

Beyond the Words: Considering Nonverbal Communication in Reading Recovery Teaching

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Introduction

Among the changes readers of *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part One: Why? When? and How?* (Clay, 2005a) and *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part Two: Teaching Procedures* (Clay, 2005b) have noted are Clay's new emphasis on less teacher talk and more demonstration on the part of the teacher in response to the child. In the past, several authors (Anderson, 1999; Clay, 1998; Clay & Cazden, 1990; Van Dyke, 2006) have discussed elements of child-teacher conversation within the Reading Recovery lesson, and Clay has advised that lessons should have a conversational tone. However, given the highly interactive nature of the Reading Recovery lesson and the new focus placed on "speechless demonstrations" and "showing versus telling" as forms of teaching, it seems important to examine the role of nonverbal communication within the Reading Recovery lesson and the impact it may have on the efficiency and effectiveness of our interactions with children.

While nonverbal communication and verbal communication may appear to be discrete categories of communication, they are in fact intertwined and must be viewed holistically. The effect of nonverbal

communication goes "beyond the words" to convey information of critical importance to teachers and children in literacy learning contexts in general and in Reading Recovery in particular.

In this article I first, present an overview of nonverbal communication in early literacy learning; second, relate research on nonverbal communication in early learning contexts to Clay's work in Reading Recovery; third, present three transcripts illustrating elements of nonverbal com-

munication in child-teacher interactions in select Reading Recovery lesson activities; fourth, analyze these transcripts in terms of their relevance for a particular child and highlight the critical elements of nonverbal communication that complement verbal communication and seem to make a difference to the child's responses to instruction; and fifth, provide recommendations that we as Reading Recovery professionals might consider as we interact with our students.



Teacher attentiveness and responsiveness including models and demonstration are powerful elements of nonverbal communication with implications for young children's literacy learning.

Nonverbal Communication in Literacy Learning

While the field of nonverbal communication is extensive, for the purposes of this article I have chosen to focus on the application of nonverbal communication to literacy learning. Therefore, the following definition will be used:

Nonverbal communication in a literacy learning context is comprised of messages conveyed without words for the purpose of directing the child toward some constructive activity.

These messages are characterized by teacher attentiveness and responsiveness and include features such as tone of voice, timing (including pace, sequence, and interruptions), shifts and adjustments to the child, and models and demonstrations.

For example, increasing the volume of one's voice or varying the pitch and tone have been shown to support the child's understanding by highlighting concepts that are worth noting or by drawing the distinction between divergent concepts in the absence of words (Pennycook, 1985; Woolfolk & Brooks, 1985). Researchers have found that in literacy contexts, young children gravitate toward an adult voice that is warm; friendly; clear; utilizes appropriate speed, volume and intonation; and captures the child's attention (Doherty-Sneddon, 2003; Holdaway, 1979; Manusov & Patterson, 2006; Trelease, 2006). In contrast, a harsh tone of voice may distress a child, diverting his attention or discouraging his engagement with tasks even if the level of challenge is suited to the child (Holdaway; Knapp & Hall,

2006; Paley, 1981). Sensitively structuring learning or *scaffolding* has also been shown to be of importance to the learner with tasks that are pitched at an appropriate level of challenge enabling even the lowest-performing students to be as self-regulated and efficient in responding as their high-performing peers (Wood, 2003).

Further research shows that young children's use of gesture is an indication of the speed with which they develop language, while the use of gesture by both young children and their teachers fosters optimal learning on the part of the child (Broaders, Cook, Mitchell, & Goldin-Meadow, 2007; Goldin-Meadow, 2004). And, shifts and adjustments to learners as well as waiting or pausing to allow time for response have been shown to increase the amount of time children will engage with tasks or persist in the face of challenge (McNaughton, Glynn, & Robinson, 1987; Paley, 1981; Rowe, 1986).

Relationship of Nonverbal Communication to Clay's Work in Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery professionals have long been advised by Clay to sensitively observe children's literacy behaviors and patterns of response in order to effectively assist their learning (Clay, 1991, 1993, 2001, 2002). Readers of Clay's (2005a, 2005b) latest work on teaching struggling learners will be struck by the number of references to nonverbal communication including *showing* versus *telling* as a form of teaching interaction, models, and *speechless demonstrations*. Additional references stress the concept of *an economy of words* adding to the power of nonverbal communica-

tion if words as explanation must be used at all. Both volumes of Clay's *Literacy Lessons* contain well over 100 references to nonverbal communication, including the following:

