development, northeast Thailand

INTRODUCTION

Inheritance and cultural development is a continuing and dynamic process. The learning processes and the inheritance of culture begin at the family level. Children learn from observation, teachings and the interaction through activities with their fathers, mothers and relatives. Children's interactions with other humans give them the opportunity to accept and adapt to different lifestyles, values, traditions, customs and beliefs within their community. The close relationships within the family allow the children to embrace the cultural arts from adults in their family, their neighbors, from the temple and in public gatherings. This interaction eventually evolves into the process of learning the lifestyles and culture of their village, cities, home country, neighboring countries and eventually to understand world cultures. Humans have played with toys and games since the stone age. Playing provides an opportunity for people to relax and be

entertained after a hard days work. Many toys and activities have been created to meet the demands, interests and satisfaction of humans since ancient times (Mosikrat, 1979). The purpose of this research, is to study the valuable information of traditional toys and gaming activities in Northeast Thailand. To study the current situation and disadvantages of Isan toys. To formulate an action plan and guideline to support the development of traditional Isan toys that are appropriate for each age and stage of child development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research area: The research area was selected by purposive sampling in Northeast Thailand. The provinces selected include the provinces of Udonthani, Nongkai, Khon Kaen, Mahasarakham, Nakorn Ratchasima and Buriram.

Research method: Qualitative research was applied to this research and data was gathered by document analysis and field study. The process of the study followed guidelines by collecting data that was in accordance with the purpose of the study (Aekakul, 1999). Research data was collected by two separated process. Document analysis provided information on past research studies and related information that detail the agricultural historical background and methods in Thailand, especially in the region of Northeast Thailand or Isan. Documents included in the research came from government sources, educational institutes, books, texts, dissertation, internet, public sources and from individual sources. Field Data was collected by the gathering of results and responses from in-depth interviews of both structured and non-structured interviews. Data was also gathered from participant and non-participant observations. Data from focus groups and workshops from the sample group of individuals from the 6 provinces totaled 180 individuals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Toys and recreational activities are important to the development of physical, psychological, social and the intelligence of children. Playing is an activity that children use to respond to their interests and questions about life. It also brings out their capabilities such as their physical, language, expressing their feelings and their relationship with others. Many adults and parents believe that playing is just something that children do because they don't know what else to do. But the reality is that playing is work for children and is an activity that all children must do (Piyaachariya, 2008). Playing plays an important part in the development of the 4 main principles needed for child development. They are physical development, social development, psychological development and intelligence development. Playing is a child's personnel experiment that they willingly perform with pleasure. Playing is also a cultural heritage where it expresses their personal habits and also reveals what the community does in their leisure time. Playing is a cultural activity and an instinct that stays with everyone forever.

Toy story: Toys and games have been with humans since the ancient times. The earliest discovery of toys was discovered in The United States of America. The discovery of a fine crafted piece of bone in Tennessee from the skull of a deer made 7,000 years ago is hypothesized as being the oldest toy discovered so far. The bone toy is theoretically very similar to the modern game of Ring and Pin (Kridakon and Wann, 1988).

Historical evidence in Thailand shows that Thai ancestors have played with toys for >700 years during the Thai Kingdom of Sukhotai. Archaeological digs in the region provided artifacts that showed that Thai ancestors made dolls imitating people and animals by using clay. The dolls would also be coated with enamel and baked. Toys and games have been a part of Thai history, belief and culture. Traditional toys developed side by side with human development and they reflect the changes in Thai society. When adults acquire the knowledge in making pottery, children were provided with clay toys. Children later on were able to make their own miniature versions of the tools and utensils used by their parents (Phanatkul, 1993). Thai society has also viewed child play in a psychological viewpoint where the activities that children played were used to predict the future or as an omen of the things to come. This belief is depicted in literary works and folklore such as the story of Khun Chang Khun Paen. The story evolves around the life of 3 children, 2 male and 1 female. During childhood they played a game called Moh Khao Moh Kaeng which is a local game similar to modern husband and wife game. As the characters matured into adult hood, they were entangled in a triangle of courtship, deception and love. Child play is a part of culture that can provide knowledge to historical information revealing past society's history, ideas and values. Child play helps children to grow up and gives them opportunities to develop and prepares them for responsibilities in the future. The experience from playing will help them in becoming responsible adults, be a part of society and live with others in peace. Toys and games also obligate adults and keep children occupied when parents are engaged in other activities. Playing will give children the opportunity to discover themselves providing personal confidence and physical abilities (Luksanapisut, 1987).

Isan toys: Traditional Northeastern Thailand or Isan folk toys were made from the local environment. Traditional Isan toys came from nature and excess materials that were easily found such as branches, leaves, seeds, bamboo, tree sap, stones, pebbles and sand were transformed into playful items and recreational toys. All of the toys were handmade and created by adults and children. Most of the toys relied on simple mechanics and were not complex. Knowledge of making the toys would be passed on from generation to generation. The determining factors that contributed to the creation of Traditional folk toys are: The topology of the natural surroundings of the community such as grasslands, plains, hills and mountains would affect the toys structure and functionality. Beliefs and Rituals such as miniature fish

woven from leaves and bamboo symbolized the abundance of food and resources. The 3 seasons of Rain, Winter and Summer. Occupation of the parents. Traditional folk toys were not sold in mass amounts like we see in markets and department stores today. Most traditional folk toys were hand made and were modifications and adaptations of natural materials. Each home and community had their own methods and used materials that were generally available. Traditional toys were therefore unique in their own way and reflected the culture of each individual community (Krutmuang, 1999). 124 traditional folk toys were studied from 6 provinces in Northeast Thailand. They were categorized according to scientific principles of which supported the development of children. They are: toys that promote the development of large muscle movements included 44 items. Toys that promote the development of minor muscle movements included 59 items. Toys that support learning process development included 21 items.

