

PLAY EQUIPMENT FOR CHILDREN

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The child of today is the citizen of tomorrow and therefore Dr. Mehta rightly stresses in this article the need for nurturing the child's intellect during its growth and development in as best a way as possible. He shows means and methods of associating the child, through play, with the socio-economic order of the environment in which it lives and has its being. He has also outlined a scheme of graded play equipment for providing education to children from their infancy to boyhood and girlhood.

MODERN theory and practice of education emphasise the need for self-expression for the personality development of children. Play is recognised as an essential function of child life and the child at play is also the child at school and at work. If play satisfies the work desire of children and helps their education and growth, it should naturally deserve far greater attention at the hands of parents and teachers alike than it does at present. Play motives and performances of children should be carefully analysed and everything possible should be done to promote active, interesting and enthusiastic play. The play functions of children are spontaneous expression of desires and feelings generated by the environment, but at the same time several important factors need to be considered together with the subject of the present article, PLAY EQUIPMENT or the TOY. These factors are (1) Play Environment, (2) Playmates, (3) Play Time, (4) Play Leadership and (5) Play Supervision.

Play Environment.—The atmosphere in which the child should play is a creation of adults and hence maximum care should be taken that it is not congested nor packed with articles which are not of direct use to the child, and that it is clean and beautiful, orderly and well arranged, and properly equipped. The Home Nursery is found only in some modern homes of well-to-do families and it is unfortunate that children on the whole cannot have at least some play space all to themselves. In relation to play equipment the environment should at least include adequate space to spread out the play materials and a proper place which should be easily accessible for storing them without the assistance of or interference from the adults. Low cupboards and large "artistic boxes are essential for all good Nurseries.

Playmates.—In its early years the child likes to play alone and it is naturally jealous and acquisitive. The gradual introduction of a child to its playmates requires to be done gently, carefully and systematically. It is a fundamental socialisation process which will involve sharing, co-operation and co-action. In the selection of toys it is necessary that any one child does

not receive exclusively for itself toys which are beyond the means of its fellow playmates. The selection of playmates is subconsciously done by the child itself, and there will be natural likes and dislikes. The likes need to be encouraged and the dislikes discouraged, but children should not be coerced into companionships which are temperamentally uncongenial.

Play Time.—Play is essentially a free activity. Whilst play time is a necessary item in the child's daily routine which may be guided by habit, there can be no special fixed hours for playing with toys. The desire to play with toys may be caused by several factors, namely, the urge of playmates, relaxation from other tiresome activities, the desire for occupation during isolation, or the sudden appearance of a new plaything in the environment. As far as possible play should be encouraged at any time except when it should be habituated to vital routine activities. It is well known that children like to play in bed after they wake in the early morning and they play before going to bed. This habit needs to be encouraged as it provides a proper frame of mind for sleep and daily activities. Play should not be permitted to interfere with meals, baths and evictions, dressing up and similar routine activities. Play time will be naturally restricted to non-school hours for school-going children. In this case a child should not be habituated to get absorbed with its toys at the cost of outdoor life and special toys may therefore be provided for outdoor play.

Play-Leader ship.—Play leadership, so far as playing with toys is concerned, only consists of a wise selection of play materials not overlooking the desire and interests of the child and active participation of the adult in play as a secondary playmate. It is an art for an adult to be able to share the play interest and activity of child playmates, but if the adult can do this pleasantly without interfering with their initiative and enthusiasm, then the children are fond of adult playmates and they greatly appreciate the sympathetic interest of adults in their play and playthings. As a matter of fact such a co-operation between the adult and the child will create strong bonds of affection so essential for a happy family life. In selecting playthings the adult may suggest a number of suitable articles and it should be left to the child to decide what it would have for itself.

Play Supervision.—If active co-operation of the adult in play is not possible, then it should receive the minimum of supervision by and the least possible interference from adults. Supervision can only extend to the protection and safety of the child. The play-pen is an old invention to leave the child alone and absorbed with its playthings. Undesirable behaviour of children with reference to their playthings may be gently corrected. The child should be encouraged to develop the habit of keeping things in **order**

and putting every thing in its proper place. It may be shown the correct way of handling a toy though it is necessary that toys may be handled by the child according to its fancy. It is a common habit with children to experiment with playthings, manipulate them in various ways and even break or destroy them. The toy may be protected but not at the expense of the freedom, initiative and curiosity of the child.

