

Clay's Teaching Procedures for Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words

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The secret of successful instruction in hearing and recording sounds in words is to have a teacher who knows how to help a child 'hear' the sounds singly or in clusters, and how to 'see' the letter forms and recurrent patterns. The teacher guides the child to the most efficient links between letters and sounds, or clusters of letters and patterns of sound. Being able to do this will improve every aspect of learning to read and write.

— Clay, 2005, p. 81

In *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part Two: Teaching Procedures*, section 7, Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words, Marie Clay presents detailed and precisely sequenced teaching procedures that can be used in support of the child's development of phonemic awareness as he attempts to write words he has not yet learned to spell. Becoming aware of the sounds in words, or the development of phonemic awareness, is key to word recognition and involves hearing even the slightest differences in similar sounding words, i.e., *cap / tap, purpose / porpoise, single / signal*. Most children learn to recognize these differences regardless of the classroom teacher's approach to literacy instruction. In contrast, Reading Recovery children require individualized support from the teacher who guides them in learning to become aware of sounds in words, distinguish and isolate individual sounds in words, link sounds with letters and letter clusters and record them, acquire some of the rules of spelling, and apply these rules with increasing regularity (Clay, 2001, 2005).

However, applying these teaching procedures in the daily writing activity goes well beyond merely helping children learn to spell words. If implemented immediately after Roaming Around the Known, with precision and matched to each child, the procedures can effectively support learning more about the reciprocal relationship between words written and words read, and how to use this knowledge to monitor, cross-check, integrate, search, confirm and, ultimately, produce independent strategic readers and writers.

Because these teaching procedures are fundamental to daily lessons with children, readers are invited to revisit

the specific sequence of steps outlined by Clay in section 7 that support a child's learning at early, intermediate, and advanced levels (see pages 72–81). Interactions between a teacher and child during the writing activity are presented with rationales for the teacher's decisions, followed by discussions of the implications for the child's learning and how it changes over time.

Early Learning

Hearing large parts and individual sounds in words

The teacher first takes the child through a series of steps that require him to learn to attend closely to hearing sounds. "No letters are used in the earliest stages of developing phonemic awareness" (Clay 2005, p. 71). The teacher starts by supporting the child in hearing large parts of words before focusing on individual sounds. She directs the child in clapping the parts in words, beginning first with one- and two-syllable words (*dog, baby*), followed by three- and four-syllable words (*dinosaur, helicopter*) as illustrated in the following transcript of interactions between teacher and child.

- 1 T: Watch me. I'm going to clap the parts of a word, *dog* (clap). Now you do it. Clap *dog*.
- 2 C: *D-* (clap) *o-* *g* (claps while segmenting the individual phonemes).
- 3 T: Let's try that one again. *Dog* (clap).
- 4 T&C: (together and accurately, as in the above)
- 5 T: And this one, *jump* (clap). You clap *jump*.
- 6 C: *Jump* (clap).
- 7 T: That's it. Clap *house*.
- 8 C: *House* (clap).
- 9 T: You've got it. Now, watch. *Ba-* (clap) *by* (clap).
- 10 C: *Bab-* (clap) *y* (clap).

- 11 T: Yes, and now try *wagon*. Clap the parts.
- 12 C: *Wa-* (clap) *gon* (clap).
- 13 T: How about *butterfly*?
- 14 C: *Butter-* (clap) *fly* (clap).
- 15 T: Let me show you. *Bu-* (clap) *tter-* (clap) *fly* (clap). You clap it.
- 16 T&C: (together, as in the above)
- 17 C: *Butt-* (clap) *er-* (clap) *fly* (clap).

Notice that in Turn 10, the child's actions suggest that while he heard the breaks differently than his teacher, he did indeed *hear* parts in a word. It is the child's role to hear the breaks in words and because he did so successfully, the teacher wisely refrains from further demonstration and instead moves to another two-syllable word that he claps independently. These activities—hearing and clapping the large breaks in words—are refreshed from time to time as appropriate throughout early lessons and later as the child learns to solve multisyllabic words in both reading and writing.

