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# Time for TV

## **East Cobb Women Create Video to Help Autistic Children Learn to Write**

By Erin J. Murrin  
*Marietta Daily Journal Staff Writer*

Five-year-old Ryan Ellis is a pro at writing now. But a few years ago, Ryan, who was diagnosed with the developmental disorder autism at 3-years-old, refused to pick up a pen.

“He would not write and was in therapy for about two years—in the school system and with Marnie (Danielson, Ryan’s then occupational therapist) trying to get him to write,” said Ryan’s mom, Susan Ellis of Marietta.

Ms. Ellis embarked on a last ditch effort inspired by her son’s love of television. By enlisting the help of Ms. Danielson, who is a Marietta resident and owner of Building Blocks Pediatric Therapy Inc., the two women created what is now known as The TV Teacher.

“I begged Marnie to let me video tape her doing these rhythmic chants with the letter C,” Ms. Ellis said. “I threw in props to make it funny, make it goofy.”

Ryan saw the tape and was glued. He asked to watch the segment again, picked up a marker and started writing the letter C based on Ms. Danielson’s chant. “Up and around, letter C.”

(It) made him connect inside and it made him motor plant,” said Ms. Ellis. “He was motivated to do it and he understood what to do.”

A business idea was born. Ms. Ellis was equipped with a background in accounting and being the mother of two special needs sons, while Ms. Danielson had 10 years of occupational therapy experience.

The two women created chants and scripted segments for each of the remaining letters of the alphabet.

“We tried it on people in {Marnie’s} clinic with varying diagnosis and on my friends who have typical developing kids,” said Ms. Ellis, “The kids liked it. We knew at that point that we had to make it professional.”

The women cut a video in about 14 days using production equipment and studio at Chattahoochee Technical College in Marietta.

The result is a two-hour long training DVD called Alphabet Beats that teaches children ages 2 to 7 how to write using visual and auditory stimulation coupled with repetition and rhythmic chants.

“The whole auditory component is huge and then kids love things on TV so this is like a wonderful tool for them to watch TV and hear something repetitively,” Ms. Danielson said.

The video, hosted by the dynamic personality of Ms. Danielson, features 26 chapters each prompted by an easy-to-navigate main menu.

“Every letter is about four to five minutes long,” Ms. Ellis said. “not only is it teaching them writing, there’s also eight to 10 vocabulary words within each letter. And it shows kindergarten skills like cutting, tying your shoe, coloring, painting, going to the doctor, shapes, colors, body parts.”

Ms. Ellis and Ms. Danielson said although The TV Teacher works well in developing skills in children with special needs, the video is also helpful for typical developing children as well.

“It is very interactive,” Ms. Danielson said. “It incorporates a lot of gross motor movements as well as fine motor skills.”

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In eight months since its release, The TV Teacher has taken off. Through marketing strategies that include placing the product in catalogues as well as selling it to teachers and other therapists, the word is spreading.

Locally, the video is sold at The School Box and The Teacher's Orchard, both in Kennesaw.

In December, the ladies will be back in the studio to produce their next project featuring lower case letters to be released in March 2007.

Long-term goals for The TV Teacher are plenty. The founders plan on making more videos, but their ambitious vision stems even beyond that.

"We're hoping to get some studies done to get some empirical evidence because there's a big push to get some evidence-based data," Ms. Danielson said. "If we can turn around and say, 'There are studies on this, this works,' that would be a tremendous asset to this product."

Ms. Ellis said they are also hoping to incorporate The TV Teacher into the curriculum of preschools and kindergarten classes across the country.

And, since it ensures major publicity and sales gold, the ladies are attempting to get on the Oprah Winfrey Show.

Armed with an enthusiastic pride in their idea, Ms. Ellis and Ms. Danielson are out to change the way kids learn to write, one TV at a time.

For more information on The TV Teacher, visit [www.thetvteacher.com](http://www.thetvteacher.com).