Exploring Clay’s Teaching Procedures for Assembling Cut-up Stories

Elizabeth L. Kaye, Fort Worth ISD, Fort Worth, TX
Mary K. Lose, Oakland University, Rochester, MI

The cut-up story provides an opportunity to orchestrate many literacy activities on familiar material, slowed up, and constructed deliberately. If this were an occasional activity it might not be so important, but in Reading Recovery lessons this happens every day.
— Clay, 2005b, p. 85

Editor’s note: All names are pseudonyms

In Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part Two: Teaching Procedures, section 8, “Assembling Cut-up Stories” (2005b), Marie Clay presents teaching procedures that can be used in support of the child’s integration of the composing and constructing processes associated with writing, speaking, and reading. In every lesson, Reading Recovery children benefit from this unique message constructing opportunity as they practice orchestrating strategic action on familiar material, the story they recorded in their writing booklet only minutes before. During each lesson’s cut-up story activity, the child is provided an opportunity to assemble his composition respecting the one-to-one correspondence of spoken and written words and the breaking of oral language into segments, while also engaging in strategic actions to monitor, search, and confirm using letter-sound relationships, known words, meaning, and structure as sources of information (Clay, 2001). At first, the child may assemble his story slowly and with assistance and occasional prompting from his teacher. Later in lessons, as his sentences become more complex, the child may speed up the assembly of the cut-up story, an indication of his increasing independent control over all aspects of literacy processing.

Teachers can use their observation of the child’s assembly of the cut-up story to inform further teaching, taking into account how quickly the child works across knowledge sources—whether used or neglected—and how he “consolidates one-to-one correspondence of words spoken and written, co-ordinates directional behaviors, practises checking behaviours and monitoring behaviours, breaks oral language into various segments (not just phonemes), and gives attention to a word among other words in a way that no activity for studying words in isolation can ever teach” (Clay, 2001, p. 30). The teacher’s observational notes of the child’s story assembly often resemble those of a running record and are recorded in the cut-up story column of the daily lesson record.

Children delight in managing this aspect of their Reading Recovery lesson. They move the cut-apart story pieces, choosing from among the alternatives, often commenting aloud “Huh? Where is it? Oh, here!” and confirming with confidence, “There! Yep, that’s it! I’m right!” that their efforts to make all sources of information match resulted in success. As much as they enjoy the activity, Clay (2005b) strongly asserts that the cut-up story is “not an optional extra put into the lesson to keep the child
amused. Watch the child carefully and you will clearly see evidence of what the child is attending to and what he is neglecting” (p. 84). Yet, in our observation, some Reading Recovery professionals may not appreciate the full power of the cut-up story activity, especially if they find it hard to deliver all the lesson activities within the 30-minute lesson framework.

Indeed, the space devoted to the discussion of “Assembling Cut-up Stories” in Literacy Lessons Part Two is significantly less than the space allotted for most of the other teaching procedures; however, Clay emphasizes its importance in the construction of the learner’s literacy processing system. “The cut-up story calls for the rehearsal of whatever the child is currently learning about letters, words, and sentences” (Clay, 2005b, p. 83), and for this reason, it holds significant potential to advance the child’s literacy learning and to inform our teaching. Therefore, we invite readers to join us in examining Clay’s teaching procedures for the cut-up story and the processes for its use in lessons. Our article is not meant as a substitute for section 8 of Literacy Lessons Part Two, but as a supplementary resource that provides examples of children’s stories from Reading Recovery lessons that will help explain Clay’s rationales and descriptions of the procedures for assembling cut-up stories. Interactions between children and their teachers during the cut-up story activity in early and later lessons with the rationales for the teacher’s responses to the child are included, followed by discussions of the implications for children’s learning and how it changes over time.

