

00:00.00

theautismhelper

Hi Lois thank you so much for joining me.

00:01.59

Lois Letchford

Hello Sasha I am delighted to be here and share my story and my expertise with you.

00:08.25

theautismhelper

Well, we're excited to hear because I love talking about literacy and reading and I think honestly this is something that people aren't talking enough about because once we can get our kids reading and excited about reading to me. It's just a game changer.

00:26.92

Lois Letchford

Ah I Totally agree with you and you said the words then not only reading but excited about reading and because that's where the growth happens The growth doesn't happen from reading the same text again and again and again.

00:33.22

theautismhelper

Um, yes.

00:42.65

theautismhelper

And so many of our kids you know are struggling with this in special needs classrooms. But in JuEdClassrooms as well and I think you know, especially after covid and virtual instruction when so many kids lost out on you know months or years of meaningful instruction. They're now just.

01:00.19

Lois Letchford

Yes, yes, and once you're left behind you need something to push you. You need some help to go from left behind to grade level and above.

01:00.78

theautismhelper

Left behind.

01:13.15

theautismhelper

Yeah, and what do you see I mean what do you see that that is that's motivating students that are that are really reluctant struggling I mean yeah, that's ah, that's a huge question right? What's the magic wand trick here to get us started. But.

01:20.66

Lois Letchford

Ah, is that another question.

01:29.50

Lois Letchford

What's the magic. What's the magic wandering. Do you know what? it is curiosity tapping into a child's curiosity.

01:33.27

theautismhelper

Um, oh I'd love to know oh when that's great.

01:46.42

theautismhelper

Because reading's how you figure out the answers to things.

01:47.42

Lois Letchford

Yes, and when you've tapped into the curiosity and you've got the answers or you need more answers. There's never an end to answers those letters and sounds become critically Important. So you're giving a child a reason. Why to learn the letters and sounds you're not just saying you have to learn it and you have to do this, You're saying ah this is why and can I tell you something else about Curiosity. There's one of my favourite books that most people won't have read.

02:17.46

theautismhelper

Um, yes.

02:25.68

Lois Letchford

And it's called why by Ian Leslie I forget whether it's why by Ian Leslie or curious by Mario lavio and in it. They look at Mris and Mris particularly of the brain and I think it's Mario levio in his book and he says. Taking an mri of the brain is like taking a slice of an um mri of the ocean you can only take 1 slice of it and another slice and and then you assume from there but you can't actually do that with the ocean or with the brain and he said curiosity changes the brain. And curiosity propagates in the brain in untold ways and I love that because that's exactly what happened to my son when he was learning to read.

03:10.83

theautismhelper

Um, wow.

03:22.78

Lois Letchford

And you know the brain has like I know millions of Networks and just to have it propagate to have it change to have these connections come about in ways that are unexpected changes the outcome for our children.

03:38.76

theautismhelper

Yeah I can totally I can totally see that and and how if we could apply that idea of getting to that curiosity piece to you know within both special ed and Gen Ed classrooms how that can really be that huge motivator for kids that are feeling really down on themselves as I'm sure many kids do when they're significantly behind so thinking about those you know the go ahead.

04:00.43

Lois Letchford

Yes, it's it's no no, it's a real challenge to be able to do that. But that is the challenge. How do we do it because you know this is. 1 of the questions you sent me what is some of the biggest mistakes educators make when kids when teaching kids how to read and the first one. The first mistake that we make is that we forget about engagement. A child's engagement in literacy and literacy instruction is critical and if we don't tap into that everything else we do is a waste of time.

04:32.18

theautismhelper

Um.

04:41.24

theautismhelper

So what are some practical or actionable ways that you see teachers tapping into that engagement piece within their literacy instruction.

04:49.83

Lois Letchford

There is no one answer, you cannot say this text is going to work what you can do is try and this is where you know teaching is.

04:53.20

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

05:07.83

Lois Letchford

A game and an art as well as a science that we are required as teachers to pull our students along and also to push them and you pull them along by reading things that helps their eyes sparkle.

05:18.40
theautismhelper
Um, to her.

05:26.77
theautismhelper
Um, yeah.

