Promoting Discovery During Roaming Around the Known

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My grandson, Colin, and I were writing a story about playing with Ninja Turtles. As he slowly said and recorded the dominant sounds in the word, play, I jumped in and said, “And there’s a quiet y at the end. It doesn’t make a sound.” Colin wrote a miniscule y at the end of play, much smaller than the previous letters. In fact, the y was barely perceptible. When I inquired as to the reason, Colin solemnly replied, “It’s quiet, Grandpa.”

As a preschooler, Colin’s response is another bit of anecdotal evidence of the rule-governed system a child constructs with more-competent others in their early literacy attempts (Clay, 1975, 2001; DeFord, 1991). These discoveries don’t come out of the blue but are intentional (Clay & Cazden, 1990, 2007; Siegler, 2000), and a noticing teacher or parent gains insights as to the child’s intentionality, noting what is useful or problematic as the adult frames a response to this primitive, yet powerful processing.

Why Roam Around the Known in Reading Recovery?

Though an admittedly shameless retelling from a proud grandpa, Colin’s writing episode is also a reminder of some of the desired features during the first 10 lessons of a child’s Reading Recovery program (Clay, 2005), a timeframe delineated as Roaming Around the Known:

• Shared, meaningful literacy tasks
• Massive amounts of successful responding from the child
• Appropriate adult support
• Opportunities to engage in useful strategic behaviors, e.g., saying a word slowly, choosing and recording appropriate letters to go with sounds, and scribing left to right
• Sustained chances for the adult to listen and observe
• Active, tentative discovery of how print works

Yet for all these positive features, it is not unusual for the teacher to question the purpose for 10 Roaming Around the Known lessons, especially in the high-stakes arena of early literacy intervention where she is cognizant of the need for the child’s accelerated progress within a window of opportunity that is limited to 12–20 weeks.

Prior to Roaming Around the Known, the teacher has put time and talent into constructing what McNaughton (2014) termed a personalized literacy profile of the child. This profile emerged from the administration and scoring of the Observation Survey tasks (Clay, 2013), the Observation Survey summary, and predictions of progress (Clay, 2005). Yet Clay mandates that in the beginning lessons, the teacher should “stay with what the child already knows how to do. Do not deliberately teach him any new items or processes …” (2005, p. 32).

It is understandable, yet premature, for a teacher to think as I used to think: I know what the child can do. I have summarized what is useful and what is not useful. I have developed short-term and long-term goals for this child based on a careful analysis and synthesis of six literacy tasks. Let me teach!

A cursory look at past guidebooks reveals that Roaming Around the Known has been the inaugural event of any child’s intervention since Reading Recovery’s inception. “Hold his interest, bolster his confidence, make him your co-worker. Get the responding fluent and habituated. You will have founded your programme on a rock” (Clay, 1979). Though the quote’s wording has been updated in subsequent guidebooks, the underpinning theoretical justification for Roaming Around the Known is still evident even as far back as 1979. According to McNaughton (2014), “the concept of ‘roaming around the known’ is a brilliant application of a developmental analysis” (p. 3) in which precious instructional time is devoted to a better understanding of how the child works on text.
Discovery During Roaming Around the Known

The teacher should review the reasons that Roaming Around the Known must be at the start of any child’s lesson series. Those nine reasons are distilled into four desired outcomes: “Confidence, ease, flexibility and, with luck, discovery are the keynotes of this period…” (Clay, 2005, p. 32). Though discovery is the final outcome listed, coming only after the qualifying prepositional phrase, “with luck,” what appears to be the extraordinary at the start of any child’s program can become the ordinary if there is a noticing teacher scaffolding successful reading and writing opportunities from the outset.

Clay states that Roaming Around the Known should “unleash two sets of responses — those discarded approaches this child has ceased to use on texts and new ones that come from we know not where” (p. 37). These responses can’t help but prime a child’s discoveries on print in the right conditions. And if discovery is expected in Roaming Around the Known, then the teacher must be ready to capture those discoveries and immediately integrate these into subsequent reading and writing opportunities. If the child is truly roaming around his known, the teacher soon realizes that any child’s discoveries put a shelf life expiration date on his Observation Survey results, and she must be ready to roam with the child into new learning that has not been directly taught.

I have often invited Reading Recovery teachers and leaders to pinpoint in the four scant pages dealing with Roaming Around the Known in Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part One (Clay, 2005), explicit or implicit references to discovery. Over 10 cryptic or extended references can be found, suggesting that just as there is a high chance for rain when the conditions are right, Clay might be signaling the teacher that there is a high chance for discovery if the right learning conditions are present.

