

Interpreting Running Records: Reexamining Common Practices

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A note from the authors

This article grew from a presentation entitled “Interpreting Running Records: Retooling for Reliability” that we gave at the 2011 Teacher Leader Institute with Cheri Slinger and Leslie McBane. We broadened the scope by illustrating the benefits of sensitive observation and careful analysis practices, including actual running records with tentative interpretations of students’ reading behaviors, setting student learning goals based on patterns of responses, and selecting teaching procedures to support the learning goals. *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* guides our analyses and supports our understanding of literacy processing throughout the article.

We encourage you to use this article as a resource for professional conversations. Take advantage of Colleague Discussion prompts suggested within this article to support your learning and reflect on your own practice.

You will want to have several items close at hand: *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*, *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part One* and *Part Two*, and a set of running records for one of your current Reading Recovery students.

The numerous citations we provide reference the revised second edition of *An Observation Survey* (Clay, 2005a).

Children’s names are pseudonyms.

Taking a fresh perspective on common practices can lead to new learning and deeper understandings of why we do what we do. Our journey into a reexamination of our practices in taking and scoring reliable running records and interpreting those records came through an opportunity to work on the *Sensitive Observation of Reading Behavior Running Record Professional Learning Package* — the three-part running record learning series developed by the North American Trainers Group and produced by the Reading Recovery Council of North America (2008, 2009, 2010).

As Reading Recovery teachers we were trained on the administration and analysis of running records as an assessment tool, and we used running records in our lessons with students in Reading Recovery and in our classroom practice. Through our professional development as Reading Recovery teacher leaders and trainers we endeavored to tidy up our practice and deepen our understandings around analysis as we revisited “Taking records of reading continuous text” in Marie Clay’s *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (2005a.)

Working together on the learning series added another layer to our understanding of how and why we administer and analyze running records and how interpretation factors into what we see, hear, think, and how we act on the information running records provide. While developing the series there were occasions where we, along with others on the development team, encountered differences in how we would code or analyze a child’s reading behavior. These occasions became opportunities to monitor our interpretations and remain tentative about them.

Clay alerts us to be mindful of our interpretations when taking and analyzing running records.

Children do some unusual things, so further discussions with colleagues should be scheduled. From time to time school teams should schedule monitoring sessions to review whether the recording and interpretation of Running Records is being conducted with consistency. (Clay, 2005a, p. 52)

In this article we set up a framework for collegial discussions that can function as monitoring sessions to review practices in administering, analyzing, and interpreting running records.

We begin by revisiting Clay's methodology: the systematic observation of reading behavior. Next we examine what we have gained by adhering to that methodology, recording all behaviors that we can capture in a standard way, and reading back from the record as we work out our interpretation. We then invite you to join in on our conversations as we share our interpretations of student behavior and a theory of literacy processing that informs our interpretation and leads us to consider next teaching moves within the framework of the Reading Recovery lesson. In your discussions with colleagues, we challenge you to take a fresh perspective on your own recording and interpreting practices as you work through our examples and review sections of *An Observation Survey*.

Observing as Methodology

Observations should occur under conditions which reduce the error of personal bias in the observer to an absolute minimum. If this is not so, and the observations are carried out to confirm our assumptions there would be nothing in the results to surprise us. The observer has to become objective in data collection, analysis and interpretation. An observer can easily influence the observations and must take all precautions not to. (Clay, 1982, p. 4)

What is to be gained by closely observing a child in the act of reading? We invite you to accompany this section with a review of chapter 1 in *An Observation Survey*, "Observing change in early literacy behaviours."

Primateologist Jane Goodall used observation in her study of the behaviors of chimpanzees in their natural habitat. In a recent interview (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2011) Goodall was asked to share something of what she saw while observing chimpanzees. She described the details of an encounter when a chimpanzee gently squeezed her fingers as he took a piece of fruit from her hand. After observing similar finger squeezing behavior in encounters between chimpanzees, Goodall interpreted the gentle squeezing as a way one chimpanzee reassures another.

Two things stand out for us in this example in relation to observation as methodology. First, the link between observation and interpretation, and second, how noticing a behavior leads the observer to look for and notice the behavior on subsequent occasions.

As in biological science, Clay (1982) reminds us that if we view each child's literacy development as uncharted territory, we need an observation tool that captures exactly what is occurring during the act of reading and reduces our personal biases to a minimum. From our own experiences we have come to agree with Clay on the importance of capturing in our running records all a child says and does—recognizing in our own teaching that it is easy to arrive at false assumptions—to be selective about our observations, and to direct our observations based on our experiences with what occurs for most children we teach.

An observational tool for teachers

Taking observational records may act like self-correction in reading; it may provide teachers with a basis for improving their own theories of instruction. (Clay, 1982, p. xii)

In the first chapter of *An Observation Survey*, Clay introduces us to the running record as one form of systematic observation and a standard way of observing a child while engaging in literacy activity. We encourage you to read the section titled "Systematic observation."

As Clay explains, there is more than one way to look at reading behavior in a standardized manner. One way is to examine the product of reading instruction, such as standardized reading tests administered in standard intervals, for example, prior to report card writing. However, standardized tests do not provide information about how a child is learning under a teacher's guidance between testing intervals or how those ways of learning change (Askew, 2009, p. 103). Information on how the learner is learning is particularly helpful to teachers when

- the learner is young and changes can be rapid (Siegler, 2006),
- starting points vary and prior knowledge is diverse, and
- what is to be learned is novel and complex (Clay, 2005a, p. 7).

In addition, we have found that running records administered daily to our Reading Recovery students provide us with crucial feedback on how our students are responding to our instruction: the focus of their attention, the action of searching for information in print, and the confirmation of what they think.

"In every way the information produced by systematic observation reduces our uncertainties and improves our instruction" (Clay, 2005a, p. 3). In essence we are more confident in our teaching decisions when those decisions are based upon systematic observation and careful objective analysis of the reading behaviors of our students.

If running records function as one kind of systematic observational tool that teachers can use, what does the administration of a running record require of us? To be confident that our running records were reliable documents from which to base our teaching decisions we had to learn how to administer a running record with integrity. For we found that the usefulness of the information gained by administering a running record was based on remaining neutral during the administration, capturing all reading behavior according to the conventions for administration, and taking into account all of the captured behavior in our analysis.

