1992). It is important that children come to initiate this action independently.

In the following example, the child quickly chooses between alternatives to identify a word in the text, and the teacher confirms this independent action.

C: And _mŏst/SC_ purple elephants are very good
    most
    at games.
    (Child used short _o_ sound on first attempt and then self-corrected.)
T: I like the way you changed it when the first one didn't work. You did that fast, too!

This writing example shows a teacher's attempt to add to the child's repertoire of ways to solve problems independently.

C: (Child is writing the word _like_ and stops at the letter _k_.) Is it a _k_?
T: Why don't you say it slowly?
C: (Child says _like_ slowly, emphasizing the _k_.)
T: Write it and check.
C: (Child writes _k_ and then _e_.)
T: Is that what you expect _like_ to look like?
C: Yes.
T: That really helped when you said it slowly and then checked to see if it looked right.

All too often, the role of children as active learners who teach themselves many things is neglected in classrooms. Bissex (1984) offers a challenge on behalf of children: "Children have demonstrated their power to abstract, hypothesize, construct, and revise. Given this view of children, surely one role of education is to affirm each child's inner teacher" (p. 101).

## Ways to observe active processing

The teacher's role is built on precise knowledge of the child during these early literacy experiences. It is not an easy task. "Being able to observe and interact with a child in order to discover what he [or she] knows, understands, and can do, takes time, considerable knowledge and skill" (Wood, 1988, p. 224). Yet responsive teaching is critical to active learning (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

We cannot _see_ a child's thinking. However, observations of the overt reading behaviors of young children can support sound hypotheses about complex "in-the-head" processes. A teacher has several ways of knowing the child's repertoire of strategies and responding behaviors. Two are highlighted here: _An Observation_

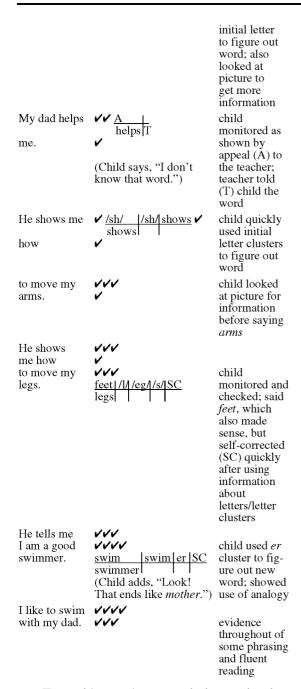_Survey of Early Literacy Achievement_ (Clay, 1993a) and running records of text reading.

The _Observation Survey_ is a tool for classroom teachers that captures observable behaviors of young children both in quantity and in quality. From the _Survey_, the teacher learns about the child's knowledge of letters, words, sounds, and concepts about print in both reading and writing. A text reading task gives information about how the child operates on text. The teacher also learns about a child's engagement, speed of responding, and ability to initiate. When teachers summarize the results of the _Survey_, they have evidence of the child's actions or control of literacy behaviors.

All of the behaviors of active learners previously explored can be examined through a careful analysis of a child's oral reading behaviors. Running records are tools for ongoing assessment (Clay, 1993a) for the purpose of analyzing these observable reading behaviors. The teacher sits alongside a child while the child reads a book or story. As a neutral observer, the teacher uses a simple coding system to record the child's exact responses on a form or sheet of paper. The teacher is careful not to respond in any way so as to capture the child's independent processing behaviors.

The teacher's goal is to gain and analyze a precise record of the child's processing. The teacher can determine whether the text was at the appropriate level of support and challenge for the reader, analyze how the child actively sorted and related sources of information, and assess the child's phrasing and fluency.

Consider the following excerpt from a child's running record. A check mark indicates an accurate response to the text. A response placed over another indicates a substitution of a word in the text made by the child.

| Text | Running record | Hypotheses based on observations |
|---|---|---|
| I like to swim. ✔✔✔ | | child read accurately |
| I can swim across the pool. | ✔✔✔<br>✔✔✔(Child adds, "I can swim across the the pool at the park.") | child responded to story meaning |
| I can swim on my back, too. | ✔✔✔<br>✔✔ /b/  /b/ back<br>    back<br>✔ | child monitored; quickly used |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| My dad helps me. | ✔✔ A \| helps\|T ✔ (Child says, "I don't know that word.") | initial letter to figure out word; also looked at picture to get more information child monitored as shown by appeal (A) to the teacher; teacher told (T) child the word |
| He shows me how | ✔ /sh/ \|/sh/\|shows ✔ shows\| \| ✔ | child quickly used initial letter clusters to figure out word |
| to move my arms. | ✔✔✔ ✔ | child looked at picture for information before saying *arms* |
| He shows me how to move my legs. | ✔✔✔ ✔ ✔✔✔ feet\|/l/\|/eg/\|/s/\|SC legs\| \| \| \| | child monitored and checked; said *feet*, which also made sense, but self-corrected (SC) quickly after using information about letters/letter clusters |
| He tells me I am a good swimmer. | ✔✔✔ ✔✔✔✔ swim \|swim\|er\|SC swimmer\| \| \| (Child adds, "Look! That ends like *mother*.") | child used *er* cluster to figure out new word; showed use of analogy |
| I like to swim with my dad. | ✔✔✔✔ ✔✔✔ | evidence throughout of some phrasing and fluent reading |

From this running record, the teacher has evidence that the child is initiating a number of helpful actions. There are several instances of monitoring and checking behaviors. He knew what he didn't know. The child searched for several sources of information and interacted with the text, actively commenting on its meaning.

It is not only the child's use of different sources of information that is significant, but the fact that the child made several attempts, was dissatisfied that all sources of informa-tion did not match, and continued to puzzle out, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. This processing behavior is active, so the child is learning about the process by reading.

## The teacher's challenge

To foster active learning, we as teachers have to plan and reinforce a self-extending system. We must show children ways to detect errors for themselves, and we must encourage them to do so. We must teach them a variety of alternatives for problem solving when reading and writing texts. When they work out a problem for themselves, we may need to help them understand how they did it. If we are teachers who set a high value on independent responding, we must also allow the risk of being wrong. We need to give children time to discover that all is not well, permission to work at the problem, and encouragement to discover something for themselves.

Our goal is for children to take over the learning process and work independently, while discovering new things for themselves both with us and when working alone. We must keep in mind that this process takes place across time. We must be careful not to establish a pattern early on where the child waits for us to do the work. All children, from the beginning, need to learn that they must work at points of difficulty, they must take some initiative, and they must make some links. As evidenced by Peter and Sam, when all this activity takes place on tasks that are well within their control, children will indeed be *active from the start*.

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## A call for action

The role of the teacher is to stimulate, fos-
ter, support, and reinforce reading work
carried out by the learner. According to Clay
(1991), the learner must
- actively search for information,
- relate things to the known,
- detect error even if he or she cannot solve
  the problem,
- use all of his or her own resources,
- initiate his or her own word solving of
  whatever kind,
- actively relate new discoveries to estab-
  lished knowledge.

With your grade-level colleagues, discuss
how you can foster each of these actions
with the children you teach—from the start!

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