

# Predictions of Progress: Constructing Lessons for Individuals

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As Reading Recovery teachers, we must remain instructionally present throughout each child's lessons, alert and responsive to the child's evolving ways of working on complex literacy tasks. Reading Recovery teachers develop expert knowledge of the instructional procedures described in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part Two* (Clay, 2005c). How each Reading Recovery child develops his own ways of problem solving for reading and writing, however, will always vary, requiring us to "make these procedures work for the individual learner with unusual patterns of responding" (Clay, 2005b, p. i). Predictions of progress are vital to this achievement.

Constructing useful predictions of progress is based on the understanding that no Reading Recovery child has the exact same patterns of strength and difficulties. Even when two children have identical scores on *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2005a) tasks, the specific ways in which each child thought about and worked on these tasks were, nonetheless, undoubtedly different from one to the other. Nor does effective Reading Recovery teaching result in children's identical use of strategies. Strategies are "in the head." This concept means that strategies are built actively over time by each child in those particular ways of thinking and acting that work for him or her:

Some teachers think that the final outcome is the same for all children but that is not true. Children in the average band of readers in a classroom do not all process information in the same ways. (Clay, 2005b, p. 31)

You can demonstrate this point for yourself by observing and informally interviewing two average-progress children who appear to be equally successful within a classroom's guided reading lesson. While both children may have read the text chosen for that day's lesson with success, they will each talk with you differently about the work that they

did as they read the text and about their own differing responses to the author's meanings.

Predictions of progress are also much more than just a document. Rather, these predictions require us to engage actively in a problem-solving process that extends across each child's series of lessons, relating what the child can and cannot do on entry to the outcomes needed by this particular child at the end of the lesson series (Clay, 2005b, p. 31). Predictions of progress is an analytic, constructive process that ties together and structures a purposeful use of Reading Recovery teaching proce-



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dures within (a) ongoing observation of each child's literacy behaviors, and (b) knowledge of the needed outcomes for each child.

This article focuses attention on key aspects of predictions of progress that make them absolutely worth doing, and even essential. In preparation for your reading of this article, the following self-assessment (Figure 1) will help you to evaluate your own actual use of predictions of progress to date.

The items listed on this self-assessment are all essential to a process for predictions of progress that can ensure that daily Reading Recovery lessons are constructed (during both

initial planning and for "in-the-moment" instructional decisions) for accelerated progress. The intent of this article is to support your deep understanding of predictions of progress through

1. examination of Clay's description of this essential approach to instruction,
2. description of long-term use of predictions of progress across each child's series of lessons, and
3. active and collaborative steps that will improve your use of this nonoptional instructional procedure.

## An Analytic Framework: The Observation Survey, Observation Survey Summary Sheet, and Predictions of Progress

It is appealing (but inaccurate) to define predictions of progress simply as a quick, on the spot answer to the four familiar questions posed by Clay:

- At the end of the lesson series he will need to know how to do this and that in order to ...
- and in the next few weeks he will need to know how to ...
- and extra work will be needed on ...
- and I will need to pay special attention to ... (2005b, p. 31)

The answers to these questions are the result of an analytic process that actually begins during your administration of the Observation Survey tasks with each child. Before deciding that the predictions of progress for a child should simply call for more-accurate reading, for example, careful observation and analysis are needed to understand when the child already monitors and for which source(s) of information. This information will help to determine how and when it might be most useful to prompt for monitoring during text reading. Such predictions may actually be what is needed to improve a child's self-correction ratios: "In the next few weeks he will need to know how to determine whether or not an attempted word in text looks right."

This analysis, leading to intentional teaching decisions (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2011), is essential for effective instruction. Reading Recovery teaching that is based merely on day-to-

**Figure 1. Self-Assessment**

	Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree
I am very comfortable with the idea that the outcomes of Reading Recovery teaching are not the same for all children.	•	•	•
I know how to create predictions of progress that are unique to the child as I begin teaching.	•	•	•
I integrate information effectively from each child's Observation Survey and Summary Sheet into predictions of progress.	•	•	•
I understand how to relate what a child can do now with the outcomes needed for that child at the end of the lesson series.	•	•	•
I use predictions of progress to maintain my long-term perspective on day-to-day teaching decisions.	•	•	•
I write notes focused on each child's strategic activities as observed and prompted on the lesson record form.	•	•	•
I revisit and revise each child's predictions of progress periodically throughout his/her lesson series.	•	•	•
Predicting the changes that will be needed for each child helps me to ensure that most children I teach are able to discontinue.	•	•	•

day “hunches” will be less effective than is necessary. Prompting that arises only in reaction to an error, for example, is not likely to be the best, in-the-moment instructional decision:

Child: [reading] “Meow, I like this,” said the hungry little cat [an error of *cat* for *kitten*].