Processes for the Cut-up Story Activity
First, the teacher writes the child’s story using a thin dark marker for clarity on a strip of lightly colored unlined cardboard. Then, the teacher asks the child to reread his story as she cuts the story apart with scissors, starting with the level of language that would enable the child to successfully assemble his story. Perhaps for a few children in early lessons, this means that the cuts will be made only at first in two or three phrases, but for most children the story is cut apart at the word level. Then, depending on the aspects of print a particular child needs to focus on next, one or two words may be cut apart on the run (not in isolation after the entire story has been cut): the first letter (p/ut, h/ave), inflectional endings (-s, -ed, -ing), two-syllable words (un/der, ba/by), onset and rime (wi/ent, t/ook, st/ ay), compound words (some/thing, up/stairs) and known letter clusters (oth/er, quick/ly, st/opping, pr/actice, str/ eet). When cutting apart a word at the syllable level, the teacher asks the child to clap the syllables to show the teacher where to cut and to reinforce work he has done in another part of the lesson, (i.e., solving words in writing or taking words apart in reading). At other times, the teacher might exaggerate the pronunciation of an onset (e.g., c/-an, sh/-iver) as she makes the cuts, to create echoes of word work done across the lesson (i.e., comparisons of words presented in the breaking activities at the white board, while constructing words, and during writing). Very importantly, the teacher refrains from making too many cuts, avoiding the creation of “confetti” unhelpful to the child’s learning or the assembly of his story (Clay, 2001).

Once the teacher cuts apart the story she quickly arranges the pieces with the correct letter orientation in an array on the table in front of the child. For the child who initially experiences great difficulty—for example, recalling his story and coordinating the voice-to-print match required for the story reconstruction task—the teacher might direct him to look at his story in his writing book. However, in almost all other cases, the child assembles his story without using his writing book as a reference and repeats his story aloud while selecting each piece for the story assembly. At this time, the teacher observes the child’s monitoring and searching behaviors, offering support if he encounters difficulty (reminding him of his story, prompting him to make sure “everything looks right,” or suggesting that he monitor for meaning and structure). The child might also check and correct even before he moves a particular piece, work slowly and then more rapidly to confirm or self-correct, or focus on the meaning and structure with alternative phrasing or word order to assemble his story. As soon as he completes the task, the child may reread his story to determine if his assembly is correct while his teacher records evidence of the child’s strategic action on the daily lesson record. Then, the teacher places the pieces in an envelope on which she writes the child’s story and gives it to him for his reassembly at home with a parent or caregiver or later that day with a volunteer at the school.

Children and Teachers Working Together in the Cut-up Story
In the sections that follow we present transcripts and analyses of children and teachers’ work in the cut-up story activity of the Reading Recovery lesson both in early and later stages of literacy acquisition. In some of our examples, the children require teacher support and
prompting in order to assemble their stories. In other examples, the children work quite efficiently and with only minimal interaction or response on the part of the teacher. We describe the teacher’s choices about where to cut the story apart and the teacher’s invitations to the child that acknowledge the child’s current understanding of language breaks and offer him opportunities to extend his strategic control over literacy. Also, as happens often in Reading Recovery lessons, children make interesting discoveries or respond in unanticipated ways that contribute significantly to our understandings about teaching and advance the child’s and our own learning. Thus, we present some examples of these delightful surprises and invite our readers to consider how they might respond to a particular child. While reading the following examples, we suggest that you consult Clay’s (2005a) Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part One, chapter 5, “How children’s behaviours change during a series of individual lessons” for a description of possible learning progressions (particularly pages 50–51), and also review Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part Two (2005b), section 8, for procedural clarifications.

**Working in Very Early Stages**

*Cutting at the phrase level*

For the poorest readers, Clay (2005b) suggests we might cut the story into larger segments, such as phrases, for a short period of time. The teacher chooses this option for Jaden, who has difficulty remembering his story and coordinating voice-print match in reading in very early lessons. The letters and words that Jaden contributes to his written story are italicized below.

$$I$$

I found a puppy at my front door.

Jaden successfully reconstructs his cut-up story. What facilitates his work? Jaden had ownership of this message; the story idea came from an exciting discovery made when he left for school that morning, and in conversation with his teacher, he was supported in composing the story using the language that came naturally to him. Additionally, he had rehearsed the story before writing it and had reread it several times during and after the process of recording it. These experiences helped him search for and use meaning and structure while assembling the message. His known words $I$ and $a$ appear at the beginning of two of the phrases, which probably helped him attend to visual information while he worked. As an additional support, the teacher left Jaden’s writing book open so that he could use it as a model for his story assembly as shown here in Figure 1.

