

UTILIZE PLAY ACTIVITIES DURING RECESS/BREAK TIME TO IMPROVE MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS IN KINDERGARTENS¹

Wawan S. Suherman, M.Ed.²
Endang Sulistyowati³

Abstract

The objective of this article is to describe the utilization of play activities during the recess time in improving multicultural awareness in kindergartens. The aim of kindergarten education is to improve all of children potentials in effort to get ready to enter elementary school education. One episode in educational process at the kindergarten is recess time. Recess time is a break period, typically outdoors, for children. Recess is a time when children have more freedom to choose what they want to do and with whom. To optimize the utilization of recess, teacher can utilize play activities. There are two kinds of play activities, structured and unstructured play. There has been an enormous amount of research conducted on the important role recess plays in healthy child development, concluding that recess is necessary for a child's: physical health, mental / emotional health, social development, cognitive development, and academic achievement. Play activity is a way for children to learn about the world around them and to learn cultural values. They do not only learn about themselves but also about the differences in other people. Kindergarten programs must work to enhance a positive awareness of individual differences and cultural diversity as a whole. Play experiences may serve as an excellent way to help teach children about the differences in other people and that these differences are not bad.

Key words: Play activities, recess time, multicultural awareness, kindergarten.

Introduction

One afternoon in the kindergarten school yard, many pupils are running cheerfully. Their bodies look healthy and powerful. Their movements are alight, agile, and aligned without hesitation. Their faces

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² Professor in Physical Education, Faculty of Sport Science, Yogyakarta State University. ws_suherman@yahoo.com, wansuherman@uny.ac.id

³ Teacher at Al-Amien Kindergarten, Kadisoka Purwamartani Kalasan Sleman DIY.

look happy and cheer without any sadness. These conditions show the real children's world. A play world is a world which is full of happiness. Can we see those conditions in the kindergarten around our house at this time? A question that is require a lot of time to get the answer. Ideal schooling above is what many people want. Various efforts have been done to create the atmosphere of a kindergarten as described above, whether by government or by society.

One of the educational ladder considerable attentions lately is the kindergarten. Kindergarten tries to prepare children into the formal primary education. Kindergarten has a unique position in the education world in Indonesia. In formal academic education, the coaching operation of kindergartens is under the Directorate of Kindergarten-Primary School, but in non-formal education, kindergartens are under the management of the Directorate of Early Childhood Education. The supports of the directorate should be stronger in order to improve the quality of education and increasing the access to kindergarten education. However, education management and development still faces many problems. One of the problems is coordination between the formal and non formal education which is not solid yet, because the management of formal and non formal education looks exclusive and not mutually supportive.

In general, the process of parenting in kindergarten takes place every day. One part that could be optimized in the process of debriefing for children is a time of recess or break time. Generally, a break time in kindergarten lasts for 30 minutes. Recess is an adequate time to filled-out with various activities to develop the whole children's potential, especially the motor potential. One kind of activity that can be utilized to fill the rest time is play activities, because play activities were in line with the world of children, and can be implemented flexibly by the children. Children will play voluntarily, chirpy, tirelessly but they have to be supervised in order to keep their security and safety.

Considering the possibility of using the description of recess time, play activities, and development of multicultural awareness, there are

some questions to link the three, they are: (1) How can the kindergarten develop all potential of the children? (2) Why the play activity needs to be done at recess time? (3) What type of play activity that can be implemented at recess time? (4) How is the influence of play activities to increase multicultural awareness? Thus, the answers to these questions focus in the discussion on the use of play activities to fill the recess time in order to increase the multicultural awareness of children. This does not mean that the activity of play is the only activity to fill the recess time, and the only activity that can develop multicultural awareness, but the use of play activities to fill the recess time to get attention from all parties. During this time, the use of recess time playing with the play activity has not received adequate attention yet from all parties. In addition, the actual play activity has proved to be an appropriate tool for developing multicultural awareness.

Developing Children's Potentials

Children have the talents, capacities, capabilities and skills which are developed through the educational process. According to Gardner (2003: 36-53), humans have different potential to be developed. Development potential needs to be done so that human beings have the ability to solve problems or create something of value in society. The ability is called intelligence, there are seven intelligences that have been identified at the initial stage, and added one intelligence in the last process, making it eight intelligences, namely intelligence (1) linguistic, (2) logical-mathematic, (3) musical, (4) physical-kinaesthetic, (5) spatial, (6) naturalist, (7) interpersonal, and (8) intrapersonal. Hoerr (2007: 14-16) adds that all children have the talents. Schools must provide the opportunities to the students to develop the talents they have.

