

# *From the Heart...*

*...Lifeskills for Today's Family*  
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



## ***The World through their eyes***

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 2, 2016)

We have all probably made this parenting mistake the moment we first set eyes on our newborn baby. We instantly begin to perceive and relate to our precious children as if they see and think like we do as adults. Yet, the world is brand new to those precious little eyes just awakening to the sights, sounds, and senses of every kind.

With the early years of babyhood and beyond, we all have basic physical needs such as breathing, food, water, sleep and more. Then comes the need for safety, whether it is keeping our bodies safe, the family unit, health, a roof over our heads, a job. Then, according to Maslow's 1943 *A Theory of Human Motivation* the next basic need to build on is friendship, family, and at some point along the adult journey sexual intimacy.

From there we are seeking to broaden self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of others, and respect by others. The next level of needs is what Maslow called self-actualization, such as morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, and acceptance of facts. Maslow considered this fifth level of his pyramid a "growth need" that enables a person to reach his fullest potential as a human being.

So, how does a child first see the world around him as he moves through these levels of basic needs? According to Marko Nardini, et.al., in his presentation to the

National Academy of Sciences (2010), *Fusion of visual cues is not mandatory in children*, it seems, unlike adults, children are able to keep information from the senses separate and perceive the visual world differently. “Human adults can go beyond the limits of individual sensory systems’ resolutions by integrating multiple estimates (e.g., vision and touch) to reduce uncertainty. Little is known about how this ability develops. Although some multisensory abilities are present from early infancy, it is not until age  $\geq 8$  years that children use multiple modalities to reduce sensory uncertainty.” Results show that using two kinds of depth information together does not happen until very late in childhood, around age 12.

This also means that your 6 year old , although unable to experience fusion of different stimuli actually, “. . . enables them to outperform adults when discriminating stimuli in which these information sources conflict.” They can also “. . . show speed gains consistent with following the fastest-available single cue. Therefore, whereas the mature visual system is optimized for reducing sensory uncertainty, the developing visual system may be optimized for speed and for detecting sensory conflicts. Such conflicts could provide the error signals needed to learn the relationships between sensory information sources and to recalibrate them while the body is growing.” Maybe that is why us “adults” get more easily confused at times and can’t easily detect sensory conflicts with all the sights and sounds surrounding us daily.

If this is how children visually see the world in those early years, one can only imagine how they handle sensory inputs by us parents! Maybe that is why our young ones always seem to catch us doing or saying something that precedes their profound

questions starting with the wondrous word WHY, such as “Why did you do that?” What a word that is . . . “Why.”

What happens when they hear you laugh, cry, get mad? What happens when they are cold, hungry, neglected? What happens when we treat our little ones with remarks like, ““You're so hopeless" (or "lazy" or "stupid") or “Don't bother me. I'm busy” or “Don't cry. Don't be a baby” or “Why can't you be more like your sister?” The list goes on.

Another wondrous thing about our young ones is kids seem to have a natural inclination to see the world as purposeful rather than natural causes. Mountains are they for animals to climb; trees are there to give shade. Children want to see everything as having a precise function in the grand scheme of things.

According to Newsweek (11/5/2007), *Mind Matters: How Kids See the World*, “University of California-Berkeley psychologist Tania Lombrozo suspected that the strong childhood preference for purposeful design might actually be a lifelong default position, one that is eclipsed but doesn't actually disappear as we gain experience and form beliefs . . .” Lombrozo tested Alzheimer patients on this with the results being the same as a child's view of the world, everything having purpose. It wasn't so much how it world works as much as its function in the scheme of life and living.

Then there are some experts who extend children's view of the world as designed and with purpose with an instinctive belief in God as the Designer. That works for me! How about you? Maybe it's us seemingly more “mature” adults who try hard to remove that connection in our children since so many believe the mind to be the “all in all.” Which way do you lean? Possibly, we adults have so very much to learn from our

young children the wonders of the world and us as human creations, designed for a purpose. How about us slowing down enough to gain a glimpse of their wondrous world? It just may enlarge ours more than we could ever imagine!

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# *From the Heart...*

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## ***How did children play?, part 1***

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 9, 2016)

Have you ever wondered how children in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century played? Are the basic ways children play any different today than back then? With all the technological changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one would think that is a “Duh” question. Yet, I still wondered what the difference might be if I cruised through the decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for awhile. So, this is what I found out.

