

The Role of Powerful Language Interactions in Reading Recovery Lessons: Developing Strong Literacy Processing Systems

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Editor's Note: All children's names are pseudonyms.

Introduction

The reading and writing opportunities in the Reading Recovery® lesson provide an ideal context for meaningful language interactions between teacher and child that are derived from key characteristics of adult-child interactions fundamental to developing both oral language and literacy. For example, the teacher's intentional language provides a scaffold that fosters the child's ability to draw upon multiple sources of information, from his own language resources and his knowledge of the world. According to Clay, the child's own oral language is both a resource and a beneficiary:

If we harness the established power of children's oral language to literacy learning from the beginning so that literacy knowledge and oral language processing power move forward together, linked and patterned from the start, that will surely be more powerful. (2001, p. 95)

Another key characteristic of adult-child interactions is that as children learn to read and write with the support of interactions with expert others, they link their spoken language and knowledge of the world (invisible information) to the visible symbols of the messages they send and receive from texts (Clay, 2001, pp. 98–99). Indeed, implicit within Clay's definitions of reading "as a message getting, problem-solving activity," and writing "as a message sending, problem-solving activity" is the assumption that teachers and children engage in powerful language interactions around those messages that are foundational to becoming literate (Clay, 2005a, p. 1).

Clay has written extensively about the role of conversation in fostering language development and in negotiating meanings between teacher and child. The adult speaker in conversation with a child listens carefully to the child's responses, reformulates them while maintaining the child's meaning, and gives them back in a more-complete grammatical version, thus expanding the child's language (Clay, 1991). The teacher must tune into the child's intentions because his control of language is still developing and he can understand more than he can express. This is especially relevant in the case of the second language learner who does not yet have control over language structures, and this might interfere with his teachers' assessment of his comprehending. Indeed, "Language and cognition are fused in verbal reasoning. Comprehension problems, which arise because children have yet to master specific features of language use and structure, act as a barrier to learning and understanding" (Wood, 1998, p. 180). Therefore, through conversation teachers tune into the child's attempts at making meaning, despite his limited control of language. As Clay (2014) explains, "Sometimes the expert sends the message and the child has to understand (receive) it. Sometimes the novice sends the message, and the expert has to try to understand it" (p. 23). Clearly, the making of meaning is always paramount.

In addition to Clay, other theorists note the importance of conversational exchanges between adults and children in fostering children's learning, language competence, and independence. For example, Siraj & Asani (2015) write about the interactions of adults and children in preschool settings and refer to the sharing of thinking with an adult as "sustained shared thinking" (p. 403). This concept suggests that shared language is essentially pedagogical

because it is internalized by the child and central to his capacity to develop self-regulation. Judith Lindfors also discusses the role of the adult in modeling what accomplished conversationalists do: “In collaboration with a more competent conversationalist, each child can go beyond herself. She can be the very thing she is becoming: a conversationalist . . . watching, noticing patterns in what more accomplished conversationalists do, and then doing it [herself]” (Lindfors, 2008, pp. 5–6). Raban (2014) also emphasizes the powerful role of talk in supporting the child’s cognitive and emotional development. She specifically refers to a kind of talk called extended discourse which helps children with “developing a depth of understanding, achieving a deferred purpose other than the here and now, establishing links between ideas and experience, and fostering precision and articulation of thinking” (p. 8). Similarly, Stuart McNaughton has argued for the modeling and elaboration of instructional conversations which include “deliberately activating the children’s background information, directly teaching a skill or concept where necessary, and deliberately promoting complex language and expression by eliciting student rationales for their statements” (McNaughton, 2002, p. 148). In this way, teachers create opportunities for children to initiate the production of language that ensure higher levels of engagement and a gradual increase in language complexity.

Concurrently, teachers should aim to reduce the psychological distance between themselves and their learners with language. As Peter Johnston states in *Choice Words*, “The greater the gap between teacher and learner, the harder the teaching becomes” (p. 7). It behooves us to know precisely what the child knows or controls and aim our teaching interactions at the ‘just right’ level thereby contributing to the development of a sense of agency in children. “Teachers’ conversations with children help the children build the bridges between action and consequences that develop their sense of agency. They show children how, by acting strategically, they accomplish things, and at the same time, that *they are the kind of person* [emphasis added] who accomplishes things” (Johnston, 2004, p. 30).

For the purposes of this article, we make a distinction between the language used in genuine and meaningful child-teacher conversations during reading and writing activities and the language of succinct prompts used by the teacher as a call for the child’s action during problem solving. In other words, both kinds of language interac-

tions throughout the lesson foster a way for the teacher and child to establish and maintain a productive working relationship. As Clay (2005b) states, “Conversations in the lesson should be warm and friendly, but when the child must attend to something, or must pull several things together, the prompts must be short, clear, and direct” (p. 202). Additionally, the child and teacher often engage in spontaneous language interactions before and after the child’s lesson that inform their work together during the lesson. Conversations create a safe context within which teachers employ the more precise language of prompting to build effective literacy (Clay, 2005a, p. 34). Essentially, the warm and friendly conversations are intentional. They create the necessary climate for the teacher’s prompting that calls the child to action and supports his construction of a literacy processing system. These conversations support the affective domain that is foundational to the effective prompting that activates the child’s cognitive response (Lyons, 2003). Otherwise, the short prompts would feel abrasive and too teacher-directed for the child, resulting in his merely reacting versus internalizing the strategic action required to advance his control over literacy. We emphasize that throughout the child’s series of lessons, both kinds of language interactions are equally important to advancing the child’s effective literacy processing.

Thus, in this article, we present the centrality of language interactions in the Reading Recovery lesson and their role in supporting the child’s construction of a strong literacy processing system. Drawing upon the contributions of Clay and other theorists to understanding the role of language in teaching and learning, we examine select examples from Reading Recovery lessons that illustrate children’s attempts at extending their control over language and their ability to construct and derive meaning from texts while working with a noticing and responsive teacher. We also provide recommendations for creating opportunities within lessons for powerful intentional language interactions that strengthen our teaching and our students’ learning.

Examples of powerful language interactions are to be found in the daily lesson and throughout the child’s series of lessons in Reading Recovery. In fact, researchers have noted that one element that influences students’ learning is the “judicious use of language” by strong Reading Recovery teachers during lessons (May et al., 2016, p. 99). The examples we provide highlight child-teacher language interactions in Roaming Around the Known, in familiar reading and after the reading of yesterday’s new book,

before and during the writing of a story, in reconstructing the cut-up story, during the orientation to and first reading of a new book, and in the discussion after the reading of the new book.

Powerful Language Interactions in Early Lessons: Roaming Around the Known

Just as a listener tunes into a speaker, so a teacher must observe, listen to and tune into a learner. Being sensitive to the learner's thinking allows the teacher to draw the child's attention to many things. The teacher in conversation with the child creates opportunities for the child to talk, and to talk more.

— Clay, 2005a, p. 34

During the Roaming Around the Known lessons, teachers aim to create an environment rich in language exchanges which facilitates the child's tentative attempts at literacy learning. Clay suggests that in the first few lessons "the child and the teacher have an opportunity to get to know each other and develop useful ways of interacting" (Clay, 2005a, p. 32). Those interactions resemble closely parents' and caregivers' interactions with children as depicted in the exchanges between a father and his two young daughters during a visit to a supermarket on a Saturday morning (Figure 1).

This kind of exchange models for children ways of communicating about the world around them that prepares them for successful learning in school. Through these early interactions children start constructing an identity in the company of caregivers who respond to their attempts at making sense of the world around them. Similarly in teacher/child language exchanges, the teacher makes every effort to learn not just *where* this child is at in his literacy competencies but also *who* the child is as a human being. In essence teachers during these early lessons acquire an "ethnographic stance" (McNaughton, 2002, p. 195) that enables them to closely observe their students and gather information about them as members of diverse communities that extend beyond the world of the classroom.