In order to illustrate the conditions that might accommodate a child’s discovery during Roaming Around the Known, I will use examples from my teaching a few years back with Anthony (pseudonym). Anthony entered Reading Recovery midyear. His Observation Survey scores for fall and his mid-year entrance are summarized in Table 1. A happy young boy who had recently turned 7 at the end of December, Anthony’s scores indicated that he had not made much movement forward in his journey to read and write, though he came into his program controlling many concepts about print including how it tracks, one-to-one matching on three lines of text, the difference between first and last, letter and word, and uppercase and lowercase letters. Anthony tended to search the pictures and maintain a simple, established pattern when he read, and he heard and recorded beginning and ending sounds, using slowly formed lowercase letters. He had meager reading and writing vocabularies.

In the remainder of this article, I will discuss the following conditions that might foster discovery during Roaming Around the Known: reading and writing of continuous text, opportunities for fluency and flexibility, the child’s ownership of the tasks, conversation, and the teacher’s tracking of discoveries.

Reading and Writing Continuous Texts

In the quest to achieve Roaming Around the Known outcomes, teachers have designed and implemented many creative, appealing activities, often justifying the inclusion of such activities by citing from Clay (2005):

- “Design interesting, shared activities and have the child contribute what you know he knows as his share of the activity…

- … you can engage in some new activities that will catch his attention…”

Table 1. Anthony’s Observation Survey Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Initial Assessment (September)</th>
<th>Entrance Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter Identification (54)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Word Test (15)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts About Print (24)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Vocabulary (10 min.)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing &amp; Recording Sounds in Words</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Reading Level*</td>
<td>Below TRL 1</td>
<td>Below TRL 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NOTE: Anthony was unable to read at his instructional level (90–94% word accuracy) the easiest book administered to him in the Text Reading Level task. Using established program procedures for finding continuous text that he could read at his instructional level, I discovered during my initial assessment that Anthony could successfully read a program Level 1 book after I had read it once.
• Work until your ingenuity runs out and until he is moving fluently around his personal corpus of responses.” (p. 34)

When teachers share such creative activities they often ask themselves and their teacher leaders, “Can we do that during Roaming Around the Known?” In order to answer that question, they should review the fourth bullet under the listed nine reasons for Roaming Around the Known: “The teacher works mostly with reading texts and writing texts. This seems to give the child the feeling that he is reading and writing” (Clay, 2005, p. 32). It is clear that the bulk of time in any Roaming Around the Known lesson must be devoted to the reading and writing of continuous text, and any activity that steals valuable time from independent and joint attention to such texts must be challenged as to the suitability for a condition that can promote discovery.

The challenge to the teacher is how to be creative with her responses and activities during the reading and writing of continuous text, because it is through this ingenuity that a teacher will prime for discovery without unnecessary, distracting activities that could focus the child on isolated bits. For example, at the start of his second lesson, Anthony—a big fan of Batman—chose two Batman stickers showing the caped crusader in action. From those stickers, Anthony wrote with me the following: “He is sliding.” He paused before writing is and announced, “I don’t know how to write is,” even though is was a known sight word. At that point I had a decision to make. Do I write the word for him, sharing the task, or do I prompt him to use what I think he might know about is, i.e., his known sight word? Holding my breath, I quickly handed Anthony two magnetic letters and replied, “You read is all the time.” Here are the letters for is. Make is.” Anthony successfully assembled the word and copied it into his story. Later in the writing, Anthony cowrote a second sentence about Batman after I inquired what else Batman was doing: “He is jumping.” When Anthony arrived at is, his eyes glanced up to the original sentence, and he quickly copied is into the second sentence.

Later in that same lesson, I read with Anthony, What is a Huggles (Cowley, 1986), a patterned book with strong picture support that humorously details all the zoo animals a Huggles is not. I established the pattern on the first reading and Anthony joined in, pointing along on each page’s single line of text. After the first reading, I framed the word is on one of the book’s pages and asked, “What is this word?” Anthony replied, “is!” I then invited him to point and read the book on his own. Anthony was very successful until he got to the page that read: “A tiger is not a Huggles.” Anthony overpointed, saying ger for is. But then he stopped, returned to the beginning of the sentence and self-corrected. He repeated similar self-correction behavior when he subsequently read, “A giraffe is not a Huggles,” and even later, “A kangaroo is not a Huggles.”

