

The Malaysian National Science Centre and its Science Stories as a Visitors' Companion Programme

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Overview

The National Science Centre of Malaysia is situated at a 20-acre site at Bukit Kiara, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It is an informal education institution under the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment. The Centre's mission is to inculcate a science-cultured society, which will contribute to the nation's development to improve the quality of life.



The National Science Centre of Malaysia

To implement the said mission, the Centre has a five-year strategic plan. The strategies are:

- ◆ to provide an environment as well as facilities for the fun teaching-learning of science
- ◆ to provide and build interactive science exhibits
- ◆ to provide and run interesting science programmes and activities
- ◆ to author and publish science literature
- ◆ to facilitate and advise on informal science education.

The Centre is equipped with various world-class facilities such as science laboratories, library, theatres, mechanical and electronics workshops, computer teaching laboratories, auditorium and seminar rooms. It provides an exciting informative atmosphere for visitors to explore, discover and learn the relationship between science, technology and everyday life without forgetting that a balance should be maintained between science, the environment and human ethics.

A total of 3,000 interactive, interpretive exhibits are housed in 14 thematic galleries, including a tropical freshwater aquarium and an outdoor educational

science park. The design of some of the exhibits takes into consideration the limitations of the physically challenged visitors to the Centre.

The Centre carries out value-added activities under its *Science Enrichment Programme* known as *Program Tarbiyah Sains*. Both in-reach and out-reach activities are implemented throughout the year under this programme. Through the Centre's mobile science exhibition, the Malaysian rural communities get a taste of a science museum. Activities for pre-school children are designed in accordance with their cognitive development and space for these activities was designed with young visitors in mind. The teaching-learning techniques used in most of the activities are student-centred, informal and problem-solving.

The Centre authored and published its own bulletin, *Sahabat Sains*, (*Science Pal*) which parents and teachers can use to assess the effect of science centre visits on their children or students. The Centre has recently embarked on the writing and publishing of a series of science story books in the Malaysian language, which is the only one of its kind in Malaysia. This series of storybooks has been used by the Centre as its visitors' companion programme which is described in detail below.

Since the establishment of the Centre ten years ago, we have worked closely with university academics, educators and schoolteachers. The Centre conducts training programmes for trainee teachers, and provides research facilities to undergraduate and postgraduate university students. This research is focused on the effective mode of imparting and presenting science to the young and the general public. The Centre also provides an industrial training programme to undergraduate university students and credit points collected are accredited towards their degree.

Visitors' Companion Programme

The Centre has recently introduced a new visitors' companion programme, *Story Telling with the Centre*, after a great response was received from the parents and teachers from the *Science Visitors' Companion Programme*. There is great shortage of storybooks in the Malaysian language and no science storybooks at all, except those translated from other languages. Because of this, the Centre decided to write and publish its own series of science storybooks, in the Malaysian language, based on the science concepts as presented in some of the exhibits at the Centre.

Three science concepts – animal senses, animal camouflage and animal inter-dependence – were chosen. The moral of the stories is to inculcate love and

respect in humans towards nature. The books are targeted for children between six and ten years, with the aim to cultivate the parent-child relationship through reading the books.

It was decided that the writers should be the Centre staff so they would have the opportunity to improve their science knowledge, writing skills and creative presentation of science concepts. This is also one way to help the staff to be multi-skilled, versatile, self-confident and develop self-worth.

A series of workshops on creative writing and graphic animations was organised by the Centre for the would-be writers and graphic designers. Professionals, academics and consultants were engaged to guide and to train the staff. After the training session the team was given a free-hand to develop their own ideas, story lines, style and format. A team spirit was maintained throughout the year it took to complete the project, which resulted in three books entitled:

- ◆ *Bagaiman Ikan Mengesan Benda* (How Fish Detect Things)
- ◆ *Saling Bergantungan* (Interdependence)
- ◆ *Haiwan Menyamar* (Animal Camouflage)

The Centre then co-published the three books with Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, a renowned publisher in Malaysia. The books were officially launched by the Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment.

As an added value for the Centre's visitors and the readers, the stories from the books have been dramatised by the Centre staff for its *Story Telling with the Centre* programme. Through this programme parents learn how to use the books interactively and dynamically so that the science concepts are transmitted across to the readers through fun play.

Achievements

Since the Centre opened its door three and a half years ago, it has reached out to no less than one million people in Malaysia. The Centre hopes to contribute positively to the Nation's mission of generating a society of educated people.

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