

## Learning as You Go

I often find myself wondering if I am doing a good job teaching my students. In the past, I taught water aerobics to adults and swimming lessons to children, but teaching someone to do an action or a sequence of moves is very different from teaching someone to read. Actions can be demonstrated and mimicked, but reading requires your student to learn not only the letters of the alphabet, but how to combine those letters to form sounds and words in ways that aren't always consistent and are sometimes confusing.

Tri-County Life Learners provides a wonderful framework for working one on one with students. As volunteers with TCLL, we have the freedom to choose whether we want to adhere to a strict curriculum of the provided workbooks and reading materials, or whether we want to deviate from the curriculum and try new materials and concepts with our students, if we think they will further our students' literary education. I would like to pass on information about things that have worked with my students, in the hopes the new tutors won't feel the same sense of trepidation about their efforts that I did.

One thing that I have found helps my students is to use a theme. A theme helps my students to keep their minds focused and keeps them from making wild guesses. The contextual clues that a theme provides give students a framework to work within. When my students know that every word in that lesson's vocabulary section is related to something, such as food, they can self-correct when they realize that they are not properly sounding out a word.

I have also found that my students enjoy a challenge. Occasionally, we will take a break from the lesson books and choose a book to read. There are advantages and disadvantages to reading books and other materials. The advantages are that it is fresh and interesting in the eyes of your student and that your student will encounter new words and new styles of writing. The disadvantages are that the book you choose may contain words that your student finds too difficult to sound out and that your student may get frustrated. If you would like to try out alternative reading materials, Glenn and Joan can provide suggestions. If you know your student's reading level, you may also be able to ask your local librarian for suggestions.

One thing that helps me, as an instructor, is to remember that encouraging my students is just as important as teaching my students new things. When I tell my students what a great job they are doing, they feel confident and are eager to move on to the next thing, whether it is the next word, the next sentence, a new sound, or a new punctuation mark.

When my students are frustrated, I remind them that we all learn from our mistakes. I remind my students that we never stop making mistakes; the best thing we can do is learn from them and use what we learn to achieve our goals.