In the above example I inferred the following discoveries:

• Anthony discovered that if he can read a word, he can write that word.
• He continues to know how to read a word in isolation and discovered that he can find that known word quickly in text in order to write it himself.
• He uses a known word in order to self-monitor and self-correct his reading.
• And who knows? Perhaps Anthony was even beginning to think about how some words like tiger, giraffe, and kangaroo, need just one touch of the finger while reading, even though these words have more than one beat!

If discovery is expected in Roaming Around the Known, then the teacher must be ready to capture those discoveries and immediately integrate these into subsequent reading and writing opportunities.
I do not contend that the teaching prompts or activities in this reconstructed example were very creative or even ingenious. Upon reflection of my Roaming Around the Known diary entries, though, I saw the payoff when quick teacher prompts and actions during reading or writing allowed Anthony to engage in useful problem solving that was not observed on the Observation Survey.

Opportunities for Fluency and Flexibility
The example illustrating Anthony's problem solving with is can also illustrate the next condition for a child's discoveries during Roaming Around the Known: The teacher is always on the lookout for chances for the child to use what he knows and knows how to do in different ways.

Even in Lesson 2, the word is was fast becoming what Clay (1991) calls an “island of certainty,” (p. 172). In Lesson 2, Anthony had at least three chances to construct the word with magnetic letters or marker, and he did so by honoring serial order. He quickly read it in isolation and picked it out among other words in a sentence in order to write it or self-monitor with it.

Anthony’s Batman story expanded over four subsequent lessons, and any lesson’s writing was typed up and pasted into a blank book, accompanied by the chosen stickers that matched the day’s message. During the composing of another page in his Batman book in Lesson 3, Anthony discovered that he could independently write is. In fact, whenever is had to be written in subsequent stories, Anthony was so confident and eager to write that I had to be ready to prompt him to show his eyes where he was going to write the word since he was not yet controlling his own spacing between words in his written stories.

What began as a known sight word for Anthony quickly became a useful anchor that he could count on as he read, wrote, and problem solved in continuous text. When a teacher sets up this condition of recurrence in many different formats, while prompting for quicker responding, she sets up for the child the discovery that what is known in one setting can also be known in different settings.

Ownership
Clay (2005) challenges the teacher who “has not accepted that the child has to gear up to actively using his eyes, and his ears, and his thinking. He needs to take ownership of part of the tasks during this period…” (p. 33). Certainly a child who is successfully reading and writing continuous texts—along with a teacher who is also providing multiple opportunities for him to quickly use what he knows in flexible ways—begins to take ownership of his learning, a condition that also primes for discovery.

A gross measure of a child’s control is illustrated in Table 2 where simple tallies of book titles independently read by Anthony over the 10 lessons are summarized. Note that except for Lessons 1 and 7, Anthony read more books independently than books he read with me in any one lesson. Further, shared books always began with a supportive orientation, and I sometimes read the first page or two, after which the shared reading quickly morphed into an independent reading.

Similar tallies of a child’s successful control during reading can easily be achieved by the Reading Recovery teacher if she has found for the child what Clay termed “readable texts,” (2005, p. 35), i.e., those types of texts the child showed on the Observation Survey that he could read with 90% or higher accuracy. Readable texts provide a consis-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Independent Control</th>
<th>Shared Control</th>
<th>Total Books Read</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Books Read</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: If Anthony controlled the reading of the book with little if any teacher prompting, that book was determined to be independently controlled. A book that was designated as “shared control” was one that was new to Anthony and one in which I provided a supportive orientation to the storyline and book structures, often reading the first page before inviting Anthony to join in the reading.
tent mix of success and challenge that will allow the child
to orchestrate all that he knows and knows how to do,
while at the same time freeing up his attention to discover
aspects of print that have not yet been noticed.

An example of discovery resulting from Anthony’s inde-
pendent control occurred early in Roaming Around the
Known. He and I initially shared the reading of I Can
Jump (Cowley, 1986), a book that contrasts what brag-
gadocios insects do to what the poor snail can’t do. By
Lesson 4, I invited Anthony to read the book independently
which he did with 100% accuracy, even self-correcting
can’t for can. Midway through the book the text reads: “I
can fly,” said the butterfly, to which the snail replies, “I
can’t fly.” After reading those pages, Anthony stopped sud-
"Fl and butterfly rhyme! They both
have F-L-Y.” The previous repeated readings of the book
oriented Anthony to the meaning and language of the
book, priming him to independently control these features
of the text while freeing him up not only to self-monitor
and self-correct using a known word (can), but also delve
into the detail of print and discover how some word units
sound alike.