Genishi and Dyson (2009) remind us of "the importance of educators' learning about each child as a person whose social sense and knowledge resources come from a diversity of involvements as a friend, a family member, and a participant in community and popular cultures" (p. 19). As the second example of the supermarket father/child interactions indicates (Figure 2), children, in conversations with adult caregivers not only produce intelligible utterances but also meaningful statements that help them

Figure 1. Language Interactions Between Father and Two Young Daughters at the Supermarket in the Fresh Produce Aisle

A father and his two young daughters around the ages of 3–4, engaged in a lively discussion about green vegetables at the fresh produce section. The father invited his daughters to identify all the green vegetables they could think of.

- Daughters 1 and 2: (at the same time) There's broccoli, green beans, lettuce, spinach ...
- Daughter 1: (extending the conversation) And spinach is good for us, right daddy?
- Father: Yes it is; and we can eat it raw in salads or we can cook it in different ways.
- Daughter 1: I like spinach. It makes you strong and healthy.

construct specific identities that have an impact on the world around them. It is important to acknowledge that even ordinary events and routines are profoundly influential in shaping children's thinking and actions. Through these natural exchanges about everyday events and occurrences, children are socialized into a language discourse that not only enables them to communicate their thoughts with clarity and precision but also helps them shape their thinking and acting upon the world as empathetic human beings. As Peter Johnston has remarked, "In these conver-

Figure 2. Language Interactions Between Father and Two Young Daughters at the Supermarket in the Canned Soup Aisle

The family's attention was directed to different kinds of canned soup which they intended to buy for a food drive that was organized by local charities. (At the entrance of the supermarket the customers were given lists of foods that they might want to buy and donate.) The father and his daughters were discussing the options in front of them. They were naming different soup cans, describing ingredients as they were trying to make appropriate decisions about what to buy.

- Father: So what do you think the children of the families we're buying the soup for would like to have?
- Daughter 1: Well, maybe some chicken with vegetables would be nice?
- Father: Is this something you would like and do you think that the children would like that, too?
- Daughter 2: Yes, they'd like that because it's yummy and good for kids.

sations children learn how to understand and share emotions and sensations—developing their empathy—and expand their ability to understand the beliefs and wishes in others” (Johnston, 2012, p. 75).

The tone and the intent of these conversations between caregivers and children are recreated during the first 2 weeks of the child’s series of lessons in *Roaming Around the Known*. During this time, children extend their control over language and construct meaning from texts while conversing with their teachers during reading and writing activities. Teachers make simple early books enchantingly interesting when they interact with children to help them go beyond mere deciphering of print.

The following examples from a teacher working with her student, Amal, in *Roaming Around the Known* illustrate the negotiation of meanings in reading and writing between teacher and student as well as the role of teacher language in building upon and expanding the student’s language through paraphrasing and reformulating of her less complete utterances. Figures 3 and 4 present excerpts from conversations around the reading of *The Little Snowman* (Level 3) and the subsequent composition of a story about the family activity of building a snowman. The seamless flow from the reading to the writing illustrates how conversations in *Roaming Around the Known* support the child’s attempts at constructing an effective processing system in both reading and writing continuous text and highlight the reciprocity between the two activities.

During the reading of the book (Figure 3) and the lively exchanges between the teacher and Amal around the meaning of the story, the teacher took the opportunity to confirm the child’s noticing of the print (see Turns 8, 9, 10, and 11 in transcript where the teacher directs attention to *snowball* and *snowman*). Of particular importance is that the child’s attention to visual information does not occur at the expense of enjoying and talking about the story. The child has demonstrated and the teacher has reinforced the importance of cross-checking as a strategic activity — using both the meaning she has searched for in the pictures and the visual information on the page. Also notice how the teacher takes the opportunity before and during the reading of the story to paraphrase and extend the student’s utterances (Turns 4, 5, 14, and 15). Through active listening, the teacher sends the message that the child is understood despite her incomplete and tentative utterances (“it was like a light everywhere,” “The hat?”).

After the reading of *The Little Snowman* and as a way of moving into the writing activity, the teacher made the decision to connect the reading of the book to the conversation that led to the reading.

During the conversation that led to the composing of the story (see Figure 4), we notice that the teacher’s invitations to Amal to talk and the appropriate wait time following the questions seeking information allowed Amal to engage in self-repair in speech (going from “Mom don’t want to do that” to “Mom didn’t do it” and from “I can do it myself” to “I did it by myself” in Turn 10).

As Clay has remarked, “Every sentence the child constructs is an hypothesis about language” (1991, p. 69). As the child listens to herself, she makes decisions about whether her ideas should be expressed that way, and her teacher in turn confirms her choice through her response: “You did it all by yourself.” During this conversation Amal’s teacher works on new vocabulary (*snow angel*, Turns 4 and 5), and helps Amal shape her story (Turns 19 and 21).

During the writing after teacher and child have started to co-construct the story, with Amal writing independently what she knew in the story and her teacher adding the rest, the teacher invited the child to read what was written thus far:

Teacher: So far your story says...

Child: On Saturday my mom and grandma and me made a...*snowman* (looks back at the book *The Little Snowman*)

Teacher: Oh, is that word in the book?

Child: *snow-man* (copying from the book)

Teacher: You read that word in the book and now you’re writing it into your story (while child writes).

It was obvious that the child’s noticing of print (*snowman*) while reading the book provided an opportunity for the child to make the link to a word she wanted to write. The teacher beautifully scaffolded when she first commented on the child’s noticing (in reading) and in her conversation with the child about the story she was writing. This is an example of the reciprocal links between reading and writing and of a noticing teacher who is poised to provide this timely support to the child.

Figure 3. Language Interactions Between Teacher and Child (Amal) During Rereading: *The Little Snowman* (Level 3)
(actions in parentheses)

Turn	Teacher	Child
1	We had kind of an exciting weekend, didn't we? What happened? First we didn't have school on Friday, and then we didn't have school yesterday, so we had four days. What did you do with your time?	
2		(points at the cover of book, <i>The Little Snowman</i>) My mom can do this! My Mom holds a snowball and we take a picture two times, another day and another day.
3	The two days when it was snowing out. So, you're pointing at this picture of a woman in <i>The Little Snowman</i> book. Did your mom wear gloves?	
4		My mom she throw the ball and we take a picture. And it was like a light everywhere.
5	So your mom threw the ball and you took a picture. When you looked at the picture, it was light everywhere. That's because of the snowflakes coming down. Would you like to read this story?	
6		Okay.
7	This is where they're making the snowman, they have the snowman's eyes... And then the surprise ending, right?	
8		And the hat. (begins reading story) Look at the snow! Yes! (looking at pictures and reading the pages with print hesitates on the word <i>snowman</i> on page 7, reads <i>snow</i> pauses a bit and then reads the second part of the word, <i>man</i> , commenting) He was a snowball and here he's a snowman.
9	Are you talking about the picture or the word?	
10		The word.
11	So, you noticed that on this page it said <i>snowball</i> and on this page it said <i>snowman</i> . I noticed that too. The first part of the word is the same <i>snow</i> — but the second part is different — <i>ball</i> , — <i>man</i> .	
12		(continues reading "Here is the snowman's scarf," commenting) I have a red one. (on page 14 reads with good expression and comments) Oh, oh... (commenting on the picture)
13	We know what he's going to do, don't we?	
14		The hat?
15	Yes, he's putting his own hat on the snowman.	
16		But, how about if dad gets cold?
17	It looks like he's getting out of his car from work and he's going to go right inside.	
18		(reads page 16 with excitement and finishes the reading of the story)

Here's another exchange a bit later during the writing:

Teacher: So your grandma made a nose out of ice and snow? Oh, that was smart, your grandma had a great idea.

Child: (writes in her book) And my grandma made a...

Teacher: *Nose* — what do you hear at the beginning of that word?

Child: *N*

Teacher: I hear that, too.

Child: writes *nos*

Teacher: Oh you heard many sounds. And to make it look right we put an *e* at the end, like in *made* (referring to a word they had constructed earlier).

