

## **Ready! Set! School! Project**

### **Focus Group Report**

#### **Group U—Session 1: 2/23/06**

**Location: Murray Utah, 5192 S. Green Pine Dr.**

#### **Introduction:**

We have assembled three different groups of parents of pre-school aged children to provide baseline data about what they currently do to help prepare their children for school. Recording the baseline, getting acquainted with the parents and having the parents in each group become acquainted with one another is the primary goal of Session One.

Each of the three groups will meet twice more as we enter into the pilot product testing phase of the research. The second session will introduce each group to the Ready! Set! Go! Products and sample their initial reactions. The third meeting, after the parents have taken home the materials and used them with their children for about a month, will focus on detailed comments from the groups of parents after testing the product.

#### **Group U:**

The “U” stands for Urban mixed. The word mixed refers in this case to geographic location along the Wasatch Front, as well as income, number and ages of children, blended families, etc. There was some ethnic diversity, but this area was stressed more in the L group. We did have a Latino couple and one other Latino mom. We also had one parent from Utah County, and two from Davis County. Within Salt Lake County there was a good mix of Westside and Eastside, north end of the valley and south end of the valley.

#### **Session Overview:**

Jack Wilbur conducted the session, which lasted approximately one hour. Each of the parents were asked to state their name, indicate how many children they have and their ages.

Then each parent was given an opportunity to talk about what they do to help prepare their child for kindergarten. Who are the care providers? What sort of things does the child do with them? What do you do with your child?

The last two questions were opened up for voluntary answers. Parents were asked how they know what they teach their pre-school children. Where do they get that information? The final formal question was designed to find out what areas of their child’s development they would like more information about.

What follows is an edited, but fairly detailed transcript of their answers to the major questions:

### **What do they do now?**

#### **Francisca—Boy just turned five**

Their little boy's name is Jason. He hasn't gone to preschool. They just moved from Wyoming and they've only been here for six months. He knows a lot of English even though he hasn't had any formal schooling. He knows the computer really well. He likes the Sesame Street website. Sesame Street is the only TV he watches. He only watches videos that help him progress. He is learning a lot in both languages and sometimes he gets confused between Hi and Ola. They only speak Spanish in their house. Her older children never had any problem learning English. Her other kids did go to preschool but this one hasn't, so think he's just a little bit confused.

#### **Phoenix—3 children, seven, 4 ½ and two.**

My four year old Ruby is in the same preschool and it's a non academic preschool. So all of the learning is experiential. I try to do the same thing at home. The letter writing, if somebody has a birthday we make birthday cards. We're learning how to write Happy Birthday and signing our names. It's really about what's going on in our lives. Instead of sitting down and doing something structured. I've never really done that. I love to read to the kids. I think most of what I've done for kindergarten readiness comes from the books we read. She's in dance class and learning to play the violin. I just try to make her well-rounded and expose her to many different experiences. And I cross my fingers.

#### **Jackey—2 children: 4 1/2 and two.**

Lilly's in preschool and she has been in preschool since she was three. So in the summer she goes to Spanish school. She's kind of resistant to me speaking Spanish at home. As someone who came to the states when I was eight I think you try to be like everybody else. The other language is kind of embarrassing for the child. You don't want to be different. As a child you just want to be like everybody else. In Spanish school she has no problem with it. When we went to Florida and all her cousins were there she thought it was cool. I'd say the majority of what we do has to be with what we do in our daily lives. Going up the stairs counting as we go up and down the stairs. Cooking, counting cups of flour. Even my 18 month year old understands because we are always doing it. But I think most people do that to some degree. But I think that because we don't do much structured learning we do it that way based on play. For Christmas we got her a lot of games and puzzles. We practice taking turns, which is difficult and not always being the winner. She's in dance class which helps with creativity. She likes the TV and I have to limit it, but she learns from it. The Sesame Street web site there's a game on there about letters.