Increased control during writing is also expected from the
child as well. Writing should be occurring several times
in any Roaming Around the Known lesson. Teachers who
are used to the formal lesson’s writing component, may
forget that Clay stipulates that the teacher should “use
a variety of different media to write with and write on,”
(Clay, 2005, p. 36), and that the teacher “works mostly
with reading texts and writing texts” (p. 32). Certainly
increased student control is not promoted if the teacher
limits the opportunity to write, and the child is subse-
quently denied opportunities to quickly use what he knows
and knows how to do — that fluency and flexibility con-
dition, already described above.

The sidebar below summarizes the types of writing and
the formats for writing Anthony experienced throughout
the first 10 lessons. These evidenced for me that I was
trying to honor Clay’s stipulation.

### Table 3. Anthony’s Independent Control of Writing
Over Five Lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I like chicken and sausage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I like watermelon and bananas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I like muffins and cake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I like popcorn and hally popcorn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I like pizza and tacos.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Underlined segments indicate the parts of the sen-
tence Anthony independently wrote, without copy. Portions
of words independently written followed teacher prompting
to say the word slowly or clap it.

Most of Anthony’s writing products were variations on
books he had read independently, often using the same
pattern that he had read. For example, over Lessons 6–10,
Anthony read and reread I Like (Scott Foresman, 1976).
Photographs of food items in this book were organized
into groups, e.g., desserts were organized on one page,
various vegetables on another. At the top of each page were
the words, I like. The book’s photographs generated lots
of conversation and reactions as Anthony and I discussed
what we liked and didn’t like to eat. In later lessons of
Roaming Around the Known, Anthony composed his own
version of I Like. In each lesson, Anthony chose a page from
the book to return to and I invited him to select two items
he liked. Then we cowrote the sentence using the pattern:
I like (noun) and (noun), building his variation into his
own I like book by Lesson 10.

Anthony seized the opportunities to write many times in
any lesson and throughout Roaming Around the Known,
and Table 3 is illustrative of the subsequent, increased
control he exhibited. The portions of his writing that are
underlined in Table 3 were produced independently, with-
out a copy. Anthony demonstrated on the Hearing and
Recording Sounds in Words task of the Observation

### Types of continuous texts cowritten with Anthony
- Original stories
- Variations on books read, using
  the books’ structures
- Personal responses to a book
  read or a favorite page
- Dialogue balloons

### Formats used during the writing
of continuous texts
- Paper
- Chalkboard
- Post-it tape
- Blank books
- Dry erase board
Survey that he could say words slowly and that he heard and recorded many beginning sounds of unknown words. It was important that Anthony had a chance to fluently and flexibly continue this behavior, even in Roaming Around the Known, so I consistently prompted him to say a word slowly on selected words that were not part of his writing vocabulary. What began as a limited sound analysis and recording of the beginning sounds in Lessons 6 and 7 (e.g., /s/ in sausage, /b/ in bananas), ended with more-extensive analyses, including sounds heard within words and at the end of words, (e.g., /m/ and /n/ in muffins, =/k/ in popcorn, and /t/ and /s/ in tacos).

As the teacher, I discovered by reviewing my diary entries over these lessons, that Anthony also knew how to independently write words that did not show up on the Writing Vocabulary task of the Observation Survey (Clay, 2013), e.g., like, and. In fact, I challenged myself to give Anthony some breathing room in order to keep his control over the writing. For example, given that and was not part of Anthony's writing vocabulary when he started Roaming Around the Known, I still cautiously asked in Lesson 6, “Do you know how to write and?” at that point in his composing. He nodded but paused. I prompted, “It starts with an a.” He wrote an a then quickly added the n and d. I reflected on my need to give Anthony a little more time to produce what he knows, realizing that I can set up future opportunities to get the tentatively known to fluency.

As with control in reading, increased control during writing can promote discoveries that the child will share with the teacher. After we cowrote tacos in Lesson 10, Anthony covered the s and announced, “If you take away the s, you get taco.” Clay (2005) says, “Listen carefully to what he says and the connections he is making. Be prepared to be surprised by his ingenuity!” (p. 35). I certainly was surprised at this moment in Lesson 10, but if I have faith in the conditions for successful Roaming Around the Known, such as child control, then discoveries will be made.