Figure 4. Conversation Between Teacher and Child (Amal) Around Writing a Story During Roaming Around the Known (prompts in black; actions in parentheses)

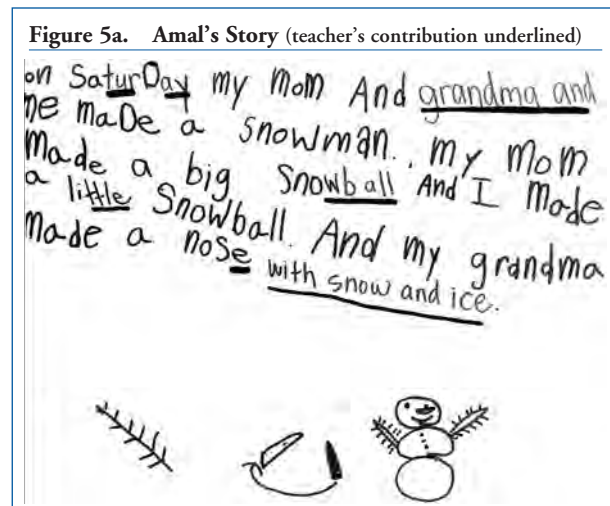
Turn	Teacher	Child
1	So I was wondering if you and I could write a story together about some of the fun things that you were just telling me about. I uhm, I was also watching the snow come down and I got to go outside in it.	
2		Me too.
3	Oh, you had those boots on, that would be helpful.	
4		Yeah, and I did this, look (demonstrating making a snow angel)
5	Did you do a snow angel? We call that a snow angel.	
6		Yeah. Snow angel.
7	Did Mom do it too?	
8		Nah.
9	No, just you?	
10		Because, my Mom don't want to do that. Mom didn't do it (self-repair in speech). And I can do it myself. I did it by myself.
11	You did it all by yourself, a snow angel?	
12		I did three times.
13	You did three snow angels? Mmm that's so fun. Did you make a snowman, like in the book?	
14		Yeah, it was my Mom did a big one, I did a small one because I can't do the big ones that's why.
15	Do you want to maybe start writing...	
16		I, I, go with my Grandma, Mom, and me!
17	Should we write a story about that snowman that you made? Hmm...so you said your Mom helped you and uhmm I'm wondering if we could start, do you remember what day this was?	
18		Uhhh it was like... Saturday!
19	It was Saturday, so maybe we could start the story out by saying "on Saturday"?	
20		Yes, "On Saturday..."
21	What would you say next?	
22		... my mom and grandma and me made a snowman.

Figure 5. Language Interactions Between Teacher and Child (Amal) in Roaming Around the Known: Conversation After the Writing of a Story

Turn	Teacher	Child
1	You said something about sticks for arms. Whose idea was that?	
2		We did around around...It was mom, me, grandma, and my mom again.
3	So everybody took turns. You went around and around. So mom took a turn, grandma took a turn, and you took a turn...	
4		No. Mom, me, and grandma, and again mom.
5	So everyone got a turn and got to help.	
6		Yeah.
7	That's so great! Where did you find the stick?	
8		The stick fall out.
9	It fell off the tree?	
10		Yeah. And she put it right here.
11	This was a fantastic story. I feel like I was there! I can picture what you did!	

The exchange around the word *nose* shows that explicit prompting can occur within the context of conversation. During Roaming Around the Known lessons the child discovers a lot about print in an incidental way and in the context of the intentional conversations that support the meaning and the structure of the messages that are negotiated back and forth between teacher and child. Teachers position themselves to be surprised by the discoveries children make daily as they interact with print (Schnug, 2015). During these early lessons the teacher does not teach anything new but confirms the child's known or almost known through helpful commenting and invitations to the child to share what she already controls. The child in earlier exchanges had demonstrated an awareness of the silent *e* at the end of words so the teacher took the opportunity during the writing of *nose* to link to this knowledge. Following the writing, the child is encouraged to draw a picture of the snowman and the conversation continues further as the teacher invites the child to share more information about the building of the snowman. Within the context of a friendly conversation, the child is given more opportunities to have her language extended and elaborated upon by her teacher as they talk about the drawing that the child has done to illustrate her story.

Notice how many opportunities this child—an English language learner—had to converse with her teacher, formulate statements, and hear statements reformulated by her teacher in standard English grammar (she *throw* the



ball/she *threw* the ball, in Figure 3, Turns 4 and 5; the stick *fall* out/it *fell* off the tree, in Figure 5, Turns 8 and 9) in a conversation that flowed naturally, back and forth.

Just like parents, teachers listen sensitively to the child's utterances and ungrammatical forms and instead of correcting they reformulate and expand the child's statements. In Clay's words,

...many of the child's early attempts to read are partially right and partially wrong, and, like parents talking to a little child, teachers need to make a facilitating response to the half-right, half-wrong response

of a child at a particular moment in time. They must respond to gradual shifts in less than perfect performance. (2005a, p. 47)

The child will continue to construct hypotheses about how something can be said and changes will occur over time as the child listens to the teacher's reformulations or expansions of his own utterances. Throughout the lesson, the teacher is making decisions about how she will interact with what the child provides without insisting that the child adopt the teacher's patterns of language. She might also take the opportunity during Roaming Around the Known to read to children books that are beyond their reading level, exposing them to new vocabulary and literary language (see Clay, 2001, p. 95). Teachers need to be patient in their expectations for children's language development, for as Clay reminds us, there are no shortcuts to extending the child's language (Clay, 2005b).

As illustrated in the text examples on pages 8 and 10, both kinds of language interactions were present in Roaming Around the Known lessons to encourage the child's strategic action: the warm and friendly conversations that fostered the trusting relationships *and* the short succinct prompting by the teacher. The conversational exchanges and ways of working together in Roaming Around the Known are indeed language acts that "create and express interpersonal relationships every bit as much as they create and express content, information, message" (Lindfors, 1999, pp. 6–7). These exchanges continue as teacher and child move beyond those early lessons and into instruction.

Interacting Powerfully Using Language Across the Child's Series of Lessons: Reading Books and Writing Stories

The rich language interactions established in Roaming Around the Known continue as teachers move into instruction. In reading books and writing stories, the child is pulling together information from texts and integrating it with his prior knowledge to arrive at new and more substantial understandings. These insights are subsequently shaped and modified by the child as he converses with more knowledgeable others, including his teacher. Thus, a continuous process of knowledge construction, the essence of which is to extend the child's comprehending and language during reading and writing, is further established with the child becoming the singular architect of his refined thinking.

Reading Books

When we read what someone else has written we are constructing and composing.

— Clay, 2005b, p. 50

In every lesson, Reading Recovery teachers foster the child's construction of meaning and language development through powerful conversations and succinct prompting throughout three book-reading opportunities. The contexts for these language interactions are found during and following the child's reading of familiar stories, during the orientation and the first reading of the new story, and following the teacher's taking of a running record of the child's reading of yesterday's new book.

Reading and discussing familiar books: Making familiar books more familiar

Clay has guided us to "arrange for massive opportunity for each child in Reading Recovery to read enchantingly interesting texts fluently,...[and] briefly question and discuss what he has read to you" (Clay, 2005b, p. 99). The first opportunity in the lesson for conversation around stories is found in familiar reading in which the child reads stories that he has read previously but has not memorized. The goal of familiar reading is for the child to enhance his strategic control over reading by problem solving flexibly, becoming more phrased and fluent in his reading, and shaping his ideas to arrive at new insights that may not have been discovered in earlier readings of familiar texts (Clay, 1991). Clay advises teachers to engage in conversations so as to align with the child's interests, stating, "After any of the two or three familiar books, teacher and child may discuss the story (*focusing on what it meant to the child*)" (Clay, 2005b, p. 88).

