Toys and their significance in early childhood education

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As Early Childhood Care and Education refers to a philosophy of providing opportunities/experiences to young children up to 8 years of age in order to promote their holistic development, the researcher feels that the present study helps in making teachers and teachers educators related to the field of ECCE, aware of the importance of toys in education particularly at the childhood level.

Vivekananda thinks of education as the manifestation of the divine perfection already in man. Mahatma Gandhi wanted education to draw out the best in child and man—body, mind and spirit. Yet another definition is that it is the transmission of the cultural heritage.

The main aim of education is for harmonious development of the individual. It is evident from several facts that education brings on holistic development of the individual. As education starts from young ages, some educationists believe that the training given in schools must be in harmony with the natural gifts and abilities of each child, as each one of us is endowed differently from others. It follows that education must be according to the age, ability and aptitude of different children. A similar sentiment was expressed by Rousseau when he suggested that institutions be made consistent with giving free play to the native instincts and impulses of the child.

Early Childhood Care and Education
The first 6-8 years of a child’s life, known as the early childhood stage, are globally acknowledged to be the most critical years of lifelong development, since the pace of development during these years is extremely rapid. Recent research in the field of neuroscience, particularly the brain, has provided very convincing evidence of the critical periods located within these early years, particularly the first three years, for the formation of synaptic connection of the brain and for the full development of the brain’s potential. Research also indicated that if these early years are not supported by or embedded in a stimulating and enriching physical and psychosocial environment, the chances of the child’s brain developing to its full potential are considerably and often irreversibly reduced. Therefore there is a need for taking up this field seriously to obtain the overall development of the nation.

Crafts in education
Handicrafts are mostly defined as "items made by hand, often with the use of simple tools, and are generally artistic and/or traditional in nature. They are also objects of utility and decoration. Now a days, hand-made products are considered to be a fashion statement and an item of luxury.
Craft can be used as a means of interpreting many social issues and ways of living. Craft in India is so universally prevalent that it has been unseen over the centuries as a metaphor for numerous philosophical, metaphysical and social concepts. Many words, forms of measurement, colors, and materials have a craft origin.

Toys in education
A toy is an object for children to play with. They are physical items used in play by children. It’s a plaything for a child or infant.

Toys, like play itself, serve multiple purposes in both humans and animals. They provide entertainment while fulfilling an educational role. Toys enhance cognitive behaviour and stimulate creativity. They aid in the development of physical and mental skills which are necessary in later life. Toys can support cognitive growth, development of fine motor and gross motor skills, and improve problem solving and attention that are considered as the basis of education.

Educational toys and games are among the most significant tools to create the right learning environment for a child and thereby improve the learning ability.

In India, toys and dolls have a history as old as the icons and idols themselves. From the realm of divine inspiration day to
day recreation, the craftsmen with their innate skills transformed mundane objects as toys into expressions of art.

Toys and dolls are an integral part of the culture and general psyche of Andhra Pradesh. Handmade toys and dolls in various shapes and sizes are probably the best presents for children as well as unique home décor items.

**Kondapalli Toys**
The ubiquitous Kondapalli toy is not just another decorative piece. It is a thing of reverence for most Telugus across the globe. Handicrafts thrived and are going strong in this village on National Highway No.9, 25 km away from Vijayawada. The quaint village life is preserved and brought into the drawing rooms of the rich and the affluent by the toys.

Kondapalli toys are made of softwood, known as Tella Poniki. Apart from Poniki wood, sawdust, tamarind seed powder, enamel gums, watercolours, vegetable dies and lime are used in making these toys.

**Etikoppaka Toys**
Etikoppaka near Vizag is the place where these toys are made. Their creation is an art form, all right. It consists of applying lacquer on wood in delicate shades. The lac, taken in dry form, is applied to the wood pieces mostly by hand. To enhance the beauty, designs are hand painted with vegetable dyes. So, along with toys, you can find any number of house ware items in the Etikoppaka style.

**Need of the study**
The present study helped to know the extent to which Kondapalli and Etikoppaka toys are useful in promoting education particularly in the childhood stage. Also, as the world is buzzing towards a safe environment and eco-friendly devices, the study helps in knowing how eco friendly the Kondapalli toys and Etikoppaka toys are as compared to plastic toys available in the market. The study also helps in finding out the toys that are useful at ECCE level for promoting overall development at different stages. The study helps in identifying and categorizing Kondapalli toys under different domains of development.