After learning to hear large breaks the child is now ready to attend to single sounds using Elkonin boxes; one box for every sound in a word. The teacher starts by teaching the task to the child so that he understands what he is being asked to do, with the goal that he eventually applies this new skill independently to solve words. Using picture cards for a few simple words with two to four easy-to-hear sounds, the teacher demonstrates slow articulation and invites the child to do the same. Letters are not introduced at this time and the teacher shares the task with the child until he can do it on his own as illustrated below.

- 1 T: (showing the picture card) This is a *rope*. *R-o-pe* (slowly articulates word and invites the child to do the same). You say it slowly. *R-o-pe*.
- 2 C: *Rope* (neglects to slowly articulate).
- 3 T: Watch. I'm going to say it slowly. *R-o-pe* (while articulating slowly, drawing out the three sounds, making certain not to segment the phonemes).
- 4 C: *R-o-pe* (slowly articulates).

The teacher's demonstration is repeated with two or three more examples and returned to again in subsequent les-

sons until the child takes over the task. The key is that the child learns to *initiate* independently saying words slowly and isolate individual sounds in words, actions that are fundamental to his developing phonemic awareness.

Next, the teacher produces cards with boxes representing two, three, and four sounds (not letters) in words. The teacher models saying a word slowly, and pushes counters into the corresponding boxes on the card, sound-by-sound, as shown in the following transcript.

- 1 T: (using a card with three boxes, slowly articulates) *R-o-pe* (then, articulates again, isolating each sound, while demonstrating the pushing of the counters into the corresponding boxes). Now you do it.
- 2 C: *Rope* (slowly articulates, but neglects to coordinate pushing the counters into the corresponding boxes).
- 3 T&C: Let's try that together (guiding the child's index finger to help him coordinate the task, matching one sound to one box in order). Every time you hear a sound, push your finger in a box, one at a time like this, *r-o-pe* (together, both teacher and child slowly articulate). Now you do it (teacher guides the child's index finger in pushing the counters into the boxes).

The child successfully completes the task on his own and continues until he demonstrates he can do this with other words of up to four sounds. Although the teacher accepts the child's approximations, she strives to support him in gaining independent control over the coordination of the task as soon as possible. Soon the child will abandon the use of counters and use only his finger as he learns to apply this new skill to solve words.

Intermediate Steps

Recording sounds with letters

Now that the child is able to hear the large breaks in words, initiate a slow articulation, and isolate individual sounds, he then learns to record letters for the sounds he hears in Elkonin boxes. From the child's story, the teacher first chooses two or three words for which there are three to four easy-to-hear sounds and easily recorded letters. Later, words of more than four sounds are chosen by the

teacher, who draws boxes on the work page that match the number of sounds in the selected word. The teacher may model the sound analysis, highlight with her voice the difficult-to-hear sounds, and prompt the child as needed to draw his attention to the link between sounds and letters and the placement of those letters, asking (see pages 74–75 in Clay, 2005): *What can you hear? How could you write it? Where will you put it? What else can you hear?* As the child demonstrates increasing competence, the teacher asks him to think about the location of the sounds he hears—*What do you hear at the beginning? In the middle? At the end?* Then she shifts to *What letters would you expect to see?* (Clay, p. 75)—so that eventually he combines this sound analysis with links to the letters he would see, thus calling for “recording letters in the boxes *in sequence, from beginning to end, from left to right* (making only occasional concession to this requirement)” (Clay, 2005, p. 76).

When teachers draw boxes in pencil and the child writes with a thin colored marker, the letters will stand out clearly to the child who is just learning how to perceive sequences of letters and sounds. Initially, the teacher shares the marker with the child, writing the letters that he does not yet hear or is unable to write, including those that are seen but not heard (i.e., *coat, rope, friend*). Although the child writes the letters for any sounds he can hear, early in his lessons he often records the last sound heard first. Eventually, with his teacher’s explicit support, he records consonants and some vowels in order from left to right, perhaps using only his finger to point to the boxes.

