Activating Teaching: Using Running Records to Inform Teaching Decisions

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I have always admired Clay's beliefs in teachers and the power of their teaching decisions to make an impact on a young child's learning and achievement. I have been fortunate to be immersed in Reading Recovery teaching and learning since the pilot study in the United States in 1984 when I first trained as a teacher leader for the Columbus City School District. It was obvious from the beginning of my training that I was not learning to deliver a "how-to-do-it program."

Since I began teaching teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers in Reading Recovery as a trainer at The Ohio State University, I have been challenged to keep learning and to help others build clearer understandings of Clay's theory of *literacy processing*. Understanding literacy processing and teaching young, beginning readers who are having great difficulties learning to read and write puts demands on teachers that some have never experienced before. In her books for teaching Reading Recovery, Clay provides a basic framework for the 30-minute daily lesson and a range of procedures to select from and use when teaching a child. This has led some to believe that the lessons are rigid and prescriptive. This would be wrong.

Clay states: "This book does not construct a beginning-to-end sequence of teaching. Early intervention teachers move flexibly around these procedures as they observe

children and plan instruction opportunities" (2005, p. 2). She calls for teachers to be "tentative, flexible, and immediately responsive to the best opportunity for a particular learner to have at this moment" (2005, p. 2). Reading Recovery teaching decisions are not based on rules but on close observation of each child, an understanding of literacy processing, and a rationale for what will help this child make rapid gains in learning to read and write.

In the teacher/child interactions, both are to be actively engaged and actively thinking. All who teach in Reading Recovery or Literacy Lessons work very hard to design individual lessons for struggling readers and writers. We agree with Ronald Gallimore's view of teaching as *continuous improvement* (Gallimore & Ermeling, 2012). The framework of the lesson becomes very easy for us but the teaching decisions within the framework continue to be a challenge. This article will explore findings based on an extensive, systematic analysis of running records and present recommendations for teachers to use to inform their teaching decisions, to discuss and challenge their thinking, and to work for continuous improvement of their teaching interactions.

The Purpose of Running Records

Marie Clay made a lasting contribution to early literacy teaching by

developing the running record — an easy to use, standard coding system for capturing what young readers say and do while reading texts. Running records are often taken to assess the text difficulty for the child and may be taken at different time intervals to capture the child's progress. These attributes of the running record system have proven helpful for many classroom teachers of young children as well as early intervention teachers; however, these checks on levels of reading and progress in reading are not the primary purpose of running records. Clay states: "Records are taken to guide teaching … what teachers record can challenge them to think with greater clarity about the progress of beginning readers … [running records] provide evidence of problem solving and how the child is processing the information" (2013, p. 52). The analysis of running records should have a major impact on the teaching decisions the teacher makes while responding to and helping extend the beginning reader's literacy learning.

Summary of Research Study

In 2009–2010, I was part of a research study at The Ohio State University with Lea McGee entitled *Development of Children's Problem-Solving Activities at Point of Difficulty* (2011). As part of each Reading Recovery lesson, a running record is completed by the teacher. Researchers at Ohio State asked experienced

Reading Recovery teachers to volunteer to record their running records in a spiral bound booklet for one or more students at text levels 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, and 18. For each level, we designated three or four titles to choose from that most teachers would have in their collection of books. Booklets were collected at the end of the child's series of lessons (usually 12 to 20 weeks). The Reading Recovery teachers who participated were not required to do any special analysis or take any actions that were not already part of their regular teaching of children in Reading Recovery lessons.

After collecting the running records we coded and analyzed every attempt made by the students. We developed a coding system that captured the sequence and quality of attempts each child took while trying to solve a word. A total of 241 running records were compiled for 56 different students reading the same texts for a minimum of three different levels. After massive amounts of coding and analyzing these running records, patterns of responses emerged which set me to wondering if a deeper, but still practical, analysis for determining patterns of responding could be used by teachers to help inform their teaching decisions. This analysis would be in addition to the coding and analysis recommended by Clay and is in no way intended to change Clay's recommended use of running records. I call this additional analysis a *quality of processing check*.

