Chapter VI
Conclusions, Recommendations, and Suggestions for Future Research

For this study, student/teacher instructional dyads in a Reading Recovery venue were observed to learn how independence was fostered and attained. The Reading Recovery program is intended only for the students most at risk of reading failure. After reviewing the data, the following conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for future research became evident.

Conclusions

This study was used to examine the development of student independence: (a) the student's disposition for independence (Katz, 1985), (b) the student's employment of functional independence while reading, (c) the development of strategic knowledge of the reading process as lessons progressed both in terms of teacher behaviors and of student behaviors, and (d) evidence of Clay's theory that, "In the end it is the children who learn to actively integrate their experiences and the parent or teacher is powerless to do more than contribute to this active construction completed by the learner" (Clay, 1991a, p. 1).

Disposition for Independence

A disposition for independence can be fostered while teaching students to read. The students observed for the study had some independence but did not use it in early reading lessons. A disposition for independence is common for most children, but some children arrive at school and seem to lack this disposition (Katz, 1985). The school needs to foster this disposition (Clay, 1998). In the observed lessons, fostering independence appeared in several forms. The teachers:

(1) Showed students how to do things (e.g., in Time I Liz reread a difficult page with Pete so he could experience himself as a reader)
(2) Discussed goals with the students and shared thinking about strategies used to reach those goals (e.g., Liz showed Pete how to point while reading to check for a one to one match of text and spoken word)
(3) Offered choices to the students when problems occurred (e.g., Liz, Gwen, and Nell each introduced the thinking questions of "does it look right?" "sound right?" and "make sense?")
(4) Asked students to monitor their success when they attempted a strategy (e.g., Liz, Gwen, and Nell used the prompt "Try That Again" and asked the student to reread sentences that were almost correct)
(5) Encouraged student application of strategic knowledge to solve difficulties (e.g., Liz expected Pete to check the meaning and visual information to see if the reading made sense and looked right)
(6) Explained to students why an attempted activity was successful and later expected a student to do the same behavior independently (e.g., Gwen had Sue read using the word she had offered to see if the word made sense in the sentence)

The goal was to have the student experience success, know why their work was successful, and know how to replicate that success. In time, students appropriated the learned tasks as their own, initiated solutions with other tasks, and required less teacher support (Rogoff, 1990). The student did the reading work independently and noticed other things about the reading process that were not known before.

Functional Independence

The encouragement of student functional independence was critical in the process of becoming independent. When the students used knowledge from other contexts to solve reading difficulties, they began to independently apply prior knowledge in current situations. For example, in Time I Pete was functionally independence when he read Painting. The illustrations of the book, combined with instruction to use initial letter/sound relationships helped him identify the words "table," "chair," "cat," "floor," and "wall" (knowledge that illustrations represent story content is functional). He remembered the story theme (book knowledge and memory for stories is functional), and used his knowledge of language to utter logical sentences (language is functional). He used his finger to point to each text word as he said it (use of one to one relationships is functional). He was monitoring when he turned to Liz and smiled suggesting it was her turn because he lacked the knowledge to proceed (knowing what is not known is functional). Thus the use of illustrations, book knowledge/memory, language, one-to-one relationships, and monitoring what he can read represent Pete's functional independent behaviors. These combined with the social context of learning made it possible for him to contribute what he knew to the task at hand and to behave like a reader from the beginning. (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, 1989, 1999; Rogoff, 1990).

With the support of functional independence, Pete was able to learn more about reading. On the first page he mixed up "boy" for "baby" and Liz told him the word. On the next page he attempted the syntactically appropriate word "then" for "and." Liz helped him learn "and" by saying the word with him. Then Pete was enabled to "act like a reader" until the last page. The repeated pattern of the text provided practice for reading work and reinforced success. On the last page Pete knew what was intended but could not identify "then" and "mom," so he sought teacher assistance to read the page. (In these cases functional independent attempts based on illustrations and language did not enable Pete to read the text.) Pete's zone of proximal development was changing as he solved problems and "read" the story although he did not have control of the vocabulary or sentence pattern. Pete was learning how to read by reading Painting in a social context (Vygotsky, 1978). This fits Rogoff's work of learning occurring in other cultures when a novice sits near an expert and observes to learn before taking over the portion to the task that is known and the expert does the rest of the task (1990).

Strategic Knowledge and Independence

During book orientations each student first required a demonstration of how the scaffold of a book orientation worked. In Time I, book orientations were guided by the teachers with questions for the students. Pete's example is similar to others. During Time I he needed Liz's questions to understand what was important in the book. In Time II Pete acted like a reader by applying new strategies and word work on the book offered. Self-initiated book orientations were observed to be occurring in Time III as students sought to explore the book independently to understand the topic. This was another step of learning to read by reading. The teachers selected books that were leveled and contained material the students were prepared to read with support.

