



University of Cyprus
Department of Education



EARLY CHILDHOOD
RESEARCH LAB



CHILDREN'S PLAY SKILLS AND TEACHER INVOLVEMENT

Series: Informational Brochures on Early Childhood Education

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Constructive Play

DEFINITION

Children are involved in the process of creating structures by combining materials in the context of real and/or imaginative themes

In the context of constructive play children create, explore, experiment and interact with each other

Key factors influencing children's experiences in constructive play are the child herself, the materials and the adult

This brochure presents examples of toys that can be used for constructive play, the stages of constructive play, the process of teacher involvement during play and lastly the connection with development and learning

The constructive play materials are differentiated based on the :



Construction Material

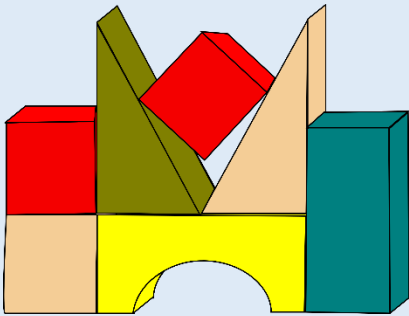
Size

Weight

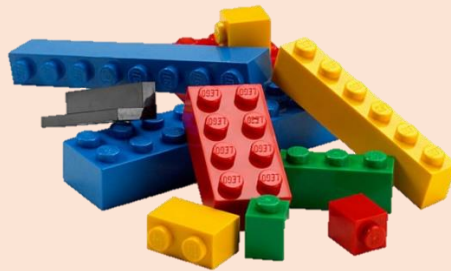
Shape

Construction Play Toys

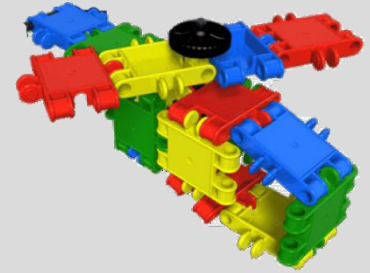
WOODEN BRICKS



LEGO



CLICKS



MAGNETIC BLOCKS



BRISTLE BLOCKS



CONNECTING COGS



**CONNECTING
PLANES**



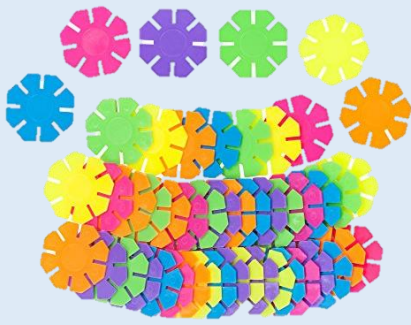
GEARS



BUTTERFLIES



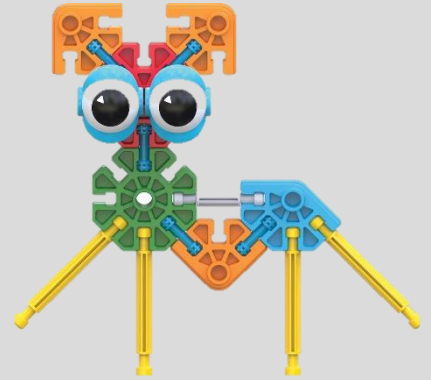
OCTONS



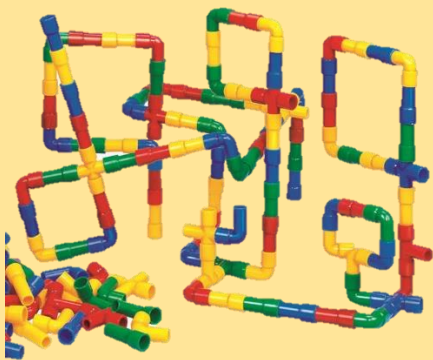
LADDER BUILDERS



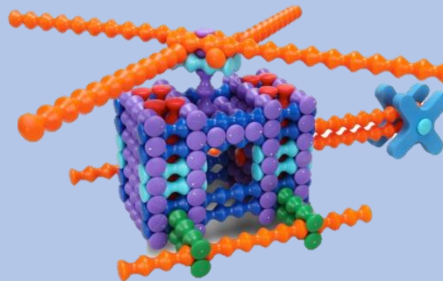
K' NEX



PIPEBUILDERS



PLAYSTIX



POLY - M BOX



The type of toys leads children to construct specific structures during which they strengthen certain abilities. This is why it is important for children to play with diverse types of constructive play toys.