Analysis of the Quality of Processing

The quality of processing check—or Q√ for short—is a 4-step process that increases in complexity at each level. The goal is to have a practi-

cal way teachers can easily check and reflect on how the child is attempting to problem solve words as he reads. A running record for William reading *Father Bear Goes Fishing* (Level 5) is offered as an example for the discussion of Q√ (Figure 1a on page 7 and Figure 1b on page 8). William is a pseudonym and this running record was not part of the original study.

Following are the basic four areas to analyze for a quality of processing check. I will explain each step of the process then present a follow-up research study on the analysis of Tolds later in this article.

1. Tolds

2. High-Frequency Words

3. Self-Monitoring

4. Summary of Problem-Solving Actions

Count and analyze Tolds

Using William's running record as an example, let's begin with the first step. Count the number of Tolds given during the running record. It is easy to count that William received three Tolds, all on the first page of the text he read. For some records there will be no Tolds and the first analysis would be over, but for others there will be some Tolds and there may even be a pattern that indicates an excessive amount of Tolds.

The pattern of Tolds given by a teacher over time emerged as I did the original analysis of running records. I noted that some teachers tended to give many more Tolds than others. I think it is important for the teacher to look at each Told and reflect on why the decision was made to give the child the Told. For many years, I have believed that looking

closely at Tolds can give teachers insights into what might be important to teach. Tolds are an important area that will be discussed in more detail later in this article.

Check on high-frequency words

Now let's shift to the second level of analysis for our Q√. For this analysis, count up every high-frequency word that was recorded as an error, or as a self-correction, or that resulted in a Told. For William's running record I count a total of eight, with four subcategories for analysis (Table 1 on page 9). The four sub categories are (a) No attempt or some attempt followed by a Told; (b) an incorrect attempt with a self-correction; (c) an incorrect attempt that is not noticed but has evidence of using MSV; and (d) an incorrect attempt with no or very little evidence of using visual information but may or may not fit meaning and/or structure.

Although there might be debate on the issue of what constitutes a high-frequency word at Level 5, there is no question that in Clay's theory of literacy processing the speeded, automatic recognition of often-repeated words is critical for fluency and ease of understanding, or comprehending, when reading continuous text. Two patterns in this category are revealed from William's responses: (a) the high number of times high-frequency words had to be attended to with problem solving, and (b) the substitution of am/come without noticing that *am* did not look right. This is also a concern for lack of self-monitoring.

I propose that William needs more intensive practice on getting easy level, high-frequency words under control. This needs to happen within and outside his 30-minute lesson

Figure 1a. William's Running Record of *Father Bear Goes Fishing*

Father Bear went fishing.
He went down to the river.

"Where are the fish?"
said Father Bear.
"Where are the fish?"

Father Bear looked up.
"Here come the fish,"
he said.

"Fish!" shouted Father Bear.

"Fish, fish, fish!"

"Where is Father Bear?"
said Mother Bear.
"Where is Father Bear?"
said Baby Bear.

time. During the lesson, this can be accomplished by brief practice with quickly writing high frequency words generated in his stories. Additionally, specific attention to the procedures described in Clay (2005, p. 40–41) should be applied. Even though William may have a meager knowledge of words he needs to continue building speeded recognition of high frequency words. This would

be done quickly after reading any book where issues with high-frequency words were noted. Outside of his lesson, collaboration with William's classroom teacher on how he is progressing in building fluent reading and writing vocabularies is another important step. How are spelling and writing taught in the classroom? I would encourage William's Reading Recovery teacher to get samples

of spelling tests and independent writing samples from his classroom teacher to analyze together. Perhaps extra practice in a small group or at home could also be part of the plan. The goal is more automaticity in reading and writing high-frequency words in order to free up his attention for problem-solving actions and comprehension during reading.

Figure 1b.   William's Running Record of *Father Bear Goes Fishing*

Mother Bear and Baby Bear
went to look
for Father Bear.

"Here I come,"
said Father Bear.
"I am home."
"Look at the fish!"
said Baby Bear.

"A fish for Father Bear,
and a fish for Mother Bear,
and a fish for me,"
said Baby Bear.

