



Kate McQuiggan
Literacy Specialist

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HANDBOOK



Welcome!

Thank you for considering me to work with your child on their language literacy.

My first job would be to establish a bond of trust and build a safe space where your child will feel seen and heard. Students who struggle with their reading and writing often suffer a great deal of educational trauma in our school system. Part of my job is to help them begin to have positive learning experiences around their literacy work.

As they begin to feel safe with me, we would start exploring the amazing world of spelling, reading and writing in English.



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Approach

How will you be teaching my child to read and spell?

I use a multi-pronged approach to teaching spelling, reading and writing. I have learned that my students thrive best when I do not try to separate the many elements of language literacy – reading, reading comprehension, fluency, background knowledge, vocabulary, writing, grammar, and spelling (orthography, morphology, phonology & etymology) – into individual silos. To teach these skills in an integrated manner, I have trained in multiple teaching methods and studied many facets of literacy and language. I am not limited by adherence to one methodology or approach. I have an wide array of tools to draw on and when faced with each individual student's needs, I can pick the right tool for the job.

If a student is struggling with mapping their letter-sound relationships, I use my training in Structured Literacy to help them. We use a systematic approach to learning the essential letter-sound relationships in English and work together to build an understanding of why so many letters, and groups of letters, in English write more than one sound. While we do this, I am also using my training in Word Inquiry to help my students understand how the phonology of English fits into the larger coherent structure on which English is built.

This coherent structure has guiding principles that we can uncover. We can explore how these guiding principles apply across the entire writing system. This helps students to understand not only that there is a very good reason for why we spell *be* with one <e> and *bee* with two, it is also the same reason why we spell *egg* with a double <g> and *such* with a <ch> instead of a <tch>.

Thus, students develop tools that help them spell many words instead of learning to spell one word at a time. As they learn the underlying structure of words, they are able to not only decode them, but also understand how the base of a word holds the key to its meaning. In this way, they improve their spelling and their reading.

In order to learn about words this way, we have to discuss the parts of speech, so grammar is a natural part of our studies. The parts of speech are the building blocks of sentences. You have to know what jobs words can do in a sentence, in order to really understand how sentences work and how to use that knowledge to be a better writer. So once students have begun to understand the parts of speech and are beginning to understand how English spelling works, we can begin to work on their writing.

All this takes time, however, and I work at each student's own pace. I let our work move at the rate of their growing understanding. Parents are linked to all our working documents and can see what we do at every lesson.



Do you use a curriculum or “sequence”?

In Word Inquiry we believe that learning is cumulative rather than linear. While we make many spelling concepts and conventions explicit in our teaching, we do not follow a specific sequence. We teach these concepts and conventions as they arise from the words we are studying with our students.

There are, of course, essential concepts about how the English spelling system works which your child must learn in order to develop an understanding of English orthography (spelling). This is the reason I use a mix of student-led and guided inquiry, to ensure that these essential concepts make their way into our lessons. My students build their own record of their learning as they discover these concepts. You will see that record each time we add to it and be able to discuss it with your child.

In SWI we do not work on a mastery model. I will not be asking your child to memorize these concepts and conventions and recite them by rote. Instead, because they are fundamental to the way English spelling works, as we conduct our word studies, do dictations, write sentences and read texts, we will run across these concepts and conventions again and again. And we'll discuss and explore them every time. Eventually, these concepts and conventions become fully integrated into students' deeper understanding.



Lessons

What would a typical lesson look like?

I do not have a set structure for each lesson because I use a combination of child-led inquiry and direct instruction in my lessons. I believe strongly in child-centred learning, and I tailor my lessons to the learning needs of each individual student. Each lesson is based on the work done in the prior lesson. This allows me to build on new discoveries or pivot in new directions depending on where the student's learning is taking us.

However, there *are* 5 areas of language literacy that I focus on with my students: spelling, reading, fluency, grammar and writing. Each of those five areas have many components; most of which must be individually taught and practised, before they can be integrated with components from the other 4 areas. For a period of time, I may focus on only one or two of these areas of literacy because that is what my student needs. Nevertheless, I am always keeping all 5 areas in mind and working towards my student's growing proficiency in all of them.

In terms of skills, I work with my students on spelling, reading, decoding, fluency, grammar, sentence writing, background knowledge, vocabulary, and improving their reading comprehension. When and how this gets done in each lesson and across the months, varies with each individual student.



Feedback

How will I know how my child is doing?

I provide brief written reports at the end of each month. These reports provide a summary of what your child and I have been working on.

In addition, I scan or photograph all written work and add it to the online work that I do with students. All of this is done in google suite and I share the links for those documents with parents so that they can see the work their child is doing at any time.