05:27.50
Lois Letchford
And that's a critical component and when you see something that you've read fall flat. You say well it didn't work The next thing you do is keep going until you get that sparkle and when you get it. That's when the game-changing happens.

05:42.80
theautismhelper
Um, yeah, you know as you were saying that I was thinking Oh go ahead.

05:44.80
Lois Letchford
I Sorry I was teaching a child. He was Autistic. He was in you know at the end of elementary school going into middle school. He couldn't Read. He couldn't read a thing which is why I was called it I became a literacy expert teaching kids who'd failed. Everything. Couldn't read anything so my task is to teach him 1 on one because there were some legal issues happening around this child. So I said to the mother ah look I've got this lesson I've got a box lesson which has got some things in the the box that might help and then we've got this other lesson. So one. We're giving him choice. Which one do you want to do first so choice became important and then once ah he and he went for the box lesson that I had because you're tapping into their curiosity immediately and then I started to do a few other exercises with him and eventually.

06:25.83
theautismhelper
Um, and.

06:40.85
Lois Letchford
This boy who was not reading when I first picked him up wanted to read Harry Potter and then it's not only reading Harry Potter but I said let's record it so you can listen to it. So here's the push and pull. You're not only reading it.

06:47.66
theautismhelper
Um, wow.

07:00.69

Lois Letchford

With them for them and them reading and independently. But you're giving them a real purpose for reading and writing if you record it. Why are you doing this? Ah was that recording good enough. Can we reread it hey you know you got a couple of words wrong here. Ah, would you like to get them right? As we record it again and that becomes a game Changer. It's offering a real purpose for reading and writing.

07:28.55

theautismhelper

Really embedding that Why into the instruction and I think that's a struggle with a lot of our kids on what's the point of this you know why am I doing this and if they can't see that of course why are they going to want to do it.

07:34.38

Lois Letchford

Um, yes in.

07:43.30

Lois Letchford

Yeah, yeah, and that's exactly what was happening with this little boy because I did not teach him all the letters and sounds required in that four to five months that he went from nothing to Harry Potter but once you start to give them the why all the teaching that's been done. In the past then starts to come together and make sense and gives him a reason to say now I can use these tools that you've given me now I know why I'm doing it. Ah, let's put it all together. It worked it was it was astounding to watch his growth and to watch his love of learning grow.

08:14.50

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

08:21.73

theautismhelper

Yeah, that's so amazing and I mean to Harry Potter look at that as as you were kind of saying that story before I was thinking about a client I had very similar and same thing that you said the why the engagement he was.

08:21.83

Lois Letchford

As he learned to read. Um, yes, yes.

08:37.11

theautismhelper

Exiting Junior high very littleter littleter littleter little literacy

skills teachers had just not figured him out at all. He was in a great school teachers. Loved him. They couldn't figure out how to teach him not to read. He was nonverbal and once literacy really clicked and he was really motivated was once he got a cell phone. He wanted to text. He wanted a snapchat he wanted to email and suddenly kind of same thing. You said all of those lessons he had had for years and years kind of came together because he wanted to be able to utilize that cell phone like his teenage sisters and you needed to know how to write and. It. It was cool. Same thing kind of cool to watch that like oh wow, this all came together right now because the why is here and it's right in front of you.

09:16.48

Lois Letchford

That's yes, yes, yeah, the why is a game changer and you know when you're doing a standardized reading program. No one's asking No teacher is asking. How is this working for my students and and that's what you have to do.

09:28.99

theautismhelper

Are.

09:34.10

Lois Letchford

And particularly for those who are on ah have been given a label you know whether is it autistic or dyslexic those children in particular need to see how it works.

09:48.20

theautismhelper

Yeah, is that do you think that's one of the biggest struggles with those like traditional reading instruction programs where it's more standardized. You know there's more of a script that it that it doesn't hit on that Y or that engagement piece. What are what are some other struggles with that are.

10:01.87

Lois Letchford

That's one of the reasons That's the one.

10:06.70

theautismhelper

That our students are facing with that type of instruction.

10:07.69

Lois Letchford

Big, Be huge ones. The jumps are too big. The jumps they make are far too big. They make the writers of the program make far too many assumptions about a child's background knowledge of words and

language.