During the first attempt at reading, the teacher scaffold corresponds to student needs and includes prompts that are critical for fostering independence. Later these prompts are incorporated in the student's memory, available for subsequent appropriation of the task of reading. The prompts including discussion, modeling, and feedback about how certain things worked or did not work helped students read and learn more about the reading process. The student always had opportunities to implement what was taught on authentic reading tasks. During Time II, Gwen asked Sue if she was correct. Sue rereads and says, "yes." They assessed problems, applied solutions, and checked their results by searching for cues, rereading, monitoring, and cross checking meaning, visual information and syntax. During Time III, Bill reread and worked on text until he read it correctly, and Nell intervened only when needed.

As students became willing to make and correct their errors, the process became more self-initiated and the teacher's participation faded. A key issue for fostering independence is to know when to "fade" the scaffold to ensure that support does not interfere with the formation of a disposition for independence, independent learning, and developing maturity (Clay & Cazden, 1990; Rogoff, 1990;Wood, 1988; 1998). This seems a problem for many middle class parents in our culture who "help" children of all ages to gain "better" results with what they attempt (Rogoff, 1990). Clay has concerns that teachers have difficulties learning to reduce support. She cautions: "Never do for the child what the child can do for himself" (1991c).

Independent behaviors result from the instructional subtleties of the interactions, intersubjectivity, and the maintenance of the zone of proximal development. These three support the student's ability to be in charge of the learning, to sort things out, and learn more about the reading process with each reading. In both Time II when Pete is having trouble with "really" and Time III when Pete understood his story, he discussed what he was thinking about and Liz clarified issues that he brought up.

Expanded Life-Long Independence

Because of the level of knowledge of the reading task, the available teacher support, and the developing disposition for independence, the learning progresses and evens out, although students still have some difficulties in literacy. This progress was observed in the results of the

June Observation Survey. The students progressed to higher reading levels and showed more adaptability with other components of the survey. The process appears smooth. However, in the unseen literacy landscape below the observable surface of learning, mental processes still continue to change as an interpretation of the shifts in new learning on the Observation Survey indicated. Clay suggests that the literacy learning systems expand themselves within the head of the student. The student adapts what is known to these additional changes and expectations. As the students become more successful, they can cope with incidental adjustments and corrections to their learning (Clay, 2002).

Teacher Observation, Knowledge, and Scaffolds

To teach all children to read, knowledge about the reading process in terms of the integration of all the components by the student must be understood by the instructor. Moreover, the instructor must also know how to support learners in their zone of proximal development (Au, 1990; Clay, 1993b) and guide learner control to solve their problems (Wood, Wood, Ainsworth, O'Malley, 1995). The teachers observed during this study were reflective, highly trained, and offered continuing opportunities for growth as they refined their knowledge about the reading process.

Research explains that reading is not a sum of its parts but rather a system for communication between individuals that incorporates these components in support of the message created by the author for the reader (Goodman & Burke, 1980; Cole & Griffin, 1983; Smith, 1988, 1990; Wood, 1989, 1998; Rogoff, 1990; Clay, 1991a; Goodman, 1993). There has also been work to show that students may need encouragement to expect meaning from text (Clay, 1991a & b; Palincsar & Brown, 1983; Cole & Griffin, 1983). When students take on the process of reading for themselves, they learn more about reading each time they read, and that knowledge helps them to link the information they acquire in ways that are meaningful for them. During Times I, II, and III, Bill was a "messy" reader. His oral reading was never impressive. He was a successful reader in Time III. Later in June when he was assessed again he had made the best gains among the three students observed. His work during the three observation times clearly showed that he expected meaning from what he read and this probably kept him progressing in spite of difficulties caused by his physical and emotional problems.

Recommendations for Practice

Reading Recovery is not a panacea for learning to read and becoming independent. Clay reports that it is just good interactive teaching to meet the individual needs of students based on good record keeping, observation, reflection, and on-the-spot decision-making. Good teaching includes teaching for the development of knowledge and fostering independence. Progress has been made since the 1960s (Baumann, Hoffman, Duffy-Hester, & Moon, 2000), and teachers are most effective when they have sufficient philosophic breadth and a wide variety of reading approaches to use to meet the needs of all their students (Bond & Dykstra, 1997; Graves & Dykstra, 1997; Readence & Barone, 1997). Vygotsky's concept of learning in a social context (1962, 1978) suggests interactive instruction, which supports student knowledge of the task and goal. For this

process to be effective as in this study, fostering student independence is critical. Students, especially those experiencing difficulty, need to be taught in their own ways (Cole & Griffin, 1983), and independence can be the key factor for success. The findings support the following recommendations:

(1) Teacher should observe their students to learn what they can do, can almost do, or cannot do and keep records of teaching theories related to observed behaviors with dates of occurrence.

