

What to Teach? Supporting Strategic Processing at the Earliest Text Reading Levels

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Author's Note: In this article, Reading Recovery® teachers also refers to Literacy Lessons™ teachers. All names are pseudonyms.

Introduction

Young learners come to literacy with different experiences and strengths and do not respond to every literacy task in exactly the same way (Clay, 1998/2014). Consequently, their teachers must instruct in ways that are tailored precisely to the child. The challenge for Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons teachers is to make optimum use of lesson time and teach in ways that focus on what the child needs to learn “how to do next” in terms of strategic processing. At the same time, teachers must provide the “just right” amount of support for the child, encouraging independence and without doing for the child what they can manage for themselves. Easy to say, but much harder to put into practice.

In every lesson, the goal is to help each child build an effective literacy processing system in which they independently monitor their own reading; search for information using meaning, language structure, and visual information in print; notice their errors; take unprompted action to correct those errors; and problem-solve flexibly (Clay, 2015; Doyle, 2019; Konstantellou & Lose, 2016). As the child engages in this range of strategic actions over time, their processing systems become stronger and more efficient enabling them to read increasingly complex texts with fluency, accuracy, and a focus on meaning.

Reading Recovery teachers sensitively observe and note the child's use of meaning (M), structure (S), and visual (V) information sources on their running records and lesson records. Yet, this alone is not sufficient to inform teaching. Teachers must go beyond mere observation to “... search for better explanations of how children are

producing those behaviours” (Clay, 1991/ 2015, p. 232). Ultimately, to respond effectively to children, teachers must probe further, beyond their observational records, to generate hypotheses that help explain what led to the child's decisions to do “this vs. that.” Engaging in this inquiry in every lesson with every child will increase and strengthen the quality of our one-to-one teaching and support the formation and extension of children's processing systems for literacy.

The specific focus of this discussion is how to get the literacy processing system underway in early text reading levels. Examples of children's reading work are shared to focus on self-monitoring and self-correcting in early reading.

An Early Literacy Processing System

To illustrate a literacy processing system in action, notice how one young learner, Rachel, reads a Level 8 text, *A Friend for Little White Rabbit* (Randell, 1994), during one of her Reading Recovery lessons:

Text: Little white duck, little white duck.
Please will you play with me?
said the little white rabbit.

Rachel: Little white bunny [pauses, quickly rereads] little white, /b/ bird [repeats “bird” in a whisper], /b/ -uck, duck [quickly self-corrects, rereads, and continues reading accurately].

Now, consider this analysis of Rachel's reading:

- First, Rachel provided a meaningful and grammatically correct attempt. However, the words *bunny* and *duck* are visually dissimilar.
- Second, after pausing as if to notice, Rachel reread up to the error, then articulated a first sound /b/ for the letter *d*, perhaps an indication

of a b/d confusion although her substitution of *bird* for *duck* is meaningful and grammatically correct.

- Third, she initiated a search of the letters to the end of the word (-uck) and read *buck*, a further indication of a possible b/d confusion.
- Fourth, she quickly substituted *duck* to self-correct, perhaps resolving the b/d confusion while also concluding that although *buck* was somewhat relevant, it did not resemble the illustration and fit the text's meaning.
- Finally, she reread from the beginning to confirm her self-correction and continued thereafter to read accurately.

Essentially, Rachel searched, monitored, and self-corrected independently to make all sources of information match. She attended to language structure (the reading is grammatically correct or sounds right) and visual information (the reading uses letter-sound correspondences and orthography to make everything look right), all with a focus on meaning (the reading makes sense). Importantly, Rachel also reread to confirm her self-correction without prompting to do so. Reading with attention to this combination of information sources and taking the initiative to confirm the reading are indicators of Rachel's decision making as she persistently works toward a resolution. Although Rachel's processing is still rudimentary, it will become more efficient over time as she reads and writes progressively complex texts with increased flexibility. Rachel's reading is a good example of an independent strategic processing system in action—the teacher's goal for Rachel in her early literacy lessons.