The Toy.—Several important factors like native interests, home, school and playground environment, play leadership, playmates etc., affect the play of children, but in the present article we mainly concern ourselves with one important factor of play life, viz. play equipment. Play is as old as human civilization and from the earliest times children have played with natural and manufactured toys. These are the tools to be utilised in the play environment which is the children's workshop. We shall not discuss here in detail the history and evolution of toys and it is unfortunate that painstaking and accurate anthropologists have failed to notice this particular aspect of human life.

It may be true that the children of the early times played only with natural objects. Stones, sea shells, pebbles, sand, sticks and branches even to-day interest the child brought up in natural surroundings. The hunter's child played with the bow and arrow and probably handled with curiosity the skulls of animals. The child of the fisherman waded into the shallow waters of the sea shore and played with the fishing net. The child of the nomad probably loved the little animals and built small tents of rags to store the meagre domestic furniture. The peasant child played with the pick-axe and shovel and sowed seeds in a little garden of its own. With the emergence of the aristocracy with its wealth and leisure, the child had new opportunities for play. In Assyria and Babylon, Egypt, India and China the child played with miniature weapons of war, toy elephants and horses, wooden dolls and silver bells. The children of the princes played with toys of silver and gold, and giant playthings that resembled real objects. Even now in India silver rattles and bells are not unknown. But whenever the child has played, it has been interested in the things used by the older folk, things which were constantly in the environment but which could not be easily handled, things which were bright, colourful and capable of movement, and of making strange sounds.

It is only very recently that educationists commenced observing the complex play activities of children. They were interested in children; they were anxious to know about their natural and spontaneous activities, and they were keen upon helping the growth and personality development of the little ones so that they may become healthy, lively, energetic, intelligent and creative citizens of the future. Many of those friends of children were teachers and some were intelligent parents, and being interested in the play

antics of the child, gave their attention to analysing play activities and suggesting equipment, apparatus and materials that will contribute to play as well as to the education and growth of the child. Froebel started a new era of educational technique that has led to the introduction of further play-teaching materials like the set of articles invented by Madame Montessori that are included in the apparatus for Montessori Schools. Manufacturers and business men took their clues from these practical educationists and put hundreds of toys in the market for the benefit of millions of children. Today toy manufacture is an art and the provision of proper toys and play materials is a problem for the teacher and the parent.

Graded Apparatus.—As the child grows up different types of playthings attract its interest and stir its enthusiasm. The attraction varies normally according to (1) age, (2) sex, (3) temperament, (4) physical environment and (5) the social group in which the child lives. Ordinarily, most of the playthings and play equipment can be grouped under five major heads and toys in each successive group will be found to interest the child according to its growth. The groups are graded according to the variations of the play interest of the child and the growth of its normal abilities. In the first group can be included things that are merely handled. In the second group the articles which are capable of simple manipulation. The third group contains a variety of playthings and in equipment required for imitating various adult individual and social activities. Articles in the fourth group involve ability and skill, whilst in the last group are included equipment and apparatus that involve creation and invention.

Play in the First Year.—The child is able to handle play materials from the first year of its existence. Sound, shape, taste and colour attract the smallest child. The rattle, the sucking thimble and the ball are amongst the first tools that are dropped into the cradle for rough handling, or are hung up for merely dangling before the wide open eyes of the attracted, interested and curious child. Safe and clean materials, smooth surfaces and bright colours receive the first attention of the scientific manufacturer. The materials used for manufacture are mainly wood, cloth or light metal and silver is used where it can be afforded. Special care is required in the selection of toys for the baby. The edges must be rounded and the surface must be smooth so as not to injure the child during play. Of all the shapes the child is interested in the round shape and carved objects. Sharp angles should be avoided. Bright colours attract the infant but the most suitable are light yellow, light sky blue, pale pink and red. Cloth toys are now also very popular and the infants delight in using plush or velvet balls hung up by coloured strips of ribbon,

Wooden Toys.—From the earliest stage of industrial production of toys as also in the previous handicraft stage, the wooden toy had found the largest market in the Western as well as Eastern countries. Even today the educationist unhesitatingly recommends the wooden plaything as against the metal and mechanical toy. The wooden toy is safe, smooth and durable, easily coloured and easily manufactured. It is comparatively light in weight and can be handled with ease. Various types of wooden toys afford ample scope to the child for manipulation and exercise of the imagination. Educational play apparatus for the small child has almost universally been made of wood since the days of Froebel.