Colleague Discussion 1

Review Clay's discussion of what can be gained by making teaching decisions from reliable and valid running records in chapter 1 and discuss with colleagues your understandings of the concepts of reliability and validity and how they apply to running records.

Learning to Check Assumptions Against Running Record Evidence

When we become neutral observers and watch children at work in systematic and repeatable ways we begin to uncover some of our own assumptions and notice how wrong these can sometimes be. (Clay, 2005a, p. 9)

Janice remembers Jake

Jake became my student in Reading Recovery at the beginning of his Grade 1 year. He was able to read Level 1 texts and had low stanines across all of the other tasks

of the Observation Survey (Clay, 2005a). Looking at what Jake could do and considering what he needed to learn how to do, one prediction of progress for text reading was that he needed to continue to search for and use meaning and structure (something I predicted he could do) and learn how to use visual information in text reading (something I predicted he needed to learn how to do). These predictions guided my teaching in those early lessons.

As I moved Jake into Level 3, his progress in text reading began to stall. Running record scores fell below 90%, and further analysis of how he read the text led me to ponder over when Jake could locate and use known words or letters in continuous text (Clay, 2005c, p. 106) and when he could not.

On one occasion he read the book *Plop!* (Melser, 1987), where the text structure is "Frog can see" followed by "He can see." Jake read those pages well. When the text structure changed to "Can he see," Jake was unable to use *can* (what I thought was a known word) or any other information in that context. His running record showed a *told* was needed before he could go on.

Telling a child a word is a convention that is coded in the body of the running record and included in the error count. It is not an error that can be analyzed for information used or neglected. Consequently while reviewing Jake's running records at Level 3, as long as I limited my review of his behavior to substitutions that could be analyzed for information used or neglected, I was missing a barrier to effective processing: the flexibility required to deal with variation in sentence types such as transforming a simple declarative sentence ("He can") into a question ("Can he?"). By reading back from the record all that Jake did (Clay, 2005a), I was confronted with evidence that did not fit with my original predictions.

Clay (2005b) advises Reading Recovery teachers to, "Evaluate a child's progress regularly against these predictions. Week by week you may need to adjust your predictions as new strengths and weaknesses emerge" (p. 31). Now I needed to adjust my predictions of progress for Jake to reflect his emerging challenges with unfamiliar text structures, plan carefully across the lesson activities for how to extend his knowledge, and continue to make adjustments to my predictions and teaching decisions based on running record evidence.

What Do We Gain Using Standard Procedures?

As our understandings have grown over the years, we have realized that standard administration and scoring of running records are critical to producing reliable accounts of children's reading behaviors (Clay, 2005a). Our subsequent interpretations of students' reading behaviors are more valid when we use these standard procedures. In our efforts to support students' accelerated progress, we try to record as many behaviors as possible and consider each of those behaviors as we interpret the records.

The following examples from Betsy's running records illustrate how we learn more about a child's reading by capturing and considering all behaviors, as recommended in the Observation Survey. Each running record excerpt highlights a different recording convention, and we offer a tentative analysis about what the behaviors reveal.

Capturing all attempts for later analysis

"A Running Record needs to capture all the behaviour that helps us to interpret what the child was probably doing" (Clay, 2005a, p. 53). By capturing every attempt students make at a point of difficulty, we are better prepared to understand how children arrive at a final response. In Grayson's running record (Figure 1), each attempt at the word *living* brought him closer to solving the word.

On page nine of *A Mouse in the House* (Dufresne, 2004), Grayson read the sentence "It ran up and down in the living room." He said, *It ran up and down in the long, loving, loving* (then self-corrected) *living room*.

Betsy's analysis:

1. Grayson's attempt *long* looked a bit like the actual word, *living*, beginning with the same letter and ending with the same two letters. *Long* was also meaningful and structurally appropriate.
2. His second attempt, *lov-ing*, revealed that he was attending more closely to visual information, breaking the word at the inflectional ending. This attempt had more visual similarity to *living*.
3. When he said it as a whole word, *loving*, it fit the syntax of the sentence up to the point of error. However, when he completed the sentence by saying *loving room*, he probably realized it did not make sense.

4. Grayson reread and found the solution that fit in every respect—*living room*.

Grayson's attempts to work out *living* were encouraging. If I had not recorded each of his attempts, I would not have seen the effort he made to continuously monitor his response and search for alternatives. A reader's "willingness to choose between alternatives foreshadows the developing processing systems which will monitor, correct and control advanced literacy behaviors" (Clay, 2001, p. 120). Grayson was learning how to access and link information and check decisions in order to problem solve.

With practice, teachers are able to record more information such as children's comments, how they moved across print, or what the hands and eyes were doing (Clay, 2005a). Considering these behaviors in the running record analysis adds another opportunity for insight.

Teachers learn to make notes while taking running records, noting how students group words together, whether they pause at punctuation, and whether their expression or intonation is suited to the story content. Capturing spontaneous comments children make about the story allows for additional insight. These remarks help us "hear the reading again" (Clay, 2005a, p. 53) when reviewing the record later, and they support our interpretation.

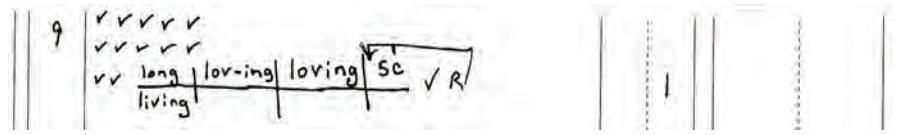
Noting how the reading sounds

When teachers note observations about how the reading sounds, they learn how fluently the child processes the information from print, how punctuation is interpreted, and whether the language is phrased in a meaningful way. These notes may include comments about phrasing, pace, pausing, stress, or intonation. The running record of Calley reading *Baby Bear's Hiding Place* (Randell, 2000) shows the usefulness of making notes about how the reading sounded. (See Figure 2.)