**Delimitations of the study**
Due to several constraints the scope of the study was delimited to the Kondapalli toys and Etikoppaka toys that cater to the needs of the ECCE age group only.

**Objectives of the study**
Based on the scope of the study the following objectives were framed.

1. To study the significance of Kondapalli and Etikoppaka toys in Early Childhood Care and Education.
2. To classify Kondapalli and Etikoppaka toys on the basis of age groups
   - 0-3 years
   - 3-6 years.
3. To classify Kondapalli and Etikoppaka toys under different domains of child development.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of Kondapalli and Etikoppaka toys with respect to:
   - Play potential
   - Educational value
   - Originality
   - Manipulative value
   - Safety aspects
   - Durability
   - Replicability
   - Suitability for target age group
   - Cost effectiveness
   - Get up and finishing
   - Eco friendliness

**Educational implications of the study**
The following were the educational implications of the study

- Promotes the usage of Kondapalli and Etikoppaka toys at the ECCE level.
- Identifies the set of toys that are useful for children below the age of 8 years.
- Helps in recognizing the educational importance of the toys.
• Helps in identifying the toys that help in conceptual learning.
• Helps in evaluation process particularly at the ECCE level.

Method of research
Research is a systematic enquiry seeking facts through objective, verifiable methods in order to discover the relationship among them and to deduce from them broad principles or laws. Therefore the very success of a research work depends upon collecting the necessary information. Several methods of collecting information are developed to assist the research. Every survey expert has his own ideas of selecting a best method of collecting information. But it cannot be uniform to all.

As the present study is exploratory or formulative, the observation method is used.

“Observation may be defined as systematic viewing, coupled with consideration of the seen phenomenon, in which the main consideration must be given to the larger unit of activity by which the specific observed phenomena occurred.

Operational definitions
The following are the key terms used in the study:
2. Etikoppaka: A village near Tuni situated in Vishakapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh.
3. Toys: Toys are physical items used in play by children
4. Significance: Importance
5. Early Childhood: The period from conception to age 8 of a child.
6. Early Childhood care and education: It refers to a philosophy of providing opportunities/experiences to young children up to 8 years of age in order to promote their holistic development.

Analysis of data
Analysis of the data is the most skilled task of all stages of the research. It depends on the judgment and skill of the researcher. Necessary analysis procedures were used to perform the analysis on the data collected.

Findings
The major findings of the study are:
• Kondapalli and Etikoppaka toys are useful learning materials and are useful to educate the children of ECCE level.
• Most of the toys are age appropriate and suit the children of ECCE level.
• There are different toys that help in promoting different domains of development and thereby help in promoting over all development of the child.
• These are highly secure and reliable and can be used for the purpose of educating the child.
• These toys can be best used to evaluate child development under different domains without using any testing procedures.
• These toys can be also used with the children who suffer visual disorders.

Suggestions
Kondapalli and Etikoppaka toys provide a wide variety of learning opportunities to children particularly at the ECCE level. These toys should be properly utilized to develop conceptual learning in the country. These are very reliable and helpful for shifting the educational approach in the country from traditional approach of teaching to constructivist approach. These toys can be used as best evaluating devices particularly at the primary level to recognize the level of the children and thereby restrict the formal means of evaluation particularly through examinations at the primary level. These toys will also overcome the difficulties faced by the children of primary level though programmes like CLAPS. Necessary efforts should be taken to develop a kit for ECCE using Kondapalli and Etikoppaka toys similar to that of the learning materials of Montessori method. Introduction of these toys in education will definitely help in providing a child centered education in India and the government should consider seriously using these toys in education and helping the children to be relieved of pressures of education.

Suggestions for further research
Research is not an end in itself. As a researcher one has to provide some guidelines for the next persons who undertake a research in the related field. It helps in guiding them and warns them on non relevant aspects.

• Studies can be done on the utility of Kondapalli toys in Anganwadies
• Studies can be done on the significance of Kondapalli toys and Etikoppaka toys in activity based learning.
• Studies can be conducted on the views of teachers in using kondapalli toys in teaching learning process at primary level.
• Studies can be done on the educational toys in India.
• Comparative studies can be done on Montessori learning materials and Kondapalli toys and their influence on children.
• Studies can be done on the utility of toys in special education.

References