**Conversation**

Like many teachers in Roaming Around the Known, I knew it was important for Anthony and me to get to know each other; that’s the first listed reason for Roaming Around the Known on page 32 of Literacy Lessons Part One (Clay, 2005). What books did we like? What did we do for fun? Did we have siblings? What are we good at? Only through conversation could we establish that human connection. But a closer reading of the second clause in that first reason allowed me to value the role of conversation far beyond just “connecting with my student,” i.e., our conversation will “develop useful ways of interacting” (p. 32). Clay (2014) privileges the role of conversation in the instructional setting: “[T]he conversational exchanges should be a valuable context within which literacy learning becomes the focus” (p. 34), and she compares the teacher to a listener, adding this:

In some ways the listener has to be more active than the speaker — and that is not the way one would normally think about it. Teachers can think of themselves as a listener and remind themselves how active they have to be to understand what is being said. (p. 35)

I will be the first to admit that is difficult to be an active listener as I move into Roaming Around the Known lessons. I have many ideas about this child as a reader and writer, given the preparatory assessment and planning that preceded Roaming Around the Known. And therein lies the danger as Clay (2005) warns that the most important reason for Roaming Around the Known is to “require the teacher to stop teaching from her preconceived ideas” (p. 33). Conversation between the child and me and my active listening allow me to keep what I know about that child at arm’s length, knowledge that can easily be reviewed and revised through talk with the child during the reading and writing of texts.

The concept of teacher as active listener resonated with me in the following exchange with Anthony during Lesson 2. He was independently reading an easy, patterned book, *The Way I Go to School* (Randell, Giles, & Smith, 1996) after I had introduced it and read it with him in Lesson 1. When he arrived at the page showing a picture of a child getting into a van with the accompanying words: *I go to school in a van*, Anthony announced, “It’s going to say van on this page.” I had come into that lesson that day knowing that Anthony could remember and repeat simple structures such as those in this book. He also demonstrated on the Text Reading Level task of the Observation Survey that he could actively search pictures to identify unknown words. I could have easily remained silent when Anthony made his prediction, assuming that he was remembering this page and connecting with the picture. At that point of his observation, I had the wherewithal to ask, “How do you know?” This is a simple question that can be overused, but I asked it thinking he would tell me that he looked at the picture and I would affirm that problem solving.
Instead, my question got me much more than I bargained for. Anthony pointed to the word *van* and replied, “It has a *v* and an *n*.” Clay (2014) maintains that my question, “is asking the child to reflect on the grounds of her own reasoning” (p. 22). I hurriedly scribbled down Anthony’s discovery as he continued to read, while also reforming my view of him as a problem solver during reading. Presenting the concept of conversation as a rich resource for instruction, Clay says, “Sometimes the expert [teacher] sends the message and the child has to understand it. Sometimes the novice sends the message, and the expert has to understand it” (p. 23). The second situation is both the challenge and reward of good conversation during Roaming Around the Known, as the following example illustrates.

In Lesson 3, Anthony was independently reading *The Shopping Mall* (Parker, 1995), a story of a dad and his children who inform the reader where they went in the mall. On page 5, Anthony read the sentence: *We went in the doors.* He stopped, laughed, and announced, “They should have written, ‘We are going in the doors.’” I didn’t inquire as to why he said that — an opportunity missed. After the reading, I did go back to page 5 and asked if he wanted to cowrite his revision on the chalkboard. At the chalkboard, Anthony decided to maintain the page’s original structure. He started to laugh, almost uncontrollably now. I could not find anything funny about that original book structure, so I finally asked him, “Why are you laughing?” He replied that he thought it was funny that the family *walked in* the doors, “Like BAM!” Again, a simple question from me provided insights as to Anthony’s reasoning. He didn’t want to change the original structure because his revision would put the structure in the present tense and more closely match the picture, as I assumed. Rather, to Anthony, the original structure was a hilarious mismatch with the picture. (In fact, we drew a picture of the family

Conversation between the child and teacher and active listening allow you to keep what you know about that child at arm’s length, knowledge that can easily be reviewed and revised through talk with the child around the reading and writing of texts.
crashing in the doors once the sentence was written, taking the hilarity to its rightful closure.)

Given all we know about the child moving into Roaming Around the Known, conversation is our best refuge against calcified notions about this child as a struggling reader and writer, as well as a natural context for exploring further discoveries with the child who will be leading the way.

Tracking Discovery
A final condition for facilitating a child’s discovery during Roaming Around the Known is teacher note taking. Though no formal forms are used during this time, Clay (2005) suggests teachers use a diary format in order to record the many reading and writing activities accomplished over the 10 lessons, and, more importantly, the diary is used “to capture as many aspects of the child’s behaviours as you can. Make yourself specify just how he responds. Put it into words. What does he do well? How does he help himself?” (p. 33).

