

Cyberchase Workshops-In-A-Box
Formative Evaluation
of Outreach After-School Activities for
Leaders and Youth

Report for
WNET Thirteen

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SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Nine leaders of upper-grade elementary after-school groups reviewed and implemented two activities from the *Cyberchase Workshop-In-A-Box*: “Pattern Play” and “Fences and Fields.” Leaders were interviewed after reading through the box materials; leaders then implemented the two activities with their youth, completed a leader and a youth survey after each activity, and were interviewed after their experience. About 63-66 youth participated in each activity review.

Reactions upon initial exposure

After the initial review of the Workshop-In-A-Box but before implementing activities, 8 of the 9 leaders reported that they would do at least one of the activities with their youth if they had received them in the mail. On the initial exposure, leaders reported liking that the directions were clear and that the activities appeared easy to do.

Implementation of activities

In implementing the activities, two of the nine leaders had difficulties following where to stop the tape and suggested integrating such directions into the body of the activity instructions. Some leaders also desired that all materials be included in the box to decrease preparation time.

Perception of math in activities

All leaders agreed that “Fences and Fields” uses math concepts - perimeter and area. Leaders were split on whether “Pattern Play” uses math skills, with five saying yes and four saying no. Two of those who felt “Pattern Play” used math referred to the final handout problems rather than to the instrument pattern-making activity; two leaders also felt that the handout was difficult for their third graders.

A large majority (70%) of youth could not describe an interesting thing learned from “Fences and Fields,” even though 55% said that the activity felt like math to them. Only 25% of the youth participants mentioned something about “perimeter” and/or “area” in their answers about what they learned; 10% responded with an answer indicating some relationship between perimeter and area. Half of the sample could describe learning something interesting from “Pattern Play,” mainly learning “about patterns” (23%), or that you can make patterns or music with sound (11%) or that there are different patterns (8%). Half of the youth said that the “Pattern Play” activity felt like math to them, but those who reported watching *Cyberchase* previously were less likely to say the activity felt like math.

Appeal of activities

Both activities were rated high in appeal by leaders and their youth. With respect to “Fences and Fields,” leaders liked most the curriculum concepts and the video. Six of the nine leaders would recommend the activity, emphasizing the entertainment and educational aspects. Those hesitating in their recommendation were concerned with the activity’s preparation time and school-like feeling. Youth liked most watching the video and doing the hamster cage activity, but girls liked the experience significantly more than boys. One-third of the boys did not like the hamster cage activity.

Leaders liked “Pattern Play” because their youth enjoyed the activity and it encouraged youth participation. Two leaders noted specifically liking the video. Two cub scout leaders were less enthusiastic because of control issues with their boys-only groups. Six of the nine leaders would recommend the activity because of their kids liked it. Those hesitating to recommend the activity were concerned with the effects of group size and gender on staying with the task. The participating youth liked most making music, noise or sounds and watching the video, but one-fifth of the sample disliked the video.

Potential for further activities

Five of the nine leaders were interested in receiving further Workshops-in-A-Box. Those not interested were concerned about their time, the academic-bent and level of difficulty of the activities. Seven of the nine leaders were interested in receiving activities to help their youth understand about spending, saving and budgeting money. Six of nine leaders preferred to receive instructions by mail because of computer and printer access, color ink expenses, download speed and time limitations. Two leaders preferred downloading from the web because of efficiency and saving trees. The remaining leader had no preference either way.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on only nine leaders and should be considered tentative in their recommendation power. The activities, on average, were appreciated by both the leaders and their youth. Continue the current approach of clear explanations of simple hands-on activities that are set up and complemented by video from the series. To improve the workshop, leaders requested provision of all materials and integration of the start-stop video directions into the activity instructions. In terms of learning outcomes, most youth had difficulty describing anything interesting that they learned from the experiences, and half of the youth and some leaders did not feel there was math in the activities. Participating may have been enjoyable but the impact on learning was relatively low compared to impact of the in-school and at-home activities. This difference may result from the fact that the after-school participants were third graders while the other evaluations used fourth graders. Consider how the workshops can present a simple take-away message for younger participants. Five of the nine leaders were interested in other workshop activities, and seven were interested in future money activities and preferred receiving such activities via mail.