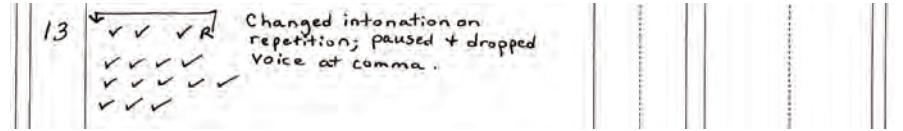
Although Calley correctly read *Father Bear said* on page 13, running record notes indicate that she paused and dropped her voice after *Father Bear* (as if there were a comma) then continued with *said*. Next she reread *Father Bear said* as a three-word phrase with a slight drop in pitch after *said*, as one would expect.

Figure 1. Grayson's Running Record Excerpt

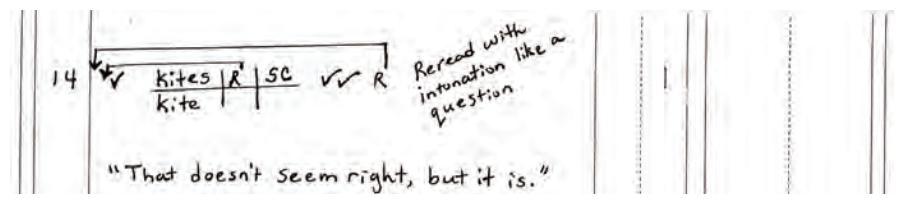
Jasper looked at the mouse.
It ran up and down
in the living room.

**Figure 2. Calley's Running Record Excerpt**

Father Bear said,
"Come on, Baby Bear.
We are going home, now.
Where are you?"

**Figure 3. Braden's Running Record Excerpt**

"Some kite," said Dad.



Betsy's analysis:

Calley probably reread because she noticed the words were not meaningful when grouped the first way. Although the words were correct, she subsequently monitored for meaning and altered the way the sentence was parsed. She may have noticed visual information too—the comma after *said*—which provided information about how the line should be read.

Recording children's spontaneous comments

Writing down the comments children make as they read books will also support the interpretation of running records (Clay, 2005a). When reading *Victor and the Kite* (Rayner, 1989), Braden made several attempts followed by a comment (see Figure 3). His comment revealed he was struggling to make sense of the text. The final page of the text reads, "Some kite," said Dad.

Betsy's analysis:

1. *Some kites* was a meaningful rendition, and the syntax could work that way. In addition, *kites* for *kite* was a close match with the visual information. Perhaps Braden added the *-s* ending because that structure sounded more appropriate to him.
2. He reread and self-corrected, saying *Some kite, said Dad*. It is likely that his awareness that *kites* would require a final *s* spurred the self-correction.
3. Although he fixed the error, he subsequently reread the sentence with a questioning tone. That behavior might indicate he was not satisfied with his response. Perhaps the expression "Some kite" was unfamiliar.
4. Finally Braden commented, "That doesn't seem right, but it is." This spontaneous remark implies an interesting thought process. It seems he knew he had read the author's words correctly, although he thought it should have been expressed differently.

Table 1. Practices That Impact the Analysis of Running Records Citing *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2005a)

Practice (Convention)	Resulting Learning Opportunity	Page Reference
Remain neutral while taking the record	Learn what the child can do independently. Objectivity increases the reliability of each record and allows for reliable comparison across running records.	9, 52, 53, 57, 60
Note and consider how the reading sounded	Learn how fluently the child processes the information from print, how punctuation is interpreted, and whether the language is phrased in a meaningful way.	60 (#13, #14), 61
Record all trials	Learn more about the range of problem-solving behaviors, ways of seeking help at difficulty, and whether the child tries to search for more information or confirm attempts.	54, 58–60, 63, 72–73, 128
When the child self-corrects, analyze the error <i>and</i> self-correction	Gain insight about the sources of information the child used for the initial response as well as the extra information that was added to make the correction.	69–70, 72 (examples 67, 68)
Analyze <i>all</i> errors and self-corrections	Notice patterns of response and reduce the likelihood of making teaching decisions upon an unusual, selective, or “accidental” response. Recording errors and self-corrections without analyzing them all gives incomplete data about the information the child searches for and uses to make a response and to monitor that response.	69–70
Consider each source of information (M, S, V) guided by the questions on p. 69	Think about how effectively the child works with the information in print and his language to make decisions about the message quality while reading. Consider meaning, structure (syntax), and visual information (letter form and/or letter-sound relationships) up to the point of error.	69, 128
Maintain consistency when considering visual information	Consider changes in children’s use of visual information in a standard way. We ask, “Did visual information from the print influence <i>any</i> part of the error—letter, cluster, or word?” This question does not change across a child’s lesson series despite the fact that we continue to notice and teach for increasing sophistication in the child’s use of visual information.	69, 72, 128
Write a summary statement	Bring together an analysis of errors and self-corrections that will guide teaching.	70 (example 71)

Taking running records in the standard way, with a concerted effort to record all behaviors we see and hear, generates more accurate and useful records. Later we can “replay” children’s reading and reflect on their literacy processing. Conversely, if we are not standardized about our practice, we short-change our opportunities for learning more about our students, which could impede acceleration. Likewise, limiting observations to a few common behaviors, such as wrong responses (Convention 2, Observation Survey, p. 58) and correcting errors (Convention 4, Observation Survey, p. 58), reduces opportunities to discover how children came to their decisions.

Through conversations with colleagues, we have realized that some recording and analysis conventions frequently get overlooked. Table 1 highlights several of these stan-

dard practices and explains how each practice creates opportunities for us to learn more about our students. Page references in the 2005 edition of *An Observation Survey* are provided for further study.

Colleague Discussion 2

- 1—Review Table 1 with a colleague to consider the conventions and learning opportunities included in the table. Look at your own records to see where your practice matches and where it differs, using the Observation Survey to clarify your understanding.
- 2—Choose your student’s most recent running record, and “replay” it aloud with a colleague. Make tentative analyses about how the child arrived at each response. What do your anecdotal notes suggest?

