Predictions of Progress: Charting, Adjusting, and Shaping Individual Lessons

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Authors’ note: All children’s names are pseudonyms.

Introduction

Clay’s idea of predicting a student’s progress at the beginning of individual lessons is a disruptive innovation (Christensen et al., 2008) in practices for supporting children who are struggling to become literate. Where else in education was such a working document used? Consequently, although designing predictions of progress can be challenging for Reading Recovery® educators, it is an essential element of Reading Recovery teaching.

This article expands on the key messages in Sharan Gibson’s (2012) article, “Predictions of Progress: Constructing Lessons for Individuals,” in The Journal of Reading Recovery. Drawing from our experiences working with Reading Recovery teacher leaders, teachers, and our students in Reading Recovery, we propose that Reading Recovery teachers are the wayfinders or navigators of a child’s literacy development. On our journeys to making predictions of progress an essential part of our teaching, we discovered that navigating our students’ paths to progress required much more than a profile of scores (Clay, 2016). Although our experiences are in Reading Recovery, we include our colleagues in Descubriendo la Lectura, L’intervention préventive en lecture-écriture, and Literacy Lessons® in our community of practice.

Wayfinding

Navigation involves knowing your position in space compared to a known location, and the process of determining how to move (e.g., by driving, or sailing) from one place to another. We use the term wayfinding to include all processes that allow humans to orient themselves, including traveling over unknown or unmarked paths or waters.

The early Polynesian voyagers were some of the best wayfinders in history (Exploring Our Fluid Earth, n.d.). They were able to find their way across the Pacific Ocean navigating by the sun, stars, and other natural cues—such as wave patterns, seabirds, and clouds—which could indicate the presence of land.

Charting a course

Charting is another form of navigation. A nautical chart is like a road map of a body of water. It shows the expected lay of the water and gives references through lines of latitude and longitude for finding your way to a destination. It is particularly essential when you don’t know the route, and includes critical information on depth, hazards (such as rocks and shoals), and landmarks.

With or without modern navigational tools, charting a course is essential to navigating unknown waters. Here, we apply the essential art of wayfinding to Reading Recovery teachers charting a possible literacy journey for children whose route to literacy development may not be smooth sailing.

Unplotted territory

Clay (1982) used a navigating metaphor when she wondered how early one could see the process of learning to read moving off-course. “The obvious way to approach this problem was to use the strategy of biological science in studying unplotted territory, and that was to observe and record exactly what occurred in the natural setting” (p. 1).

For children whose literacy development is moving off-course, Reading Recovery teachers begin their work...
with careful observation of what processes the reader and writer are using, and seeing how they go about a literacy task (Clay, 1982). Clay (1982) found that an interesting change occurred in teachers who learned how to observe closely.

“They begin to question educational assumptions” (p. 3). That explains why a starting point for Reading Recovery teachers is learning how to observe closely using the Observation Survey (Clay, 2019) and how to interpret those observations through a literacy processing lens. Knowing what a child does while engaged in literacy activities leads to more powerful teaching interactions (Clay, 1982).

Preparation for the Journey: Identifying a Starting Place for Teaching (Clay, 2016, p. 27)

Janice taught first grade for 4 years before beginning her training as a Reading Recovery teacher. While sorting through her Reading Recovery books, Janice leafed through the higher text levels and thought it would take a miracle for the lowest-achieving students to reach those levels.

Through assessment training and beyond, Janice learned not to rely on miracles but on reliable observational records and careful charting of each student’s literacy journey—what they needed to know how to do in order to control a critical aspect of literacy processing. As in navigation, she learned to make any adjustments along the way. A starting point for designing predictions of progress, therefore, is careful analysis of a completed Observation Survey, gathering additional information (New Zealand Reading Recovery; NZRR, 2021a, 2021b, or 2021c) and pulling the information from all tasks together in the Observation Survey summary. Understanding the power of predictions of progress begins with learning how to link assessment information on a child’s current competencies to the initial design.

An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Observation Survey; Clay, 2019) is the first text that Reading Recovery teachers-in-training are introduced to during assessment training (NZRR, 2021). Teachers first learn how to administer the Observation Survey, collecting evidence of a child’s competencies. How the evidence is interpreted, however, is heavily influenced by our own beliefs about literacy (Clay, 2019). Knowing this, Clay guides our observations to consider the aspects of literacy development we may not have noticed or thought were important.

