Working With English Language Learners: The Case of Danya

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A number of studies have documented the effectiveness of Reading Recovery with English language learners (ELL) in recent years (Ashdown & Simic, 2000; Clay, 1993b; Hobsbaum, 1995; Neal & Kelly, 1999; O’Leary, 1997). Research results indicate that this population of children is as successful as native English-speaking children in developing an independent system for reading and writing and discontinuing from Reading Recovery. Understanding how to best help ELL students achieve such gains has been of interest to me for the last several years. In this article, I will share a case study of Danya, an ELL student for whom Reading Recovery was an effective intervention. I will share my reflections about what most helped Danya accelerate her literacy learning and develop independence as a reader and writer. Additionally, follow-up data in second and third grade will document her success in sustaining the gains she made in Reading Recovery. Lastly, from this case study and my work with many diverse learners in Reading Recovery and other ELL children, I will share several conclusions I have derived about working with ELL students in the context of Reading Recovery.

I met Danya in December of her first-grade year. Her teacher indicated that she was struggling with reading and was near the bottom of her class in terms of acquiring literacy skills. Despite Danya’s natural shyness, she was a willing participant in both the assessment and the learning processes from the moment I met her. She was soft-spoken and unsure of herself, but she brought a number of strengths to the learning tasks. One was her bilingualism. (For an in-depth review of research that reports significant advantages for bilingual students on metalinguistic and cognitive tasks, see Cummins, 2000.) She was fortunate to be from a home where she learned both Spanish and English. Her mother spoke Spanish almost exclusively; however, her father spoke both Spanish and English.

Danya had the advantage of hearing and using both languages at home. Yet when we met, Danya was still learning English, and many words, concepts, and English structures were unfamiliar to her. Although the language of instruction in her classroom was English, some of her classmates spoke Spanish so she had opportunities to use Spanish as well as English in school.

| Table 1: Results of An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement | December 1998 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Scores 12/8/98** | **Stanine Scores** |
| Letter Identification (54) | 51 | 4 |
| Word Test (20) | 3 | 1 |
| Concepts About Print (24) | 13 | 2 |
| Writing Vocabulary | 3 | 1 |
| Hearing Sounds in Words (37) | 9 | 1 |
| Text Reading | A | 1 |

Assessment

To build rapport, I asked Danya to read a few books with me before I began assessing her abilities. I administered An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 1993a) over two days. According to Clay (1998), “All tasks in my observation survey are like screens on which are projected the immaturity or degree of control demonstrated by the young child’s tentative responses to print and to books” (p. 63). Danya, though tentative, demonstrated control over
several concepts about print and showed considerable item knowledge. Her literacy profile was similar to many second-round Reading Recovery students, with higher item knowledge compared to text reading level. (See Table 1.)

Although she knew most letters by name, a few words (and, the, am), and many concepts about print, she did not use this information in reading. By closely examining the concepts about print tasks, I noticed that she had several confusions about how print works, and it was apparent that these confusions contributed to her inability to read even easy texts. Among the concepts about print over which Danya did not have control were one-to-one matching, first and last concept, one and two letters, and the concept of word. She also appeared to have difficulty remembering simple patterns in repetitive pattern books.

In writing, she did not leave spaces between words, but she controlled some easy words (Danya, mom, cat), and she responded correctly to some beginning sounds in words in the Hearing and Recording Sounds In Words task.

Reading Recovery sessions began with Danya in January and continued with interruptions (due to my surgery and her vacation) until late August, when she was reading at an appropriate level for her grade in school and Reading Recovery was discontinued. Danya had participated in a total of 58 lessons including 10 Roaming Around the Known sessions. Here is the story of our work together.

Roaming Around the Known

During Roaming Around the Known sessions, Danya began to develop many new understandings about reading and writing that had not been apparent during my assessment of her. My notes revealed that she learned to match one-to-one by watching me, began to put spaces between her words in writing, wrote several new words independently, and started articulating slowly the words she wanted to write in order to hear beginning and ending sounds. After the first Roaming Around the Known session, I wrote,

Danya is very engaged in reading and writing. She catches on quickly to what is expected [of readers and writers]. She wrote can, see, and the independently on pages 2 and 3 of her book. I think she is beginning to understand one-to-one matching and she can locate known words.

