

THE UPSIDE OF MAKING YOUR OWN Educational Toys

by Barbara Sher

I remember the first time I brought an educational toy. It was a shape sorter in which the square block fits in the square hole, the ball in the round hole and so on.

I worried that the toy had only one square, one ball etc. and if my children ran true to form, those parts would disappear within minutes.

Roxanne lost the square immediately and the puppy chewed the ball. I wrote an irate letter to the toy manufacture pointing out their error. I expected a letter of apology and a notice of their intentions to add spare parts to future toys. I got back, instead, a price list. For two dollar each (!) plus shipping. I could purchase more parts.

I've discovered since then that a lot of learning toys can be made in my own kitchen using nothing more complicated than scissor, colored paper and glue.

For instance, when I wanted to teach my children about colors, I would use colored paper and make two squares of each color (an index card was my template). I'd have two yellow, two blue, two green, and so on. At first, I'd lay out two cards and say, "Here are two cards. One is red and the other is blue. Now here is another red card. Please put this red card on top of the other red card". I'd help guide their hand to the correct pile at first until they caught on. Later, I'd lay out all the colors and ask them to "put the card on the one that is the same color. As they got older and I wanted to introduce words like 'puce' and "teal", I'd "borrow" matching paint samples from the hardware store for the game.

The same type of matching game can be used for numbers and letters (capital from small, script vs. print). I've also done matching detailed designs

so they would notice the difference between a circle with a cross inside from a circle with an x inside it.

Since puzzle pieces often went awry, I would sometimes make my own by using the sides of cereal boxes. I would cut the picture up in a number of pieces; more as they got older, and let them put it back together.

The great thing about these games is that they provided some quality time between my children and me. They seemed to relish these moments. I remember my then 3 year old would approach the task like a competent executive pursing her lips and tapping the card against her forehead as she scanned the cards for the matching pattern. Some times they would take turns being the "teacher" with each other and friends.

It's important to emphasize that these are games and NOT tests. I am happy to supply answers. The object is not to just help children learn, although that will be happening, or to increase their awareness, although that too will be happening, but mostly to do something enjoyable together and that's always nice when it happens. ♥

Barbara Sher M.A., O.T.R, an occupational therapist and author of nine books on childrens games. Titles include *EARLY INTERVENTION GAMES SPIRIT GAMES* and *EXTRAORDINARY PLAY WITH ORDINARY THINGS*. Send request for workshops to barbara.sher@gmail.com or www.gameslady.com