*Cutting between words*

Marcus has a good memory for his story and is learning to use known words and letters in print to guide the assembly of his message. The teacher cuts his story into individual words as Marcus reads, “I am going to Eric’s house today so we can play his Xbox.” Marcus begins putting his story together selecting *can for am*, then remarks, “That’s not *am!*” and quickly self-corrects. He rereads from the beginning and continues assembling. *I am going to—*

“Where’s Eric’s?” he asks; then he remarks, “Here it is,” as he grabs it. Marcus’s eyes scan the remaining words as he says, “house /h/, /h/,” and swiftly completes the remainder of the story (see Figure 2).
In his assembly of the story, Marcus clearly demonstrates control of one-to-one matching and directional behavior. His searching and monitoring are evident as he selects most words quickly and accurately, rereads to find the next word of his message, articulates the first phoneme /h/ in house to help himself know what letter to look for, and self-corrects can for am. Marcus’s comments, “That’s not am!” and “Where’s Eric’s? Here it is,” are characteristic of many children in early lessons and provide teachers with further evidence of self-monitoring and searching.

**Working at Later Stages**

**Independent monitoring and correcting**

As children move beyond the earliest stages of their work in lessons and as we carefully observe them assemble their cut-up stories, we see evidence of increased checking and self-correcting behaviors that suggest how the child is attending. Sometimes the self-monitoring occurs quickly and the error is self-corrected immediately, as illustrated in Tina’s story, cut apart as follows:

We / got / a / toothbrush / when / we / were / in / kindergarten /.

Tina reads her story while assembling it but selects were for when saying, “We got a toothbrush when—oops!” She immediately notices the error and makes the self-correction, completing the assembly of her story. “There, I did it!” she announces. It seems Tina initially attends to only the beginning of the word as she selects were; however, when she slides the word into place and lifts her hand away, she notices her mistake and self-corrects. The teacher notes the child’s actions on the lesson record as shown in Figure 3.

At other times, the child notices his mistake after the story assembly, as did Edward in the following example. We see him assemble his story, then monitor and self-correct with his final comment, a confirmation that he knows he has worked out the problems.

**Story:** Michael fell off his bike. The ambulance put him in the hospital.

**First assembly:** Michael fell off him bike. The ambulance put his in the hospital.

Edward swiftly carries out the first assembly as shown above, interchanging him and his, while stating the intended message. When he rereads the story he remarks, “Uh-oh, where’s his?” and scans the remainder of his message. Edward swaps his and him then verifies, “Now it’s right.”

When searching for visual information, it seems that Edward, like Tina, initially attends to the beginning of the two similar high-frequency words but does not check the final letters and sounds until after the first assembly. Edward’s errors and self-corrections are recorded on the lesson record form (see Figure 4) so the teacher can analyze the behaviors to inform subsequent teaching.

**Cutting apart the inflectional ending and the teacher’s demonstration for new learning**

In this example (Lose, 2008) the teacher cuts apart the story between the words and invites the child to attend to the inflectional ending in pierced. The teacher’s arrangement of the cut-up pieces and the child’s first assembly of her story are illustrated in Figures 5 and 6.

I / got / my / ears / pierc / ed / at / Claire’s / and / they / had / diamonds /.

Because the pieces at and –ed are visually similar and have the same sound /t/ at the end of the word when attached to pierc (i.e. piercat vs. pierced), the child must direct her attention beyond both the language structure (the past tense sounds right) and the letter-sound correspondence (the -ed is pronounced /t/) to also include attention to orthography (-ed looks right) for a precise match. Thus, the child’s first assembly of her sentence illustrated in Figure 6 is incorrect, but is quickly corrected by the child without comment from her teacher. It seems the child
merely noticed the remaining piece, knew it needed to be
used and simply exchanged it, so that her second assembly
was correct. Even so, the teacher is not satisfied with just
a self-correction and wisely decides to explicitly teach by
demonstration using the child’s own work as illustrated in
Figures 5 and 6.

