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BACKGROUND

As his mother, Judith says, "We knew Allen had special learning problems very early. As a result, we started him in kindergarten at the Gateway School in New York City. Gateway is a school for children with average or above intelligence and no behavior problems, but who have difficulty learning. It is a wonderful school, with totally dedicated teachers. We trusted them completely. Part of their philosophy was that they would be in charge of their students' learning. They encouraged us to send him to let him play after school and in the summer. They did not advocate tutors or extra programs."

Unfortunately, according to his mother, Allen did not make progress. "Everything was difficult and painful for him. He couldn't decode words; he read at an agonizingly slow speed. He couldn't write or do math. All this, and yet we knew he was bright."

THE DECISION

"At the end of second grade, his teachers suggested a tutor for the summer. This was an unusual step for them. Of course, I was anxious. We debated over what to do. He worked so hard all year, and we wanted him to go to day camp, but we saw that he wasn't learning. I don't even remember how we stumbled on Lexia's Touch and Learn (now **Lexia Phonics Based Reading**) software. We debated about the decision. First, there was the expense. We would have to buy the program which was manageable, but also, we didn't have a computer. It was a major decision for us," says Judith, "but we did it!"

WORKING HARD

Allen loved the program. He enjoyed working independently on a computer, and began to feel successful. According to his mother, he wanted to spend every free minute after camp with the software. Still, she remained worried. "I saw him playing lots of games on the computer. He especially loved the basketball game (an exercise to develop awareness of long vowel sounds and to practice applying a silent-e to appropriate words). In fact, he still loves basketball," she laughs. "But we didn't know if he was learning."

RESULTS

In September, Allen went back to Gateway. His teachers were astounded and delighted by the progress he made over the summer months. They said he was like a different child. By the end of the fourth grade, he was testing in the 99th percentile in reading. He continued at Gateway through the fifth grade, but the real breakthrough came because of that summer he spent with the Lexia program. Previously, nothing came automatically for him. Allen needed the drills and additional practice. He also liked being able to monitor his own progress with the software. That's what did it."

Allen was also successful at the local high school he attended. He plans to go to college. His mother knows that this is a reasonable goal for him. She claims, "The truth is he wouldn't have succeeded without the Lexia Systems software. We are so grateful. One of his younger siblings, though mainstreamed, is having some difficulties with reading. We have bought the software for her. Now it comes on a CD and is much less expensive."

When asked about that period in his life, Allen says that he can't even remember the time when he couldn't read.

By Elaine Dohan