Clay (2019) helps Reading Recovery teachers to think about the Observation Survey as providing specific information about children’s literacy responses at three general levels in the language hierarchy: the text level (phrase, sentence, or larger text); the word level; and the letter level. She directs our “observational lens” (Clay, 2001, p. 42) in summarizing the Observation Survey findings with a series of guiding questions (see Clay, 2019, pp. 133–135). These questions are directed to text processing and help us to focus on the ways in which a child identifies and solves challenges and to think about strategic activity or processing. This, Clay (2019) explains, is a starting point to a course of individual help.

Two views of progress

As an experienced Grade 1 teacher coming into Reading Recovery training, Janice held an item– and skills-based view of progress. Children’s progress was measured by their knowledge of letters, sounds, word parts, and words, and by skills, such as comprehension, word recognition, and decoding. Clay’s guiding questions were Janice’s first introduction to an additional and alternative view of progress.

Clay’s literacy processing view directed Janice’s attention to how children work on texts as they read and write (Clay, 2001). For example, an item– and skills-based theory would see the learning of letter identities as an end goal. A literacy processing theory directs teachers to evaluate how a child is using their knowledge of letter identities in text reading and writing (Clay, 2001).

Working with an item– and skills-based theory is not enough for most children in Reading Recovery. As Clay (2001) explains:

Obviously literacy professionals across countries operate effectively using a skills-based surface behaviour approach; my argument is that a theory of literacy processing is, to date, more helpful for teachers of young children having severe difficulty learning how to read and write. (p. 235)

Clay’s observational lens takes teachers beyond the surface behaviors to ask different questions:

• How is this student looking?
• What is this student hearing?
• What is this student thinking about?
• Can this student link these things together?

• How does this student use different sources of information, and can they link up that information?

• How do their current ways of working on text need to change?

Digging Deeper:

Study the transcript of Kay’s reading behavior and Clay’s description of Kay’s acts of processing in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (Clay, 2016) pp. 206–207.

Describe how Kay worked through the challenges in the text.

Why might Kay have worked in this way on the text?

Compare the two theoretical explanations of learning letter identities as presented in *Change Over Time in Children’s Literacy Development* (Clay, 2001) on page 235.

How does Adam’s explanation differ from Clay’s?

Gathering additional information on text reading and writing

There are strong rationales for gathering further evidence of text processing before completing the second side of the Observation Survey Summary Sheet. Here we refer to two Reading Recovery inservice course guidesheets for teachers: *Reading: Low Text Levels on Entry* (NZRR, 2021b) and *Writing Progress* (NZRR, 2021c). For children whose instructional text level is below level 3, running records administered as part of the Observation Survey will provide very limited information on reading behaviors. The procedures for gathering additional information on text reading directs us to collect four or five samples of text reading and selecting from the following approaches (NZRR, 2021b):

- Ask the child to draw a picture and tell you a story about it. Write the ‘story’ in clear print, read it to the child and ask the child to read it.
- Ask the child to read their story again.
- Read a very simple little book two or three times and then ask the child to read it.
- Talk through a simple little storybook and ask the child to read it.

Record the child’s reading behavior. Although you may use a running record sheet, it will not be scored. Rather, put into words how the child reacts to text (NZRR, 2021b). Some areas to consider:

- Control of language and language patterns
- Access to meaning
- Use of vocabulary knowledge
- Knowledge of how books work
- Responses to mismatches

Now you will have more information to draw on when summarizing a child’s useful and problem strategic activity at the text level.

In writing, the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words and the Writing Vocabulary tasks do not give you information on how a child engages in early message writing. However, a rating technique for early writing, procedures for gathering additional information, are found in Chapter 8 of the Observation Survey (Clay, 2019, p. 103). Teachers are directed to rate at least three classroom writing samples of a child’s writing competency for language level, message quality, and directional principles. As with the additional reading information, your analysis of the writing samples will give you helpful additional information on how a child is working on writing text when summarizing the child’s useful and problem strategic activity at the text, word, and letter level and in writing their initial predictions of progress.