Check for evidence of self-monitoring
The last two steps of checking on the quality of processing are examples of more-complex problem-solving actions that young readers need to learn how to do. The third step is to check for evidence of self-monitoring by looking for both positive and negative examples of monitoring. In William's running record, each time he self-corrects an error is strong

evidence that he not only self-monitored, noticed something wrong, but also took the action to correct the error. Page 8 is an excellent example of self-monitoring combined with rereading and self-correcting. The multiple attempts for *went* and *down* on page 3 are also good evidence of William checking and not being satisfied with his own attempts. On page 3 he was likely hesitating which

is an indicator of self-monitoring, but he received support in the form of a Told for *river* from the teacher.

Multiple attempts and rereading are usually a sign of self-monitoring but, unfortunately, this is not always true. Some children are taught to reread but they only do it because the teacher seems to like it — not as a part of active monitoring and problem solving.

Now examine the times William did not notice his errors. This might be considered negative evidence or lack of self-monitoring. Two of his substitutions are revealing about his lack of self-monitoring. On page 15, William says *here* for *home* and on page 13 and 16 he says *Momma* for *Mother* two different times. His processing pattern seems to be, "If it fits meaning and structure and the first letter of the word, that's good enough for me!" At some point earlier in his progression of learning to read this might have been a positive beginning step in the right direction for quality processing, but William is now at Level 5 and seems to control the basics of learning to use the print to read the author's message, so William's expectations for monitoring need to be extended.

His lack of self-monitoring is readily apparent in the substitution of *am* for *come* that was noted in the discussion of high-frequency word errors. It is this lack of self-monitoring—when the two words do not look similar—that McGee and Fried (2011) found to be the most problematic for student progress. We coded a special category for this type of error: GVD NM, gross visual discrepancy not monitored. This is a red flag warning the teacher to take action to prompt the child to notice errors and be aware that problem-solving action is needed. Notice I did not say the student must self-correct every error; this is not a concern for 100% accuracy. However, not noticing the error when it does not look like the word in the text is a prime example of where the teacher may need to direct the child's attention after the running record by saying, "Try this page/part again, something didn't look right."

Table 1. Subcategories for Williams's Running Record Analysis of High-Frequency Words

	Pages	High-Frequency Word		Result
1	3	*went*		6 student actions then a Told
2	7, 16	*and/Here* *a/and*	*said/he* *Baby/me*	All substitutions self-corrected at the word level
3	7, 15	*comes/come* *here/home*		Both substitutions fit the meaning, structure, and some visual information of the text (MSV integrated)
4	15	*am/come*		Substitution fits the meaning and the structure of the text but not the visual information

The quality of William's self-monitoring is on the positive side for his substitution *comes/come* on page 7. Now all sources of information and knowledge are integrated. This type of error may not trigger self-monitoring for even competent readers nor should it be an immediate teaching point for William as there are other errors that indicate more important processing problems.

Summarize problem-solving actions
The last category in the analysis of the quality of the child's processing is a call to summarize the child's problem-solving actions. Before reading my summary of his processing below, you may want to look at William's running record again and write what you think describes his problem-solving actions. This is the type of statement that would be written in the comments column on a lesson record. These summaries should help you focus on what you need to teach William how to do.

Here is what I wrote:

> William usually self-monitors, self-corrects, or has multiple attempts. He left one GVD not monitored and some of his

attempts are limited. He has some issues with high-frequency words as he often works to solve them or makes a self-correction after the first attempt.

He had three Tolds. For two of the Tolds he took limited actions. He tried little words that had some of the same letters and he reread. After two of the Tolds William did not reread to fit the word back into the story. For one Told he made no attempt and took no actions before or after the Told.

The running record for William is in the instructional level range at 93% accuracy and contains many self-corrections, a ratio of 1:2. The numbers are good but can be a false positive if the quality of his processing is not analyzed. After the running record, the teacher has to make decisions on the run as to what to do and say. This should be a powerful teaching time for the student; scores are only one indication of progress. Clay (2013, p 170) points out that "[To] record all error behaviour in full, as against merely tallying its occurrence, takes much more practice (but provides more evidence of the child's

processing strengths).” We also know not to go back to every error and attend to everything the child did or didn't do; that could be overwhelming. Teachers must be selective, make decisions on the run, and attend to the few teaching points after the running record that will have the biggest payoff for the child's learning. And, of course, this would be after the teacher and the child had the opportunity to react personally to the story. The story reaction might be spontaneous from the child or based on a probe question from the teacher. For example:

> What did you already know about bears eating fish? or
>
> Which fish do you think Baby Bear is going to eat? or
>
> Why did you pick that one for Baby Bear?

