

Engagement leads to success, which is why it is so essential with our children to encourage them to find their passion before focussing on their level of achievement.

Often in literacy we find ourselves worrying about their spelling, their punctuation and their grammar, before anything else. It is common as parents, to look at the 'easy' to teach things or the obvious things (surface features) as the most important things we can help with at home. In actual fact, our best intentions are frequently misplaced in this. Research shows that if a student is hooked into a task and engaged in the learning process, they will in fact succeed.

Studies have shown that many of the 'reluctant writers' populating our classrooms are boys. 75% of all referrals made to outside services for extra help are for these boys. Why is this? The simple answer is boys are often louder, they take up more physical space and often are more prone to rapid, regular movement which can hinder them in the writing process. What are we doing wrong? The answer is nothing. We are doing nothing wrong. There are many things we can try as parents to help our children to engage in writing and to truly become 'an author'.

The first thing we can try, is to encourage our children in their passions or interests. It is okay to have 100 stories about trains or guns or war. It is okay for your child to write gruesome horror stories. In fact, this is a multimillion dollar industry and one of the most popular genre of novel and film! You could have a budding Spielberg in your family. Foster their interests. Don't let the events of the world or the social concerns we all face as parents colour what you think are appropriate topics for your child's writing. If you have a child who loves playing Fortnite, then accept and encourage them to write about this or related topics. The reality is that children write best when they write what they know. As children, our lives are seldom the exciting, wonder-filled, experience-driven existence our parents would like to believe. Children look to their interests to find what they know.

Another thing to consider is if you have a child who strongly prefers to read non-fiction and watch documentaries and biographies, then your child may not enjoy writing exciting narratives as much as they may enjoy writing a report or article. The flip-side is also true. A child who loves fiction will often want to write only fiction so they can exercise their wondrous imagination. There are ways to work around this and your child's teacher will know of many they can use in the classroom. We, as parents, need to help find our child's interests, then foster these in as many different ways as we can. Easier said than done I know.

What can I do to help my child to engage in writing? Studies show that children who can see a purpose for writing are more likely to engage actively in a writing task and in fact enjoy it. Give your child as many opportunities as you can to see you writing. Do the unheard of in today's modern age and handwrite a postcard or letter to a loved one. Write a note and place it in your child's lunchbox every now and again. Write instructions for them to follow on how to prepare dinner or do a load of washing. Then next time, have them write instructions for you on how to prepare their favourite meal. Help them to see they are an author. If your child writes a great recipe for that favourite dinner, publish it into a family cookbook for them to keep when they are older. If they write a heartfelt letter, put it in pride-of-place or better yet, frame it!

Always remember that engagement leads to success. The secret to engagement is interest and this comes from inside each child. Instead of focussing all your efforts on their spelling and punctuation, spend time with your child exploring their interests, delving deeper into their passions and embracing this journey with them. You spend the next few years reading about fairies and unicorns or blood, guts and zombies. Just keep in mind, you may have the next multi-million dollar novelist on your hands.