Following the second Roaming Around the Known session, I wrote, “Danya used one-to-one today after watching me. She might be using beginning letters to help her predict unknown words.” By the end of Roaming Around the Known, we had read 38 books including those she had authored. My book selections had included a variety of books from

Table 2: Danya’s Daily Book List for Lessons 1–25 (See Bibliography for full references.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>SC Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Birthday Cake for Ben</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bumper Cars</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hot Dogs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Flower Girl</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Baby Owls</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Farm Concert</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>1:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Father Bear Goes Fishing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>1:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sammy at the Farm</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ben’s Teddy Bear</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Where Is Hanna</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>1:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>A Home for Little Teddy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Blackberries</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Hungry Kitten</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Baby Hippo</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Diana Made Dinner</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>1:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Choosing a Puppy</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>1:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Ben’s Dad</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>1:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Mrs. Wishy-Washy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Snowy Gets a Sash</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Who Will Be My Mother?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Magpie’s Baking Day</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Are You My Daddy?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Floppy the Hero</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Duck With a Broken Wing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>1:2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Levels 1–4 with an emphasis on Rigby Early Starters and PM Readers (Red), which I felt provided the type of language that would help Danya develop new language structures and build a bank of known words. By the end of the Roaming Around the Known period, Danya was really noticing print and she understood that using meaning and the pattern could also help her read. In fact, she was able to use language patterns much more effectively than when she read the Scott Foresman test booklets during our initial assessment. Above all, she was enjoying reading.

**Reading Recovery Lessons: Progress in Reading**

During early lessons Danya developed many useful strategies in reading, including monitoring herself while reading, cross-checking one source of information with another, self-correcting, and rereading to confirm. Her careful approach to reading and learning began to pay off when she started to understand what to attend to. According to Clay (1993b),

> The beginning reader can only sample some features in print which he recognizes. Gradually he must learn how to pay attention to different kinds of information in print (different types of cues) so that he can do this when it is necessary to do so. (p. 23)

Even in the first week of lessons, Danya’s self-correction rates were often quite good (e.g., 1:3 and 1:1). She was able to notice when it didn’t look right very early on: self-corrections included *the/a* and *Tim/Tom*. However, sometimes she did not notice mismatches related to English structure, and it was especially hard for her to distinguish singular from plural words. In *The Baby Owls* (Randell, 1997), she said *babies for baby* and *cow for cows*. This type of error is very common among children learning English. While English native speakers might hear that it sounds wrong to use a plural for a singular noun, ELL students are unable to detect many errors using knowledge of English structure. I knew it would be a while before she would be able to take in all the visual information (i.e., word endings) and probably even longer for her to consistently use structure to monitor.

At the same time, I knew we would have many more opportunities to address these types of errors when Danya controlled more visual information, so I did not worry about these errors. I was pleased that she had begun to self-monitor using meaning, some structure, and visual information (particularly initial visual information), so I reinforced the positive signs of her developing processing abilities.

I learned much from Danya as we worked together. She taught me to be careful about my assumptions. For example, in the book *Hot Dogs* (Randell, 1996, Level 4), although I provided what I thought was a supportive book introduction, I came to learn that the meaning of simple concepts was not always clear to her. In the first reading, I told her the word *matches*, thinking she knew what matches were and that having been given the word, she would now be able to use meaning and some visual information to read it for herself. However, the next day on the running record, *matches* was once again a Told. Although I was pleased by her attempt at difficulty (she had attempted the word by saying *ma*), it wasn’t until a few days later when she read the book as part of her familiar rereading that I suspected she was having trouble with the word *matches* because she didn’t understand the concept. When I queried her about how her family lights the barbecue, she told me that they used a lighter! After I explained what matches were, she had no more trouble. I learned that even what I considered very simple concepts might not be understood by some ELL students.

