

Case Study: District Technology Practitioner Shares Effective Literacy Solutions Using Assistive Technologies



**Jennifer Ziolko, Assistive Technology Practitioner
West Linn/Wilsonville, Oregon School District**

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QUOTES

“SOLO helps us align our instruction for special-needs learners with access to the general curriculum materials.”

Jennifer Ziolko,
Assistive Technology
Practitioner

Background:



In 2006, Jennifer Ziolko, Assistive Technology Practitioner for West Linn/Wilsonville Oregon School District, received a Top 20 Emerging Leaders in Education Award by the National School Boards Association. Ms. Ziolko was recognized for her outstanding work in evaluation, implementation and support of students with learning disabilities.

In this study, Jennifer describes her district's selection of the SOLO Literacy Suite and Start-to-Finish computer books to create engaging learning experiences and to make a difference in their students' learning outcomes. Her efforts involve supporting the district's special education classes with assistive technology through a research and evaluation process.

Assistive Technology Role

My role as the Assistive Technology Practitioner is to be the eyes and ears of our team to help teachers find and identify useful technologies to support their struggling learners. I am responsible for finding out what works, learning how to use it and helping teachers learn how to implement it. I also coordinate the installation and training of all software programs.

In education today, we must strive to leverage our tools and technologies to serve the most students and learning populations in our schools. This makes sense from many perspectives:

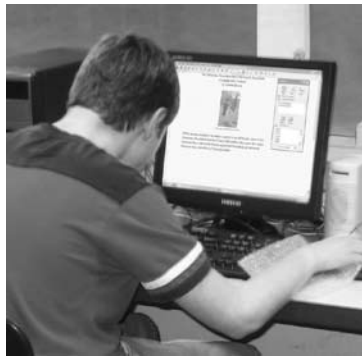
- 1) to get the most efficient use of time and resources
- 2) to ensure cost-savings
- 3) to bring uniformity to our technology programs

Improving Literacy Skills - Leverage Tools & Resources

The SOLO Literacy Suite is one of the technology programs we selected for our middle and high school students after attending Don Johnston's workshops at Closing the Gap and CSUN where they demonstrated SOLO. Our district uses the Step Up to Writing strategy, which SOLO supports. This tool helps us align our instruction for special-needs learners with access to the general curriculum materials. During my evaluation, I saw how SOLO could provide guided scaffolding writing support for my students to become more successful writers and independent learners.

Serving Multiple Students' Needs

In Spring 2007, I made a presentation to our District School Board on our Virtual Resource Room, highlighting SOLO and its benefits for students with disabilities.



Our District decided to create a Virtual Resource Room where technology programs, like SOLO, are available for special education teachers and students on an accessible network.

We began to use SOLO in our life-skills, self-contained classrooms to assist students in taking formative tests. Teachers in PE, health, drama and other subjects would email me their test and I would upload them into SOLO. Our students loved this because it helped them become more independent and autonomous learners.

With SOLO, we now have more flexibility and can efficiently determine a student's need without any added support from Instructional Assistant's (IAs). Prior to this, an IA would be required to administer tests (read them orally) to students who needed extra audio support.

SOLO is a four-program literacy suite with tools and instructional support to fit many students' needs. My students use:

Co:Writer — a word prediction tool

Write:OutLoud — a step-by-step writing and word processing tool

Draft:Builder — an organizing tool for creating outlines

Read:OutLoud — a text reader for reading digitized text like NIMAS files which are required for some students with IEPs

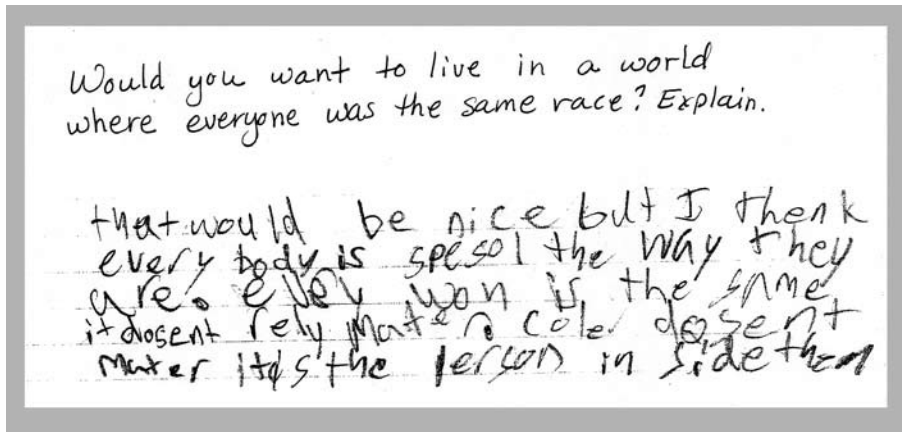
Engaging Reluctant Readers

We also created a central reading library system which includes Don Johnston's Start-to-Finish Core Content high/low audio and computer book series. These books provide multiple learning approaches to support standards-based informational text and prompts students to question, make meaning and summarize the information as they read to learn. The computer books offer full fluency and comprehensive supports that build strong expository reading. The vocabulary and audio feedback engage students. Topics cover many areas of our required curriculum and come in Lexile reading levels for grades 2-3 or 4-5 readability.

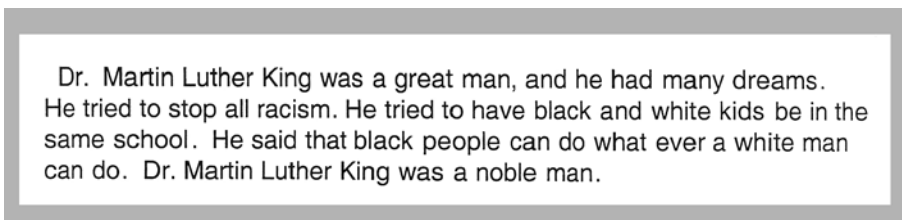
With Start-to-Finish our reluctant readers are better able to grasp the concepts and get the extra support they need, while feeling good about reading the same content as their peers. While reading the Start-to-Finish computer books, my students answer the chapter questions. After reading the passages, they open Draft:Builder to assist them with organizing their thoughts. Finally they move to Write:OutLoud so that they can fully support, revise, edit and publish to complete their book reports.

A New World of Learning Through the Eyes of a 6th Grader

Below is an example of a 6th grader's work and his passionate feelings around the question, "Would you want to live in a world where everyone is the same race?" He handwrote the answer to one question where you can see he didn't capitalize words and it's difficult to read.



This paragraph is a work sample showing a student's response using Co:Writer to the following—Summarize what you learned about Dr. Martin Luther King. In this paragraph you can see correct capitalization and punctuation, complete and thoughtful sentence structure and conviction from the heart. What a difference these tools and technologies can make in the lives of our students' learning experiences.



What a different world we, as educators, can create when we identify and use the right resources and technologies to help our students learn and thrive.

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