Part One

- The teacher can demonstrate as she reads and writes... Clear demonstration is more effective than talking about these directional things. (p. 33)
- [referring to Roaming Around the Known and the sequencing of tasks] Try to arrange for the *newest* things to recur in different parts of every session. (p. 35)
- Talking yourself through a movement or analysis (letting your words guide your actions) is a way to slow down attending...but this gets in the way of fast perception... (p. 43)
- Teach most new things by demonstrating slowly. (p. 38)

Part Two

- Demonstrations are recommended; talk may increase confusions. (p. 6)
- You do not need to talk about the demonstration; just do it when you see the child is attending. (p. 7)
- Deliberate demonstrations by the teacher when appropriate without verbal explanations will produce good results. Children mimic well. (p. 13)
- Teacher talk is not very helpful...limit instructions...use minimal verbal prompts. (p. 32)

- Avoid doing too much cutting and too much talking... (p. 83)
- To habituate left-to-right body and eye movements when working with words in isolation have the child work to your left at the magnetic board. Create your models on the right. (p. 140)
- Demonstrate phrasing on the text...occasionally mask the text with a card or your thumb...slide a card underneath each line...slide a card from left to right. (p. 153)
- Teacher talk makes it hard to do this simple work. (p. 145)

Clearly, Clay's words suggest that nonverbal communication plays a central role in our work with children. Throughout our lessons with children as Reading Recovery teachers, we would be wise to examine the extent to which we employ nonverbal communication in our teaching and to observe carefully the ways that children communicate their understanding without words. Through the analysis of the transcripts that follow, I will go beyond the words to explore the critical role of nonverbal communication in select Reading Recovery lesson activities and consider the ways nonverbal communication can affect children's literacy learning progress.

Transcript Analysis: Nonverbal Communication in Select Reading Recovery Lesson Activities

Because the procedures for the child-teacher interactions that are featured in this article are described in detail in Clay's *Literacy Lessons Part Two*, it

will not be the purpose of this paper to unpack the various teaching procedures or the rationales for a teacher's decision to do *this* versus *that* in any lesson activity with a child. Readers who wish to explore these procedures in greater detail can read *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part Two: Teaching Procedures*. Likewise, readers who wish to explore the teaching procedures that are featured in Transcripts 1–3, can refer to specific sections of Clay's text: Section 5d, "I Can Take Words Apart" (pages 42–46); Section 8, "Assembling Cut-up Stories" (pages 81–85); and Section 6, "Learning to Compose and Write Messages" (pages 50–69). Instead, I want to draw the reader's attention to the elements of nonverbal communication that play a critical role in the young child's learning when verbal communication or words alone does not.

Transcript 1: Breaking activity in one child's early lesson

In this transcript we will examine the child-teacher interactions in Figure 1 that show the teacher working with a child early in his lessons in the *breaking* activity at the white board. Notice that in Turn 1, the teacher builds the child's known word *stop* and simply states, "Watch." The teacher then deliberately moves the two-letter onset *st* to the left as one chunk. Without articulating the sounds in the letters or saying anything else, she then moves the *op* rime from right to left so that it meets the onset and appears before the child as the intact word. She asks the child to follow her lead saying only "you break it into two parts," which he does successfully, while also articulating at his own initiative the sounds of the onset and rime. Because the child appears to have understood the

teacher's demonstration by successfully breaking the known word as illustrated by his response in Turn 2, the teacher now decides to help the child become aware that this example is not an anomaly and that other words can be broken similarly. In Turn 3, the teacher begins to repeat her demonstration using the word *bring*. However, as seen in Turn 4, the child reaches in to move the two-letter onset *br* from the right to the left without waiting for the teacher's second demonstration. Taking into account the child's initiative, the teacher refrains from interrupting the child, and he proceeds to pull the rime *ing* from the right to meet the letter cluster onset on the left thus indicating that he has grasped the word breaking principle that his teacher had just demonstrated.

There are several elements of nonverbal communication that make this activity a powerful opportunity for the child, enabling him to learn this important principle of how words work. First, the child and teacher stand at a large white board, the only time in the lesson besides the Letter Identification activity in which they are not seated at a table. This change to a different physical setting communicates to the child a clear transition from one task to the other enabling the teaching to proceed with new goals and without the distraction of books, papers, markers, and other reading and writing tools. The work at the white board supports the child's ability to focus his attention solely on the breaking of individual words without the distraction of considering the meaning of the words in relationship to other words embedded in lines of print. Second, the teacher and child stand side-by-side suggesting nonverbally to the child that his

