

## Smart Start in Language Arts

I was newly assigned to an Elementary School as an Assistant Principal. I also had a teaching assignment in a Grade Two/Three class. One of the children in the class was a little girl grade three girl named Terri (name changed). I quickly determined that Terri couldn't read. She could recognize letters of the alphabet and she had an understanding of initial and final consonants, but she could not decode any words.

Terri's self esteem had plummeted over the past three years on school. She was now conditioned to believe that she was a non reader and she had developed strategies to be invisible in the classroom setting. She could copy work from those around her and could scan a page to look like she was reading silently. She was doing everything that she could to feel that she was a part of the classroom. When I checked her attendance records, I noticed she was often absent. I realized how exhausting it must be to spend the day pretending that she could do the work. I also knew how demoralizing it must be to see those around her reading and writing. I knew that we needed an intervention program that was successful, for this little girl didn't need another failure in her school experience. I called JoAnne and she suggested using Smart Start.

We began to work with Terri the very next day. As we worked on the Smart Start program Terri began to recognize words. She acted like she could hardly believe that she was able to do this. Simple steps were what she needed and this program provided simple steps. Slowly but surely Terri's smile returned to her face. Her attendance at school improved and her ability to do work independently increased.

Smart Start not only provides a child with the strategies and skills needed to read, but more importantly provides a child with the opportunity to be successful. Terri began to see herself as a reader. Her self confidence in her ability generated enthusiasm for reading and writing.

Smart Start has not only changed Terri's life, but will change the lives of future generations. Terri will be able to read to her children, and instill in them the love of reading and learning. I fully anticipate that some day, Terri will be a teacher, standing at the front of a class, teaching my grandchildren how to read. I will again be able to reflect on the importance of a simple step program called Smart Start.

Kathy Laycock  
Principal  
Maple Ridge School, Calgary Alberta