

## ROLE OF TOYS AND PLAY IN CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

**Rupam B. Upadhyaya**

*Assistant professor, Extension center  
Children's University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India  
E-mail: rupambupadhyaya@yahoo.com*

Received : 20-11-2015

Accepted : 29-06-2016

### INTRODUCTION

A play is a universal phenomenon. Children belonging to all cultures engage in this activity during the significant phase of life called childhood. The play involves toys as its inseparable component. Hence, anthropologists across the world have found evidence of toys dating as far back as there is a record of human life. Though the methods, games and toys related with the activities of the play differ from culture to culture, generation to generation, it is clearly an instinctual, essential part of growing up. Toys offer a chance to connect with the child. The parents of every child are child's first teachers and much of child's learning happens through play. Play helps child learn the maturity of the society and helps child understand some of the important images of early consciousness. Therefore, it is not unwise to assert that various games and plays children learn the very basics of behavioral science of their respective society.

Parents need to make time to play with their children. Parents can start to play when the child is an infant. When baby starts to smile and you smile back, you are engaged in play. The play is directed by the child and the rewards come from within the child. Play is enjoyable and spontaneous. Play helps your child learn social and motor skills and cognitive thinking.

Children also learn by playing with others. One provides the setting for his/her child to play with others. As one's children grow, he/she provides toys, materials, and sports equipment so that they can play with others. It is important that children learn that play is important throughout life.

Choosing toys and activities that are suitable for infants and toddlers can challenge. By being mindful of the basic principles of child development and the role of play, parents can intentionally select toys to meet young children's unique needs and interests, supporting learning. It is also important to be aware of the essential role of parent child interactions.

### **The Value of Toys**

Toys are children's tools to play better. Toys are an important ingredient of play; they are invaluable to aid a Child physical, mental, social and emotional development. Toys reflect the times and cultures we live in and provide children with tools to help them relate to the world in which they live. Toy manufacturers keep pace with the rapidly changing world and provide children with correspondingly appropriate playthings for their enjoyment and to challenge their creativity and imagination.

### **Vital Importance of Toys**

The following statement was prepared by the Spanish toy association and provides many vitally important reasons why toys are so necessary to the development and well-being of children.

- Children have played with toys throughout history and in all cultures. Toys promote children's well being.
- Toys have a central role in children's play with one another and help them develop socially.
- Toys support right to play in childhood, which is essential to healthy child development.
- Restriction of the right to play and the time to play has serious consequences on children's development and their later behavior as adults.
- Toys are vital tools that help foster the mental, physical, emotional and social development of boys and girls.
- Toys support the right to education through encouraging play and learning.
- Toys are basic instruments for the development of children's fantasy, imagination and creativity.
- Toys are available for all stages and ages of child development. They enrich family life by fostering fun, amusement and communication between all family members, regardless of age.
- A safe, secure environment is essential for play. Toys must be safe and of high quality.

- Providing they comply with all the conditions necessary to ensure children's safety, toys are an integral part of their development.

### **The Role of Toys**

In addition to being purpose-built for children's play, toys invite play and prolong play. Children will play longer when suitable play objects are available, and stand to gain the greatest benefits that play has to offer.

According to research conducted in homes, the two most powerful factors related to cognitive development during infancy and the preschool years are the availability of play materials and the quality of the mother's involvement with the child.

The availability of toys in infancy is related to the Child's IQ at three years of age. Children with access to a variety of toys were found to reach higher levels of intellectual achievement, regardless of the children's gender, race or social class.

In one study, the availability of toys intended for social play increased social interaction with disabled children in inclusive preschool.

It is abundantly clear that play is of vital importance in children's health and development and in becoming responsible citizens. Yet despite the widespread belief that play is beneficial to children, opportunities and encouragement for free play are increasingly limited. Among child development experts and education professionals there are growing calls for reintroducing play into early childhood education.

### Choosing Toys of Value

Toys have high play value when they-

- Can be used in many ways.
- Allow children to be in charge of the play.
- Appeal to children at more than one age or level of development.
- Are not linked to video games, computers, TV, or movies.
- Can be used with other toys for new and more complex play.
- Will stand the test of time and continue to be part of play as children develop new interests and skills.
- Promote respectful, non stereotyped, non - violent interactions among children.
- Help children develop skills important for further learning and a sense of mastery.
- Can be used by children to play alone as well as with others.
- Can be enjoyed by both girls and boys.

Toys have limited play value when they.....

- Can only be used in one way encouraging all children to play the same way.
- Look exciting, but quickly become boring because they only require children to push a button and watch what happens.
- Do they play “for” children, instead of encouraging exploration and mastery.
- Lead children spend more time with TV or other media, and letting the screen take control of their play.
- Promote violence which can lead to aggressive and disrespectful play.