Teacher: What word is that?

We are much more likely to make good instructional decisions when these are based on a long-term perspective of a child’s progress. A teacher (upon writing predictions of progress acknowledging that this child will need to achieve a consistently higher self-correction ratio) may have also determined the need for extra work within the next few weeks on monitoring using multiple sources of information. The teacher would then be prompting the child intentfully:

Child: [reading] “Meow, I like this,” said the hungry little cat [an error of *cat* for *kitten*].

Teacher: Something didn’t look right. Try that again.

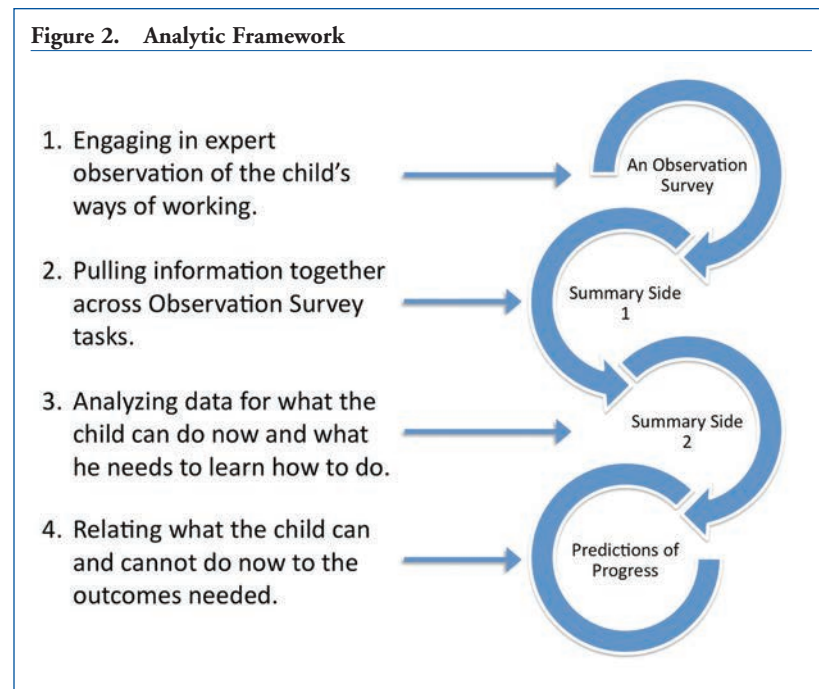
Child: Oh, it’s *kitten*.

Teacher: Try it. Read that sentence again. Does *kitten* make sense and look right?

### *Engaging in expert observation of the child’s current ways of working*

Thinking about predictions of progress begins with close attention to the ways in which each child engages in the Observation Survey tasks.

It is not sufficient, then, to record just enough information for each Observation Survey task to deter-



mine a score. Instead, you should be observing carefully and creating a useful set of notes as each child attempts the survey tasks: What behaviors do you observe the child use that help you to understand how the child works on these tasks? Without these notes you will not have the information needed for further reflection and analysis.

### *Pulling information together across tasks of An Observation Survey*

Once a child has been selected for Reading Recovery instruction, detailed information from each Observation Survey task is then pulled together onto side 1 of An Observation Survey Summary Sheet. This step may feel somewhat clerical or routine. Constructing side 1, however, is a valuable opportunity to review the child’s performance on each task within the context of all of your observations during the survey administration. Doing so should direct your attention, as Clay

advised, to what this child can do now. As you gather information for side 1 from the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words section, for example, you may be listing such information as the following:

- Did this child say words slowly, using a slow articulation that will help him to hear sounds within words?
- What specific phonemes did he hear within words? What types of phonemes, or placement within a word, were easier for him to hear?
- Did the child identify a letter or letters that are appropriate based on what he heard within a word? What letters appeared to be known by this child?
- Did the child form those letters that he identified? Was his letter formation correct and comfortable for him?