Fortunately, I learned this lesson early in her program (Week 2).

Danya continued to teach me about some of the things that may be hard for ELL pupils. In *The Farm Concert* (The Wright Group, 1998, Level 5), one of the hardest things for Danya was the concept of *farmer*. Although she understood *farm*, she could not quite get to *farmer*. Once again, I realized that her difficulty was meaning centered and that she did not understand the word *farmer*.

Because I observed that Danya was not familiar with many concepts in books, over the course of her program I was careful to take the time needed to develop schema and vocabulary during book introductions or whenever necessary. By making sure she had understanding of important concepts and words, I was providing one element of Krashen’s (1981) model for second language teaching known as comprehensible input; that is, input in the second language that is “first of all, comprehensible and second, interesting and relevant” (p. 66). Because of the constraints of a 30-minute lesson, I found that I had to develop the meaning of books over time: during the orientation to the story, during the first reading, and sometimes in subsequent readings.
I drew on another element of Krashen’s model for second language teaching: reducing the learner’s affective filter. According to the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1981), “acquirers in a less than optimal affective state will have a filter, or mental block, preventing them from utilizing input fully for further language acquisition” (p. 62). I worked to keep Danya receptive to taking risks in her second language by maintaining a low anxiety level when she forgot the name of an object or a concept; specifically, I learned to treat names of objects very much like we in Reading Recovery consider characters’ names—that is, we supply characters’ names without great concern. Similarly, I learned not to worry if Danya didn’t remember the name of the object and to simply tell her what it was very matter-of-factly. This kept her levels of concern low, and she seemed to learn names of new objects in a few days (much as children learn characters’ names quickly).

Throughout Danya’s lessons, as during Roaming Around the Known sessions, I selected a variety of little books including many of the PM Readers from the Rigby collection. (See Table 2, Danya’s Daily Book List for Lessons 1–25.) I included these books purposefully because the stories made sense to Danya and they had more natural language patterns—that is, language that is more like the structures a 6-year-old would use and that Danya would be hearing from her peers. According to Clay (1991),

Natural language texts can be regarded as transitional texts, used when the child is just beginning to relate what he knows about oral language and print to the written texts he is trying to read. While the child is trying to work out what reading is, and how he should work at it, natural language texts draw on his oral language competencies and allow him to build bridges across to more literary texts. (p. 191)

Danya was enamored of reading these little stories that had real-life plots and interesting characters. The story lines helped her build meaning, and the language structures advanced her control of English. As we collected a set of books she could read, I sent home many books every night which she read over and over. She became a phrased and fluent reader by Level 5, and I could hear the pride in her voice as she began to sound like a good reader.

Reading Recovery Lessons: Progress in Writing

Perhaps one of the greatest strengths of Reading Recovery for ELL students is that reading and writing are taught together every day. The reciprocity between reading and writing contributed to Danya’s literacy development. She developed many useful strategies in writing during these early lessons. She became consistent in spacing between words, and her spacing within words was usually good. I introduced Elkonin sound boxes to Danya during the first week of lessons. The scaffold provided by the boxes supported her ability to segment the sounds in words, and she quickly took over the task of identifying sounds in the sequence she was hearing and saying them. The control over the sounds she heard in words moved gradually from dominant consonants to most consonants to increasing control of vowels (Clay, 2001).

In addition, as she moved from sound boxes to letter boxes, Danya gained control of spelling combinations, inflectional endings, and unusual features like silent e, double letters, and hard-to-hear letters (e.g., the m in stamp). Her progress reflected Clay’s (2001) description of the changes in writing that occur over time. Despite her excellent progress in writing, Danya continued to have difficulty distinguishing which letters in English went with the sounds of e and i in some words (this is not uncommon for children whose first language is Spanish). However, this transitional confusion did not become a focus of concern, as she was taking on the strategies needed for getting to words she wanted to write and gaining increasing control over the spelling patterns of English.

