

My name is...

Can you imagine...sitting in a classroom – looking around and seeing only coloured splashes, symbols and shapes; on cards with recognizable or maybe not so recognizable pictures; then being asked to reproduce that strange symbol in the appropriate space provided? How many of us could or would even venture to take a second look, a second try, a second step if it had no meaning to us? My students have diligently embraced what is presented before them. These are the students I work with – those young and inquisitive minds who cannot recognize, recite, or write the letters that will open them up to opportunities that we, as educators, know exist.

I help them discover the meaning and unravel the mystery of the letter/word/meaning of print; enable them to develop essential reading and writing readiness skills. In order to achieve this goal, my young students need to manipulate, touch, and play with language.

One way of doing this has been to use tactile objects such as sandpaper letters, play dough, magnetic letters etc. Two exercises that work particularly well with students who have difficulty recognizing and consequently associating the print word to its meaning, have been to help them create their own personal alphabet book; and using a large portable dry erase board so they practice letter formation. On this same surface they place and move the magnetic letters. Students are able to actively engage in manipulating letters and associating letter/sound/print relationships. Teaching Kindergarten and Cycle 1 is a wonderful experience – there is great satisfaction in seeing progress in their acquisition of literacy awareness; in seeing the metaphorical light bulb switch on; in seeing a student demonstrate, generalize and utilize their newfound skills. Throughout the course of a year I have observed a young boy, who though knowing his name could not recognize nor recite the letters that formed it, shouts out: “Look I have two names like everybody else!” then proudly proceeded to spell out his first and last name. This small step for many is tantamount to climbing the proverbial mountain.

In working with children who experience difficulties in language arts, educators are well aware that materials are often within reach but costs are prohibitive. Teachers must find ways to encourage literacy and must find ways to put into practice the methods they deem necessary to achieve success. The reform has offered educators the ideas and theoretical means, it is incumbent upon the front line person to develop those materials and put them into practice. Often what seems like a terrifically wonderful project, may actually not be realistic with the realities of the classroom environment.

While attaining literacy is a matter of time, for others, it is often a huge wall that must be scaled often without footholds. As an English Language Arts resource teacher, my role is to provide those footholds and offer support, patience and encouragement. Is my role fulfilling? Ya betcha! My student said: “My name is...”

Thank you ATEQ for your support.

Cheryl Gauthier

St. Patrick Elementary