

Ready! Set! School!

Product Testing Group—2/23/06

Session Objectives:

Session moderator Jack Wilbur, and Family Center staff early childhood specialist, Meg Bounforte, presented four draft activities to a group of 11 English speaking parents of 3-5 year old pre-school children. The objective was to solicit feedback about the activities and suggestions to make them usable for parents. This was the second session for this group.

The Group:

Eleven English speaking parents participated in the session: two fathers and nine mothers. Nine of the eleven are Caucasian, two are Latino. We still had 11 participants, but one person dropped out and we added one person. The group was well mixed between parents who have one or more older children already in school, and parents whose 3-5 year old pre-school child is the oldest. Two of the parents each currently have two children that fit into the demographic. Geographically, the participants live in three counties along the Wasatch Front (Davis County, 1, Utah County, 2, and Salt Lake County, 8). One of the mothers from Utah County has a son with autistic characteristics.

The Activities and Procedure:

We went through a total of four activities during the two-hour session (I Can Do It, My Big Muscles, The Shape of Things and Patterns)

Jack and the participants read through one activity at a time. After reading an activity, Jack asked the participants a series of questions to gauge their initial impressions (refer to the Product Testing Review Questions attachment).

Following the initial round of questions and answers, Meg demonstrated the activity as the writing committee had envisioned it.

When Meg finished demonstrating the activity, Jack asked a follow up set of questions to determine if any of the parents felt differently about the activity after seeing it demonstrated.

This procedure was followed for each activity one at a time.

Parent Impressions

General impressions, overriding themes:

1. The Parents liked the layout, readability and understandability of the cards this time much better than last time.
2. Because the cards “made more sense” the visual demonstrations were not as necessary as they were during the first session two weeks prior.
3. “Disclaimer” type of comments didn’t seem to fit into any of the sub-headings. If you are going to use them, you may want to give them their own section.
4. Some of the language still needs to be more direct and to the point. For example, Kindergarten Connection refers to what a child will learn during Kindergarten. It doesn’t mean the child needs to know it at the end of “this” activity. There are several examples listed below.
5. It was suggested that the website have a way to rate or vote on specific activities, besides posting a written response on the bulletin board.

Specific Activity Comments:

I can Do it:

Main comments:

“Liked the formatting better than two weeks ago.”

“I like how they said why it is important”

“I was thinking I’d like to take a picture of my daughter doing things and put them in the book”

On the web site vote on or rate the activities

Some parents liked the book better than the jar.

Under more ideas, some parents thought that “I can” and “I can do it” were the same and redundant. After Meg explained it, they got it. **The difference needs to be spelled out better.**

“Call it ‘I can almost do it’ or ‘I can help.’”

After demo:

“I wouldn’t be able to follow her around all day.”

“Have them come to me and tell me when they have done something.”

Having seen it I’m less likely to do it at home.”

I’ll stick to the jar. The book is too hard”

“I think the way it’s written spurs creativity.”

The parents generally liked this activity and would try it at home.

My Big Muscles

Main comments:

Again, they like the format better, more readable and understandable.

“I’m not drawn to it, but that’s just me. My house is already an obstacle course.”

“It’s good to get them used to friendly competition”

“The map should be the first bullet.”

One parent got turned off when she got to the map.

Meg explained why the map shouldn’t come first. One parent said if that’s the case it should be reworded.

The placement of the books box is better. Again there was a disconnect between intent and parent interpretation. One parent thought the books would be parent resources or references. Meg said that they were intended to be children’s picture book. This wasn’t as big of a deal, I think.

One parent who really needed the demonstrations last time said she is getting it much better this time. Could be the writing and formatting. Could be the material.

No demonstration was given for this activity.

The Shape of Things:

This was a big problem—a misunderstanding of what is expected.

This first issue that came up was smaller. One parent didn’t like the domain name of Mathematics. She thought it should be numbers and counting because they don’t do mathematics.

Another parent said calling it math is fine.

Another parent thought that numbers and shapes is better.

One parent really liked the opening statement that talks about shape in the environment.

Another parent disagreed. He wants to teach his son definite definable shapes and name them.

A big debate ensued about conceptual vs. tangible teaching of shape.

The parents thought that Kindergarten Connection referred to what their children need to know before going to kindergarten. Meg explained that Kindergarten Connection refers to something they will learn sometime during kindergarten.

The parents felt like this was not explained adequately.

There was a reference in the instructions to two dimensional shapes after the rest of the paragraph discussed building three dimensional shapes with clay, toothpicks, etc. Meg explained that the two dimensional reference would be if you were doing the exercise on paper. One parent suggested putting the reference to drawing shapes on paper in the more ideas section.

One parent said I'd do the activity as written.

Another parent said that he'd do it by baking cookies with his children. They make shapes and talk about them. They would use cookie cutters too.

Meg reminded parents that the point isn't to make "Cookie Cutter" shapes. It's not about labeling and defining the shapes, it's about exploring shape.

Meg said that a shape a child creates could be compared to a shape in the world around them, but that it should not necessarily be labeled as a rectangle or square, etc.

"I'm not seeing that. I didn't catch that at all"

The parents collectively had a different idea than Meg had intended.

They started to get it. One parent said, "My five year old will make a shape and name it. My three year old will make a shape and say that it's bigger or smaller than something else."

Meg started to demonstrate the activity. One parent cut her short by saying: "No, I'm bored. I am." I'm not following it. I was following it better on paper."

One parent asked: "What do you think shape is? They don't understand what shape is."

Finally the concept of shape rather the names of shapes is the concept. One parent suggested using the word abstract. Meg said that the instructions need to be written at a 4th grade level, but that abstract is the right idea.

In the end, it appeared that most of the parents would do this activity, but they fear that without substantial re-writing, most parents will misinterpret the intension.

Patterns:

No substantial comments.

We read the activity and talked about it for a few minutes, but it was obvious that the previous activity had drained this group of much of their energy.

Conclusions:

This group of parents seemed very interested in the products being developed. Most of them liked most of the activities. But they want the activities better spelled out. They still want more ideas about other ways they can accomplish the same outcomes and variations of the activity. Visual cues such as simple as a picture of a finished activity for the cards would be helpful to these parents. This group mostly seems interested in the internet and using the website. They believe that parents sharing ideas, resources and experiences will be very beneficial. Most of these parents are willing to test the products out at home concurrently with the time the focus groups test the products.