My explicit teaching for control of high-frequency and high-use words in the context of the writing component also seemed important to Danya’s progress. I was purposeful and consistent in taking words to fluency by having her practice new words many times (up to 9 or 10 times if necessary) during writing. This helped Danya learn how words look, and her development of known words grew daily. For example, she independently wrote 10 words during her first full week of lessons, and for the remainder of her time in Reading Recovery, she learned five to eight words per week. By developing a corpus of known high-frequency words that she had ready access to, she increasingly was able to write more fluently and independently. By the end of her program, she controlled 82 high-frequency words.

As Danya moved through her lessons, I observed a steady growth in her control of English language struc-
tutes. I believe her path of progress in composing stories played a large role in this advancing control of common structural patterns. At the beginning, she often composed stories which imitated the structures as well as the ideas of books she had just read. I supported this early preference on her part by following her lead and not insisting that her stories be original ideas. During the first few weeks of lessons, her writing included the following paraphrased sentences or direct quotes from the little books she was reading.

**Lesson 2:** They said, “Dad can I go in the red car?”

**Lesson 4:** She said, “Look at me.”

**Lesson 5:** Up in the tree the baby owls are not asleep.

**Lesson 6:** Quiet yelled the farmer. I can’t sleep.

**Lesson 7:** Where is Father Bear? said Mother Bear.

**Lesson 9:** Sammy saw a cow but the cow didn’t see Sammy.

**Lesson 10:** Mom, Mom! Where is my Teddy Bear?

**Lesson 12:** You can come inside the house.

Although many of her early stories imitated or were patterned after the ideas of books she had read, sometimes even in early lessons she used ideas from stories combined with what was going on in her life; the structures of these sentences reflected the advances she was making in language acquisition. For example, in Lesson 1, after reading *A Birthday Cake for Ben* (Randell, 1997, Level 3), she wrote, “My Dad make me a strawberry cake.” During Lesson 3 after reading *Hot Dogs* (Randell, 1996, Level 4), Danya generated the following sentence: “I help my mom make hamburgers.” By Lesson 13 after reading *Blackberries* (Randell, 1996, Level 6), her sentence was more complex: “I went with my mom and my Dad and my brother to pick some strawberries.” I believe my stance of acceptance paid off. She seemed to be teaching herself new yet common structures from the stories she liked best. In all, 23 of the 47 stories she wrote were very close if not exactly like the language in the books she was reading.

In later lessons, as her confidence and control of language advanced, Danya’s compositions reflected more and more of her personal story:

**Lesson 25:** I love to play on the monkey bars.

**Lesson 30:** Today we had an ice cream party at school.

**Lesson 34:** One day I was late for school because I was reading.

**Lesson 37:** I like my Aunt Amalia’s house because I ride on horses.

**Lesson 40:** I went to the park and we had a picnic and my Daddy brought our bikes.

**Lesson 44:** My new rat’s name is Mini. She is beautiful.

**Lesson 45:** I went to my cousin’s house. We went in the pool four times.

Danya enjoyed composing stories and she approached writing with enthusiasm. Over the course of Reading Recovery, she gradually developed as a confident writer in English. According to Clay (1991), “It is very clear in children’s oral language learning that they work their way up through a gradient of difficulty as they gradually come to control the grammar of their language” (p. 177). Danya’s compositions provided evidence of the way in which she worked her way up through a gradient of difficulty as she came to control the grammar of the language she was learning. My support came via our conversations from which she could compose stories and in my acceptance of her attempts at language construction, whether correct or not. Additionally, I welcomed her use of book patterns and language until her own control of English gave her the ability to generate original structures for expressing her ideas.

### A Self-Extending System in Progress

As Danya gradually came to control book language (through both reading and writing) and more and more demanding visual input, her fluency in reading also continued to improve. This is not always the case for ELL students, as sometimes their development of fluent reading lags behind their control of visual processing. I believe that Danya made progress in both realms simultaneously because I was generous in providing book language in my book introductions, and I had Danya repeat novel English structures she would encounter in the reading. (See Recommendation #3, below.)