Running Record Analysis Informs Knowledge of Processing

When teachers have different theories about what is important for the beginning reader to learn they could interpret the same behaviour record in different ways. They may ask quite different questions of the data because they emphasise the importance of different things. (Clay, 2005a, p. 72)

While discussing the early years of our Reading Recovery teaching experience, we realized that we used to place great emphasis on the accuracy rate of the record or the text level, and we were less cognizant of the power of running record analysis to help us support children in building literacy processing systems. Janice described being almost nervous about how the calculation would turn out, with 90% or above giving her a sense of relief, like passing a test. Betsy recalled a concern about how the book graph would look on the day she recorded that week's entry; it "needed" to be an open circle, and preferably a text level higher than the week before. As a result, text level sometimes influenced text selection more than the child's strengths and interests. Initially, we both focused on the end result—the product rather than the process. As we became more interested in how our students were reading, we began to value more than just scores, correct reading, and text levels. We grew fascinated by "the growing efficiency and sophistication of our students' decision-making" (Askew, 2009, p. 104).

The behaviors we observe and record signal some of the 'reading work' in which children engage (Clay, 2001, p. 128). When we consider all behaviors and think how the child went about the process of solving, we begin to formulate a richer picture of the child's literacy processing.

The first step in running record analysis is examining the kinds of information readers used in their errors. Very early in children's lesson series, we discover which sources of information they are beginning to use or notice. Later, analysis reveals whether they use sources of information flexibly and strategically in order to get meaning from the text (Johnston, 1997). Analyzing self-corrections is also important because these behaviors indicate how children have monitored their reading and searched for additional information to make the correction (Clay, 2001, 2005c). When interpreting running records, we look at the overall pattern of responses and consider information used and neglected. Then we write a statement in the

upper portion of the record to summarize the information used and neglected in errors and self-corrections. These summary statements, along with comments made on the records and notes about how the reading sounded, guide subsequent teaching.

As teachers, we naturally bring our own theories, experiences, and biases to our work. The process of analyzing running records in a standard way helps us work from a literacy processing theory. Clay (1991, p. 232) states that observing and recording reading behavior during teaching gives the teacher "*a way of keeping her explanations of her teaching in line with what her pupils actually do*." So every teacher builds a kind of 'personal theory' of what the surface behaviours in reading imply about the underlying cognitive processes." Observations guide our teaching decisions and should increase the quality of our planning and teaching. Our reflection and planning change as we try to understand how children are producing those reading behaviors.

Reading Recovery professionals often find it helpful to discuss running records with colleagues to get others' perspectives about their students' reading behaviors. The following two vignettes present small groups of teachers discussing the patterns they see in running records of *My Dog Willy* (Peters, 1995). Figure 4 (page 12) shows the running record for Olivia that is discussed in Vignette 1, and Figure 5 (page 13) is the running record for Aiden discussed in Vignette 2. The teachers are interpreting the behaviors and forming tentative theories about their students' processing. While reading the vignettes, review the accompanying running records to find the evidence upon which the teachers based their interpretations.

Vignette #1: Olivia

Emily (Olivia's teacher): Looking over her attempts, I'd say that Olivia is doing a good job trying to be sure her attempts look like the words in the story. She certainly noticed the first letter of the words, and I've been working hard to teach her that. The only exception was when she said *shop* for *go*, but she self-corrected that error.

Matthew: True, and look at her attempts for *hello* and *bath*—she said more than just the first letter.

Caroline: I'm concerned that Olivia isn't checking on herself with meaning and structure. Several of these attempts don't fit the context of the sentence: *My dog Willy likes to we me up in the morning* and *My dog Willy*

Figure 4. Olivia's Running Record of *My Dog Willy*

Figure 4. Olivia's Running Record of *My Dog Willy*

RUNNING RECORD SHEET					
Name: <u>Olivia</u>	Date: _____	D. of B.: _____	Age: _____ yrs _____ mths		
School: _____	Recorder _____				
Text Titles	Errors/ Running Words	Error Ratio	Accuracy Rate	Self-correction Ratio	
Easy _____	1: _____	_____ %	1: _____		
Instructional <u>My Dog Willy</u>	<u>5/71</u>	1: <u>14</u>	<u>93</u> %	1: <u>6</u>	
Hard _____	1: _____	_____ %	1: _____		
Directional movement _____					
Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections Information used or neglected [Meaning (M), Structure or Syntax (S), Visual (V)]					
Easy _____					
Instructional _____					
Hard _____					
Cross-checking on information (Note that this behaviour changes over time)					
Page	Title	Count		Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections	
		E MSV	SC MSV	E MSV	SC MSV
1	<u>My Dog Willy</u>	1	MSV		MSV
1	<u>vvvvvv we</u> <u>wake</u> ✓✓	1	MSV		MSV
3	<u>vvvvvvvv</u>	1	MSV		MSV
5	<u>vvvvvvv h- h- he</u> <u>hello</u> ✓✓ <u>night</u> <u>neighbors</u>	1	MSV		MSV
7	<u>vvvvvvvvvvvvv</u>	1	MSV		MSV
9	<u>vvvvvvv shop</u> <u>go</u> ✓✓	1	MSV		MSV
11	<u>vvvvvvvvvv</u>	1	MSV		MSV
13	<u>vvvvvvv+r v b-at</u> <u>bath</u> bat R	1	MSV		MSV
15	<u>vvvv likes</u> <u>loves</u> ✓✓	1	MSV		MSV
	Reading is fairly slow and word-by-word throughout book.				
	5	1	2 4 6	- - 1	

likes to say he to the night. She didn't stop, and she didn't try to make another attempt. I don't think she noticed when it didn't make sense.

Matthew: Her self-correction rate reflects that issue—1:6. Is that typical for Olivia?

Emily: Her self-correction rates on the last few running records were 1:5, 1:7, and 1:6. So I would say it is typical. She read these books at an instructional level, but it's not very strategic if she isn't checking on herself very often.

Matthew: Look at page 13, though. I wonder if she was trying to incorporate meaning and structure with the visual information when she was working on the word *bath*. First she tried to take the word apart, saying *b-at*,

bat, but then she reread, *have a bat*. It just didn't end up making sense.

Caroline: Look, Emily, your comments on the bottom of the running record might be a clue as to why this is happening. You wrote, "Reading is fairly slow and word-by-word."

Colleague Discussion 3

- 1—Work with a colleague to write a summary statement at the top of Olivia’s running record that represents your analysis of her errors and self-corrections. Consult pages 69–73 for guidance.
- 2—Using your student’s running record from Colleague Discussion 2, work with a colleague to review and revise the summary statement.