The teacher responds (smiling at the child), “I’m glad you
made everything look right. This (directing the child’s
attention to an arrangement of the pieces to indicate the
child’s original choice pierc + at) sounds right, but this
(again, making sure the child looks directly at the sec-
ond accurate assembly, pierc + ed) also looks right!” The
teacher then records the first and second versions of the
child’s assembly of the cut-up story on the lesson record
and resolves to plan further opportunities for the child to
explore these understandings in other lessons. (Note: For a
complete discussion of this cut-up story example, see Lose
2008, pp. 9–11.)

Cutting within a word and the child’s assembly
When teachers want to emphasize a particular segment
of a word, they cut off the segment that complements the
work being done in the other parts of the lesson and that
advances the child’s searching strategies.

In the first example, the teacher cuts the message into
pieces she thinks Kestyn can easily assemble, as shown
in the compound words anything and doorstep. The child
reads as her story is cut apart with the teacher pausing at
the words anything and doorstep.

The / little / boy / was / not / doing / any / thing / . / 
He / sat / on / the / door / step / .

Teacher: (with scissors poised between any and thing)
We can cut this into two parts.

Kestyn: any and thing

Teacher: (making the cuts between the parts) Good,
and let’s keep going (as the child reads and the
teacher prepares for the next cut). Where could I
cut doorstep?

Kestyn: (pointing to each part) Between door and step
(with the teacher making the cuts as the child
suggests)

The teacher decides to cut anything and doorstep into two
pieces because halves of compound words often are used
when solving words in reading (Kaye, 2006). Earlier, as
the child was composing her story, the teacher had drawn
the child’s attention to the parts of anything, and Kestyn
had noticed the parts of doorstep on her own while reading
yesterday’s new book.

Kestyn fluently assembles the sentences, sliding each word
and the word parts into place as she reads, beginning a
new line for the second sentence. She does not reread,
pause, or make any self-corrections, leading us to sug-
uggest reasons for the rapid searching and monitoring that
characterize this smooth assembly. First, the message was
well established and easy to remember because it was the
child’s idea, drawn from the previous day’s new book.
Second, the familiarity of the message also makes it easy
for Kestyn to search for and use meaning and structure
as she assembles the story. And, finally, Kestyn writes
many words independently, exhibits a growing aware-
ness of word parts, and has worked on three words with
teacher support on the work page (little, anything, and
doors), all factors that would support her use of pho-
nological and orthographic information. These sources of information combined suggest that Kestyn is developing a strategic processing system that leads to this efficient story assembly.

**Assembling the story with teacher support**

Sometimes students incorrectly assemble their stories, perhaps neglecting to check the detail within words, as in Samuel’s cut-up story:

My super power is going fast, and I will break the world record.

In this example, the teacher prompts Samuel to find the error and when he does not, offers critical support in three places. The teacher’s language is key. First, the teacher gets the child to find the syllable break. Second, after the child assembles the story, she calls for him to find his mistake. And, third, she offers additional support when he is unable to locate the error.

Samuel: (reading the words as the cuts are made) My super

Teacher: Clap super.

Samuel: (clapping once for each syllable) Su-per

Teacher: Show me where to cut it.

Samuel: (motions with his finger to indicate that the cut should be made between the su and per) Power. Cut it here (pointing between pow and er, to direct the teacher to make the cut, continues reading as the teacher completes all the cuts).

The child assembles his story as shown in Figure 7.

Teacher: (calling for self-monitoring) Something’s not quite right.

Samuel: (rereading the story as it was written but not finding the error)

Teacher: Let’s check it again (pointing to My). My. Does it look right?

Samuel: Yes.

Teacher: (points under su then er while carefully articulating the correct syllables su – per): Su-per. Check each part.