Moreover, I did not withdrawing support for language as she moved into higher-level texts (see Kelly & Neal, 1998). Instead, I continued to provide modeling of the language of the new books during book introductions throughout her program so that she could hear and repeat some of the structures before attempting to read them. Then, when she actually read the text, the sounds of the language were familiar to her. According to Clay (1993b), she had the language she needed “to produce when prompted in sequence by print cues.”
Table 3: Post-Test Results of An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement for Danya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores</th>
<th>August 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter Identification (54)</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Test (20)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts About Print (24)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Vocabulary</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Sounds in Words (37)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Reading L 16–90%, 1:3.5 SC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Danya’s Text Levels in Second Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>August (End of Program)</th>
<th>November</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>91% SC 1:3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>91% SC 1:3</td>
<td>95% SC 1:4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>90% SC 1:5</td>
<td>94% SC 1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>90% SC 1:3.5</td>
<td>94% SC 1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>94% SC 1:5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>92% SC 1:6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(p. 37). This furnished her with a sense of how the language sounded—hence, developing her ear—before she tried to read structures that were novel for her.

Throughout the duration of individualized instruction, Danya’s development as a reader was quite remarkable. She progressed from Level A to Level 16 in 48 lessons and 10 Roaming Around the Known sessions, despite two rather long interruptions in lessons. On daily running records of the new book, she consistently scored above 90% accuracy and frequently above 95%; and more importantly, her self-correction rate was usually very good (between 1:1 and 1:3). In Table 2, you will notice that I did not rush her up the levels even when she had high accuracy rates. I felt that it was important for her to have access to books at almost every level so that she could learn to control the language structures that were offered.

As Danya advanced in reading and writing, she appeared to be developing a self-extending system whereby she continued to learn to read each time she read. At the end of my instruction with her, An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement and the Scott Foresman text booklets were administered again to determine whether or not Danya had attained reading and writing competencies commensurate with her peers. The results indicated that Danya had developed the independent reading and writing strategies that are necessary for success in the regular classroom environment. (See Table 3.)

As indicated on Table 3, Danya had progressed considerably since our first meeting the previous December. Now she knew many sight words, as well as six more concepts about print, including one-to-one matching, first and last concepts, and the concepts of both letter and word. Also, she was able to write 43 words in 10 minutes, she knew how to represent almost all sounds on the dictation task, and she was reading at an instructional level comparable to readers in her grade at the end of the year (Level 16). Based on the results of the testing and Danya’s behaviors during reading and writing, it appeared that (since school was recessed for the summer, input from Danya’s teacher was not available) Danya was likely to succeed in second grade without further intervention.

Subsequent Progress

In order to follow Danya’s progress into second grade, I administered the alternate forms of the leveled reading texts in the Scott Foresman test packet in November of her second-grade year. As displayed in Table 4, Danya’s scores reveal that she was not only maintaining her gains in reading, she was building upon her literacy foundations and going forward with the average readers in her classroom. Table 4 displays a comparison between the end of her program and November text reading levels for Danya.

In the testing in August, Danya was reading at an instructional level for texts ranging from Level 10 to Level 16. Danya was able to read for meaning and problem-solve unknown words, as indicated by her self-correction rates of 1:3 and 1:5. Many of the errors that went undetected (and consequently, uncorrected) had to do with verb tense. For example, on the Level 14 text she read *pet* for *petted* six times. She was not able to detect by listening to herself read that *pet/petted* did not sound right. Other verbs that she miscued on were *fall* for *fell* and *keep* for *keeps*.

Nonetheless, Danya read higher-level books at an instructional level. Notice her unusual pattern of reading Levels 10–16 at an instructional level. This pattern persisted through the second-grade assessments. I believe this was due to her advancing visual processing abilities to which her advancing control of structure would eventually catch up. In other words, Danya couldn’t hear that it didn’t sound right, so she read on without self-correcting substitutions that were meaningful and visually similar to the
text. This kept her from scoring in the independent range.