Charting the Journey: Writing Initial Predictions of Progress

“The predictions about each child’s progress should relate to what you know he can and cannot do on entry to the outcomes you want to see at the end of a lesson series.” (Clay, 2016, p. 28)

A Framework: Needs to know how to…

Conversations with colleagues helped Janice to better understand how predictions of progress connected the initial design of a child’s series of lessons to the Observation Survey findings and summary in a way that built on a child’s existing competencies. The power of the opening statement of the predictions of progress framework, “needs to know how to” (Clay, 2016, p. 28) is about change in what a child knows how to do. This change requires processing action.


Teachers start with a review of a child’s competencies as captured in the Observation Survey findings and summary. What is the child’s current processing and how does it need to be expanded, built on, adapted, used, or maintained? Table 1 is a framework that Janice uses to summarize current processing action drawn from the Observation Survey Summary Sheet, and how that processing action needs to change.

Table 2 provides an example using the Observation Survey summary for Jaydin, the student whose Observation Survey Summary Sheet is found in Chapter 10 of the Observation Survey (Clay, 2019, see p. 131 and p. 137).

Table 1. Framework for Relating Current Processing With How It Needs to Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis of Processing/Strategic Activity</th>
<th>Predictions of Progress Needs to Know How to …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Text</td>
<td>Maintain/Expand/Adapt/Build On/Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Words</td>
<td>Maintain/Expand/Adapt/Build On/Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Letters</td>
<td>Maintain/Expand/Adapt/Build On/Use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Linking Jaydin’s Current Processing With How It Needs to Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis of Processing/Strategic Activity for Jaydin</th>
<th>Predictions of Progress Maintain/Expand/Adapt/Build On/Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Text</td>
<td>Expand search for all three types of information when taking problem-solving actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes brings all three types of information into substitutions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Words</td>
<td>Build on sound-to-letter knowledge in message writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hears and writes many sounds correctly when doing a sound analysis on unknown works.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Letters</td>
<td>Use letter knowledge as a source of information in text reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies most letters by name.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Clay (2016) directs Reading Recovery teachers to write predictions of progress for as many aspects of processing their students will need to control in reading and in writing. You may have quite a few for some children with each one suited to the literacy behaviors of that student.

Digging Deeper

Study Jaydin’s Observation Survey Summary Sheet: An Analysis of the Child’s Processing on page 137 in the Observation Survey (Clay, 2019). What are some of the other processing actions Jaydin takes? How do those actions need to change, and why do they need to change?
In the next few weeks
In charting the particular path your student needs to take, there may be some aspects of processing (Clay, 2016) that must get underway in the first few weeks of lessons. For example, there may be foundational reading behaviors that your student needs to control such as directional movement for written English. There may also be areas of concern, in addition to aspects of processing, that need to be crafted into predictions of progress. For example, maintaining focus and attending to comfort in a one-to-one teaching situation that requires special attention or extra work (see Kat’s journey later in this article). We write the predictions of progress that require special attention or extra work before Roaming Around the Known. However, be prepared to adjust what you consider essential once you know more about what your student can do. During Roaming Around the Known you will have observed more of their way of responding to literacy activities, and you will have had a check on any preconceived ideas about your student (Clay, 2016). Reading Recovery teachers are advised to attach a student’s predictions of progress to their Observation Survey Summary Sheet. That way you will have both documents on hand for easy reference as you begin Roaming Around the Known.

Switching Tack: Adjusting Predictions of Progress
Whether using a nautical chart or wayfinding using the stars, there are factors that can reduce accuracy and require adjustments to your original course. In sailing these factors would be compass deviation, tidal currents, sideslip, and variable winds which may require switching tack.

Clay (2016) uses the sailing term switching tack as a metaphor for how children need to be flexible in their approach to problem solving. Switching tack is also an appropriate metaphor for adjusting predictions of progress in response to a child’s processing challenges. Whatever the problem, it is the teacher who must check their teaching decisions, review records, observe literacy behaviors more closely, and seek insights from colleagues and other stakeholders in order to recover a smoother path of progress.

Janice’s Reflections on Navigating Kat’s Journey
“...teachers do use outcome tests and ability scores, and many will be required to do so, they should be aware that every expectation they hold of what a child can or cannot learn should be mistrusted. This means that they should make an hypothesis that they are willing to revise. If we give the learner particular opportunities and different learning conditions, he might prove the next predictions to be wrong. Teachers should always be ready to be surprised by any child,” (Clay, 2019, p. 6).