#### **Heather—2 children, 3 step-children. Their ages are 12, 10, nine, seven and almost three.**

I've only been a step-mother to Austin for four months, so I'm still learning. And it's different because we only see him like every other weekend. But there are a few things that we try to do when he is in our home. One is the reading part. Dad said I tried reading and he doesn't like reading. But I've tried incorporate the other kids, as has come up many times. It was my son Garrett who really got Austin to enjoy books more. We've been working on repetition because his language skills are a little bit lacking. So we're working on games and toys and for Christmas I got him toys that have sounds that repeat back to him. And of course, he's still two so we have a ways to go. The other day in the car I asked him what the dog says and all he could come up with was "no," but I think we'll get there. It's been interesting to go back to the three year old. One thing I did with Reed and Garrett that I've gone back to is cooking. He likes to be right in the middle of it. We talk about what's hit and how to mix the stuff and how the mixer works. But there's a lot of language and shapes and colors that just happen with cooking.

**Elise—six step children and two of her own, including a three year old of her own and a three year old step daughter.**

This is hard for me because I'm thinking what I do and I don't do any of this. My son and step-daughter get a lot from their older brothers and sisters. I am amazed at what they have learned on their own. The other day Charles, my three year old got on a web site alone. He can't read yet but intuitively he can get on and look at letters and things. My step daughter has known her letters since I met her and she was one. I think even having each other on the same level is good. They can play with each other and straighten each other out.

**Jennifer—2 children, 3 and seven months**

My son's a little different. He has high functioning autism, so he's not exactly to the point where some of your children are right now. He is going to a special preschool right now and he's also in speech therapy. We spend a lot of time reading. He likes to look at the pictures. He still hasn't learn numbers and shapes and colors, but he is excellent at matching.

**Lindsay—2 children, 3 and six months**

Conner is three. For him, he has a little Leap Frog desk and he loves that, learning numbers and counting and that. The way I've had him learn his shapes is when I am making a peanut butter and Jelly sandwich for lunch I'll cut it into different shapes and he'll tell me what the shapes are or I'll use cookie cutters and make different shapes. As far as colors we do a lot when we are driving around in the car I'll say I see a green tree and he'll say he see a red car.

**Michelle—one son who will be three in a month.**

My son will just be three so I have a lot of time with him. I work part time, but when I'm not working I just dote all over him. He has a propensity toward the verbal anyway, so we read a lot. He likes the magnetic letters on the fridge and all of that. He's starting to ask me how to spell something. He wanted to spell computer. He can pretty much do it, so we just spend a lot of time playing. And when I'm at work my parents are with him

and they dote on him too. He knows his colors. He does a lot with flashcards and big on puzzles. And like another parent said, when something comes up we just talk about it. We just talk and talk and talk. And his latest thing is rhyming. He's a rhyming fanatic. This is the greatest tool for increasing vocabulary ever. Car, star, you'll have to explain what that word is.

**Michele—4 children. 8-year-old, six, four and two.**

I'm on the boat with the parents talking about the older kids, love the older kids. My four year old is a girl. She's always with her older siblings coloring. She knows a little Spanish because her sister is taking Spanish. I just try to pickup on things she says. Why are we stopping there Mom. Because there is a red stop sign there. She already has her numbers and a lot of letters down. I read to her. She doesn't want to sound out many words yet.

**Sarah—three year old and three month old.**

He loves flashcards, so we do a lot of flashcards. He can actually put together a 50 state puzzle. That's pretty impressive. He's not in preschool right now, but he is in a dance and gymnastics class to help socialize him because his only sibling is three months old.

**Shawna—3 children, 14, 10, 5**

Jacob is in preschool. He's more stubborn than either of his older siblings, so working with him has always been a bit of a challenge, but he's doing quite well. Having the older siblings has really helped. They sit down and do their homework and he says he wants to do his homework too. He can already do his numbers and letter.

