

Case Study: Educators Win Award for Bridging Assistive Technologies with Daily Instruction

May 2009



QUOTES

“ When we collaborate, we discuss upcoming assignments in social studies and science to help each of our students be successful in their research and writing projects through the support of assistive technologies. ”

Mrs. Elizabeth Rohrbaugh
AT Specialist
Fulton County
Public School District, GA

Elizabeth Rohrbaugh, AT Specialist, Fulton County Public Schools, GA
Velita Cochran, IRR Teacher, Northwestern Middle School, Alpharetta, GA

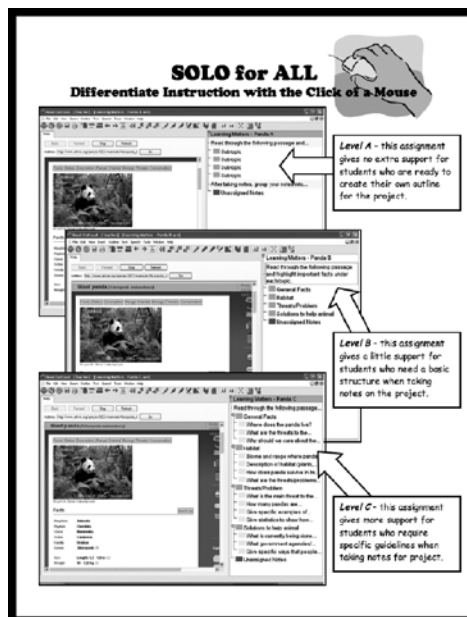
Promoting Excellence in the Classroom



In May, 2009, Mrs. Elizabeth (Betsy) Rohrbaugh, AT Specialist and Ms. Velita Cochran, IRR Teacher at Northwestern Middle School, Fulton County Public Schools, GA were presented with the 2009 Innovation Award for Promoting Excellence in the Classroom by the Foundation of the Council for Exceptional Children, Fulton County, GA.

They received this award for developing a unique collaborative instructional model to improve the writing skills of more than seventy students with learning challenges. In their model they used the SOLO® Literacy Suite, a reading and writing assistive technology software, as a bridge to daily instruction. Students increased their writing gains and received the 2009 YES I CAN! Award from the Foundation. Today, the district uses SOLO as a core software component in 90 schools to serve more than 2700 students who require differentiated learning approaches. Here is their story.

Bridge to Instruction Across the Curriculum



Mrs. Rohrbaugh saw that her students with learning challenges needed more guided writing support to improve their basic literacy skills across the curriculum. In 2005, she recommended SOLO to her district to complement classroom instruction.

Spearheading the effort was Ms. Velita Cochran. She used SOLO to adapt the curriculum materials to support 6th, 7th, and 8th graders who were reading and writing below grade level. Ms. Cochran took general education assignments and created three-tier writing templates in SOLO that corresponded to a rubric of students' abilities. (SEE SOLO for All Template)

SOLO for All Template

Students use their knowledge of C.U.P.S.S. to edit all of their papers. They write and revise their work in SOLO and review grammar for capitalization, punctuation, usage and spelling as a requirement of their completed project.

Editing— Peer-to-Peer Critique and Document Review

| C. U. P. S. S. Steps for Editing | | |
|---|--|--|
| | Student Circle and Total Errors | Teacher Circle and Total Errors |
| C - Capitalization | | |
| Did I start each sentence with a capital letter? | | |
| Are all proper nouns capitalized? (names of specific people, places, and things) | | |
| U - Usage | | |
| Did I use strong action words? (run/sprint, hit/smash, jump/leap) | | |
| Did I use the correct word? (there/their, bare/barely, buy/by) | | |
| P - Punctuation | | |
| Did I use correct punctuation after each sentence? (. , ? !) | | |
| Did I put a comma before connecting words? (No, but I wanted ...) | | |
| Did I put commas in a series? (pizza, ice cream, cookies) | | |
| S - Spelling | | |
| Have I spelled every word correctly? (spell check) | | |
| Did I accidentally leave out any words? | | |
| S - Sentences | | |
| Does each sentence make sense? | | |
| Is each sentence a complete thought? | | |
| Does each sentence contain a subject and verb? | | |

After students complete their writing assignments, they self-edit their work in Write:OutLoud, the word-processing component of SOLO, using text to speech and a C.U.P.S.S. Writing Rubric, created by Ms. Cochran. (C.U.P.S.S. stands for Capitalization, Usage, Punctuation, Spelling and Sounds Right.)