Figure 5. Aiden's Running Record of *My Dog Willy*

RUNNING RECORD SHEET					
Name: <u>Aiden</u>	Date: _____	D. of B.: _____	Age: _____ yrs _____ mths	Recorder _____	
Text Titles	Errors/ Running Words	Error Ratio	Accuracy Rate	Self-correction Ratio	
Easy <u>My Dog Willy</u>	5/71	1: 14	93 %	1: 4	
Instructional					
Hard					
Directional movement _____					
Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections Information used or neglected [Meaning (M), Structure or Syntax (S), Visual (V)]					
Easy					
Instructional					
Hard					
Cross-checking on information (Note that this behaviour changes over time)					
Page	Title	Count		Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections	
		E	SC	Information used	MSV
1	vvvvvvv - wake	1	1		
	vv morning				
3	vvvvvvv - breakfast	1	1		
5	vvvvvvv vv friends neighbors	1	1	(M) S V	
7	vvvvvvv - shopping	1	1		
9	vvvvvvv for se at	1	1	(M) S V	M S V
11	vvvvvvv - shopping	1	1		
13	vvvvvvv - shopping	1	1		
15	vvvvvvv friends new	1	1	(M) S V	M S V
Reading is slow on p. 1-3, then gets faster. Fluent + phrased by p. 11		5	2	3 3 -	-- 2

Did your discussion and summary statements incorporate information about sources of information used in errors and self-corrections? Did you discuss the information students neglected as well? You may have discussed the types of visual information used in responses (first letter, clusters, inflectional endings, etc.). Perhaps you discussed Olivia's success at integrating meaning, structure, and visual information on page 15 or the evidence you found that she monitored and made a second attempt when the first try was incorrect. Were you concerned about her slow reading and wondering if that was interfering with her ability to keep the meaning and structure in mind?

Vignette #2: Aiden

Rachel (Aiden's teacher): I'm glad we have a chance to look at Aiden's records. Although the accuracy level looks fine, I'm really concerned with what I've seen lately. There were four instances when he stopped and didn't make any attempts. I had to tell him *wake*, *morning*, *breakfast*, and *shopping*. He just doesn't seem to be taking initiative.

Lee: But let's look at what happened when Aiden *did* make productive attempts. Maybe it will give us some ideas about what he can do.

Rachel: Well, on page 5, *neighbors* was a hard word but he made a try; he said *friends*. That made sense and fit

with the sentence structure. The same is true with the words *for* on page 9 and *friends* on page 15.

Lee: And after he made those last two substitutions (*for* and *friends*) he probably noticed some of the visual information because he quickly fixed them.

Rachel: *For* and *at* are both known words, so that probably made the self-correction on page 9 pretty easy.

Lee: From your comment at the bottom of the record, it seems his problem solving became more efficient once the story was underway. Maybe it was harder for him to pull together what he knew at the beginning of the story.

Rachel: Probably so. Now I'm thinking that I need to teach Aiden how to search for information of any kind when he encounters a challenge.

Colleague Discussion 4

1—Complete the summary statement at the top of Aiden's record with a colleague. Do you agree that Aiden needs to learn to search more effectively for information of any kind when he comes to something new? Support your decision with evidence from the running record.

2—Aiden and Olivia both scored 93% accuracy on their running records, yet their processing is different. Discuss these differences with a colleague.

Did your discussion include a review of the guidance in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part Two* (Clay, 2005c) about searching for information of any type? Perhaps you found yourself wanting to know more about Aiden's competence in writing, his vocabulary, background knowledge, or story knowledge. Did your discussion of Aiden and Olivia include differences in their strengths and their behaviors at difficulty? Did you go beyond a discussion of sources of information to consider how they search, self-monitor, and self-correct?

A Literacy Processing Perspective on Change in Reading Behavior

The most important challenge for the teacher of reading is to sequentially change the ways in which the child operates on print to get to the messages. (Clay, 2005a, p. 15)

In chapter 3 of *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part One*, "A starting point," Clay (2005b) describes how her observations, using assessment tasks accessible to teachers in *An Observation Survey* that includes running records, informed her view of reading acquisition. This view has been described as a literacy processing theory or a general theory of learning to read and write. Teachers who take a literacy processing perspective assume that

- reading continuous text involves problem solving and the integration of behaviors;
- initially limited knowledge needs to expand, and primitive response patterns need to work together in well functioning and flexible networks; and
- what requires reading work and the ways a child engages in reading work changes over time.

(Clay, 2005b, p. 19)

Consider how a general theory of learning effective motor movements for climbing applies to 1-year-old Derek who wants to sit beside his father on a couch. Derek's father was sitting on the couch having a conversation with a cousin when Derek approached and decided he wanted to climb up on the couch beside his father. Derek set about achieving this goal by using both his arms and legs to move his body onto the couch. Although his arm and leg movements were useful, he was not quite tall enough or strong enough to get onto the couch. Noticing his child's actions, Derek's father can do one of two things depending on what he considers most important. If the goal is simply to sit on the couch, he could pick Derek up and place him on the couch. However, if the goal is learning how to climb up onto the couch independently, then supporting Derek's useful efforts would have to be included in his father's actions. Without a break in the conversation, Derek's father placed his foot gently under Derek's backside and lifted him just slightly, enough for Derek to scramble the rest of the way onto the couch.

A literacy processing perspective on what it means to be helpful places value on the problem-solving actions a child takes while reading and evaluates the child's response patterns as useful or problematic in deciding, like Derek's father, what actions to take. If the goal is finishing a book as accurately as possible, then a teacher may help in ways that achieve that goal. If the teacher's goal is to support a child's efforts to problem solve as independently as possible and learn from those problem solving actions, then the teacher's help will look more like the father's help, taking into account the child's useful actions in the teaching decision.

