

The Autism Fight: One Mom's Journey to Deliver a Breakthrough for Educating Special-Needs Children

by Anne Scroggs



"Your son is autistic"

When I first heard those words in 1991 autism was not the epidemic that it is today. New children were not diagnosed every 20 minutes and few researchers were searching for a cure. It was a relatively rare diagnosis and little was known about how to care for autistic children, let alone educate them.

There are many different ways that a mom can react to the news that her child is autistic. In my own case, I became obsessed with finding special education schools that offered some hope for my son, Mitchell. As a family, we selected the most well-respected private program in our area and learned everything we could about autism. Then, when Mitchell was ready to move to the public school system, we moved to make sure he was in the best school district and we carefully monitored his progress. Mitchell's teacher provided us frequent reports that indicated Mitchell was doing well in the classroom.

However, after several years he hadn't progressed beyond his 30 word vocabulary and at one point when we would talk about school he would just scream. In my heart, I knew something was wrong. I decided to follow my instincts and visit Mitchell's classroom unexpectedly one day.

I found Mitchell playing by himself in a corner of the room while the other higher functioning students were being taught. I hoped this was an unusual event but as I continued to monitor the situation I soon realized that the educators felt that they didn't have the tools necessary to help Mitchell and they had quit trying. The situation was both heart-breaking and infuriating. If this was happening in one of the best special education programs in our state what was happening in the others? Frustrated and furious, I finally pulled Mitchell out of school.

What had I done? I wasn't a teacher and I never intended to become one. However, I believed in my son. I knew he could show progress. I became intensely focused on finding teaching strategies that were proven to achieve results for autistic children. I didn't want the latest trendy educational program - I

wanted education strategies that offered real evidence of progress. Eventually, through a lot of trial and error, I used this research to create a comprehensive suite of special education tools that I could use with Mitchell which was:

- Research-based – Combined a number of teaching strategies which universities had proven achieved results.
- Progressive and Integrated – Built upon one another to reinforce key concepts and advance learning.
- Engaging and Easy to Implement – Made learning fun for Mitchell and straight-forward for me to implement.
- Measurable – Allowed me to set expectations, track Mitchell’s progress, and see measurable results.

Using this system of learning tools, Mitchell improved from a 30 word vocabulary to a 275 word vocabulary in just 6 months and I was able to place him back into the school system where he could interact with other students. I went back and visited the educators who hadn’t been able to make progress with Mitchell earlier and showed them the results. They were shocked and soon special education teachers throughout Washington State began to ask me for copies of my tools. These teachers started seeing results as well. Children who didn’t have any sight words started progressing to over 75 words in just 5 months.

One school saw increases in communicative speech between 200-400% for their special-needs students. Success stories like these spread beyond Washington and soon teachers in California, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and even Canada began asking me for the tools. I realized that through my desire to help my own son I had created a system that could help special-needs children everywhere. Acknowledging this responsibility, I soon made another informal career change from teacher to entrepreneur. I launched my own company, Creative Teaching CAP (<http://www.creativeteachingcap.com>), a special education organization dedicated to creating a comprehensive suite of measurable learning tools that are proven to help autistic and special-needs students thrive. My hope is that by launching Creative Teaching CAP others parents and teachers will never feel as alone as I did when I started this journey and that, by using these tools, we can join together and revolutionize special education programs across America.

Nearly two decades after first receiving my son’s autism diagnosis, Mitchell now can both speak and read over 1200 words. I look back on this entire experience with pride in all that we have accomplished and anticipation for the progress we will make in the future. Ultimately, I have found that in helping my son achieve his full potential I have also come to achieve my own. I now understand the one word in our vocabulary which sums up what it means to fight and persevere in the midst of unimaginable challenges and seemingly insurmountable odds - mom.

Anne Scroggs is the CEO and Founder of Creative Teaching CAP (<http://www.creativeteachingcap.com>), a special education organization dedicated to creating a comprehensive suite of measurable learning tools that are proven to help autistic and special-needs students thrive. She is a long time student of autistic spectrum disorders and an accomplished advocate for special-needs students. Anne formerly held management positions at a number of Fortune 500 companies, including Seafirst Bank, NCR, and Wang Laboratories, and was recognized for her accomplishments in creating efficiencies in banking systems. Anne resides in Issaquah, WA with her husband and two sons.



Link to a video of children and special ed. teacher using the products:

http://www.creativeteachingcap.com/v/vspfiles/files/video_pages/in_the_classroom.html