This brief interaction is valued both for the oral language opportunities and for the importance of understanding (comprehending) the story as the essence for all reading.

The Challenge of Teaching Decisions

Now it is decision time. What teaching points are important for William? This might be a time to stop and write down your decisions about what to teach or to discuss possible teaching decisions with a colleague. I would choose to go back to have the child read page 15 and page 3 again so I might scaffold some different responses or focus his attention on some needed learning. You might choose differently, but for now see if you can come up with a rationale for the choices I made as well as the rationale for things you would choose to draw to William's atten-

tion. (See the rationale for my teaching decisions on page 14.)

Analysis of Follow-up Study on Tolds

The 2009–2010 research study with McGee became the basis for a follow-up study that I completed in the summer of 2012. I used the same set of 241 running records for 56 students. The number of teachers varied slightly based on what level of text was being analyzed. The text levels I analyzed were 3, 5, 7, 9, and 12. The number of teachers ranged from 14 to 21. All records collected were for students who entered Reading Recovery in the fall of 2009.

The analysis I wanted to complete was an in-depth analysis of Tolds. I believe Tolds represent a teacher decision and a teacher action not only during the running record, but also anytime the child is reading. Analyzing a series of running records for one teacher and a specific student may also provide a glimpse into what is most likely happening in the teacher/student interaction during the first reading of a new book. Analyzing a set of running records for one teacher across multiple students reading around the same level may also reveal teaching patterns, teaching decisions, and in some cases patterns of Tolds.

The range of incidences (lowest and highest) of Tolds based on the analysis of 241 running records follows:

Teacher A: 12 running records, 4 Tolds

Teacher Z: 15 running records, 98 Tolds

I propose that this is further evidence that Tolds represent teacher decisions and teacher actions. Another analysis of the incidences of Tolds which was

revealing was the number of Tolds for the students who were successful in reaching average reading levels and the students who had a full series of lessons, made progress, but did not reach the average for successful reading in their classrooms (Table 2).

This analysis suggests that the more Tolds a student gets or needs over time and text levels, the less likely that student is to reach average or above in reading achievement. The least amount of Tolds, the more likely the student is to have a robust, problem-solving system in use while reading.

Having the least amount of Tolds may also be a factor of highly effective teaching indicating the child has been taught to actively problem solve, not just sit and wait for support. This finding reinforces the research of Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, and Rodriguez (2002) on the analysis of teaching in classroom settings:

> A consistent finding of the HML [High, Middle, and Low groups of student achievers in literacy learning] analysis was that the more a teacher was coded as telling children information, the less the children grew in reading achievement … less-accomplished teachers engaged in much more telling than highly accomplished teachers. (p. 278)

Clay sets a standard on page 60 in *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (2013) for giving a Told during the assessment task running record:

> If the child baulks, unable to proceed
>
> a) because he is aware he has made an error and cannot correct it, or

b) because he cannot attempt the next word, he is Told the word (written as T). This preserves the storyline and starts the reader off again. (Wait no more than about three seconds.)

This suggestion of about 3 seconds is most likely Clay's standard for a neutral stance and a standard operating procedure during the assessment measure. But even this guidance for giving a Told is modified by the word *about*. It is important to note that *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2013) is written for a much wider audience than Reading Recovery educators. On page 338 in *Becoming Literate*, Clay (1991) states: "Self-correction is reduced if the teacher does not allow time for self-correction and intervenes immediately at error." I would add that if the teacher does not allow time for problem solving and supports the child too soon by giving a Told, the number of Tolds could increase dramatically and not allow the child to develop or even execute his problem-solving actions. It is not my position that Tolds are evil or not allowed. My position is that Tolds are important and the amount of time to wait before giving a Told should be based on evidence that the child is still working and the judgment of the teacher.

Taylor et al. (2002) stresses these points:

This does not mean that teachers should never tell students information …. However, excessive amounts of "telling," especially in situations where coaching [prompting] students to come up with their own responses is possible, may rob children of the opportunity to take responsibility for their own skills and strategies. (p. 278)

The analysis I completed also shows that Tolds vary in value from low to high. Clay (1991, p. 338) has some excellent insights into why some children may have less self-correction in their reading. I have taken Clay's information and interpreted it to apply to why some children might receive an increased number of Tolds. As with less self-correction, children with more Tolds may (a) have a limited language system, (b) have trouble attending to the visual information in the print, or (c) take a passive approach about learning and are content to wait for teacher help.

