January 2022

Marianela O.'s artwork "Starry Invasion" on display at the Figuralo Art Show

In this Issue

Wildcat Times

Students Learning on Campus

Issue #2

Learning to Love Reading

Interview with LRC Director Renee Toy by Wildcat Times Editor, Alex Argüello

As students settle into a routine, many visit the Learning Resource Center weekly where they experience story time with Ms. Renee Toy. In this interview, Ms. Toy shares her process for helping students become readers and describes how the process unfolds for students that are blind and of various abilities.


LRC Director, Renee Toy

What is the first step in teaching a student to read?

Renee: The first step is to establish a regular reading routine. Having a predictable routine reduces the stress level of many students and gives you the opportunity to build trust. The goal is to make the story time experience pleasurable and something they look forward to.

How do you keep students with visual impairment engaged in the story?

Renee: Students with significant visual impairments and those with additional disabilities, such as autism or intellectual disability often require additional support for comprehension of and engagement with literature. Using real objects and character representations from the stories assist with comprehension. I use specifically curated objects to help the students understand the vocabulary and story structure. These objects can be as simple as a stuffed animal to help the students understand what the animal looks like and how many legs the animal has. I have the students pass the objects around so that they can engage with their fellow classmates in conversations about the objects. The process of handling various objects expands their knowledge of the world.

What other storytelling techniques do you use to engage the students?

Renee: I find it helpful to ask students to predict what will happen next in the story. This type of question leads to discussion with their peers and helps them to develop the vocabulary needed to express more complex ideas and opinions.

Learning to Love Reading continued

"the goal is to make the story time experience pleasurable and something they look forward to"

Renee Toy, LRC Director

Do all students learn how to read?

Renee: Once the love for hearing stories is firmly established, the desire to learn how to read will follow for most students. There are reasons why not every student will learn how to read, but the process of developing a love for listening to stories and discussing the story with your classmates, friends, or family can lead to other positive outcomes.

I have seen non-reading students become very good story tellers and develop an advanced vocabulary from regular exposure to listening to stories. I have also seen students who never read become very good writers. For some students, sitting down and listening quietly for twenty minutes is a successful outcome of story time.

What can parents do to help their child develop a love for reading?

Renee: I know that parenting can be hectic and my advice is to focus on making the experience positive. Start with short books and build up slowly. Connect the story to things that they like and build it into their daily/weekly routine.

Resources for Parents:
Texas Talking Book Program
Learning Ally
Bookshare.org

TSBVI Farmers Market

Learning by Experience

by Pamela Henkel, M. Ed.
EXIT/Transition Teacher

I love thinking back to when our farmers market idea first got started with three students in my class. I remember we first practiced by selling smores in the hallway for $.25. Sales were so good that we eventually moved up to the Overlook room, built a cart, painted it bright red and decorated it with every tactile craft we could find. Once the cart was complete we started making soaps and wheeling our cart outside near the quad. Every week we hoped someone would take notice and buy our products so that we could practice our social interaction skills and learn about money. Teachers, students, and staff were starting to take notice of our experiential learning project. The following year, two more classes joined and we were ready for the big stage, the pavilion outside! After three years, the farmers market started to double in size each year. The farmers market developed a of functional

Picture of the farmers market

Student selling jars of home made jam and lemonade

> "more importantly students gain experiences that will lead to more meaningful activities in their adult lives."

Pamela Henkel, M. Ed. , EXIT/Transition Teacher

way for our students to experience success in a setting that is predictable, encouraging, and fun! It gives them a way to interact socially with their peers and practice communication skills needed to interact with others.

The TSBVI Farmers Market is now a regularly anticipated event hosted several times throughout the school year. Eleven classes participate and student workers help by serving in roles such as: cashier, greeter, or set up/ break down crew. The students have expanded the variety of craft items and enjoy making things like: aromatherapy essentials, arts, upcycled crafts, homemade pickles, sweets, potted succulents, bath salts, screen printed bags, and much more. The event expands the opportunity to learn what interests our students and allows us to build upon those interests by making changes to their routines to capitalize on new skills. Exploring these types of work-related routines achieves the curriculum goals

literacy, math, and social skills, but more importantly students gain experiences that will lead to more meaningful activities in their adult lives.

Ethan selling a custom made greeting card

Creating 3D Shapes to Enhance Student Instruction

by Sue O'Brien, M. Ed.
Adaptive Materials Coordinator &
Braille Transcriber

This semester, I launched a new Fundamentals of Computer science class. I selected OpenSCAD, a 3D drawing application as the primary learning resource.

My four students: Jacob M., Michael F., Paulina (Yuki) H., and Ashton H. These students started off by learning how to create primitive shapes and as they learned more complex programming commands they were able to add to, subtract from, and intersect shapes to build more complex designs.