It is the process of working with a range of information sources and the child's thinking as they work on information at the point of difficulty that are essential and lead to the development of an effective literacy processing system. For the most struggling young literacy learners, that processing system is dependent on expert teaching. The teacher must tune in to the child's reading (and writing) behaviors in order to

- create hypotheses to explain the behaviors that can be tested and responded to “in the moment,”
- reflect upon the child's responses to plan for instruction, and
- arrange opportunities for their future learning.

As Clay (1991/2015) states:

The teacher has a general theory in her head about children's responding. This is a theory she should check against what she is able to observe and infer from the individual child's responding, and which she should be prepared to change if the two are in conflict. (p. 233)

Expert Teaching: Contingent and Responsive to the Child

Fundamentally, for learners like Rachel, assembling an effective literacy processing system will require the most expert teaching (Lose, 2007a). Instruction that is contingent and responsive to each child's developing competencies is evident in our work with children during lessons and addresses three contingencies to inform our interactions with a child (see Figure 1). Wood (2003) identified these critical contingencies as

- *temporal contingency* (if and when to intervene),
- *instructional contingency* (how to support the activity and at what level of support), and
- *domain contingency* (what to teach or focus on next).

According to Wood (2003), tutoring has its origins in the basic human need to provide help when encountering a person who is struggling. Wood describes helping as essential to the survival of the species: an investment in the person that helps them adapt to their environment. In Wood's view, contingent tutoring is based on the principle that the tutor works at an appropriate level that will ensure success, perhaps interacting only minimally to help the learner successfully complete the next step in a task.

To deliver contingent instruction requires viewing these contingencies holistically; each contingency is important for the learner's next action (see Lose, 2007b).

Additionally, a graphic representation of the contingencies that comprise Wood's theory of contingent support for learning is presented in Figure 2. In a theory of contingent teaching, the “sweet spot” or perfectly contingent interaction is achieved when the temporal, domain, and instructional contingencies converge. In other words, when a child encounters difficulty, the teacher

- decides if and when to intervene,
- decides what to teach or focus on next in response to the particular child's current competencies, and

Figure 1. Elements of Contingent Support for Learning with Application to Reading Recovery Teaching

Temporal Contingency	Instructional Contingency	Domain Contingency
<i>Deciding if and when to intervene</i>	<i>Deciding how to support an activity and at what level</i>	<i>Deciding what to teach and what to focus on next</i>
<p>Use of the 30-minute lesson time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • timing of responses (e.g., waiting a few seconds before telling the child a word, or helping a child right away if they do not have the information needed to help themselves) • pace of the responding (e.g., slow, moderate, fast) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • from least supportive defined as “General Verbal Intervention” (e.g., “<i>Why did you stop?</i>” or “<i>Try that again</i>”) • to most supportive defined as “Demonstrates Action” (e.g., to teach for cross-checking, a teacher rereads for the child and says “Father Bear went down to the” [pauses and points beneath the first letter in word and taps on the picture] “river. Could it be <i>river</i>? R. Yes, it could!”) <p>Instructional Contingency resembles Clay’s (2016) “Scale of Help” (pp. 152-153).</p>	<p>The teacher combines knowledge about the child’s use of information sources and the child’s strategic actions combined with the teacher’s understanding of Clay’s theory of literacy processing to inform teaching decisions.</p> <p>Addressing the domain contingency requires knowing what items (letters, sounds, words, etc.) the learner has accumulated and how they use this information for strategic actions in text reading or writing. (e.g., self-monitoring, searching, cross-checking, etc.)</p>

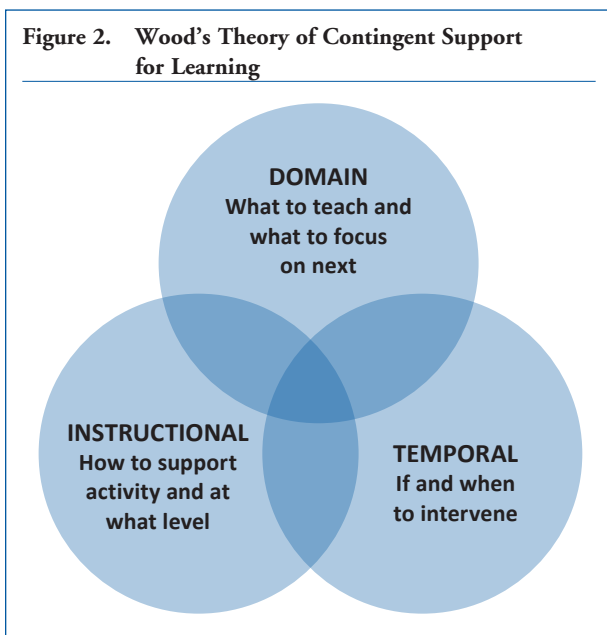
NOTE: See also Lose, 2007b, Table 1.