10:16.20

theautismhelper

Um.

10:27.22

Lois Letchford

That is huge. They tend to think if a child reads the words therefore they have all the comprehension of the sentence or the paragraph and that's a fallacy they read the words does not equal comprehension.

10:39.30

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

10:44.52

Lois Letchford

And I think the other huge problem and what I do significantly is that decoding and comprehension are code-dependent and interdependent. They are not separate entities that we can teach in isolation they work together. And we have to recognise that and it's particularly important because um comprehension um comprehension so challenging and that when you read a sentence. Inference is often not recognized that the words are not often in their child's oral language so we are teaching them words that are outside of their oral language and they don't have a clue what it means and the big one for autistic and dyslexic children. Is that words have multiple meaning and we make an assumption that if children read the words they will have the concrete and the abstract meanings together and they don't I'll give you an example now. I've said I teach children who failed all reading programs and one of the very. The first things I do with students is ask them to read the word t o and they'll read it and they'll read the word for and I um, write them on a piece of paper in front of me and say read this word 2 and 4 get it right now. Give me a sentence with 2 now. This.

12:17.83

Lois Letchford

Sentenced from a 16 year old child who had been in a a school for dyslexic children for four years and he said to me I've got 2 lizards the same. What do you notice about that word t o he.

12:30.86

theautismhelper

Um, yeah, yeah, he's using the wrong form of the word. Yeah.

12:37.30

Lois Letchford

And he's sixteen years old why can't this child read because he has no

clue that the word t o has got multiple meanings and it's the same with the word fo r he said to me.

12:49.15

theautismhelper

And there's so many words that are a struggle like that. My gosh the English language is so confusing.

12:54.83

Lois Letchford

Yes, and we when we teach we assume we make assumptions about child knowledge rather than teaching children. This word is t o it means I go to school. We go to the library. We go to the shops we go. We go to the baseball game. And Tw 0 is the number I always teach the concrete before the abstract and same with their fo r exact and once these students not only see the word and get the comprehension then read sentences about it. You come to a book then they can read it. They go? Ah, ah.

13:16.48

theautismhelper

Are the.

13:33.44

Lois Letchford

Now I get it now I get it and that's where I start and that's an assumption that teachers and writers often make oh you should know that they should know that they don't we have made an assumption about a child's background knowledge.

13:46.98

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

13:50.80

theautismhelper

And I definitely agree with what you said on on reading words that are not even in their oral language yet. So yeah, we don't have that any context to pull from that background to pull from and so many learners that I see have way higher reading fluency than they have reading comprehension so they sound like they know what they're talking about. But. That comprehension sometimes is almost at 0 So It's it's kind of like Well what's the point you know we if we're not comprehending the text. What are we doing.

14:15.40

Lois Letchford

Exactly and you know particularly where now we've had this push towards decoding. You know there's a lot of words that have got a short vow in them that are used that children have never used Nip. Um,

now I don't have these words off and I'm thinking of a word like Bran or tuck you know they're words that are easy to read but never used them in their oral language.

14:37.32
theautismhelper
Are.

14:46.37
theautismhelper
Um, yeah I know how often are we saying those words.

14:51.10
Lois Letchford
Ah, how often that's the big question. How ah and and again we haven't recognised that the the big connection for literacy is the the challenge between the oral language and the written language.

15:01.88
theautismhelper
That has always been a frustration to me as a teacher and now as a parent being on the other end of it when you see you know, worksheets and activities. My daughter was doing this recently and the word was pale like a bucket and I was like she's literally never said the word pale like she calls it a bucket. Everyone calls it a bucket. But you're right, You know that then we're using words that are not in our kids background knowledge and then where's that connection going back to what we started talking About. There's no why in it.

15:28.88
Lois Letchford
And then ah children find it acceptable to then read words without comprehension because the teacher has praised the reading of words and I I have a student who right now she's 9

15:36.60
theautismhelper
Um, true. Yeah.

15:44.75
Lois Letchford
And we're reading frog and toad and it said walk across a meadow walk in the wood and along the river you know the story of frog and toad and the lost button and and she started yawning. Which is you know sign number one. There's a problem and I said well what's the problem here. What's a meadow and she said I don't know again. It's a word that is not in the child's oral language. We don't use Meadows in America.

