

News You Can Use:

Educational Toys: Manipulatives & pretend play

This and Other Helpful Kid-Related Articles Exclusively From:



Where High Quality and Low Prices Bring You Back for More!

301-668-0837 / 240-329-2121

146 S. Main St., Boonsboro, MD 21713

www.EnkoreKids.com

We all want what's best for our children and what's better than providing them with toys that not only entertain, but teach as well? But what is an "educational" toy? In truth, most any toy for young children have educational value (so long as it's safe and age appropriate), but we'll be touching on two categories of educational toys: Manipulatives and Pretend Play. See a future issue for info on Arts & Crafts & Musical.

Manipulatives: Rattles, Shape Sorters, Blocks, & Puzzles

What's more a more basic toy than baby's first rattle? Rattles & other noise-maker infant toys provide baby's first experience in cause and effect: they move the toy and it rewards them with a noise. It's also builds dexterity as they learn to grasp it and pass it from hand to hand. See our selection of Melissa & Doug's First Play series of toys are great manipulatives for infants aged 6 months & up.

Shape Sorters, Blocks, and Stacking Toys are great for older infants starting at about 18 months. Shape sorters work on identifying shape and manual dexterity to get them to fit the right's slot. Blocks can introduce pictures and the alphabet and teach cause & effect (build it & knock it down). Stacking toys introduce order.

Our most popular manipulatives are puzzles. We have puzzles that are age appropriate from 12 months to 12 years and up. It doesn't really matter how many pieces or what the picture, puzzles can teach many skills student need to succeed.

First, and most obviously, puzzles teach subject matter. A child can learn something about the pictures that he is creating. Extensive vocabulary can help a child read at higher levels, especially in the middle school years and beyond.

Puzzles teach other language skills as well. When a parent and child do a puzzle together, the parent may help the child by suggesting: "turn it around" or "put it next to..." These are great directional words.

Children can also learn adjectives such as straight, curvy, round, red, blue, etc. Another language skill is categorizing. This means sorting objects or ideas in to groups that have a common theme.

Try this idea with familiar peg puzzles: Take 2 or more puzzles with different topics and scramble the pieces. Have the child sort the puzzle pieces into piles. You can provide (or ask the child to provide) a heading for each pile. This is a foundation skill for organizing facts for paragraph writing and constructing essays.

Puzzles also help children develop visual skills needed for reading. Simple infant and toddler puzzles can teach a child visual matching skills that can be transferred to reading tasks. Simple puzzles teach children to match one picture to its mate. Sometimes the pictures can be identical and other times the child must match a picture to its outline. Jigsaw puzzles also require visual closure skills. Children need to use clues from the surrounding pieces to choose the piece that fits. This teaches our brains to "size up" the whole picture- important for being able to "fill in the blanks" for reading difficult text and for life.

A Train Set is an example of Pretend Play:



Puzzles teach more than just a subject, children learn strategy & perseverance, too!



Blocks & Magic Sets both develop manual dexterity...



(over...)



Where High Quality and Low Prices Bring You Back for More!

301-668-0837 / 240-329-2121

146 S. Main St., Boonsboro, MD 21713

www.EnkoreKids.com

Manipulatives, continued:

Finally, puzzles can teach good study skills. They require the child to get organized before starting a task, such as turning pieces picture-side up or sorting out straight edges. Children learn to develop a strategy: should I start by completing a focus object and working my way to others or should I do the edges first?

Puzzles teach perseverance, as a child has to try piece after piece in a particular spot, possibly many different ways. If the missing piece is not found, the child needs to decide to try another area. Lastly, puzzles teach older children how to manage long-term projects. Working on a puzzle a little bit each night can lead to a great accomplishment.

When selecting puzzles for young children, consider many things. Puzzles with pictures that interest the child are motivating. Also consider if the child has the visual skills and dexterity to complete the puzzle. Or maybe this puzzle will be one that he does with his family. There are many different kinds of puzzles so every age can be challenged and successful.

Pretend Play:

Make-believe play is more than just fun, it helps kids:

- Explore imagination
- Acquire language skills
- Problem solve
- Learn essential life skills from adults
- Safely explore the world beyond
- Think in the abstract
- Build social skills
- Understand someone else's perspective
- Discover leadership skills
- Acquire confidence and a sense of self

The more open-ended the toy, the better. For example, a Dora Doll will likely be used only in associate with Dora story-lines. Which is fine, but a generic doll can be used for a lot more and requires more thought from the child to come up with stories.

There are several types of pretend play, and all should be encouraged:

Imitating mom & dad: taking care of the kids, shopping, going to work, playing with make-up, etc, help them learn the roles they will fill later in life. Provide your child with props that will let them pretend to be you: baby doll, shopping cart, kitchen, purse/wallet and the like.

Playing dress-up: Get the most out of your Halloween costumes and choose dress-ups that your child can play with all year. Grown-up clothes are also great dress-ups- just be sure they know what's available to them and what's not.

Acting out real-life stories & make-believe stories: School, doctor, bank, and favorite stories from books, tv, & movies encourage cooperative play with others, taking turns, and vocabulary.

Creating make-believe spaces such as sofa forts & box houses may encourage the budding architect in your little one and **performing for an audience** by singing, acting in skits, and directing puppet theater will build your child's imagination and confidence.

At Enkore Kids, we have plenty of toys to choose from in both categories discussed here: Manipulatives & Pretend Play. Ask to see our Melissa & Doug catalog or checkout our selection in the store and on-line at www.enkorekids.com today.



Enkore Kids specializes in "previously-loved" children's clothing, developmental toys, and kid-related equipment for newborns to age 8. We also carry high-quality new items from vendors such as Robeez, Ergo, Melissa & Doug, Baby Einstein, and Clean Shopper. We stock most of the items made by Melissa & Doug and can special order anything that may not be in stock at your request. This article was contributed to by Cari James, a former teacher and current associate at Enkore Kids.

Our "News You Can Use" Series includes several other issues that are added to regularly. Be sure to check our website for additional guides coming soon. This information is a starting point and should not be considered all-inclusive. If you'd like to offer suggestions for future issues, please call the store at 301-668-0837.