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One of our philosophies at TutorBright is that a tutoring session should not feel like work. We do everything we can to keep our students completely engaged with the material. When students are not active participants, learning simply becomes work; the process becomes a job that students perform during the school week. Of course students who treat their education as work can still become very good at their â€œjobsâ€•; this is what has happened with child literacy in Ontario.

A recent study has shown that Ontario primary students are among the most literate in the country. One may feel that this is cause to celebrate; these students clearly know how to read and how to memorize what they read. However, there is a difference between learning how to do something and learning the value in that activity.

This becomes especially relevant when one considers a recent report which reveals that only about 50% of Grade 3 and Grade 6 students in Ontario actually enjoy reading. This percentage marks a downward trend from 1998-99 when 76% of Grade 3s and 65% of Grade 6s claimed to like to read.

Something is clearly wrong here. If students cannot find the joy in reading, they are missing out on something fundamental. Memorizing the content of a book can help one to do well on a test, but getting lost in a book can open oneâ€™s mind to a vast array of emotions, experiences, and life-lessons that can change oneâ€™s perspective of the world. If students are, therefore, to find the real value of literature, they must once again become engaged in the process of reading. So how can this be accomplished?

This is a difficult question, and there is no quick or easy solution. One thing is clear though: simply being told what to read and then having to regurgitate that information on a standardized test is not enough. If there is no venue for real creativity, if students are given no control over their own literary education, reading becomes a monotonous task that children simply strive to get through. We need to bring a sense of discovery back into the world of literature. This can be done by encouraging students to seek out books that truly interest them, by asking them thoughtful questions that will lead them to find hidden themes and connections, and by creating exercises which will encourage them to be insightful.

A great article on www.parentcentral.ca discusses the case of an educator in the Peel region who has her students write scripts and direct student films based on what they read. The students are first placed into small groups to have in-depth discussions of the themes of the work, and then they translate those themes into a totally different medium. This sort of creative environment needs to become more commonplace. Students ought to be shown that when it comes to literary analysis, there need not always be a right or a wrong answer. Ultimately, we must remember that the most important thing any child can discover from a work of literature is what that work means to them.

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