Figure 1. Breaking Words into Parts

Turn	Teacher	Child
1	(stands to the right of the child at the white board) Watch. (using magnetic letters of various colors, builds the known word <i>stop</i> by pulling the <i>st</i> as one chunk toward the left and then moving the <i>op</i> chunk to make <i>stop</i> ; sweeps her finger beneath the built word and says ‘stop’) You break it into two parts.	(facing the white board)
2		(looking at the word <i>stop</i> , pulls the <i>st</i> as one chunk from the right to the left and articulates the sound, then moves the <i>op</i> chunk across to build the word) <i>St-, -op. That’s stop.</i>
3	Right and here’s another one. (begins to repeat the demonstration presented in Turn 1, using the known word <i>bring</i> , but on noticing the child’s unprompted initiation, suspends the demonstration and permits the child to take over)	
4		(child reaches over and pulls the <i>br</i> part to his left, then moves the <i>ing</i> part across to build the word) <i>Bring!</i> (smiles, pumps arm as if to celebrate, expresses tremendous satisfaction)

teacher will work with him as a partner in the activity and that should he encounter difficulty, support will be forthcoming. Third, the teacher stands to the right of the child so that when she demonstrates the breaking task, letters enter the child’s field of vision from the right so that he can scan them left-to-right as he would when reading and writing words. This shows the child without verbal explanation that the order of letters in words is not arbitrary.

Fourth, the teacher uses three-dimensional colored magnetic letters so that the child can easily see and feel the differences among the letters reducing the chances that certain visually similar letters will be confused or mistaken for other letters that might complicate his recognition of word parts. The use of the three-dimensional letters is an important form

of nonverbal communication as it draws the child’s attention to particular letter features in isolation that would not necessarily be apparent to him when encountered in their two-dimensional form embedded within print on a page. The use of a variety of colored magnetic letters ensures that the child will not attend to letter features by color only but will learn to break words by discriminating carefully and attending to letter detail including the size, shape, and orientation of the letters. Fifth, in her previous demonstrations, the teacher has made sure that the child has developed a preferred way of looking at words respecting the left-to-right order of letters in words and that he has learned to break words at the root and inflectional ending before moving from these first two steps to the third and more-challenging principle of onset and rime. Choosing a word

well known to the child and proceeding from the known (easiest) to the partially known and in later lessons moving gradually to the unknown (hardest) is a form of task *sequencing* that helps the child learn the word breaking task first before being asked to apply that knowledge to less well-known or unknown words. The careful sequencing of tasks on the part of the teacher aims the instruction at the child’s current level of understanding, thus avoiding additional demonstrations that could confuse the child and consume precious lesson time.

Sixth, the teacher issues a one-word-only invitation to the child (“Watch”) and then uses only six words (“you break it into two parts”) to prompt the child to respond to her demonstration. Deliberately using a minimum of verbal language enables the child to process the task without

excessive auditory interference that could compete for his attention to print (Clay, 2005a, p. 43). Seventh, the teacher moves the *s* and *t* letters together, communicating that both of the letters comprise the onset as she does when she moves the *o* and *p* letters together to indicate that they are the rime. Had she moved the letters individually, she might not have been able to clearly demonstrate these concepts, and she may have had to augment her teaching with another demonstration that might confuse the child. Eighth, when the child takes the initiative to break the second example word on his own, the teacher wisely withholds comment so as not to compromise his independence. Taken altogether, these elements of nonverbal communication make it easier for the child to learn and permit the eventual fading of teacher support to encourage the child's independent application. This fading of support communicates nonverbally a level of respect and care for the child as a learner; that he can strike out on his own and learn by his own efforts without the necessity of another's words to confirm for him what he is able to do independently.

Transcript 2: One child's reconstruction of the cut-up story

In this section, I examine the ways in which the cut-up story activity provides another clear example of nonverbal communication operating within the Reading Recovery lesson in support of the child's learning. Figures 2a–2d illustrate the work between one child and her teacher mid-way through the child's series of Reading Recovery lessons. Figure 2a is a transcript of the verbal and nonverbal communication between the child and teacher during the entire cut-up story activity. Figure 2b

shows the ways the teacher cut apart the story based on the child's current understanding of language and where the child needs to direct her attention concerning print. Figure 2c shows the teacher's arrangement of the cut-apart pieces in an array, and Figure 2d shows the child's first attempt at reconstructing the story pieces.

In Figure 2a, Turn 1, the teacher turns toward the child holding the sentence strip so that the child can read the message from left to right, as it would appear in text. The teacher holds the scissors above the strip at the beginning of the sentence and without any verbal comment offers a simple but firm nonverbal signal to the child that her full attention is required for the task. Also without comment, the teacher cuts apart the child's story word by word as the child reads each word aloud and then pauses with her scissors poised above the word *pierced* to invite the child to suggest precisely where the word should be divided.

