Chapter I
Introduction

Learning to read is a complex task easily accomplished by most students. One of the major educational concerns is ensuring success for those students who have difficulty learning to read. (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Adams, 1990; Allington & Walmsley, 1995; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Routman, 1996; Bond & Dykstra, 1997; Graves & Dykstra, 1997; Readence & Barone, 1997; Duffy & Hoffman, 1999). Some envision reading as a task the students teach themselves individually with the reflective support of others (Smith, 1988, 1990; Clay, 1991a; Lyons, Pinnell & DeFord, 1993;). From the perspective of ensuring success, learner initiative or independence is essential for the process of learning to read to develop smoothly.

Some students who initially have difficulty in learning to read do help themselves by "bootstrapping"(Stanovitch, 1986), but research suggests that most students who do not learn to read in the primary grades continue to find reading difficult throughout their lives, if they are successful at all (Chromsky, 1972; Juel, 1988; Clay, 1990; Hiebert, 1991). A conceptual shift offered by Watson supports the current study described here: "The problem is not student learning; it is that educators and researchers have not discovered how to teach all students yet" (B. Watson, Feedback on a Reading Recovery lesson, personal communication, Reston, Virginia, 1992).

If independence is essential for learning, then fostering that independence is a necessity for unsuccessful emergent readers. Studying the instructional setting that fosters student independence provides insight for teachers who seek increased student success. The study described here illuminates the process of fostering student independence while students learn to read. For the study, Reading Recovery instructional dyads were observed through the lens of Vygotsky's theory of learning in a social context, and independence, intersubjectivity, and scaffolding were examined within this qualitative study project (Vygotsky, 1978).

Independence

Although not always understood or specified, independence is an unspoken goal of all reading programs. The case can be made that intentional fostering for independence is a key ingredient for learning to read (Mooney, 1990; Clay, 1991a; Watson, 1994; Watson, 1999). Often in educational literature, independence refers to the physical setting of a student working alone with no reference to the quality of the student's work or to a developing ability level supported by an instructor (Watson, 1994). In this study, the operational definition of independence is defined as a student's ability to understand reading within the current ability level and to apply strategies to solve the reading problems that occur, thus negating the need for teacher support. (See more in Independence section of Chapter 2.) Others define *fostering independence* as modeling for behaviors, instruction for metacognition, and for self-regulation (Dorn, 1994; Cox, Fang, & Schmitt, 1998).

Whether or not a student has achieved independence in reading can be determined by observing student behaviors such as self-monitoring, checking work for accuracy, anticipating outcomes, and evaluating accuracy of the task performance. Unfortunately, unsuccessful emergent readers may believe that they can neither master nor control the reading process. With this attitude they neither participate in their learning process nor evaluate how their performance supports or hinders success. To overcome this dilemma it is important to help students by fostering independence from the beginning of instruction so that students can contribute to their reading success (Clay, 1991a).

Independence is a disposition or a character trait nurtured by opportunities to express reflective, inquisitive, problem-solving behaviors when confronting a problem (Katz, 1987). If a student lacks the disposition for independence, then teachers should foster problem solving as part instruction to enable learning to progress smoothly (Clay, 1991a).

If it is not an instructional goal, independence is rarely fostered while teaching. Most children who are slow to take hold of things and carry them out independently are held back by teachers who are not (a) creating opportunities for independence; (b) observing the child's accomplishments carefully; (c) backing off from interfering when the child could do it alone effectively; or (d) sharing the hard bits while the child expands independence over the easier bits (Clay, 1998). The fostering environment is supportive, instructive, and interactive when teachers use effective scaffolding (Clay, 1991a).

After observing students learning to read, Clay theorized that students can develop a self-extending or independent learning system from strategic scaffolds (Clay, 1982). She identified fostering independence as an important ingredient for learning to use strategies to solve reading problems. Instruction is presented slightly beyond the student's current level using appropriately challenging books and teacher scaffolds. As students take over tasks, they maintain a sense of independence as new learning occurs. The lesson is a rich instructional conversation that enables the child to read a new book independently (Clay, 1991b; 1993b). Therefore, the key is teacher/student interactions. Within these interactions, the subtle teaching behaviors of both intersubjectivity and scaffolding are essential to the process.

Intersubjectivity

Before commencing instruction, the teacher adjusts teaching goals to acknowledge the different definitions of the task, vocabulary, tools, and procedures that exist between the student and teacher (Wertsch, 1984). The teacher observes and assesses student performance to identify the student's abilities and understandings that indicate the student's knowledgebase. Then the teacher establishes a mutual instructional foundation including useful language discourse that comprises vocabulary for dialogue and teaching demonstrations. The teacher instructs by using what the student knows and by offering portions of new knowledge to help the student understand and learn. This learning environment equates to the zone of proximal development where partial knowledge is expanded in an equivalent of Vygotsky's learning in a social context

(1978). The student learns as the teacher scaffolds to build on existing knowledge (Clay, 1985). To maintain intersubjectivity, the teachers continue to assess and observe as they scaffolds learning with instructional conversations that help the student understand what is expected (Clay, 1993b).

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is observed in classrooms and tutorial programs that use an interactive teaching method. Scaffolds allow the teacher to lift the student beyond the current level to new learning. A scaffold can include recruitment, simplification of tasks, encouragement and support, assisted performance, shared effort, and demonstration. Scaffolds also support intentional fostering for independence.

