



# Technology: Worth Its Weight In Gold!

By Liz Petruzzi

“Mom! I need you to read this to me!” “Mom! How do you spell propose?” “Mom! I have to get this done; when can you help me?”

Homework at the Bem house used to take hours and required a joint effort between Tracy Bem and her twelve year old daughter, Nicholle. Although extremely bright, Nicholle, like other dyslexics, struggles with reading and

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spelling. It is estimated that 10-15% of the U.S. school population has dyslexia. Only 5% of those with dyslexia are ever properly diagnosed and given appropriate remediation. Statistics further show 85% of adults who are illiterate are also dyslexic. Dyslexia is a language disability, **not** a reading disability. This is why individuals with dyslexia do not benefit from methods traditionally used to teach those with learning disabilities.

Individuals with dyslexia think in pictures, making it difficult to understand letters, numbers, symbols, and written words. It is not so much *what* is seen on the written page but how the mind *interprets* what is seen.

Dyslexia affects other areas as well. These areas may include sequencing difficulties, losing time, trouble

prioritizing and completing tasks, poor memory, quick learner but quick forgetter, difficulty following oral directions and remembering what has been told.

When meeting Nicholle, it is immediately apparent what a bright person she is. She is creative and artistic, a wonderful friend and an animal lover who loves to host parties for the neighborhood. Yet in school Nicholle was dependent on having someone read her class work, textbook, assignments, tests and quizzes for her. When tests or quizzes were administered, Nicholle had to wait until the teacher was available to read for her. If the teacher wasn't available, she had to leave the class, go to the resource room and ask another teacher. If that teacher wasn't available, she would then have to leave a different class, later in the day, to complete her

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exam. Class work required a reading buddy to read work for her in the hall, so the rest of the students weren't disturbed. The reading buddy was a student volunteer who read for Nicholle. There were days, although few, that no one volunteered. Imagine being completely dependent on others to complete

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your required assignments and having to work out these details every day. In spite of her circumstances, Nicholle worked hard and managed to do well in school. But her story has changed. That is all in the past for Nicholle, thanks to new technology that allows her to be independent for the first time in her school career.

New software developed by TextHelp Systems, Inc. called *Read & Write Gold* is the software that allows Nicholle to read independently for the first time. As Nicholle herself says, "I get to be a normal kid." *Read & Write Gold* is basically a toolbar that sits on the desktop. It looks deceptively simple

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and takes up very little room on the computer's hard drive, considering its capabilities. Upon request, the software will read whatever is on the computer. This includes internet sites, Word documents, and any scanned item, i.e. textbooks or worksheets. Nicholle has the software installed on her laptop and uses a scanner to scan in whatever she needs to read. During class she's able to scan handouts, tests or quizzes, the software reads the material, and Nicholle types her answers, prints out her work and hands it in, just like all the other students. Nicholle never has to leave the room.

The software offers other features besides reading capabilities, like phonetic spell checker, invaluable for those with dyslexia. For example a phonetic spell checker will suggest "physics"

if "fisics" is typed. The software also has word prediction, a dictionary, calculator, speak text (reading feature), speech input and scanning capabilities, just to name a few. It even builds a list of Nicholle's most misspelled words and has a teaching component that allows parents to monitor areas of difficulty.

The software has been life changing for Nicholle. Mom Tracy, recalls a moment. "She went into her room to do her homework. I remember sitting there waiting for her to ask me for help. I'm folding laundry, waiting. The next thing I know, she's coming out of her room saying, I'm done! It was the first time she had ever been able to complete homework independently. I remember thinking, she's going to be okay."

Nicholle says, "It's a really good program that helps me be independent. It's teaching me to read and I'm learning more words than ever." When asked how her teachers like the software, she enthusiastically responded, "They love it! All my teachers are happier because I had to bug them or my friends to ask them to read for me. Now I can do everything myself!"

Tracy discovered the software through Palm Beach County's FDLRS Instructional Technology Specialist, Linda Laverty. Parents can purchase the software directly from TextHelp Systems at a special rate through the Palm Beach County Parent Purchase Program. Parents contact the company directly and simply mention the program to get the discounted rate. Bem bought the software and brought Nicholle to the training to learn how to use it. Within a few hours, Bem reports Nicholle was using it like a pro. Nicholle says, "it (*Read & Write Gold*) takes a little while to learn, but once you get it, it's easy." Tracy then approached

Nicholle's school, Wellington Christian School and submitted a request for Nicholle to use her laptop with the software in the classroom. The response was overwhelmingly supportive and positive. Tracy says, "The teachers

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***classroom.***

love it and now they don't have to stop what they're doing to help her." Nicholle says, "When everyone else is done, now I'm done at the same time. I don't have to go in the hall anymore. I get to be like everyone else."

Truly *Read & Write Gold* is revolutionary. The School District of Palm Beach County has the software on their main server and as soon as staff are trained, *Read & Write Gold* will be available in every Palm Beach County classroom.

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For more information about dyslexia, visit: *Dyslexia Awareness & Resource Center* at [www.dyslexiacenter.org](http://www.dyslexiacenter.org)

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