Taking her cues from the child (Turn 2), the teacher cuts apart the word at the inflectional ending between the *c* and the *e*, because the child had commented on it during the writing of the word ("Oh, the *ed*") and because the teacher's earlier observations of the child's work had shown that she had been neglecting to search completely to the end of words. The teacher continues cutting apart the story without comment until all the cuts have been made, including a break between the last word and the period at the end of the sentence (Figure 2b). The teacher quickly arranges the pieces oriented from top to bottom in an array and places the visually similar *and* and *ed* pieces in the first row (Figure 2c). This arrangement invites the child

to scan, while coordinating carefully her search, respecting the ways that print and language work together. As illustrated in Figures 2d and 2a (Turn 4), the child attached the *at* piece to the end of *pierc* (*piercat*), yet quickly self-monitors and searches, resulting in a self-correction (*pierced*) which her teacher praises as shown in Figure 2a, Turn 5.

There are several important elements of nonverbal communication on the part of the teacher and the child that are illustrated in the cut-up story examples. First, the teacher's cuts show the child without words that language can be broken at the word and subword levels and that she needs to attend to all of these levels in the construction of a message. Second, the teacher's arrangement of the pieces in the array invites the child to search visually the multiple levels of language using meaning, language structure, and print as sources of information that can be used to construct a precise message. The teacher's arrangement of the pieces within the array from left-to-right and top-to-bottom minimizes confusions and communicates nonverbally to the child that letter detail and word order matters.

The child's nonverbal responses also communicate a great deal to the teacher. In Figure 2d, we see that the child rapidly assembled the cut-up story but attached the *at* and *pierc* parts to make *piercat*, an incorrect substitute for the word *pierced*. This reconstruction on the part of the child indicates nonverbally to the teacher that the child has conducted a search to the end of the word, drawing upon her knowledge of how the word sounds. But the child's assembly also indicates that as yet she has not acquired an understanding of

Figure 2a. Transcript of the Teacher's Arrangement of the Cut-up Story and the Child's Reassembly

Turn	Teacher	Child
1	(after writing the child's story on a strip of oak tag, begins to cut the story apart word by word as the child reads it aloud, then pauses with the top of the scissors directly above the word <i>pierced</i> , as if to invite the child nonverbally to suggest where she should break the word) See Figure 2b	
2		(points with her index finger indicating that the cut could be made between the <i>c</i> and the <i>ed</i>)
3	(without commenting, makes the cut between <i>pierc</i> and <i>ed</i> and completes cutting apart the child's story, then arranges the pieces as illustrated in Figure 2c)	
4		(quickly scans the pieces of the cut-up story, and reconstructs the story as illustrated in Figure 2d neglecting to utilize the <i>ed</i> piece in the reassembly; rereads her story aloud while scanning the print and quickly notices the extra piece <i>ed</i> has not been used; removes the <i>at</i> piece from the end of <i>pierc</i> and substitutes in its place the correct inflectional ending, then inserts <i>at</i> to make a precise match; smiles, expressing a sense of accomplishment) There!
5	(smiling at the child) I'm glad you made everything look right. This (showing an arrangement of the pieces to indicate the child's original choice <i>pierc</i> + <i>at</i> while also making sure the child is directing her attention to the demonstration) sounds right, but this (again making sure the child looks directly at the child's second and accurate attempt <i>pierc</i> + <i>ed</i>) also looks right! (makes a note on her lesson record to indicate the first and second versions of the child's assembly of the cut-up story and resolves to plan further opportunities for the child to explore these understandings in other parts of the lessons)	

the inflectional ending's orthography to make the word look right as well. Furthermore, the child's hasty search on the first attempt, in which she neglects to utilize the remaining piece, *ed*, prompts the child to monitor and search again respecting the one-to-one correspondence between oral language and print. The child's arrangement of the pieces signals to the teacher nonverbally that the child continues to have some lapses in her attention to print, in particular inflec-

tional endings, and may need further opportunities to bring her understanding of these concepts under control. Because her teacher withholds verbal explanation of a complex linguistic principle that would likely confuse the child, the child can begin to understand that although the past tense of the verb may sound different (e.g., the *t* sound in *looked* vs. the *d* sound in *played*), nevertheless it is represented visually only with the *ed* inflectional ending. Alternatively, the

child's omission may signal haphazard responding or a simple temporary lapse in attention to the task on the part of the child.