- provides the just right amount of support for the problem solving required of the child at this point in time while also considering how best to help the child transfer this new learning to other similar literacy tasks.

Importantly, the elements of contingent teaching are not predetermined or fixed. As Clay (2016) asserts, “There are no set teaching sequences: there is no prescription to teach this before that” (p. 1). Reading Recovery lessons are optimally effective when the teaching is responsive to the individual learner. Thus, the responsibility for the child’s opportunity to learn rests squarely with the teacher whose commitments have been described by Clay (2001/2015), as follows:

- The teacher would make maximum use of the existing response repertoire of each child, and hence every child’s lessons would be different.
- The teacher would support the development of literacy processing by astute selection of tasks, judicious sharing of tasks, and varying the time, difficulty, content, interest and method of instruction, and type and amount of conversation within the standard lesson activities.
- The teacher would foster and support active constructive problem solving, self-monitoring and self-correction from the first lesson, helping learners to understand that they must take over the expansion of their own competencies. To do this, the teacher would focus on process variables (how to get and use information) rather than

Figure 2. Wood’s Theory of Contingent Support for Learning



on mere correctness and habitual responses, and would temporarily value responses that were partially correct for whatever they contributed towards correctness.

- The teacher would set the task difficulty level to ensure high rates of correct responding plus appropriate challenge so that the active processing system could learn from its own attempts to go beyond current knowledge. (p. 225)

For Reading Recovery educators, instruction referred to by Clay (2001/2015) as “intensive contingent teaching” (p. 225) is understandably difficult and requires “moving flexibly around the teaching procedures described in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals, Second Edition* as they work with children every day” (Clay, 2016, p. 1). As such, our teaching requires

- embracing a theory of the constructive learner;
- working with each child’s strengths;
- sensitively observing the child’s literacy acts;
- keeping daily and weekly records of the child’s responses and responding history;
- noting how it changes over time to inform instruction; and
- applying Clay’s teaching procedures as designed, with precision, and tailored to the child. (Clay, 2016; Doyle, 2015)

With all of the aforementioned conditions to inform instruction in place, effective Reading Recovery teachers make the teaching of the lowest-performing young learners look relatively seamless. Occasionally, when surprised by a child’s responses during text reading, teachers are able to respond in ways that best support the child’s solving and what they need to learn how to do next in terms of strategic action. Consider for example, Patrick’s reading of the Level 11 new book, *Mushrooms for Dinner* (Randell, 1996). In this story, Mother Bear wants to add mushrooms to the family’s meal. Baby Bear proclaims that he is good at finding mushrooms, conducts a search of his surroundings, but is unsuccessful locating any until he climbs a tree and spots them from his aerial view. Baby Bear then proceeds to gather the mushrooms and present them to his Mother, who compliments her son’s ingenuity.

Patrick’s teacher, Ms. Schieltz, noted how intently he focused on the illustration depicting Baby Bear atop the tree gazing at the mushrooms below. He seemed particu-

larly fascinated by Baby Bear’s resourceful solution to the problem of finding mushrooms and read the text below with gusto. If you were Patrick’s teacher, how would you respond to his reading and why?

Text: They are beautiful mushrooms.
You are a clever little bear.

Patrick: They are beautiful mushrooms.
You are a *climber* little bear.