- Separate girls and boys with highly gender divided trays.
- Introduce academic concepts at too early an age, leaving less time for creative play that best prepares children for academic learning.

### Toys and Play in Infancy

The first toys of infancy can be ones that stimulate the senses of sight and hearing, not necessarily ones that can be manipulated. Newborn infants do not have enough voluntary control over their muscles to handle a toy. At first, their muscle movements are reflexive, uncoordinated and jerky. Therefore, even if one puts a rattle in a baby’s balled-up fist, (Babies reflexively keep their hands balled into fists the first few weeks after birth), he/she will more than likely hit himself in the head with it, cry from the pain, and never realize that he/she himself/herself was the originator of the pain.

### The Sight of Infancy

Change and stimulation are necessary, even in the crib. While lying on his back, the infant can see the ceiling of his/her room, the upper walls, and the sides of the crib usually all white. On his stomach, he/she can see the crib sheets and the sides of the crib.

Put up decals or figures on the ceiling. Some kind of temporary attachment would be best so that they can be changed from time to time.

A wallpaper border with animals or a colorful parade of children or other figures marching around the room can provide hours of interested gazing and fantasy creating. A picture can also be placed on the walls and when the infant can stand in his crib, he will be able to see

decals placed anywhere on them, even at the bottom.

### **The Sound of Infancy**

A toy that we can use early in infancy to provide auditory as well as visual stimulation is a crib mobile that contains a music box. Fisher-price makes an excellent one. Other toys that offer auditory stimulation, even before the infant has the muscular control needed to directly interact with them are wagging musical stuffed toys made by Eden, which gently move their heads when wound up.

### **The Mouth as a Tool for Exploration**

For the infant, the mouth is also a tool to explore and get information about his environment. He is not necessarily trying to eat everything he puts in his mouth. Along with satisfying an innate need to suck, he is trying to learn something about the particular object, much as he does by using his eyes and ears. Because of this, infants will always put playthings into their mouths. It is important to give them chewable, "mouth able" toys-toys that can be sucked on without danger. We may see specially heavy chewing on toys during teething. The baby's toys could

- Be too large to be swallowed
- Be totally immiscible in water and easily cleanable
- Be colored with non toxic lead-free paint
- Contain no small pieces.

### **Self Awareness**

During the period of infancy (Birth to 2 years), a multitude of important behavioral changes takes place. Physically, the child moves from being a passive onlooker to becoming a

self-locomoting, talking interactor with one's environment. Socially, s/he moves from a totally self-centered, non - social being to one who becomes aware of others and is integrated into the family. Psychologically, s/he becomes aware of oneself as a separate entity and also develops feelings either positive or negative about oneself. Intellectually, s/he takes great strides in learning about, classifying, and putting some order into his world and all of these far - reaching changes are taking place a coordinated, interconnected fashion.

During this important phase, the toys play very significant role in the definitive sense. Hence, the core question arises at this point is, how to select the toys for one's child that may pave the way for these crucial developmental changes? First, two very important factors are needed to be discussed. The infant is beginning to form an idea of who s/he is; and to facilitate this self - awareness, s/he can be able to see oneself. So, one important early - infancy toy is a non breakable mirror. Parents can also play with the infant in front of a large - scale mirror. As the infant is becoming self aware, s/he is at the same time developing feelings about oneself, a concept of oneself, self awareness says, "I am"; self concept says, "this is the way I feel about what I am" And these feelings can be either positive or negative. Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, there are no toys that directly influences an infant's self-concept. The infant gets a feeling about himself/herself by the way others respond to him/her. Some psychologists feel that the self concept or the way a person feels about himself/herself is at the very core of and influences his entire personality, even the

way he/she interacts with the world of play and toys. So, at the very least, one should start one's baby off with a good feeling about themselves. At this stage the infant is also introduced to a very important concept of cause and effect. A person who is internally controlled is one who sees a connection between what he/she does and what happens to him/her. He/she sees a connection between his/her behavior and its effects.

Children need to be provided with toys that allow them to see some connection between behavior (the cause) and what the toy does (the effect). The following are some examples of cause and effect toys that can start the movement internally:

- Squeeze toys that make a sound when pressed or chewed
- Click clack duck, click clack bunny, baby chimes, and baby flutter Ball

### **Development of Child through Toys**

#### **• Physical development**

Physical development begins in infancy. As the baby begins to get stronger, he progresses from random, jerky, reflexive movements to conscious control of his large muscles. At each step along the way, increased physical development produces ripples in the areas of social and psychological development.

When a child "discovers" his hands, and how he can make them turn and grasp and let go, the look of rapt attention and wonder on his face is a joy to behold. When he has the physical ability to reach out and grasp a toy voluntarily, to examine it visually and put it in his mouth, he is getting valuable information about his world.

He used all of his senses to explore, discover, examine, and organize his environment.

