



Eastern Connecticut State University

NEWS

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MEDIA ALERT: This Story is Embargoed Until 10 a.m. on Friday, Nov. 16.

Eastern Reveals TIMPANI Research Results for Best Toy in 2012

Willimantic, CT — Faculty and student researchers at Eastern Connecticut State University have named DUPLO bricks, a toy made by the LEGO Group, as the 2012 TIMPANI Toy (Toys That Inspire Mindful Play and Nurture Imagination). Rainbow People, a toy made by Environments, Inc., received an honorable mention.

Eastern researchers announced the results of the 2012 TIMPANI Toy Study at 10 a.m. on Nov. 16 in the University's Child and Family Development Resource Center (CFDRC).

This annual study, conducted by Eastern faculty and students through Eastern's Center for Early Childhood Education, examines how young children in natural settings play with a variety of toys. Toys are selected for the TIMPANI study based on recommendations from parents, teachers and faculty. After the toys are chosen, they are placed in the CFDRC's preschool classrooms and rated on three subscales: thinking and learning, cooperation and social interaction, and self-expression and imagination. DUPLO Bricks and Environment, Inc.'s Rainbow People received the two highest overall scores in this year's study.

DUPLO bricks are colorful, plastic, interlocking building bricks. Parents and teachers know them as a larger version of the popular LEGO bricks, sized for use by preschool-aged children.

"DUPLO bricks pose many problems for children to solve, so there's a lot of deep thought that goes into building," said Jeffrey Trawick-Smith, the Phyllis Waite Endowed Chair of Early Childhood Education at Eastern and the study's principal researcher. "Construction toys have done well overall in our studies due to the fact that they don't suggest any one use. They can be used in many different ways, so children tend to interact more and negotiate what they want to build.

"One reason that DUPLO bricks did well compared with some of the other toys tested is that they maintained child interest and very high levels of play across three days of play,"

continued Trawick-Smith. For most other toys, children's interest waned after the first or second day of testing, or the quality of play dropped off over time. "DUPLO bricks also elicited high levels of play from children of very diverse backgrounds, scoring equally well across children from different ethnic and socioeconomic groups," said Trawick-Smith.

Rainbow People, a set of 30 wooden figures in a variety of colors, also scored highly. "Rainbow People prompted the children to be creative," said Jamie Vallarelli, an Eastern senior in early childhood education who was involved in the study. "They encouraged the children to create elaborate play scenarios, which developed their knowledge and vocabulary."

Vallarelli was responsible for videotaping the toys and coding the videos according to the evaluation rubric, along with students Jenny Wolff and Marley Koschel. The three students joined Trawick-Smith to present the results of the study at the National Association for the Education of Young Children conference in Atlanta on Nov. 10.

"Today's announcement of the top scoring toys in the third annual TIMPANI Toy Study demonstrates the quality of research that is occurring at our Center for Early Childhood Education," said Eastern President Elsa Núñez. "At the same time that we are identifying and testing toys that promote the intellectual, social and creative development of children, we are also helping our students prepare for careers as professional early childhood educators. I congratulate Professor Trawick-Smith and his students for this ground-breaking research. The investigative work they are doing to build strong learning environments for preschool children is impacting an entire generation."

"We are thrilled that our LEGO DUPLO bricks have been chosen by Eastern Connecticut State University's Center for Early Childhood Education as the TIMPANI Toy of 2012," said Michael McNally, brand relations director for LEGO Systems, Inc. "Research shows that construction play inspires creativity and imagination among children of all ages while also fostering storytelling and social skills, and early childhood vocabulary and literacy, and DUPLO is a perfect way to introduce toddlers to the LEGO building system."

Previous TIMPANI winners have included Hasbro's Tinker Toys, and Wooden Vehicles and Signs made by Melissa and Doug, LLC, of Wilton, CT.

For more information on the TIMPANI Toy Study, contact the Center for Early Childhood Education at (860) 465-0687 or visit www.easternct.edu/cece/timpani.html. For information about The LEGO Group and its products, visit www.lego.com. For information about Environments, Inc., and its products, visit www.eichild.com.

Eastern's Child and Family Development Resource Center will host a workshop on "Choosing Quality Toys: What All Parents Should Know" on Dec. 4, from 7 to 8 p.m. To register for the workshop, call (860) 465-0206.

Disclaimer

The TIMPANI toy study does not consider, nor does it test, the safety of toys. The study makes no claims about the safety of any toy studied. Neither the Center for Early Childhood Education nor Eastern Connecticut State University is liable for any mishaps related to the use of toys mentioned in study findings. Concerns about any toy listed in the study findings should be directed to the Consumer Products Safety Commission.

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Eastern Connecticut State University is the state's public liberal arts university and serves approximately 5,400 students each year on its Willimantic campus and satellite locations.