Important to the process is evaluating when to reduce the scaffold to support the student's emerging control of the task. A teacher might guide a student to solve a reading problem and not encourage thinking strategies to solve that problem or future related problems (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

An example of a scaffold that does not help the student gain access to the unknown word "red" might be: "What is your favorite color?" This question suggests the need for guessing and offers no helpful reading strategy to the student. A supportive strategic scaffold would be to use an information cue such as one of the following: "What does the word start with?" (visual information cue), "What does the picture show?" (meaning information cue), or "What would make sense here?" (language information cue). These questions suggest using information cues from the text itself as thinking strategies for this and future reading situations.

These strategic questions are examples of human mental development originating in verbal communication between a student and a more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978). The development first shared by teacher and student later becomes the means for student organization of behavior (Luria & Yudovich, 1959). Scaffolding is a way to teach by supporting learning (Bruner, 1990). Bruner expanded on Vygotsky's theory by providing an educational application using diagnosis and scaffolding in zones of proximal development (Wood, 1988). An educational parallel in Vygotsky's work suggests that the zone of proximal development is only useful when instruction leads the learner into new territory (1978). Interactions that scaffold learning difficulties may result in instructive questions that the student internalizes. These later become learner thinking in the teacher's words that scaffold the learner until the learner can appropriate them as tasks.

A Reading Recovery teacher scaffolds students beyond the boundaries of their knowledge to new learning (Clay, 1991a). The teacher instructs by having a conversation with the student while the student reads the text. This interaction is described as "a system of social interaction organized around the comprehension and production of texts that demonstrably create new forms of cognitive activity in the child" (Clay & Cazden, 1990, p. 206). Because of these interactions,

Reading Recovery provides an excellent venue for observing dyads, intersubjectivity, scaffolds, and learning in a social context (Clay & Cazden, 1990), as well as for observing the fostering of student independence as students learn to read (Clay, 1993b).

<u>Reading Recovery</u>

Reading Recovery is a one-on-one reading intervention program for first grade emergent readers who are struggling with classroom reading instruction. It is not a remediation program but rather a successful prevention program (Smith-Burke, 2001) when classroom instruction is not working that solves instructional problems. Reading Recovery often negates the need for a remediation program later (Pianta, 1990). The program is respected for its success with the lowest performing students (Slavin & Madden, 1989). The lessons are individually tailored to meet specific student needs. A Reading Recovery lesson lasts 30 minutes and follows a carefully orchestrated sequence of events that include reading one or two familiar leveled books, rereading yesterday's new book and making a running record, identifying letters or making and breaking words or both, writing a story, rearranging a cut-up story, introducing the new book, and attempting the new book (Clay, 1993b p.14).

Purpose of the Study

This study was undertaken to learn how fostering student independence in reading supports reading success. The approach was to observe the student/teacher instructional dyads in Reading Recovery lessons. Clay calls the language of these dyads "instructional conversations" (Clay, 1993b).

The observation data were collected over a 18- to 22-week period of instruction at three different times: early, midway, and late in the students' program, labeled respectively as Time I, Time II, and Time III. These data collection intervals were key to the data collection.
The analytical scheme was then developed to guide the observations:

     a.   Observe student learning as it occurs over time in terms of independent reading.

     b.   Observe the ever-changing problem-solving strategies of three students as they respond or do not respond to their teachers' instructional attempts to foster student independence in reading.

     c.   Observe how and if the students assume skills, regulate their own behavior, and can assess and solve their immediate reading tasks in an independent manner.

     d.   Observe what the teachers do that supports or hinders the development of student independence.

The observations were of the new book introduction and the first attempt sections of the lessons; that is, the new book orientation and first attempt to read that book. Primary goals were to observe (a) what student and teacher behaviors occurred, (b) changes in behaviors as students matured as readers, (c) what teacher behaviors could be identified as fostering student independence.

The observed lessons were transcribed as linguistic units, and these data were analyzed to identify shifts in independent within lessons and growing independence across lessons as the students progressed from being assisted by the teacher to being independent.

Throughout the analysis, it was important to consider Vygotsky's theory of learning in a social context as a reference for understanding what was observed (Vygotsky, 1978). To analyze the conversations, a qualitative study was developed that explored the content of the interactions. Analysis of the participants' behaviors during these instructional activities was expected to expose behaviors helpful to understanding the process of fostering and acquiring independence.

<u>Guiding Questions</u>

The questions that guided this study were:

1.   What student behaviors exhibited during the orientation and first attempt to read the new book reflected growing independence within the Reading Recovery lessons?
2.   What teacher behaviors exhibited during the orientation and first attempt to read the new book reflected fostering growing independence within the Reading Recovery lessons?
3.   What evidence of identifiable shifts in a student's program reflected growing student independence?

<u>Study Organization</u>
The literature review follows in Chapter II. A description of the methodology is in Chapter III. Chapter IV provides the case studies of the three students who participated in the study. These cases show how teacher behaviors respond to student academic needs. In Chapter V, the analysis of the data is presented. A discussion of conclusions and recommendations for instruction are in Chapter VI. Supporting data and documents are placed in the Appendixes.