Whatever the reason for the child's error, the teacher uses her close observation to respond immediately and warmly to the child, confirming that while her first attempt, *piercat*, sounded right, her second attempt now looks right at the end just like other words that the child knows

Figure 2b. The Cut-up Story Divided at the Word and Inflectional Ending Levels

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

**Figure 2c. (left) The Teacher's Arrangement of the Cut-Up Story****Figure 2d. (above) The Child's First Arrangement of the Cut-Up Story**

(e.g. *looked* and *jumped*), all of which she explains nonverbally utilizing the pieces from the child's first (*pierc+at*) and second (*pierc+ed*) assemblies of the word. It is important to note that the teacher wisely refrains from further comment, making a note on her lesson record to arrange additional opportunities for the child to explore this concept again later in the same lesson or in subsequent lessons as needed.

Clearly, several elements of nonverbal communication are evident in the cut-up story lesson activity. The teacher cut apart the child's story without talk about her decisions, so as to provide optimum opportunities for the child to examine print and to self-monitor, search for useful information, and self-correct her original attempt. The teacher arranges the story pieces without verbal comment so as to foster the child's search of information without interference from the teacher's words. The teacher sequenced or scaffolded the tasks respecting the child's current understanding of language, and with a minimum of new challenges, to advance the child's strategic control.

Finally, the teacher used her observations of the child's responses in the cut-up story activity to assess the child's understanding and to inform subsequent interactions with the child.

Transcript 3: Nonverbal communication in the constructing and composing of a written message

The examples provided in Figure 1, breaking words at the white board, and in Figures 2a–2d, the cut-up story, provide evidence of nonverbal communication operating on the part of both teacher and child within Reading Recovery lesson activities. While these are clear examples of nonverbal communication within instructional contexts, Transcript 3, showing the child and teacher conversing to generate the story for writing, goes beyond the instructional implications to show the affective or emotional factors that are conveyed nonverbally and that are essential to support children's learning.

Within the time period that precedes the writing of the child's story, the teacher and child engage in a conversation that helps the child construct

a story that he would like to write.

The conversation with his teacher enables the child to consider what he wants to say and the teacher helps him shape the message so that it can be recorded utilizing the letters and words that the child controls and with support as needed from his teacher. It is important that the message come from the child. Not only does the use of the child's own message help him monitor what he wants to write, it also communicates nonverbally to the child that what he has to say is worthwhile.

This form of nonverbal communication is important for it motivates the child to maintain interest, contribute optimally, and work diligently within the story writing activity. When the message is personal and meaningful to the child, it "belongs" to him, making it less arduous to manage the mechanics of its production; both the analysis of the words and the formation of the letters if not yet fully under the child's control may present challenges. Equally importantly, when the person with whom the child is working expresses genuine interest in what the child has to say,

the likelihood of his persistence in the face of challenge is increased.

Notice how in Turn 1 the teacher looks directly at the child and invites him to participate in the conversation by pausing, smiling and leaning forward. These nonverbal behaviors on the part of the teacher—including the insertion of a short “filler,” in this instance, “hmmm...” — are invitations to the child to either contribute to the topic that the teacher initiated or ideally to reject the teacher’s topic and propose instead a topic for a story that personally interests him. Initiating one’s own topic and turn taking in a conversation, usually reserved only for friends or individuals who share emotional space, are important steps; they are not typically features of conversation within instructional or school settings where teachers often dominate the discourse, taking complete control over conversation or explanations and disregarding the child’s current level of language competence or his interests.

Notice how in Turn 2 the child looks away from his teacher, shifts his weight from foot to foot and utilizes “rerunning” starts, each one a nonverbal indication that he is experiencing some difficulty crafting a response to his teacher or searching his knowledge of language for the precise words. Because his teacher is patient, refrains from interrupting the child, and seems genuinely interested in what he might have to say, he persists in his quest to make meaning. After three false starts or what Pinker (1994) calls “repairs to the speech” and Wood (1998) calls self-correction or evidence of self-instruction (“I wouldn’t...I wouldn’t...I wouldn’t even if I...”), the child abandons his attempt to answer his teacher’s question and selects a topic that truly

interests him. In a complete shift in direction, he takes the lead, posing a question to engage his teacher’s interest and to invite her response as he looks directly at her: “Know what I’m going to wear outside?” This form of nonverbal communication—the turn taking and the shifting of perspective on the part of the child and the teacher, and the seizing of the topic on the part of the child in response to his teacher even though she is in a position of authority with greater control over the direction of the lesson—suggests that the emotional bond between this teacher and this child is excellent.