**Delia—2 children, 11, 4, and she is expecting**

My four year old was going to preschool but now she is home with my mom. She's watching Dora to learn some Spanish. She's learning her numbers with my mom and kind of how to spell her name. Before when she went to preschool she learned a lot about coloring and numbers. Her older sister reads to her. She pretends to read.

**Other Questions:**

**Where do you get the information you use?:**

Library. We probably make two or three trips a weeks.

Older children make it easier because they are bringing resources homes. They send fliers homes with the elementary school children.

Once a month I get an email from the perpetual preschool dot com. There are always great resources and activities.

I had a mom who was a family and consumer science teacher and she was always feeding me stuff.

I subscribe to the Nick Jr. Magazine. Once a week we do finger painting. The magazine has been giving me a lot of ideas of things to make.

It's mostly just books. We have older cousins that clean out their bedrooms and brings us books. I'm thinking I need to do more structured learning things. But listening to you all I can see I'm in a rut. Oh yeah, finger paints. I'm pretty much just shooting from the hip. Washable markers are good too.

A lot of the fun ideas I get are from the shows he watches. I remember he was watching an episode of the Backyardigans where they were following what they thought was a Yetty. They ended up in an igloo. He was fascinated by that. I remembered when I was a kid making an igloo out of marshmallows, so we made one. I try to think of something we can do to improve fine motor skills. We don't really use any websites or anything. I don't know where I get my information from. I don't get any information.

Wal-mart. The school isle. That's where I got the flashcards and 50 State puzzles. We also like the Us born books.

Playgroups. We did really formal play groups. That was really helpful for me when I was a first time mom. I got a lot from sharing with the other moms.

### **What kinds of things are you doing for socialization beyond preschool?**

LDS-Primary. Brothers and sisters.

My son will be turning three in March and he was ready for preschool a year ago because he wants to be with other kids. I've had him in a gymnastics class. At first he was aggressive but in the last four months I've seen a big change in how he gets along with other kids. He's also in a music class with other kids too to get him comfortable singing with other kids.

Jasmine has been in a dance class, and she is a chatterbox. She has a friend she likes to call to come out to play.

We go to the park a lot. He's extremely gregarious. He's walk away with any of you and be happy forever.

I think at the park too I try to seek out kids the same age and size.

My kids have a lot of siblings and cousins he plays with.

I have several meetings I have to attend throughout the week and I've talked to other parents to get informal play groups together.

### **What other kinds of resources or subject matters do you need more information about?**

I would like to know what I am supposed to be teaching him. He's my first, so I'm wondering if I'm doing the right thing. Am I too advanced with this and I too far behind. I have absolutely nothing to gauge it off of. Just having some sort of guideline telling me at this age this is what they are supposed to be learning or this is what they should be absorbing.

The only guideline I felt like I had was my doctor. Should they be writing yet? No they don't need to be writing yet. Some don't even write until they get in kindergarten. Even with toilet training. I had such a thing about getting him toilet trained by two. After my first I'm like you can be in a diaper until your ten. I think I got something from the hospital that had a developmental chart.

You are so focused on it when they are infants and when they are two you think, oh crap, what am I supposed to do now.

And the magazines have a lot of stuff about infants, but not as much about older children. Conner will go to preschool this August and I have been at a loss for how to teach him how to get ready for school. He's one of those boys who is so active and I'm at loss about how to teach him to sit still. He goes to Primary and even has a had time to sit still, so I'm at a loss as to how to help him get ready for preschool.

Isn't that their job though?

My girl was calm and still. She could just sit and hang out for hours. My son is half way through kindergarten and is still working on it. But he's suddenly doing much better and I think it's because it was his idea.

I'd like to see something where there is this sort of universal thing for preschool teachers. Especially when you have your first you send them to preschool and you don't know what you are supposed to know. You rely on these preschool teachers for guidance. But we don't always get all the information from them.