Students also use Canva to create different representations of their learning. These projects are shared with parents both while they are in progress and when they are complete.

I meet with parents at the end of each term (December, March and June) to discuss what we have covered in the past term, what I have observed about their child's learning (both their progress and what needs work) and my plans for the upcoming term.

I am always available for additional meetings during the year and, if I have any concerns that cannot wait until the end-of-term updates, I contact parents immediately.

Parent's Role

From the moment I begin working with your child, we are a team. You know your child better than anyone and working collaboratively with you is the best way for me to provide your child with the support they need.

I am happy for parents to sit in on my lessons, but I do ask that they stay quiet and let their child do the talking. It is important for the student to make their own discoveries and for the lesson to be guided by the student's learning and interests.

Will there be homework after every lesson?



I prefer not to give students homework as I do not like to intrude upon their family time.

However, there is substantial research supporting the value of both retrieval practice and repeated reading in supporting learning. So there may be times when I will ask students to re-read sentences or paragraphs on a daily basis, or practice certain skills at regular intervals during our work together.

As a parent, what can I do to help?

Please ensure that your child is at my house, or logged into the computer, on time. My students are booked with only a small window in-between so I cannot extend your lesson time.

For online lessons, your child will need to have access to a laptop. A tablet or phone will not be sufficient as my lessons are interactive and require your child to be able to manipulate objects on the screen. They cannot do this when using a tablet or phone. A strong wifi connection is also essential so that we can see and hear each other clearly during the lesson.

If we are working online, please ensure that your child has a reasonably quiet environment to work in. It will help if outside distractions (people moving through the room or calling to one another, pets going in and out, etc) are kept to a minimum.





There will be times when your child will need pen and paper to complete an activity during our online lesson. Please ensure that your child has a notebook (or binder) dedicated to our lessons that they have ready for each online lesson. For in-person lessons, I will provide all necessary writing supplies.

I am happy to have children snack during our lessons. Food is fuel for the brain and kids can't concentrate if they are hungry.

Fidget toys and room to move (if they need it) are always helpful for students who struggle with attention issues and are welcome at our online lessons. If you are unsure as to what kind of fidget toys might work for your child, I am happy to discuss some inexpensive possibilities that you can try. There are also some great ways to build movement into our lessons that don't necessarily require a lot of space, such as using a stability ball for a chair.

For In-person students, I have plenty of fidget toys available but students are also welcome to bring their own. I build movement breaks into our lessons and use a lot of games to make the necessary repetition and review more engaging.

For the most part, I hope that working with me will begin to relieve the pressure on you rather than increase it!



Fees

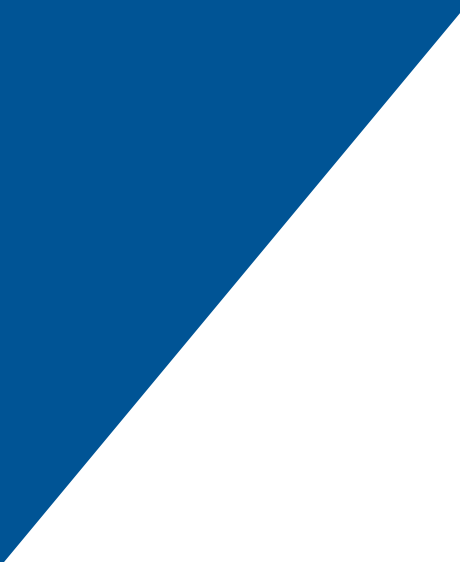
My current hourly rate is \$95/hour. I use a “tuition model” that employs an equal payment plan. The cost for all your child’s lessons for the entire year is added up and then divided by the number of months in the school year (Sept-June), giving you equal payments each month.

This means that you won’t get the sudden high cost created by months with more lessons (such as November and May). These will be evened out by combining them with the months that have fewer lessons (such as December and March). You will be able to plan your expenses more easily because **your monthly payment for tutoring will always be the same.**

This payment plan is **not an obligation to work together and does not require an advance commitment of ten months.**

Most families work with me for the full year, but if for any reason this tutoring relationship is not feeling like a good fit, either of us can choose to discontinue the lessons.

I have provisions in place for monthly make-up lessons in the event of unavoidable cancellations. These will be explained in detail when we set up the equal payment plan.

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I send invoices at the beginning of the month and payment can be made via e-transfer. I provide monthly receipts and, if requested, can provide an annual receipt as well.

Arrangements can be made for summer lessons. These are paid for separately from the year-long plan.



Any more questions?

I hope this handbook has answered any questions you still had about your child's upcoming work with me. If not, please, do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

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