Finding Kat’s way into literacy learning required regular adjustments to my initial predictions of progress. Her school record was a thick file outlining a history of pediatric care, intensive language support, occupational therapy, and private tutoring. From Kat’s Grade 1 classroom teacher and educational assistant, I learned about the type of support she received in the classroom. From Kat’s mother, I learned about her family life and the things that brought her joy. Regular conversations with these stakeholders gave me insights into her personality and her world outside of the Reading Recovery room.

Kat’s Observation Survey showed strengths in Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words and Writing Vocabulary (see Figures 1 and 2) resulting in stanines that outperformed other children I had taken into Reading Recovery.

Roaming Around the Known revealed Kat’s unique way of being, in particular how quickly her attention shifted as she withdrew into her own world of imaginary play. I discovered that she responded well to knowing the structure of her day and her Reading Recovery lesson. What worked for Kat was a combination of a 30-minute lesson followed by resetting the timer for 5 minutes of play. Knowing play was coming, Kat could regulate herself to focus through the lesson. For me, play time became an opportunity to take additional observational notes, unless I was invited into the play. Her favorite activity was playing teacher using the whiteboard. She would often write her version of a classroom schedule or a list of items needed for something, such as an overnight stay at her grandparents’ house. The 5 minutes of play continued throughout her series of lessons until one day she decided to join her class rather than stay and play. Although not every Reading Recovery teacher can afford an extra
5 minutes with a child, adjusting Kat’s journey illustrates the importance of shaping lessons to the unique needs of our students.

Kat’s performance on the Observation Survey tasks led me to predict that she needed to expand on what she would communicate in writing (see Table 3), going from ideas to composition (Clay, 2016). This initial prediction of progress provided a direction for selecting Reading Recovery procedures. I created invitations for talking about a variety of topics only to be consistently rejected by Kat.

Switching tack
Thinking through Kat’s response to my teaching, I realized that I was prioritizing “a variety of topics” over engaging around what I knew would interest her (Clay, 2016, p. 33).

In short, I focused on skill and neglected identity. Who was Kat as a developing writer? What did she enjoy writing about? What aspects were needed in her environment to help her to write (Muhammad, 2020; Ferlazzo, 2022)? Paying more attention to these questions, I adjusted my prediction of progress and went with Kat’s interests which centered on the daily workings of family life. From this general topic we were able to branch out into subtopics, such as her fascination with visiting the dentist and the tooth fairy, and to bring in texts that told the stories of other families and their activities. By attending to identity and skill development, Kat

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Analysis of Processing</th>
<th>Initial Predictions of Progress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Able to recall prior experiences and use personally important words (family names.)</td>
<td>Expand on topics to record in written language in order to give variety and permanence to her ideas and share them with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appears to hear the individual words in a sentence, use known words in sentences, and problem solve unknown words by hearing and recording sounds in words.</td>
<td>Use known words to solve by analogy when writing messages in order to have flexible and efficient ways of solving unknown words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Kat’s Assessment: Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words

Figure 2. Kat’s Assessment: Writing Vocabulary

Table 3. Linking Kat’s Current Processing With How It Needs to Change
learned how to increase message complexity around her very specific interests.

Further adjustments
While Kat’s composing processes were underway and her writing vocabulary was expanding, my approaches to supporting her ability to articulate words slowly were not working. It was necessary to once again switch tack. While her Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words stanine was relatively high for early in the school year, how she recorded words like “greteg” for “going” and “semelli” for “school” were evidence of what she was putting together when she did not articulate a word slow enough to hear the sequence of sounds. She appeared to search for the initial letter sound and some memorable features of a word (see Figure 1).

The adjustment to predictions of progress for Kat was that she needed to know how to slow down word articulation in solving an unknown word in order to hear the sequence of sounds. Creating a new prediction of progress is then linked to a fresh approach to selecting teaching procedures for the next few lessons. I returned to Reading Recovery procedures for using phonemic analysis during story writing and in particular the guidance to “Choose the words carefully to suit this child and [her] current learning” (Clay, 2016, p. 98). I had always interpreted this passage as choosing an unknown word. However, thinking only about Kat and her ability to learn and recall the spelling of words, I began using the procedure for slow articulation on known words that came up in Kat’s compositions before moving to unknown words. Just as with nautical charting, adjustments to predictions of progress are essential to the journey. They reflect the importance of the strong link between observational records and the selection of Reading Recovery procedures with each unique child in mind.