As they mastered the foundational skills associated with all programming languages, such as understanding the commands, syntax, and the ability to debug, their designs became more creative. This allowed each student to add a more personal flair to their projects.

A benefit to learning programming using OpenSCAD is that students can produce a 3D object. This allows them to better self-evaluate their knowledge and skill. When a 3D print doesn't turn out the way they thought, they go back, make adjustments to their code, and try it again. This iterative process of planning, designing, producing, and evaluating reflects the 21st century teaching and learning taking place in class, while also providing students opportunities to sharpen other ECC skills like self-determination and assistive technology skills.

Launching and teaching this new Fundamentals of Computer Science class has proven to be a good fit for our students and I look forward to more students joining the class.

Student Michael F. holding a 3D printed object

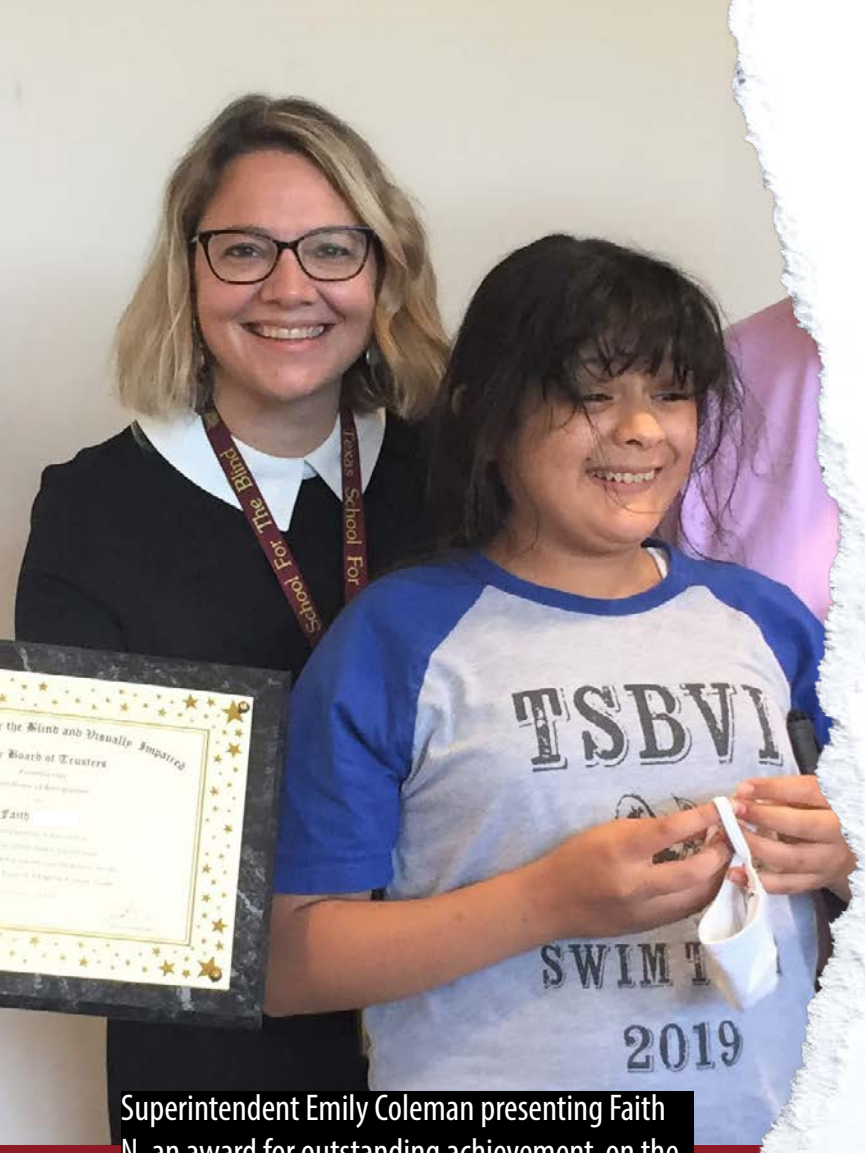
Photo Booth

Alia performing at The Big Show

Jacob displaying his ceramic art sculpture at the Figuralo art show

Paulina H. holding the 3D snowman model produced with OpenSCAD

Wrestling team leaving for a meet in San Marcos



Superintendent Emily Coleman presenting Faith N. an award for outstanding achievement on the STAAR test.

Alex Argüello, Editor and Head of Community Engagement:

Suzanne Becker, Archivist Photo Contributions

Wildcat Times is a production of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The purpose of this publication is to inform parents about the many exciting activities on campus and to spur conversations between parents and students.

www.TSBVI.edu