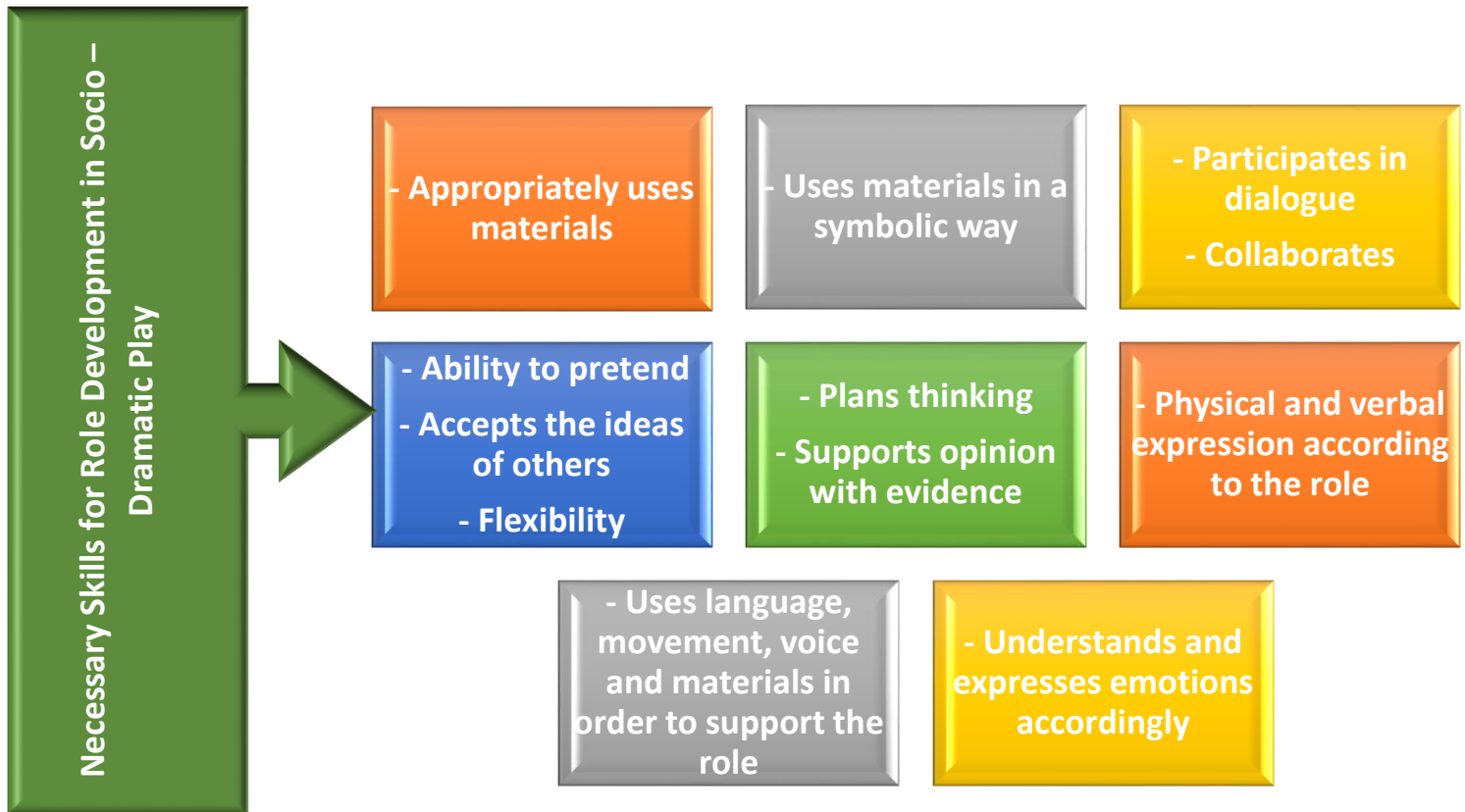
STAGES OF CONSTRUCTIVE PLAY

CHILD'S INVOLVEMENT

Below we present the stages of Constructive Play which describe the expected actions of children in the context of Constructive Play. The stages are presented as consecutive because they are based on children's development. However, there may be cases where children exhibit the characteristics of the stages either earlier or later depending on the stimuli they receive from their environment.

1 Exploration	2 Transferring
<p>Child's Action (CA): Children use all of their senses to explore and experiment the world around them. Thus, they try out construction materials, by holding and placing them in their mouth, knocking them on the floor or banging them together.</p>	<p>CA: Children begin to develop advanced motor skills, walking and moving within space, thus become interested in transferring constructive play materials. They move them from one spot to another without necessarily showing interest in building something.</p>
3 Simple Building	4 Enclosed structures
<p>CA: Children begin to be able to coordinate their hands and eyes and successfully place blocks one on top of the other, while also trying to build rows or columns. Depending on the toys they create patterns with colored blocks or with shape blocks. So, they try to combine and connect rows of blocks in different ways and construct bridges.</p>	<p>CA: At this stage, children can estimate the amount needed for their construction, and so they productively use the blocks to encircle space. They place blocks sideways as a means to create enclosures. Due to the development of verbal communication, they indicate what kind of figures or accessories they want to use in their play, with the aim of increasing the duration of their play.</p>

<p>5 Complicated structures</p>	<p>6 Complex contrustions and socio – dramatic play</p>
<p>CA: Children seek to use more blocks to make complicated structures since their fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination are well developed. Figures and accessories play a leading role in play. In the context of their play, they name their construction but this is not necessarily related to its function.