Also, when I checked on her in November of Grade 2, I saw continued improvement in Danya’s overall reading strength. She scored in the independent range through Level 12, she almost scored at an independent level at Levels 14 and 16 (based on accuracy, fluency, and self-correction rates), and she scored at an instructional level at Levels 18 and 20, which are the text levels children in Grade 2 are expected to read. The fact that she scored at an instructional reading level for both of these texts indicates that she was able to successfully read second-grade material with instruction.

The types of errors that went undetected at this time related to some structures with which she was unfamiliar, some verb tenses (hid/hid, was/were, get/got), and some difficulty with vowels (sill/sell, looked/liked, shored/shared). On the other hand, Danya did an excellent job problem-solving several words that she had probably seldom or never before seen in print (afraid, animals, corner, break, heard, earth, human). Two other indicators of Danya’s success as a reader were in her fluency and in her comprehension of the texts; the latter was determined through discussion of the stories after the reading.

The difficulties that Danya had in terms of not always being able to tell when something did not sound right—including confusions about verb tense and trouble with some vowels—are typical for children learning English. In my discussions with her teacher at that time, I learned that Danya was in a reading group that was reading a basal reader at a first-grade level (below her instructional reading level). I shared the results of my assessments with her teacher and suggested that Danya would likely be able to read with a group of her peers on second-grade materials.

When I went back to read with Danya in February, I was delighted to learn that Danya had been moved to the grade-level group and was doing very well in terms of decoding and fluency. According to her teacher, Danya was having some trouble with the inferential questions posed at the end of stories in her literature-based reader. Data I collected in February showed that Danya had advanced considerably, surpassing other children in the classroom. The running record I took of her reading was on a story in the grade-level literature-based basal reader used in the group to which she had recently been moved. This text was at her instructional level (90% accuracy rate). She read for meaning and much of her reading was fluent. Her problem solving of unknown words was often done on the run. She was able to figure out many novel words including aunts, uncles, cousins, wonderful, and everybody. Not surprisingly, she had trouble with some proper names and with number words used for exaggeration (e.g., a hundred times, a million years, a thousand balls). It was evident that her abilities to apply problem-solving strategies flexibly were improving.

Further Assessment

I had the opportunity to read with Danya during the summer after second grade and again in November of her third-grade year. On both occasions, I used the Developmental Reading Assessment (Beaver, 1998) instead of the Scott Foresman texts because the selections were more comprehensive and still similarly leveled. Table 5 shows the results of the text reading.

During the July 2000 testing, Danya scored at the independent level on all of the Grade 2 passages (Levels 18, 20, 24, and 28) and usually maintained a good self-correction rate. Her reading was fast and fluent, and her comprehension was very good.

In November, well into her third-grade year, she read Levels 28, 30, and 34 of the Developmental Reading Assessment. Levels 30 and 34 are third-grade levels for the beginning and middle of the year. Danya was independent on these passages, scoring 100% and 99% respectively. My notes indicated that her reading was fast and fluent with good intonation. She was able to use punctuation, she adjusted speed appropriately, and her comprehension was excellent.

Clearly, Danya had a self-extending system in place. Not only was her reading of high quality, but the last passage we read (Level 34) was about

Table 5: Text-Level Reading on Developmental Reading Assessment in July and November of Danya’s Third-Grade Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Levels</th>
<th>Grade-Level Equivalents</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>November</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Grade 2 Fall of Year</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>SC Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Grade 2 Middle of Year</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>SC 1:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Grade 2 Spring of Year</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>SC 1:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Grade 2 End of Year</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>SC 1:4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Grade 3 Fall of Year</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>SC 1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Grade 3 Middle of Year</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>SC 1:4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At this point, Danya resembled Clay’s (2001) description of successful 8-year-old readers:

By definition, successful readers by about eight years of age can work at problem-solving the hard parts of the texts while also rapidly processing most of the messages. They have built effective processing systems which allow them to read and problem-solve known words in new texts and new-to-them words encountered for the first time. They can work aloud or silently. Those successful readers do what needs to be done mainly alone, somewhat analogous to the way every child builds a grammar for speaking. (p. 49)

Shy, reticent Danya had blossomed into a self-assured reader who loved to read and learned more about reading every time she read. In school, she read grade-level literature and content texts. At home she read chapter books from the school library. She chose to read all the time and it showed! Her shyness had melted away like winter snow on the nearby mountains. Danya was confident—transformed into a child who believed in herself.