16:02.30

theautismhelper
Um.

16:12.75
theautismhelper
Um, yeah.

16:16.89
theautismhelper
Are.

16:20.80
Lois Letchford
You know it's a field isn't it or a paddock or a yard depending on where you are in your circumstances. What are people in the City use I don't know it might be a park and without recognition that.

16:29.44
theautismhelper
Um, yeah.

16:36.62
Lois Letchford
The meadow caused the problem and then why would you walk across it and not around it is a second question language is abstract and that causes children who think concretely very a lot huge difficulties. Which we don't acknowledge so the concrete words are easier to learn than the abstract words most of the sight words are abstract they are pronouns they are prepositions they are verbs. Um, and past and present tense verbs. They throw our children and yet the way we teach them changes the outcomes.

17:19.30
theautismhelper
Are.

17:25.58
theautismhelper
And we tend to teach those first. So we're like losing kids right off the bat. Especially if they're that super concrete thinker.

17:34.22
Lois Letchford
Totally agree with you Totally agree and.

17:37.44
theautismhelper
Do you think that's why a lot of learners with Autism you know, just a broad generalization struggle with reading because many you know individuals Autism are more concrete thinkers and like you said yeah

language is super abstract. Do you think that disconnect right? There causes a lot of the struggle.

17:52.64

Lois Letchford

Yes, yes, that's your first struggle. The second struggle is just what we said before the words that are not in their reading words that are not in their oral language now that throws even more confusion on the first confusion. And then as they expand their vocabulary Everyone's happy that they're reading words and we're not interested in the comprehension piece I you know I wrote a lot of my material for my struggling readers and I had this very simple poem. And it uses the word the cat the hat the rat from the bat. You know the rhyming words and it's you know the cat in a hat on a mat with a rat and a bat. Well fancy that well that is just not possible. There might be 1 scratch cat. No rat or bat.

18:32.63

theautismhelper

Um.

18:45.69

Lois Letchford

And 1 messy mat now what's the problem with such a simple problem with such a simple poem. It's got all the rhyming words why is it so difficult. What's going on what are your thoughts exactly well the first. First is you know you've got a cat in a hat on a mat Although we've said the cat is comes first when you actually come to act it out. What's happening the mat goes on the floor first then the hat goes on the floor and then the cat goes in it.

19:17.46

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

19:23.74

Lois Letchford

So the way we're saying it and the way we're visualizing. It are 2 different things.

19:28.76

theautismhelper

Um, yeah I was struggling to visualize it. You know listening.

19:30.35

Lois Letchford

Listening because there are so many rhyming words that you have to slow it down and create that picture I don't create the picture first I get them to act it out and I say who wants to be a cat who wants to be a rat and who wants to be a bat.

19:41.60
theautismhelper
Are.

19:48.54
Lois Letchford
Then you go back to the beginning. You know the cat in the hat on a mat So we've got now picture of the hat with a Rat and a bat. So Now we've got a cat a Rat and a bat in a hat and the next line is we'll fancy that. Now that's a scene that's a more complicated one isn't it well fancy that because that doesn't actually have a meaning and you've got to know what that is about and that's all these 3 animals in a hat. Um, well that is just not Possible. So and this is where my students get confused.

20:13.98
theautismhelper
Are.

20:23.53
Lois Letchford
And I say to them. You've got 3 animals in a hat. What would they do and the moment you say that the children go ah they would fight and then the last line is well. There's no there's 1 scratch cap. No rat what's happened to the rat rat's dead or bat. What's happened to the bat. The bat's dead and 1 messy ma once you've acted it out. The comprehension is a gamechanger because even with the simplest of poems you have inference.

20:58.28
theautismhelper
Um, yeah I like.

21:02.61
Lois Letchford
Literacy is tough. It's high level. It's complex. We can't let anything go. We have to teach every single step for our most challenged readers.