One example of how the child's understanding was shaped and extended through conversational exchanges during familiar reading is found in Jeremy's reading of *Seagull is Clever* (Level 8). In this story, the reader discovers how seagull opens a seashell to access the food inside and evades capture by a seal. The meaning of the story was explored in earlier readings, yet each subsequent reading contributed to Jeremy's further understandings and wonderings. Clearly intrigued by Seagull's ingenuity, Jeremy theorized, "The shell's too hard, he doesn't have hands, bloop!" (mimicking the action displayed on the cover illustration by gesturing as if to drop the shell from above) then wondered aloud, "Why does he like it?" With a genuine response, the teacher extended the conversation and replied, "It's gooey stuff. Seagulls like shellfish and

some people even like them, too.” “Yuck, I don’t. I don’t like stuff like that, gross!” he responded, clearly disgusted by Seagull’s preferences for the raw cuisine. “Me neither,” echoed his teacher. “So, people have their own ways of opening up food, like nuts. They might use a nutcracker” (gesturing its use). “I never done that,” replied Jeremy, to which his teacher adds, “Well, you have to be careful, it’s hard to do.”

The conversation continued in another lesson in which Jeremy again reread the same book, offering several of his own ingenious ways to access a variety of sealed foods: a can opener for cans, a knife to make a slit in a plastic bag, and with reference to nuts, “I’d get a hammer (gesturing its use) but it might break the plate. I never done that.” Then, quickly adding to these ideas, he described his strategy for breaking apart Oreo cookies: “I do this (mimicking twisting the top and bottom of the cookie) and eat the inside.” The conversational exchanges between child and teacher around the reading of this familiar book covered not only the subject of animals’ and humans’ resourcefulness and approaches to obtaining foods, but also their preferences for certain foods. Clearly, there were opportunities for Jeremy’s extended understanding and comprehending because his teacher followed his lead and conversed with him around his inquiries and observations. Through the opportunity to initiate a conversation and receive his teacher’s genuine response, Jeremy continued to broaden his understandings and display increasing confidence, concluding that like Seagull, he was indeed quite clever — he was a big kid who knew how to do a lot of things and, yes, becoming a proficient reader was one of them! This is precisely Clay’s advice — that when we discuss a story, the focus should be on what it means *to the child*. In this way, teachers “help readers see the text from their own perspective so that they relate to it and make connections” (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009, p. 408).

Introducing, reading, and discussing new stories

The teacher’s introduction to the new story and her conversations with the child help orient him to the ideas and concepts in a new book and extend his understandings and control over language.

Story book texts are written to entice children into the story, to bring what they know to understanding the text, to take multiple meanings and new meanings from the encounter, and to learn more about how stories can be made meaningful by the reader’s active interaction with text. (Clay, 1991, p. 190)

The teacher converses with the child to help him become familiar with the plot, unusual language, ideas, and the overall gist of the story, and to connect these with the knowledge he brings from his personal experiences. In this way, the teacher’s support of the construction of meaning and the use of language before the reading allows the child to use flexibly all sources of information while attempting the reading.

Children in Reading Recovery must connect what they know, orienting themselves to texts and transcending surface meanings in order to comprehend deeply. To accomplish this, “the teacher must plan for the child to have in his head the ideas and the language he needs to complete the reading” (Clay, 2005b, p. 91). Thus, the introduction to the story establishes the critical foundation for the child’s comprehending and provides opportunities for him to engage in strategic activity — monitoring, searching, confirming, discovering, and further extending his control over literacy processing during the reading of the new text. Ultimately, the goal is a successful first reading with one or two new things for the child to learn while also maintaining fluency. Over time, strategic activities become smoothly integrated, and as Clay points out, the child will be using visual information efficiently “while remaining attentive to the meaning of the text, to the structure of the language, and to pace” (Clay, 2005a, p. 49).

To illustrate the power of the book introduction, we examine the language interactions before Jeremy’s reading of the new text, *Little Bulldozer* (Level 8) (see Figure 6). As illustrated in the transcript, Jeremy was intrigued and listened intently as his teacher provided the theme and overall gist of the story. Clearly excited, he immediately began to read the first page but his teacher purposefully suggested that he further orient himself to the story by perusing the illustrations. Jeremy paused on one page, clearly distraught that in spite of *Little Bulldozer*’s desire to help, the large vehicles vehemently rejected his wishes.

The teacher’s language supported the child’s construction of meaning, his use of language structure (Turn 2) and his search for and use of visual information (Turns 8 and 10). Turning the pages, Jeremy noticed a big bulldozer preparing to extract a large tree as *Little Bulldozer*, hesitant at first, joyfully accepted the invitation to share in the chore. Throughout this process, Jeremy was clearly engaged and excited, checked the illustrations intently, engaged with the emotions of the characters, wondered aloud (“Why do they call it a dump truck?”) and suggest-

ed that Little Bulldozer's unfortunate predicament would indeed be resolved satisfactorily. In this exchange between child and teacher, one can observe the power of a clearly crafted introduction to the story that not only acquaints the child with the plot, big idea, and new vocabulary (*dump* truck), but also presents a critical opportunity for the child to go beyond the story elements to engage further with the emotions and feelings of the main character who—contrary to the convictions of some of the other characters—is indeed resourceful and competent despite his small stature.

During the reading that followed the introduction, Jeremy continued to notice the expressions on the faces of the Fire Engine and Big Truck, commenting, “They don’t like him (Little Bulldozer), adding “He’s angry and so is he” (pointing to the big vehicles), and as if to denounce reasons for Little Bulldozer’s outcast status, “but he didn’t do nothing!” The story’s theme, the triumph of a diminutive character over significant obstacles and disapproving others, is often repeated in the little books read by very young readers, enabling them to connect the experiences of the story’s characters to their own feelings of accomplishment and self-worth. Peter Johnston (2004) has described these ideas in the following way: “Building a sense of identity means coming to see in ourselves the characteristics of particular categories (and roles) of people and developing a sense of what it feels like to be that sort of person and belong in social spaces” (p. 23). Throughout Jeremy’s commentary during the reading, the teacher quietly affirmed his indignation and empathy with the character (“Ah-huh,” “It isn’t fair.”) further contributing to Jeremy’s engagement with the story.

A successful introduction helps students extend their understanding so that in addition to thinking within the text (accessing the literal meaning of the text and recalling the important information) they can think beyond and about the text in order to predict, make inferences, connect the text to personal and world knowledge as well as to other texts, and also think critically about the text and notice how the author has crafted it (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). Similarly, Rosenblatt’s (1994) transactional theory of reading and Kintsch’s (2009) construction-integration theory hold that the reader’s application of his prior knowledge and the ways in which he brings meaning to the text are central to his understanding of that text. Thus, a mere accumulation of known words and word-solving skills alone are not sufficient for comprehending.

Teachers like Jeremy’s, having negotiated meanings during warm and genuine conversations, can use this as the canvas for the precise prompting for the use of additional sources of information—in this instance, visual information (as illustrated in the transcript in Turns 7 and 9) and language structure (Turn 1)—that are required for a strategic, successful reading of the story. Similarly, during the first reading of the text when Jeremy encounters difficulty, substituting *what* for *with*, his teacher responded as follows.

Text: Come and help me *with* this tree.

Child: Come and help me what this tree (stops, genuinely stumped by the sentence structure).

Teacher: Why did you stop?

Child: This (pointing to *with*).

Teacher: Read that again and think about what would sound right and look right.

Jeremy reread, self-corrected, and continued reading. These language interactions—warm and friendly conversations and crisp prompting—are combined to seamlessly support the development of the child’s literacy processing system.

Language interactions following the child’s reading of yesterday’s new book

The teacher and child continue similar interactions around stories after the child reads the text again the next day and the teacher has taken a running record. The teacher again uses crisp language to reinforce the child’s correct responding and to prompt for further problem solving. The teacher might reinforce phrased fluent reading by stating, “On this page your reading sounded smooth. Why don’t you read this page over here the same way? Start here.” Or she may prompt for monitoring and self-correcting: “You made a mistake on that page/in that sentence. Can you find it?” (Clay, 2005b, p. 113). Likewise, a teacher might invite the child to discuss the important ideas or explore some elements in the story that he did not quite understand (Clay, 2005b).