Play in the Early Years.—From about the age of two years or even a few months earlier, the child is introduced to shapes and colour. The coloured shapes are handled, arranged, manipulated and counted according to the fancy of the child. Amongst modern toys the most important play materials that go to make a large variety of interesting toys are the bead, the play block, the building blocks and the wooden pegs.

Beads.—The educational play material catalogues of leading firms all the world over include as many as twelve shapes of wooden beads in several sizes. Very large beads or wooden balls are the basis of the first two of the eight kindergarten gifts invented by Froebel. The beads are usually coloured in the primary and secondary colours and large holes drilled through them provide interesting, manipulative play. The use of the bead for teaching arithmetic probably originated in China and is known throughout the world. The most interesting bead counting apparatus exists in Japan. A recent bead play apparatus in the catalogues of most of the important toy manufacturing firms is the toy jewellery box which includes coloured beads and strings. The experience of passing the coloured metal tipped lace through the holes of the multi-coloured, multi-shaped beads develops manipulative skill, observation and concentration and at the same time gives scope to imagination.

Play Blocks.—The wooden brick or play block stands foremost in this group. The normal child has a genius for construction and a fondness for destruction. Play blocks are the best materials to give ample scope to the child for creation and destruction without any danger of wear and tear of the materials. The oblong wooden brick led to the introduction of house-construction sets, and these followed picture cubes and building cubes as well as various other multidimensional wooden shapes. Wooden block play, so common to the West, is not much in evidence in the Eastern and especially Indian homes. Amongst the most famous of the wooden blocks is perhaps the series introduced under the Van Aistyne Chart. This list consists of standard bricks ($6'' \times 3'' \times 1\frac{1}{2}''$),

double depth bricks, double length bricks, half bricks, cubes, cylinders, triangles and semi-circles. The standard Aistyne set meant for the school-room for the use of 15 children of kindergarten age contains more than 300 pieces. It is the famous Aistyne set which has been manipulated by manufacturers to turn out the house construction sets. In Germany the manufacture of the house construction set was an exclusive monopoly of an important toy manufacturing firm. The Aistyne blocks, made to smaller dimensions, are sold in boxes as well as in wheeled carts and trolleys. Picture cubes, common especially to France, have interested children and especially girls all over the world. The Alphabetical Cubes are an interesting play apparatus for language teaching. Telescoping cube-shaped boxes are a recent introduction to the toy market. The play blocks are also useful for exercising manipulative skill and teaching arithmetic. Special apparatus has been invented for stringing, counting and pegging coloured wooden blocks of various shapes.

Wooden Pegs.—Perhaps in order to reduce the monotony of the bead and the wooden block, the peg has appeared both in the toy catalogues as well as in the lists of kindergarten apparatus. The coloured peg has the shape of a bottle cork with a small dowel-extension at the bottom of the peg. Manipulating ability is developed by inserting the pegs in holes provided in various types of Boards. Peg play has led to the invention of the famous Spoil Five game.

Mosaics or Parquetry.—The child is extremely fond of manipulation, and the bead, the block and the peg provide most interesting manipulative exercise; but the pleasure derived from manipulation is very much increased when abundant scope is given to the child for the use of its own imagination. The various types of Mosaics or Parquetry sets are perhaps the best combination of manipulative and imaginative play which indirectly also contributes a good deal towards the artistic development of the child. Originally, mosaics consisted of flat coloured wooden shapes, especially triangles, diamonds, squares and oblongs, which were arranged on trays to form exquisite floor designs. Later bead and peg mosaics have also appeared in the market. In this play apparatus the beads and pegs are placed in holes drilled into the boards, The child will make pictures and designs by placing the beads or pegs in different positions. Lentil and Figure Laying Boxes are a further improvement on the mosaics which only helped to make floor designs and patterns. Lentil boxes consist of a large number of multi-coloured wooden circles, semi-circles and squares, whilst figure laying boxes include other shapes like semi-circles, oblongs, pentagons, etc. and also a number of coloured wooden sticks of various sizes. Mosaics are now also used for the teaching of the alphabet and counting.

