

Roark, M. F., & Evans, F. (2010). *Play It, Measure It: Experiences Designed to Elicit Specific Youth Outcomes*. Monterey, CA: Healthy Living.
 155 pages plus CD-ROM, Cost of \$24.95, ISBN: 978-1-60679-092-2

Reviewed by

Jo Ann Coco-Ripp, Therapeutic Recreation Program

Winston-Salem State University

Does this little book measure up to the billing by the promoters?

An enticing cover, clever title, and deceptively brief number of pages all invite the reader to jump in quickly and willingly. However, reading a book to write a review does not sound like a fun activity after a day of lecture and grading papers. *Play It, Measure It* lived up to the invitation for this reader and seems to accomplish the purpose of the authors. Roark and Evans chose a question-and-answer (Q & A) format for the information chapters. Adapting the American Camp Association (ACA) Outcome Questionnaire to use as measurement tools for these activities, the book attempts to provide “program leaders with an intentionally designed sequence of activities that will elicit a desired youth participant outcome ...” (p. 12).

The authors design the first two chapters using the Q & A format to explain the purpose, describe the format of the resources, and provide background to persuade readers that structured sequential activities are important to obtain predetermined outcomes. The rest of the book and an accompanying CD-ROM provide the materials to carry out the plans. There are four themed sets of activities with the purpose of fun and one other intentional outcome:

Five Senses Experience—affinity for exploration

Pirates Experience—teamwork

80s Experience—friendship skills

Masquerade Experience—friendship skills

The description and other instructions follow the same pattern in each chapter. Even though this redundancy does not present exciting reading, it does serve the purpose quite well. Each themed sequence of activities starts with purpose and ends with scripted directions for administering the brief questionnaire.

Resources on the CD-ROM are created to make the work as effortless as possible. Each of the Experiences has templates, flyers, and other materials to support all the activities for that particular theme. There is even an Excel spreadsheet set up with directions so response data can be entered. In several places throughout the book, the authors also offer to give assistance or brainstorm if there are any obstacles using the materials provided. Roark and Evans also hint at future volumes with outcomes focused on responsibility, independence, and perceived competence.

The underlying foundation for the results in this book and future ones in the series is the ACA Developmental Outcomes and Questionnaires. Anyone who wants

to read further about the development of these items can visit <http://www.acacamps.org> at the ACA site, which provides details on the validity and reliability of the questionnaires. The connection with ACA research on Developmental Outcomes is both a strength and limitation to this resource. Rigorous attention to detail such as strict adherence to using the same script for administering the questionnaires creates reliable measurement results. Use of questionnaires that have been refined by ACA and the authors provides confidence for program leaders who select them. Limiting the evaluation of outcomes to written questionnaires may not uncover results from a variety of sources. For example, results from these groups may be missed: youth from other cultural backgrounds, youth who have difficulties with reading or other cognitive processing problems, youth whose first language is not English. In addition, leaders may rely on these questionnaires and miss some important observation or intuitive professional judgment forms of evaluating outcomes.

Nevertheless, *Play It, Measure It* makes a worthwhile contribution to increasing intentional program outcomes for youth. Bringing together the resources for four sequential sets of Experiences to elicit friendship skills, teamwork, and interest in exploration is a great step in a positive direction for quality evaluation. In my Research Methods and Evaluation class, this approach may be included as an assignment during the next semester. Involvement in the 80s or Five Senses Experience from beginning to analysis of outcomes may be a learning activity that can provide structure to propel college juniors into design of an outstanding group service learning project. The connection of practitioner and researcher may not be fully accomplished through this book but it certainly makes a good start for program leaders and college professors to begin more discussions.