When teacher and child discuss the story after the second reading, it is important to make a distinction between the teacher’s request for a retelling of a story by the child and a genuine conversation between teacher and child that positions the child as a meaning maker. In a retelling,

Figure 6. Language Interactions Between Teacher and Child (Jeremy) During Book Introduction: *Little Bulldozer* (Level 8) (prompts in black; actions in parentheses)

Turn	Teacher Language and Actions	Child Language and Actions
1	(showing the cover) This story is <i>Little Bulldozer</i> . Little Bulldozer wants to help out, but all the big trucks tell him he's too little. They're mean and tell him to 'go away'. You say 'go away.' (prompting for rehearsal of the structure and foreshadowing Little Bulldozer's triumph in spite of his small size)	
2		Go away! (stated with enthusiasm and obviously engaged with the meaning)
3	But, when he meets a big bulldozer, he finally gets to help! So, he's not too little after all. (suggesting the resolution of the plot)	
4		(looks at the cover, notices that page 2 is identical to the cover) He's not too little. He's going to do it. (spoken with conviction)
5	I think you're right. He's not too little. (confirming the child's prediction)	
6		(opens the book and begins reading the first line of text, page 3)
7	Wait, let's look at the pictures. (pausing for the child's perusal of the pictures to reinforce construction of the meaning, then on page 5 asks) What letter would you expect to see first in <i>help</i> ? (prompting for the use of initial visual information)	
8		<i>H</i> (points beneath word)
9	(also referring to page 5) <i>Went</i> . What letter would you see expect to see first in <i>went</i> ? (a page on which <i>will</i> also appears; prompting for the use of initial visual information)	
10		<i>W</i> (scans page, then points beneath <i>went</i> . Continues turning the pages, pausing at the illustrations on pages 6 and 8) He's sad. He wants to help.
11	Yes, and everybody keeps telling him that he's too little. (confirming the child's assertion)	
12		He can do it. He's not too little. Why does he look like that? (referring to the picture on page 8)
13	He looks mad, doesn't he? (acknowledging the child's observation and inviting further elaboration)	
14		But he won't let him; he's angry. (turning to page 10) Why do they call that a dump truck? (initiating, wondering)
15	I guess because it empties dirt and stuff out the back, it dumps. (clarification in response to child's inquiry)	
16		Hmmm... (turns to the beginning of the book, quickly begins to read as if intending to confirm or disconfirm his hypotheses and observations about the story)

in response to a teacher's questions, a child must put aside the elements of a story that matter most to him and instead respond to a set of pre-determined questions that matter primarily to the teacher (Van Dyke, 2008). In contrast, in an authentic conversation teachers have an opportunity to tap into what engages the child and probe what he understands about the text, helping him synthesize and interpret information from the text (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009).

For example, in the discussion following the taking of the running record, Jeremy continued to explore the range of emotions shown by the characters in *Little Bulldozer*, puzzled by Big Truck's dismissal of Little Bulldozer's gracious overtures to be of assistance to him in his work. Together Jeremy and his teacher engaged in a purposeful discussion of how older authoritative people sometimes might not fully realize how helpful a small person or a child, or in this case Little Bulldozer, can be.

Teacher: Big Truck was so big and powerful, he couldn't imagine that Little Bulldozer could be of help. He just told him to go away.

Jeremy: But when he, Big Bulldozer came, he let Little Bulldozer help.

Teacher: Yes, he gave him a chance to show that he could help.

Jeremy: Yeah and he did. He did it!

Both teacher and child continued their discussion later when reading another book, *Little Bulldozer Helps Again*, (Level 10) a story in which Little Bulldozer's small size now works to the advantage of Big Truck and Big Bulldozer. These intentional conversations continued over a series of several lessons in which Jeremy described how he had been helpful to his mother, teacher, and siblings, and led to several more stories being read (and written) that continued with the same theme. Thus, children are not merely relating information from a text as in a retelling, but they are talking about what is most interesting and meaningful to them and constructing deeper understandings about ideas and messages that transcend the literal meaning of a story or text.

Essentially, from the beginning to the end of the Reading Recovery lesson and across the child's series of lessons, there are numerous opportunities to read and discuss delightful stories that support the child's comprehending and extended control over language.

Writing Stories

When we write down a phrase, message, or story we are constructing and composing.

— Clay, 2005b, p. 50

Conversations that lead to composing

Writing stories during the Reading Recovery lesson provides opportunities for the child to learn language, learn through language, and learn about language (Halliday, 1982 as quoted by Anderson, 1999.) Teachers should not merely utilize writing as a way of constructing and solving words but conceive of the writing opportunity in the larger context of bringing together the child's own ideas and messages to signify something of value to him. One of the most persuasive arguments for writing is "its strong motivation potential because of the sense of power it gives" (Clay, 1982, p. 225) because it is a self-composed message "rather than a dictated task or a message drawn from the teacher's mind..." (Clay, 2001, p. 33). At first the child's written messages resemble the messages he produces in speech and later on increase in complexity to match the more sophisticated and literary language that the child is being exposed to in the texts he reads.

Clay is emphatic about providing opportunities for the child to talk: "The child can talk. He has been composing messages orally for three or four years" (Clay, 2005b, p. 51). Conversations are key to helping the child talk about his ideas that will then lead to the formulation of a message that he will write in all its detail. The interactions with adults around ideas are critical. As Anne Haas Dyson (1999) has commented, "... messages do not come from thin air, nor do they emerge directly from expressive hearts. Their themes and forms—their very words—come from others; they are improvised revoicings" (p. 129). Teachers help children move "from ideas to spoken words, to printed messages" (Clay, 2001, p. 27). It is important to pay attention to Clay's guidance that "at first the teacher creates a conversation" by thinking of topics that might be of interest to the child ranging from an event that resonates with him, an object or item that the teacher has brought to the lesson to engage the child, or a familiar story the child has read and enjoyed during his lessons. As Clay has suggested, "The invitation is open-ended" (2001, p. 27). The conversation should move back and forth genuinely as in conversations between friends. The teacher should resist the tendency to interrogate the child because the "teacher's goal is to increase initiation by the child" (Clay, 2001, p. 27). Similarly, having the child reread one

Figure 7. Conversation Between Teacher and Child (Erica): Composing a Story (prompts in black; actions in parentheses)

Turn	Teacher	Child
1	Well, you're going to take this story home tonight (referring to yesterday's new book that the child had just read) and you're going to read it to your cat, Splash. Now, where do you usually find your cat, Splash, when you go home? (supporting the child in establishing a focus for the writing)	
2		Uhm, probably under the fridge.
3	Oh that's where...	
4		'Cause we got two fridges.
5	Okay, you have one in the kitchen... (inviting the child to add detail)	
6		One in the kitchen and another in the kitchen.
7	Oh you have two in the kitchen (as if to clarify). Alright so does he have a little blanket or a box that Splash likes to stay in?	
8		Mmm, no...
9	Does he have a perch? (offering a term that might find its way into the story) You know what that is? (assessing whether the child is familiar with the term)	
10		Oh, like a house?
11	He has a house? (repeating as if to clarify and invite the child to say more) Okay, where do you keep his house? (seeking additional information that might find its way into the child's story)	
12		In the bathroom
13	Oh, that's a good place. (validating the child's expansion)	
14		The bathroom is his house. Or, he's under the bed. I can crawl under that bed.
15	Oh, that's interesting that you could do that. So you're telling me now that Splash... (invitation to go from spoken ideas to the message to be written)	
16		Or, uhm behind the other, uhm, fridge (adding ideas)
17	All right, so you're telling me that Splash lives in the bathroom and sometimes he's under the fridge. (narrowing the possibilities)	
18		And sometimes he's under the, uhm, couch. (continuing to expand upon ideas)
19	Ok, so what could we say in a story that would be very interesting about Splash? What could you say? (prompting the child to pull together or shape the ideas for her composition)	
20		Splash hides a lot of places.
21	Oh, I like that. That's a wonderful start. So, you're telling me that Splash hides a lot of places. (confirming the child's story)	

or two previously written stories also fosters the child's initiation and provides the teacher and child with additional opportunities for conversing and extending understandings around familiar topics that the child has written about and that are of interest to him.

