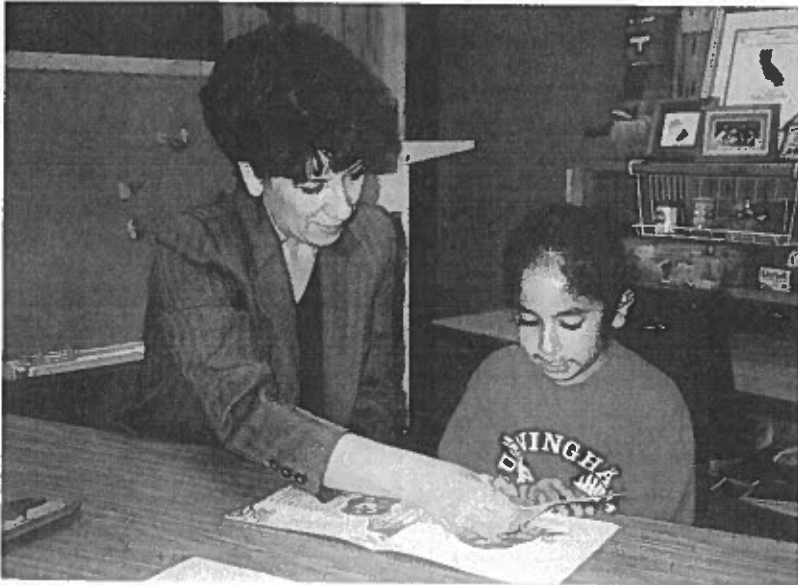


Reading Power in Half an Hour

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California teacher leader Mary Borba teaches an economical 30-minute lesson.

Many Reading Recovery teachers in the schools in our area display a poster designed by Mary Engelbreit. It depicts a child pointing to her wrist-watch, and the caption says, "Time's Up!" This is a favorite gift given to Reading Recovery teachers early in their training programs because keeping to a 30-minute lesson seems to be a constant challenge for many.

For the past nine years, I have had the opportunity to teach many Reading Recovery children and to observe many Reading Recovery teachers deliver efficient, powerful lessons. I have noted that teachers who are able to beat the clock and maintain 30-minute lessons give specific attention to four important instructional considerations. These include attending to phrasing in fluent reading, selecting books thoughtfully, teaching strategically, and organizing for efficiency. The following discussion reviews these

four attributes of effective instruction and provides examples from my experiences working with Reading Recovery children and observing Reading Recovery teachers.

Attending to Phrasing in Fluent Reading

In both the *Guidebook* (1993) and *Becoming Literate* (1991), Clay reminds us of two types of gain for readers resulting from the opportunity to read both familiar and instructional materials:

One is to allow the child scope for the orchestration of all the complex range of behaviors he must use (and this is best achieved on easy or familiar texts). The other is to encourage him to use his reading strategies on novel texts and to support his tentative efforts (Clay, 1993, p. 36).

The important rereading of familiar texts provides learners the "opportunity to orchestrate a network of decision-making strategies in fast, fluent responding" (Clay, 1991, p. 211). Phrased and fluent reading is an expectation and a goal of every lesson. This leads to an important question in terms of lesson length. Are lessons long because children are being allowed to read slowly? If teachers are certain that texts are not too difficult yet observe reading that is not phrased and fluent, are they using the procedures detailed in Section 12 of the *Guidebook*, "Teaching for Phrasing in Fluent Reading"?

When José was having great difficulty reading with phrasing in a fluent manner, two procedures from this section were especially helpful. I introduced repetitive texts as his new books over a number of days. Sing-songy texts like *Greedy Cat*, *I'm the King of the Mountain*, and *The Hungry Giant* seemed to "carry him forward" as Clay suggests (1993, p. 53). Another helpful procedure was teacher modeling of fluent reading for José. I read a whole story chosen from his familiar reading collection to demonstrate fluent reading. I was aware that demonstrating only a page or two of text was not enough modeling for him to understand how he needed to sound as he read his familiar books. We did this each day for several consecutive days. In addition, because fluency was an ongoing focus of instruction for José, we reread his new texts together, following the first reading, to emphasize fluency and phrasing (Clay, 1993, p. 38). José was able to make a shift to more consistent phrasing in fluent

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reading with these procedures. My attention to José's fluency strengthened his reading, and as his reading became more fluent, he did not need extra time to complete reading tasks.