21:15.25
theautismhelper
I Like that example, how you really you know, even in our quick conversation here. But you know meticulously went through every line like you said we can't let anything go what? What does that mean that assume that they know that that's referring to the previous sentence and the 3 animals and. And I think about a lot of instruction in in typical in Gen in Classrooms in special classrooms that it's rushed. We're not taking that time to go into so much detail because there is this pressure to like get back on grade level or keep keep up or move

ahead. But. We're we're doing our kids a disservice by pushing them forward too quickly.

21:54.52

Lois Letchford

Exactly totally agree and yes, totally totally agree and you know from that point I've got another component. This is my little bugbear I read a book to my students and I wish we were on video but we aren't. And it's called a ha said stalk by Gerald Rhodes and it was published in the 1980 s and it's written for a child who is twelve months old and the story goes a ha said stalk a ha said stalk. Let me get the book if I can find it yes here it is. I've forgotten the first line off the top of my head for the moment which is what I do a ha edge stalk ah said st stalk I will eat this eke he pecked at it but it would not break and the Peter is a double page spread of a stalk trying to Peck at a neck.

22:50.58

Lois Letchford

He pecked at it but it would not break and the next page the double page spread of a hippopotamus and it said hippopotamus rolled on it and then lion bit it and chimp hit it an elephant stamped on it and the book goes on and on and on and on when I first. Use this book with some third graders eight years old I got to the end of the book and I said to my students and what's the it. My three students sat in front of me and they said to me so earnestly it it is nothing.

23:25.13

theautismhelper

Um, wow.

23:28.45

Lois Letchford

Why are we rushing and it's only when I went back to the beginning of the book and I said well you know that it there. That's that's an interesting word isn't it. How about we acted out. The moment you acted out. It goes from something abstract to concrete and ah it's an egg. Yeah, it's an egg and then you go through the whole book hippopotamus rolled on the egg lion bit the egg Chimp hip.

23:56.92

theautismhelper

Um.

24:06.33

Lois Letchford

And then the next step you've got to do is make sure that when they come to the next book that they are actually taking the reference or the antecedent of the word it and not the concrete noun.

24:23.18
theautismhelper
Um, yeah.

24:23.95
Lois Letchford
The egg. So again, you teach them with another book and say well.
What's the it now and you're teaching children to think as you teach
them to read because reading is thinking.

24:40.90
theautismhelper
And starting with the comprehension right away as opposed to like oh
you read the book so nicely and fluently but you didn't know what it
was. You didn't know that it was about a mag.

24:48.92
Lois Letchford
Yeah, and you're teaching much more than decoding words and the moment
you're teaching comprehension along with decoding. You're giving the
decoding value. You're giving the decoding more value because the
letter order counts.

25:08.54
theautismhelper
Um, yeah.

25:08.85
Lois Letchford
And you can't just use any Word. You're using that word there and
you'll watch children change the words until they become more
confident and comfortable with them and comfortable with the decoding
of the word. Because we're going back to is that word in their oral
language or have they substituted something else until they become
familiar with the word that's written on paper.

25:35.15
theautismhelper
Yeah, that's a great point and that's a great example I mean think
about how often the word it is Houston even yeah, like you said the
most simple of stories and that it might just be purely going over
students' heads.

25:49.91
Lois Letchford
It it. It. Ah you know this is goes back to my story I Grew up a non-
diagnosed dyslexic person I learned to read words without any
comprehension and everyone was happy. But. I Felt like readings wading
through mud and I tried and tried and tried my absolute harvest to
read and I would come up with at the absolute most a stick figure for

a book any book and so when I went to teaching I started to look At. Why was it so hard for me and that was one of the reasons is that words like it and I vividly remember a teacher saying to me it. It's one of those words you just have to learn as opposed to hey let's show these children How the written language works. Show these children How the oral language worked because if you said to a child look. You've dropped it. You've dropped your hat pick it up. They would know exactly what to do because it's concrete because they can physically do it and we've got to take that knowledge of doing something in a real world.

26:55.70
theautismhelper
Are.

27:03.91
Lois Letchford
To the book world.

27:04.59
theautismhelper
Yeah,, that's great and tying it back to what you started talking about like the curiosity and engagement I can imagine probably for you and then for many struggling readers if you go through years and years of reading instruction where you're not comprehending anything or minimally there's there's. So little opportunity to have it be fun or interesting or something that you're curious about because you don't know what it is about right? like you don't even have that opportunity to get the why and the reinforcement embedded into that activity.