This list is not to make excuses or give a sanction to allow more Tolds for some children. Listing the reasons some students may receive more Tolds is to highlight what should be addressed in our teaching. Remember, Tolds give you insights into what you should be teaching.

A Deeper Analysis of Tolds

The first major revelation for me in analyzing 478 Tolds was the fact that all Tolds are not the same. I developed three different subcategories for classifying Tolds: No Appeal, After an Appeal, and Followed by Student Rereading (Table 3). Then I did a deeper analysis of classifying patterns of student and teacher actions surrounding each Told.

The examples in the following pattern analysis chart (Table 4) were from students reading one or two Level 7 books entitled *Pat's New Puppy* or *Jolly Roger and the Treasure*. By studying the examples below you can gain an understanding of the variety of patterns of responses or lack of any action or attempts that were contained within the running records of students' reading at Level 7.

Some patterns are more productive than others; however, all should give some insights into the processing or lack of processing that may be going on. It would be important to stop reading for a bit and take the time to think about what the examples mean to you as far as active processing and problem solving and, perhaps, even danger zones for progress.

Table 2.   Incidence of Tolds

Category	Number of Students	Number of Tolds	Average Number of Tolds
Successful at Average and Above	42	303	7.2
Unsuccessful	14	175	12.5

Table 3.   Subcategories of Tolds (N = 478)

No Appeal	395	82%
After an Appeal	46	10%
Followed by Student Rereading*	37	8%

*Note: In this study the coding 'R' for repeating or rereading after a Told was only coded if the child repeated the word two or more times or reread two or more words. It was assumed the child always repeated the one word that was Told after the teacher said it. (See Clay, 2013, pp. 60–62.)

Table 4.   Patterns of Action Before/After a Told at Level 7

Student Action	Examples	Total Number of Tolds — No Appeal	Appeal
No Attempt/No Action	— / through | T — / had | T	32	3
Limited Action: Letter/Sounds	w– / was | T tr–tr–e–s / treasurer | T	35	3
Limited Action: 1-Word Substitution	Happy / Him | T him / her | T	28	1
Other:			
Limited: Rereads Before a Told	— | R / through | | T	2	0
Action by Teacher "You try it" After an Appeal	— | A | a / and | y | T	0	1
Action by Teacher "You try it" No Appeal (non-standard)	— | go / gone | y | T	2	0
Multiple Actions	in | R | th– / through | | | T	32	1
Note: In all examples with R, the student reread from the beginning of the sentence.	goldbox | R | t– t– / treasure | | | T		

You can think about which types of Tolds represent a productive decision on the teacher's part and which might be used for possible teaching points after the running record. I will follow this time out for thinking or discussion with a partner with my overview summary.

No attempt/no action
I was both surprised and concerned about the total number of Tolds (32) given with absolutely no action or attempt or even an Appeal by the students. I consider this a major danger zone of processing problems. If the student just stops at a difficulty we have little evidence of strategic activity. The student may only have learned a behavior that ensures help from the teacher. Clay (2005) warns of this danger:

> Do not establish a pattern where the child waits for the teacher to do the work. The child must learn to take the initiative, make some links, and work at a difficulty. (p. 107)

I am especially concerned because this was one of the most frequently recorded patterns and it is Level 7 text! This waiting helplessly for a Told needs to be addressed at much earlier levels. A typical pattern of teacher/student interaction I have used successfully many times with many students at earlier levels (3 and

4) could be used after the running record.

Teacher: Show me a word I told you on this page.

Student: (points to the word)

Teacher: Yes, but you didn't try anything. Next time you try something first. Think about the story and try a word that makes sense, then I will help you.

One particularly feisty student, after this type of teaching interaction, said to me the next day, "I tried one now you better tell me!" Of course, I did, but soon both Mary Elizabeth and I realized her attempts were coming at a faster pace, her demands for help diminished, and her self-correction rate was rapidly improving.