Toys for the Toddler.—As the play interest of the child advances, it desires to play with things that require greater manipulations. The creative side becomes more developed and keen enthusiasm is displayed for doing things. Colour sense is sufficiently educated to recognise shades of the eleven colours that are included in the list invented by Madame Montessori. Several play articles have been invented to provide intricate manipulation and advanced series of play blocks and house builders afford better opportunities for engaging the creative interest of the child. Amongst the advanced toys for children between four and six years of age are colour towers, pyramids and posting puzzle boxes. To suggest effort and obtain success and at the same time provide opportunity for manipulation, the hammer is introduced in various types of play apparatus. The most interesting of these toys are known as Hammer and Pegs, and Tap Tap. The Hammer and Pegs is a single play apparatus. The pegs are slit crosswise at the ends and they are to be hammered into holes by the child. The Tap Tap is like the Mosaic, but each wooden bit has a hole through which a thin nail has to be driven into a soft wooden board with the aid of the hammer. The idea of fitting things into holes of the original shape of the article has been well exploited by Madame Montessori. The same idea has appeared in the toy market and various cut-outs are used as insets to fit into similarly cut holes and shapes in the pieces of wood.

The four-year old is interested in reading the clock, and several play articles have been invented to teach "What Time is it ?" to children. The simplest is the clock whose hands are easily moved by the child to show a particular time. The Peg Clock and similar devices attain the same object in more difficult ways.

Wheeled Toys.—After the interest in creation, destruction and manipulation comes the child's fascination for movement. Every moving object in its environment has a strange attraction for the child. This was noticed by Froebel when the first two of the Kindergarten apparatus were invented. Throughout the world the wheeled toy holds the imagination of the child as soon as it begins to walk. In the beginning the child is satisfied with what are known as Pull-Along toys. The hobby horse on wheels appeals to the western child. The child in the Indian slum is satisfied by fixing four wheels on a tin box to drag it along with plenty of noise, if it is possible. Well coloured wheeled carts, trolleys, trucks, loaded barges and cargo boats, railway engines, motor cars, aeroplanes, fire engines, horse carriages, military transports and innumerable varieties of wheeled toys in different sizes are there to satisfy the child about its curiosity for moving objects.

The child is not merely satisfied by dragging a toy, but it is more interested in enjoying movement. Wheeled toys of a larger size which can be

occupied by the child" whilst it is dragged by others or are self-propelled occupy a prominent place in the toy market. The perambulator precedes the Kindergarten toy. Later on the play-pen idea is represented in the "High Chair" and the "Kiddy Ear". The child, seated on this chair on wheels, is enabled to move about of its own accord. Self-propelled wheeled toys, especially the tricycle and the scooter interest older children.

The hand-cart, wheelbarrow, the porter's truck and trolley, which are used by carrying about loads of play articles and play blocks from one place to another, are of much interest to children. These articles are an important item in the equipment of Labour Schools in Europe and Nursery Schools all over the world. The child indirectly takes to manual labour and realises the importance of physical effort. It is the first interesting lesson in playing with the "Work Idea". The luggage-carrying play articles are efficient instructors for imparting the idea of self-help.

Water Play.—Almost together with the interest in movement, appears the child's interest in water. The sea ought to become any child's companion, The sand is a safe and hygienic play article for every child. The sand-pit and the sand table can be provided for the child in the garden or in the house. Sand affords ample opportunities for and gives full scope to the growing imagination of the young one. To improve its natural faculties and afford greater play activity the sand cart and sand play apparatus like bucket, shovel, sand-pencil, sand tapper and sand carver are provided. Children delight to play in water, wade in pools and splash in the wading ports that are a part of Housing Settlements in the West. Children are keenly interested in floating paper boats on pools of water, and play equipment manufacturers produce "bath toys" like wooden boats, sail boats, steamers, battle ships and barges which can easily float in a bucketful of water.