Making Thoughtful Book Selections

Thoughtful, appropriate book selections for the learner are a second important consideration. Are lessons long or slow because the texts are too difficult? Text selection impacts the child's processing in all reading contexts: the familiar rereading, the running record text, and the new book. Teachers must strive to maintain a balance across their lessons and ensure that learners are given "practice in orchestrating complex processing on just-difficult-enough texts" (Clay, 1993, p. 53).

In the familiar reading lesson component, the child chooses the book, and the teacher confirms that the choices are appropriate by noting that the child reads these books with fluency and yet also has the opportunity to make new discoveries about print and reading. "Slow progress children need many more opportunities for independent reading than they usually get. A wide selection of materials suited to the lower level of skills of slow readers

should be available" (Clay, 1991, p. 209). A child who has the opportunity to build stamina with lots of easy reading develops a stronger processing system over time.

Another consideration of the text choices for familiar reading relates to how the reading experiences impact performance and learning across the lesson. The ease, enjoyment, and independence experienced by the child during fluent reading of familiar books have the potential to create momentum for the learner that builds throughout the lesson.

Thoughtful new book selections are critical. If there are too many challenges in the new book, the child and teacher may become bogged down or may have to abandon the reading of the book completely. Teachers need to think about the challenges and confirm what will be easy for the child in the new text. This is a critical part of the lesson preparation, and if it is shortchanged, lessons may go awry. Having a second new book at hand is a good practice especially if the

teacher is unsure about the book choice.

It is expected that the new book will have some challenges, and the child will have to engage in reading work. It is also expected that there will be stretches of text that the child will read with fluency in order to access meaning and to develop the endurance needed to problem-solve more difficult parts. "Long stretches of correct reading with a full measure of grammatical meaning and story cues provide a rich backdrop to error when it occurs" (Clay, 1991, p. 307).

Teaching children to be strategic is easier when the material is appropriate. Clay reminds us, "If you have children who read and write texts it is extremely easy to make them conscious of any component process you feel is important using materials they have just read or written successfully. It is extremely hard to help them with component processes on material that is too difficult for them to read" (Clay, 1991, p. 253).



Reading Recovery teacher Lorna Seadore works with one of her students.

Keeping a Focus on Teaching for Strategic Actions in Text Reading

Teaching decisions must be made carefully throughout the lesson. Is the lesson too long because there is too much teacher talk? If the Reading Recovery teacher talks too much during the lesson, the child may become overwhelmed and not understand what is most important because there is just too much to think about and attend to.

The child should be able to read with few interruptions in the familiar reading component. Of course, there may be a teachable moment that cannot be missed, but these will not occur frequently. What the teacher chooses to ignore is just as important as what the teacher chooses to teach. I draw from my work with Francisco to share an example.

During his familiar reading, Francisco applied new learning that had resulted from a teaching point made in a previous lesson. Specifically, following his meaningful substitution of *store* for *shop*, he monitored, reread the sentence, and self-corrected. I did not stop him to reinforce what had been taught the previous day because he demonstrated he understood. It was more important to allow him as much time as possible to read more text.

In another book, Francisco read *said* for *says* on several consecutive pages. I chose not to attend to the error because I knew it was related to both his limited control of visual information and his oral language. Therefore, as he was turning a page, I commented about what the character *says* using the structure directly from the text. He picked up on my language input, and we did not take time to have a conversation about the error. I decid-

ed there would be another time when attention to the visual processing would be more appropriate.

Teaching following the running record needs to be quick, efficient, and generative. Efficient and effective teachers choose to teach what is applicable on another day, with another text, and in another problem-solving opportunity. Teachers do not need to take the time to talk about each error recorded or all behaviors that are strategic. It is more effective to choose one or two, teach them well, and keep the lesson on pace.