During Anthony’s Roaming Around the Known, I paid particular attention to his self-correction behavior. Given these self-tutorials that revealed how he successfully helped himself (Clay, 2001; Goodman & Goodman, 2013), I was able to gain additional insights into Anthony as a reader. In Lesson 1, for example, Anthony was independently reading The Way I Go to School, referenced above. On page 14, he instantly self-corrected on for in when he read the text, “I go to school in a bus.” When he read page 16 (“I go to school on a boat.”), Anthony read, I go to school in a boat. I prompted him, “Try that again.” He returned to the start of the text, reread and self-corrected. Clearly these two self-corrections, considered together, indicated Anthony was probably paying attention to some fine print detail, detail that he didn’t pay close attention to when he was reading during the Observation Survey.

Such self-correction behavior that seems to be new for the child isn’t really new. As Clay (2005) says, “He begins to apply his strategic problem solving that he learnt in everyday life to his work with his teacher” (p. 36). Self-correction behavior evidences a child’s discoveries on how he can problem solve and are bright signals that the child is controlling his literacy learning. A teacher needs to be aware of these opportunities as they occur and track them in her diary.

I also returned to the Roaming Around the Known diary every two lessons or so to look for notations that evidenced child behavior I did not see during the Observation Survey. Whether this new behavior is new to me or to the child, it is behavior that can recur in later opportunities during Roaming Around the Known if the teacher is on the lookout to promote its use. In Lesson 2, for example, I was able to capture six instances of Anthony’s self-correction behavior over three independent readings. This was enough of a pattern to encourage me in later lessons to prompt Anthony to “Try that again,” if he made errors that I felt he could self-correct through some type of rereading.

The same applies for writing. Anthony was writing I packed my folder in Lesson 1, a response to the book, Victor Packs (Comodromos, 2010) that we had just shared. He said to himself after he wrote I, prior to writing packed, “I need a big space.” That discovery became a new touchstone I referred to in later writing opportunities when I often prompted, “Where are you going to write that next word? Show your eyes.” As mentioned earlier, spacing between his words was not yet under independent control, but as he paid attention to it, I could as Clay (2005) says, “prompt him to recognize the things you know he knows in different settings” (p. 35).

An ongoing review of diary entries during Roaming Around the Known will also allow the teacher to note ongoing or emerging confusions. As shown earlier in Table 3, Anthony independently wrote the words, like and and, in Lessons 6 through 8. In Lesson 9, though, Anthony wrote ili for like and and in mirror image. The inevitable ebb and flow of what is known and how well it is known is evident in this example, and the diary entries allow the teacher to flag the child’s approximations, ready to anticipate these in later lessons and think about how she might scaffold her response in future recurrences in order to get more successful responding.

Summary
The Roaming Around the Known period lasts 10 lessons, the equivalent of 5 contact hours, or less than 1 school day. So much must happen in this relatively limited time, and in this article I have reviewed the theoretical underpinnings and rationales for Roaming Around the Known as well as illuminate conditions that promote a child’s discovery. If it is the teacher’s goal to make it easy for the
child to roam, then discovery will occur, without explicit teaching. In order for this to happen, the child should have voluminous, ongoing chances to be in control successfully, using what he knows in different ways while reading and writing continuous text. Through conversation and active listening, the teacher sets up a valuable conduit for successfully focusing the child while reading and writing, and her diary and reflection directs her as to how the conversations will need to change. Ultimately, Roaming Around the Known must be a time of learning that solidifies what the child knows and knows how to do, while allowing him to roam into new discoveries about how print works.

Author’s note:
Appreciation is extended to teacher leaders Michael Buonaiuto, Brenda Baleno, and Lori Fitzgerald who helped me move in my own understandings of the power of discovery during Roaming Around the Known.

References


Children’s Books Cited

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Jim Schnug is a Reading Recovery trainer with The Ohio State University. He was first trained as a teacher leader in 1987 and served in that capacity at the Ashland University/Mansfield City Schools teacher training site in Ohio. He retrained as a Reading Recovery teacher in 2010, after serving as a tenured Ashland University faculty member for over 20 years. In 2010, Jim became the project administrator for the Reading Recovery: Scaling Up What Works i3 grant and ultimately trained as a trainer with the New York University Reading Recovery Project in New York City. Jim currently serves on the RRCNA Board of Directors and on the research committee of the North American Trainers Group.