- Did the child show signs that some of the words on this task are known words for writing? What words did he write fluently?

*Analyzing observations demonstrating what the child can do now and needs to learn to do*

Completion of the Observation Survey Summary Sheet side 2 requires analysis, rather than simple recording, of the child's literacy behaviors. Analysis is always a difficult and challenging endeavor. It is natural to want to move directly from a child's survey scores straight into lesson planning. Instead, you must first determine what you know about this child's literacy behaviors. Clay, for example, asked us to consider the following points before beginning to write predictions of progress:

Look at each Observation Survey Summary Sheet, consider the profile of scores, and look at the information used and neglected. What are the useful things this child can do and what areas are most problematic for him? (Clay, 2005b, p. 31)

As you complete side 2, review your observations of the child's performance on all Observation Survey tasks and sort only those conclusions for which you have direct evidence into categories: Useful strategic activity versus problem strategic activity for text, words, and letters. You should not state, for example, that a child "does not use visual information" if this conclusion is not supported by the child's behaviors on survey tasks. Even very tentative use of visual information is a strength that your teaching can help a child to

build on. The child may, for example, have read several high-frequency words correctly on a running record (even though she made errors at other points with substitutions that made sense but did not look right). This type of behavior would indicate a tentative, initial use of visual information: "Correctly identified a small set of known words when reading text."

Remember to note all strategic activity that you have observed, rather than just those behaviors that you feel are already sufficiently developed. The description of each child's current literacy behaviors as written on side 2 should provide a thorough and accurate picture of the child's profile of Observation Survey scores: What are those useful responses that

you observed from this child and what observed responses are most problematic?

*Constructing understanding relating what the child can and cannot do now to the outcomes needed*

It is only after careful attention to observations during Observation Survey tasks and Summary Sheet analysis that we reach the point where initial predictions of progress can be usefully written for a child. The task now is to build your hypotheses regarding the essential steps this child will need to take in order to engage in effective problem solving on increasingly difficult texts: "At the end of the lesson series he will need to know how to do this and that in order to...." (Clay, 2005b, p. 31).



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Predictions of progress do not include any routine thinking and are not written onto a preprepared form. Instead, it is vitally important to explicitly revisit pages 31 to 32 in *Literacy Lessons Part One* (Clay, 2005b) each and every time you write predictions of progress. Rereading this information each time will remind you that Clay recommended strong reflection and analysis:

- Look at what a particular child can do now and think about what he needs to learn to do.
- Consider the changes you would expect to see in the reading and writing behavior of each child, as he becomes a more competent reader and writer. (Clay, 2005b, p. 31)

Writing predictions of progress is not simply for the purpose of creating a record. All authentic writing requires the writer to construct his/her understandings while writing — rather than to simply display those understandings. You must be hard at work constructing your own interpretation of where your teaching must go for each particular child as you build these predictions. Engaging in this multistep process in a thoughtful and analytic way will help you determine how this child's current strengths and limitations relate to “the outcomes you want to see at the end of the lesson series” (Clay, 2005b, p. 31).

When asked during an interview to describe a child whose lessons had recently been discontinued (Gibson, 2010), for example, one Reading Recovery teacher stated that she learned how to best help Andrew (who was unwilling in early lessons to attempt any task that seemed

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hard) by keeping all tasks at an instructional level and demonstrating explicitly that using strategies would make each task easier. Her thoughtful analysis of the child's useful and problem strategic activities led her to construct important hypotheses to support her intentional teaching (illustrated below with a portion of her initial predictions for this child):

- Extra work will be needed on clear and crisp teacher prompting for strategies during text reading, so that I am consistently directing Andrew's attention directly to the information most needed to solve the problem. (Clay, 2005c, p. 94)
- I will need to pay special attention to careful book selection and how to orient Andrew to each new text so that new books are always at an instructional level for him.