27:37.13
Lois Letchford
I totally agree with you I'm just sitting here nodding my head because you know it it and it's an embarrassment. It's you know it the the okay another component of literacy instruction that is 100% ignored is the emotions in learning.

27:42.85
theautismhelper
Um, yeah.

27:56.29
Lois Letchford
Change the brain so that if we are disinterested in it. We're limiting brain growth when you're excited about learning. You're changing the brain and there's been a lot of research on it and I can give you the name one that sticks out to me is. Mary Helen I moreudden o yang on her work on emotions and learning and plato knew two thousand years ago that emotions are connected with learning when kids are in pain and they're learning and they're going to school in tears or coming

home in tears. We're actually detracting from their learning. And in fact, we're not into learning. We're into negative space.

28:37.17

theautismhelper

If like the process is aversive and we're scared or you know feeling ashamed. It's going to have that negative reaction. Yeah.

28:46.96

Lois Letchford

Yes, and and you know to get back to normal I and I teach these kids I teach kids who would want. Ah you know they would rather have an earthquake between me and them than cross the floor between the door and me because they are so embarrassed and so humiliated.

29:03.16

theautismhelper

Um.

29:06.48

Lois Letchford

That they are whatever age they are 101112 and can't read and yet for me to take them and say you know this is okay this is okay you and I are going to have some fun together and to let them relax and when they don't get it right? You know it's all right? Yeah, it's fine.

29:16.99

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

29:24.20

Lois Letchford

And let's work out how we'll do this together which is why I spend a lot of time turning books into plays. That's my first strategy for teachers turn a book into a drama or a play or a reader's theatre because it takes language for being abstract and irrelevant. To real world and relevant.

29:45.47

theautismhelper

Um I Love that um, do kids get and then you can kind of incorporate like you've been talking about that like. Doing something out because you're going to be able to see what what's actually happening versus having to envision it yourself.

30:00.12

Lois Letchford

Yes, and what I noticed when I was teaching I was teaching in a class and I was reading this book to the kids. The skilled readers come out with Rembrandt because you ask them? What does this mean and they tell

you blah blah. But yeah, yeah, yeah. The unskilled readers sit there and look at you and that whole description has gone right over the top of their heads and they've missed it. But once the skilled reader acts it out for the unskilled reader. We're now all on the same page. The children everyone has gained. From the knowledge of the best kids in the class.

30:41.29

theautismhelper

Yeah, and that's a great way to include students with limited verbal skills too because I think a lot of teachers are really struggling with kids with limited verbal skills on how to include them in literacy instruction because most traditional literacy programs are. Based on spoken language and if our kids don't have you know a strong repertoire in Spoken Language. We're kind of like I don't know what to do but giving those other response options. We don't have to just answer questions or write questions. There's other ways to to show what we know.

31:12.15

Lois Letchford

To do it. You know you've hit on another um, really important component there and that is the stories that children are reading.

31:26.20

Lois Letchford

Are they within a child's experience. Are they within a child's experience because if they not you've removed the book world from the child's life. Yes, we want to show children. How the world works and what the world's got in it. But when you're learning to read and we're dealing with young children with really limited experience experiences if they've not experienced it what we're reading about. The chances are it will be lost on them and I'll give you an example I was teaching this kid who'd come up from New York city up to the country in where I live in Albany and they're reading a book about farm animals animals in spring. So it's got you know. Sheep and a horse and a pig has a child from New York city experience those things do they know about them and yet we make an assumption that animals are everything that everyone knows.

32:30.48

theautismhelper

Um, probably.

32:42.69

Lois Letchford

And we also make an assumption that they know that ah a cow has a calf a horse has a foal a sheep has a lamb and pigs have piglets without the adequate background knowledge. We're just wasted a whole session. Because the child hasn't got a clue what we're talking

about and we're far better to take those kids to a farm and say this is what a horse looks like let them feed the animal. Let them touch. It. Let them understand. There's a difference between the coat of a sheep and the coat of a cow and a horse and that's a game changer. When we experience. Things 1 emotion comes with it two the books become alive and we make sense of it and it's very difficult to read without experience and once you get the experience. Then you can start reading more widely. But otherwise it reading is just something that happens in a book and it's not relevant to me. We're back to why are we doing it does that make sense to you.