As we converse with a child we need to encourage him to "say more" and expand upon his limited formulations of language. The concepts of personalization (bringing the child's own experiences to bear on the topic), shared territory (the teacher completing the child's communication act), and appropriation (the picking up of new language by the child) are central to our understanding of the richness of the teacher-child interactions (Van Dyke, 2006, p. 27). Mindful of these three elements, teachers are aptly poised to extend the child's language and his meaning-making acumen.

An example of how these concepts play out in a Reading Recovery lesson can be seen in a teacher's interactions with her student, Erica, during writing (see Figure 7). The teacher's open-ended invitations (Turns 1, 7, 11) that keep prompting the child to provide additional information about her cat's hiding places create opportunities for Erica to clarify her thinking and synthesize information about a topic that is obviously of high interest to her. In Turn

17, the teacher pulls together the ideas that the child has talked about regarding her cat's hiding places that result in the child's use of the teacher's statement to compose her own succinct message. The significance of this reformulation has been aptly described by Cazden:

In the more contingent writing segment of Reading Recovery, the sentences that the child orally composes are more likely to be more complex and varied if that oral conversation is preceded by a scaffolding conversation in which the teacher draws out the child's ideas ... sometimes reformulating what the child says in more expanded form. Then that language will also be in the air for the child's subsequent appropriation into his or her own composition. (2001, p. 96)

In another example of a conversation between teacher and child, later in the lesson series, the child is quite competent in composing and the conversation requires very little negotiation between teacher and child (Figure 8). The teacher's demeanor indicated that she appreciated the child's story and the child in turn spontaneously offered more information. The teacher responded with a warm, open-ended authentic commentary ("Really! Everyone must have stood around watching!") delighting in the child's amusing story and validating her thinking.

Figure 8. Conversation Between Teacher and Child (April): Composing a Story (prompts in black; actions in parentheses)

Turn	Teacher	Child
1	What would you like to talk about today? Do you want to talk about your little brother? [Note: The teacher had observed that the child's baby brother had accompanied her to the lesson.]	
2		No.
3	You don't? What would you like to talk about? (signaling to the child that their conversation will lead to a composition)	
4		Hmm... My aunty's choking on a gumball?
5	Off we go then. (tapping on table)	
6		(gesturing to show her grandpa's action, expressing amusement) My grandpa had to pull in the ankles.
7	No! Really! (laughing in response to the child's amusement)	
8		At the movie theater.
9	Goodness gracious! Everyone must have stood around watching!	
10		(laughter)
11	That's very funny. Off you go then. What are you going to write? (prompting for the child's composition)	
12		(recites story aloud) My aunty choked on a gumball. (begins writing)



Teachers should not merely utilize writing as a way of constructing and solving words but conceive of the writing opportunity in the larger context of bringing together the child's own ideas and messages to signify something of value to her.

Language that leads to constructing and solving words in writing

During the composing the conversation can be warm and friendly, but while the teacher and child are searching for ways to record the message, the prompts are distinct, crisp, and clear. The teacher's language helps the child search for and use in an integrated way different types of information, the meaning of what was composed, the language she will need to use to convey the message, and the phonological and visual information that she will link in order to construct words. The child engages in these strategic activities in both reading and writing continuous text.

The exchanges between Erica and her teacher that helped Erica construct words in writing (see Figure 9) are examples of a teacher's economical use of language that aims at prompting the child to be strategic about ways of solving words.

In Turn 1, the teacher's question prompts Erica to attend to sound-to-letter correspondence and in Turn 3 to print

conventions. In Turn 5, the teacher makes a link to an uppercase letter that the child has encountered in a different context in the classroom. In Turn 5, she prompts the child to monitor using meaning and in Turn 7 she helps her again link sound to letter. The teacher's helpful language also sends a clear message about what a writer does in the process of writing a story or message. For instance, in Turns 13 and 17 the teacher teaches explicitly for the strategic action of rereading: "Now it helps us when we go back and read our story and then we'll know what comes next" and "If you read it back, it will help you." As the child parses her story, she makes hypotheses about language structure and modifies her original story from "Splash hides a lot of places" to "Splash hides *in* a lot of places," switching from an oral to a written register and becoming flexible in using language structure to monitor her writing. This self-initiated action is made possible because the teacher's prompting provided an opportunity for the child to listen to herself and make a decision about how the language should sound. Thus, the teacher's succinct prompts throughout the process of constructing the

Figure 9. Language Interactions Between Teacher and Child (Erica): Constructing Words in Writing
(prompts in black; actions in parentheses)

Turn	Teacher	Child
1	What are you going to start <i>Splash</i> with?	
2		S
3	What kind of an S? (prompting for conventions)	
4		Uppercase
5	Yes, just like the ones we have up on the board. (writes the rest of the word) OK. What's your next word going to be?	
6		<i>Hides</i>
7	<i>Hides</i> . What's that going to start with? (prompting for initial letter)	
8		H
9	(confirms and directs the child to write <i>h</i> , then writes the rest of the word.) What do you hear at the end? You say it. (prompting for recording of the letter heard at the end of word)	
10		(says the word slowly) S
11	Yes, (confirming) you put it right in.	
12		(writes S)
13	Now, it helps us when we go back and read our story and then we'll know what comes next. (prompting the child to reread in support of continued recording of story)	
14		(rereads <i>Splash hides</i> and adds) in a lot of places.
15	Well you know you started to say "Splash hides a lot of places." So how would you like to say that? What word are you going to put next? (prompting child to state next word)	
16		(hesitates, does not reread)
17	If you read it back, it will help you. (prompting for the action to be taken by the child)	
18		(rereads) <i>in</i>
19	Do you know that word <i>in</i> ? Let me see that word <i>in</i> up on your work page. (prompting child to write the word)	
20		(writes <i>in</i>)
21	Take a good look at that word. What's that word?	
22		<i>in</i>
23	Let me see if you can write it a bit faster there. (prompting for automaticity) This is a word that we need to know fast in first grade. (providing a rationale for the word's utility)	
24		(writes <i>in</i>)
25	What is it?	
26		<i>in</i>

Figure 9. Language Interactions Between Teacher and Child (Erica): Constructing Words in Writing CONTINUED
(prompts in black; actions in parentheses)

Turn	Teacher	Child
27	Don't make such a tall back on that <i>n</i> . (prompting for monitoring letter formation) Let's do it one more time. Let's go up to the easel and write that word fast. (prompting for automaticity)	
28		(practices writing <i>in</i>)
29	Say the word. (prompting for identification)	
30		(practices writing <i>in</i> several more times and says <i>in</i> responding to teacher's prompt)
31	(returns to the table) It's your job to read it. (reminding child to check on herself)	
32		(rereads story) <i>Splash hides in a lot...</i>
33	<i>Lot</i> , what's that going to start with? (prompting for the first letter in sequence)	
34		<i>L</i>
35	(teacher writes the <i>o</i>) What do you hear at the end? (prompting for searching sounds heard last in the sequence)	
36		<i>T</i> (writes <i>T</i> , then writes <i>of</i>)
37	I didn't know you knew that word <i>of</i> . Good for you!	
38		(child pronounces next word) <i>places</i>
39	How would that start? (prompting for first letter(s))	
40		<i>P - L</i> . I know blends.
41	You say it slowly. (prompting for searching sounds heard in sequence and how to record them)	
42		<i>A</i> . That says <i>pla</i> (writes <i>pla-</i>)
43	Good for you that you noticed that. (finishes word, writes <i>ces</i>) That helps us to start new words. (confirming the child's independent action in support of solving words in writing). What are we going to put at the end of the sentence? (prompting for punctuation)	
44		(adds period)
45	Read your story back with your eyes. (prompting for attention to the print vs. merely remembering the story)	
46		(reads story)
47	Read it quickly. (emphasizing pulling together all sources of information combined with a fluent reading)	
48		(reads story)
49	Read it one more time so that you have it in your head. (directing the child to attend to the meaning and structure of the message so that in preparation for the assembly of the cut-up story, the child will be able to reconstruct it by also attending carefully to the visual information)	

story in writing aim at scaffolding the child’s strategic moves so that eventually she internalizes the language of the teacher and becomes increasingly independent and self-regulated. Vygotsky (1978) has described this as the *role of assisted performance* in the development of autonomous decision making.

