

# Tools for Learning

## BUILDING HEALTHY AMERICANS

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THE EXTENSION WORKER walked on to the schoolgrounds of a large elementary school in one of the ten largest cities in the state. She carried a ball under each arm. The children waiting for her to come to work with them before a group of elementary principals watched, noticed the balls and said as they crowded around her: "Oh, Boy! Balls!!" One child said: "Oh, let me hold a ball!" And another, "Please, may I just touch the ball?" The superintendent who was escorting the teacher from school to school, turned to the principal of that school and said, "What is the matter here? Don't you have any balls?" The principal replied in a bit of confusion, "Yes, we have one someplace, but I wasn't able to locate it. Anyway, I guess it isn't blown up."

In order to realize whether or not that principal was justly embarrassed at her plight, we need to ask ourselves what we are running schools for. Any elementary school principal could tell you why her teachers and pupils are supplied with readers. She could tell you just what reading skills are necessary for successful achievement of various tasks. She would remind you too, that many emotional problems arise among children who are unable to read the materials which are required at each level of the child's school life. But probably not many principals would ask of their teachers, "Can your pupils catch a ball well enough now so that they can play

the games being played by their group?"

Probably most thoughtful teachers would agree that the child's leisure time and the leisure time of the adult is of as much or possibly more importance to him in making of himself a happy and well-integrated person as is his working time. They would also, it is likely, agree that health is one of the most important assets to build and retain in every citizen. But what have balls or any other play equipment to do with health or leisure time, one might ask.

A child is an active dynamic individual, and that activity does not stop where his shoulders begin. What happens to him below the shoulders affects him above the shoulders—and vice versa. That his world is filled with balls of many descriptions has not come by chance. And since they are there, he needs and wants to know how to use them. He needs as careful planning for time, and as thoughtful provision for learning situations in obtaining his ball-handling skills as he does for any other skills which the school is asking him to learn. The skillful handling of the ball gives him a feeling of mastery, but beyond that it is an incentive which draws him into action, purposeful action which makes him breathe harder, makes his blood circulate faster, his metabolism increase, and his spirits rise. There are plenty of balls in our colleges for our varsity teams, but down in the first grade where the child is skill-hungry and thrilled by his ability to contact that elusive bouncing object, we too often feel that such equipment should be on the list of the non-essentials.

If ball-handling skills are to be learned, then there must be enough balls and few enough children in each play group so that every child will have the opportunity to handle the ball many times during a learning period. Two balls should be the minimum requirement for any grade. The organization of the class period for play has much to do in determining the numbers of balls and other play

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*If children are to be mentally alert, it goes without saying that their physical condition must be excellent. The schools play a major part in developing the good health of the pupils, but too often, the necessary equipment is lacking. In "Tools for Learning", Doris E. White, Physical Education Department, Iowa State Teachers College, Cedar Falls, contributes some timely suggestions for the proper implements and apparatus to be used in building the health and physical skills of the youth of the nation.*

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equipment that will be needed. The kind of ball, too, is important. The production of waterproof balls has done much to increase the times when children can use them.

But balls do not constitute all of the equipment that is necessary in building healthy Americans and not all equipment need be purchased from an athletic supply house. Things to climb, to lift, to push or pull, and experiment with, are essential.

Some criteria we might use in determining what equipment we should supply in order to build healthy Americans are:

1. What attitudes are formed by it?
2. How much and what kind of activity can be obtained from its use?
3. What skills can be developed by its use?
4. How much do the skills developed by its use lead on into further and more difficult activities?
5. What is the cost, considering the number served by it, the amount of use made of it, and the length of time it will last?

Some expensive pieces of apparatus encourage idleness—just sitting and letting someone else do the work—developing no skills and building no strength. Other simple things like a horizontal ladder, a slant ladder, a horizontal bar, a trapeze, and a climbing-pole or rope, furnish unending challenges and, if made of metal, last for years.

Balls and bats, inflated balls (such as soccer balls, basketballs, and footballs) one or two basketball goals, jumping-ropes, and a tumbling-mat, meet criterion number four very fully. Three or four high jumping-standards of different heights with bamboo cross-bars may be homemade at very little cost and yet they furnish a challenge to increased accomplishment from kindergarten through college.

A type of activity which seems to intrigue

the child from the time he first masters walking on the level ground, is walking on narrow ledges, such as curbsings. A "two-by-six" set on edge and called a balance-beam makes a good substitute for the bridge railings and railroad tracks which still seem to entice those who can get in contact with them. The pleasure, skill, and activity obtained from a trapeze or flying-rings, or similar contrivances is increased by the use of small ramps slanting from the ground 51 inches long to a height of about 16 inches, from which the child can learn to jump and catch the swinging apparatus, and then dismount at the far end of the swing, landing with bent knees.

Because all children and some adults seem to like to jump from heights such as stairs and chairs, and too often land on hard unyielding cement walks or floors, it is well to substitute for this a ramp 9 feet long and 3 feet high at the edge of a sandbox so that, to the joy of the jump down, can be added the run up, and the landing in a soft material. Teeter-ladders seem to lose their appeal after the kindergarten age, except for rare occasions, but if they are loose so that they can be moved, they are invariably used for a ramp to run up. If there are two of them, the second one is slanted in the opposite direction so that there can be a run down, too. It would be cheaper and just as much fun to build such a runway of two planks with a support between them.

Often the apparatus and supplies which are simplest and least expensive hold interest longest, and lend themselves to the creating of new uses by the child himself.

Because other creative and manipulative materials and those used for housekeeping and other dramatic play are not discussed in this article, it is not to be construed as indicating that the author does not value them as contributing to the emotional, and thus the physical health of our young Americans.



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