Parents must provide a conducive environment for children so that all their potential can develop in a balanced manner. Educators must provide opportunities for students to be ready to develop all their potential. Haywood (1986: 75-76) says that educators must understand

the influence of environmental factors toward the growth and the development of children. The existence of the environment will determine the person's potential to develop further. The environment includes the process of birth, nutritional intake, physical environment, and physical activity and regular exercise. In addition to understanding and preparing the environment, Kelly and Melograno (2004) states that the prerequisite for any effort to maximize student learning is the knowledge of students' readiness to learn. Students must be prepared physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively to learn. Students will not learn motor skills, social behaviour, self concept, or intellectual ability, if they are not prepared to do so. Therefore, beside we have to pay attention to the environment and the readiness of students, education in the initial stage should not be concerned with only one course of intelligence. All aspects or potential intelligence should be given equal opportunity to grow and develop further.

Kindergarten is a learning environment that provided for early childhood as a preparation to enter on formal education. It started to develop in the early 19th century. Kindergarten is a manifestation of the idea and practice of Robert Owen in England, JH Pestalozzi in Switzerland and his students Friedrich Froebel in Germany, who coined the term Kindergarten, and Maria Montessori in Italy. Kindertartens deeply concerned in emotional and spiritual aspects of children, encouraging self-understanding through play activities, and provide a wider freedom than required to comply with adult thoughts. In 1837, Froebel kindergarten opened in Blankenburg, Prussia, "a school for the psychological training of children using play as the ship." By choosing the name "Garden of childhood", he wanted to convey a message that this institution is environment where children grow freely like a beautiful garden where flowers flourish. During the 25 years after Froebel's death, kindergarten evolved throughout Europe, the U.S.A., Japan and other parts of the world. Froebel education method is influenced by Johann Pestalozzi, who comes from the premise that humans are basically more

active and creative, not just receptive. Belief in an independent activity and play in the education of the children caused him to introduce a series of children's play equipment, or tools of learning. (www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/318044/kindergarten).

Paying attention to the above shows that preschool education plays a strategic role in the development of children. Therefore, the pattern of education in kindergarten should be an effort to develop the whole potentials possessed by learners. Law No. 20/2003 on National Education System recognizes that early childhood education as a step towards primary education and established as an institution that can be organized in formal, non-formal or informal.

One of the main learning tools in kindergarten is play. Willis and Hyman-Parker (2010) stated that play is how young children learn and assimilate new things into what they already know. According to Saskatchewan Education (1994) it is through play that much of children's early learning is achieved. The physical, socio-emotional and intellectual development of children is dependent upon activity. Therefore, opportunity for play is a key aspect of the kindergarten program. The program builds on, rather than detracts from, this natural approach to learning. Through exploring, touching, manipulating, and testing, children find out about the world around them. Through play, they learn how to solve the problems and work cooperatively with others.

Guisburg (2007: 183) proposed that play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development. Play helps children develop new capabilities that lead to enhanced confidence and the resiliency they will need to face future challenges. Play is integral to the academic environment. It ensures that the school setting attends to the social and emotional development of children as well as their cognitive development.

Play Activities during Recess Time

Children need free play at home and at school. The time assigned for free play at school is known as recess. Recess is defined as a break time during the school day that allows children the time for active free play. Unstructured and undirected are two key components of recess. On the basis of the literatures and as stated by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), school recess should be provided at least once daily, for a 20 minutes. Recess provides children with discretionary time and opportunities to engage in physical activity. The most obvious characteristic of recess is that it constitutes a break from the daily routine. By allowing a mental change and release of energy, recess may have other benefits for classroom behavior; students may be more attentive to academic tasks and less fidgety in the classroom afterward. Recess is typically held outdoors and allows children to move freely (Barros, Silver, and Stein, 2009: 431).

To take the recess time, children like to fill it with play activities because play is their world. The kids can choose different types of play activities that appropriate to the level of their ability to execute it. Saskatchewan Education (1994) indicated that children engage in different type of play depending upon circumstances and particular needs. Types of play range from inactive observation to participation in group play requiring planning and cooperation. Kindergartens encourage several types of play: associative play, cooperative play, solitary play, onlooker play, and parallel play. Guddemi (2009) stated that play, along with the basic needs of nutrition, health, shelter and education, is vital to develop the potential of all children. Play is communication and expression, combining thought and action; it gives satisfaction and a feeling of achievement. Play is instinctive, voluntary, and spontaneous. Play helps children develop physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. Play is a means of learning to live, not a mere passing of time. Play is the child's way of learning.