Ever so gently and without insisting that he follow her lead and respond only to her questions, she also leans forward expressing strong interest in what he has to say and responding to the personal nature of their communication by offering warmly, “What?” Again with some false starts, the child explains that instead of worries about forgotten snow boots that should be worn at recess, he will be covering himself in his old Halloween costume—a “plaything” as he describes it—much more interesting and elegant attire than a pair of sensible snow boots for a 6-year-old on the day before Halloween! (See Turn 4.) While also gently encouraging the child, the teacher clasps her hands on the table, looks directly at the child and tilts her head as if seeking clarification and restates the child’s message asking if he is going to wear his “costume” outside. (See Turn 5.) In Turn 6 the child again shifts his weight from one foot to the other displaying the significant difficulty he experiences expressing himself, but eventually explains that he is entitled to wear his costume outside because it is ripped and thus qualifies as a plaything.

Throughout this interaction, the teacher again wisely withholds comment and in Turn 7, opens her arms wide, a nonverbal expression of acceptance and acknowledgment of the child’s explanation and invites the child to restate his story in order to shape the composition. As warm as her response is, the child merely nods, seemingly unable to produce the words to formulate his original message. Again his teacher provides the context for shaping the composition, providing some needed “wait time” for the child and ensuring that she will partner with him in the recording of the message: “Oh, say it again, so we can write it down!” (Turn 9). As evidenced by the clapping of his hands, an expression of joy (“Oh yeah, yeah, yeah!”), and later the clasping of his hands together with fingers intertwined and stretched apart, the child displays clearly his enthusiasm for his message and his conviction for what he intends to write: “I’m going to put on my fireman costume!” (See Turn 10.) His teacher acknowledges his message by smiling, indicating nonverbally her admiration for him and his wonderful message taking delight in his enthusiasm and suggesting, as she hands him the marker, that he is indeed ready to begin writing (Turn 11).

Figure 3 shows what happens when the teacher makes shifts and adjustments in her agenda and goes the way of the child. By smiling genuinely and warmly, turning to face the child, looking directly at him, and pausing to provide time for his response, she communicates nonverbally that what he has to say and write are important, valued, and worthy of recording as an authentic and permanent record of his ideas. This form of nonverbal communication in response to the

Figure 3. Constructing and Composing a Written Message

Turn	Teacher	Child
1	(with enthusiasm and looking directly at the child) Oh, Christopher! I was just so surprised this morning when the snow came and you forgot to put your boots on...hmmm... (pauses, leans forward, smiles warmly)	
2		(standing near the table where they will write, looks out the window at the snow, shifting his weight from one foot to the other) I wouldn't...I wouldn't...I wouldn't even if I... (turns and looks directly at the teacher; leans forward as if to share an important message revealed only to his teacher and asks in a soft voice) Know what I'm going to wear outside?
3	(leaning forward in response to the child, displays great interest and speaks softly) What?	
4		Uhm, my uhm, my costume, but it's ripped. (gestures as if to indicate rips in fabric) So I'm gonna have it as, uhm, a plaything.
5	(as if seeking clarification, continues to express interest, clasps hands in front of her, places them on the table, looks directly at the child and turns head) So you're, so you're going to wear your costume outside?	
6		(shifting from one foot to the other again and gesturing in the air with his hands as if trying to clarify what it is he is trying to tell, then leaning forward and looking intensely at his teacher; searches her face in response to her increased interest and speaks softly) Because it's my old costume and it's all ripped.
7	(raises arms, then opens arms as if inviting response) Oh, so you get to wear it outside and play with it, play in it?	
8		(nods, looks intently)
9	(expressing enthusiasm, smiling broadly, picks up her pencil to record what the child has said in her notes) Oh, say it again so we can write it down. (pauses as if to offer the child an invitation to further shape his story)	
10		(sits in his chair and then excitedly says) Oh yeah, yeah, yeah! (clapping once, then clasping his hands together weaving the fingers of both hands together and inverting the hands, flexes his fingers as if stretching the fingers in preparation for writing) I'm going to put on my fireman costume!
11	(smiles broadly, looks directly at the child and hands him a marker inviting him to begin writing)	
12		(smiling, leans over the paper and articulates the first word; begins writing his story) I'm...

child's interests and feelings is critically important to the child's engagement in the writing task and a necessary support for his literacy learning and development over time.