</p>	<p>CA: Children build more complex structures using many more blocks, even small size blocks, since their fine motor skills are quite advanced. They build separate sections to their structure, taking into consideration scale details and the functionality of space. Different figures and accessories are central to their play. They name everything they construct as well as their figures, take on a role and a scenario is developed based on their construction. There is interaction between the children and they all participate in a scenario taking on roles, using materials in a symbolic way, with their construction being one of these</p>



Motor Skills

Use, coordination and control of small muscles

- develop eye-hand co-ordination
- handle small materials and control the muscles of her hands to develop fine motor skills such as strength and agility

Personal and Social Awareness

Self – perception

- recognize her skills

Attitude towards learning

- show interest in new knowledge and experiences
- have a positive attitude towards new things and taking risks

Social Skills

- create positive relationships with adults in her environment
- develop skills to initiate social relations
- collaborate with other children
- help other children when they need help
- interact and communicate with other children in order to achieve a common goal



Emotional Empowerment

Expressing Emotions

- name and recognize her own emotions
- express her non-verbal emotions
- talk about her emotions with peers and/or adults

Controlling Emotions

- react calmly to peer challenges
- accept things which don't always go her way
- wait for her turn
- negotiate with peers

Cognitive Empowerment

Conceptual Comprehension – Representations

- interact with the environment and collect information
- identify similarities and differences of things/situations
- use concepts to solve problems

Skills Development

- observe, compare objects and draw conclusions
- group / categorize using different criteria

Problem Solving

- test and experiment to solve problems
- formulate generalizations in relation to how to solve similar problems
- assess and revise strategies for problem solving
- formulate problems

Creativity – Creative Thinking

- express thoughts in multiple ways
- use something old in a new way

Pretending

- imitate and use actual materials to give meaning to her play
- mentally organize her play
- use verbal communication to enrich roles and scenarios
- transform objects and materials according to her role

Critical Thinking

- compare information, formulate an opinion and judge situations
- plan and express her thoughts
- explain and justify her decisions