Ms. Schieltz is pleased that his reading integrates all three sources of information. His substitution of *climber* for *clever* is meaningful, sounds right and looks right both at the beginning and ending letter clusters of the word. Previously Patrick’s attention to visual information was limited only to the first cluster of letters in a word. At this point, Ms. Schieltz must decide whether to intervene and, if she does, what she will attend to, how, and with what level of support. Not wanting to disrupt Patrick’s fluent and mostly accurate reading, she decides to withhold comment (temporal contingency) until he finishes reading. After a brief exchange about the story, she acknowledges his effective reading (“It was good the way you read this”); offers him a chance to detect his error (“Did anything trick you?”); and plans to teach according to his response. What she knows about his patterns of responding thus far (integrates all three sources of information and attends mostly to the initial letter or letter clusters, but neglects to search further using additional visual information) is outlined in the transcript below.

Ms. Schieltz: Baby Bear found the mushrooms after all...

Patrick: He climbed the tree and saw them. Bears can do that!

Ms. Schieltz: They sure can. (turning to the page with his climber/clever substitution) Over here it was good the way you read this. Did anything trick you?

Patrick: (rereads, pauses at *clever*, but does not take the initiative to problem solve or self-correct)

Ms. Schieltz: I’m glad you stopped. (acknowledging the self-monitoring) What did you notice? (inviting him to search)

Patrick: (rereads and self-corrects) It’s supposed to be *clever*. (pointing at the word)

Observations of Reading Recovery teaching have suggested that too many times we are anxious to teach for the searching action (often visual searching within words) without inviting the child to find their own errors first, thus ensuring that the child is less involved in the discovery process that is central to their learning.

Ms. Schieltz: Yes. How did you know?

Patrick: This. (pointing to the *cl* at the beginning of the word)

At this point, Ms. Schieltz decides to highlight Patrick's solving, rather than focusing on mere accuracy. Although she isn't entirely certain if Patrick simply recalled the word *clever* that has appeared in several of the other stories he has read up to this point, or if indeed he is going beyond the beginning letter/s to conduct the search that results in his correction, Ms. Schieltz concludes there is enough information thus far that will help her teach for the more-complex solving that Patrick will need to do to advance his processing system further. She responds "Yes, you made it look right at the beginning. And what else do you see?" Patrick then points to the -er ending and adds, "Yep, it's *clever*."

In an effort to further verify Patrick's noticing and to ensure his transfer of this new and more-sophisticated searching behavior, Ms. Schieltz hands him a small masking card and adds, "Yes, and you can show yourself all the parts." Patrick moves the card left to right to reveal the parts of the word that correspond to his articulation, *cl-ever*. Ms. Schieltz acknowledges Patrick's work stating, "I'm glad you were looking closely" and adds "remember to do this when you're reading so that everything looks right."

Ms. Schieltz then makes a note on her lesson record to watch for this and other signs of Patrick's similarly developing strategic behaviors that will be important as texts become longer and more complex. She also notes where, in the other lesson activities—for example writing, the

cut-up story, or the isolated word work at the white board—she can further support Patrick's new word analysis skills. Finally, she also plans to consult Clay's teaching procedures that will support her decisions about what to teach next in terms of strategic action in text reading, in writing, and in the other parts of his lessons.

This precisely tailored instruction requires rapid decision making on the part of the teacher and is key to contingent teaching:

- Knowing if and when to intervene or respond (temporal contingency).
- If responding, determining what to focus on or teach (domain contingency).
- Modulating the level of support in response to the child (instructional contingency).

At the same time, all the contingencies are considered holistically for optimum effectiveness and so as not to undermine the child's initiation.

Deciding what to teach or focus on next (domain contingency) can challenge even the most skilled teacher. In the example above, Ms. Schieltz wisely focuses on Patrick's substitution of *climber* for *clever* and teaches first for self-monitoring. In contrast, if she had focused first on fostering "further visual searching" she would have removed the opportunity for Patrick's self-discovery and ultimate self-correction.

Observations of Reading Recovery teaching have suggested that too many times we are anxious to teach for the searching action (often visual searching within words) without inviting the child to find their own errors first, thus ensuring that the child is less involved in the discovery process that is central to their learning (Anderson & Kaye, 2016; Schwartz, 1997). As Clay (2016) reminds us

It is important for teachers to notice self-monitoring because the process is a general one required in all reading and because the child's half-right, half-wrong behaviours *help the teacher to decide what to teach next* [italics added for emphasis]. If the child resolves the problem we call it self-correction. (p. 134)

Thus, Ms. Schieltz provided Patrick the chance to self-monitor first; he did so; and, he subsequently corrected his error. This self-discovery and the personal reward derived from the self-correction increase the likelihood that Patrick will be able to conduct this type of more sophisticated searching action to solve words in the future

on texts of increasing complexity and ultimately further strengthen his developing literacy processing system.

