The founders of Peekapak, Ami Shah and Angie Chan, knew they had an idea for a unique product that was lacking in the world of early childhood education, a solution for busy parents and crafty kids alike. Peekapak is the monthly delivery of a shoebox-sized package of curated arts and crafts supplies combined with an element of storytelling.

Shah and Chan recognized they were facing an oversaturated market, so before they took Peekapak to Kickstarter they carefully created a backbench of researchers, psychologists, regular kids and their parents as well as highly critical advisory boards. They streamlined their prototype based on feedback, all while creating an early network of supporters that would prove pivotal in getting the word out when the Kickstarter campaign began. When it did, they soared past their initial $7,500 goal to over 10k in a week. Just like that, Peekapak was born.

Most children today are supervised 24/7. Gone are the days where kids played outside until the streetlights came on. “Our toy stores are woefully lacking in positive, authentic, true to life images. Ami and Angie are very thoughtfully and purposefully adding a counter-narrative,” says Dr. Kimberly Bezaire, an early researcher-turned-supporter of Peekapak. She became involved with the startup when Peekapak enlisted George George Brown College’s School of Early Childhood—where Bezaire is a professor—to assist in their initial research stages after Shah and Chan received a government grant.

Asked how the Paks offer up something different, Dr. Bezaire says, “[Peekapak] builds fundamentally on children’s natural play, children’s emergent literacy. In a lot of wonderful ways it’s a child’s natural toy, but it’s also innovative. The materials they put into the Paks are not standard craft materials, not cookie cutter materials, they give a lot of thought to the creative potential. There’s a really wonderful connection between the material and the storytelling happening in the book.”

Dr. Bezaire says open-ended materials, like those that Peekapak provides, are crucial in play as they require children to use their imaginations as the main means to get started. The onus is not on passive entertainment, as is the apparent trend through handheld devices such as smartphones or personal gaming gadgets. She also says something like Peekapak could eventually replace traditional homework, which by nature is traditionally frustrating rather than fun for children, being that it’s the work that was the hardest to finish in class hours.

In the meantime though, Peekapak is pressing on. Shah and Chan have hired on new staff to facilitate their acceptance into the MaRS accelerator program and move into the company’s affiliated Discovery District in downtown Toronto. They have also been accepted into the San Francisco-based Imagine K12. While Peekapaks initial concept might seem simple, it shows what can happen when you think outside the shoebox.