Through the activities that support the analysis of sounds in words and the letters that comprise words, concurrent with the child’s reading and writing continuous text, he learns to anticipate the probability of particular sound and letter correspondences (*out / how, read / feet, first / other*) and increases his core of known words in writing and reading. Likewise, by analyzing change over time in the child’s accumulated writing and reading vocabularies and his strategic actions in reading and writing continuous text, the teacher takes deliberate action to arrange opportunities within and across lessons to foster writing and reading reciprocity and the child’s developing attentiveness to orthography.

The following example illustrates the teacher’s use of teaching procedures for a child who is working in the intermediate steps for Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words. The child’s story presents several opportunities for

solving using an analysis of sounds in words in boxes. For one child, perhaps *will, give, and from* present ideal choices for sound boxes; each one contains three to four easy-to-hear sounds. Whereas for another child, perhaps two or three of the following—*when, math, face, stamp, and hand*—might be chosen for this work. Clearly, the teacher’s decisions are informed by her analysis of the child’s current competence and what he needs to learn how to do next in terms of strategic activity. For the child’s composition below, consider a teacher’s options for taking words to boxes. What words might you select, and what learning opportunities would they provide?

When I finish my math, my teacher will give me a happy face stamp on my hand.

Based on this child’s acquired writing vocabulary, his current control over word solving in writing, and evidence of his recording of consonants and some vowels in sequence, the teacher has chosen *math, face, and stamp* as possibilities for solving in sound boxes. Even so, the teacher remains open to surprises in the child’s work and ready to shift the focus of her interactions depending on what he solves independently or requires of her in terms of support. The interactions around this solving are illustrated below.

- 1 C: (writes first four words with support as needed from the teacher, initiates saying next word slowly) *Math*, I hear *m* (writes *m* in story). Hmm, *math, ma-th, m-a-th* (continues saying word slowly but neglects to record more letters).
- 2 T: (noticing the child’s struggle, draws three boxes on work page)
- 3 C: (slowly articulates, records *m* and *a* in order in the first two boxes, slowly articulates the word again, records *th*)
- 4 T: (sliding her finger beneath the boxes, one at a time, to demonstrate that all sounds are represented) And does it look right?
- 5 C: (following his teacher’s model to check slowly) Yes (continues writing as needed with support until he comes to *face*, articulates slowly and suggests *f*; then pauses).
- 6 T: Three sounds (draws three boxes).

- 7 C: Oh yeah, *f-a-ce* (drawing out the sounds, records *f* then *a*, and seems poised to record *s* in the last box).
- 8 T: (anticipating the difficulty) And this time it's a *c* to make it look right (writes *c*). And it needs another letter at the end to make it look right.
- 9 C: *E?*
- 10 T: Try it and see if that looks right.
- 11 C: (writes *e* in the third and final box, then initiates a slow check) *Face!* (rereads story and slowly articulates *stamp* neglecting to draw out the *m* sound). I need boxes.
- 12 T: (drawing five boxes) Okay, *stamp* (modeling slow articulation of the entire word, and stressing the difficult to hear *m*).
- 13 C: (slowly articulates and uses his finger to point to the boxes, neglecting the coordination, repeats the articulation and successfully coordinates the task, records *s*, *t*, and *a* in the first three boxes, then pauses)
- 14 T: (writes *m* in fourth box) This one's hard to hear.
- 15 C: (writes *p* in last box and checks to see if the word looks right) Yep, *stamp* (writes in story). It's got *am* (pointing to the part).
- 16 T: That's right, you know *am* (noting the child's discovery on her lesson record, resolves to highlight and bring forward additional opportunities to foster links between seeing and hearing throughout his lessons).

