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# A Toy Is A Toy Is A Toy Is Subliminal Educator

By PATRICIA McCORMACK

NEW YORK (UPI)—Back in the good old days, toys were toys.

Now, moms of America, be advised: Toys are subliminal educators. Only don't let the kids know it.

Richard Hackett, educational consultant to a toy firm (A. C. Gilbert Co.) and a former science department head in the Milford, Conn., school system, said so.

"These subliminal educators," he said in an interview, "are an ideal bridge between school and play."

Hackett, who is writing instructional booklets for chemistry, physics and microscope sets the science-minded Santa might leave under the Christmas tree, said also that it's an educational axiom that toys are a continuation of a child's education.

"Consider the effect of your own leisure time activities," he said, "and you'll have some idea of what I mean. For example, if you take up boating as a hobby, you'll also read boating magazines.

"What's more, you'll spend time talking about boating. And you'll tend to draw closer to those of your friends who share your interest in the sport."

## The Effect

The effect: You build up a considerable store of knowledge on the subject without ever being conscious — at the book-learnin' level—of broadening your education.

Hackett said the same process holds true for a child and his toys. "And this is why," he said, "we call them subliminal educators."

The best example of how this works with children, according to the expert, is in the field of science.

"Most school systems across the nation," he said, "now have greatly accelerated science programs, and many even start the youngsters off with it in kindergarten.

"This builds a natural curiosity on the child's part to learn more about the world around him. If he is studying biology, he may ask for or get a toy microscope as a gift—the better to see his captured butterfly with."

Most microscope sets, according to the educator, provide the material for interesting experiments. If the set is worthwhile, it also provides a simple scientific explanation for the experiment and stimulates the child's curiosity for further fun and knowledge without his being aware of the learning process. This is subliminal — almost sneaky — education.

## Key Is Fun

"The key to successful subliminal education," Hackett said, "is fun. The basis of any good toy is still play. If it doesn't amuse and excite a child, he won't play with it, no matter how much his mind stands to benefit."

The educator suggested the following guidelines for Santa's helpers getting an early start on the toy-shopping chore:

—Buy for stages, not for ages. Some children mature faster than others. Best bet is to take your cue from the youngster's interests.

—If possible, choose a toy that provides for many different uses. This way it will fit a variety of

skill levels and hold the child's interest longer.

—Keep play value uppermost, with educational benefits a close second. With toys, fun comes first.