

Case Study: Assistive Technology

How To Connect Special Needs Students to a Blended Curriculum Through Supportive Tools and Resources



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QUOTES

“*The best gift we can give our students is to accept them. What I know to be true is that each student requires different learning approaches to be successful.*”

**Ms. Linda Bates,
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My Mantra for Students—Give the Gift of Acceptance!



Ms. Linda Bates

How many of us today have, or know, children that struggle in school? I have worked with students in a variety of learning settings from residential schools to regional schools for many years. What I know to be true is that each student requires different learning approaches to be successful.

This is a very important part of my teaching practice. I accept all students on their own terms. I know that it is not my responsibility to change them, but it is my responsibility to find new ways to connect with them and to help them have successful learning experiences. I watched my daughter struggle for years, but with the help of good teachers who took the time to understand her learning style and resources like assistive technologies, she succeeded in school and went on to graduate from college. This first-hand experience with my own child taught me that each child can succeed and has helped me stay focused on finding creative ways to help every child reach their optimal learning potential.

For the last several years I have integrated assistive technologies into the learning mix for my students. My willingness to do this was not there at first, but with a gentle push from my director, I kept forging ahead. Today, I can tell you that the assistive technologies I have identified to help my students experience learning success has made a huge difference in their lives. Making learning connections is not difficult; it just takes time and intuition. When I find the right technology or learning support, it's like opening the flood gate for my students. I see an immediate burst of energy from a student who quickly grasps the benefits of a technology tool and learning momentum begins to take hold.

What Resources and Supports 'Open the Door' for Students?

Audio and Computer Books / High Interest / Low Readability

When a new student comes to my class, my first priority is to gather information about that student's emotional and social needs. This helps me decide which resources and supports to try. As I start to figure out what resources work best, I make recommendations to their teachers. We must share out what works for these students to better equip them for classroom learning. About three years ago, I introduced Start-to-Finish® audio and computer books to students who required individualized reading instruction. These 5th graders came to my class not being able to read or reading poorly and feeling very discouraged. They had given up and their self-esteem was low.

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The reasons I selected Start-to-Finish books are:

- 1) Don Johnston and I share a vision that all kids can learn
- 2) Struggling readers need high interest topics to keep them engaged
- 3) Struggling readers want to read the same books their peers read
- 4) Struggling readers need added modality and text supports
- 5) Titles and topics complemented the required curriculum
- 6) Content matched Lexile reading levels

Now, when the general education history class is studying Egypt, these kids pull out the Start-to-Finish titles on Egypt and feel connected to their peers. When the general education language arts class reads *Call of the Wild*, we pull out our Start-to-Finish retold version of this classic and again watch our struggling readers become engaged readers.

Many times, I pair a good reader and a struggling reader together. This team approach encourages students to help other students as they work on the cloze passage activities and chapter quizzes. Using the Start-to-Finish books in parallel with the required general education curriculum has been an excellent way to boost students’ self-esteem and reading independence.

Gabe's Story



A few years ago, I had Gabe, who was then a fifth grade student, for direct reading instruction and support in the resource room. Gabe couldn’t read, couldn’t spell and was extremely discouraged. I noticed that Gabe learned by listening rather than reading. I sat him down at a computer and popped in a Start-to-Finish *Nick Ford Mystery* book. He loved it and started requesting more titles. I then asked him to give me a written book report using the Co:Writer word prediction tool and the Write:OutLoud talking word processing software. These tools support students’ writing efforts and help them to scaffold the writing process into

manageable activities. Gabe is now in 8th grade and has made considerable progress and growth in his reading and writing abilities. What a difference this assistive technology tool made for Gabe!

Julia's Story



Julia has multiple handicaps. She also loves horses! When I gave her the Start-to-Finish book on *Black Beauty* her eyes shone wide with excitement. She quickly became engaged in the reading process as the story was presented visually to her, and her comprehension of the story surprised us all.

Recently, Julia read Don Johnston’s book, *Building Wings*, and it became her favorite book! She asked her mother for her own copy for Christmas. These computer and audio books will unlock the interest

that is bottled up in our struggling readers. You just have to find the right connection like we did for Julia!

Nick's Story



Nick couldn't read and felt sure that he would never learn to read. I also gave him Don's autobiography, *Building Wings* and Nick began to understand that other people struggled like him. He told me that it was his favorite book ever and has completed a timeline book report that he has shared with his sixth grade class. He now says that if Don can be successful, he can too! How wonderful I feel as a teacher when these learning experiences are the key to a student's success!

Build Self-Esteem, Start a Reader's Theater Program

It's been inspiring to see the way students have opened up to me and other teachers through reading Don's book. I have always tried to find the one book for each individual student that would spark their interest in reading. Don Johnston's book, *Building Wings*, has become the one book that has touched so many different students, parents, and fellow educators. It has truly inspired many of my students to build their own learning wings. All reading teachers should download the free Reader's Theater materials on Don Johnston's web site to start a student advocacy program.

It is exciting to see the new and innovative Don Johnston materials evolve and to be able to incorporate them into everyday curriculum to facilitate student learning. I can't say enough about the Start-to-Finish Books, Core Content Materials, Incite™ Learning Series, and SOLO® Products, and how I have been able to:

- individualize instruction
- provide parallel learning activities
- integrate students through inclusion
- share resources with teachers, students and parents

Make Home Connections

These days, I can't order enough Start-to-Finish books to keep up with my students' wish list. We use them in literature clubs and in pull-out reading groups. Parents have asked to lend the books out to their kids for take-home practice. Each year I sit down with my students and look at Don's catalog to determine which books we want to order. I don't think Don can keep up with our wish list of new titles, but he is always interested in hearing what we want.



“Using these computer and audio books have given these students a ray of hope that they can read and learn!”

Students Think and Learn Differently...
*Enrich the Learning Experience for Every Student
with Brain Based Research, Multiple Learning Approaches
and Proven Instructional Models*

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