To help us in furthering our understandings of useful reading behaviors from a literacy processing perspective and how those behaviors might change in ways that help a child to become a proficient reader, we discovered how useful chapter 7, “Summarizing the Observation Survey results,” particularly the section titled “Think about strategic activity (in-the-head activity),” is in guiding our interpretations. In our analysis of students’ running records during their lessons series, this chapter’s guiding questions around useful strategic activity on text, with words and with letters helps us to interpret our students’ ways of working with information in the books they read at the text level (phrase, sentence, and larger text), word level, and letter level (Clay, 2005a, p. 123) when performing adequately (90–100% accuracy). Then we can

ask how effectively is this child working with the information he or she can find in the print (Clay, p. 128), and how are those ways of working, or response patterns, changing to become more efficient?

Analyzing strategic activity

You may be accustomed to using the questions around useful strategic activity on text, with words, and with letters to guide your analysis of useful and problem-strategic activity when summarizing the results of the Observation Survey tasks. We invite you to review the guiding questions with a different purpose in mind: a deeper analysis of the strategic activity revealed in a running record. As you read our discussion of Braden's running record of *Victor and the Kite* (Rayner, 1989) in

Figure 6. Braden's Running Record of *Victor and the Kite*

Page	Information used	
	E	SC
1	✓ and sc ✓ R ✓✓	1
2	✓✓✓✓✓	
3	✓ don't sc ✓✓✓	1
4	✓✓ ✓- sc ✓ R at sc ✓	1
5	✓✓ drawed draw ✓ pic- v plans fast!	1
6	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	
7	✓ don't sc ✓✓✓✓✓	1
8	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	
9	It sc ✓ it sc ✓ R ✓✓✓✓	1
10	He sc ✓ and sc ✓ R ✓✓	1
11	✓✓✓✓	
12	✓ let lid landed ✓✓✓	1
13	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	
14	✓ kites R sc ✓✓ R Reread with kite intonation like a question ✓	1
	4 7	968 - 15
	"That doesn't seem right, but it is."	
	Read smoothly + at a good pace; grouped 3-5 words together as a phrase	

Figure 6, notice how the comments relate to Clay's questions under the subheadings "Useful strategic activity on text," "Useful strategic activity with words," and "Useful strategic activity with letters." Items in parentheses within the dialogue correspond to the group of questions about strategic activity that prompted the discussion.

Janice: I see a pattern in this running record that relates to Braden's use of language. Several of his substitutions occurred on verbs: *don't/didn't*, *drawed/drew*, and *let/landed*. (see "Language" and "Substitutions")

Betsy: Yes, most of the substitutions he was unable to correct were verbs that fit his oral language structure but not the structure of written English. It would be very natural for him to say, "It don't fly very well" and "Then he drawed some plans." Yet I found it interesting that he seemed to know *drawed* wasn't quite right—he made a second attempt, saying *draw*, but he couldn't come up with that irregular past tense *drew*.

Janice: You mentioned that he seemed to know when he was not quite right. He often monitored his reading at a point of difficulty then tried again. Look at his attempts with *at/about*, *pic-/plans*, and *let, lid/landed*. Although his first substitutions did not make use of enough information, his second attempts showed an awareness that more information was needed, which often led to a self-correction. (see "Behaviour at difficulties" and "Self-correction")

Betsy: Braden's work with *plans* on page 5 was a new behavior. He said, *Then he drew some pic-, plans*. I think he was going to say *pictures*, which used meaning, structure, and some visual information. But he interrupted himself, saying *plans*. That was quick checking! The only visual similarities between the two words are the first and last letters. He might have been listening to the sounds in the word he was saying, *pictures*, and quickly realized the letters he would expect to see were not there. (see "Substitutions," "Visual features of words," and "Visual awareness")

Janice: Or, perhaps he was thinking in a more sophisticated way about the meaning, reading for the "precise message" (Clay, 2005a, p. 128). A person would draw *plans* before constructing a huge kite. (see "Language")

Betsy: It's interesting that you mentioned reading for a precise message. Look at his comment on the last page. After Braden correctly read 'Some kite,' said Dad, he reread the sentence as if questioning whether it could be

correct. He wouldn't use that kind of expression himself, but his comment indicated he knew it was right. He said, "That doesn't seem right, but it is." So, maybe this indicates a growing awareness of book language or structures. It's as if he knew he read the words correctly but it still didn't make sense to him.

Janice: His substitution of *It* for *He*, makes me wonder if he confused the letters *I* and *H*. (see "Visual awareness")

Betsy: Yikes, I didn't even think about that. I know he never confuses them when writing, but I need to go back to my records for the last several weeks and see if that's a pattern in reading. If so, I'll need to address that right away.

Determining a learning goal

The preceding discussion shows how we interpreted Braden's reading behavior. Next we consider learning priorities that will strengthen Braden's useful behavior and address the problematic behavior across the activities of his next Reading Recovery lesson.

Betsy: I looked back several weeks in Braden's records, and I didn't see any other indication that he confused the letters *I* and *H*. I don't think I'll need to address that, but I'm glad you brought it up because now I will be more watchful.

When I am thinking about my teaching decisions, I try to keep in mind Clay's advice related to a child making accelerated progress. She writes, "He must continually push the boundaries of his own knowledge...The teacher must watch for and use this personal searching on the part of the child to shift the emphases in her teaching" (Clay, 2005b, p. 23).

Janice: When you consider what Braden is able to do and what he needs to learn next, what do you think will extend his problem-solving ability? What's the next step?

Betsy: I am thinking more about structure now. I see that his oral language, while it's a great resource, differs from the structures he sees in writing. It doesn't fit the growing complexity of the texts he's reading, so I want to extend the variety of structures Braden controls.

Janice: It's a challenge, isn't it? As children read longer and more complex texts, the language they encounter becomes less familiar, more complex. But at the same time, they have to work with increased speed and fluency (Clay, 2005b).

Betsy: Up to this point, I've seen a lot of evidence that he searches for and monitors with all sources of information, but I also know that he still needs input to deal with the new structures he will encounter at higher text levels such as "shook with fear" (Cowley, 1997) and "sniffs the air for danger" (Davidson, 1998), which he will be seeing soon. If he is trying to read a structure he doesn't yet control, it will also be a challenge to self-monitor and notice whether the syntax is right.

Janice: As you help him extend the variety of structures he controls, you'll want to see him successfully integrate this new learning into the strategic activities he's using already.