Toys for the Pre-School Child.—As the child grows up, special kindergarten toys have been invented to suit its needs. Amongst these the most important are pyramids, circular towers and cones. These are manufactured in different colours. Coloured pictures are added to enhance the interest and the educative possibilities of the toy. Other special play apparatus include Puzzle Boxes, Posting Boxes, Insets and Hammer and Pegs of a more advanced type than those provided for the toddler. Picture puzzles and Jig Saw puzzles are well known, and easily constructed pictures attract even the very small child. There are several types of block puzzles with colour and shape clues that exercise the mind and invite the curiosity of the playmates. The Posting Box likewise is a puzzle that teaches shape and affords easy manipulative exercises.

Pets and Animals. —'Little children are not merely interested in bright,

colourful green shaped, smooth surfaced objects in their environment; they are also interested in living creatures. Animals are the greatest friends of the young. They are the fellow playmates of the little human world. If living pets are not easily available as companions for the affectionate child, then even animal toys are adequate to satisfy their love of the sub-human kingdom. It is necessary to avoid giving ugly, ill-made unreal animal toys to the enthusiastic little boy or girl, though many educationists have suggested that the unreal toy appeals to the fancy and imagination of children. Amongst the many animals, the puppy, the pussy, the teddy bear and jumbo the elephant are desired by most children; but the good toy producer can make any animal appeal to the imagination of the young. Some of Walt Disney's creations like Micky Mouse and Donald Duck or the human Pinocchio have easily caught the imagination of the western child. The animals by themselves, carved in wood or made of cloth or velvet are good enough for any child; but they become more interesting when they are coloured and are capable of being moved. Still greater interest is added when they are performing toys.

Dolls.—Playthings that belong to the living world are not merely objects of play. Just as the primitive mind confuses the inanimate with the animate, likewise the toy is 'real' and alive to the small child. It shares its life, receives its tender affections and mother care and listens to the word pictures of the young imagination as they leave the innocent lips. The animal, and still more the doll, has a great humanising, socialising influence on the young child. It gives shape to tender emotions and makes the children kind and pleasant. It is true that the doll, be it the old Indian wooden "Chotis" or the modern fancy-dress doll, appeals more to the girl than to the boy. It is not merely a toy by itself, but it becomes another live companion round which other interesting games will revolve. The girl will not merely have the doll, it will cook for it and feed it, give it a comfortable home, dress it and lull it to sleep, rock it on the hobby horse and drive it in the small perambulator. The doll provides another world, a world full of imagination, beauty and grandeur, to the active and interested child.

Mimic Play.—If dolls are not very fascinating to young boys, they delight in playing with human figures in another way and they mimic other aspects of the social life of man. Playing at soldiers with forts and guns may not be a very pleasant and educative pastime for peaceful citizens of the future, but this type of play has appealed very much to the Western mind. Playing at shop, or reconstructing a miniature railway system is a prototype of the dolls' house with its cooking and house arrangements.

Mimic play should be regarded by parents and teachers alike as a very

instructive type of amusement for the young. The play system of the Soviet Union is carefully planned to introduce the young to factory and farm life from very early years. There is not the slightest harm if the child is made to rehearse the entire round of healthy folk activity in the playroom. For example, there is an interesting American toy which explains to the child the correct methods of crossing streets and demonstrates the functions of a policeman in regulating traffic. Toy workshops and tool sets provide very great amusement to the boy and miniature toy workshops are sold for the benefit of Japanese children.

Educational Play.—The toy which is mainly an instrument of play has been requisitioned for the benefit of the classroom, especially for teaching the alphabet and arithmetic. Wooden cut-outs help the teaching of the alphabet and the building up of the child's vocabulary. Alphabet blocks are commonly used in the Nursery School. Interesting counting devices have been invented using the bead or the wooden cube as the basis of instruction. The printing press is not merely useful for creating school books but also a large variety of printed play objects. Printed wall charts, clocks, etc., are used in classrooms for the purpose of instruction. The games of Anagrams, Word Building and Sentence Building are useful for teaching vocabulary to the child in a much quicker time than would be necessary in a classroom. In the toy market the book has now definitely taken an important place. Picture books and story books appeal more to children than the Primer and the Copy Book, but these books deserve a more careful planning if they are to serve the play interests of children.