Melissa’s Reflections: Shaping Each Child’s Journey
Each prediction of progress I have written documents how my own sensitive observations, teaching decisions, and analysis of literacy behaviors using a literacy processing lens have changed over time. This occurred as a result of gaining experience as a Reading Recovery teacher, engaging in professional learning, and working with a diversity of students. Predictions of progress help me think about how to teach students to create increasingly complex networks in their brains that link what they see on a page and what they hear in language so that they can make sense of, or construct, novel messages that they have never read or written before (Clay, 2016).

My training as a Reading Recovery teacher was influenced by Janice’s framework for writing predictions of progress (see Table 2). As I reviewed the early predictions of progress I wrote when training as a Reading Recovery teacher, it is evident that my teacher leaders (who Janice supported as their trainer) shared her understanding of paying attention to what students know and are able to do as a starting place to chart the course for the desired literacy processing change. Here is an example of a prediction of progress I wrote in my training year for a student who read a level 1 text fluently with meaningful phrasing: “Maintain Marco’s concept of what phrased and fluent reading sounds like as he moves into text that does not have a pattern.”

As I learned more about Clay’s literacy processing theory, I could see that with each student I worked with, I was better able to apply the language of literacy processing in my predictions of progress. For example, “Adapt substitutions that anticipate meaningful language structures to include knowing how to crosscheck multiple sources of information in order to monitor reading of the precise message in increasingly complex texts.”

While my predictions of progress were individualized for each student’s cognitive processing when reading and writing, I wondered whether this working document was capturing enough of students’ strengths and harnessing the different ways they process information. I noticed that when teaching lessons, I was adapting not only what was taught, but how I engaged with each student. How could this realization be an intentional part of my predictions of progress, so I could better chart a path for my students?

I will need to pay special attention to...
As I reread predictions of progress I wrote for students over the years, I noticed there was one aspect that tended to be the most personalized for each student’s way of engaging with the world. It was in the section, “I will need to pay special attention to…” (Clay, 2016, p. 28). I seemed
to use this section as a place where I articulated specific ways to make myself accountable for teaching interactions that were responsive to each student. These predictions of progress arose from conversations with the student, their families, and their classroom teachers, and helped me to create a more complete portrait of each learner (see Table 4).

**Uncharted waters: Designing culturally responsive predictions of progress**

As I work in a school district that has some of the most culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Canada, I wondered how to make predictions of progress culturally responsive in order to teach to and through the strengths of each student (Gay, 2010). Cultural responsiveness draws upon and responds to the histories, identities, and literacy and language practices of students for teaching and learning (Muhammad, 2020).

Zaretta Hammond (2015) offers one rationale for why paying attention to cultural responsiveness might be essential to support acceleration in Reading Recovery. Hammond describes culture as the way that every brain makes sense of the world with culture acting as software for the brain's hardware. She explains:

> The brain uses cultural information to turn everyday happenings into meaningful events. If we want to help dependent learners do more higher order thinking and problem solving, then we have to access their brain's cognitive structures to deliver culturally responsive instruction. (p. 22)

One important way to get to know the cultural context of each student is to engage in ongoing conversations with families. Clay (1998) advises:

> If we take the culture of the child as a starting point for instruction, we allow him or her to construct a response by using both our teaching and the things the child already knows from his or her own culture to achieve some kind of productive response. The child’s cultural knowledge will combine with our instruction. (p. 188)

As I considered how to embed cultural responsiveness within Madison’s predictions of progress, it was the ongoing conversations with her grandmother that revealed how

