

## FEBRUARY SEARCH NEWSLETTER: **Encouraging Literacy in the Young Student**

When we think of "literacy" at the early elementary level, we usually mean reading, but writing is also part of literacy. How can parents and teachers, working together, instill a love of reading AND writing in young children? While it's vitally important to give children the skills they need to sound out words and to know what words, that's only the first step on the journey toward being literate. Being able to read is the foundation, of course, but instilling a desire to move from being a consumer of information to being a producer of information is the ultimate goal. Why is this important? Let's look at Bloom's Taxonomy for an answer!

The famous Bloom's Taxonomy was revised in 2000 and now defines these as the steps in learning:

- Remembering: being able to recall and repeat information
- Understanding: being able to explain information that has been memorized
- Applying: being able to use that information in a similar task
- Analyzing: being able to understand how all the parts of information fit together in a relationship
- Evaluating: being able to explain why certain information is useful and other is not
- Creating: being able to produce new ideas or things by using everything that has been previously learned

Most young students develop the skills to read a story back to you (the parent) or to the teacher. It becomes a little more difficult for them to be able to summarize and explain what they have read. The next steps on Bloom's Taxonomy become more and more difficult until we reach the highest objective--creating. This is the level we hope the truly educated student/young adult reaches, but how do we start now to help our young students attain that goal?

The National Council for Teachers of English has some practical suggestions to help parents and children work together at home to encourage literacy. In a recent article on the NCTE website (<http://www.ncte.org/writing/aboutearlygrades>) some commonsense observations and activities were suggested:

**"Young children possess knowledge about written language and a variety of forms of writing—stories, lists, signs—from an early age; quality instruction in the primary grades reflects children's experience and knowledge."** Both at school and at home, encourage young children to notice all the print materials around them. Help them understand how vital it is to be able to read which way to go (road signs), what restaurants may be nearby (billboards), the names of buildings (school names, business names). Take pictures of these signs, print them out, and make a little "My Neighborhood" or "My Trip" booklet. Encourage your child to write a sentence underneath each picture to CREATE a memory book of a special trip or a record of the place where you live.

**"All families engage with literacy or literacy-related experiences. Creating ways to bridge family and school writing experiences insures greater participation and success with school tasks."** Take time every evening (or at least on a regular schedule every few days), to ask your child to write three things he has learned, why she thinks this information was important, and how he/she might use it in the future. Once your child has done this, you should write a response to your child's journal entry. Do you remember when you learned this when you were in school? How has it been useful to you? Keep an ongoing family journal which can be read over and over again in the future. You'll be surprised how motivating it can be for your child--and you!

**"The 'language arts' develop in concert. Drawing supports writing, writing supports reading; opportunity to use multiple expressions of language increases language ability."** Drawing a picture is an easy introduction to telling a story. The very young child can begin to "write" stories by drawing sequential pictures. Before long, that child will be able to add a caption, and eventually will actually want to add more information by writing about the picture.

**"Writing is a social activity; writing instruction should be embedded in social contexts. Through face-to-face interactions, children come to understand that writing serves many functions, that relationships exist between speaking and writing, and that writing is aimed at, and therefore must be sensitive to, an audience. "** Help your child **do** something with his/her writing. Send his story to a grandparent. Ask her to write a letter to a friend in another city. Show your child the many ways that sending a letter, writing a little note, making greeting cards, or just writing a story to read to a younger sibling can make life more interesting and fun.

**"Writing is effectively used as a tool for thinking and learning throughout the curriculum."** No matter what the content, reading is essential, but writing, which is unfortunately viewed in isolation sometimes, is necessary in every subject, also. Even in math classes, students are expected to be able to explain clearly how they solved problems. Scientists working in research labs must eventually publish their work. The need for clear and effective writing never ends! As your child conquers new material, ask her to record in a journal the difficulties she encountered and how she overcame them. Ask your child to write down the steps he used to solve a problem so that, in the future, he can refer to his own information in order to apply it to new situations.

**Using these NCTE strategies, you and your child can begin the new year "WRITE"!!!!**

(And by the way, introduce your child to puns. It's a fun way to get your child to think about words, spelling, meaning, and humor!)