Every Young Child A Reader

Using Marie Clay's Key Concepts for Classroom Instruction

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Foreword by Gay Su Pinnell

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Introduction

This book challenges F–2 teachers, reading specialists and literacy coaches to revise and expand their instructional expertise in response to (1) the multifaceted nature of children's literacy learning, (2) expert observation as children work on reading and writing tasks, and (3) the characteristics of powerful instructional interaction with children. Teachers with an "encompassing commitment to thoughtful practice" and increasingly deep knowledge of literacy processes will bolster all students' literacy skills (May, Sirinides, Gray & Goldsworthy, 2016, p. 91). Such teachers are also uniquely situated to best support school-wide instruction through collaborative relationships with year level and intervention teachers for improved schoolwide achievement levels. Without this expertise, classroom teachers are likely to instruct from narrow definitions of children's literacy learning, expecting children to bridge the gaps between demands to simply memorise letters and words or to keep up with a predetermined instructional sequence, and the complex behaviours needed to read and write text (Clay, 2001). It follows that instruction founded in a comprehensive understanding of literacy development is essential for effective teaching of today's diverse students, including children from varying achievement levels and socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and in response to each child's personal learning history and interests.

Many children will continue to fail, struggle or experience gaps and confusions about literacy in the absence of the differentiated teaching that ensures they develop the foundational skills and strategic activity (in-the-head, problem-solving behaviours; Clay, 2005b) needed for reading and writing. We have written this book with these risks in mind, constructing a bridge from Marie Clay's research-based understandings of children's literacy development to effective instructional contexts, learning opportunities and teacher–student interaction. Accordingly, we have presented examples in each chapter illustrating Clay's theories of literacy processing, and describing how teachers should conceptualise and build literacy instruction within their own classrooms in light of Clay's theories of literacy development. Our readers can learn, for example, why an accuracy score alone is not sufficient for decisions about easy, instructional or frustration-level

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reading texts – or why and how to improve the quantity and quality of their prompting in support of children's strategic activity during small-group instruction and brief, individual coaching.

Clay is most well known for her development of the Reading Recovery® early intervention (Clay, 1979, 1993, 2005a, 2005b). Reading Recovery has an impressive and proven track record of extraordinary results with failing year-one readers (D'Agostino & Murphy, 2004; International Data Evaluation Centre, 2014–2015; May, Sirinides, Gray & Goldsworthy, 2016; Schwartz, 2005a; Sparks, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Any child, then, who is one of the lowest-achieving readers in her year-one classroom should have access to Reading Recovery instruction in order to catch up quickly to year level or higher reading ability. Most children, however, respond positively to excellent classroom instruction and do not need Reading Recovery intervention (Clay, 2005a). Additionally, Reading Recovery instruction is based explicitly on the results of ongoing program evaluation with year-one, failing readers only, and cannot determine how a classroom literacy program for diverse learners should be constructed (Clay, 2005a). This book, then, does not describe an adaptation of Reading Recovery instruction to the classroom context. We have not recommended, for example, that classroom teachers should somehow teach a series of one-on-one lessons with individual children, or that small-group reading instruction should simply copy the procedural steps used in Reading Recovery lessons. Instead, this book explains Clay's theories of literacy development, coupled with effective classroom teaching practices that reflect these understandings.

Clay's development of Reading Recovery was founded on her research and construction of a literacy processing theory and teaching based on systematic observation (see Figure I.1).

Throughout her career, Clay contrasted and developed detailed understanding of the import of changes over time in the reading behaviours of children at varying achievement levels. She presented detailed accounts of children's learning as the foundation for understanding effective literacy instruction, and articulated a strong commitment to instruction that meets the needs of individual learners:

> As a consequence of thinking about teaching a class we reason as if it were the class that learns; but only individuals learn … the average learner, the curriculum, the stages of development, the sequences of learning, and the poor or slow learner – these are teaching concepts that get in the way of individuals having appropriate opportunities for learning. (Clay, 2014, p. 238)