**Recommendations For Instruction of ELL Students**

Several recommendations for instruction have evolved from my interactions with Danya, from my interaction of several other ELL students, and from my work with teachers as they puzzle over the teaching of these children.

1. **Observe carefully during assessment and during lessons in order to take thorough notes of what you are observing.** Reading Recovery teachers learn much from keeping careful records of the progress ELL students make as they learn to read and write and control English language structures. The variety of tasks in An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement measuring a young reader’s control of early literacy behaviors provides the teacher with a profile of the strengths the child brings to literacy instruction so that the child can begin to build on these strengths. Although Danya’s language production was sufficient enough for me to gather language samples without using the Record of Oral Language (Clay et al., 1976), this tool may provide valuable insights about a child’s control of oral language, which can be used in selecting the earliest texts. Additionally, careful analysis of daily running records and the stories the child writes helps inform instruction by capturing the development of useful behaviors and strategies, as well as the developing control of language. These records are used best as a road map to help the student become increasingly more strategic as a reader every day.

2. **Select books carefully in order to advance the child’s language, meaning, and visual processing.** Early in Roaming Around the Known sessions, I selected and read with Danya many texts with language patterns she could control. As she began to read, I continued to select texts that contained natural language. “While the child is trying to work out what reading is, and how he should work at it, natural language texts draw on his oral language competencies and allow him to build bridges across more literary texts” (Clay, 1991, p. 191). Only gradually did I add texts with more diverse language in order to develop more complex language. I believe that we, as Reading Recovery teachers, need to think very carefully about the role of language structure in beginning reading, particularly for ELL students. Book selection should include careful evaluation of structure for ELL students.

Careful attention to meaning is also essential. As I mentioned earlier, I found that I needed to do more explaining of common concepts, such as matches and farmer, than was usually necessary with children in Reading Recovery who were native speakers of English. In selecting texts, teachers also need to think about how many new concepts there are and if they are accessible to the child through the story. Too many new things will place too many demands on the fragile processing systems of these young learners. Keeping a low-anxiety approach with new concepts as described above will help to build confidence and concept knowledge.

Another factor to consider is how helpful the text is in fostering comprehension. An advantage of some of the early little books (i.e., Rigby PM Readers) is that they have real stories that hang together, boosting the child’s ability to construct meaning while reading.

3. **Plan book introductions carefully with special attention to the types of structures that may be outside of the child’s control.** Although it is common practice in Reading Recovery lessons to have children...
hear and say some of the language structures that they will encounter in print, I had Danya repeat many more phrases and sentences than I have done with most native English speakers. This helped her become familiar with English structures, it fostered her ability to problem-solve novel words, and it helped her to read with phrasing and fluency. I learned that the more generous I was in providing language during the book introduction, both through having her hear new structures and having her repeat some of the language of the book, the better Danya was enabled to do the increasingly more demanding visual processing as she progressed into upper levels. Rather than reducing Danya's opportunity to hear and rehearse text language at higher text levels, I continued to model and have her repeat novel structures throughout our lessons, helping Danya to learn more and more complex structures. (See Kelly & Neal, 1998 for an in-depth discussion of support at higher text levels.)

4. Reread for fluency. Having the child reread the new book a “second time in the same lesson to get a flow of words and a real feel for the story” (Clay, 1993b, p. 38) is particularly helpful in developing ELL students’ phrasing, fluency, and control of new structures. We did this in early lessons when appropriate, and it paid off in fostering fluency and language development.

