Taking Words A-part, Ap-art, Apar-t While Reading

Elizabeth L. Kaye, Trainer, Texas Woman's University

Note: All names are pseudonyms.

"*Perfect*," Chase mused as he stared at the word he had just figured out, "it has *er* in it. And *perfect* sounds like *purse*."

Children learn about taking words apart while engaged in real reading and writing of continuous text, as Chase's comment reveals in the preceding example. The goal of word analysis is for the reader to be able to take words apart quickly, as needed, while reading and writing (Clay, 2005b). These may be new words, words still being learned, or known words that appear in unexpected places. Learning begins when children first pick up a book or set pencil to paper. Yet, confusions and misconceptions can occur which forestall progress. Knowing how and when to support children's efficient word analysis during Reading Recovery lessons can be challenging.

In this article, I share my learning journey as I studied how children worked at taking words apart while reading and writing. The exploration began with the study of reading behaviors of proficient second-grade readers (Kaye, 2002). I marveled at the variety of ways they worked out complex words and at their efficiency in doing so while maintaining the fluent pace of their reading. My analysis and reflection continued as I worked with children in Reading Recovery and studied *Literacy Lessons Designed*

for Individuals Part One and *Part Two* (Clay, 2005a, 2005b). I began to see important links between the reading behaviors of proficient second graders and those of my first graders in Reading Recovery. As I refined my understanding of Reading Recovery procedures and the rationales behind them, my teaching decisions became more helpful. By sharing this exploration, I hope to support teachers' thinking about taking words apart as they observe children, analyze their lesson data, study with colleagues, and reflect on their teaching.

Learning from Proficient Readers

Clay (2005b) reminds us that competent readers break words in many different ways and that our aim for children in Reading Recovery should be the same. Because we are preparing children to work as independently and successfully as their classroom peers, it is important to clearly understand our endeavor. Clay's reference to the variety of ways proficient second graders break words comes from a study in which I followed a group of children across an academic year, taking running records monthly to gain insight about their strategic reading activities (Kaye, 2002). In the process, I learned a great deal about the ways they worked on new or unusual words. Four key features of the second graders' word solving stand out as critical to this discus-

sion. (See Kaye, 2002, 2006 for more detail.)

1. Variety — Skillful second-grade readers used 63 different ways to take words apart while reading. Every child demonstrated several different ways of breaking words, yet many methods were unique to particular children at a particular point in time. The following example illustrates five children's attempts to work out the word *industries* in a passage about Peter the Great from *Qualitative Reading Inventory-3* (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001).

Text—Peter tried to establish modern *industries…*

Sara: in-dus-tr, industries

Caleb: in-, in-dustries

Greta: intri-, industries

Jasmine: indu-, industries

Steven: in-, industries

Clearly there was not one "best" way to approach a difficult word, and children were flexible in their attempts.

2. Efficient units — Second-grade proficient readers used large, efficient units when taking words apart. They never tried to solve words phoneme-by-phoneme or letter-by-letter. They were adept at quickly accessing a variety of useful segments to help them solve words on the run. (See Table 1 for the most common units used in solving words.)

Table 1. Efficient Units for Second Graders' Word Solving

	Examples	
Units	**Child's Attempt**	**Word in Text**
Multisyllable segments	inter-ested	interested
	elec-, electricity	electricity
	Saca-jawea	Sacajawea
Syllables	voy-age	voyage
	skir-mish	skirmish
	purch-, purchased	purchased
Root word + ending(s)	sight-ing	sighting
	strength-ened	strengthened
	long-, longer	longer
Halves of compound words	news-paper	newspaper
	ship-yard	shipyard
	earth-worm	earthworm
Onset-rime	fl-ip	flip
	th-eory	theory
	n-, notes	notes

3. Left-to-right analysis — Every time these competent readers broke words apart, they worked left to right. Across hundreds of examples, the children never began by articulating segments toward the middle of words or at the end of words. They always started on the left and worked sequentially across the word. Occasionally they returned to the beginning for a second attempt. For example, children read

- *dr-ied* for *dried*;

- *es-tablish* for *establish*;

- *in-dus-tr-*, *industries* for *industries*; and

- *pair-*, *pairlem-*, *parliement* for *parliament*.