Colleague Discussion 5

1—Discuss the process Betsy and Janice used to arrive at a learning goal for Braden. What other learning goal might be beneficial? Support your response with evidence from the running record and your texts.

2—Return to your student's running record used in Colleague Discussion 3 and reflect on the questions Clay presents about useful strategic activity on text, with words, and with letters. Ask yourself what patterns of reading behavior are you noticing for

- locating particular information in print,
- use of language,
- actions taken at difficulty,
- substitutions,
- self-correcting actions,
- cross-checking actions,
- searching behavior at the word level, and
- searching behavior at the letter level.

3—Work with a colleague to determine what your student needs to learn next in order to extend current problem-solving abilities.

Making a teaching plan

Now that Betsy has decided that Braden needs to extend his control of the structures found in written language, we must determine how she will ensure this outcome. We now discuss teaching procedures to support Braden's learning. A summary of the teaching plan appears in Table 2, following the discussion.

Betsy: To make as much impact as possible, I want to think about the ways I can address this learning through the various lesson activities. My choice of a new text will be important.

Janice: True, you want to ensure he has the opportunity to encounter new structures, but you want to make the challenge manageable.

Betsy: Even though I feel like I know the books pretty well, Clay reminds us to read the book to ourselves first to think about "the best ways to orient this child to this book" (Clay, 2005c, p. 91). My introduction will be critical to his learning, so I need to be sure he is oriented to the new book in a way that makes the new structures more accessible. I need to familiarize him with new phrases of language, whether it's a past-tense verb that he doesn't use, a complex structure, or an unusual turn of phrase.

Janice: Yes, letting him hear and use some of those structures in a meaningful way before he reads the book will prepare him to search for and use structure as he reads. It also may be helpful to chime in with the new structure as he reads.

Betsy: Braden's writing provides another good opportunity. I can ask him to reread one of the stories he wrote in a previous lesson where he used an interesting turn of phrase or a more sophisticated structure. That will reinforce his achievement, and in rereading the story, he is searching for and using all sources of information in an integrated way—just like I want him to do when reading new books. It might be easier with his writing, though, because he constructed the message himself.

Janice: The conversation you have before he writes a story provides another opportunity to help extend his control of various structures. You can help him expand his ideas and increase the complexity. You also might suggest a slight change in structure since your goal is to increase his knowledge of the syntax used in written language.

Betsy: I want to make better use of my notes about the longest utterances I hear him use. That will provide more feedback about his learning. Also, I'm going to jot down the structures I hear in his oral language that he won't see in books, like "it don't." Then I can make a point of using the standard construction "it doesn't" in my conversations with him.

Janice: That's true. Think of all the opportunities we have within the daily lessons for conversation. Teachers provide models for the standard structures that appear in books, and it happens during natural conversation.

Betsy: I think I have a good short-term plan for helping Braden. I can reflect on his progress through my running records and lesson records. I want to be sure my teaching is paying off, so my careful note taking during lessons will be essential.

Colleague Discussion 6

Table 2 summarizes the teaching decisions Betsy and Janice discussed. What evidence can you find in *Literacy Lessons Part Two* to indicate these teaching decisions address the learning goal for Braden? What other teaching procedures would be helpful?

Looking for evidence of change

Several days later, we review Braden's running record of *Snake's Sore Head* (Meharry, 1998) to determine whether the teaching procedures have helped Braden work more

strategically. Refer to the record in Figure 7 as you consider our discussion.

Betsy: As I look at this, I'm most interested to see whether Braden is more effective at using structure as a source of information while searching and self-monitoring.

Janice: He seems to show more flexibility in searching for more information of every type. He has a more balanced use of meaning, structure, and visual information than he did in *Victor and the Kite*.

Betsy: Yes and this text has some complex structures that he handled pretty well, such as "snake still had" and "came along."

Janice: He worked out some of those unusual verbs too, like *flapped* on page 4 and *fanned* on page 16. He had a harder time bringing together meaning and structure to solve *tickled* and *whirled*.

Betsy: Although *whirled* might not be in his vocabulary, *tickled* certainly is. That brings up another difference since the last record. It looks like he was trying to take apart those words: *t-*, *tick-* for *tickled* and *w-*, *whir-* for *whirled*. On *Victor and the Kite* he was more likely to

Table 2. Teaching Plan to Extend Braden's Control of Language Structures Citing *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part Two* (Clay, 2005c)

Lesson Activity	Teaching Procedures	Page Reference
Throughout lesson	Use correct grammar Jot constructions you want to include in conversations Track longest utterances Reinforce rereading that appears to pull in meaning and structure	56 56 51 108
Rereading familiar books		
Rereading yesterday's new book		
Working with letter identification		
Breaking words into parts		
Writing a story	Reread previous story Conversation for eliciting story Encourage expansion of ideas or change in structure Model correct grammar	57 55–56 55, 56 56
Hearing and recording sounds		
Reconstructing cut-up story		
Listening to new book introduction	Choice of text Orientation Familiarization with language	89–90 90–92 91
Attempting to read new book	Support with new phrase, chime in	93

Figure 7. Braden's Running Record of *Snake's Sore Head*

| indicates a new text line

It was a hot day|in the jungle.|Snake had|a sore head.

Elephant came along.|“I can help you,”|said Elephant.|And she|flapped her big ears.

But snake still had|a sore head.

Tiger came along.|“I can help you,”|said Tiger.|And he tickled Snake.

But snake still had|a sore head.

Monkey came along.|“I can help you,”|said Monkey.|And she whirled Snake|around and around.

But snake still had|a sore head.

Peacock came along.|“I can help you,”|said Peacock.|And he fanned Snake|with his tail.

But snake still had|a sore head.

Bear came along.|“I can help you, Snake,”|said Bear.|“Come with me.”

Bear went into his cave.|It was cool and dark|and quiet.|“Sssss,” said Snake.|“This is good.”