There are several options for teaching presented by Clay in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (2016) that could inform the domain or what to teach Patrick at this time. Ms. Schieltz decided what to teach Patrick based on his responding history and his responses in the scenario above, with application to Clay’s teaching procedures. The primary task and the challenge for Ms. Schieltz and all of us who work in Reading Recovery is to apply Clay’s teaching procedures effectively and in response to the particular child.

Application and Analysis of Clay’s Teaching Procedures for Text Reading: Support for the Individual Child

We now turn our attention to some of Clay’s teaching procedures for text reading. The complex theory upon which Reading Recovery is based and the rationales that support Clay’s teaching procedures, and their application to an individual child (2016) at a particular time, both within lessons and across the child’s series of lessons comprise the domain contingency or “what to teach.” To

explore this contingency, we will now focus on teaching during text reading with reference to two (among the many) “Reading Recovery (teaching) Procedures” in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (Clay, 2016). The procedures presented below are designed to support the child’s self-monitoring and self-correcting. Even though these procedures identified below are presented separately, in actual practice we sometimes respond using more than one teaching procedure in our work with children (for example, teaching for the child’s self-monitoring and another strategic action combined) as illustrated in the transcripts and analyses below.

Teaching for self-monitoring in text reading

See *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (Clay, 2016), pp. 134–135.

According to Clay (2016), the emergence of self-monitoring is a highly significant signal of effective strategic activity and it “must be continually adapted to encompass new challenges in texts” (p. 134). Likewise, the monitoring (that leads to self-correcting) appears to arise “from an awareness, however vague, that there is supposed to be a neat fit between the reader’s knowledge and the words in print, and as readers work on the several messages of the



Expert teaching is astutely timed and precisely tailored to respond to the child’s current understandings in order to optimally support the development of a strategic, literacy processing system.

text—the story, and semantic, syntactic, visual or phonological information—they discover things that do not fit with what they have just read. Sometimes the child follows an error with a protest but does not succeed in making the self-correction” (Clay, 2001/2015, p. 185).

As children read their first books—simple stories with one and two lines of text—they use their knowledge of language and the world to make links between the pictures and the print. Self-monitoring is observed in children’s early reading behaviors; attending to print in a left-to-right direction and using some known letters and known words along with ensuring their reading makes sense. In the absence of self-monitoring in early reading, the teacher provides explicit demonstrations. For example, the teacher might use a pointer or show the child how to use their finger to establish a one-to-one match. She might reread a sentence and sound the first letter of a challenging word or ask, “Can you hear this letter?” (Clay, 2016, p. 133). Teaching for self-monitoring succeeds when the teacher’s demonstration builds on what the child can contribute to their own solving.

In this scenario, Elana is reading the simple (Level 2) book *Sally’s New Shoes* by Annette Smith. On every page, the book’s main character, Sally, tells the reader about all the things she is going to do in her new shoes (I’m going to *walk* in my new shoes; I’m going to *run*..., *jump*..., and so on). Each page is accompanied by an illustration that clearly supports the text’s meaning and repeated pattern. Elana’s reading proceeds smoothly until she comes to the text depicted below. The illustration that accompanies the page shows Sally in a pirouette and Elana substitutes *spin* for the word *dance*. Her teacher, Ms. Brooke, must decide if and when to intervene and how. And, if she chooses to intervene, what will she teach for in terms of strategic activity? Ms. Brooke’s response to Elana’s self-monitoring is illustrated in the transcript below:

Text: I’m going to dance
in my new shoes.

Elana: I’m going to *spin* (frowns, but takes no
action to self-correct, continues reading) in
my new shoes.