In Turn 2, the teacher has a decision to make. She could ask the child to continue searching for sounds using a slow articulation to write the word directly in his story, use the work page to try writing the word, or she can increase the level of support. Noticing the child's hesitation, the teacher chose to draw sound boxes, thus providing the support of a visual scaffold to bolster the child's solving of this word and possibly increase the probability

that he will transfer this learning to solve unknown words independently, including those that come up later in his story. The teacher's decision to provide this subtle support—the provision of the sound boxes—is also informed by the child's recent responses in which he has just begun recording letters in sequence from left to right (see Turns 4 and 5). She wants to make salient to the child that he can confirm that what he wrote not only *sounds* right, but also *looks* right. To nudge the child toward becoming aware that some sounds are represented by more than one letter, in Turn 8 the teacher acknowledges the child's plausible attempt *s* for the letter *c*. Interactions like this one, with minimal teacher talk, help children learn particular spelling conventions in the context of authentic writing without the constraint of learning spelling rules in isolation. Does this example prompt you to think about the types of processing your students are doing in reading? What words have your students begun taking apart in reading and can this be supported by your choice of words for boxes in writing?

Advanced Learning

Attending to spelling using boxes for letters

The child who has progressed through the early and intermediate stages usually hears and records consonants well and in order, has control over writing letters, and selects some vowels correctly. The teacher now uses letter boxes to more precisely support the child in transitioning from the sounds he hears and the letters he expects to see, to a more advanced understanding of the links between phonology and orthography and spelling patterns unique to the English language. She starts with the explanation that there will be one box for each letter in a word and temporarily assumes the articulation role for the child, demonstrating with pausing and stress, where he might expect to see letters in words for which there is no corresponding sound. Consider how the teacher might interact with a child in letter boxes at this advanced stage of his learning. Her instructional language must be crisp and clear; she must be mindful of where the child is currently in his control over literacy processing.

With reference to the child's composition featured previously in this article (*When I finish my math, my teacher will give me a happy face stamp on my hand.*) there are 10 words that could be chosen by the teacher for work in letter boxes. In the example that follows, the child is introduced to the letter boxes activity for the first time. Considering where this child is currently, do you agree

with the teacher's decisions and her responses and does the teacher foster initiation on the part of the child? Is the teaching responsive to the child? In what ways does the teacher's language align with Clay's rationales for the teaching procedures in section 7?

- 1 C: (initiating a slow articulation) *Finish, finish*. That's a long word.
- 2 T: Okay, you could clap it to hear the parts.
- 3 C: (clapping) *Fin- ish*, two parts.
- 4 T: That's right (draws letter boxes). And, this is new. Now there is a box for each letter. Watch. *Fin- ish* (slowly articulating the first three sounds, sliding her finger beneath the three corresponding boxes, pausing at the break between the two parts, then slowly articulating the sounds in the last syllable—*ish*—as she pauses her finger beneath the fourth box to highlight the vowel, then articulates the *sh* sound sliding her finger beneath the final boxes). Think about how it looks, what letters you would see.
- 5 C: (records first three letters, pauses)
- 6 T: Okay, you got the first part, all you need is the last part. Do it with me.
- 7 T&C: (teacher and child articulating the entire word again, teacher repeating the demonstration beneath the boxes with pausing at the syllable break)
- 8 C: (records the final three letters and confirms) *Finish*. I'm right. Yeah, it's right (writes the word in his story, continues writing until he gets to *teacher*, pronouncing with a break, indicating an awareness of the *er* chunk at the end). *Teach-er*. It starts with a *t* and then *e* (pauses).
- 9 T: (Because the child easily recorded 'finish' on his first attempt in letter boxes, the teacher chose letter boxes for a more-complex word for his second attempt). Ah, huh. Let's use boxes. *Teach-er* (draws 7 boxes, pronounces

the word and while sliding her finger beneath the corresponding boxes, articulates the sound *t* for box one, *e* for boxes two and three, *ch* for boxes four and five, pausing slightly before articulating the final chunk, for the sound of *r* in boxes six and seven).