Much of the way children played depended on their country of origin. In the early 1900s immigration continued in full swing in spite of the restrictions put on the number of immigrants allowed in the US. From the late 1800s through the 1920s mass immigration had it greatest impact.

By 1960, the children of immigrants formed 20 percent of the potential electorate (U.S. Census Bureau 1965:8). They brought with them their faith whether Catholic, Jewish, or Protestant, family values, political views, and daily family life that evolved into the diverse American society we have today. The Statue of Liberty actually became the national symbol of a nation of immigrants.

The children of these immigrant families also brought their toys and ways of playing to our American neighborhoods. Toys were not only chosen on the basis of gender and family of origin, but were shared among the growing American population.

Prior to the 1900s, children did not have many toys. Those few they had were precious to them and came in all shapes and sizes . . . such as ball and ball games such as Knurr and Spell, a distance ball hitting game. Another one was Battledore & Shuttlecock, an outdoor game played since the earliest American Settlements; and an ancestor to both modern badminton and table tennis. Then add rolling hoops, dolls, dominoes, and drums, just to mention a few that have followed us to today.

Many new toys were invented in the 20th century. Plasticine was invented in 1897 by William Harbutt. After patent of 1915, the Harbutt company promoted Plasticine as a children's toy by producing modeling kits associated with popular children's characters. Frank Hornby of the UK invented a toy called Meccano, a construction kit initially known as "Mechanics Made Easy." In the United States, a competitive toy with a similar play pattern was launched in 1913 under the Erector Set brand, later purchased by the Meccano company.

Other popular toys in the early 20th century were tin cars, train sets, and soft toys such as teddy bears. Certain toys reflected the real world in miniature, encouraging children to create social roles. Teddy bears took their name from Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt (1858-1919), president of the United States, from a story that one day Roosevelt refused to shoot a bear he was offered during a hunt.

Then came the Crayons, invented by Edwin Binney and Harold Smith, who owned a paint company in New York City. Crayons were first marketed as Crayola crayons in 1903 and were an instant success. Then there were children's books. In most homes in the early 20th century, only printed material with a religious theme were available in the home, along with a few textbooks and volumes. By the 1940s children

book titles abounded with biographies of saints, heroes, model children, conservative tales, and novels with a moral to the story. Then came adventure series.

We need to keep in mind that in the early 1900s children generally slept in the same room as their parents or shared a bedroom (and bed) with their siblings. Children also worked with their families either on farms, factories, or doing a multiple number of tasks at home before and after school. Some even never went to school but were taught the basics at home. Some children as young as eight years old worked in coal mines. Yet, games played an important part in coal camp life during the 1920s and 30s. Most of these families were poor. Although they may have had a few “store-bought” games or toys, the children made the best of what they had with their imagination.

As the decades moved along and after World War II, many families’ lives improved financially and moved into larger houses, sometimes with a room for each child. Most all children stayed in school longer and didn’t work as much at home as in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

So you can imagine when children of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had a chance to play, they did so with gusto with the precious few toys they had in their possession. This is something to think about in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How much room do your kids really need and how many toys do they say they “need” to fill their space and occupy their time?

How do all those toys enhance their imagination and social development? The next article will cover children’s play and toys of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the meantime, give this book a try . . . *Children at Play, An American History* by Howard P. Chudacoff.

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# *From the Heart...*

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## ***How did children play?, part 2***

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Did you get a chance to play with your kids or grandkids this week? If you did, what kind of “play” did you do together? What “toys” did you share in the fun? I bet in the mix was some kind of electronic gadget such as ipad, computer, or TV, right? Or were you among the few who actually brought out an actual physical board game or cards of years gone by? Were you both able to get outside under the sunshine to kick a ball around?

From previous article, we learned in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century kids played outdoors a lot with their often times homemade ball and bat. And their imaginations were at the center of their “play.” It came natural to them most out of necessity of the times where families couldn’t afford to buy lots of toys, particularly kids of coal mining families.

But that didn’t stop kids from grabbing the moments between school and jobs they did at home and in factories around the nation. Let’s not forget the paper routes that dotted the land before TV, ipads, and smart phones game into “play.” So, let’s see how kids played in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Keep in mind that even in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, things did improve for many children. By the 1920s and 30s

most were healthier, better fed, clothed, and more educated. In the early 1900s children general left school at 12 years old; then in 1918 it was raised to 14.

