

Showcase NC: Buncombe County Extension Homemaker Helping Meet Developmental Needs of Visually-Impaired and Physically-Challenged Toddlers and Their Families

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Ginger Clough

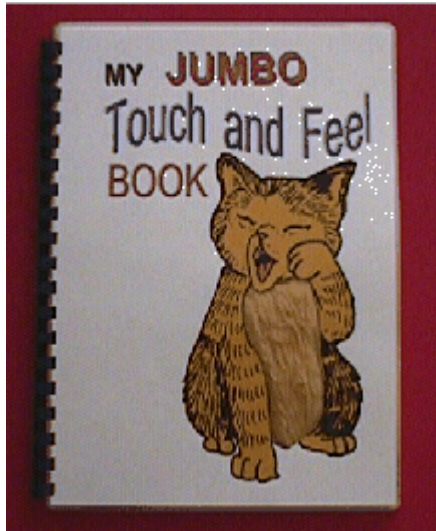
Sometimes ideas for Extension programs and projects emerge out of specialized committees. Sometimes from a large number of requests for information or expressions of concern. And then there are those serendipitous moments when an unmet need meets a group hungry for a creative project, and *VOILA!* -- magic happens!

That's how *My Jumbo Touch and Feel Book* was born in Buncombe County. The staff of the Infant-Toddler Early Intervention Program * of the Blue Ridge Center in Asheville, North Carolina, had been trying to find large-sized, large print multi-sensory books for the visually-impaired and physically-challenged toddlers in their program, but with no luck. At the same time, the Buncombe County Extension Homemakers were searching for some new and exciting ways to volunteer their talents. So when the two groups found each other, it didn't take much to get the ball rolling. Soon the phone lines between the early intervention office and the Extension Center were buzzing.

Only two volunteers came forward at first. However, after reviewing smaller multi-sensory books, their liaison agent found a way to incorporate computer graphics and household materials, including bath towels, sand paper and floor tiles into a larger (8 ½" X 11") prototype. The result excited both the Blue Ridge staff and the Extension Homemakers. Once Extension Homemakers' County Council members saw the finished product, their enthusiasm grew into a planned county wide workshop to produce larger quantities of the books.

The finished project is a 13-page, comb-bound book that teaches simple concepts through sensory stimulation. Ginger Clough, Blue Ridge Center's Early Intervention Specialist who commissioned the project, tells why this is important for a child's development.

Toddlers learn by exploring, and the multi-textures encourage them to feel and learn through the experience of touch. By stimulating touch receptors in the skin, toddlers learn about the characteristics of objects such as "rough/smooth" and "hard/soft." Touching and exploring objects are a fun way for toddlers to learn about the world around them!



In the "**Jumbo Book**," fake fur on the stomach of a kitten allows toddlers to feel and experience the concept of "soft" while a turtle's shell fashioned of self-adhesive floor tiles allows the young pre-readers to learn what "hard" feels like. Transparency acetate simulates the smoothness of glass on an illustration of a gumball machine, and two different types of sandpaper glued in the shape of a sandcastle teach the concept "scratchy." Bright yellow feathers on a baby chick illustrate "tickley," and a terry cloth bath towel wrapped around a dripping little boy feels "nubby."

What comes after bathtime? Why, bedtime, of course! The book ends by wishing the reader sweet dreams as the concept of "fluffy" is depicted through two tiny foam pillows attached to an illustration of a bed.

Clough says that the "**Jumbo Book**" is an excellent pre-literacy tool.

Exposure to books enhances young children's later reading skills and enjoyment. Infant-Toddler Specialists often include a component of reading with the children during home visits. Being able to feel the differing textures on the pictures expands a child's interaction with the book which often increases interest in reading activities. The textures in the book also provide opportunities for parents and the developmental specialist to expand on the text by talking about other objects in the toddler's environment that have

the same or different feeling. This is also a wonderful language-stimulating activity. The books can be loaned to families so that parents can cuddle and read to their children. Reading with children is a way for family members to connect and spend time together.

The book was formatted using WordPerfect 6.1 for Windows™, and all graphics were accessed through *Holy Cow! 250,000 Graphics* software from Macmillan Digital Publishing. The cover and all pages of the book were laminated for greater durability and easier clean-up. The lamination also makes it easier for little hands with limited dexterity to turn the pages. Clough explains how important that is:

I first approached the Homemakers about making multi-textured books with a particular child in mind. She is a 2-year-old with cerebral palsy. She loves our small multi-textured books but her limited muscular control makes it difficult for her to move her hands and arms so she can feel the materials. The 'Jumbo Book' uses larger materials so she can more easily coordinate her eye, hand, and arm movements in order to touch the pictures. The size of the book is also helpful for children with visual impairments.

Although Extension Homemakers were willing to donate many scrap materials for the books, it was decided that since the books were to be used with toddlers, all new materials should be purchased to avoid any possible inadvertent contamination problems that might occur with used materials. Even so, the cost of supplies for at least eight books (not including paper and laminating) was less than \$25.00. An additional \$20.00 was spent to incorporate Braille captions into one book to allow visually impaired, Braille-reading parents to read to their children.

All costs of the initial books were covered by the Early Intervention Program, but the Extension Homemakers County Council has expressed interest in taking on at least some of the future costs of production, including purchasing a portable laminating machine.

Response to the books has been extremely positive. *"They turned out much better than I ever imagined! Everyone at the office has gone crazy over them!"* says Clough who is currently surveying speech and occupational therapists at other local agencies to determine interest in more books. She is also arranging for a Spanish translation of the text, and when the translation is available, Extension Homemaker volunteers plan to produce several copies of the book in Spanish.

Although the book was originally designed for use by children with special needs, one Buncombe County Advisory Council member pointed out that it could easily be used with any toddler. *"It's the kind of thing all kids should have."* Indeed, one of the county's family resource centers has expressed interest in getting a copy.

In the future, instructions for assembling the basic book may be made available on disk to other North Carolina counties. This way, the project can be adopted state wide as part of the family issues and/or literacy projects of the North Carolina Extension Homemakers Association. The "**Jumbo Book**" is a project that stimulates a lot of excitement among Extension Homemakers because it matches their interest in families and children with their love for arts and handicrafts. It is great fun with a great purpose, and it's making a difference in the lives of kids and their families who face extraordinary challenges every day. Says Clough, "*The collaboration between the NC Cooperative Extension Program, the Extension Homemakers, and the Infant-Toddler Program is an exciting way that agencies and volunteers can utilize local resource and talents for the children of our community.*"

* The NC Infant-Toddler Program is an early intervention program for families with children ages birth to three years old who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities. Infant-Toddler Developmental Specialists work with families to promote growth and development, offer parent training and support, and provide case coordination. [Return to text.](#)

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