(2) Teachers should include opportunities from the beginning for students to behave like readers who expect meaning from their reading and who use functional independent behaviors to support their early reading successes.

(3) Teachers should offer a balanced program for individual learning that includes the incorporation of new knowledge and practice with familiar books for rereading during authentic reading opportunities. These behaviors should provide for flexibility and automaticity, both critical in the early stages of reading development.

(4) Teachers should instruct just beyond the student's current ability level and foster students by guiding them to be willing to make miscues that they detect and then self-correct.

(5) Teachers should always consider the gradual reduction of teacher scaffolds as new knowledge is acquired. This supports independence especially when teacher support resumes if a student seems to flounder. These scaffolds should resume from least supportive to gradually increased help as behaviors suggest.

(6) Teachers should foster the learner's disposition for independence as key to success when continual student learning is the goal.

(7) Teachers should show or tell students what they did that was correct in early lessons and have students monitor their reading as a part of their repertoire of independent behaviors.

(8) Teachers should allow the student freedom to learn in their own ways while teaching what needs to be known to solve current problems.

(9) Teachers should check that taught strategies are learned. When learning has not occurred it is time to reteach in a different way.

(10) Teachers' instruction should continually result from informed and reflective decisions to support student development based on observational data of student progress coupled with present need.

Suggestions for Future Research

The instructions observed during this study focused on fostering student independence within teacher/student dyads and dealt with students who were emergent readers in first grade classrooms. Suggestions for further study seem relevant and the following questions could focus such research:

(1) Can fostering student independence be transferred into primary classroom settings? Unfortunately, Vygotsky who developed the concept of learning in a social context did not include suggestions for how this should be done. In the literature search for this study, one reference addresses fostering student independence in New Zealand primary classrooms (Watson, 1994). Therefore, it seems appropriate to suggest a study to see how independence could be fostered in United States classrooms. Since fostering independence was observed to occur dyads in this study, the part of classroom instruction that would most likely provide a logical comparison would be the setting of individual instruction within a full classroom setting while other students are involved with appointed tasks.

(2) How can teachers be taught to foster student independence? Clay suggests that independence cannot be taught. She goes on to say that teachers find it difficult to let children be independent and that what teachers need to know is how to stand back and let the independent child take over. In this way the student learns what is expected quickly. M. M. Clay (personal communication, January 13, 1999). Training teachers in fostering techniques for student independence would be a worthwhile research goal. Perhaps the exploration would move from observing teachers who do foster independence to an exploration of the components of these behaviors to clinical observation of teachers being trained. Then discussions of progress while intentionally attempting such behaviors is possible.

(3) Since teacher scaffolding is so powerful in first grade tutorial Reading Recovery settings, can teacher scaffolding be generalized to peer scaffolding? In the study of children and adult tutors in single sessions with puzzle support, the child tutors had difficulty not telling the student what to do (McLane & Wertsch, 1986). Determining how to teach child tutors or peers how to support other students without telling or do them could be an interesting challenge.

(4) Can the replacement of functional independence by strategic learning be documented? Do students return to functional independence when difficulties emerge? Functional independence in this study was used with children who were just beginning reading instruction. In this study functional independence was used to enable students to read before they knew very much about reading. Functional independence seemed to fade as students gained knowledge and skill with the reading process. Whether students retain functional independence when difficulties emerge is a consideration. Maintaining

functional independence when the student has other strategies becomes an artificial scaffold that encumbers learner development.

(5) Can this study be replicated by non-Reading Recovery researchers?
The replication of this study has merit. A Reading Recovery teacher leader conducted this study by observing teachers she herself had trained. In observing their fostering of independence, the researcher found that it was difficult to observe the teachers without a Reading Recovery lens. It seems important to replicate this study with non Reading Recovery researchers. A replicate of this study with non-Reading Recovery researchers would further validate that fostering of independence is a contributor to reading success.

In this study, successful readers developed when teachers fostered independence and taught low students the way high students are taught. The intention of the teachers was to teach each student in a social or interactive context according to that student's current level of development. To do this each student learned to read using authentic texts, and scaffolds were provided at points of need, such as teachers praising students when the student behaviors were partially correct and explaining what was done well. Later the next day, that teacher checked to see if learning was secure and then, if needed, a few critical points were taught in memorable ways. After appropriate scaffolds were used, students became independent and then helped themselves learn, do, and know, as they became readers.

The findings of this study can be applied in the Reading Recovery community, helping teachers to look more closely at fostering independence with their students and sharing their insights with the rest of the educational community, especially primary classroom teachers. Thereby, other young students could benefit from the techniques for fostering independence. This area was not explored in this study but suggestions for future study were offered.