33:45.60

theautismhelper

Yeah, yeah I Love that I mean and again like thinking about Covid I mean kids lost a lot of experiences that they maybe weren't going on a field trip to a farm and or going grocery shopping with Mom and. That we need to kind of now in schools and in homes and our families communities have those experiences again because now it's going to lead to literacy instruction later we have that background knowledge. Totally.

34:12.65

Lois Letchford

And I'll tell you something else and this is a really tough one to say the children who struggle the most are given the worst instruction and that comes from an academic paper. This is not just Lois Letchford talking I read a lot academically in literacy and that struck me as a critical component of literacy and if you know you know my story out and my son failed my second son failed first grade and at the end of grade one you know he can read 10 words. He's got no strengths. He's got no spatial awareness and Mrs Lettch with your son has a low icu. Well after a year of sitting in the class and being shouted at screamed at and you told you can't do anything and you become aware. You can't do anything. You certainly do have a lie ique I had the opportunity to remove him for six months and that six months became a game-changer I took him out of school I wrote poems for him. We wrote.

35:11.16

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

35:26.15

Lois Letchford

About what we were seeing. We wrote about what we were looking at around the city. My son started asking questions I could not answer. It was the first time I recognised this child doesn't have. Ah, likeq and we're learning things that you don't teach a 7 even-year old learning about things. You don't we learned about the history of world mapping and while I'm writing about it. He's thinking about it and because he's got low oral language skills. When he asks the question

that I can't answer I know there's been a huge amount of thinking going on into that question that time that we had changed his world and was. That was where we tapped into his curiosity. He learned the basics of decoding but again, why are we decoding because I want to learn all these things and are so exciting, but it was spent.

36:34.17

theautismhelper

Um, yet tying it right back to that curiosity piece. That's what you're saying that like oh he's he wants to know he's got the why.

36:41.76

Lois Letchford

Yes, and I still remember the little eyes that were were you know beams of light for just sopping up information. But yeah, well that was the start of the change because if we had stayed in school they would have given him.

36:50.33

theautismhelper

Oh I Love that.

37:01.60

Lois Letchford

Letters and sounds of which made no sense. But here's and and long term. My son got a ph d in applied mathematics from Oxford University why are we destroying our children at 6 and 7

37:02.98

theautismhelper

Um, for years and years probably.

37:13.59

theautismhelper

Um, well.

37:20.79

Lois Letchford

The beginning of their lives when we should be enhancing them and and treating with such tender loving care so that they do know that they can do it and that they are smart people and they're capable of anything.

37:37.16

theautismhelper

So that research you mentioned about you know some of our most struggling readers getting the worst instruction. Why does that happen.

37:44.37

Lois Letchford

Because we got a fixed idea that you have to learn to decode and you have to do it this way. There's one way not not a hundred ways.

37:50.50

theautismhelper

Are.

37:57.24

theautismhelper

Yeah, so we just get stuck on that and then it's like drill and kill and like maybe quite literally. Yeah.

38:02.19

Lois Letchford

That's why yes, yes, exactly drill and kill drill and Kill is is what we do instead of thinking you know they're not getting it. They haven't got these words we have I think as a literacy specialist who teaches these kids. What else do I have to do to teach this child to read. They haven't engaged with that. Whatever example, we've given that didn't make sense. You know.

38:26.31

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

38:34.10

Lois Letchford

What do I have to do there's another academic paper that really shook my world and it's called beyond the deficit theory and this one's written by an Australian professor Brian Cambourne and he was teacher of the year way back in about 2004 his paper was published in one ninety beyond the deficit theory and in it. He said the children who failed to learn to read failed for numerous reasons. The first is that we blame the child we say look at their background look at their iq look at this look at that. That's why they're failing as opposed to saying what else do we have to do. The second thing he said was why do children fail because we they fail to engage with the examples we give and secondly we give inadequate examples for language. That children cannot engage in the words, 2 and the words for are exactly what Brian Campbe talks about we make assumptions or we haven't given an example that children understand and when they don't understand it. We're dealing with memory. We've failed. To tap into their memory. Why because we're not thinking about the child. We're thinking about us.