Karen is a teacher I have observed who understood this and demonstrated effective teaching following her running record of Joey's reading. Her teaching point was to help Joey identify words by searching for known parts rather than by analyzing letter-by-letter, and she chose to have him focus on a word he had identified correctly by letter analysis, the word *street*. She asked, "Joey, will you show me where you did some good work on this page?" He pointed to *street*. She continued, "Yes, let me show you a quicker way to get to that word." She then provided appropriate instruction. This exchange took less than 30 seconds and was generative to other words in subsequent texts.

Teachers must help learners understand what is important and what provides the most gain. Effective teachers stay focused on what a particular child needs and are very selective about teaching points and what to draw attention to. They reflect on their lesson records daily and their careful analyses allow them to follow the child and teach to the child's needs. As a result, students begin to teach themselves. This is demonstrated in what Filipe shared following his

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reading of the running record book one day. "Wait, don't tell me," he said. "I know where I did good reading work. Here, here! Do you know how I got to this word (*just*)? Look at the first part, it's like *jump*."

Keeping a Focus on Teaching for Strategic Actions in Writing

Teaching decisions made in the writing component often affect the teacher's ability to complete a lesson in 30 minutes. How do effective teachers conduct the writing component? The teacher engages the child in a genuine conversation to generate the writing and then guides the child to choose a sentence that provides just enough learning opportunities. With the sentence determined, the teacher makes a range of important decisions regarding the most productive use of time and the practice page. Effective teachers may ask themselves a range of questions: How is this word like another known word? Could I show the child how to get to a word like this from yesterday's or last week's lesson? What words might the child take to fluency? What words can be analyzed by using boxes to hear the

sounds? Am I teaching the child to be a problem solver in this interaction?

Students can be reminded of previous teaching in earlier writing lessons. When Joana needed assistance with the word *ground*, her teacher quickly flipped to a previous lesson where they had worked on *grass* and then helped her link to the known word *out*. This teacher was effective in assisting the child to make links to previous learning in order to facilitate her problem solving and writing of a new word.

Inefficient letter formation and a limited writing vocabulary can also slow down the writing process. Each year it seems I have at least one or two students who need extra attention in these two areas. Time taken early in the program to teach children how to learn letters, including their identification and formation, and how to learn words pays big dividends later in the program. As children's writing vocabulary grows, they will be able to record what they know quickly, and the teacher will be able to slip in and out of a supportive role as needed with new and more difficult words.

Cameron was one student who needed assistance learning letters and words. He avoided writing activities in the classroom because it was so hard for him to hold a pencil, and he displayed difficulty in identifying and forming letters. Following the suggestions in the *Guidebook*, I introduced new letters using three ways of remembering and worked for over-learning (Clay, 1993, p. 24). As a result, I found that teaching the formation of a few key letters facilitated the learning of other letters in the same formation family (e.g., *c, o, a, d, g*). Cameron had learned how to learn.

Organizing for Efficiency

Effective Reading Recovery teachers have all their materials at arm's length so that the flow of the lesson is not interrupted. Record sheets are organized and analyzed so that the teaching is focused. Reading texts are selected and ready, and the writing book is within reach. Magnetic letters are neatly organized on cookie sheets, and letters for the making and breaking activities are selected. All teaching materials, including masking cards, white board and pen, salt tray, and the child's alphabet book, are easily accessible. The timer is visible and used each day to assist the teacher in appropriate pacing of the lesson. Efficient teachers keep track of the time throughout the lesson so that each lesson component is an appropriate length of time.

Conclusions

Many factors contribute to slow lessons. This article has focused on the areas I have observed that contribute to reading power in just half an hour. Thirty-minute lessons are possible if children read with phrasing in fluent reading, if the teacher selects books thoughtfully, if the teacher teaches for strategic actions, if reading and writing selections have appropriate learning opportunities, and if materials are organized and easily accessible. If Reading Recovery teachers consistently teach 30-minute lessons, they just may have time for lunch, for communicating with the classroom teacher, for daily lesson analysis and reflection, and maybe even for slipping in an extra lesson periodically to make up for previously missed lessons. Imagine how many more children we could serve in Reading Recovery through really efficient teaching. Besides, teaching fast, effective, efficient

lessons makes instructing children much more fun and rewarding.

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