5. Engage ELL students in many conversations. According to Clay (1991), “the child’s language patterns are most rapidly improved by quantities of one-to-one conversations with an adult, increasing massively the child’s opportunities to talk” (p. 88). By being aware of the importance of conversation, I took every possible opportunity to engage Danya in conversations throughout the lessons. We talked as we walked to and from my Reading Recovery room, and we talked during transitions from one part of the lesson to the next. During writing, we talked about anything that was of interest to Danya, but our conversations often centered on her family, what she did on weekends and vacations, and the books she was reading. Our conversations resulted in a variety of writing opportunities, many of which echoed the language in the books she was reading. I accepted her stories, whether original constructions or echoes of the little books, without trying to change her messages.

In addressing the need for more oral language learning opportunities, Clay (2001) indicates that we need to borrow time from each lesson activity to allow for more conversation. From my experiences with Danya, I endorse this approach!

6. Welcome approximations. When she composed a story independent of text language, I did not correct Danya’s imperfect English but accepted it and helped her to write whatever message she composed. The emphasis was on meaning rather than grammatical correctness. Danya learned to be a risk taker in both reading and writing because her attempts were always valued.

7. Appreciate that developing language takes time. During Roaming Around the Known sessions and in early lessons, provide many opportunities for ELL pupils to read books at lower levels, building up their control of language and of high-frequency words. In Danya’s case, because she was a second-round student, much of this reading of easy texts took place during Roaming Around the Known. Additionally, even when the processing is good, consider the value of having ELL students read books at every level, rather than skipping levels, in order to be exposed to the varieties of language each level offers.

8. Keep it easy to learn. Keeping the learning easy is managed when we scaffold, model, tell instead of ask, and teach new things in the context of the known. The more I helped Danya with what she did not know or control, the faster her acceleration of learning took place.

9. Notice and praise the half-right attempts. I discovered the value of praise in building Danya’s self-confidence. Therefore, I recommend that Reading Recovery teachers praise the half-right attempts made by ELL students instead of focusing so much on accuracy in both reading and writing. Children will become willing to take chances in an environment that values their approximations; as they take more chances, the likelihood that learning will occur will be greatly enhanced.

10. Work closely with the classroom teacher, sharing the student’s successes in reading and writing. I did this by sharing Danya’s running records and writing samples with her teachers. This is especially important if the child is quiet and unlikely to take risks in the classroom setting, which is often the case for ELL students. Because second language students like Danya frequently are very quiet in the classroom, their true capabilities may go unobserved by the classroom teacher.

**Final Thoughts**

Reading Recovery is successful with ELL students. The teaching that occurs during Reading Recovery
lessons reflects principles embedded in Cummins’ (1986) reciprocal model for working with second language learners:

Talking and writing are means to learning…genuine dialogue between student and teacher in both oral and written modalities, guidance and facilitation rather than control of student learning….This model emphasizes the development of higher level cognitive skills…and meaningful language use by students rather than the correction of surface forms. (p. 28)

We do not need to change what we do in Reading Recovery in order to succeed in teaching ELL students; we simply need to be purposeful in our teaching, patient in our expectations, and supportive of efforts of ELL students to gain oral command of a second language while developing literacy in it as well.

Reading Recovery was effective in promoting Danya's accelerated literacy development during first grade. It put her on a path of success that continued to build as she moved into Grades 2 and 3. The self-extending system, which was beginning to develop as supplemental instruction was discontinued, advanced with each new book she read until Danya was independent and confident. ELL students are successful in Reading Recovery and they discontinue on the basis of their successful processing (coordinating meaning and visual information with an ever-expanding control of structure), but they may need a little more time to develop a language system that can be fully utilized during reading. For Danya, this took until the middle of third grade. For others it may take a bit longer.

My hope is that schools will allow for this further development and not hold ELL students back or underestimate the abilities of these children who are making steady progress in language and literacy.

References


**Children's Books Cited**


