



The Parent Page

Winter 2010

The Changing World of Toys and Toy Play

By David Elkind

Children learn about themselves and their world from their play with toys. Over the past half century there has been a remarkable transformation of the toy world of children. Toys have changed in quantity, quality, and level of technology. Mass production has made inexpensive toys available in enormous quantities, and in seemingly unlimited variety. Once given to celebrate special occasions such as birthdays and holidays, toys are now routinely purchased all year long. Comforting toys of wood, cotton, and wool are now made of synthetic materials. Microchip embedded toys that mimic human behavior have replaced the wind up and battery operated toys of the past. Too many toys, given too often, made of synthetic material, and run by computer chips have denied children many of the benefits they once took from interacting with less high tech playthings.

Too many toys, too often

Toy play is one of the ways children nourish their disposition for imagination and fantasy. Like other human potentials, imagination and fantasy can only be fully developed through practice.

The sheer number of toys owned by contemporary children weakens the power of playthings to lead children into the world of make-believe. Familiarity breeds contempt but so, too, does abundance.

My three-year-old granddaughter Lily, doesn't really

value her toys because she has so many of them. She sometimes seems overwhelmed by the multiplicity of playthings and goes from toy to toy without spending much time on any one of them. She now appears to look to toys for amusement and distraction, rather than for imaginative inspiration. It is really hard to help her parents appreciate that when it comes to toys, less is more. Only when a child spends time with a particular toy can he or she weave it into a story tapestry of his or her own invention.

Too many toys, given too often, contribute among other things to the decline in the imaginative activities of young children. Psychiatrist Alvin Rosenfeld tells the following anecdote regarding young children's imagination.



"I have observed the steady decline of play over the past 30 years, but even I was astonished by a recent call from a counselor at an elementary school nearby. She had been talking with a first grade class and used the word imagination. The children stared blankly at her, she explained the meaning, but the children continued to look puzzled. She gave an example from her own childhood when she loved to play Wonder Woman. She would put on a cape, she said, and run down the hill near her home with her arms outstretched, pretending to be aloft. 'That's imagination when you pretend to be someone you're not,' she explained to the children.

"'But we don't know how to do that,' said one child and all the others nodded in agreement. Not one child in the first grade seemed to know what imagination was" (Rosenfeld 2000).

To be sure, many children still become attached to their toys and build a fantasy life around them. But it is much more difficult for children to do so when they are receiving new playthings all year long. Nonetheless, children are still drawn to those toys which nourish their need for imaginative play. This explains the longevity of some toys, like blocks, and the short half-life of others, like battery operated toy animals.

Continued...

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the YMCA CCRR is funded by the Province of British Columbia

Sensational toys

Young children are very much oriented to the senses. Now that so many toys are made of artificial materials, they no longer give children the rich sensory experience they once did. The color and feel of plastic is just not the same as that of real materials. Certainly artificial materials are here to stay. Yet if children are first exposed to toys made of natural materials, they will have a healthy standard against which to compare man-made materials.

There are other reasons why natural materials benefit children. Our pet dachshund, Remy, prefers cotton to synthetics and refuses to rest on a polyester blanket — should we have the temerity to offer him such. Natural materials like cotton and wool (if you are not allergic) have a comfort and warmth that synthetics do not. We now appreciate that touch is a very powerful and important sensory experience. Research demonstrates that cuddling and fondling of infants by caregivers is critical to their healthy development. The human skin is a very comforting sensory experience. We should not underestimate the comfort, and stress reducing qualities of natural materials, particularly for young children.

Microchip toys

Computer chip embedded toys have also affected what children learn from toy play. Spring- and battery-operated toys were limited in what they could do, but computer chips vastly increase the range of activities performed by toys. Remote-controlled cars, planes, and boats are one example, and toys that respond selectively to a child's voice is another. The complexity of electronic technology changes the child's intellectual engagement with these playthings. The mechanics of jumping jacks and wind-up toys are easy for children to understand. Computer chip toys, in contrast, work as if by magic. Four- to eight-year-old children cannot really understand the electronics that run remote controlled devices and other chip produced activities.