Between 1910 and 1940, “high school” education rapidly increased in cities and neighborhoods. There was also a shift to more local oversight with open enrollment to blue-collar families. By 1947 children left school at 15 years old. During early 20th Century, it was common for high schools to have entrance exams restricting entrance to fewer than five percent of the population in preparation for college. Most were expected to be ready for a job or a family after junior high school. By 1950, comprehensive high schools became common, giving free education to any student who stayed in school for 12 years and received a diploma with a minimal grade point average.

In the mix of all this, kids had their toys and more of them as the decades rolled on. However, during World War II most toy factories were turned over to war production. Yet, according to Tara Winner (The Home Front: Toy Production during World War II, Blog, Museum of Play.org) the War Production Board’s (WPB) orders “. . . and related material shortages inspired toy manufacturers to come up with creative ways to continue production. Paper dolls, puzzles, and games increased in popularity thanks to their widespread availability. Toys, board games, and hobby sets with military and war motifs also became standard playthings.” Creativity abounded using heavy-duty paper stock for wartime freight train toys.

Starting in the 1950s Lego became a popular toy. Mr. Potato Head was invented in 1952. The skateboard was invented in 1958, and Barbie dolls in 1959. From the 1950s and beyond, radio, TV, then the Internet were brought into children's homes and expanded exponentially just about any game and toy you could imagine. and because

times were better financially, most families could afford them. It seemed everyone wanted to be the first on their block to have “it.” The fascination with these new technologies, programs, toys, and games were designed especially for children. Your kids become a select target market.

Other toys that became favorites in the US from the 1960s on were Toy Trolls, Etch-A-Sketch, Easy Bake Oven, G.I. Joe, Operation game, Twister; 1970s Skateboarding, Hungry Hungry Hippos; 1980s Cabbage Patch Kids doll, Trivial Pursuit, American Girl dolls, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Super Soaker, 1990s Rollerblading, Beanie Babies, Tickle Me Elmo, and Rescue Heroes.

Guess what is one of the most favorites entering the 21st century? Here’s a hint . . . Yu-Gi-Oh. The next article will cover our 21<sup>st</sup> century game and toy world transformation on every kid’s mind and imagination! Want to have a little more history . . . check out these resources:

Children at Play, An American History, by Howard P. Chudacoff (2008)

The Home Front: Toy Production during World War II, Blog by Tara Winner (6/11/2013), <http://www.museumofplay.org/blog/play-stuff/2013/06/the-home-front-toy-production-during-world-war-ii/>

20<sup>th</sup> Century Toys & Games, <http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0768872.html>

Most Popular Toys Of The Last 100 Years, [http://www.forbes.com/2005/12/01/mattel-hasbro-toys-cx\\_lh\\_1202feat\\_ls.html](http://www.forbes.com/2005/12/01/mattel-hasbro-toys-cx_lh_1202feat_ls.html)

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# *From the Heart...*

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## ***How did children play?, part 3***

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 23, 2016)

In so many ways throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, children always found creative ways to play. Whether it was with a toy, a game, or simply their imagination, play has “played” a major part in every generation. In every decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, children responded to their circumstance through their play time.

Simply watch any child. According to Tara M. Hall, et.al, *Fifteen Effective Play Therapy Techniques* (Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 2002, Vol. 33, No. 6), “For children, toys are their words, and play is their conversation.”

Throughout this month's lifeskill, *Childcare*, we learned in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century kids played outdoors a lot with their often times homemade ball and bat. And their imaginations were at the center of their “play.” It came natural to them most out of necessity of the times where families couldn't afford to buy lots of toys, particularly kids of coal mining families.

But that didn't stop kids from grabbing the moments between school and jobs they did at home and in factories around the nation. American families traversed the decades during significant technological changes, life-changing wars, and changing educational, physical, and economic landscapes. Yet, kids still were kids, even when

they had to grow up a little too fast. Popular toys in the early 20th century were tin cars, train sets, and soft toys such as teddy bears. Then came the crayons or crayolas.

Kids had their toys and more of them as the decades rolled on. However, during World War II most toy factories were turned over to war production. With material shortages toy manufacturers came up creative dolls and trains, puzzles, games such as board games, and hobby sets with military and war motifs. . . most all made from heavy-duty paper stock. Then in the 1950s Lego became a popular toy; next Mr. Potato Head, Skateboard, and Barbie dolls.