39:56.81

theautismhelper

Um, yeah, that's huge I mean it's It's easier in Theory you know to be like oh it's it's the kid's fault. It's not ours. But that's not our role as educators. It's to go back to what other tools. Do we have

instead of kind of wiping our hands and walking away.

40:11.83

Lois Letchford

That's exactly right? Well you know I I had you know this incredibly privileged experience of teaching my son to read and and such an exciting exciting time in both our lives. That's what's. Stuck with me so when I became a literacy specialist I'm reading everything from the point of view of what did I do to help my son and so much that was in the academic literature resonated with. How we would have taught my son if he'd been stuck in school and what I did and it it was just transformative and to read the academic literature know that emotions emotions tie into memory and it's not only the emotion of.

40:46.32

theautismhelper

Are.

41:02.42

Lois Letchford

Ah, the word but it's the emotions around all of the things around it and the happier our kids are the more it ties into memory the sader they are the more scared they are the more afraid they are the less chances you have of memory and you know and I'm I'm part of this memory thing. Because I would say you know I'll remember that oh I'll remember that that'll be easy for me to come the next day and guess what it's gone and then I have to go back to myself and say why didn't I remember it what happened and it simply I didn't make enough connections.

41:28.00

theautismhelper

Are.

41:39.38

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

41:41.24

Lois Letchford

I didn't make a connection that that allowed it to stick you know so when our children fail to learn something we have to ask why and drill and Kill is not part of it.

41:55.40

theautismhelper

Yeah, and then the why and then what can we do next about it instead of you know turning it on well that this is what we have to offer and that's it I Love that.

42:03.17

Lois Letchford

Yes, yeah, but I'll give you a defense for teachers. We don't give them enough time the work I do with my students I you know I might spend an hour or with the student. I will spend particularly in the early days of teaching them another hour often looking through books or finding material that is adequate for that child. That's a real struggle for teachers to do.

42:37.34

theautismhelper

And there's so much pressure by administrators and I know administrators get pressure from above but you know we have state tests coming up and we have standards and grades. We have to meet and we want to push everyone ah above so that that pressure piece in addition of the time is is huge.

42:51.14

Lois Letchford

And and what for what for what does it gain us if by third grade they can't read and comprehend adequately and I was in Texas when you know when no child was left behind and they put the standards so high at.

42:57.34

theautismhelper

Um, nothing. Yeah.

43:09.19

Lois Letchford

Third grade. What's the point we don't need kids to read 600 words at third grade to do one. You know one passage you're only going to get the you know the standardized answers. You're not having kids thinking thinking thinking thinking through it. I mean I was just appalled at what they were doing back then.

43:29.52

theautismhelper

Yeah, the preschool standards and Kindergarten standards still make me real sad because like we shouldn't be like we shouldn't be focusing on this in Preschool. We're still learning how to problem solve and our social skills and. There's plenty of time for everything later we need like you said the background knowledge the oral language the connections and all that and I and I feel sad for a lot of early child teachers that you know these are the standards they're given and that's what they got to work with.

43:56.22

Lois Letchford

And standards put out by whom for whom who's gaining who's losing. Yes, Yes, yes.

44:06.34

theautismhelper

My god that's ah, that's a whole other episode Lois. But ah oh my gosh I I have loved chatting with you and I love I really appreciated all of the examples you gave because I think it really you know I'm a visual learner so it really illustrated a lot of the. Ideas and strategies that you shared. So. Thank you so much.

44:24.97

Lois Letchford

Thank you for having me I love talking about literacy. Ah, my website is www.watlowersledgeford.com my book is reversed a memoir and there's an audio version of that.

44:26.69

theautismhelper

So where can people go to learn more from you.

44:41.51

Lois Letchford

And that's the story of ah my story and my son's story I'm on LinkedIn I'm on Twitter and Facebook Facebook I've given up on I think ah thank you.

44:51.67

theautismhelper

Ah, awesome. Well thank you so much Lois it was a pleasure to talk with you today.