Another teacher who participated in this same study (Gibson, 2010) learned how to best support a child who showed confusion between how words and letters work in English versus how they work in Vietnamese. This child “really took off” when he understood (a) the relationships between letters and sounds in words, and (b) how to look across letters in

a word and search for known parts. The predictions constructed by this teacher focused on Min's need to unpack the crucial relationship between how words look and how words sound (illustrated below with a portion of his initial predictions for this child):

- At the end of the lesson series, Min will need to know how to identify sounds within words in sequence, in order to develop expectations for how a word should look based on how the word sounds.
- In the next few weeks, Min will need to know how to say a word slowly, with smooth articulation of most sounds within words.
- In the next few weeks, Min will be able to complete sound boxes on the work page as independently as possible.
- Extra work will be needed on teacher prompting for monitoring during text reading: What do you expect to see at the beginning? ....at the end? Check it. Run your finger under it. (Clay, 2005c, p. 108)

The alternative to your strong engagement in predictions of progress is to attempt to teach a lowest-achieving child without thorough and accurate knowledge of the child's current strategic behavior or where he needs to arrive at in order to reach an average or better literacy achievement level. Any Reading Recovery teacher may be able to discontinue lessons for a few children each year without useful and accurate predictions of progress. In this case, however, too many Reading Recovery children will almost inevitably encounter avoidable roadblocks as the texts and needed problem solving become more difficult. While identification of those few children who are truly in need of long-term support is a good outcome of Reading Recovery teaching, missing the opportunity to guide most children to discontinuing is not.

### Ongoing Monitoring of Each Child's Progress Against Predictions

Constructing predictions of progress for each child's lesson series is a continual process, rather than a single document:

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, finding space on your lesson record to note these shifts. (Clay, 2005b, p. 31–32)

Your predictions should not be buried inside the child's Reading Recovery binder. Instead, place the most-current predictions document

where you will remember to review it before planning or teaching lessons. With your predictions of progress in mind, summarize and provide examples of each child's progress on lesson records and running records, and revise predictions of progress as new strengths and weaknesses emerge. It will be useful, for example, to

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**Adjusting predictions for each child requires us to continually observe and consider the child's current strategic behaviors against the changes that are expected and needed for discontinuing.**

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reread previous predictions and to check off those that seem to have been achieved. When you have not yet been able to help a child control needed strategies as described in your predictions, it is important that you consider why this might be so and create new predictions based on your current hypotheses.

Predictions of progress should certainly be revisited and revised at least as soon as a child's progress begins to stall; perhaps when a child has not been able to move up to a higher text level for more than a week, for example. In this case, your careful review of the most-recent running records for overall scores, evidence of sources of information used or neglected, strategic behavior (monitoring,

searching for information, and self-correction), and fluency should provide important information about where the roadblock(s) might be:

- Where does the child typically encounter difficulties during text reading?
- What does he do most often when encountering a difficult word in text?
- Are there sources of information that he is neglecting? Is he using more than one source of information at difficulty?
- What can he read fluently? Are there types of books, or stretches of texts, that he reads with phrasing, accuracy, and expression?

Adjusting predictions for each child requires us to continually observe and consider the child's current strategic behaviors against the changes that are expected and needed for discontinuing. After careful consideration, a possible revision to your predictions of progress might address a concern for a child who typically appeals to the teacher at difficulty:

In the next few weeks he will need to know how to reread a section of text without prompting in order to pick up more information from language structure.

Or, it may be necessary to review your recent lesson records for a child who is not yet compiling a bank of known words for reading. Tentative answers to a set of useful, relevant questions may lead to your revision of the predictions of progress for the child:

- How quickly has she been able to learn new words?
- What evidence indicates that particular words on this child's list of known words for reading are still new to her, only just known, successfully problem solved, easily produced but easily thrown, or well-known and recognized in most contexts? (see Clay, 2005c, p. 46)
- What kinds of instructional support have been needed in order for her to take a good look at new words?
- What kinds of words are harder or easier for her to learn?
- What seems to be getting in the way of word learning for her?

After this analysis, it will be easier for you to accurately determine what this child will need to know how to do, and what extra work will be needed in order to accomplish word learning at a faster and more independent pace. With this information in mind, you would then review Clay's description of each relevant teaching procedure in *Literacy Lessons Part Two* (2005c). This child's teacher, for example, might decide that he needs to help her learn a few words to a well-known level (rather than many words that are still new): "Extra work will be needed to ensure that new words learned are revisited right away and in next lessons, during text reading and writing." The teacher might then resolve to pay close attention to how well the child is holding onto each word studied for the next few lessons. These points, then, become part of the revised predictions of progress for this child.



