

# Educational Benefits of Toy Blocks

## by The Children's Home



For centuries, parents and educators have known that children love to play with objects known as “building blocks,” “alphabet blocks,” or simply “toy blocks.”

But where did these iconic toys come from?

Why are they found in schools?

“We’ll likely never know precisely who invented building blocks or where they originated from,” said Dr. Steven Wilson, communications director. “But, we do know that as early as 1693 John Locke was writing about the benefits of children learning the alphabet via ‘dice and play-things, with the letters on them.’ Then, in about 1818 Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel, who laid the foundations of today’s kindergarten, began using physical objects carved from wood to teach young children about the world. Most historians point to these ideas that paved the way for today’s toy blocks.”

But, experts in kindergarten readiness and preschool educators know there’s much more going on than just what one might merely call “play time.”

“Children learn through play and building with blocks is one way that play supports young and developing minds,” said Carolyn Brinkmann, director of early childhood & school age services. “Opportunities for creative play fuels imagination, and promote hand-eye coordination and problem-solving skills. Early math and construction skills are enhanced as kids work to tell things apart and figure out what pieces fit where.”

Educators call this type of learning and teaching “constructive play.” Marcus Clarke, BSc, MSc, and author for Psychology & Science, defines constructive play as activities “where children use objects and begin to construct things. The goal of constructive play is to use objects to represent something else, which involves abstract thinking.”

This type of play allows developing minds to construct larger objects out of smaller ones, and create something that remains after the child has finished playing. What remains behind after “the build” is also beneficial.

“Our students often want to showcase what they have made with their building materials,” said Ashley Thompson, assistant preschool teacher. “What surprises many, including some parents, is the amount of time a young mind will spend planning, crafting, and experimenting with what turns out to be a very elaborate structure. Constructive play inspires kids to consider creative ways to solve problems, as well as provides brain stimulation, that’s critical at this stage of development.”





Educators say that their students' wanting to exhibit their creations is a sign of progressive growth.

"There are also some positive social implications," said Brinkmann. "The larger blocks encourage preschool-age kids to work in groups and collaborate to problem-solve. They also often want to share their accomplishments with friends, teachers and parents, which is a great way to foster interpersonal communication and self-confidence."

Constructive play for young children can have long-term effects on future academic success coupled with the critical issue of ensuring kindergarten readiness.

"Kids at this age who enjoy building structures tend to do very well on things like early math and spatial intelligence tests," Brinkmann said. "The more time spent exploring and trying to build complex structures, the better chance a young mind has to develop these skills."

