

Classroom Spotlight:

Head Start Teacher Makes Reading Unforgettable



PPCD Teacher Michelle Luthman uses Letters alive with a student.

*Augmented reality based reading curriculum -
Letters alive - promotes early literacy for children*

Herman Lawson Early Childhood Center in McKinney, Texas is more than a daycare. Through Head Start, Early Head Start, and other preschool programs, the center partners with families to foster each child's potential as a lifelong learner.

To support students in reaching their full potential, their Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities (PPCD) teaches vital early reading skills using *Letters alive*, a supplemental reading curriculum that utilizes augmented reality to create an engaging learning environment for their students.

Discovering Letters alive

PPCD teacher Michelle Luthman teaches students with learning and intellectual disabilities, physical impairments, and other health concerns, who often require unique approaches to catch their attention. Michelle discovered Letters alive at the 2011 Texas Computer Education Association convention.

She and her fellow teachers were drawn to the special teaching ability of the program, which invites students to learn with a kingdom of animals that play, make sounds, and respond intelligently to students' actions and questions.

"How can you ignore a large bear that roars and jumps out of the screen at you? You won't forget that bear begins with a B!"

-Holly Hammond
Library Media Specialist

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Herman Lawson students take part in a lesson.

Engaging Students

The interactive program reinforces letters, sounds, sight words, statements and questions by creating an environment that gets students excited about learning. The teachers, who were also quite excited, led the center to purchase *Letters alive* with their state funding for special education.

Michelle uses the curriculum in her three special education classes and says that *Letters alive* helps her students make deeper connections with their learning. The program grabs students' attention visually with 3-D graphics, and then reinforces letter sounds and words through animated animals.

Michelle says that students respond very strongly to the animals – some of her nonverbal students have even been so excited that they have spoken for the first time in class. As she says, "The reaction that you get from that is amazing. It literally brings the kids to speak. We have parents coming in asking how they can get the technology in their homes." *Letters alive* has been so well received that the center has purchased an additional copy for use in their general pre-K classes.

Importance of Early Education

Early education prepares students to begin kindergarten at a higher level. Studies show that a quality early education leads to students learning better, earning more, and being better citizens - for life.*

Lawson Library Media Specialist Holly Hammond explains that *Letters alive* helps the center meet and surpass Texas pre-K guidelines, which emphasize recognizing letters. The program, she says, helps "change a normal day into something memorable and spectacular."

Through *Letters alive*, the center lays the foundation for early literacy among students. According to Michelle Luthman, the technology was easy to learn and has produced undeniable results. "To see their faces light up with recognition...kids who didn't care at all about the first letter of their name, who can now spell it because this is so interesting. I mean, wow."

*Calman and Tarr-Whelan, "Early Childhood Education for All - A Wise Investment," *Legal Momentum* (2005).

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