Samuel: (pointing under each part) Su- (moves his finger to -per) Oh, I know! (quickly swaps per and er then rereads from the beginning of the sentence to confirm the message).

Samuel easily locates the syllable breaks in *super* and *power* when the teacher cuts the story, but his searching and checking processes are challenged during the sentence assembly. Even with the teacher’s prompt, “Something’s not quite right,” Samuel does not detect the error. However, the subsequent teaching interaction provides an opportunity for him to learn to check words at the syllable level, coordinating the sounds of the words with the expected sequences of letters (see procedures and prompts in Clay, 2005b, p. 83).

**Working with onset-rime breaks**

When a student is learning about onsets and rimes (breaking words into parts, for example), the teacher might reinforce that learning in writing activities and again in a child’s cut-up story. Consider the following example with the cuts between each word and the onset and rime in *stand* and *bike*. Notice the teacher’s concise language during the cutting and Kara’s searching behavior as she constructs her story.

I / can / st / and / up / on / my / b / ike / seat / , / but / I’m / not / supposed / to / .

Kara: (reads while the teacher cuts each word) I can *stand*.

Teacher: (clearly articulating) Look, *st-and* (cuts the onset immediately after articulating /st/).

Kara: (continues reading as teacher cuts) up on my *bike*

Teacher: (clearly articulates as she cuts apart the onset from the rime) *b-ike*

Kara: (continues reading to the end of the story on the strip as the teacher cuts, then reads aloud as she selects the pieces needed to remake her story) I can *stand*, *st-* (selects the onset, then selects the rime, and scans the pieces before her): up on my *bike*, *bike*. Oh yeah. (pulls together the *b* and *ike* pieces then rereads the phrase before continuing)
Celebrating 30 Years

on my bike seat but I’m not supposed to (quickly puts the period at the end). Oops, there’s a comma left over. Where does it go?

Teacher: (turning the initiative back to Kara, confident she can do this) Read your story and see where you pause.

Kara: (rereads again fluently, pauses appropriately after seat, then continues to the end of the sentence) I can stand up on my bike seat, but I’m not supposed to. I think it goes here (points between seat and but, then rereads to confirm the accurate assembly and nods). Yes, it goes here (slides the comma into the correct place).

The teacher says very little to Kara as she cuts the story. Instead, the pairing of her clear articulation and precise cutting draws attention to the onset-rime break. This story contains several words that might provide a good opportunity for learning about onset and rime (e.g., can, stand, bike, seat, not), but the teacher chooses those that she thinks will be most beneficial to Kara at this point in her learning. Although this story contains an additional challenge in the cutting of the comma, Kara’s teacher has been showing her how to determine when and where punctuation is needed in writing. So after Kara appeals for help, the teacher reminds her that she can help herself by thinking about the way reading sounds, a link to oral language and to her prior writing experiences.

Searching to make all sources match and with teacher support

I / have / to / get / syrup / on / my / pan / cakes / .

In this example, Omari searches for ways to integrate his oral language with the print displayed on the cut-up story pieces from his written composition. He shows a preference for constructing the story in the past tense using the word got, (as shown by his several attempts to switch from got to get, but only the latter is available to him as a piece for the sentence assembly task. By his own admission (“I should’ve said got”) he seems to be experiencing difficulty coordinating his oral language with the available print, the words on the cut-apart pieces. Unable to extricate himself from the difficulty, he appeals to his teacher asking, “What should I do? Like, write on the back?” Clearly confused, Omari does not appear to have the flexibility with language to resolve the current problem on his own and assemble the story in a way that also draws on the meaning of his written story. Thus his dilemma: shall the story be “I have to get syrup” (words to describe the act of procuring the sweet topping) or “I get to have syrup” (suggesting the opportunity to satisfy his palate)? Rather than add to the child’s confusion with unnecessary talk, Omari’s teacher produces his writing book and asks him to take another look at the story he has just written.

Omari: I should’ve said “I got,” but said “I get.” (rapidly assembles three words) I get to (then rereads) got to (self-corrects), get (rereads again) I got (self-corrects again), get to (searches remaining cut apart pieces and adds next word) have (then selects the remaining pieces to complete the assembly of the sentence) syrup on my pancakes (looks at teacher).