When students finish with the self-editing process, they switch papers and edit a peer's work using the rubric. Ms. Cochran says that if students edit only their own work, they cannot do a good job because they have too much invested to make the necessary changes. Over the years, she has seen many students experience success with this self-critiquing and peer-editing writing model.

C.U.P.S.S. Steps for Editing

Multi-Modality Learning, Listening and Writing Structure

Students use Read:OutLoud, the text-reader in SOLO, to hear content from their books read aloud. Study tools in the program help them comprehend what they read and hear. Ms. Cochran said, "This tool provides access to curriculum that can be overwhelming for students with reading disabilities." She says the students like the multi-modality of hearing the content while following along with the highlighted text.

Making the Technology Connection



SOLO technology is also used in other learning environments in the Fulton County School District such as the Technology Connections class.

Students learn basic keyboarding skills such as typing and editing while following embedded writing instructions in SOLO.

Some teachers use SOLO as a testing accommodation. Their students benefit from hearing a test read aloud through synthesized speech, rather than hearing and listening to a teacher read the questions to them. "Students often will not ask a

teacher or para-professional test reader to repeat passages more than twice, shared Mrs. Rohrbaugh. "With the computer, they have the ability to reread as often as they need to."

This past year, a parent of a third grader who was reading below grade level was frantic that her daughter was not going to pass the state test. She requested that she be given extra reading practice. Mrs. Rohrbaugh tried Read:OutLoud for the audio feedback and reading comprehension support. The student practiced her reading test using Read:OutLoud and then took the text without the tool. She passed. Her mother was thrilled and asked for more reading support for her daughter on a daily basis. "Now in 4th grade, this student uses Read:OutLoud with ease and races through assignments," said Mrs. Rohrbaugh.

Another group of 5th graders wanted to use SOLO for a social studies project to research U.S. Presidents. Each student used Read:OutLoud while online to highlight key passages and take notes about their President. They compiled information in Draft:Builder, the graphic organization component of SOLO, and wrote their final essays in Write:OutLoud.

“SOLO is more than a word processing tool,” said Mrs. Rohrbaugh. “It has all the recommended teaching supports and reading guides that are evidenced to work by the National Reading Panel and Reading Next Report.”

Teachers in Fulton County Schools use SOLO for special writing assignments. Ms. Cochran said that this year has been the best so far in using technologies to support students included in general education. She said more teachers are having success incorporating SOLO into their research projects. “SOLO makes the writing process smooth and minimizes the frustration for students during the revising process. It cuts down the laborious writing barriers students often experience. I like the step-by-step process that guides them as they read and write.”

The district’s goal this year is to use assistive technologies on a wider scale, not only for special education, but for students at-risk who are not making AYP (adequate yearly progress). Ms. Cochran credits this success and the sustained use of technology to the encouragement of her school administrators.

“The bottom line is to boost our students’ confidence levels,” she said. “Using this writing technology, students who were once intimidated by the writing process now tackle assignments they would never have dreamed of. SOLO helps students read, follow instructions and understand the curriculum that would have been beyond their ability. We have seen our students go from being overwhelmed to being independent writers. This is the ultimate benefit of using assistive technology to improve student achievement.” These educators and students have the awards and scores to prove their success!

View Ms. Cochran’s website at:

www2.fultonschools.org/teacher/cochranv/

Learn more about SOLO:

www.donjohnston.com/products/solo/

About The Foundation Yes I Can! Awards

In 1981, **The Foundation of the Council for Exceptional Children** established the **Yes I Can! Award** ceremony for the purpose of acknowledging the achievements of children and youth with disabilities. More than 30,000 students have been recognized for their achievement through the Foundation to:

- Overcome barriers caused by public misconceptions
- Encourage children and youth with disabilities to seek their greatest potential
- Increase public awareness of the abilities, aspirations and personal qualities of persons with disabilities

Learn more:

www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/AboutCEC/YesICanFoundation/

“Read:OutLoud provides access to the curriculum that can be overwhelming for students with reading disabilities. By the time our students are in 8th grade, we want them to be independent readers and writers using these guided supports.”

Ms. Velita Cochran
IRR Teacher at Northwestern
Middle School, Fulton County
Public School District, GA

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.

Don Johnston empowers educators with specialized accessible technologies and supported reading and writing tools for students with cognitive, physical, and learning differences. Since 1980, the company has partnered with literacy experts, assistive technology specialists, speech language pathologists, psychologists, teachers, researchers, and scientists to develop over a dozen assistive technology products. The company also publishes Start-to-Finish®, a collection of paperback, audio and computer books for students who read below grade level.