Metacognition

- reflect and revise personal opinions through reflection and review of information
- relate knowledge and experiences with new situations



Adult involvement during constructive play is best presented in the following figure. This model is based on research about how adults' actions which respond to the needs of the child support mature forms of constructive play

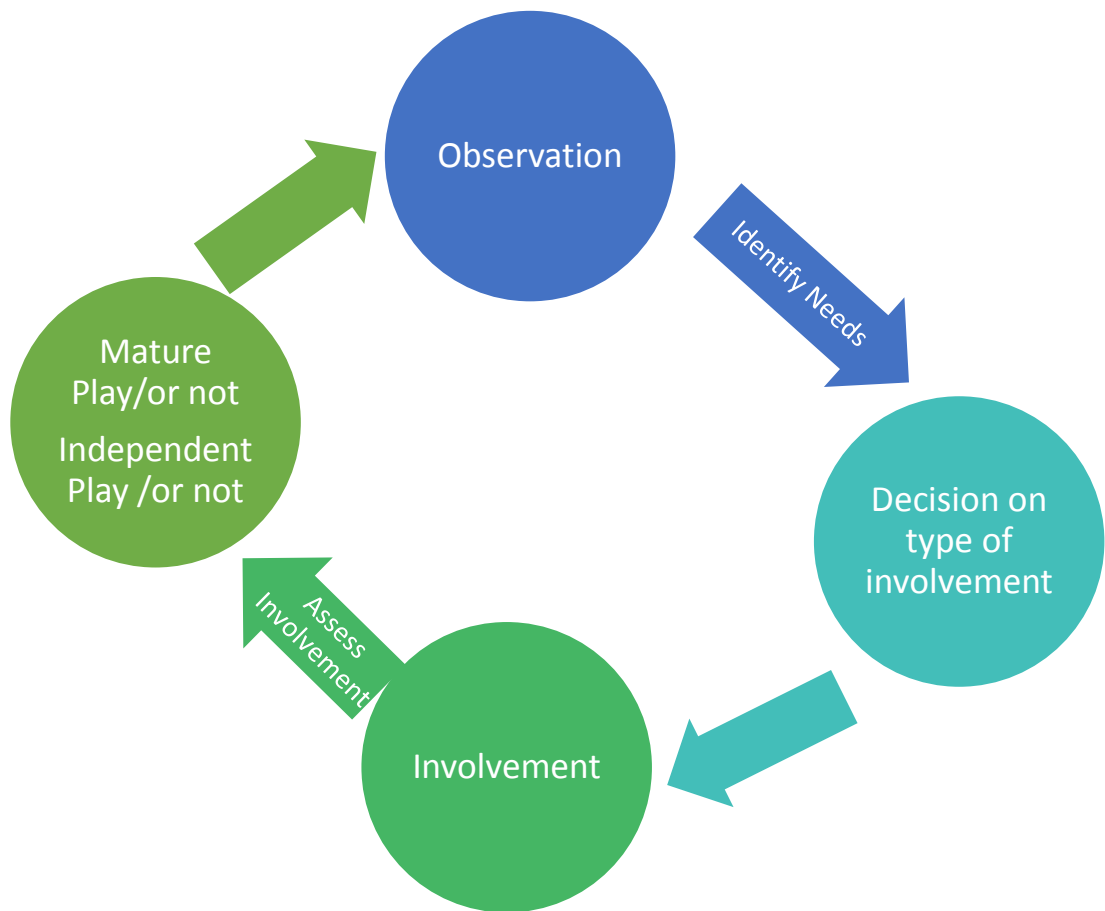
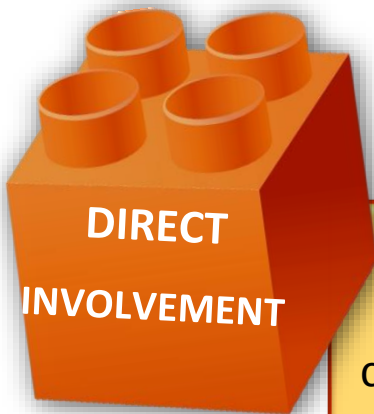