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Instruction is most effective when delivered to small, flexible groups of children working on just-challenging-enough texts, and as children learn to use strategic activity for reading and writing. Children must learn, for instance, how to simultaneously extract and construct meaning from increasingly sophisticated texts by developing a complex set of skills and strategies (e.g. Pearson, Valencia & Wixson, 2014; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). We have written this book with these principles in mind, illustrating how such instruction can be best understood and constructed in F–2 classrooms. The instructional procedures we have illustrated maximise the effects of instruction for diverse learners; instruction targets the specific learning needs of individual children within whole- and small-group instruction and is based on systematic observation of children's current strengths and roadblocks. Consequently, children do not simply receive instruction based on any one approach or program alone (such as may occur in response to a suspected disability). Nor is it assumed that all children will enter school with similar understandings (or even interest) in literacy activities. Instead, children of diverse backgrounds and interests participate in robust classroom instruction with learning opportunities matched to their own, immediate needs.

In the sections below, we present an overview of key aspects of Clay's theories. We begin this discussion with a description of two very different year-one children's reading behaviours. These are described in order to illustrate the importance of children's development of strategic activity, as well as the ways that classroom teachers can respond to children's differing progress. We also explain four crucial aspects of Clay's theories in preparation for material described in the book's chapters: an overview of Clay's literacy processing theory, the reciprocal relationship between learning to read and learning to write, the essential role of continuous text in literacy learning, and how to achieve success via a steep gradient of difficulty.

ELIAN AND KAREN: THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF STRATEGIC ACTIVITY

A few months into his year one, Elian controlled directional behaviours with ease, knew most letter names and sounds, and could locate and identify a small set of high-frequency words within text. Elian also demonstrated an increasingly sophisticated use of early strategic activities. He generally did notice, for example, when one of his attempts to identify a word in text did not look like the word in print and/or make sense. He would then reread from the beginning of the sentence or page to pick up more

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CHAPTER 2

Teaching Foundational Skills

Clay (1991a, 2005b) believed that children must take on comprehensive, well-established and highly usable knowledge of foundational skills. These include concepts about print, links between how language sounds and how it looks in print, and letter/word knowledge. Foundational skills are broadly defined in curricula such as the Australian Curriculum as print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition and fluency. Clay (2014) cautioned, however, that learning to read and write requires complex learning beyond simply memorising letters or words. Foundational skills are not seen as "an end in and of themselves" (CDE, 2011, p. 17). Neither learning letters in isolation, for example, nor sounding out words one letter at a time is a sufficient basis for adequate progress. Instead, children must learn how to manage the complexity across all sources of information (Clay, 1982; Doyle, 2013). Children learn how to use print in an organised fashion; they attend to features of print, words in sequence, and letters in a word from left to right while also understanding language and meanings (Clay, 2005b). Children must also be taught how to use these foundational skills when reading and writing text. Doing so supports stronger learning of foundational skills themselves as well as text reading and writing. One framework, for example, notes that students who can decode "are best positioned to make significant strides in meaning making, language development, effective expression, and content knowledge" (Slowik & Brynelson, 2015, p. 5).

This chapter illustrates Clay's theories regarding effective teaching of foundational skills with examples of teaching through skill-oriented lessons and while children read and write text. The chapter describes the teaching of foundational skills for a small group of emergent readers in one foundation-year teacher's classroom, and clarifies the complexity of concepts about print and letter learning. It will be helpful to consider the following focus questions while reading this chapter:

1. In what ways are foundational skills more complex and challenging than might be expected?
2. How can instruction in foundational skills be differentiated to meet children's needs?

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at the top left of the page, for example, are in need of clear, immediate prompting. During a small-group reading lesson, a teacher can simply point to the correct place to start on a page just before a child begins to read independently. This activity will help a child develop the habit of beginning to read and write from a top-left position. When a child has skipped a word in text, the teacher might simply reread up to the error while pointing word by word (without unnecessary teacher talk). The prompting is quick and targeted, and allows the child to return quickly to sustained reading. These on-the-spot reminders ensure that confusions and challenges are not practised incorrectly. Otherwise, such problems become increasingly difficult to correct over time (Clay, 2005b).

LEARNING LETTERS

Readers must know *what* to look for in print, *where* to look for needed information and *which way* to look across print (Kaye & Lose, 2015). This includes noticing and using letters and letter sequences from left to right within words. Over time, children learn many aspects of letter knowledge in detail and with fast production (see Figure 2.2). Children are then able to choose the most efficient way to access and use letter knowledge while reading and writing, without being limited to a narrow range of letter knowledge.