*The creation and revision of predictions of progress is a task that is best shared with colleagues. As you engage in these discussions, it is vitally important to notice and respond to a child's orchestration and use of strategic behaviors.*

***Learning how to create and revise predictions of progress: Active engagement and collaboration***

The reflection and analysis required for predictions of progress are urgent. Without them we run the very real risk of allowing a child to continue to build "a system of responses which does not work efficiently and in particular does not continue to build itself with self-scheduled learning" (Clay, 1987, p. 160). Writing brief, formulaic predictions of progress with the primary goal of finishing quickly and putting a required document into a child's Reading Recovery records is not useful. Instead, the creation and revision of predictions of progress is a task that is best shared with colleagues:

- Set up a meeting with a colleague or two as you are

beginning early lessons with children. Each person will share the predictions for one child, and colleagues will ask pertinent questions about the child's strategic activity. This discussion will help each of you sort out what extra work will be needed for a child in the next few lessons.

- Invite several Reading Recovery colleagues to observe one of your lessons (or your administration of the Observation Survey) with a child. After the observation, focus discussion on what each colleague observed that the child could do during text reading and writing. Check these observations against your predictions of progress.



- After participating in behind-the-glass lesson observation and discussion, take a few minutes to write down several questions that were discussed and that relate to a child you teach. Consider these questions carefully as you teach the next lessons for the child, and revise your predictions of progress based on your observations.
- Make predictions of progress a part of the conversation during a coaching visit with your teacher leader. Have copies of the predictions for the child available for review. Discuss revisions that may be needed for these predictions after the lesson observation and discussion.
- Invite a colleague to observe two children's lessons on the same day, back to back. Discuss the essential ways in which these two children are different — How might one child's lesson series need to be different from the lesson series for the other child? After the discussion, revise your predictions for each child as necessary.

As you engage in these discussions, it is vitally important to notice and respond to what matters; that is, to a child's orchestration and use of strategic behaviors. Expert literacy teachers engage in more-frequent and detailed hypothesizing than do less-expert teachers, focused on children's emerging, partially correct processes (Ross & Gibson, 2010). This hypothesizing helps teachers interpret observed literacy behavior. A child

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Learning how to observe and analyze each child's strategic behaviors and how to use this information to monitor and predict each child's unique path to discontinuing is both challenging and essential. Predictions of progress will help you support more children to discontinuing lessons each year.

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who independently attempts to spell the word *elephant* as LFNT, for example, is showing that he can hear and record consonant sounds within words. This expert noticing ability and hypothesizing supports teachers' development of teaching expertise.

Problem solving and moment-by-moment implementation of instruction that is closely targeted to a child's immediate needs engages us in a valuable cycle leading to internalization of the principles of effective instruction. In contrast, teachers who are not able to describe and interpret students' literacy development are more likely to simply refer children for learning disability evaluation (Broikou, 1992, discussed in Johnston, 2011). Reading Recovery teachers who are not able to observe and interpret a child's current use of strategic behaviors are less likely to support that child's progress to discontinuing.

### Constructing Lessons for Individuals

The individual instruction that we provide to each of the lowest-achieving first-grade children is truly a remarkable accomplishment. This feat rests not on the fact, alone, that

we teach one child at a time. Individual teaching occurs because we absolutely know what the response repertoire of each child is from one lesson to the next. We are able to utilize the teaching procedures in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* in a thoughtful way for each child. Predictions of progress is one key component in support of teaching that is truly individual:

Throughout the 30-minute lesson, the teacher's attention is tuned to the responding history of this one child. One teacher per pupil is the only practical way of working with children who have extremely different kinds of responses to the tasks of learning to read and write. (Clay, 2005b, p. 21)

Learning how to observe and analyze each child's strategic behaviors and how to use this information to monitor and predict each child's unique path to discontinuing is both challenging and essential. Predictions of progress will help you support more children to discontinuing lessons each year, thus providing you with a well-earned sense of self-efficacy and accomplishment as a Reading Recovery teacher.



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