

Learning to Compose: the conversation before writing



Mary Rosser
Reading Recovery UTC
University of Maine

Learning to Compose: the conversation before writing
Response to Video Clips: guide observation and discussion

Video 1 – Giselle Working in Small Group Situation
Questions

- In what ways is this teacher helping these young children learn the elements of conversation identified in slide 10?
- What did you notice about the teacher’s use of language?
- What did you notice about the children’s developing use of language?

Put down your ideas as you watch the video and be prepared to share your thoughts with colleagues

Video 2 – Writing. “My mum likes the house quiet. Everybody has to be quiet. They whisper and they lock their mouths.”

As you watch this video

- note the significant ideas you would like to share and discuss with colleagues

Video 3 – Writing. Exploring the genre of problem/solution through “The Hungry Kitten”

As you watch this video

- Identify what Giselle is
 - Learning, and
 - learning how to do (becoming strategic)
- Identify the ways in which her teacher uses language to support her learning

Video 4 – small group work around Ben’s Candle

As you watch this video

- Identify the ways in which the teacher’s language shapes the children’s thinking

Video 5 –Writing. Baby List

Question

- What are the major points of discussion for you in this teaching/learning episode?

Video 6 – Writing. Letter to the Dolls from Little Teddy

As you watch this video

- Note the teacher’s emphasis
- What was interesting about this?
- Discuss your responses with a colleague

In Summary

- What are the major personal points of learning for you?
- What are the major points of discussion you would like to take to your colleagues?



Session Overview

In this session participants will:

- Explore the power of talk and rich conversations in literacy learning
- Observe the reciprocal links between talk, reading and writing in promoting accelerated learning
- Trace the journey of an ELL student as she engages in group and shared conversations to learn language, learn about language and learn through language

Share in writing activities where a range of genre are explored and composed throughout a series of Reading Recovery lessons

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Conversation and Talk

Why is the conversation before writing a topic of interest for so many of us ?

What are the types of talk used by literate people?

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Types of Talk

- Automatic talk
 - subject matter of every day life
 - spontaneous
- Literate Talk
 - sophisticated
 - academic
 - analytical
- Involves
 - complex sentences
 - symbolic language


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Literate Thinking

- Literate talk promotes literate thinking, which is:
 - analytical
 - symbolic
 - reflective
 - systematic

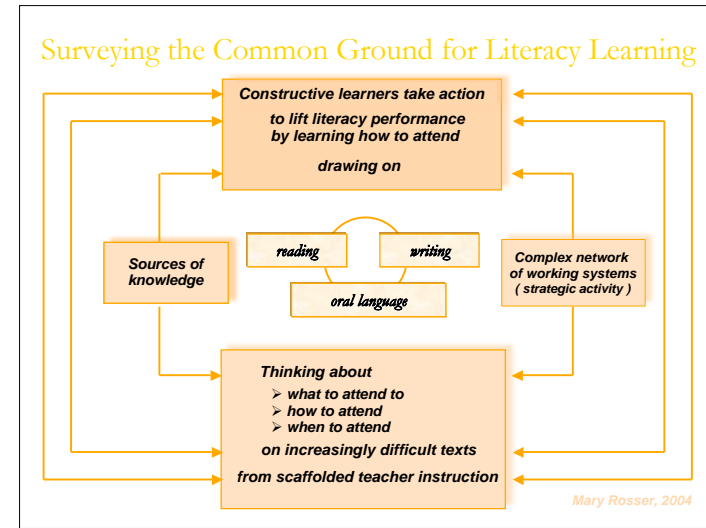

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Literate Thinking

- How does the classroom prepare students to think in these ways in order to:
 - problem-solve
 - learn language, about language and through language?

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Literate Thinking

- How does the classroom prepare students to think in these ways in order to:
 - problem-solve
 - learn language, about language and through language?
- Through rich conversations, writing, and the exploration of meaningful texts

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Conversation - What is it?