Northeastern Thailand is rapidly changing. Globalization and modernization has created a borderless commerce. Local folk toys have rapidly declined and replaced with more modern toys manufactured from plastics, metals and electronics. Modern toys also come with many vibrant colors and can easily be purchased. Many children have also altered their recreational habits from traditional gaming activities to finding amusement and entertainment via computer games, internet and television. Nowadays most toys are made from plastic which is of low cost. More than half of parents and adults in Northeastern Thailand do not acknowledge the dangers of modern toys. Factors that contribute to the neglect of the possible dangers from modern toys include: Parents and adults do not have standards for choosing the appropriate toys for their children. Over indulgence of their children. Letting the children to make their own decisions. Lack of funds to buy safe quality toys.

Factors that contribute to the unpopularity of traditional folk toys:

- The limitations of materials used to make folk toys are limited to mostly natural materials
- The social structure of modern Thai families due to economic conditions has isolated many families. Most adult members in the family are engaged in their occupations with little time to spend with their children. The passing on of traditional knowledge has mostly been discontinued
- Local folk toys are not durable and not fashionable or pretty compared to modern toys
- Globalization and modern advertisements have flooded the markets with foreign toys

- The effect of capitalism has wrongly promoted to favor materialism more than moral goodness and decency
- The advanced development of science and technology has greatly improved toy production processes. Modern manufacturers can produce large amounts of toys in less amount of time

Danger from modern toys: China is the largest producer of toys. A 70% of toys annually sold in world markets come from China. Manufacturers in China are also the biggest illegal copier of toys. There are no strict laws or prison terms to punish manufactures that violate copyright laws, only fines. Thailand imports 1,248.4 million Baht worth of toys annually, where 88.7% was spent on toys from China (Srisantisuk, 2004). Eight types of heavy metals have been found in modern toys that were sampled from markets throughout Northeast Thailand. These heavy metals included Lead, Chromium, Mercury, Cadmium, Arsenic, Antimony, Barium and Selenium. A total of 31 imported toys have been banned and the customs department ordered to collect and destroy.

CONCLUSION

Traditional folk toys in Northeast Thailand were created from natural materials and easy to find local resources such as branches, leaves, seeds, bamboo, sap, stones, pebbles, dirt and sand. Toys were first created by the parents and elders. Children later were able to develop and also learned by example to create their own toys. Most of the toys that children would create would be simple and uncomplicated items. Adults would create more complex and complicated toys. The toys created would also be different for each season such as, during the winter they would build kites and miniature harvesting tools. During the rainy season they would make miniature weave baskets and fish traps. Play areas for Northeastern Thailand children would be rice fields, open areas within the house, village, temple and school grounds. Families in the past were very tight and shared close relations with one another. Children and younger family members would learn how to make various toys from elders and the knowledge would be passed on to the younger generation. The toys would mostly be taught by example and orally passed down. In modern times communities have become secluded and family relations are not as close as they were in the past. Social and economic environment has changed dramatically which has caused many families to purchase goods and toys for their families. Traditional crafts and

entertainment have been replaced by materialism causing discontinuity of making traditional toys.

Modern toys have received much popularity among children in Northeast Thailand but low grade materials, low standard production process have created health hazards and put children in danger. Safety issues from low quality toys are a clear signal that modern technology and science are not perfect and can harm children if parents and children not careful. The problems with modern toys have provided an opportunity for the promotion and development of traditional Isan folk toys. Guidelines and process for promoting and developing of traditional toys should ensure that traditional folk toys can compete with modern toys. There must be new ways and methods of application such as choosing more sturdy natural materials that are safe and durable. Toys must be updated and more fashionable while preserving the cultural identity and values. Other applications and features should be added to enhance the functionality and playability. Traditional toys should also be made in various colors to satisfy a wider range of customers. Function and portability should also be included in the design and features.

Traditional Isan Folk toys promote development of children in 4 areas. To promote development of physical health. To promote development of the intellect and intelligence. Promote development of the mind and emotions and Promote development of good social character. Conservation methods and promoting commerce will help prevent traditional Northeast Thailand culture and the production of native toys not to disappear. Urgent steps are needed for future generations to see, play and understand. Traditional folk toys are economical, cost effective and promote the development of children in many areas. The promotion of traditional folk toys will not just help local economies in Northeast Thailand but it will connect the current generation with the good cultural traditions and toys of our ancestors.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Development projects that emphasize on technique alone without proper management will only lack development power. It is just, the same as management

that lacks discipline and responsibility towards decency, culture and the environment will also fail. The successful development of Local Indigenous Knowledge therefore must emphasize the awareness and responsibility towards moral standards, good management skills and know how to use the proper techniques. Teaching on how to develop Local Indigenous Knowledge should be the responsibility of all schools. Schools must be responsible and dependable. Educational institutions play an important part in rural areas in many aspects such as stature, confidence and self sufficiency. The development of Local Indigenous Knowledge in modern society is a must, but the processes must be thoroughly laid out and must always be in accordance to the needs of the community and not the policy. Successful development of Local Indigenous Knowledge relies upon a capable leader, who is self initiative and is someone that can guide the group to modernization without forgetting the values of the past.

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