



Transcript for the video:

What Makes a Good Toy?

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Narrator: Young children do most of their learning during play. Research from the Center for Early Childhood Education shows that different kinds of toys inspire different kinds of play.

Child: I'm making a man.

Narrator: Some toys are better at inspiring deep thinking and problem-solving, while others are excellent at promoting creativity or social interaction.

Child 1: Say "Ah!"

Child 2: Ah!

Narrator: But what does the research tell us about the most important things to consider when selecting toys for preschoolers?

What Makes a Good Toy?

Lessons from 10 Years of the TIMPANI Toy Study

Child: Have a good trip.

Claudia Sweetland, Lead Teacher: I think a good toy is safe, developmentally appropriate, engaging, and stimulating.

Child: Let's connect it on this end and see what happens.

Patricia McCarthy, Lead Teacher: Something that sparks their imagination, allows them to work together with their peers.

Child: Yeah!!

Heather Standish, Lead Teacher: One that everyone can engage with, even children who don't speak English or have minimal English. So if we have a toy that they can interact with each other, even if it's not using the same language, I think that makes a really good toy.

Sabrina Bowersett, Assistant Teacher: Something that you would want to touch right away. You want to go to it; you want to feel what it feels like; you want to move it.

Child 1: Let's make a castle!

Child 2: Okay, we can make some castles.

Jeffrey Trawick-Smith, Play Researcher: One of the most important characteristics is that toys are simple and nonrealistic. Why that's important is that children are able to use them in many different ways.

Child 1: Look at my motorcycle!

Child 2: I like your motorcycle.

Vincent Knox Douglas, Student Assistant: Something that's flexible and that isn't just locked into doing one thing with it all the time.

Karla Alamo, Teacher Associate: A toy that inspires imagination. Something that they can think outside of the box.

Child: This is a, this is how you make a magic wand.

Niloufar Rezai, Director: A toy that is open-ended enough that allows them to use their imagination.

Leisha Flynn, Lead Teacher: That the children can, sort of, recreate their environment, their world with the toy.

Teacher: What did you make? Tell me about it.

Child: House.

Teacher: You made a house?

Child: Yeah.

Patricia Brickner, Teacher Associate: So you see what their ideas are, the questions they ask. A toy that engages them.

Child 1: This is a big one.

Child 2: How taller is than me?

Child 1: Um, no.

Child 2: It's tall like Stephen.

Jeffrey Trawick-Smith: Another reason that nonrealistic toys are so beneficial is that they are ambiguous. As children are playing, they need to explain to one another, their peers, what the toy represents, what kinds of activities are going on.

Child: I'm making flying car! Beep beep! Beep beep, beep beep!

Emily Grogan, Teacher Associate: When they're playing together, it allows for different play scenarios that they can create with their friends.

Child: That's our ball pit that you slide into. This is the slide.

Jeffrey Trawick-Smith: Toys that have multiple parts tend to score very well. There are lots of different parts for children to share with peers, to discuss, to negotiate around.

Child 1: So what if this goes down here, and then it rolls?

Child 2: I might have to hold it.

Stephen Hatch, Student Assistant: Something the kids can build with, but after they accomplish it, they kind of can sit back, and they can see that they completed something together.

Child: That was a perfect idea.

Jeffrey Trawick-Smith: Some of the highest scoring toys are those that are sort of classic, good old-fashioned toys from long ago that have been around for forever. I think about blocks; I think about Tinker Toys, even Legos. I think it kind of suggests that sometimes the toys that have been used throughout the generations are very valuable, still, for children's development. If I had to pick two types of toys that I felt were, based on our research, most powerful, I would pick these two: construction toys and also replica play toys.

Child: Do you want to make a house?

Jeffrey Trawick-Smith: Over many years of study, we've found that toys with small pieces that they can put together had a really powerful impact on children's thinking and learning and play.

Child: I am a robot!

Jeffrey Trawick-Smith: The other type of toy that I find so critical, based on our findings, are replica play toys.

Child: That's the sister; that's the boy; that's the mom.

Jeffrey Trawick-Smith: These are small people, animals, even cars, I would include, where children can play out elaborate scenarios in kind of a make-believe way.

Child 1: Someone need help.

Child 2: Ok. I will come. Wee-ooo, wee-ooo, wee-ooo.

Jeffrey Trawick-Smith: Those tend to not only do well in terms of promoting thinking and learning and symbolic thought, but they also are great for promoting social interaction and verbalization.

Child 1: I go to school, mom.

Child 2: Okay, come on, baby. It's time to go to toddler school.

Narrator: The TIMPANI Toy Study investigated more than a hundred toys over a ten-year period and found that simple, open-ended, non-realistic toys with multiple parts inspired the highest quality of play in preschoolers. Children playing with these toys were more likely to be creative in their play, engage in problem-solving, interact with their peers, and use language.

Child: Can I have four lemons?