

## Criteria for Selecting Toys

by Francis Wardle, PhD

Wise selection of toys is critical to maximize resources, for safety reasons, and because young children learn a great deal from playing with toys.

### Meets Criteria . . .

**Yes**    **No**

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Does the toy have high initial interest?</b><br>Initial interest is created by novelty, attractive physical characteristics (color, shiny, frilly, strange noises, etc.), and interest to the child (matches his likes, his friends have one, he saw it on TV).   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Does the toy have high prolonged interest?</b><br>Everyone knows the story about the attractive Christmas gift that was eventually ignored by the children for the box it came in. The box had high prolonged interest. Toys that have high prolonged interest lend themselves to many uses and to children's creativity. Examples are blocks, crayons, balls, Duplos, dolls. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Can the toy be used with minimal adult supervision?</b><br>Toys should not use adult rules, need constant attention to solve conflicts, or close adult supervision to prevent misuse or breakage.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Does the toy strengthen self-concept?</b><br>Dolls that reflect the child's cultural and physical characteristics are a good example. Can the child positively identify with the toy?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Does the toy strengthen the child's respect for others?</b><br>Does it expose children to diversity in non-stereotypical ways?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Does the toy foster nonviolence and teach alternative ways to solving conflicts and arguments?</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Is the toy durable?</b><br>Will it withstand constant, active use by children; will it last over time; if designed for the outside, will it last outside; can it be easily repaired?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Is the toy versatile?</b><br>Can it be used in many ways; can a child impose his meaning on it? For example, blocks and dress-ups.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Is the toy adaptable and progressive?</b><br>Can it be used by children of a variety of different developmental levels; can one child use it in progressively more complex ways? For example, Duplo blocks can be grouped by color, used to build simple constructions, and used to construct a futuristic space vehicle or replica of a complex castle from a book.          |

# Beginnings

- Is the toy easy to keep clean?**  
Can it be sterilized in the dishwasher; can the cloth components (dolls' clothes) come off to be washed; does it absorb and "attract" dirt?
- Does the toy encourage large and small muscle development and eye-hand coordination?**
- Does the toy strengthen social relationships?**  
Balls are usually more fun when played with by more than one child, as are large blocks. A swivel swing requires more than one player.
- Does the toy arouse imagination and creativity?**  
Dramatic play materials are a good example. Enough toys must be provided, and the environment needs to encourage creativity and imagination. Play periods also have to be long enough.
- Does the toy encourage intellectual development?**  
Is language, grouping of similar objects, labeling, comparing shape, size, weight, and color encouraged? Is basic knowledge taught?
- Is the toy safe, and can it easily become unsafe when broken?**
- Can the child easily replace the toy to its correct storage place?**  
Toys with lots of little parts are difficult to restore.
- Is the toy developmentally appropriate?**
- Does the toy encourage constructive play?**  
Constructive play involves making things: blocks, woodwork, painting, crafts.
- Does the toy convey to the child a sense of quality?**  
Is it well made, does it feel solid when picked up, does it look like someone took care in making it, and does it keep its appearance over time?

While all toys in a program won't meet each criteria, all should be developmentally appropriate, safe, durable, easy to clean, and minimize supervision. Other criteria encourage more extensive use of toys and self-concept development. Make sure the program has toys that cover all the other criteria. Don't overemphasize one area.

*Francis Wardle has a PhD in early childhood education, with a Masters in cultural foundations of education. He is the director of the Center for the Study of Biracial Children in Denver, Colorado. Dr. Wardle has given workshops throughout the country and Canada on playground safety and design for young children and has published many articles on this topic. Dr. Wardle is also a professional photographer (of children). He has four biracial children, ages 8 to 16.*