Page	E	SC	Information used
	MSV	MSV	
2	✓✓✓ - sc a ✓✓R = a pm I right?	1	MSV
4	✓✓✓✓ + he sc said R sc said elephant! ✓✓✓✓ flapped ✓✓✓✓	1	MSV MSV MSV MSV
6	✓✓✓✓✓ ✓ sore headache head	1	MSV
8	✓✓✓✓ ✓R ✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓ tickled R tick - R ✓	1	MSV MSV
10	✓✓✓✓✓ ✓ headache sc headache sore head	1	MSV MSV
12	✓Monday sc ✓R ✓ Monkey ✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓ whirled A R ✓ ✓✓✓✓✓	1	MSV MSV
14	✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓ ✓ headache head	1	MSV
16	✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓ flapped sc ✓R fanned ✓✓✓✓	1	MSV MSV
18	✓✓✓✓A ✓✓ ✓✓ headache expressive head	1	MSV
20	✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓✓	1	good intonation like conversation
22	✓✓✓✓ the his ✓✓ ✓✓ cold cool ✓✓ ✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓	1	MSV MSV
	9	6	10 11 2-4

substitute a word that started and ended with the letters of the word in text, but he wasn't trying to use parts or clusters. A sounding out of chunks or clusters won't usually

work on its own though (Clay, 2005a). I'm seeing progress, but I need to be vigilant about making sure he consistently integrates meaning and structure as he searches.

Colleague Discussion 7

1—Considering Braden's progress and the refinements that are still needed, what do you think he needs to learn next? Share your reasoning with a colleague, and work together with *Literacy Lessons Part Two* to find helpful procedures, using the framework of Table 2 to guide your discussion.

2—In Colleague Discussion 5, you determined some learning priorities for your student based on recent running records. Work with a colleague using the framework of Table 2 to plan your teaching for this student.

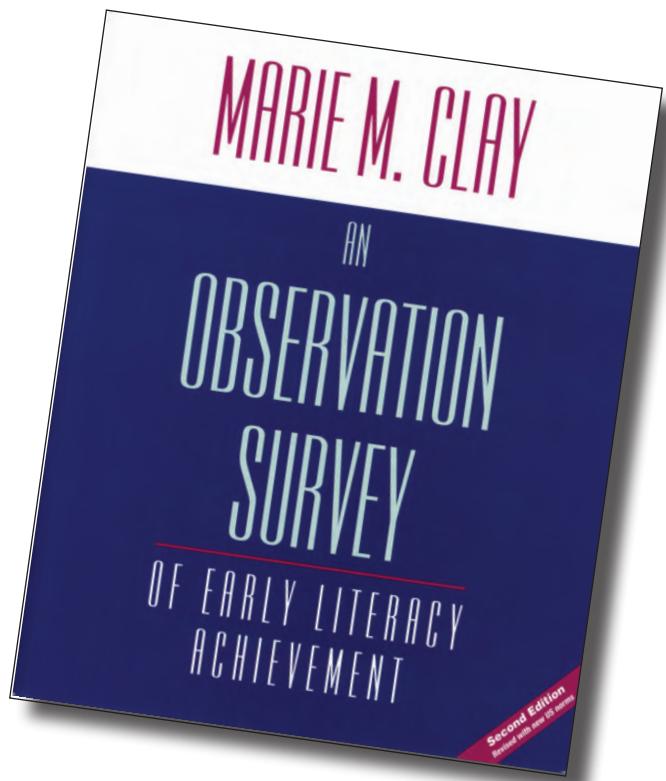
By following our students' progress through careful recording of what we see and hear them do, we notice the changes in how they use information from different sources that we can then weigh up as useful or problematic. Reliance on our running records allows us to refine and direct our teaching within the framework of the Reading Recovery lesson toward helping our students become more flexible problem solvers as their reading improves.

That is why systematic observation of what the child can do and where his new learning is taking him is so important in the first year of school. Close and individual attention from a teacher at this stage can help children to operate on print in more efficient ways so that the low progress readers come to function like the high progress readers. If that does not happen they do not learn to work effectively under normal classroom conditions and they may never make progress at average rates. (Clay, 2005a, p. 15)

Final Thoughts

Students entering Reading Recovery often match a description found in chapter 2 of *An Observation Survey* that Clay provides of a low progress reader or a reader at risk of having difficulty learning how to read. We encourage you to read this description found on page 15 and consider how closely it matches your students' early reading behaviors when they enter Reading Recovery. On the same page of this chapter is Clay's description of a proficient reader.

At the end of a series of Reading Recovery lessons, we believe that our students' reading behavior needs to resemble Clay's description of a proficient young reader so that they continue to make gains in their classrooms. To facilitate the changes necessary to become efficient readers in as short a period of time as possible, our students rely on us to be diligent in gathering evidence of their reading behaviors in a systematic way, then carefully analyzing all of the behavior in order to be sure that our interpretations are grounded in evidence rather than on assumption or memories. Our students have everything to gain by this type of recording and analysis and we have just as much to gain, knowing our records can reliably guide our teaching decisions to support change in our students' response patterns and related information-seeking processes.



Chapter 5 of *An Observation Survey*, "Taking records of reading continuous text," introduces us to the rationales for taking running records, administration of the conventions, how to quantify and interpret running records, and how our theories influence our teaching decisions. Chapter 2 continues to help us gain a deeper understanding of reading as a complex process with a helpful description of the kinds of information efficient young readers need to learn how to find and use including

- knowledge of how the world works;
- the possible meanings of the text;
- the sentence structures of the language;
- rules about the order of ideas, or words, or letters;
- the words used often in the language;
- the alphabet;
- special features of sound, shape, and layout; and
- special knowledge about books and literary experiences. (Clay, 2005a, p. 14)

We encourage you to draw on this list as a starting point in examining your own theory of what you think is important for your students to know and be able to do with that information.

Our journey into a reexamination of our practices in taking and scoring reliable running records and interpreting those records led us to discover that the Observation Survey is much more than an assessment tool to be taken out at the beginning and end of a student's series of lessons. Chapter 1 refines our understandings of systematic observation, chapter 2 provides us with helpful expansions on reading as a complex process and plenty of questions for discussion, and chapter 7 continues to help us to interpret our daily running records from a literacy processing theory and to support our students' useful strategic activity toward greater flexibility and control. We encourage you to take a fresh perspective and discover how this text can guide your teaching as well as your assessment practices.

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Betsy and Janice are among the co-authors of the *Sensitive Observation of Reading Behavior Running Record Professional Learning Package*.

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