

# Case Study:

## Phonics Instruction for Elementary 'Exceptional Needs' Students



**Mrs. Ann Marie Flanagan, Exceptional Children and Nationally Board Certified Teacher  
Mocksville Elementary School, North Carolina**

### QUOTES

*“Simon taught students how to approach reading in a systematic, fun and interactive way!”*



*This 2005 pilot program documented by Mrs. Ann Marie Flanagan, studied thirteen first through fourth grade exceptional needs students using Simon S.I.O., a multi-level phonics instruction program published by Don Johnston Incorporated.*

### **Controlled Research Study: Background**

Two Exceptional Children (EC) teachers and one EC assistant studied the effects of supplementing classroom phonics instruction with Simon S.I.O. phonics software. The teachers hypothesized that pairing the technology with high-quality classroom instruction would help improve the Reading Achievement Program Assessment Scores of the nine resource students and four self-contained students who participated in the study.

The resource students' primary exceptionalities included Developmentally Delayed, 'Educable' Mentally Disabled and Specific-Learning Disabled. Some students had secondary exceptionalities, including speech/language impaired, occupational therapy, physical therapy and/or English Language Learners. The majority of these students have repeated one grade.

The students in the self-contained classroom that partially participated in this study ranged in primary exceptionalities including Trainable Mentally Disabled and Other Health Impaired. This group's time on the computer ranged from 2 to 8 minutes per student. The self-contained classroom teacher had students work on Simon S.I.O. lessons a minimum of once a month, due to the severity of their needs.

This study was initiated on August 29, 2005 and ended June 2006. The study was fully supported by Administrators at Mocksville Elementary School as well as the Exceptional Children's Director of Davie County Schools, Mocksville, North Carolina.

### **Research Process**

In the resource room, students were given both pre- and post-tests using the Hill Center's Reading Achievement Program Assessments. This is a program that Davie County Schools has initiated in order to follow the guidelines of NCLB.

“Not only did students make academic progress, ... they also greatly increased their self-esteem and their outlook on learning how to read!”

“These students developed the skills to attack an abstract concept and learn the rules of our English language.”

The assessment consisted of several components of successful reading instruction:

- phonological awareness
- phonics
- vocabulary
- comprehension
- fluency

Seven of the nine resource students were also in the Hill Center groups and were administered the pre- and post-tests.

### Pre-Test Data

The results of the pre-test data identified and demonstrated students' deficits in all five areas of reading, especially the areas of phonological awareness and phonics that are the basic foundation skills for reading. **We selected Simon S.I.O. as part of our strategy and instruction to provide more skill-building assistance.**

The resource students utilized Simon S.I.O. lessons for a minimum of three days a week which varied according to individual students.

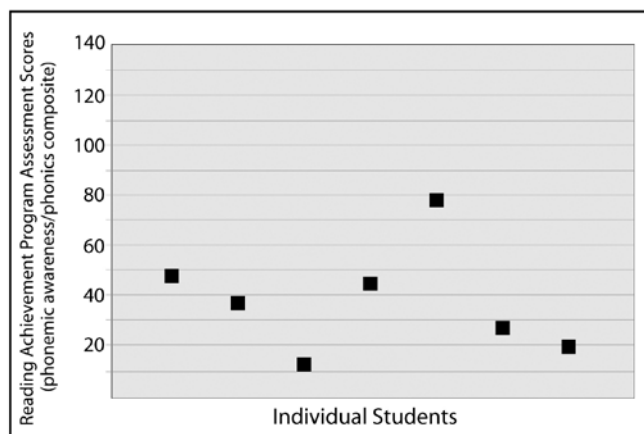
(Minimum time 10 minutes - maximum time - 30 minutes.) The self-contained students used Simon S.I.O. inconsistently due to varying needs and the degree of support needed in social/emotional areas.

One of the components that Simon S.I.O. taught the students was how to divide words into onsets and rimes through a logical and predictable technique. Simon S.I.O. software provided students with explicit instruction on how to learn key words by decoding them. These students developed the skills to attack an abstract concept and learn the rules of our English language.