Remember the Mickey Mouse Club? This iconic TV program debuted in October 1955. I remember Mom and Dad buying a television and watching it every time Mickey showed up on the screen! According to Alix Spiegel, *Old-Fashioned Play Builds Serious Skills* (NPR Morning Edition, February 21, 2008), “What is less remembered but equally, if not more, important, is that another transformative cultural event happened that day: The Mattel toy company began advertising a gun called the ‘Thunder Burp.’ The reason the advertisement is significant is because it marked the first time that any toy company had attempted to peddle merchandise on television outside of the Christmas season.”

Toys that became favorites from the 1960 to 1990s, just to name a few, were Toy Trolls, Easy Bake Oven, G.I. Joe, to Twister; then Skateboarding, Cabbage Patch Kids doll, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Rollerblading, Beanie Babies, Tickle Me Elmo, and Rescue Heroes. Those four decades revolutionized the toy industry and how kids played and transformed their imaginations.

Now as we are moving through the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what do you think has shown up so far? You may know these from 2005 . . . as Yu-Gi-Oh; then came Nintendo Wii U,

2DS, Rainbow Loom, Bratz, Mindflex, and Zhu Zhu. By the time we get to 2010, here were the top ones: Sing-a-ma-jigs, Morphology, LEGO Board Games, Toy Story Mania, Paper Jamz, Doodle Track Car, Fisher Price Kid Tough Digital Camera, Razor Sole Skate, Computer Engineer Barbie, and Disney Princess & Me Doll. What do you think may be the top toys for 2016? Some say Pokémon Toys, Lego Star Wars games, even Barbie is still around! I guess it all depends on what floats your “toy” boat.

With this journey down toy memory lane, it seems like toys do reflect the play signs of the time. How do you see the next generation playing? How can the current focus on that latest “toy” thing be moderated with the kind of activity and imagination needed for our 21<sup>st</sup> century children? The final article next week on this month’s lifeskill, *Childcare*, will hopefully give us hope for our children’s “play” future.

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# *From the Heart...*

## *...Lifeskills for Today's Family*

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### ***How did children play?, part 4***

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 30, 2016)

With this journey down toy memory lane, it seems like toys do reflect the play signs of the time. How do you see the next generation playing? How can the current focus on that latest “toy” thing be moderated with the kind of activity and imagination needed for our 21<sup>st</sup> century children? As I close out this month’s lifeskill, *Childcare*, I hopefully can give us hope for our children’s “play” future. Yet, there are a few concerns parents and educators have voiced for several years now.

It seems obvious parents and kids are focused on “toy” things. Where does the “activity” fit? Are today’s toys bringing it together? According to Howard Chudacoff, *Children at Play, An American History* (2008), from the 1950s into the 21<sup>st</sup> century children's play almost immediately was focused on *things*, toys, rather than *activity* (which was the focus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Technology went big-time with radio, TV, then the Internet and were brought into children's homes and expanded exponentially just about any game and toy you could imagine. Your kids become a select target market.

Other things also changed. With the widespread commercialization of toys, a child’s imagination was shrinking. Kids didn’t make up their own rules of the game or toy as much. Parents were concerned for their children’s safety and focused their activities via so-called safe environments, such as karate classes, gymnastics, and summer



campus. In addition, middle income parents increasingly worried about achievement and enriching their children's minds. These changes also changed children's cognitive and emotional development. As the years moved on, safety and the education costs for providing play space, the type of play, and time to play became top issues for parents and educators alike.

Many psychologists believe the time spent playing make-believe actually help children develop critical cognitive skills related to what is called "executive function." Executive function gives the child the ability to self-regulate so they are able to control their emotions, behavior, resist impulses, and exert self-control and discipline. Therapists and educators are trying to unravel this often controversial dilemma.

Yet, there is hope for "play" that help children thrive and develop into healthy, well-balanced adult. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), *Play and Children's Learning* (<http://www.naeyc.org/play>), and others as well, the importance of physical play, and play generally, in early childhood development is becoming center stage in the dialogue. Not only does research suggest play supports academic-related skills, but also physical skills and development.

No matter where the dialogue may take us, as parents we all have an opportunity to encourage healthy and imaginative play for our children and grandchildren. Whether it's with the latest 21<sup>st</sup> century game and toy or our legacy of simple playtime still available today, let's all provide the next generation with opportunities to experience at home and school the joy of imaginative play with other children, both indoors and outdoors. And for us adults, be sure to join in on the fun too!

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