It is most difficult to invent toys for the grown up boy or girl above seven years of age. There is a dearth of varieties and the same articles are repeated with minor changes. Grown-ups like also to play with the same article for a longer period than the toddler as their interest is more sustained. It is only recently that advanced toys suitable for girls have come into the market and yet they are less numerous and less interesting than corresponding play articles for boys unless the girl acquires interests which are similar to the boy's interests.

Advanced Play.—Construction games which are an improvement on the original manipulative games are the first on the list for grown up children. Complicated Mosaics and House Builders with a larger number of pieces interest children till they are ten to fourteen years old. There are a large number of other Construction Sets in the market for toy-making and building wheeled toys like engines, motor cars, motor trucks, aeroplanes, etc. The metal construction sets originally came from Germany and they were later manufactured in England and U. S. A, also. The Maccano Primus, and the

Merklin sets are the most important and interesting of these. They not only interest the young, but are capable of giving satisfaction to adults till old age. Complicated House Builders and Architect's Sets of various types have been invented but the most interesting of these are the Mobacco and the Minibrix. Construction games are not mere play but they afford very useful technical instruction, improve skill, and develop the intellect. Next to outdoor life, they are the most valuable recreation for youngsters all over the world.

What came into the home as play went into the school as handwork. Kindergarten Handwork provides innumerable interesting activities that afford play as well as pleasure. Plastascine and clay work, paper articles and coloured paper mattresses, cardboard constructions, handyman's tool sets, basket making, raffia, leather work, barbola, wire constructions, bead weaving, knitting and weaving are only some of the most interesting handicrafts that enter the curriculum of Kindergarten and Infant Schools. In the toy market are also found play boxes of plastacine sets, embroidery and knitting cards, basket-weaving boxes, bead-weaving boxes, toy-weaving looms, etc. In handwork the child actually plays with "Work Life" and enters the arena of vocations through the play room.

The grown up boy and girl can yet continue to play, play with the intellect, play with the Sciences and the Muses. The advanced construction sets, as has been said before, provide a never ending interest whilst some of the cardboard and table games as well as card games provide a good deal of intellectual exercise. But perhaps more interesting than all these is to play with Science, to experiment in physics, chemistry and electricity. The famous Lott's products, which, unfortunately, do not come often into this country, have provided interest and instruction to millions of children, especially in the West. Music, painting and sculpture too are not unrepresented in the toy market. The percussion band has added a unique interest to the school curriculum. Advanced sets of plastascine provide interesting opportunities to the budding sculptor. Tuck and his associates and firms like Windsor and Newton have done much to further the little ones interest in art.

In writing the above article there is a certain discontent felt by the author which will be shared by many other readers. India figures so little in the toy world. Wooden toys have been known to the markets, especially in Northern India. Wooden coloured playthings turned on the lathe are found everywhere, and are excellently made in Mysore. Beautiful clay toys are manufactured by our village potters. The brass toys of Delhi are yet sold in our fairs. Whilst wishing the best for our own country, one has to concede that the importance of the toy has been recognised neither by the parent nor the teacher nor the national leader. In Russia after the Revolution a great

scientist took up the work of 'inventing toys which would be typical of Russia's national life and culture. In India a good deal of propaganda has yet to be done to bring home to the public the importance of play and the toy for the purpose of aiding the growth of the child and making play a part of education and instruction. Toy manufacture has been taken up in several parts of the country during the present war when there are no imports from the West and one enterprise has originated in Bombay which manufactures educational play equipment and imitates the best of toys in the West and hopes to create national toys to suit our national culture. It is essential that educationists should aid the toy manufacturer and even the small home industry man all over the country to create toys which are interesting, beautiful and useful from the educational point of view. The really good toy must give pleasure and instruction, direct and cultivate interests, and develop skill, personality and character.

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