Limited action: letter-sounds

At difficulty the highest number of attempts (38) involved the students sounding one or more letter sounds. The examples given on the chart represent one problematic Told w/*was* and one Told for *treasure* that could easily be justified. It is problematic that a reader at Level 7 is trying to sound the letters for a basic, early high-frequency word. A pattern of letter-sounding types of attempts for irregular or even regular high-frequency words is unproductive and indicates a lack of building a fluent reading vocabulary that was described in the section about the quality of processing check. The Told after the cumulative sounding of a letter cluster and individual letter sounds in the word *treasure* is more justified because the student's response is not highly productive for this multisyllabic word. This attempt is quite limited. If the analysis of

letter-sounds or better yet the clusters of letter-sounds were combined with rereading and thinking about what the story is about (Jolly Roger and the pirates are looking for a treasure) the student's attempt would show signs of integrating more than one source of information and reflect the complexities of learning to read by reading a story not just sounding out words in isolation. This would be a powerful teaching point after the running record.

Limited action: substitution of one word

What surprised and puzzled me the most was how many times a meaningful substitution of a word given by a student resulted in a Told by the teacher — 28 Tolds with no appeal, one with an appeal at Level 7. I have questions that cannot be answered without an observation of the interactions because time intervals are not reflected in the running records I analyzed. Questions I would want to investigate further are these:

- Was the student bogged down and refusing to read beyond the substitution?

- Was a Told given quickly in an over concern for accuracy by the teacher?

- Are corrective Tolds being given to prevent further errors for words the teacher knows will be repeated in the text?

In my own teaching I have often ignored the pronoun substitution him/her and other pronoun substitutions during the running record because (a) it is a meaningful substitution that also fits the structure and (b) the English language learners I have taught had a consistent problem with English pronouns that have

no equivalent in their first language. Teaching about pronoun usage is often done in other parts of the lesson by focusing on oral language, meanings, and how the word looks or is written. One student, Rachel from Zimbabwe, even convinced me that Clifford the Big Red Dog was a girl by drawing long eyelashes on "her" eyes in a picture she had drawn.

All in all, I would recommend that teachers reflect on why they might be giving Tolds of this type. Perhaps the message a student may be receiving is "I must be 100% accurate" or "I must be a bad reader, the teacher keeps telling me all of my mistakes." Changing this teacher action during the running record might send a different message and could lead to opportunities for effective teaching after the child finishes reading independently. The child might reread to sharpen up self-monitoring or perhaps learn more about male and female pronouns.

Other: limited actions

There were a few other limited actions that I noted in the Level 7 running records. Even though they were few in number I will briefly address them here. At Level 7, two students seem to have developed or habituated the pattern of repeating the beginning of the sentence up to the error without being successful or even making an attempt. Another action by the teacher also seemed to have limited results the few times it was tried. Clay (2013) recommends a specific action by the teacher when the child appeals and has made no attempt:

A verbal appeal for help (A) from the child is turned back to the

child for further effort. Say 'You try it' (recorded Y). If the child's attempt is incorrect the teacher then gives a Told. (p. 59)

Teaching after the running record should address the expectations for making a meaningful attempt. The teaching interaction would look similar to the teaching interaction when there is no attempt or no action discussed earlier. In my analysis of all text levels, I found too many examples where teachers seem to be using the statement "You try it" more like a prompt since the student was not making any verbal appeal for help. This would be an important analysis for teachers to complete on running records they have previously recorded. Have you fallen into a pattern of prompting "You try it" during the running record? If this pattern is revealed and reversed, teachers could gain some insights that might make their teaching more effective and help the child initiate more productive problem-solving actions.

Multiple Actions

Multiple actions that flexibly use different sources of information are evidence of effective problem solving (even when they do not result in the correct response.) In the Level 7 book, the text reads,

Happy ran through the yellow flowers.

The student said *in* for *through* which fit the meaning and sounded right for language structure but he probably noticed that the predicted word *in* did not look like the word printed in the text. The student took another type of action by rereading from the beginning of the sentence to pull together meaning and language structure and, additionally, paid more attention to a third set of information, the visual information. Now the reader probably looked at the word and even sounded the /th/. This series of actions represents strategic problem solving by using more than one source of information. A similar example of effective processing is the example from the book, *Jolly Roger and the Treasure*.

The text on page 16 reads,

"Come and see my treasure!" shouted Jolly Roger.