Besides using types of play that is proposed by Saskatchewan Education, children can utilize unstructured play during recess. Unstructured play addresses a child's physical health, mental health, social and cognitive developments. It has little or no adult direction and children are allowed to choose their activity, activity levels, and degree of social interaction. A child's imagination and creativity plays a vital role in this type of play, as opposed to structured play.

Even though some experts propose children to use unstructured play in optimize the utilization of recess or break timed, but children also can utilize structured play during recess. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2009) proposed that structured play means games and physical activities that are taught and led by trained adults. Structured play provides instruction in healthy play, following rules, and resolving conflicts for students in communities where those may not be common knowledge. Structured play also ensures that all children participate and are engaged, rather than having some become marginalized or excluded. Positive effects were found for students' feelings of safety, engagement and classroom productivity.

TSHAC (2008) indicated that play, both structured and unstructured, has been shown in an extensive body of research to have positive benefits for physical, social, emotional, and cognitive domains of child development. The benefits of physical activity and play have also been demonstrated in the areas of academic achievement, problem-solving skills, social skills, student engagement and physical health.

Improving Multicultural Awareness through Play

As mention above, play activities are having an important role in developing the wholes of children's potentials. However, it does not mean that play only one of the potential tool to develop all of the children' potential. Similarly, play is not the only activities to fill the recess time; other activities can be selected to fill the recess time. Play activity is chosen to fill recess because it can develop the whole child's potential,

including multicultural awareness. Of course, when play is combined with other forms of activity, the result will be better in the development of multicultural awareness. Rettig (1995) noted that one of the most common elements of childhood across cultures is play. Early childhood educators must recognize the importance of play in the lives of young children and make use of play as a means of promoting cultural awareness. Play has an important relationship to cultural diversity based on three reasons. First, a rapidly growing population of young children from culturally diverse backgrounds is entering schools. Second, playing is a way for children to learn about the world around them and to learn cultural values. They not only learn about themselves but also about differences in other people. And finally, early education programs must work to enhance a positive awareness of individual differences and cultural diversity as a whole. Play experiences may serve as an excellent way to help teach children about the differences in other people and that these differences are not bad.

Matiella (cited by Rettig, 1995) indicates that it is important to teach children that differences in people do exist and that these differences are not bad. Play is a way for young children to learn about the cultural norms and values of a society. Ivic and Marjanovic (cited by Rettig, 1995) indicate that traditional games, especially games with rules, generally form an integral part of a culture in that they provide a means of communication for social norms, assist in the assimilation of group members, and allow for differentiation among group members. The games that children playing and the playthings they use in play are often tied to the culture in which they live and provide a way for children to practice skills needed as adults. Play then, serves an important role in enculturation.

According to Willis and Hyman-Parker (2010) play is how young children learn and assimilate new things into what they already know. Children learn about diversity through play, including music, clothing, foods, games, celebrations, and dramatic play. This approach also supports the ecological systems theory in terms of culture and its effects on children by beginning with the home lives of the children. Engaging in

activities that represent the home cultures, all of the children are able to learn new concepts, explore new attitudes, and develop new skills as well as learn more about each other's families and diverse backgrounds.

Rettig (1995) concludes that the enhancement of cultural awareness through play is that cultural diversity needs to be seen in a broader context than just racial differences. Children can differ from others in many ways, and an awareness of differences should include an understanding of differences based on such variables as gender, disability, religion, or geographic region. The most important factor is to encourage children to interact with each other, and play may be the best way to foster this interaction.

Conclusions

Kindergarten education has the aim to prepare your child ready to enter primary education. Process of kindergarten education should be able to develop the whole child's potential. One part in the process of education in kindergarten is a time of rest or recess between the hours of lessons. Recess can be filled with play activities, because play can be played anywhere at any time and by anyone. In addition, the play is the world's children therefore play is a very dear child. Play performed at the time of recess should not be exhausting children.

By carrying out play activities at recess time, children can get the increasing of multicultural awareness. In order to realize the development of the multicultural awareness, certain play activities should be done. Play activities are unstructured play and structured play. More specifically, the types of activity that can be played by children during recess time are traditional games, music, clothing, foods, games, celebrations, and dramatic play. Besides, children can play cultural games (farming, hunting games).

Together with other educational activities, Recess time which is filled by play activities can increase the awareness of multicultural when cultural diversity is seen in the broader contexts, not only viewed as racial

differences. An awareness of differences should include an understanding of differences based on such variables as gender, disability, religion, or geographic region. The most important factor is to encourage children to interact with each other, and play may be the best way to foster this interaction.

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