In the interactions around the solving of *choked*, at first April offers *choke* as the next word to be written in her story. Appropriately, the teacher offers sound boxes as a support for the child’s solving and the child recorded three sounds in sequence. However, as she was thinking about her story, she realized that the word she was searching to write was *choked* and said that she heard a *t* at the end. As indicated in Figure 10, Turns 6, 8, and 10, the teacher wisely used this solving opportunity along with clear crisp language as an example of the difference between how words sound and how they look in print, helping the child to think flexibly about how to construct words in writing and link them to reading.

As the child continues recording her story, it soon becomes evident that she is increasingly confident and flexible in her solving; recording sounds in order (*g-u-m*),

using known words to solve new words (*all, ball*) and applying the teacher’s earlier demonstration of the correct orthographic recording of the inflectional ending *-ed* (*grabbed*). Because it is apparent that the child is taking an active role in making links and monitoring the recording of the remainder of her story using multiple sources of information, the teacher wisely substitutes the clear language of instruction and prompting with almost no teacher talk at all. This “economy of words” (Clay, 2005b, p. 87) or “withholding comment” (Lose, 2008, p. 14) in the context of the child’s obvious competence is a valuable form of encouraging the child’s independent solving as shown in Figure 11, Turns 2–8. Notice how the working page “where all the risks are taken” (Clay 2001, p. 31) is bursting with examples of solving words through use of Elkonin boxes, spelling patterns, and exploration of alternative spellings as in the attempts of teacher and child around the word *aunty*.

Language in support of composing in the cut-up story

The cut-up story activity presents another opportunity to examine teacher language that directs the child’s thinking. The child composes again holding the meaning of the

Figure 10. Language Interactions Between Teacher and Child (April): Constructing Words in Writing: Solving *choked* (actions in parentheses)

Turn	Teacher	Child
1		(offering what to write next) <i>Choke</i> .
2	Okay, we’ll do sound boxes. (draws three boxes, one for each of the sounds heard, <i>ch, o, k</i>)	
3		(writes <i>ch</i> in the first box, <i>o</i> in the second box, <i>k</i> in the third box) <i>Choked</i> but I hear a <i>t</i> at the end.
4	Well, I hear it too. But to make it look right we need this at the end (writes <i>ed</i>).	
5		Oh, <i>ed</i> . (confirming what the teacher has written)
6	Yeah, and you know this word <i>look</i> (writes <i>look</i> on working page) and we need this at the end to make it look right (writes <i>ed</i>).	
7		<i>ed!</i>
8	Yeah, so even though we hear a <i>t</i> at the end — <i>looked</i> like in <i>choked</i> (clearly articulating the <i>t</i> sound at the end of the word) we write it this way to make it look right. Could we do <i>played</i> ? (with marker poised above working page as if to write, then pauses)	
9		(grabs marker) I can do it! (quickly writes <i>played</i> on working page)
10	Look at that! <i>Played</i> (emphasis on articulating the <i>d</i> sound heard at the end of the word). So this one sounds like a <i>d</i> and it has an <i>ed</i> at the end too.	
11		<i>played, ed!</i>

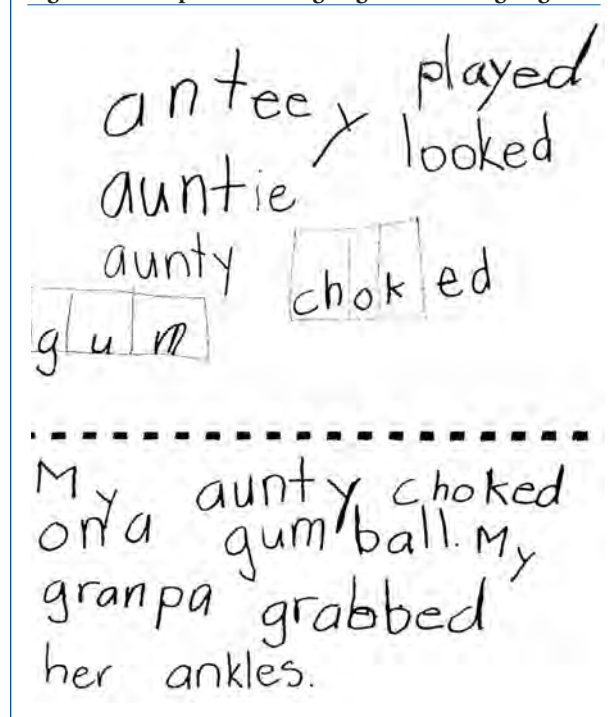
Figure 11. Language Interactions Between Teacher and Child (April): Constructing Words in Writing: *gum* and *ball*
(prompt in black; actions in parentheses)

Turn	Teacher Language and Actions	Child Language and Actions
1		(continues writing her story, recording on a) How do you spell <i>gum</i> ?
2	(draws three boxes for sound analysis)	
3		(child neglects to record <i>gum</i> in sound boxes) Well, I know how to spell <i>ball</i> .
4	You do?	
5		B and then there's <i>all, ball</i> .
6	(redirecting child's attention to the recording of <i>gum</i> in the boxes provided) Write it down there. (pointing to boxes)	
7		(records letters for <i>gum</i> in boxes in sequence) <i>gum</i> ?
8	Are you right? Check it. (prompting for monitoring)	
9		(runs her finger left to right beneath the word) <i>Gum</i> . That's right.

story in mind in order to assemble his cut-up story. During the cut-up story activity, the teacher prompts the child to monitor, search for and use multiple sources of information, and confirm the reconstruction of his story. The cut-up story presents the teacher and child with a wonderful opportunity to refocus attention from words only and take it back to the meaning and structure of language.

In an early lesson (see Figure 12), notice how the teacher prompts the child to use the punctuation (Turns 3 and 13) and read the story in a phrased way (Turn 9). In this way, the teacher provides the child with an opportunity “to orchestrate strategic behaviours on familiar material, slowed up and deliberately reconstructed” (Clay, 2001, p. 30; Clay, 2005b, p. 85). The teacher’s prompting directs the child to work strategically and check the reassembled text against her original composition (Turn 7). Essentially, as illustrated in this cut-up story activity, the child has diligently heeded Clay’s admonition: “Get your act together. Think of everything at once, and get it all sequenced as quickly as you can” (Clay, 2005b, p. 84).

In later lessons, children monitor the assembling of their cut-up story more efficiently with greater degrees of fluency and flexibility. April, who had written the “choked on a gumball” story, when asked to assemble her cut-up story, reassembled it quickly and read it with greater degrees of fluency and flexibility with her teacher’s role shifting from supportive language interactions to simply monitoring the child’s performance and reminding her to check if all

Figure 11a. April's Working Page and Writing Page

sources of information matched. So, clearly, this activity contributes to the construction of a strong literacy processing system because it “provides the child with opportunities to relate reading to writing, writing to speaking, and reading to speaking” (Clay, 2005b, p. 81).

Figure 12. Teacher and Child (Erica) Language Interactions in the Cut-Up Story: Early Lesson
(prompts in black; actions in parentheses)

Turn	Teacher Language and Actions	Child Language and Actions
1	(teacher cuts apart story as child reads it) <i>Splash / hides / in / a / lot / of / places / .</i> What's this? (pointing to the period)	
2		a period
3	What does it tell us to do?	
4		Stop.
5	Ok, now you're going to make your story for me.	
6		(assembles the story)
7	Is everything ok? (prompting the child to monitor and confirm)	
8		(checks to confirm that all sources of information match)
9	Let's read it. Read it with your eyes. (prompting the child to read fluently integrating all sources of information)	
10		(reads the story fluently and with phrasing)
11	Mrs. B. is going to make it like lines in the book. (arranges the story in two lines/phrases) Read it with your eyes. (prompting the child to read with phrasing)	
12		(reads in a phrased way)
13	Drop your voice and stop at the period. (prompting for correct intonation as indicated by the punctuation)	
14		(reads with correct intonation as indicated by the punctuation)

Summary and Conclusions

In this article we emphasize the critical importance of teacher-child language interactions throughout the Reading Recovery lesson in terms of their utility in fostering an optimal working relationship and advancing the child's development of an effective literacy processing system. Toward this end, teachers are reminded to reflect on their use of language at all times during the lesson activities, to be selective about the words/language they use, and to engage in precise teaching and prompting (as appropriate) in order to support the child's independent problem solving. In an effort to capture both the warm and friendly conversations and the crisp and precise language of the teacher's prompts, we have created a table in which we have looked across lesson activities and included examples of both types of interactions with reference to Clay's theory and teaching procedures in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part One* and *Part Two* (see Table 1 on pages 26 and 27). Many of the prompts in the table are also highlighted in the transcripts of teacher-child interactions

around reading and writing that appear in this article. The prompts featured in the table are a representative but not an exhaustive sample of prompts included throughout the *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* texts.