Implications for Reading Recovery Teaching

I am sure that many of us have observed the consequences of overlooking the role of nonverbal communication in our teaching. Sometimes within a writing conversation the teacher will stick to her agenda only or change the child's story so much so that the child forgets his story or is unable to extricate himself from a tangle of words that are not his own or a message that holds little interest for him. Other times, the teacher may select a book or tasks that are so difficult for the child that the child's approach to the task becomes compromised and he engages in a battle of wills with his teacher, too emotionally upset to redirect his attention. Or, he may sit passively, withdraw from an activity altogether, may fail to initiate problem-solving action, fidget with his clothing, avert his gaze, or take his eyes off print, thus delaying his literacy learning progress. As Clay has advised, when we utilize demonstration and modeling, we do not have to augment our teaching with words of explanation that get in the child's way, thus enabling us to respond contingently, and make effective use of lesson time to benefit the child (Lose, 2005, 2007). Clearly, a consideration of nonverbal communication on the part of teachers helps to optimize children's learning and provides useful feedback to teachers so they can refine their interactions with children. Therefore, I suggest that we consider the following recommendations to

enhance the effectiveness of our work with children in Reading Recovery.

Arrange the teaching environment to facilitate the child's attention to tasks.

For example, make sure that the chair and table at which the child sits are adjusted to his height so that his arms are at a comfortable angle, his feet rest on the floor, and he is able to look at print at an appropriate angle without having it skewed or distorted. Consider the arrangement of materials on the white board so that the child can direct his attention to focus on the demonstrations that are presented to him. Within all lesson activities minimize clutter so as not to distract the child.

Choose materials carefully to optimize the child's learning.

Avoid using texts that have too many unfamiliar concepts or, if concepts are challenging, make sure that you provide sufficient support so that the child is not stumped by the complexity. Until a child controls the early concepts of print, (e.g., left page before right page, left-to-right sequencing of print, letter vs. word, one-to-one correspondence, and return sweep) refrain from using texts that have a complex layout of print including words above and below the pictures, speech bubbles, sentences crossing two pages, intricate or unfamiliar fonts, narrow spaces between words, or multiple lines of print. These obstacles are enough to throw the young learner off course, adding to his confusion about print and sending mixed signals about what, where, and how to attend to print. Instead, introduce texts with variation in layout *after* the child learns to control early concepts of print with ease. Use magnetic letters that are easy to

see and feel and avoid letters that are all one color (e.g., blue 'a'; yellow 'd', green 'b', etc.) so as to minimize the chances that the child will attend to the *color* of letters instead of their distinguishing features. In all lesson activities, ensure that materials are appropriate for the particular child and his current learning needs.

Establish eye contact, smile warmly, and use gesture as appropriate to encourage the child and to augment his construction of meaning.

To communicate interest in and support of the child, look directly at him when conversing. Smile to signal interest in his ideas and nod as an offer of encouragement. If the child seems confused by a concept or the language structure in a text, use nonverbal language in particular intonation, gesture, or role play to clarify certain abstract concepts (e.g., *here* means something different in *here* you go and baby lamb is *here*; *can* is both a verb, I *can* paint, and a noun, paint *can*; and *off* has multiple meanings when reading *off* we go, turn *off* the light, lift-*off*, and he took *off* his jacket, etc.). These suggestions are particularly important for English learners or children who may have had few opportunities to express themselves verbally.

Withhold comment or pause as appropriate; take care not to interrupt the child or discourage his initiative.

The effect of adult interruptions can be particularly troublesome for the young learner. As Clay has noted, "Teaching (then) can be likened to a conversation in which you listen to the speaker carefully before you reply" (Clay, 1985, p. 6). Each of us can recall a time when others interrupted our words, resulting in an

idea forgotten or a failure to initiate problem solving. Therefore, provide appropriate wait time to permit the child to craft a response, repair his speech, self-monitor, or self-correct. It is important to remember, however, that if a child habituates incorrect responding, the teacher should address his confusions swiftly and if a task is too difficult for the child, modify the task or abandon it altogether and provide the appropriate level of support.

Video record your lessons.

Examine a lesson clip first without the sound, then with the sound and compare the two versions. Determine whether your nonverbal communication is supportive of the child's learning. Ask, "What could I have changed that would better support or engage the child?" Transcribe an interaction with a child; count the number of words used and determine whether fewer words or more demonstration would have been more supportive of the child's learning. Tabulate the number of times the child initiates responding. If it seems as though the child often waits for you to take the lead, ask yourself, "What am I doing or not doing that seems to discourage this child's initiation?" Examine your speech and ask, "Do I use an appropriate tone of voice? Or, do I speak too rapidly and use too many words to foster the child's understanding?"

Become a sensitive observer of every child.

Notice what the child controls and how he controls it. Utilize the first 10 lessons, aptly called Roaming Around the Known, to truly stay within what the child knows and controls. Carefully monitor and record the child's behaviors and responses during these early lessons and utilize this

information to inform your teaching as you move into instruction. Always reserve at least 10–15 minutes after each lesson to record in the lesson record comments section what you have observed. Refer to these comments as you plan subsequent learning opportunities for the child and note changes over time in the child's responses.

