

Christine Ammirati  
Reading/Language Arts Curriculum and Instruction  
Observation Survey Case Study  
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The Observation Survey was administered to Jeremy, a Matoaka second grader, on October 1 at 9:30 am.

**Interest / Attitude Survey:**

Jeremy was wearing a Williamsburg youth football league jersey and our conversation began with a discussion of his interest in sports. While Jeremy enjoys soccer and baseball, he prefers football because in this sport he plays quarterback and is “the leader” of the team. Jeremy lives with his parents and two older brothers and enjoys watching TV and playing videogames when he is not competing in sports. He says that he does not read at home “except for homework” and was not able or willing to name his favorite book. He says that his parents check his homework folder before he brings it back to school but that he does his homework by himself and with the occasional assistance of his brothers. His teachers read to him at school and he likes to listen to stories in the library corner where his teacher sits in “the big red chair.” Besides recess and lunch, Jeremy likes PE class most but also has fun at Art and Music. When pressed a bit about what part of his classroom day he most prefers, Jeremy said he likes to use the computer in the classroom.

**Text Reading:**

Jeremy labored after the first level of the DRA texts. He read “What is Red?” with relative ease and then in “Bath Time” began a pattern of hesitant reading with multiple self-corrections. He was attending carefully to the visual cues of the reading passages, particularly the initial consonants of the words and when making errors generally chose incorrect words that sounded correct and had appropriate meanings. With his slow speed and focused attention on accurate work, Jeremy caught these miscues and self-corrected “the” for “a”, “can” for “could”, and “Grandma” for “Mom”. He also self-corrected errors in meaning and syntax such as “one” for “on”, and “no” for “on.” However, when Jeremy reached level 12, “Allie’s Wish,” his focus flagged and his pace accelerated. As a result, his errors increased dramatically and his self-corrections almost entirely ceased. In this 134-word text, he made 20 errors for a 1: 6.7 error rate, an accuracy rate of 85%, and a self-correction rate of 1:3.8. His errors on this text included meaning, syntax, and visual miscues. By the end of this passage, his stamina and demeanor were deflated and I quickly redirected him to the water fountain for a breather, a stroll, and a moment of regrouping before we continued with the assessment.

**Letter Identification:**

Jeremy recognized 52 of 54 items (Stanine Group 3 for a seven year old). He identified these letters by name rather than by sound or naming a word that began with the letter. Jeremy confused two letters, misidentifying “d” for “b” and “p” for “q,” both of which are visually similar to one another. In reading through this list, Jeremy spoke confidently and quickly. His only hesitations were on the two letters that he ultimately misidentified.

### **Word Test:**

Jeremy was less confident as he read through List A of the Word Reading Test. Nonetheless, he performed well, scoring 12/15 thus placing him in Stanine Group 3. After first saying “child” and beginning to move on, he self-corrected “children”. His three errors were “car” for “are”, “shut” for “shouted”, and “way” for “away.” In each of these errors, Jeremy identified part of the word, taking a visual cue from the initial consonant. Lack of attention to details of the words may have contributed to the misidentifications. In particular, the last error may have been lack of focus or attentiveness with Jeremy neglecting to read and recognize the initial letter in “away”.

### **Concepts About Print:**

Jeremy was enthusiastic about “No Shoes.” He joked that after all the reading he had done to begin our session, it was now my turn to read. He was comfortable, relaxed, and confident about his responses through page 11. On this page, he was particularly amused to recognize the details of the altered line order but did not see the mechanics of what had occurred. He was aware that the period was in the middle of the printed section, at the end of line #1 rather than at the end of line #2 but did not track the print to realize that I had begun reading on line #2. He was attentive enough to the strangeness of the text that I wonder if he might have picked up on the specific error if the sentence had begun with a word other than “I” which is capitalized wherever it appears in a sentence. Given that this unusual sentence begins with an “I”, its incorrect order is disguised to the casual observer. After this page, Jeremy had difficulty determining what was specifically incorrect about the text. He certainly grasped that errors were present but focused on the periods being in the wrong place rather than identifying changes in word order or letter order. Jeremy scored 18 of 24 (Stanine Group 4) in the CAP test.

### **Written Vocabulary:**

Jeremy wrote no words unprompted in the Written Vocabulary assessment. He did not appear fatigued, distracted, or disinterested but simply sat and looked at the paper and twirled his pencil. After eliciting some writing by prompting him with family names, I read the “writing prompt” words and his focus began to flag markedly. At that point, I refocused on football words and he wrote the name of his favorite NFL team. Of his 19 total words, 12 were written correctly (Stanine Group 2).

### **Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words:**

Jeremy balked when presented with the recording sheet for this assessment; we paused and took another brief walk to the water fountain and to find the “fresh” paper he requested before resettling in our seats for this test. Jeremy scored 34 of 37 (Stanine Group 5). He correctly wrote all consonants. His mistakes were confusions on short vowels and forgetting the silent “e” in “here” (an error that does not figure into the score).

