

Repurposing at the grassroots: Learning numbers from *Hockey Night in Canada*

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What was the problem?

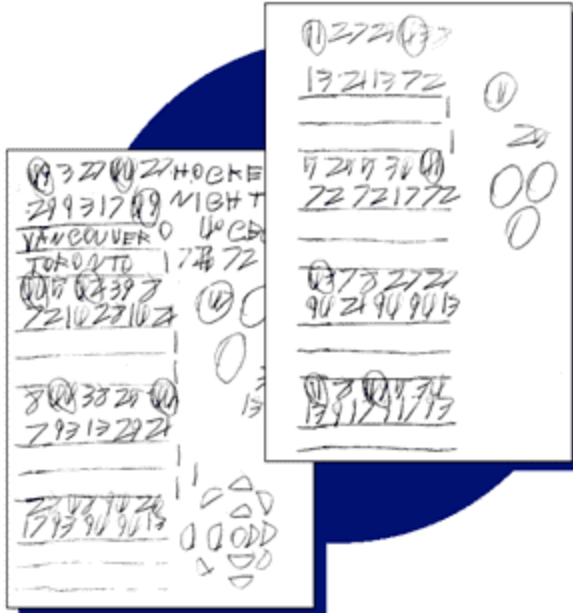
One of my former students was severely intellectually disabled and had very little understanding of numbers or letters, but a keen interest in learning. I worked with him for about three years and discovered several other skills and activities in which he delighted; copying anything he saw was a favourite. One day I asked him if he watched TV, and he mentioned that he had his own TV and that he liked to audio tape the sound of the hockey games from both the TV and the radio onto his cassette player. So, I started from this interest and pursued every idea or possibility I could think of. In the end we achieved a great deal of success and enjoyment.



What did we do?

I began by looking at TV writing in the form of commercials, news, sports, and educational programming. I discovered a world of words, if the student wants to look for them.

I started with a home-made video tape of a hockey game. When the student came to class we looked at the numbers on the players' backs. I pointed out to him when the same players skated in front. Then, I paused the VCR and had him copy the number onto a large sheet prepared with lines ready for him to write on. For homework I asked him to fill in the rest of the sheet from the following hockey game. As well, I made arrangements with the family to be sure he would be prepared, and to have a table and pencil ready at the scheduled time and be tuned to the correct channel.



He came back the following week excited that he now knew numbers. We matched his worksheet with the video tape, recited the numbers, and checked for scores which came up occasionally in the left-hand corner of the screen. After several weeks he began to catch on to “double digits” and we laughed each time he said “99.”

He learned numbers, displayed quick recognition of symbols, letters, copied detailed logos with accuracy, and eventually even the abbreviations of team names. As we sat and corrected his work, he kept repeating how he was reading and counting like everyone else.

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