Ms. Brooke: You tried to work that out. (reinforcing the
self-monitoring attempt)

Elana: This. (pointing to *dance*, but neglects to
reread and self-correct)

Ms. Brooke: Ah huh. What else could it be? (inviting a
prediction of what the word could be based
on her oral language)

Elana: *Dance*?

Ms. Brooke: Does it look right at the beginning? (using a
masking card to reveal the first letter)

Elana: Yes. *Dance*. (then rereads accurately from
the beginning of the sentence as if to
confirm)

Ms. Brooke: So, it has to make sense and it also has to
look right. (summarizing the teaching in an
effort to support the child’s transfer)

In this scenario, Ms. Brooke has decided that teaching in support of Elana’s self-monitoring is the most important focus of her teaching at this time. Essentially, the child who self-monitors is poised to participate more fully in their own learning and benefit from good instruction. Even though Elana was unable to self-correct after she monitored, Ms. Brooke’s acknowledgment of her noticing (“you tried to work that out”) provides the encouragement young learners like Elana need to continue to check on themselves while reading. As well, Ms. Brooke’s use of the masking card to reveal the initial letter—combined with the reminder that making sense is also required—are the canvas upon which Elana can focus her attention and confirm her prediction using her knowledge of oral language. Ms. Brooke’s explicit teaching in this and other early lessons lays the important foundation for Elana’s assembly of a processing system for literacy.

Yet, attending to self-monitoring is not reserved only for early lessons. Rather, it is a focus of our work with children throughout their lesson series as they read higher level texts. Because she attended to it in early lessons and Elana was successful, Ms. Brooke can now do less teaching for self-monitoring and expect Elana to self-monitor independently. She can then prompt Elana “Were you right?” or “Try that again” (Clay, 2016, p. 135). Following is an example of Ms. Brooke’s attention to self-monitoring in a later lesson at the end of Elana’s first reading of *A Friend for Jasper* (Dufresne, 2004), a more complex text (Level 18) with less supportive illustrations:

Text: It was time for a nap.
Jasper scratched at the door.
“Do you want to go out, Jasper?”
asked Mom.

Mom opened the door.
Out went Jasper,
and out went Sweet Face
right after him.
“Look after Sweet Face, Jasper,”
said Mom.

Elana: It was time for a nap.
Jasper *crouched* at the door. (continues
reading accurately...)
“Look /f/ after Sweet Face, Jasper,”
said Mom.

Ms. Brooke withholds comment (temporal contingency)
until after Elana finishes reading the rest of the chapter
and responds.

Ms. Brooke: Did something trick you on this page?

Elana: (glancing at the text, immediately points to
scratched) This one. (rereads to self-correct)

Ms. Brooke: Ah huh. I’m glad you were looking closely.
(makes note of the successful solving and
resolves to arrange opportunities for addi-
tional work with words in isolation of
similar complexity)

Elana’s reading is fluent and accurate except for the two errors above, one of which resulted in an immediate self-correction (*/f/ after*). Elana’s substitution of *crouched* for *scratched* uses all three information sources. The substitution is meaningful and grammatically correct, shares some visual similarity in the middle of the word, and incorporates the same sequence of letters (-ched) at the end of the word. The first letter, ‘c’ (*crouched*) is a mismatch for the letter ‘s’ (*scratched*). Even though Elana’s attention to monitoring has become much more advanced over time, there are still opportunities for Ms. Brooke to continue to teach for strategic processing in later lessons on more-complex texts in both reading and writing. She plans to find places in every lesson activity (isolated word work, solving words in writing, the cut-up story, etc.) that will continue to support Elana’s developing processing system.

Teaching for self-correcting in text reading

See *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (Clay, 2016), pp. 134-135.

Clay (2001/2015) states that self-correction is “evidence of one kind of executive control developed and mobilised by readers to keep them on track” (p. 186). Self-correction appears early in children’s speech as they stop, start, refor-

mulate, and repeat so as to be understood by a listener and as a result of their increasing awareness of the need to communicate effectively. Additional evidence (Evans, 1985; Wood, 1998) cited by Clay (2001/2015) suggests that the older and more advanced the learner, the greater the likelihood that they will self-correct. It seems that “awareness” is foundational to self-correcting. Wood commented compellingly on self-correction: “The disposition to correct oneself is not an attribute of personality or ability. When children know, albeit intuitively, what looks, sounds, or feels right we have reason to be confident that they will self-correct and self-instruct” (p. 199). Wood adds that a child who does not self-correct is “...offering mute testimony to the fact that they do not know what they are doing or where they are supposed to be going” (p. 199).

