



T. rex Children's Drawings Formative Evaluation

Introduction

Five drawings illustrating a fact about T. rex will accompany the animatronic T. rex being installed at the museum. The drawings will be placed at a low level to attract young children. It is hoped that to a great extent children will be able to interpret the messages of the drawing by themselves. There will also be an accompanying caption. The drawings will be placed underneath text panels aimed at adults. The intended messages of the drawings are to show that:

T. rex was longer and taller than a double decker bus.

T. rex was as heavy as about 200 children

T. rex was good at sniffing out food. The part of the brain used for smelling was as big as an orange in T. rex. Yours is only as big as a pea.

T. rex had tiny arms. They couldn't even reach its mouth.

If T. rex tripped up when running, the fall probably would have killed it.

The purpose of the evaluation was to gain children and their families' reactions to the drawings and ascertain how obvious and clear they found the messages.

Fourteen children in family groups were shown the drawings.

Age	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Male	0	2	1	2	2	0	7
Female	1	1	2	2	0	1	7

Observations

Approximately half the adults within the family groups were given the accompanying captions and half solely the drawings. This prompted different behaviours among the parents. If they had the captions they were more likely to prompt their children into giving the correct answers and were also often helpful in making the drawings accessible to their children. For example one parent whose child did not understand scales drew an analogy with a seesaw. Parents who were not given the captions let the researcher prompt the children and discuss the drawings with them. When the parents did work through the drawings with children they frequently had also misunderstood the meaning of the drawings and had to be prompted by the researcher.

It was felt that prompting the children and noting down who had said what was an acceptable method of collecting information as this is what may happen in a real museum situation.

Although the drawings were in their prototype black and white format they seemed to hold the children's interest well. The children often found the activities T. rex was engaging in funny and could relate to the children in the pictures.

1. T. rex was longer and taller than a double decker bus

Seven of the children were able to identify with minimal prompting that T. rex was as big or bigger and longer than the bus.

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A further six children were able to understand the message with some prompting from adults. The children's imaginations were obviously working well throughout the interview but when prompted they generally understood the concept with ease.

"Looks like trying to attack the bus." (M7)

All children could identify the dinosaur and bus easily and only one child was unable to make the connection to size.

2. T. rex was as heavy as about 200 children

Five children were able to identify that T. rex is as heavy as the children straightaway with no prompting. Four children focussed on the fact that T. rex was reading rather than on the scales:

"Reading a story to the kids" (M6)

"It's a recipe book so he can cook children." (M5)

A further six children were able to identify the message of the drawing with some prompting. Three of the younger children, however, did not understand the messages, this was not due to the drawings however but due to the fact that they did not grasp the idea of how scales worked.

The two drawings above seemed to work especially well with the children. The explanations needed by parents were relatively small and usually just required a small amount of direction.

3. T. rex was good at sniffing out food. The part of the brain used for smelling was as big as an orange in T rex. Yours is only as big as a pea

No child was able to identify the message of the drawing alone. Six children were able to understand the message after prompting but parents who were not given the captions were also unclear about how to direct their children. A further four children however, could see that T. rex was smelling the flower.

"seeing if he likes smell of the flower." (F5)

"he wants to eat the flower." (F8)

Only three children were unable to understand the basic messages of the drawing with two of these mistaking the flower for a balloon.

4. T. rex had tiny arms. They couldn't even reach its mouth

No child was able to identify the message of the drawing without prompting and this drawing was the most problematic.

Most children mentioned that T. rex either liked or disliked eating ice cream or another aspect of the ice cream rather than noticing his small arms.

"he wants to eat the little boy – he eats meat not ice cream" (M5)

"its so small he wants another one" (M7)

"he likes ice cream" (M6)

Six children were able to identify the messages with prompting and the researcher or parent pointing out his arms.

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Six children were not able to understand the message at all. This was often when parents did not have the captions and so were unable to direct their children as much or directed them into thinking about T. rex being a carnivore etc.

5. If T. rex tripped up when running the fall probably would have killed it.

No child was able to understand this message without any prompting. However the majority of the children (8) did notice that T. rex was either being tripped or was about to fall over.

“is she trying to trip him?” (F4)

However what would happen if he did fall over eluded most children although they came up with some interesting alternatives! This is likely to be because the first aid kit was either not noticed or understood by the children and because they were primarily focussed on T. rex and what he was doing.

“if he fell over he’d get a bruise.” (F3)

“he would squash the children.” (F5)

“he would make a big hole in the ground” (M5)

Conclusions

Drawings 1 and 2 were able to communicate the intended messages effectively to the children with only a small amount of prompting.

Drawings 3 and 5 were understood at a basic level by most of the children in that they were related to T. rex falling over or being tripped and smell. They were generally unable to make a further connection with T. rex not being able to get up or the size of the smelling part of the brain without considerable prompting and help.

Drawing 4 was the least successful as the children and adults focussed on T. rex’s face, the ice creams and the boy and not on the tiny arms.

In general, however, the children really enjoyed looking at the drawings so holding their interest whilst the intended meaning was worked out was not a problem for even the youngest child.

The parents were a lot more confident about explaining the pictures to their children when they had read the caption in advance.

Recommendations

Try to make it more obvious that once T. rex has fallen he wont be able to get up.

Perhaps have T. rex side on so that his arms are more obviously not reaching his mouth.