The student said *gold box* for *treasure*. The reader's attempt shows a strong use of meaning from the story and probably from the child's background of experience. (How many Johnny Depp pirate movies have been made and seen on TV?) The child was most likely triggered by the visual information of the text to reread, attend closer to the beginning letter of the word before getting a Told from the teacher. After the story is read, a discussion about what the treasure was and how it was found would be productive, especially if the teacher combined the discussion with the visual information in the text. For example, the teacher could say: "Clap the parts of *treasure*. Find it on this page. I'll show you the parts to look at. Now read this page again."

It is important for the learner to reread and reprocess the text on that page again in order to finish it off. These actions, guided by the teacher, are critical for students to learn to use independently. Teachers and students need to be flexible in thinking about how different words are solved in different ways, and that it is the combination of multiple sources of information that is the most productive for solving many unfamiliar or unknown words when reading

Summary of Teaching Decisions Based on William's Running Record

I chose to go back to page 15 because William needed another opportunity to learn to self-monitor, especially when the two words don't look similar (*am/come*). Perhaps when he rereads he might also notice the *here/home* substitution. If not, I could demonstrate how to check across the word and ask, "Is it here or home?"

The other page, page 3, caught my attention because of the number of Tolds on this page. For two words William seemed to be looking for a little word within a whole word. This is not a productive problem-solving action but at least it did show he was self-monitoring. William needs

to learn the word *went* as a unit and probably *down* also. I would check with his classroom teacher and recommend some extra learning practice to do in class or at home. Perhaps what William learned from these two Tolds is "The next time I will just wait and she will help me" because the next time he made no attempt and got a Told. I do not want to establish passive waiting as a pattern so I would make a teaching point: "Don't just wait for me to tell you a word. Think about the story, read it again, and try something that makes sense." Then, "Do you know what a river is? Clap *river* — let me show you the two parts. Read this page again and make it sound like a great story."

text. The actions initiated by the child before the Tolds were given are evidence that the child is trying to integrate more than one source of information provided in the text or arising from background experience. It is not merely the quantity of Tolds that will give the teacher feedback on teaching, but the quality of the actions the child takes before defaulting to a Told that are critical in evaluating the quality of the child's processing and the teacher's decisions.

What I have tried to accomplish in this article is to give teachers evidence from actual running records of high- and low-quality problem-solving attempts or lack of attempts. I paid additional attention to one particular category—Tolds—because I now have evidence of the different patterns of responses by both the students and the teachers that center around Tolds. Lyons (1993) commented about teaching:

> [T]he hardest shift for teachers to make is to think about teaching as assisting the student's problem solving. (p. 62)

My hope is that teachers will now be more aware of processing problems, the complexity of Tolds, and the possible teaching actions that might be taken to help young readers be more effective and independent in their problem solving. To become even more effective, teachers need to extend their analysis of running records for the students not making accelerated progress in reading. Clay (1991) will have a closing word by this quote:

> My view of the teacher's role is to decide how to be most helpful to the child who must enlarge

and extend his [her] strategies in-the-head for picking up and processing information. (p. 295)

After this in-depth analysis of running records I would add: My view is that teachers need to become more thorough in their analysis of how children are responding during the running record and more reflective about their own teaching patterns in order to increase the positive impact of their teaching decisions on student achievement.

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About the Author

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Appendix A

Quality Check of Running Records for Activating Teaching

"Carefully recorded observations can lead us to modify our instruction to meet the learning needs of particular children in the formative stages of new learning ..." (Clay, 2013, *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*, p. 4). **Directions**: Take a series of 3–5 running records for a particular child and record examples in the appropriate columns below to help see patterns that might activate new decisions and teaching.

	Tolds after multiple actions	Tolds after limited action	Tolds after no action	Average number of Tolds
1. Analysis of Tolds				
2. Analysis of High-Frequency Words	H-F words missed and SC'd	H-F words attempted and missed	H-F words appealed	H-F words Told without appeal
3. Analysis of Monitoring	Self-corrections	Errors that show integration with all sources of information	Errors that show the child using only one source of information	Gross visual discrepancies (GVD/NM)
4. Analysis of Problem-Solving Actions	Multiple actions resulting in correct reading OR self-corrected error	Multiple actions resulting in integrated error	Single action resulting in error	No action
Summary				

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