

Karen Howes: Unlocking potential with Dragon.

When Special Needs teacher Karen Howes, began working with Jackleen, one of the third graders at Bournedale Elementary School in Massachusetts, the student was struggling with a form of autism that hindered her ability to write, despite her exceptional reading comprehension skills. Jackleen needed a scribe, such as Howes, an aide, or even another student, to write what she said, but that person often had to ask her to repeat herself because she spoke so fast, resulting in frustration for both of them.

Howes continued to work with Jackleen in fourth grade, where the curriculum began to move more quickly and less time was available to complete writing assignments. She recalls: "Jackleen was unable to complete assignments without constant support and she was beginning to develop avoidance tactics because she was overwhelmed."

The girl's occupational therapist recommended Dragon NaturallySpeaking to Howes, who had Jackleen start using it. "Never did I realize how many doors Dragon would open so quickly for this bright little girl," Howes says. "Within a day after being introduced to Dragon, she wrote her first story. The software allowed her to say what she was thinking and correct it. It was fun for her, and it was great practice to begin clarifying her speech."

Soon Jackleen was completing reading response assignments by herself for the first time, and she often finished in the same amount of time as the other students. "Now I could assess her knowledge of capitalization and punctuation marks," Howes says. "Dragon is a program that keeps up with her brain!"

That experience culminated in Jackleen's work on a practice MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) writing prompt. Howes remembers: "I couldn't believe how quickly she caught on to creating the web graphic organizer, writing her ideas, turning them into an outline, and writing her paper. She was finished before some other students, and her writing was wonderful. I was so excited to see this adorable girl become confident and happy instead of overwhelmed and frustrated."

Reading, writing, and arithmetic

Jackleen did all her writing assignments in Microsoft Word, but Howes soon learned that Dragon works with just about any program. She had her student try it with

the school's Inspiration education software. "Since we were beginning the Geometry unit," Howes says, "Jackleen was able to select shapes and use Dragon to label them independently. This was the first time she completed a math assignment by herself. We cheered!"

Howes says the experience has prompted her to consider getting Dragon for herself and her husband, who works for the federal government, to make their jobs easier. "It's such a great way to use your time," she remarks.

Jackleen has moved on to middle school, but the little girl made a strong impact on Howes. She says: "The growth of that student over such a short period of time was absolutely the highlight of my career."

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