Conversation is:

- A learned literate practice
- A mode of communication involving oral language
- An informal, fluent exchange of ideas
- Purposeful
- Meaningful
- Generated by participants
- Shaped by participant roles and relationships
- Shaped by the context in which it occurs

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Conversation - What is it?

Conversation is:

- An active composing process of:
 - Formulating, shaping, constructing, patterning and communicating thought
 - Listening to, assimilating, analyzing and synthesizing thought
 - Identifying, shaping, building upon, extending, clarifying ideas
 - Effective meaning making between participants

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Importance of Conversation

- Humans need to talk
 - Talking is our greatest resource for expanding our knowledge about the world
 - We learn through conversation with more knowledgeable others

Dorn, Linda (2006) Keynote presentation at the Arkansas Comprehensive Literacy and Reading Recovery Conference. Little Rock: Arkansas

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Importance of Conversation

- Language is a tool for encoding ideas and thoughts
 - Collaborative talk about books becomes the tool for expanding our knowledge

Dorn, Linda (2006) Keynote presentation at the Arkansas Comprehensive Literacy and Reading Recovery Conference. Little Rock: Arkansas

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Conversation - What do participants need to know and know how to do to successfully engage in conversation?

Participants need to understand:

- Subject Matter
- Genre of conversation
- Participant roles and relationships
- Process of engaging in conversations

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Conversation - What do participants need to know and know how to do to successfully engage in conversation?

Participants need to draw upon and use:

- Prior understandings and experiences of successful conversations

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Conversation - What is the purpose of conversation before writing?

“When a child composes the ‘message’ that he will write during his lesson it is not a matter of copying words or stories. It is about:

- Going from ideas in the head
- To spoken words
- To printed messages
- And finding out that you can reconstruct those messages”

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p. 51

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Conversation - What is the purpose of a conversation before writing?

The teacher’s role is to get the child to compose and write his own stories. Writing is as much about composing as it is about spelling. It is about:

- Building a body of known words
- Building a writing vocabulary
- Construction words from their parts

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p. 52

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Conversation - What is the purpose of a conversation before writing?

The teacher’s role is to get the child to compose and write his own stories. Writing is as much about composing as it is about spelling. It is about:

- Shifting from simple sentences to complex sentences
- Using a variety of ways to structure sentences
- Packing more interest into the message

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p. 52

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Conversation - What is the purpose of a conversation before writing?

"Some children struggle to compose orally even a short message. Yet during the course of a series of lessons a child learns how to bring together:

- The ideas
- The message (which must be his own)
- The search for ways to record it
- The monitoring of the message production

And the reading of what he has recorded"

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p. 52

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Conversation - What is the purpose of a conversation before writing?

Important emphases are:

- The child is invited to tell a story
- He composes the message, which means that he puts the message into a structured sentence or two, and
- He feels he has ownership of it.

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.55

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The Composing Process - What facilitates the composing process?

Opportunities to:

- Explore and use oral language
- Engage in conversations
- Hear and enjoy stories
- Develop an ear for the patterning, rhythm, intonation of language

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.153

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The Composing Process - What facilitates the composing process?

"read a story to the child, demonstrating fluent reading. Reread it with the child, leaving him to add the end of the sentence, fluently.

This can provide support from the feel and the sound of the patterns of words and the rhythmic breaks or pauses..."

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.153

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The Composing Process - What facilitates the composing process?

Opportunities to:

- Tell stories
- Develop understanding, ease and fluency as a storyteller
- Learn how to
 - Generate ideas
 - Create a storyline/ sequence of events
 - Structure/ pattern language
 - Orally present the story to an audience