Importantly, self-correction requires a teacher who acknowledges the child’s half-right and half-wrong responses and as a result makes space for the child to work at solutions independently. Some of this space is created by our choice of texts—easy enough for the child to read with one or two new things to learn and not too hard so as to discourage the child—and is informed by the child’s responding history as captured on our running records and lesson records. Essentially, what we attend to, how, and the level of support provided to the child are the backdrop that fosters the child’s self-correction as illustrated in the response to Devon’s reading of this Level 2 text, *The Walk* (Dufresne, 2009):

Text: Dad can see water.
I can see grass.

Devon: Dad can see (pauses) wocean. (quickly looks at teacher)

Consider the following analysis of Devon’s reading. First, Devon provided a grammatically correct reading that incorporated some meaning and attention to visual information. Specifically, his substitution of “wocean” (pronounced *wo – shun*; long O, short U) for *water* starts with the letter *w* indicating his attention to the initial letter (searching) and its corresponding sound. This was combined with *ocean* to arrive at “wocean,” an ingenious substitution that looks right at the beginning and also makes sense (meaning) to this child. Second, Devon notices that something about his substitution isn’t quite right as evidenced by his quick glance at his teacher, a form of self-monitoring and a subtle appeal for help to resolve the dissonance.

Devon's teacher, Ms. Blakely, wisely acknowledges his self-monitoring and uses a prompt ("check it") that she knows Devon understands, suggesting that she believes Devon will be able to resolve the dilemma ("wocean" for *water*) without further assistance. Ms. Blakely's hunch is correct, for Devon quickly rereads and self-corrects to make all sources of information match. Not content to accept mere correctness however, Ms. Blakely proceeds to capitalize on Devon's added strategic actions—the self-correcting and the confirming—and summarizes those actions with reference to Clay's teaching procedures in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (2016) as illustrated in the transcript below:

Ms. Blakely: Were you right?

Devon: (nods yes)

Ms. Blakely: How do you know? (probing for evidence that Devon's attempt goes beyond mere guessing and to inform her subsequent teaching)

Devon: This. (pointing to the picture, an indication that meaning is used)

Ms. Blakely: And, is there any other way we could know? (preparing him to use additional visual information he is aware of and has neglected to use)

Devon: (pointing to the word *water*) It has this (pointing to w) and this. (pointing to -er)

Ms. Blakely: I'm glad you made it look right at the beginning and at the end. And now it also makes sense. (summarizing Devon's action)

Clearly, Ms. Blakely's teaching is contingent on Devon's responding and addresses the domain or what to teach contingency as informed by Clay's teaching procedures for self-correcting. It is also important to note that Ms. Blakely's invitation to self-correct was issued after first acknowledging Devon's self-monitoring (glancing at his teacher when reading, "wocean"). Devon self-corrected (*water*) and then confirmed that the word looked right at the beginning (w) and at the end (-er). Also, Ms. Blakely summarized and complimented Devon's actions—attending to both the meaning and the visual information—in an attempt to further ensure that they would be repeated again and with increased speed. Finally, Ms. Blakely considered where else in Devon's lessons, besides text reading, she could teach for and support these similar strategic actions.

Summary and Recommendations for Teachers

In conclusion, the challenge for every Reading Recovery teacher is to support the child's development of a strategic processing system for literacy. This requires expert teaching with a focus on what the child can do currently and what the child needs to learn how to do next. Essentially, our teaching needs to be precisely tailored to the child and astutely timed and delivered in response to the child to optimally support their independent strategic action. To do this, teachers need to keep tasks easy enough for the child to notice their errors and self-correct during early reading. Essentially, our contingent teaching—if and when to intervene, what to focus on in our teaching, and how to support the child—is critical to getting the child's literacy processing system underway from earliest lessons.

