

A New Teaching Method For Autistic Children

With the prevalence of autism in the United States, one company is hoping its unique reading system will be a boon to parents seeking new ways to help their autistic children develop reading skills.

About 1.5 million people are diagnosed with autism in the United States - a sharp rise from only 1 in 10,000 in the 1970s.

Dr. Temple Grandin, an associate professor at Colorado State University and author of two books on autism, has done significant research into the teaching of autistic children and lectures on the subject around the world.

"Many people with autism are visual thinkers," said Grandin, who herself was an autistic child. "I think in pictures. I do not think in language. All my thoughts are like videotapes running in my imagination."

Therein lies the concept behind the Readent learning system developed by SFK Media Specially For Kids Corp. The program uses "Reading Movies," interactive film adaptations of classic children's stories in DVD format. As the actors speak, the words appear simultaneously on the screen as text, providing the autistic viewer with written words along with the visual pictures needed to grasp language concepts and build vocabulary.

"The Readent system incorporates all the modern research for teaching reading to autistic children, including the observations of experts such as Dr. Grandin and other cognitive scientists," said Len Anthony Smith, chief executive officer of SFK Media. "Its interactive wordplay dictionary and comprehension quizzes and games seem to work wonders for autistic learners."

Grandin provides the following tips for teaching children with autism.

- * Avoid long strings of verbal instructions. People with autism have problems remembering the sequence. Instead, write the instructions down on a piece of paper.
- * Use concrete visual methods to teach number concepts, such as a set of blocks that have a different length and color for the numbers one through 10, or wooden "fruit" cut into quarters and halves to teach fractions.
- * Many autistic children have problems with motor control in their hands, therefore neat writing is sometimes hard. To reduce frustration, let your child type on the computer.
- * Keep the keyboard close to the screen. Some children have difficulty remembering something on a computer screen if they have to look up after they hit a key on the keyboard.
- * Non-verbal children will find it easier to associate words with pictures if they see the printed word on a flashcard. Some individuals do not understand line drawings, so it's best to work with real objects and photos first.

For more information about the Readent Learn to Read programs, visit <www.readingmovies.com> or call 866/SFK-READ (735-7323).