Fig.1 Adult involvement during constructive play

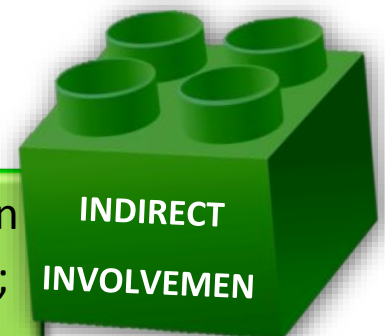
The above model of adult involvement in children's play is similar to all types of play.

ADULT INVOLVEMENT DURING CONSTRUCTIVE PLAY

Before any type of involvement the adult **OBSERVES** children's play to identify their needs and their skills (stage) in constructive play. Below are presented possible actions of the adult in various play situations, based on the children's play needs. The actions are differentiated based on the context and the two types of involvement, direct and indirect involvement



The adult, based on her observations, decides whether it is necessary for her to participate in children's play; and states the actions or provides the words about what, when and how children should act in order for their play to develop



The adult, based on her observations, decides on the type of choices she will provide for children; proposing actions and/or materials thus supporting them to develop their play

ADULT DIRECT INVOLVEMENT

She asks questions or gives information to direct and enhance play development

« Let's raise the fence so that our dog doesn't leave again. We have to put more blocks. »

Child's Need (CN): Play-construction development

She shares roles and responsibilities

« You will be the architect and inform the builders of how to build the new floor in the building. »

CN: Role – sharing, cooperation issues

She provides direct feedback on the construction children make

« To make sure your tower does not fall down you have to put more blocks on the bottom and less on the top. »

She responds on behalf of a child when other children invite her to play, and/or invites or integrates other children who hesitate to participate into play

« Costas says to get 5 white blocks and 6 grey blocks to prepare your kitchen sink. »

CN: Join the group and engage in play, socialization, self-confidence



She moves children to solve collaboration problems

«I have an idea, go get the farmer's figure from the toy box, so we can put it in the farm to look after the animals. »

She uses rewards to positively influence children's play

«Very impressive building, put some more blocks to make it higher and turn it into a skyscraper. »

She restates the rules and is a representative of reality

«When we throw the blocks we might hurt ourselves. Remember our rule! »

CN: Appropriate play actions

She asks questions within subject area content to enhance their thinking

«How many cars does your parking space fit? Let's count. »

CN: Development of mathematical thinking (Counting)



ADULT INDIRECT INVOLVEMENT

She answers questions or gives information for further development of the play activity

«Wow so many animals! Are they going to fit in the zoo? Shall we invite the Zoo director to tell us what he thinks? »

She poses challenges or concerns within the context of children's scenario

«We have new neighbors. But there are 3 cars in their family, and there is only one parking space available. What can we do? »

CN: Scenario development, creativity and flexibility in thinking

She reminds them of the rules and she is a representative of reality

«Look at the rules on the board. »

CN: Appropriate play actions

She asks questions of cognitive content and uses language that does not interrupt the play activity

«How many bedrooms and bathrooms did you say you needed? So how many more rooms do you need to build? Think about that »

CN: Development of mathematical thinking (Counting, addition)





She is a role model in using constructive play materials in the context of the play (being in role or not)

«I think I'm going to use the magnetic blocks to fix the train tracks because it will be easier to make curved lines. »

CN: Real and symbolic use of objects, appropriate role enactment

She asks questions to identify play needs

«What you are constructing is very interesting. What exactly is this part? »
(indicates point of construction).

CN: Identifies needs

She plays and talks with children about the structure they plan to make

«You have built a big two – floor house. What can you build around the house?»

CN: Scenario development, language development, cooperation

She suggests options in terms of materials, scenario, and roles

«Mr. Constructor I have brought different types of materials so you can choose with which ones to build the bridge of your city»

CN: Material enrichment, and creativity development



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