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>I Will Need to Pay Special Attention to …</th>
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| **Conversations** | … the quality of conversations by engaging in topics that interest him, allowing time for him to collect his thoughts to share, and expanding his repertoire of ways to respond and initiate conversations.  
… being aware of his IEP communication accommodations by checking he understands questions and prompts while ensuring my own concise language. |
| **Child’s Signals** | … the child’s response to levels of support to maintain her independence with what she knows and to strengthen her actively processing texts.  
… the child’s signals of frustration, distraction, or fatigue when planning the next instruction move. |
| **Student Self-Concept of Success** | … building experiences of successful reading and writing in order to incrementally strengthen his tolerance for initiating problem solving and to foster a delight in discovering new things for himself.  
… opportunities to reinforce when he initiates any kind of action to strengthen his willingness to problem solve at difficulty.  
… ways to support connections/accommodations in the classroom so that he continues to feel success beyond the Reading Recovery lesson. |
| **Child’s Way of Being** | … pacing to include movement breaks in the lessons to balance his efforts to focus attention and need for regular movement.  
… providing opportunities for her to draw upon her creative and inquisitive nature through drawing, conversations.  
… how he attends to lesson activities by watching where his eyes are, redirecting his conversation so that he completes the task, pacing lessons so there is variety and change, and seeking high-interest books and writing topics that are compelling to him.  
…designing opportunities across the lesson for her to make choices and have agency in her learning. |
Madison's multigenerational home was central to her daily experiences with and notions of family. She lived with family other than her parents and also assumed caregiving responsibilities for older and younger members of the family. Knowing that the dominant portrayal of families in school texts and classroom discussions described families composed of mother, father, and children, it seemed that Madison and her family's *funds of knowledge* (Moll et al., 1992) would be essential to incorporate into her lesson series. Funds of knowledge is defined as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., p. 133). In other words, I had to learn the kinds of expertise Madison and her family used to engage with the world. As such, Madison's predictions of progress included, “I will need to pay special attention to…” seemed to be where I could incorporate these pursuits (see Table 5) in ways that centered the gifts and genius of Reading Recovery students. My predictions of progress were becoming a place to navigate the multidimensional characteristics of each child and a place to ensure that I was positioning myself to use, as Clay (2016) recommends, all of my ingenuity with the child (and their family) as my coworker (p.168).

Clay (2016) describes predictions of progress as “hypotheses about the paths children could take” and that “children will surprise us from time to time and prove some of our first assumptions to be quite wrong” (p. 29). The expectation of tentativeness and interrogation of assumptions seems to connect well with the sociocultural consciousness necessary to be a culturally responsive educator.

Hammond (2015) compares culture to air we breathe as it permeates all that we do. To be a culturally responsive practitioner, she asks educators to first examine their own cultural identity:

[The] hardest culture to examine is our own, because it shapes our actions in ways that seem invisible and normal... A critical first step is to understand how [our] cultural values shape [our] expectations in the classroom. (p. 55)

Muhammad (2020) agrees that teachers must unpack and make sense of their own histories and identities, which includes the ways they have used language and literacy practices in their own lives. Both Hammond (2015) and Muhammad (2020) explain that this process leads all educators to examine their biases, assumptions, racism, and oppressive thoughts about communities historically marginalized by education systems. Reflecting on these ideas led me to wonder how to use predictions of progress to chart a course for planning individual paths to common outcomes while also interrogating, or wayfinding, my own cultural identities and critical consciousness.

**Wayfinding with Farzan**

Farzan was a student who helped me think about my own critical consciousness in how he used talk across the lesson. As a newcomer from Syria who spoke Arabic, I observed that he was able to respond to instructions across the Observation Survey tasks and initiate verbal responses. For example, he could accurately distinguish and identify by name 30 letters and made attempts for every letter. He read a patterned text showing left-to-right movement and made substitutions that were meaningful. He also articulated initial phonemes of words and recorded a letter to represent each word that often accurately matched the letter he heard.

During his early lessons, Farzan labeled pictures with words and composed patterned sentences. His utterances were short and exclusively used themes and language from the texts we read (see Figure 3, Table 6). I could not seem to get
Teaching

him to share anything about his own interests, preferences or family. I noticed that I was offering a high level of support to Farzan when he composed written messages. My current approach for posing questions and engaging in conversations were not making the necessary shifts for Farzan to know how to extend his oral language to compose his own meaningful message. I realized that to switch tack, I had to reflect upon what more I needed to learn about Farzan in order to refine his predictions of progress.

Meeting Farzan’s father, with the support of an Arabic translator from the community, was so impactful in helping me see this child beyond my first experiences with him as a seemingly quiet, noncommunicative student. Farzan’s father was delighted to see him reading books and writing messages in English, and to learn how Farzan was receiving extra help in Reading Recovery.