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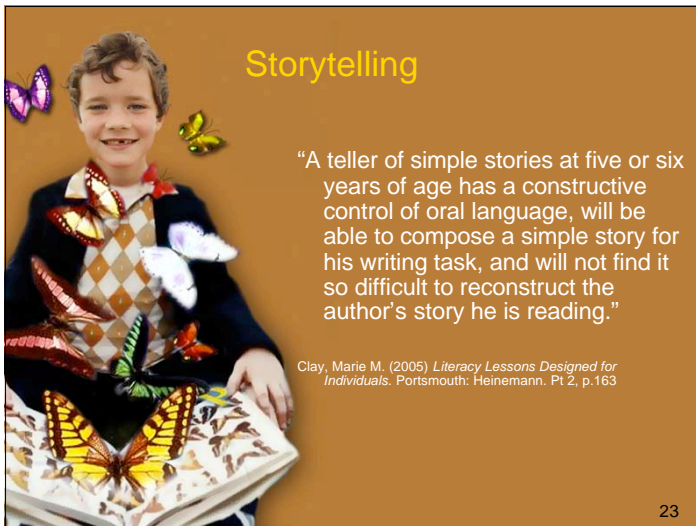


Storytelling

“I am convinced that children who have listened to stories told, and who can retell stories in their own way, with or without a book to support them, have been given something that helps them through their first steps in literacy learning.”

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.163

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Storytelling

“A teller of simple stories at five or six years of age has a constructive control of oral language, will be able to compose a simple story for his writing task, and will not find it so difficult to reconstruct the author’s story he is reading.”

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.163

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Storytelling

“Being able to ‘tell a story’ is probably a giant leap forward for prospective readers”

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.50

Question:
How do children learn to become storytellers?

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Learning to Compose - When does this begin in a child's series of lessons?

Consider the importance of:

- Classroom activities of storytelling and dramatic play
- Peer/Buddy story reading and storytelling
- Play and playground experiences
- Home opportunities
- Roaming Around the Known

Question:
What are the implications of learning to compose for Roaming Around the Known?

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Oral Language

"Teachers ask,
'What are the quick ways to extend a child's control of oral language?'"

There are no quick ways to extend language but the best available opportunity for the Reading Recovery teacher lies with the conversations she has with the child in and around his lessons."

"The child can talk. He has been composing messages orally for three or four years."

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.51

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The Social Context of Literacy

- Participating in social conversation enables students to:
 - Use language to explore ideas and solve problems
 - Understand the cultural norms for accountable talk
 - Become familiar with the rules and guidelines for sharing ideas and participating in conversation
 - Learn how to build conversational chains

Dorn, Linda (2006) Keynote presentation at the Arkansas Comprehensive Literacy and Reading Recovery Conference. Little Rock, Arkansas

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Starting a Conversation - Triggers for generating a story

"The message can be about anything that interests the child, something he has done, a message to someone, something going on in his classroom"

- The topic might come from a variety of sources
- Classroom theme or event
- Something that captures his attention
- Something you have brought along to capture interest
- Discussion of one of his books
- Some other source

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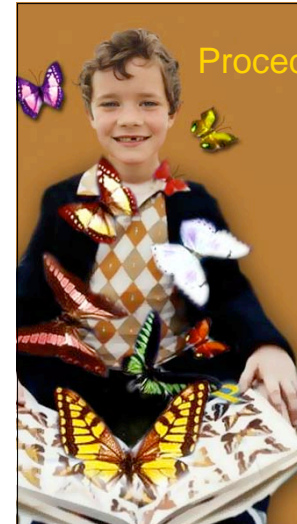
Procedure for eliciting a story

Points to consider:

- Start up a conversation, guided by all you know about this child.
- Talk about something that you feel sure he would be interested in
- This should not be an interrogation

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.56

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Procedure for eliciting a story

Points to consider:

- In a genuine, but short conversation, help reluctant children to compose something.
- Give some thought prior to the lesson to how you will get this particular child to compose a message.

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.56

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Procedure for eliciting a story

Did you notice

- HRSW - done incidentally with word "read"
 - Mary, demonstrates how to slowly articulate, hear and record
- ❖ NB The teaching is so seamless and elegant, the conversation so natural, that one could miss the strong teaching and secure learning if our attention wasn't drawn to it.