Teacher: That makes sense and sounds right.

Omari: But it doesn’t look right? (seems unsure)

Teacher: I don’t know. You check it and tell me.

Omari: Huh ah, no. Cause “I get” huh-ah, doesn’t look…

Teacher: Then fix it.

Omari: (surprised, looks at teacher) What do I do? (picks up the piece on which get is written, turns it over) Like, write on the back? (seems puzzled, gestures as if to write his substitution, got, which he has repeatedly self-corrected, on the back of the piece).

Teacher: Take a look (teacher shows child the sentence he has recorded in his writing book).

Omari: (looking at his sentence recorded in his writing book, reads) “I have (realizes his error) and switches the pieces have and get) Oops! (rereads story aloud and correctly) I have to get syrup on my pancakes.”

Attending to alternative ways of assembling the story

As stories get increasingly complex, children become more flexible with language structures and more aware of ways to vary their messages. “By about halfway through the lesson series the child will be paying attention to alternative ways of phrasing or arranging the word order or the line breaks” (Clay, 2005b, p. 85). Crystal demonstrates an awareness of phrasing when she spontaneously arranges her cut-up story with the line breaks illustrated as follows:
My dog growled at me when I was trying to pet her.

Often, teachers need to show children how phrases of language can be rearranged before they can do so on their own. In the following interaction, the teacher demonstrates how Tina’s message can be reworked. She then asks Tina to do some checking of the new structure.

Tina: (reads and correctly assembles) If I were Goldilocks, I would ring the doorbell!

Teacher: (rearranges the phrases as I would ring the doorbell If I were Goldilocks!) I’ve changed it. Would this sound right?

Tina: (reads new arrangement) I would ring the doorbell If I were Goldilocks! (pauses briefly) Yes, you can say it both ways, but you’d have to write If with a lower case i.

Several days later, Tina writes, “Last night I fell on the floor, and I woke up and went back on the bed.” She assembles her cut-up story the way it was originally written, then spontaneously reorders the phrases for an alternate possibility.

Tina: (rearranges the message and reads the new construction) Look! I fell on the floor Last night, and I woke up and went back on the bed. (points to capital letter L) But we’d need to fix that L.

In the preceding examples, we see that Tina is becoming aware that phrases of language can be rearranged while the message retains its original intent. In addition, her remarks reflect understanding of an important print convention: Capital letters seldom appear in the middle of the sentence, and certainly not for the words if and last.

Discoveries and Surprises: Opportunities for Teacher Learning

The cut-up story activity provides a daily opportunity for children to orchestrate strategic behaviors on a familiar text. The experience reveals a great deal about what children easily attend to, work on with effort, or tend to overlook. A child’s spontaneous comments can signal new discoveries to the observant teacher. Watchful teachers can learn more about their students with each cut-up story activity, and their observations guide their subsequent teaching decisions. In the lesson excerpts from Valeria and Dylan that follow, put yourself in the teacher’s position. What do you learn about the children from their discoveries and confusions? How might this information guide your teaching?

What can you learn about Valeria from her comments and actions? Refer to Figures 8 and 9 above as you read.

I love to put polish on my nails, and Dr. Kaye do too.

Valeria reads as she quickly assembles her story, “I love to put polish on my nails, and Dr. Kaye do too.” Then she pulls the words to, too, and do out of her story and excitedly remarks, “Hey, to is like too, and to is like do” as she pairs them to show her teacher.

It seems clear from Valeria’s comment that she is making links, discovering that words can look or sound similar. A teacher’s response to her comment would depend upon whether this is a new discovery or a frequent observation. Perhaps Valeria is attending to the similarities of words because she has been taught to do so. Or, maybe her comment suggests that the teacher take advantage of this newly revealed strength. Is she able to make useful links in reading and writing? Perhaps the prompts “Do you know a word that looks like that” and “What can you see that might help?” would encourage the child to use a
known word to solve a new word in reading (Clay, 2005b, p. 132). In writing, the prompt, “Have you heard another word that sounds like that?” might encourage Valeria to think about the sounds of a word she wants to write and consider whether she already knows a similar word that can help her (Clay, 2005b, p. 65). These are just a few of the approaches that might support the child’s new learning.

