

Case Study: Fairfax Virginia Writing Camps

October 2006



QUOTES

“SOLO is our number one tool for students who need more support in reading and writing.

There are many students like Don, who are waiting for us to help them make lasting learning connections.”

Bill Reeder, Director of Special Education: Assessment, Assistive Technology and Support Services, Fairfax, VA Public Schools

Self-Empowered Elementary and Middle School Students Take Responsibility for Learning, Thinking, Writing Good Essays and “Building Wings”

About the Writing Camp:



In this amount of time I would have written one paragraph. This week I wrote three essays.”

Fairfax County Public Schools in Northern Virginia just sent 54 students back to school with a renewed energy for writing and more confidence to do well on their Standards of Learning Test (SOL). “Thanks to a group of dedicated teachers and Meaghan Tracy, a camp director, these students are now better writers, more knowledgeable about their learning styles and more prepared to take the writing test,” shared Mr. Bill Reeder, Director of Special Education: Assessment, Assistive Technology and Support Services.

Seven years ago, Fairfax introduced the summer writing camp concept to enrich the writing experience for elementary school students receiving assistive technology support. The camp expanded to two camps last year

with camp Write-On! focusing on rising 5th graders and Rock-On! concentrating on rising 8th graders. Campers are identified by their teachers as needing more instruction time to develop cohesively-written essays, a required element on the SOL test.

Enhanced Writing Strategies

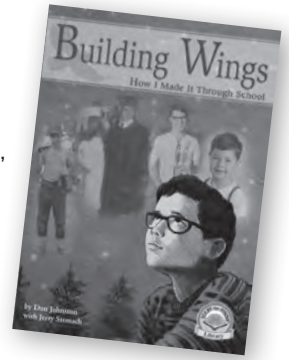
Jennifer Carr, Assistive Technology Specialist and camp counselor described the program: “During camp, students took charge of their own learning process. We introduced them to a variety of technologies and gave them a choice of software to begin their essay projects. Three of the five programs are the components of SOLO®; a universally designed technology suite that incorporates Co:Writer®, Write:OutLoud® and Draft:Builder® to help students organize, analyze and document their thoughts. One student shared that prior to camp he found the writing process very laborious. He discovered that his skills improved greatly when combining Inspiration and Write:OutLoud. This demonstrates that he was thinking in a different way about his own learning process. Our goal is to help more students identify their learning potentials.”

“This program is a powerful combination of tools. It can improve students’ reading comprehension, writing and critical thinking skills, while tackling coursework in Language Arts, Social Studies or Science.

One student said, I like the combination of using computers and software to write essays. SOLO helped me follow the writing process more smoothly and I wrote three essays in one week!”

Empowering Students with “Building Wings”

In addition to improving writing and thinking skills, Rock-On!, the middle school level camp, focused on promoting self-advocacy. Eighth graders were introduced to a book called “**Building Wings**”, written by Don Johnston, an educational software publisher who has incorporated multiple learning approaches into every product his company builds. **Building Wings** is an autobiography about Mr. Johnston’s early school years as a struggling reader. The book inspires both teachers and students with a message of encouragement to overcome learning struggles and to bring more awareness to students with diverse learning needs. The response to **Building Wings** was so positive that Fairfax Public Schools is incorporating it into its emerging student self-advocacy initiative which they will feature at the NSBA T&L (National School Boards Association Technology & Learning) Conference in November 2006.



Fairfax County has built a 15-year relationship with Don Johnston Incorporated utilizing several of their research-based literacy programs to serve a large population of students with disabilities. **Mr. Reeder said, “There are many students like Don, who are waiting for us to help them make lasting learning connections. SOLO is our number one tool for students who need more support in reading and writing. This program is a powerful combination of tools. It will improve students’ reading comprehension, writing and critical thinking skills, while tackling coursework in Language Arts, Social Studies or Science.** It keeps students actively learning and builds effective learning habits that will hopefully lead to lifetime achievement.”

Student Outcomes - Teacher Collaboration

Students attending the Fairfax writing camps go through a step-by-step writing process aligned to the Virginia State Standards. SOLO guides students with writing prompts to plan, organize, draft, edit, and revise essays in a structured framework. “Struggling students do not write enough to effectively communicate their thoughts, shared Ms. Carr. We give students a head start in identifying their learning needs and choosing the technologies that work best for them. SOLO uses simple and purposeful supports that help students self-assess their learning styles and better express their ideas. Students develop a writing portfolio to demonstrate their improved skills to their parents and teachers. **One student said, “I like the combination of using computers and software to write essays. SOLO helped me follow the writing process more smoothly and I wrote three essays in one week!”**

“Feedback from our teacher counselors was excellent!” Ms. Carr said. “In Fairfax, the AT staff works directly with general education and special education teachers,” said Mr. Reeder. “Many teachers are really good at integrating technologies for students with disabilities, and this is happening more and more in inclusive settings. Our camps provide students and teachers the chance to learn new skills inside and outside of the school setting.”



Student Testimony at State Capitol, Washington DC

A 6th grader who attended the writing camp last year recently testified at a press conference in Washington DC. She described her own positive writing outcomes using SOLO and the passion she felt about having more technology opportunities. This 6th grader was also a student counselor at Fairfax's Write-On! camp and helped teachers implement SOLO with other students.



Preliminary SOL Results

Mr. Reeder summarized by saying that preliminary SOL test outcomes for these students look positive. **“In today’s education climate, you have to look for products, like SOLO, that incorporate Universal Design for Learning and other multiple learning approaches to meet the needs of students across the board.”** We want to encourage student’s self-advocacy. Fairfax represents the general landscape of what America’s classrooms look like. In our district, we serve students from many backgrounds and cultures. Each year the number of students who speak English as a second language increases. SOLO is appropriate for lots of learners and will complement most reading and writing instructional strategies nicely. We look forward to including SOLO and **Building Wings** into our self-advocacy efforts during the school year and as part of next year’s summer camps.”

See live footage of the Writing Camp at www.donjohnston.com.

Need help creating your own Writing Camp?

Get all the materials and plans for you to create your own AT Camp!
Everything you need is in this book!



“Developing Your Assistive Technology Leadership: Best Practices for Success”

“In today’s education climate, you have to look for products, like SOLO, that incorporate Universal Design for Learning and other multiple learning approaches to meet the needs of students across the board in all classrooms.”

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.