### **Overall Analysis:**

Looking across the assessments, Jeremy is generally performing below the stanine group level expected of a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader. Given that he has been identified as a struggling reader, his performance is not unexpected. His actual ability might be somewhat underrepresented due to his flagging attention towards the end of the Observational Survey. Jeremy’s score might be particularly inaccurate in the Writing Vocabulary section where he demonstrated great reluctance

and inattention in selecting words to write. When the examiner suggested words, he demonstrated limited success on simple pronouns. Despite accurate spelling of more complex words, his letter formation difficulties resulted in no credit for them in the assessment. In addition, his two miscues in the Letter Identification assessment were easily reversed letters: “d” for “b” and “p” for “q”. In both the Writing Vocabulary and Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words sections, Jeremy exhibited good command of initial and final consonants as well as short vowels. He did not show ability in long vowels.

Jeremy achieved his highest stanine group score in the last assessment of the Observation Survey. In the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words section, Jeremy regained the focus that had eluded him in the previous Writing Vocabulary section and earned 34 of 37 possible points. We had taken a brief walk prior to this section and this refreshing pause may have contributed to his improved performance. He might also perform better when specific teacher expectations are made (such as in a dictation) rather than when open-ended tasks are assigned (such as write all of the words you know). Perhaps in the latter task, with a more defined assignment such as write a short paragraph on your family or your favorite sports team, Jeremy would have been able to produce more written words without prompting by the examiner.

Jeremy showed strong understanding of punctuation and concepts of print. Until the last DRA level 12 text, he showed mixed phrasing in his reading and did not finger point. He read with limited inflection in his voice and carefully monitored his reading for correct syntax and reasonable meaning. In fact, until the last DRA text, he methodically self-corrected and repeated words when he was unsure of the text. Jeremy was particularly challenged by proper nouns and articles.

#### **Implications of the results for classroom instruction:**

Jeremy found the Level 8 DRA text to be easy and the Level 12 text (with its accuracy rate of only 85 percent) to be certainly frustrational. This rate does not account for the multiple and varied errors Jeremy made in reading proper nouns so, in fact, it might under represent his actual difficulty with this text level. While the results of his Level 10 text showed only 2 errors, this level is an appropriate instructional level for Jeremy. Fountas and Pinnell’s Guided Reading Level “F” texts would provide sufficient support as well as challenge for Jeremy. Ideally, texts about sports and pets could be found at this level to capitalize on Jeremy’s inherent interests in these two areas. The level “F” text would provide a blend of oral and literary language structures and illustrations for moderate support. Jeremy could rely on a limited number of sentence patterns to build his word recognition, fluency, and comprehension. Instruction should build upon Jeremy’s demonstrated motivation and ability in word attack strategies and should integrate writing with reading.

Sports is an effective vehicle to build Jeremy’s interest in both reading and writing. Sports magazines for young children (e.g., SI for Kids), sports sections from newspapers, and simple nonfiction books profiling athletes (many titles published by Scholastic) should be made available for Jeremy. In addition, journaling and book making about his favorite teams would be an effective strategy to develop Jeremy’s vocabulary, spelling, and writing. A major benefit in selecting sports as a topic of study for a young fan is that updates occur regularly (weekly during the football season and even daily during baseball season). Sports also provides an interdisciplinary context and is highly beneficial in terms of developing geographic and math skills. The expected writing structure of a sports update is predictable and non-threatening for timid writers and focuses on itemizing the team, opponent, location, result, and score. As

students gain confidence, content can naturally expand to include details about player performance and standings. A word bank for teams can be found in the sports standings of any newspaper or website and can be transferred to a writing journal and individualized according to a specific student's interests. Given Jeremy's strong enthusiasm for the Dallas Cowboys, I would designate him to be a sports reporter focusing on the Cowboys and structure a part of my every session's instruction on this favorite team.

**Reflection:**

The Observation Survey was highly comprehensive in addressing a variety of skills that contribute to the reading process. I appreciate how it builds upon skills as it proceeds. However, it lacked an assessment of comprehension that would have been useful in providing a deeper understanding of the student's ability to process the information gleaned from the text. I would be interested in incorporating some level of comprehension review similar to the RIC's oral recall section.

The Concepts About Print assessment was particularly illustrative. It highlights many areas of text knowledge that are not associated with word knowledge. In order to read a text, of course a student must know how to hold the book, where sentences begin and end, how to track, and where illustrations are displayed. It brings the assessment beyond the text to illustrate how the student interacts with the book as an object and with text conventions as a communication tool. Administering this test to a second grader, I had expected that he would have demonstrated great command of all aspects of punctuation. I learned that my assumptions were misguided. I also saw that word reversals were not always obvious and that this lack of attention to detail could impact reading ability as well as comprehension.

The Observation Survey as a whole was quite protracted, lasting 45 minutes in Jeremy's case. In retrospect, I wish that I had scheduled it over two days rather than one session in order to keep the attention and focus of the student at its optimal level. Failing a lengthened administration period, I wish that I had built in some more breaks to move, stretch, and revive. Jeremy's two brief trips to the water fountain after the DRA texts and between the Written Vocabulary and Hearing and Recording sections refreshed him and positively impacted his score on the latter assessment. He needed to move, especially after reading so many DRA texts with such concentration.

The Observation Survey created a large data base upon which I could reflect and consider how to link particular concerns and how to approach instruction. It provided rich data points from a single easy-to-administer assessment.