Does this really make a difference? I believe it does. For one thing, a child who is curious about how a jumping jack or wind-up toy works can figure it out. But there is no way a child of this age is going to understand the electronics of remote control or voice recognition. It is certainly possible that children's inability to figure out how their playthings work can dampen their scientific curiosity. This could, in part at least, help account for the current decline in the number of students taking physics and chemistry courses and majoring in science.

What parents and early childhood educators can do

It would be wrong to place all the blame for the demise of imaginative play on the plethora of playthings in chil-

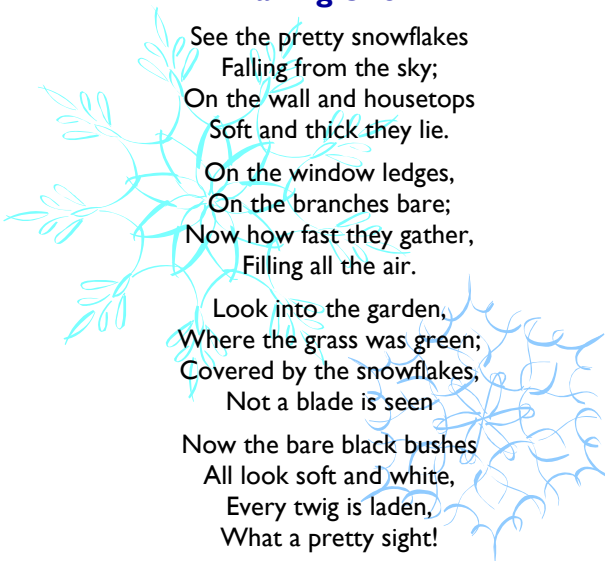
dren's toy chests. The pervasiveness of television, computer games, and competitive sports and academic pressures, all take away time from creative toy play. Yet there are things we can do. Children's toys that have borne the test of time are always a good investment. A set of wooden blocks can be used by children throughout the preschool years. Wooden puzzles, crayons, play dough, and other manipulable materials also encourage imaginative activity. Hand-me-down clothing and utensils help support imaginative dramatic play. But these playthings will only be able to work their magic if children are given the time, and the freedom, to interact with them.

Reference

Rosenfeld, A., & Wise, N. (2000). *The Over-Scheduled Child*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

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www.ChildCareExchange.com

Falling Snow



See the pretty snowflakes
Falling from the sky;
On the wall and housetops
Soft and thick they lie.

On the window ledges,
On the branches bare;
Now how fast they gather,
Filling all the air.

Look into the garden,
Where the grass was green;
Covered by the snowflakes,
Not a blade is seen

Now the bare black bushes
All look soft and white,
Every twig is laden,
What a pretty sight!

~ by anonymous

Coquitlam Centre, the Coquitlam Public Library, School District 43 and the Tri-Cities ECD Committee present:

Family Learn and Play Event

Imagine, play and learn through math, stories, song, arts and more! For children 3–10 years old. Children who participate receive a goodie bag filled with a book and lots of fun activities to try at home! Parent supervision is required.

When: Last Wednesday of each month

Time: 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Location: Coquitlam Centre Mall (by The Bay)

Citysoup presents

Introduction to Email Workshop

The citysoup.ca 'Introduction to Email' workshop will help participants in developing their own e-mail account, reading and writing emails, and attaching files and pictures. Opportunity will be given for hands-on learning. FREE.

Location: Innovation Centre
1207 Pinetree Way, Coquitlam

For more information on dates and times, or to register please call 604-927-6963 or email: citysoup-info@coquitlam.ca

The Lower Mainland Purpose Society presents

Parenting Children with Challenging Behaviour

This group is intended for parents of children 5-12 years of age. The group uses an educational approach to assist parents in understanding: how family dynamics affect parenting; how to improve parental coping; how to identify and address problems; how to use effective, positive discipline strategies; and how to improve communication with your child. Offered as a 6 or 8 week group beginning in January, daytime and evening sessions are available. FREE.

Location: 40 Begbie Street, New Westminster

Call today to register at 604-526-2522
www.purposesociety.org

Family Talk

Talk with other families. Anywhere.
Anytime. About Anything.

Join the BC Council for Families on Facebook to talk with other parents, grandparents, caregivers and youth. Find other families who want to share and connect.

www.bccf.ca/families/connect

Tri-City Women's Resource Society presents

Empowering Mother's Group

This Empowering Mother's Group is an 8 week parenting program designed especially for women to share experiences and learn more about their unique parenting concerns in a safe and supportive environment!



