

My Point Of View

Written by E.M., inmate tutor at Mount Pleasant Correctional Facility

I've always assumed that the ability to read was something that was automatic for each and every person. I've heard of individuals not being able to read, however since I had never met anyone who couldn't, I assumed that everyone could. This may sound a little naïve but this is what I've subconsciously always believed. I've never considered myself smarter than anyone else, so I assumed that everyone could read and comprehend just as well as I. I've now come to realize that this couldn't be further than the truth.

When I received my current job, teaching the Wilson Reading Program, I thought that it would be pretty simple...have the students read some books out loud and that would be it. Hermann Hesse, German poet and novelist, once stated that, "Everything becomes a little different as soon as it is spoken out loud." Once the students made attempts to read out loud, everything became a *lot different*. I've always wanted to become a teacher, but never really understood just how hard it would be and how much patience it would take. These students needed more than just someone to tell them read this or that. They needed someone to teach them. For most, there was no foundation at all. Most could not tell the difference between a vowel and a consonant. After going over the orientation videos and the entire Instructors manual, I realized just how beneficial The Wilson Program was going to be.

I've seen other reading programs that were mostly phonics based programs. The Wilson Program was so much more. Originally I started with three students, working in one on one sessions. Over the past two years I've reached or worked with as many as 18 students including group sessions that have reached as many as 8 to 10 students at a time. What frustrates me the most is seeing so many individuals who are 30, 40 and 50 years old who have somehow made it this far in life without knowing how to read. I hear over and over again that the school or special education program they took either just passed them or didn't teach them anything. These men join the Wilson program and they are so eager to learn. They have been told all of their lives that they couldn't learn by individuals who really in all honesty were too lazy to teach them or just didn't want to. If they were taught then, I believe that the lives of the majority of them would be different now. They would have the self esteem and self respect needed to excel in life. I want my life to be about helping others to improve their lives. This is why I want to teach people how to read.

The Wilson Reading Program teaches total word construction. It simplifies the learning process for the students. My reading level and overall knowledge of the English language has improved dramatically since I've begun to teach this program. The step by step process helps the student feel more comfortable with his learning, and makes it easier for me to teach. The interactive CD program is also very beneficial. The ability to discern the different sounds within the English language was lacking in most of the students. Using the interactive program, their ability to discern has improved greatly to the point that even the students that were truly dyslexic can

now sound out and spell words that have six, seven and eight sounds to them. To me this is of the utmost importance because teaching students to use dictionaries is a good way to teach reading but if they don't know the sounds how can they look up the word. If they are out and about, what are the chances that someone will have a dictionary in their back pocket? Students must be able to sound out the word in order to spell it and read it correctly. This is what makes the Wilson program unique.

Someone once asked me, how do you measure success"? When it comes to this program and what I've seen from my point of view, success is measured in many different ways. I had a student who when called upon in a group setting to go to the board, asked me in to the hallway to talk. When I arrived in the hallway, he was in tears. He was one of the few who were truly dyslexic. His fear of working in front of others was very strong. This particular individual did not know what a vowel was and had no idea what his alphabet was. Almost a year later this individual was preparing to go home. He stopped to talk to me and was in tears. He thanked me for helping him. His dream of going into the Air Force has now become a reality to him because he believed that now that he could read there was nothing that he couldn't do. He also told me the entire story of Eragon. He was proud of himself because he read the entire book. The book, by Christopher Paolini, is 509 pages long. That's how I measure success. My very first group from the beginning was rough. Nobody talked, no one wanted to go to the board and they all struggled. Even worse it seemed that no one liked anyone. Six months later all of the scores of the people in the group went up. They're comprehension increased and they all helped each other on the board and at their desk. There was one class I distinctly remember myself and a fellow tutor sat and watched as members of the group taught themselves. This is how I measure success. I had a student who was 56 years old and couldn't read at all. His spelling was horrible. A year later this student received a National Honor Society Certificate, reading reached a 11th grade level and loved to challenge me in spelling college level words. Out of every 50 words he averaged 2 wrong. This is how I measure success. With almost every student, no one talked about the future or what they wanted to do in life. After spending time in the Wilson program they all began to not only talk about things they wanted to do, two thirds of them started asking about typing classes, computer classes and college info. This is how I measure success. Even Barbara Wilson herself may not truly understand just how important her program really is. It has taken on a life of its own here and I'm sure will continue to grow and help many others.

Seeing a person's eyes light up when they truly grasp something is something that you can't put words on and I never grow tired of. I could see myself teaching this program to others for a very long time. I believe this program should be in college success centers, high schools and elementary school's across the country. I don't believe this because of what someone has told me. I believe this because of what I've seen and experienced...because of my point of view.

##