As the infant moves into early childhood, he is physically participating in much more complex and demanding world. By this time, he has developed many physical skills - walking, grasping, reaching, bending, holding, running, jumping and dressing himself. He is also becoming more coordinated, developing the large and small muscles, including push and pull and ride on toys that allow the infant to propel himself from place to place. Some recommended push and pull toys are-

- Toot toot engine, queen buzzy bee, tag alone turtle
- Child guidance's happy frog, clutch doggy, play train
- Ring tosses, gardening tools
- Ride - on toys, which allow the infant to propel himself by his own power.
- **Cognitive development**

The cognitive processes involved in play involve similar to those in learning: motivation, meaning, repetition, self - regulation, and abstract thinking: contemporary toys and games by virtue of their electronic functions and possibilities invite exploration and discovery the learning activity par excellence.

Attention is essential for reading and for many kinds of learning and performance. Attention span during free play depends almost solely on the type and number of toys available.

Children's toys provide a rich arena for investigating causal understanding because objects are understood at different levels of abstraction. For example, many dolls and action

figures can be constructed either as characters from a fictional world or as physical objects in the real world.

Parents need to be aware of the sequence of intellectual development so that they can provide the appropriate toys and experiences to facilitate this development. Toys that are beyond the Child's capabilities will serve no useful purpose: for a 100 - piece jigsaw puzzle will have no meaning for a 2 - year -old. Those toys are beneath the child's developmental level will quickly bore him. Each toy must offer an appropriate challenge, one that is not overwhelming. Piaget felt that the greatest intellectual growth or stretching takes place when there is an incongruous, some element that challenges the child's view of the world. "This round piece will only fit into the round one." The child may not know how to explain this situation in words, but he is learning the lesson just the same.

Some toys that facilitate the development of intellectual abilities are;

Puzzles, board or table games, magnetic alphabet and numbers, abacus, shape-sorting toys, nesting blocks, cups or cubes.

Toys that can be taken apart and put back together form a special category of mental development , those that foster the important skills of reversibility and whole -part discrimination.

- **Social development**

The infant's first experiences of play are with parents and siblings, who try to elicit interest and laughter from a baby. Play helps infants and toddlers gain a sense of independence and identity. Their first steps toward independence

come with their attachment to soft clothes or furry toys. Children with 'transitional objects' which they cling to at bedtime or when distressed have fewer sleep disturbances. As infants develop, their social play develops with them: At six months, babies tend to be passive; the adult must do all the work. At around six months the infant is able to sustain interest in the performance of the adult, but remains passive; the adult must do all the work. At about nine months, the infant can initiate the game, but there is no evidence of taking turns in the game. Beginning at about one year of age, when the infant shows awareness of the different play roles, infants will alternate with their mothers shifting from agent to recipient. In second year toddlers can create variations within the game, showing an understanding not only of its basic structure, but its limits and possibilities.

During play children form enduring bonds of friendship, including with their adult playmates.

Children age five to seven years with proficient pretend play skills are socially competent with peers and are able to engage in classroom activities. Children who scored poorly on the play assessment were more likely to have difficulty interacting with their peers and engaging in school activities.

- **Emotional development**

Children learn more in the first few years than they learn at any other stage of their lives. Young children learn through their relationships with others and the world around them and they learn through play. A good deal of children's important early learning about how to express and manage their feelings takes place through play. If one may see a baby trying to make

something happen, watch the baby's expression. One would be seen if the baby is really involved and wants to keep trying, so one's might be offer encouragement. For other baby one would be seen, it is getting too hard and the baby is feeling like giving up. Here a little help by moving the toy a bit closer might be just what the baby needs. The secret for babies, and for children, is to listen to the baby. At first one's 'listen' to the baby's facial expression, movements and different cries and babbles, later listen to the child's words.

### **Conclusion**

From above observations, it can be concluded that the physical, psychological and intellectual development that take place during infancy, it may be started with sorting systematically through the many infant toys on the market and choose appropriate playthings for all stages. It should be started with toys that stimulate the senses, the toys with which the infant does not physically interact at first. Then

when the child is about 4 or 5 months old, as he gains control over his body, begins grasping and sitting up, he should receive cause -and-effect toys, playthings that can be chewed on, and those that promote self-awareness.

And finally, as the child is able to move or walk on his own, has gained even more muscular control in his hands, and shows a heightened sense of awareness and interest in the world around him, he/she can make good use of ride-on and push toys, construction toys, puzzles, nesting objects, beginning art and infant books. Hobbies that begin in childhood are often continued and greatly expanded on in adolescence. Sometimes they even develop into investments or career interests.

### **Referances**

1. Erikson, Erik H. (1976). *Toys and Reasons; Stages in the Ritualization of Experiences*. New York: w.w. Norton & Company. Inc.
2. [www.childcareexchange.com](http://www.childcareexchange.com)
3. [www.tietoy.org](http://www.tietoy.org)