When: Beginning January 14, 2010

Time: 6:30–8:30 p.m.

Location: 2420 Mary Hill Road, Port Coquitlam

For more information or to register call, Kathy at 604-941-7111 ext. 106

Burnaby Family Life

Lending Library Kits

Let's Play! Let's Learn! Lending Library Take-Home Kits

The creation of a literacy lending library will allow new immigrants to have access to materials at home that their children are exposed to in their childcare programs.

If you would like to find out more about Burnaby Family Life or any of their projects, programs or services, please contact Charlene, @ charlene.sanjenko@gmail.com or call 604-659-2200.

www.burnabyfamilylife.org

Healthy Kids Preschool Fair

Come meet and chat with community health professionals about your child's growth and development and receive information on vision, speech, dental, health and nutrition.

When: Tuesday, February 2, 2010

Time: 9:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Location: Cameron Recreation Complex
9523 Cameron Street, Burnaby

For more information please call 604-415-3557

Baby Teethers Recalled

Two types of liquid-filled baby teething rings were recently recalled by Health Canada. The teething rings may be contaminated with *Bacillus sphaericus/fusiformis* bacteria that can cause infections. The teething rings are by Natursutten, sold in the shape of a blue fish and a yellow apple. Consumers should immediately take the recalled teething rings away from children and return them to the store where purchased for a full credit.

For additional information visit www.healthycanadians.gc.ca

Family Fun!



Light up the Heights

Burnaby Heights (Hastings)
11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Saturdays, beginning December 5, 2009

The 'Heights' will have strolling carollers, surprise visits from Santa and sweet treats for shoppers on the 3 Saturdays leading up to Christmas.

www.burnabyheights.com

Light up the Square

Saturday, December 5, 2009
1120 Brunette Avenue, Coquitlam
4:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.

Festive Fun for All Ages!

Place des Arts, Musee Mackin Museum and the Gare de Fraser Mills Station present their annual free holiday event.

For additional information call 604-664-1636 or email info@placedesarts.ca

CP Rail Holiday Train

Queen Street @ Clark Avenue
Port Moody

Friday, December 18, 2009

9:30 p.m.-10:00 p.m. (approx. time of arrival)

The Holiday Train hits the rails in December visiting over 100 communities in 7 states and 6 provinces to raise food, and awareness for local food banks. FREE.

www.cprail.ca



Carol Ships Parade of Lights

49th Year Celebration!

Friday, December 18, 2009
Barnet Marine Park-Burnaby
8:00 p.m.

Reed Point Marina-Port Moody
8:35 p.m.

Watch the flotilla of carol ships sail past. View the Carol Ships from the shore and enjoy the parade of ships decorated with more than 100,000 lights.

www.carolships.org

Hyack Christmas Parade of Lights

Columbia Street

Between 4th & 8th Street, New Westminster

Saturday, December 5, 2009

Begins 4:00 p.m.

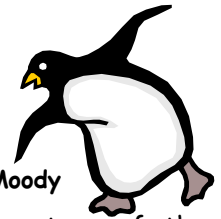
The Hyack Festival Association proudly presents a parade with bands playing Christmas music and floats featuring reindeer, elves, candy canes and toys. The parade is a swirl of colour and lights that is not to be missed.

www.hyack.bc.ca

Penguin Plunge

January 1, 2010

Rocky Point Park, Port Moody



This annual dip into the frigid waters of the Burrard Inlet gets the year started off to a memorable start. Go for a swim or watch the folks crazy enough to do it!

www.cityofportmoody.com

Olympic Torch Relay

February 11, 2010

The Olympic torch will be travelling through our communities on February 11, 2009. There will be community celebrations in Coquitlam and Queens Park in New Westminster.

For complete details visit
www.vancouver2010.com

Chinese New Year

February 28, 2010
10:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.



Gung Hay Fat Choy!

Celebrating the arrival of spring and the Year of the Tiger with thousands at the biggest parade through Chinatown in Vancouver.

In some areas of China it's a popular custom to give oranges because in Chinese, the word "orange" sounds like "Ji", which means "good luck". People present oranges to their friends and relatives to express their respect and good wishes for the coming year.