Equally important is an acknowledgment of the constructive child. We value each child's strengths, their developing understandings and the range of experiences that have contributed to their current grasp of literacy, and tailor our instruction accordingly. As such, we assume a noticing, not judgmental stance, always remaining tentative and nimble in our interactions with the child. We respect each child's idiosyncratic responding and know that understanding the child's perspective will help us teach in ways that enable the child's contributions to their own learning and ultimate happiness.

Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness of teaching in Reading Recovery and to sustain our teaching commitments to every child in early text reading, I invite all of us to consider one or more of the following recommendations.

Sensitively observe and document each child's current control over literacy processing.

It is essential to collect and analyze the wealth of data gathered from our daily and weekly records of text reading and writing to inform our understandings of what children know and how they know it, and use this information to make the most facilitative and contingent teaching moves. None of us would embark on an unfamiliar miles-long solo journey by car without the benefit of a functioning navigation system. An absence of detailed daily records and the opportunity to use those records to guide our teaching disadvantages both the teacher and child.

Develop hypotheses to be checked continuously to inform our work with children.

As Clay cautions:

Treating behavior (what the child is doing) and cognition (what the child is thinking) as explanatory alternatives is not helpful for understanding teaching interactions. Both teacher and child exhibit behaviours and both operate on cognitions. The teacher has a general theory in her head about children's responding. This is a theory she should check against what she is able to observe and infer from the individual child's responding, and which she should be prepared to change if the two are in conflict. (Clay, 1991/2015, p. 233)

Understand that a child is responding as best they can at the moment and ask ourselves: What led the child to respond in this way or that?

Teach in support of the child seated alongside us in today's lesson, not just the child we wish he would become in the future.

Ask: What does this child need to learn how to do next to expand their current processing system? The child who does not yet have early behaviors under control (e.g., consistently neglects one-to-one matching or doesn't yet control serial order within words) is unlikely to benefit from teaching that focuses on greater complexity (e.g., searching for letter clusters within multisyllabic words). Understandably, we all want children to make rapid progress. But pushing children through material that is too difficult will decelerate, not accelerate, the child's literacy processing development. When the material is too difficult, the child's ability to construct their own learning is thwarted.

Determine what's next in this child's learning that will foster the continued development of a processing system.

Aim to teach in ways that are generative, so that the child can transfer new learning to novel contexts and develop a self-extended system for literacy.

Value the child's unique contributions to their own noticing and attempts to problem solve.

The child's noticing is a first step toward their self-correction (or self-teaching) and enables greater participation in their own learning. Specifically, prioritize teaching for the child's self-monitoring in early text reading so that

they are more likely to consistently self-monitor as they read increasingly complex texts. As Clay (2016) reminds, "Effective monitoring is a highly skilled process constructed over many years of reading. It begins early but must be continually adapted to encompass new challenges in texts" (p. 134).

Keep tasks easy enough.

Tasks pitched at a too-challenging level distract the child, compromise their ability to focus attention and discover for themselves, and result in the child's discouragement.

Record our lessons and transcribe our interactions with children.

Ask: Did I create opportunities for the child to self-monitor or did I monitor for the child? Likewise, after monitoring, did the child initiate some additional strategic action (cross-checking, searching, confirming) or did I come in too quickly and remove opportunities for the child's additional action? Did I provide space for the child's own discoveries and if the tasks became too challenging for the child, did I offer appropriate and timely support?

Always focus on child happiness and ensure that it is central to every lesson.

A child who is secure and happy with their work is more likely to participate fully in learning and benefit from our instruction. Therefore, establish a learning climate that builds on what the child does well and let this be your guide for teaching. As Lyons (2003) affirms: "Emotions and thoughts interact, shape each other, and cannot be separated" (p. 176). Fundamentally, child happiness is synonymous with child learning.

Clearly, there are myriad factors that, taken together, support each child's literacy learning, yet none is more important than the responsive teacher working sensitively alongside the individual child. As Clay (2016, p. 195) so eloquently reminds us:

And in the end
it is the individual adaptation
made by the expert teacher
to that child's idiosyncratic competencies and
history of past experiences
that starts him on the upward climb
to effective literacy performances.

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