

Merilee Grage:
CREATING A NEW GENERATION OF READERS WITH DRAGON

Merilee Grage, who finds reading so important that she often dons a Cat in the Hat costume to read to schoolchildren, says: "Poor reading has a major impact on kids' lives, but there often isn't enough time or resources for teachers to meet those needs." Grage understands that impact all too well: she dropped out of college in 1979 because of undiagnosed dyslexia that is still not fully assessed.

Today, Grage is finishing her masters degree in Special Education with a 3.78 GPA, and she attributes her newfound success to perseverance, work ethic, and Dragon NaturallySpeaking. "I bought Dragon to help with my typing," she recalls, "and I ended up using it for everything: emails, papers, my online courses, and anything else that requires a keyboard. It's about creativity and having a flow of work that's not interrupted by worrying about spelling and grammar. Dragon is a major part of that."

Grage was then struck by the inspiration to apply that success to children who are struggling to read. Looking back on her own experiences and realizing the role technology can play today, Grage brought Dragon into the classroom, where she fulfilled student teaching practicums while working with many K-12 children who have reading disorders. She found that Dragon helped them improve their abilities.



One student was a cognitively delayed seventh grader who began reading the training story and was so thrilled to see the arrow move across the words that she kept going even when Grage walked away to help another pupil. "It was amazing to see her motivation," she says.

Another was a third grader who showed signs of dyslexia. Grage used a technique called echo reading, which involved her reading some text and having him repeat it into the computer. Using that strategy, Grage and the student worked their way through the Dragon profile training that includes the first three chapters of Roald Dahl's "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" and its sequel, "Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator."

"When we were done," Grage recalls, "he said, 'There has to be a third book.' His motivation was amazing. This was a student who didn't want to go to the resource room because he read at a first grade level and couldn't write complete sentences. Dragon and echo reading during profile creation forced him to work on word pronunciation, and his comprehension and fluency greatly increased."

Grage has also worked as a substitute teacher. Those assignments have given her the opportunity to introduce Dragon to more advanced students so they can improve their reading skills. "Kids of all skill levels can excel with Dragon," she says. She has even employed it while doing assessments. "The kids don't realize I'm doing an assessment because they're enjoying using Dragon," she explains.

"I'm telling teachers, administrators, anyone who will listen about Dragon and how I've seen students benefit from it," Grage concludes. "I haven't found anything that gets kids' attention like technology does. If I had Dragon at a younger age, I could have shown my potential sooner."