The cut-up story also gives teachers an opportunity to observe children’s understanding of directional and spatial concepts. Dylan’s initial assessment with An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 2013) revealed that he had some directional confusions. He moved left-to-right appropriately on the first line of print, but moved right-to-left on the second line of print. Correct directional movement became an early priority for his learning. Months after correct directional movement seemed established, Dylan quickly assembled his cut-up story as shown in Figure 10.

The little cubs are scared to get in the river.

What can be learned about Dylan from his assembly of the cut-up story? If you were his teacher, how would this inform your teaching? Dylan assembles his story swiftly and in the correct sequence, but not with appropriate directional movement in line two. (The right-to-left directionality surprised his teacher. She was distracted during the assembly of the story and neglected to intercept his directional error.) Even though he has been exhibiting correct directional movement in the stories he reads and writes, something threw him off in this context. As Dylan’s teacher, you might pay more attention to text layout and directional lapses across the entire lesson and especially in the cut-up story. You might also review your lesson records to see whether he had consistently constructed his story in one long line across the table. If so, perhaps this inadvertently suggested to the child that he need not attend closely to the directional rules for multiple lines of text.

Invitation to Teachers

In addition to the guidance Clay provides in her teaching procedures for the cut-up story and the issues we have discussed in this article, we want to emphasize that there is no one right way to cut apart a child’s story. The way in which the story is cut depends on the child’s responding history, what he currently controls, and what he needs to learn next in order to advance his literacy processing system. Factors to consider are how to cut apart a story (in phrases, between words, within words) and where specifically (at the inflectional ending, first letter, onset-rime, between known parts). For the assembly task, would you ask the child to use a return sweep, one, two, or three lines and why or why not? What in particular would you want to know about the child and where he is currently in his literacy learning journey?

We provide the following sentence for your consideration and analysis regarding the cut-up story. We can think of several possibilities for cutting apart this story and the rationales that would inform our decisions about where to make the cuts for a particular child. Following are just two options, but there are several others.

Example 1: My / mom’s / broth / er / rode / my / scoot / er, / but / when / he / did / the / jump / he / landed / on / the / concrete / .

Example 2: My / mom’s / br / other / rode / my / sc / ooter / , / but / when / he / did / the / jump / he / landed / on / the / concrete / .

What principles of language do you think we attended to in these examples? And, what are your choices for other ways to cut apart the story and the rationales that underpin your decisions?

Conclusion

Clearly, Clay’s teaching procedures for section 8, “Assembling Cut-up Stories,” are much more than a puzzle assembly activity or a brief interlude before the child meets his new story. As Clay reminds us,

Cutting up the story (which the child composed, then wrote and then reread more than once) provides the child with opportunities to relate reading to writing, writing to speaking, and reading to speaking. The interrelationships of these three language activities become implicitly and explicitly apparent to children as they learn about assembling messages. (Clay, 2005b, p. 81)
For Reading Recovery professionals, the challenge is to effectively use these teaching procedures in every daily lesson to foster the child’s increasing control over literacy. If delivered with a focus on the child’s current competence, and what he needs to learn how to do next, the teaching procedures for the cut-up story go a long way toward helping even the most-struggling learner become an independent strategic reader and writer.

References


About the Authors

Elizabeth (Betsy) Kaye is a teacher leader at Fort Worth ISD in Texas and a trainer emerita from Texas Woman’s University. She has been involved in Reading Recovery since her training year in 1988–89 and has also worked as a special education teacher and a classroom teacher.

Mary K. Lose is an associate professor in the Department of Reading and Language Arts, School of Education and Human Services, and director of the Reading Recovery Center of Michigan at Oakland University in Rochester. Her research interests focus on early literacy intervention policies and initiatives, teachers’ professional development, and contingent teaching.