Teaching for Comprehensive Letter Knowledge

Teachers need to be able to correctly interpret children's responses during instruction. The child, for example, who names the letter *M* as "Mum" has demonstrated useful, initial knowledge via a matching keyword. A child who identifies a letter by reciting the alphabet up to that letter also has at least one way to address the task. Of course, neither of these early strategies is sufficient for long-term literacy gains. Any accurate knowledge that a child already has about a letter, however, serves as a good starting point.

Teaching letters primarily within whole-class lessons, using a routine schedule of one letter per week or in alphabetic sequence, is not the best use of classroom time (Jones & Reutzel, 2012; McKay & Teale, 2015). Children who have limited exposure to storybooks and print, and virtually no known letters, for instance, will benefit from an early focus on easy-to-learn letters (perhaps *X*, *O*, and *S*; letters in words they already know; or letters at the beginning of their own first names). It is also crucial to reserve time across the school year for intentional and systematic instruction on letters as needed. Teaching one letter *per day*, starting at the beginning of the school year, can result in stronger achievement than does a schedule of one letter per week (Jones & Reutzel, 2012). This initial, 26-day cycle introduces all children quickly to the full set of letters and leaves time for additional, purposeful

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CHAPTER 5

Learning to Write Informational Text

Learning how to write is an essential accomplishment for young children. Communicating, recording and entertaining readers through written language is a highly rewarding literacy activity. Writing also supports children's overall literacy processing; children's engagement in both reading and writing creates common stores of knowledge about foundational skills. Reading and writing require similar processes as children search for information, solve words or organise information effectively (Clay, 2001).

This chapter illustrates the characteristics of effective writing instruction to ensure that children become writers as well as readers. The following focus questions will be useful to consider while reading this chapter:

1. What kinds of cognitive processing do children use during writing?
2. How can teachers ensure that the needs of diverse students (including EAL/D students) for writing are addressed?
3. How can young writers focus their attention on spelling while writing without losing sight of their intended messages?
4. What is the role of drafting in young children's writing development?
5. What instructional support do children need during independent writing?
6. How can sufficient writing instruction fit into a daily classroom schedule?

WRITING AS ACTIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

This chapter is organised around Matt's experiences during two year-one writing lessons. Early in his year-one year, Matt was experiencing significant difficulties in literacy learning. He was a friendly and engaged student, however, and demonstrated strong interests in both narrative stories and informational texts. The first writing lesson, as observed by this book's first author and described below, was not effective for Matt and other students.

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- Set a goal describing one child's expected learning over the next few days. Consider how you will prompt or coach that child to help him or her achieve the goal.

4. Create units of study to integrate children's disciplinary learning with literacy instruction.
   - Find a group of colleagues who are interested in collaborating with you to design a themed unit of study using a variety of types of informational texts.
   - As you design the unit, consider how children will best engage in tasks that expand their knowledge, interests and thinking.
5. Determine how to help children in your classroom learn through new challenges and more complex text without frustration or confusion.
   - Explore specific ways to maintain a fast pace of change in children's learning from one day to the next in your classroom literacy instruction.
   - Study one child's (or group of children's) progress in depth by presenting a set of increasingly difficult challenges over several days and assisting as needed for success. What kinds of "stretch" was the child capable of achieving?

COLLABORATIVE EXTENDED LEARNING THROUGH CLASSROOM TEACHING

Exemplary teaching does not just happen naturally for a few "gifted" teachers. Instead, teachers develop expertise by becoming insightful observers of children while they are at work on literacy tasks, and by working with colleagues to make sense of these observations (Ross & Gibson, 2010). This is a continuous process of refining teaching over time with the needs of children firmly at the centre of the learning.

It is common, in our experience, for classroom teachers to assert that they do not have the authority to engage in instructional leadership. Instructional leadership, however, does not arise primarily from authority (or solely from a position such as principal or literacy coach). Instead, effective F–2 classroom literacy teaching is a shared responsibility. Classroom teachers, in fact, are uniquely situated to both build and share knowledge with colleagues. They are actively engaged each day in fine-tuning their instruction on a moment-by-moment basis, and have immediate access to the information that best defines children's learning. This might include:

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