

February 24, 2004

Dear Parents:

Alex seems willing and eager to complete the tasks asked of him. He appears to be relaxed and motivated to read. He seems willing to make connections with the things we have read to things in his own life experiences.

Our first two sessions consisted of informal assessments: a reading reflections interview, a writing reflections interview, oral reading of graded reading passages, a listening comprehension task, a writing sample, The Names Test, a think-aloud task, a reader self-perception activity, and a directed reading-thinking activity (DR-TA).

During the reading reflections interview, I asked Alex a series of open-ended questions to explore his knowledge of the reading process, his perceptions of reading, and his interest in reading. Alex seems to enjoy reading about factual things, especially when it deals with any type of animal. At this point, however, he seems to place more emphasis on sounding out and knowing words. As we continued to discuss, however, he shared how he reads for understanding and to learn something new. Alex defined reading as, "taking the time to see what the story is all about." However, when asked why people read, he thought people only read in case of emergencies, "...like when the television sound goes out, you can still read what's going on in case of bad weather." Alex's responses seem to reflect that he may not be making the connection that others may read for enjoyment.

During the writing reflections interview, I asked Alex a series of open-ended questions to explore his knowledge of the writing process, perceptions of his ability to write, and his interest in writing. Alex seems to enjoy writing stories and decides to write by "...pretending I have a top hat and my mind is shaking up the ideas and I imagine my hand pulls out a topic. Then I start writing." In his perceptions of writing at this point, however, he seems to place more emphasis on writing as handwriting instead of writing to convey a message.

Alex's responses to the questions suggest that he understands that writing is when he "...writes words so others can read them." However, he again related to the emergency situations where people write, "...if they are in trouble and have no telephone." He does seem to understand that when a person first learns to write, he starts with writing ABC's and gradually moves to creating words. Interestingly, when asked what a writer needs to do to write well and what he does to edit a piece of writing, Alex referred back to handwriting and "...making sure you write real good." Alex does seem to make the connection between reading and writing and that when someone writes, someone else is going to read it.

I had Alex orally read graded passages levels 4 through 7 and respond to comprehension questions after each passage. Alex read at a reasonable rate and was fluent and accurate through level five. He used some expression in his reading. This, combined with the reasonable rate of reading and his ability to recognize most words on sight, suggests that Alex is well on his way to becoming a fluent oral reader.

When asked literal, factual questions about the reading, Alex showed a high understanding of the text. However, he seemed to struggle with the interpretive questions about the reading. This is an area we will work on during tutoring sessions through our goal of comprehension.

Experts describe the listening level as the highest level of text a child can comprehend when listening to another read aloud. It provides a rough estimate of the listener's potential for reading growth, and the results can be of great help in forming reasonable expectations for growth in reading. I read graded passages levels 6 and 7 and asked Alex a series of comprehension questions after each passage. Alex demonstrated some difficulty attending to the message in these passages, so I will attend to his careful listening while I read to him during portions of our sessions.

Alex was given ten minutes to write about a picture of a group of

people riding on a roller coaster. We discussed what might be happening in the picture and what Alex saw in the picture before he began writing. He was able to brainstorm ideas readily, but when it came to writing about these ideas, he needed some prompting. His ideas were written in a rather logical sequence of four sentences and included some detail. He said what was taking place in the picture and then picked a couple of people in the picture to write a sentence about. This is another area I will address during our tutoring sessions through a goal of enhanced writing.

As a means of further assessing Alex's comprehension strategies, I utilized a "think aloud" procedure. I asked Alex to read a short passage, one sentence at a time, and describe what he was thinking about as he read. His responses were analyzed to determine the kinds of strategies he was using to obtain meaning. Alex demonstrated that he was quite capable of interacting with the material being read. He was able to construct meaning from an initial sentence and monitor his comprehension and theories as new information was added. Alex also showed he was able to confirm and/or revise his predictions made when new information was presented to him.

As an additional way of assessing Alex's comprehension skills, I read the book, The Wretched Stone by Chris Van Allsburg to him. I paused periodically during the reading to ask him to make predictions about what the story would be about and what would happen in the story. Alex's responses suggest that he is able to clearly state and justify his predictions. The predictions seem to be based not only on prior knowledge but also with an understanding of what is taking place in the story. He is able to monitor any predictions made and revise them when he deems necessary.

An important principle for helping students increase their reading proficiency is to have them engage in a great deal of reading. Attitude toward reading has a high relationship with the amount of a child's voluntary reading. In order to assess Alex's attitude toward reading and his perception of himself as a reader, I asked him to respond to a

series of statements about reading and reading-related tasks. Alex's responses suggest that he had a very positive self-perception as a reader. In questions referring to his perception of his present reading performance in comparison to his past performance, he feels he has improved as a reader. In questions dealing with how he perceives his reading performance in comparison to his classmates, Alex's answered that he feels he is just as good, if not better than a lot of his classmates as a reader. In responses to questions referring to the feedback he receives from teachers, classmates and family members, he feels that those around him have a positive perception of his reading.

In order to verify Alex's decoding skills, I administered the The Names Test, a list of 70 first and last names which are fully decodable and which represent a sampling of the most common English spelling patterns. As Alex read from the list, I recorded his performance. He correctly read 56 of the 70 names. The names that he mispronounced suggest that Alex was somewhat unsure when decoding the short vowel and controlled vowel sounds. The short *e* and *a* are the short vowels missed consistently and the controlled vowels *er*, *ar*, *ew*, and *or* were the controlled vowels missed in his reading of the names. Otherwise, his decoding ability is strong.

Assessment results suggest that Alex has the word recognition skills and the comprehension skills to succeed in reading materials designed for use in grades 3 to 5. Alex appears to have a positive attitude toward reading and reading-related tasks.

During the tutoring sessions we will concentrate on extending and refining his comprehension skills and enhancing his writing skills. We will also continue to monitor his word identification skills when he encounters new words. We are still exploring his interests in order to focus on a theme around which I will choose fiction and nonfiction pieces. I will send home periodic notes keeping you informed of our activities.

Sincerely,  
Carrie D.