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.56

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Procedure for eliciting a story

At first the teacher creates the conversation

- She asks genuine questions
- Elaborates on the child's ideas a little
- Makes only minimal change to the child's ideas or use of words.

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.56

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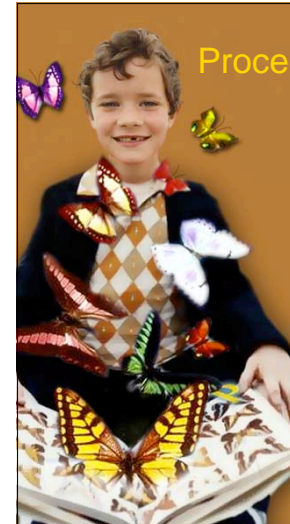


Procedure for eliciting a story

- Then at an appropriate point the teacher asks the child to formulate the message to be written
 - ‘What could you write about that?’
- Encourage him to tell you the message he would write
- As you respond to his effort stay with his message, but encourage him to expand on his statement, say a little more or tell what happened then.

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.56

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Procedure for eliciting a story

A Caution:

- One alteration from the teacher may be enough to throw the child so that he cannot recall what he composed
 - Alter the sentence as little as possible

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.163

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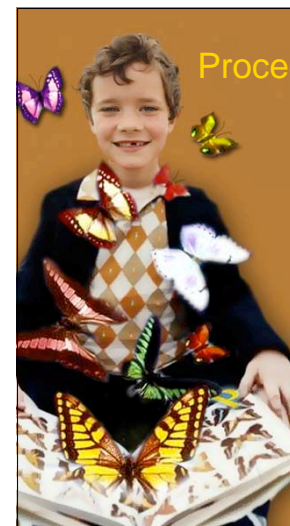
Procedure for eliciting a story

A Caution:

- This is not a time to correct grammar
 - Use the correct grammar in your conversation to provide the appropriate model for him to hear.
 - If you alter the child’s sentence he is very likely to become confused and may not remember the alteration.
 - Be brief and clear and try not to confuse the young composer at this point.

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.56

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Procedure for eliciting a story


A Caution:

After the child has become an eager writer:

- The teacher may suggest how a sentence might have some more ideas, or be changed in structure, just a little.
- If the child cannot go with your suggestions, back off. He is the composer, and the goal is for him to want to write tomorrow.

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p.56

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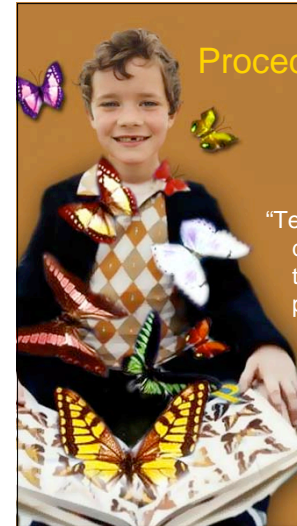


Procedure for eliciting a story

“What seems to be a casual conversation between child and adult...is actually an excellent example of a highly skilled adult moving a child through his zone of proximal development.”

Rodgers, E.M. (2000). Language matters: When is a scaffold really a scaffold? *National Reading Conference Yearbook*, 49, pp. 78-90

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Procedure for eliciting a story

“Teachers make deliberate teaching decisions that increase accessibility to the task while supporting the child’s performance.”

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 2, p5.3

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Conversation prompts

- Have you ever had a time when ...
- Can you tell me more about that?
- I wonder - I wonder why ...
- Close your eyes and think about ...
- What makes you think that?
- Something's confusing me

(Mary Fritz, 2006)

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Conversation prompts

- This is like
- That makes me think about
- What are you noticing?
- did you sayhave I got that right?
- Can you make a connection to that idea?
- I like that. I wish I had thought of it
- You know what I heard you say?

(Mary Fritz, 2006)

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Extending conversation

- Paraphrasing
Teach explicitly and call for rehearsal
 - Did you say? Have I go that right?
 - What I hear you saying is
- Piggybacking
When one idea leads to another's idea
 - Oh, that was like when I ...
 - I did that, too
 - That's just like when I

(Mary Fritz, 2006)

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Change over time

- Early in a series of lessons the child may compose a single sentence
- Later he may compose two or three sentences, writing one before composing the final form of another.