Refrain from requiring the young learner to talk about or describe his processing.

Explanations of literacy processing behavior are challenging enough for literacy teachers to describe, far too difficult for a struggling young literacy learner to put into words, and of limited value to the teacher in terms of informing her instruction of the child even if the child does make an attempt to do so. Significantly reduce the number of times you ask the child, "How did you know?" Instead, infer, based on your observation, what you think the child attended to that resulted in his successful responding and arrange for it to happen again in the child's lessons.

Consider the role of culture, context, and the rules of conversation when conversing with a child.

Children learn the rules of their culture at an early age. In some cultures, the young child would not typically look directly at his elders or a person in a position of authority when responding. Clay (1998) cites Metge and Kinloch's (1978) book *Talking Past Each Other*, in which the authors discuss how Maori and Samoans converse with their bodies and verbalize less. The pakeha teachers (white majority) contend that the Maori and Samoans are difficult to talk to when in reality they fail to "listen" with their eyes. Therefore, become an

astute observer of the child's nonverbal language. Consider also whether it is against the child's culture to initiate conversation with adults, and if so, arrange for other ways that the child can feel comfortable shifting topics, initiating responses, or taking the lead in the various lesson activities.

Sequence tasks to support the child's learning.

Begin with the child's knowns, move gradually to his partially knowns, and then proceed to the new. Likewise, consider arranging tasks in order from easiest to most difficult and provide help on a continuum of support using a *Scale of Help* (Clay, 2005b, p. 132–133).

Observe signs of a child's confusion and minimize his stress.

For example, if the child appears inattentive or directs his gaze away from tasks, ask yourself whether you have neglected to select tasks at an appropriate level, easy enough to engage the child but with one or two challenges to maintain his interest and foster new learning.

Examine the climate and pace of the entire series of lessons with children.

As Clay states, "...Conversations in the lesson should be warm and friendly, but when the child must attend to something, or must pull several things together, the prompt should be short, clear and direct" (Clay, 2005b, p. 202). Opportunities to foster the child's accelerative progress must be provided in every lesson. Make sure not to waste the child's time teaching him something he already controls. Provide support to the child as needed and consider that in every lesson, optimum joy for both child and teacher are foundational to learning (Holdaway, 1979).

Hopefully, I have helped us to reconsider the role of nonverbal communication in children's literacy learning. Research has shown that signs of a child's language development are evident in both vocal and nonverbal cues and that a child's literacy development is enhanced by astute observation and sensitive, timely responding on the part of the teacher. A conscious consideration of the critical role of nonverbal communication can go a long way to enhance our work with children. This is not surprising to those of us in Reading Recovery. After all, our first encounters with the children we teach in Reading Recovery are to observe and assess their literacy behaviors across a variety of tasks and to infer what literacy activities they control strategically (Clay, 2002). We write predictions of the child's progress and are reminded to spend the first 10 sessions with a child roaming around his known. Within and across lessons, we record our observations so that we can reflect on children's progress and arrange "just right" learning opportunities to contribute to the child's accelerative progress.

Clearly, Clay has emphasized the essential role of nonverbal communication through her reminders to observe sensitively and to reduce interference from too much teacher talk. Through their actions, the children also teach us without using words. Through their reading and writing behaviors children remind us daily of the need for expert, responsive teachers of reading who recognize the role of nonverbal communication to advance their students' accelerative progress. As Clay reminds us, "When teachers explain things to children, they cannot assume that their words

have taught the child's eyes and brain to locate, recognize, or use this [orienting behaviors] information" (Clay, 1998, p. 120). As Reading Recovery teachers, we are wise to thoughtfully examine our interactions with children to always find ways to go beyond the words in support of children's learning.

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About the Cover

Christian Garcia's Text Reading score was 0 when was given the Observation Survey in August 2005. He could read a book if it was introduced and read to him before he attempted to read it. Just 6 months later he soared to reading a Level 30 text — 2-plus years above grade level — with 90% accuracy, thanks to his Reading Recovery lessons. By year-end, his accuracy increased to 96%. That success is also evident from his Written Vocabulary progress; from 9 words when he entered first grade in the Ennis (Texas) Independent School District to 53 words in February and 63 at year-end. Christian scored the fifth percentile or above on standardized tests in both first and second grades. Kalee Sursa, a Title I aide who worked with Christian in second grade at Houston Elementary, calls him a very fluent reader who does well with comprehension; confident in his reading and always willing to give anything a try. Now a third grader at Houston Elementary, Christian continues to blossom into a stronger reader, with a total reading score this year on the third-grade Texas TAKS in the mid-80 range on his first attempt.