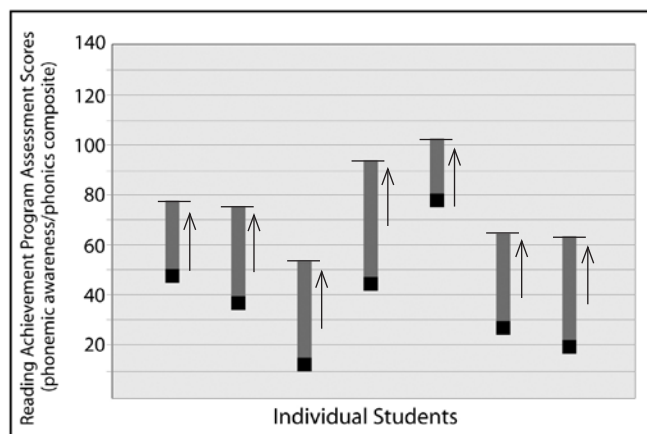
### Post-Test Data

As the post-test data and individual student progress charts demonstrate, ALL resource students made positive progress especially in the area of phonics. Simon S.I.O., in addition to the Hill Center Reading Program and the general education classroom curriculum heavily influenced the gains these students made. Simon taught students how to approach reading in a systematic, fun and interactive way!

Pre-Test Data for Individual Students



Post-Test Gains for Individual Students



**Not only did students make academic progress, which transferred easily to the general education classrooms; they also greatly increased their self-esteem and their outlook on learning how to read!**

Several general education teachers commented on these students' increased phonics skills, including spelling (at their individual levels). In addition to the software, the following activities were included as directed on the Simon S.I.O. CD: weekly practice sheets, word card practice, sentence strips; activities developed by the students included sentence scramble, word card memory and reading for speed.

Students became competitive, with themselves, when they viewed their Simon S.I.O. weekly progress reports. We would discuss strength and need areas each week with students and observed how they all strived to better themselves.

### **Instruction Strategy Model: Summary**

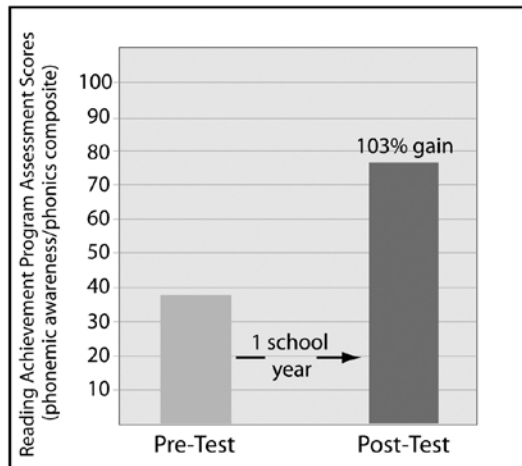
There are several changes that we will make to enhance the effectiveness of this 'best practices' model for next year. All students, no matter what their exceptionality will be given the Hill Center's pre- and post-tests in order to show consistency within the study and use the program for a consistent period of time. More students will be added to this study and will range from kindergarten to fifth graders with exceptionalities.

In summary, Simon S.I.O. has been a wonderful addition to our curriculum for exceptional children. This program straightforwardly and easily integrated into our curriculum and was simple to implement. It provided teachers with individual student feedback that was easy to read, interpret and explain in the progress reports.

This study will be reviewed by our administration and faculty at the beginning of the 2006-07 school year. In addition, we will also recommend Simon S.I.O. be implemented in our kindergarten and first grade classrooms as a supplemental tool for all students. Our school has adopted a school-wide reading program for the general education classrooms, which will also ensure that all students will receive a research-based reading curriculum.

In addition, our EC Director has asked us to present this study's results to the lead EC teachers at each elementary school. This will allow other schools to be introduced and become familiar with the program so they can determine if they would like to implement this software with their students.

Group Reading Score Gains



*“ I will also recommend Simon S.I.O to be implemented in our full kindergarten and first grade classrooms as a supplemental tool for all students. ”*

# Our Vision...

## Empower Students with Accessible Technologies that Address Unique Literacy Needs

It's commonplace in schools to see stacks of textbooks, paper notebooks, pencils and pens. These are the "conventional" learning tools in schools, and they are effective for many students. But for students with physical, cognitive or learning differences, these tools pose significant barriers to learning. These students require **specialized accessible technology** and media to maximize their learning. *This is where Don Johnston excels.* Since 1980 we have been developing and supplying innovative technologies to schools who recognize that each student has *unique* learning needs and can thrive in the *right environment*.

**We strive to create the right environment.** This requires the right tools, the right implementation and the right instructional approaches. We are committed to providing you with the most value, from product selection to ongoing support and implementation.