Farzan’s father then spoke about aspects of the family’s journey coming to Canada as Syrian refugees, including how Farzan stopped talking for a year after witnessing a bombing attack. His father described how Farzan had recently begun talking so much at

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Linking Predictions of Progress With Gholdy Muhammad’s Five Learning Pursuits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Pursuits to be Taught Alongside Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills are content-based proficiencies … that empower students to read, write, evaluate, speak and act confidently, as they seek to image and create a more equitable society. (2023, p. 75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticality builds sociopolitical consciousness, so students are not passive learners, but rather empathetic, critical thinkers. (2023, p. 75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellect is the understanding; exercising and enhancing mental powers and capacities to better understand, as well as critique the world. (2023, p. 75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy is the practice of loving self and humanity; caring for and helping humanity and earth; recognizing truth, beauty, aesthetics, art and wonder; and working to solve social justice problems in the world. (2023, p. 77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity is composed of notions of who we are, who others say we are (in both positive and negative ways), and who we desire to be … and fosters the learning of individual, family, cultural, and community identities and histories. (2023, p. 74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What more do I need to learn about this child’s multiple social identities in order to affirm them during the lesson activities?
home in Arabic when playing with his siblings.

This conversation emphasized how I had not taken into consideration Farzan’s history, lived experiences, and identities as part of developing his predictions of progress. I had assumed that Farzan’s responses in the initial Observation Survey could be easily expanded into longer oral language utterances as we engaged with the lesson activities. Table 7 shows the revised predictions of progress for Farzan, informed by my conversation with his father, that intentionally embed sociocultural activities from the home context while also naming ways I needed to be accountable for the development of my own critical and sociopolitical consciousness.

The revisions of Farzan’s predictions of progress with an intentional culturally responsive stance regarding reading and writing at the text, word and letter level, seemed to support Farzan to compose novel and meaningful messages using his expanding control of English (see Figure 4). Muhammad (2020) explains, “Students need rich and meaningful experiences when learning skills — experiences that engage the mind and heart and help shape positive school histories” (p. 98). Predictions of progress, as a form of wayfinding, allowed me to regularly evaluate both student progress and my own culturally responsive teaching practices and critical consciousness.

### Table 6. Linking Farzan’s Current Processing With How It Needs to Change

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis of Processing</th>
<th>Initial Predictions of Progress</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utterances include articulating phonemes, saying letter names, and constructing a familiar, patterned phrase.</td>
<td>Expand his single letter/word utterances to short phrases and sentences in order for him to compose messages that are longer, more complex, and varied.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Digging Deeper

Read Gholdy Muhammad’s *Cultivating Genius* (2020) and *Unearthing Joy* (2023) to deepen your understanding of culturally and historically responsive literacy and to connect this scholarship with your work in Reading Recovery. Examine one of your student’s predictions of progress and the section, “I will need to pay special attention to…” from a culturally relevant and responsive stance using some of Muhammad’s learning pursuits and questions in Table 5. What adjustments might you make?

### Table 7. Linking Farzan’s Current Processing With What Needs Special Attention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Learned About the Child From the Family</th>
<th>Revised Predictions of Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not talking was a coping strategy in response to a traumatic event.</td>
<td>I need to pay special attention to trauma-informed practices for the Syrian refugee experience when making teaching decisions and analyzing Farzan’s responses throughout the lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He is most comfortable talking in his home context, with his family in Arabic.</td>
<td>I need to pay special attention to bringing Farzan’s home experiences into the Reading Recovery lesson by planning opportunities for visits by siblings in the school and integration of Arabic language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Becoming a Better Navigator

A 2016 edition of The Economist posed the question, are good teachers endowed with supernatural gifts? Apparently, according to the story, a 2011 survey of attitudes to education revealed that 70% of respondents thought the ability to teach was more the result of innate talent than working at one’s craft. Stories of Polynesian wayfinding make clear that learning how to navigate by star locations and other natural phenomena was a skill that required careful training and apprenticeship. The idea of a natural-born teacher endowed with supernatural gifts is not the reality. As Elizabeth Green (2010) reminds us, finding a good teacher is not the same as panning for gold. Rather, like wayfinding, learning how to navigate a child’s series of lessons from predictions of progress is built on hard work that requires close observation of our students and constant interrogation of our assumptions. It also comes with wanting to get better at your practice without relying on the assistance of miracles.

References


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New Zealand Reading Recovery. (2021b). Reading: Low text levels on entry (additional information).

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