Essentially the Reading Recovery lesson is designed to foster constructive action—meaning making and meaning getting—in reading and writing activities and over all the child's efforts at assembling a strategic processing system for literacy. The language interactions throughout the lesson provide the context within which the child is encouraged to strike out on his own to become a learner who skillfully increases his control over processing every time he reads and writes continuous texts. Yet, this is not to suggest that these language interactions throughout the lesson are merely procedural. In fact, the nature of the conversations and the ways in which the teacher engages the child promote the possibility of shared joy and satisfaction that emanates from a meeting of minds (Cazden, 2005, p. 3, referencing McNaughton, 2002).

Clay has given specific guidance to teachers on how they can create environments within which they and children can talk and listen to one another. As stated in her 2004 seminal work, “Talking, Reading and Writing,” teachers can among other things

- create rich contexts for language learning,
- increase language learning opportunities,
- understand that children learn language easily through conversation,
- consider what things make a child reluctant to speak,
- recognize the importance of reading aloud to children,
- create the need to produce language,
- arrange for sources of new language,
- think about which language structures are easier to learn,
- understand how children discover new rules and find when to use them, and
- appreciate how children learn to say the same thing in different ways.

Perhaps in the end, it is worth reminding ourselves of the foundational principle of personalizing instruction, taking into consideration the child’s meaning, thinking, and understanding (Clay 2004, 2014). In this way, teaching is not a mere depositing of information into the child, but a deliberate process of eliciting from the child *what is meaningful to him*. As Clay has so thoughtfully and diligently reminded us, “[A]ny learning situation is like a conversation, for it requires the learner to bring what he or she already knows to bear on the new problem being explored” (2014, p. 15). The teacher’s prompts and the warm friendly language enable the child to acquire the stance of a thinking person and establish the foundation of a literacy processing system that will continue to extend itself every time the child reads and writes.

Endnotes

¹The works of Rosenblatt (1994) and Kintsch (2009) are useful in understanding the construction of meaning during reading. According to Rosenblatt, readers acquire a dynamic stance towards the activity of reading. In her words, “the reader and the text are two aspects of a total dynamic situation. The ‘meaning’ does not reside ready-made ‘in’ the text or ‘in’ the reader but happens or comes into being during the transaction between reader and text” (p. 1369). Likewise, Kintsch holds

that readers construct understandings based on input from the text combined with their prior knowledge and the end result is the development of what Kintsch calls a *situation model* (p. 224).

²For another example of a well-crafted book introduction and the teacher-child language interactions throughout the introduction, the child’s first reading of the new book, and the discussion after the reading, readers may consult Lyons, C. A. (2003), pp. 88–90.

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Table 1. Principles and Select Examples to Guide Language Interactions During Reading Recovery Lesson Activities

Lesson Activity	Warm and Friendly Conversations	Crisp and Precise Prompts
<p>Rereading Familiar Books</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “After any of the two or three familiar books, teacher and child may discuss the story (focusing on what it meant to the child)” (Clay, 2005b, p. 88). • Teacher “adjusts the child’s mental set for the task” (Clay, 2005b, p. 88). • During the reading, teachers ... “keep out of the reading as much as possible” (Clay, 2005b, p. 88). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you listening to yourself? • Did it sound good? • Make it sound like a story you would love to listen to. • Can you read this quickly? • Make your voice go down at the end of the sentence. <i>For these and other examples see Clay, 2005b, section 14.</i>
<p>Rereading Yesterday’s New Book and Taking a Running Record</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher and child converse about the deeper meaning of the text and/or highlight parts that the child found interesting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The teacher’s prompts and questions are critical” (Clay, 2005b, p. 115). • “... teach not only on errors, but also on successful solving” (Clay, 2005b, p. 97). • “...he or she selects for attention those [teaching points] which will contribute most to a lift in the child’s competencies” (Clay, 2001, p. 228). <i>For examples see Clay, 2005b, sections 10, 12, and 14.</i>
<p>Letter Identification and Breaking Words</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this short part of the lesson, there is little conversation. This short part of the lesson is about crisp prompting. • The teacher invites the child to work flexibly with current knowledge of letters and words and make discoveries about how they work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find one that is not like the other. • Down and around. • Make another word that looks like that. • We make it like this. • If we were going to write this word, we would have to write it letter by letter. • What’s the first letter in <i>look</i>? Can you hear the last part in <i>looking</i>? We can take the first part away. <i>For these and other examples see Clay, 2005b, sections 4, 5, and 13.</i> <p>Caution: “It is very important that the child understands what you are saying when you prompt him” (Clay, 2005b, p. 107).</p>
<p>Composing and Writing Own Story</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Start up a conversation, guided by all you know about this child... This should not be an interrogation” (Clay, 2005b, p. 55). • “Teachers help children to compose oral messages and recount simple events in their lives” (Clay, 2001, p. 27). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could you write about that? • Tell me one more time. • Say it slowly. • What do you hear at the beginning, the end? • How could you write it? • Have you heard another word that sounds like that? • Think carefully before you start and write it here. And here. • Do it faster. Once more. • What letters would you expect to see? <i>For these and other prompts see Clay, 2005b, sections 6 and 7.</i>

Lesson Activity	Warm and Friendly Conversations	Crisp and Precise Prompts
Reconstructing the Cut-up Story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no conversation because this is the time when the child has to think and attend to all sources of information to reconstruct his story. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were you right? Try that again. You made a mistake. Can you find it? <p><i>For these and other examples see Clay, 2005b, section 10.</i></p>
Orientation to the New Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher and child discuss important ideas, look at the pictures as needed, to give a sense of the complete plot. "... it helps if a child knows what the story is about before he reads it" (Clay, 2005a, p. 91). The teacher's introduction creates a scaffold within which children can complete a first reading of a whole story" (Clay, 2014, p. 187). To repeat or expand what a child says helps maintain interactive ease, but it also models that discussion is acceptable" (Clay, 2014, p. 190). "... the overview of the story is like a conversational exchange, and the attention to detail should not dismember the flow of the story" (Clay, 2014, p. 190). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher may deliberately enunciate unusual syntax (for example, when the text uses a full form and the children may produce a contraction, like can't for cannot), or may use a sentence pattern two or three times to help children hold the pattern in mind" (Clay, 2014, p. 191). For example "Baby Bear, where are you?" "Father Bear's blackberries went into this basket."
Teaching During the First Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher might make helpful comments before the child turns the page to support sustaining the meaning of the story. Avoid unnecessary interruptions that interfere with the flow of the reading. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to "scale of help" (Clay, 2005b, pp. 132–133). Try that again and think about Indicate the type of information you want the child to attend to" (Clay, 2005b, p. 94). Look for something that would help you." <p><i>For these and other prompts see Clay, 2005b, sections 9, 10, and 12.</i></p>
Teaching After the First Reading of the New Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A brief conversation that invites the child to share what he thought about the book. "Good questions give the message that the whole story is the point of the reading activity ..." (Clay, 2005b, p. 97). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try this again. Read it again, and see if you can find the tricky word. Try that again and think what would make sense, and sound right, and look like that. How did you know it said <i>was</i>? <p><i>For these and other prompts see Clay, 2005b, sections 9, 10, and 12.</i></p>

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