

PLAY VALUE

TOYS, PLAY, AND TECHNOLOGY

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The latest scientific developments have always been used in toys. From music boxes and crying dolls, to electric trains, virtual pets, and remote controlled vehicles, toys reflect the latest discoveries in science and technology.

Technology-enhanced toys and games have much to offer – language learning, physical and mental skills, opportunities for social interaction, and applications in education, medicine, training, and rehabilitation.

Children are discriminating users of in-home technology. Technology is rarely the most important feature of a toy. If a toy is no fun to play with, no amount of technology will increase its desirability as a play object.

Children should have access to a wide variety of play experiences -- both indoors and outdoors play, playing alone and playing with others, both peers and adults. An assortment of toys, both traditional and hi-tech, will stimulate and sustain this playful mix.

'Smart toys' contain embedded electronics that appear to have the capacity to adapt to the actions of the player. Smart toys share three essential characteristics: They teach a skill, make learning fun, and engage the child in doing rather than passively watching something. There is little research on whether 'smart' toys increase children's IQ or later success in life. But studies are beginning to look at what can be learned with some of these devices. For example, electronic and interactive toys can teach phonics, vocabulary and fluency to preschool and early school-age children.

Today's technology opens new opportunities for children to playfully explore, experiment, and invent. However, 'edutainment' products often miss the spirit of playful learning. We need to focus on the difference between activities that foster creativity and those that don't, whether or not they use high-tech, low-tech, or no tech. (Mitchel Resnick. 2006)

Hi-tech toys may introduce children to technology at an early age, but they also keep adults and the elderly playing beyond their youth.

All toys stimulate play and invite exploration and creativity. But electronic and digital toys also contain new elements – interactivity, modifiability, and complexity – that require new skills and new ways of thinking. So there is something to be gained from playing with the newest technology.

Children's play is the same as it always has been. This is in part because play has its roots in our biological evolution. Children play with objects in order to explore, master, and create, using any and all materials available, real and imagined. This includes the latest electronic

and digital devices, which encourage flexibility, creativity, problem-solving skills, communication, and even friendships.

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