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Change over time

- Early in the lesson series the teacher may want the child to repeat the sentence to be sure that he remembers it.
- But this should not sound like a rejection
- The goal is for the child to have a clear memory of the sentence he composed, so that he can monitor his writing production against the remembered sentence.

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Change over time

- Towards the end of the lesson series children will usually be composing on the run, probably writing one sentence, then composing another and writing it, and so on, much the way they would work in the classroom.
- By the end of a lesson series the child's construction of messages should show an increase in syntactic complexity and some skillful packaging of ideas.

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Change over time

“When the child is at the end of a series of early intervention lessons he will have fluent control of these practical aspects of story production and will be ready to blossom into producing stories of greater length and quality back in his classroom activities.”

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

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The Concept of Acceleration

Acceleration depends on how well the teacher:

- Selects the clearest, easiest, most memorable examples with which to establish a new response, skill, principle or procedure
- Selects reading and writing opportunities that reiterate this child's new learning in the context of his learning history

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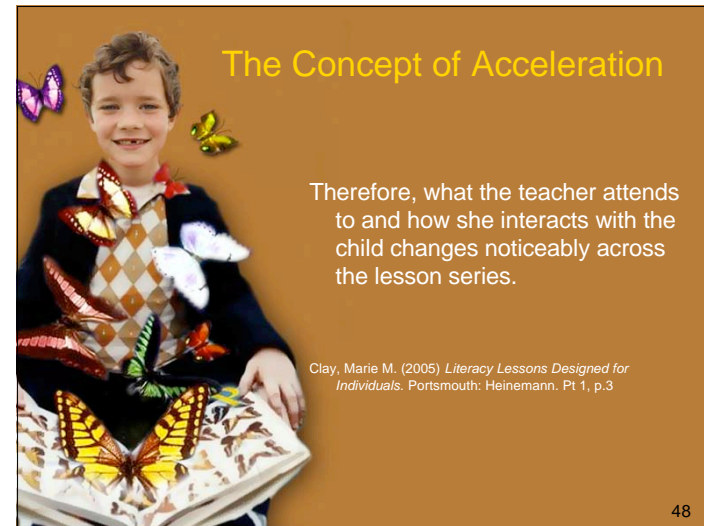


The Concept of Acceleration

Acceleration depends on how well the teacher:

- Helps the child to leap appropriately
- Provides opportunities for the child to take over the learning process and work independently, discovering new things for himself inside and outside the classroom

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The Concept of Acceleration

Therefore, what the teacher attends to and how she interacts with the child changes noticeably across the lesson series.

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The Concept of Acceleration

Question:

What does acceleration look like in the conversation before writing?

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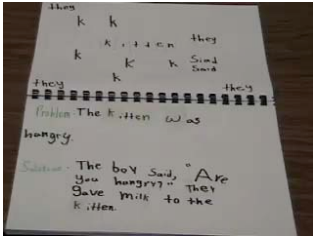
The Importance of Writing

"When a child leaves an early intervention the prediction is made that the child is likely to survive in the classroom continuing to increase his level of performance...."

That prediction is safer if the child has satisfactory levels of performance in both reading and writing, and longitudinal research evidence shows that the prediction is more at risk if the writing has been neglected, and allowed to lag behind reading progress."

Clay, Marie M. (2005) *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. Pt 1, p.128

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 k . t . a . n they
 k k n Sind
 k
 these The kitten was
 hungry
 Solution - The boy said "Are
 you hungry?" they
 gave milk to the
 kitten.



Acknowledgement

My sincere appreciation goes to Mary Fritz and Giselle for their generosity in inviting us into their community of learners. Through their shared experiences and conversations Mary and Giselle help us extend our understanding of language, learners, and the process of learning to compose during writing.

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