- 10 C: (records *t*, *e*) Another *e*, no, it's *a* (records *a*, pauses, starts at beginning to articulate again, sliding his finger beneath the first three boxes, pausing at boxes four and five records the *ch*). *Er?*
- 11 T: Like the chunk at the end of *mother*, *father* (emphasizing the *er* sound)...
- 12 C: Yep, *er*, *teacher* (records in final two boxes, checks to confirm, and records the word in his story. Then, writes *will* and *give* independently, words that appear for the first time as known). *Happy, happ-y* (pauses). Two parts.
- 13 T: (draws five boxes) Okay, a box for every letter (slowly articulates, slides finger beneath the first three boxes, quickly passes finger beneath fourth box, moves on to last box, emphasizing the sound of the last letter).
- 14 C: (records *b*, *a*, *p* quickly in the first three boxes) Another *p*?
- 15 T: (smiling) Try it.
- 16 C: (records *p* in box four) Yeah, and a *y* at the end (records *y*). Like *mommy* has a *y*.

Even though the teacher has decided that *finish* provides an ideal opportunity for introducing letter boxes, she first reminds the child that he can help himself by clapping the word to hear the parts which then helps him associate his teacher's demonstration—the slow articulation with the pausing after the first part, *fin*, and the last part, *ish*—with the letters he might expect to see in each part of the word. These moves on the part of the teacher, reminding the child of a task with which he is very familiar (Turn 2) followed by introducing the task of attending to letters in words via letter boxes (Turns 4–7), illustrate how previous learning can be combined with new learning not only to solve the word of the moment, but also words that appear later in the story (*teacher* and *happy*) and in subsequent

stories. Very importantly, it is also useful to consider not only the linking of hearing and seeing to solve words in writing, but also the opportunities for searching, monitoring, and confirming in the cut-up story; in taking words apart in reading; and in other parts of the lesson.

Working without boxes

Later in a child's lessons, after he has had many opportunities to analyze sounds in words and solve many words in letter boxes, he will write many words easily and directly in his stories, perhaps without using the work page. Words that provide challenges in later lessons can be addressed by encouraging the child to use whatever has helped him before, i.e., listening for the breaks in words, saying words slowly, or listening to his teacher articulate the sounds with stress on those that are difficult to hear. Or his teacher might return to using letter boxes. As they become increasingly independent, children can also be encouraged to attempt words on their work page to judge which version they think looks right, "the way it looks in a book" (howse / house, freind / friend, skool / school).

Clearly, Clay's series of teaching procedures for Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words support the child's development of phonemic awareness and much more. The "secret," as Clay reminds us, is that the child work alongside a knowledgeable teacher who helps him make "*the most efficient links between letters and sounds, or clusters of letters and patterns of sound*" (Clay, 2005, p. 81). The chal-

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lenge for those of us in Reading Recovery is to effectively use the teaching procedures provided in section 7 in daily lessons, in support of the child's writing and with deliberate attention to the links to reading. If delivered with intention, a focus on the child's current competence, and what he needs to learn how to do next, these teaching procedures can support even the most struggling young learners in becoming independent strategic readers and writers.

References

- Clay, M. M. (2001). *Change over time in children's literacy development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. M. (2005). *Literacy lessons designed for individuals part two: Teaching procedures*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Additional articles of interest

In addition to a review of Clay's precisely sequenced teaching procedures in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part Two*, section 7, three articles on the topics of phonemic awareness and scaffolded teaching for Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words have been published previously in *The Journal of Reading Recovery*. Readers are invited to consult these excellent resources as they refresh and refine their work with children in Reading Recovery.

- Doyle, M. A., & Forbes, S. (2003). How Reading Recovery teaches the five essential elements of reading instruction and more. *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 3(1), 1–18.
- Gibson, S. (2009). Teaching for two pathways: Hearing and seeing. *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 8(2), 16–26.
- Jones, N. (2010). Sound expectations: Revisiting hearing and recording sounds in words to foster acceleration. *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 10(1), 34–44.