It seems this sequential movement pattern across words, using useful clusters, had been firmly established by second grade.

4. Independence — Proficient second-grade readers always attempted the complex words they encountered.

They never stopped and waited for a "told," nor did they appeal to the teacher for help without trying the word. In addition, they never skipped a difficult word and read on to the end of the sentence. They always made attempts, and sometimes multiple attempts, at point of difficulty. These readers had a range of problem-solving actions that they initiated to work at challenges.

Each of the four observed patterns occurred on instructional-level texts which children usually read in a fluent, phrased manner. The vast majority of substitutions reflected the integrated use of meaning, language structure (syntax), and visual information from print (letter-sound relationships). Although children's substitutions were excellent approximations, they were frequently able to self-correct those errors as well.

As I reflected on the efficient and sophisticated problem solving I had observed in proficient second-grade readers, I realized the awesome

responsibility we have with the first-grade students we tutor in Reading Recovery. These children will need to develop an equally complex range of problem-solving behaviors as they move through second grade. As a Reading Recovery teacher, I need to be sure my students take initiative to problem solve early in their lesson series. I want to ensure that they can quickly access useful parts of words while moving sequentially across print. Habituating appropriate directional movement is paramount. Students must also be able to efficiently integrate meaning, language structure, and visual information from print while reading. Finally, I need to help students learn to work flexibly, trying different ways to problem solve as they maintain the fluent flow of their reading. My job in helping them construct the beginnings of a self-extending system is critical to their future success. These thoughts weighed on my mind as I reread *Literacy Lessons* and began to examine my teaching and my lesson data with renewed intensity.

Exploring *Literacy Lessons*

Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals (Clay, 2005a, 2005b) guides our work with children in Reading Recovery. Although we can find helpful information for thinking about word analysis in many places, my exploration centers upon four areas of Clay's text: (a) chapter 5 of *Literacy Lessons Part One* "How children's behaviours change during a series of individual lessons;" (b) "Taking words apart while reading" in section 12 of *Literacy Lessons Part Two*; (c) chapter 1 "Learning to look at print" in *Literacy Lessons Part Two*; and (d) chapter 2 "Learning to write words and messages" in *Literacy*

Lessons Part Two. I find that the more I am able to keep a focus on problem solving within continuous text, the fewer detours I need to make toward isolated word work. Therefore, section 13, "More about attending to words in isolation" in *Literacy Lessons Part Two*, is beyond the scope of this article.

Change over time

In a section entitled "Changes teachers might observe during lessons," Clay (2005a, p. 48–51) describes some general changes that help us think about shifts in our teaching as children's literacy behaviors change across the lesson series. This section is intended to serve only as a rough guide to progressions in learning for our students, yet I think it is important to consider the direction we are taking students. In looking across the section, I am struck by the number of supportive opportunities for learning about taking words apart within the different lesson components and across the lesson series.

Within each lesson component presented on these pages, the early phases of learning (labeled *I*) address the initial challenges of directional movement, letter order and orientation, spatial concepts, and breaking apart known words. In early lessons, children learn the arbitrary but non-negotiable rules about direction and sequence in written language and the relationship of print to spoken language. Learning "how" to look holds critical importance. In fact "Learning to look at print," chapter 1 of *Literacy Lessons Part Two* (Clay, 2005b), specifically addresses these concepts and lays the foundation for the later, more-sophisticated work children will be engaging in to take words apart.

The middle phase (labeled *II*) emphasizes the use of several strategic activities and multiple information sources. Breaking words is supported by fast recognition of letter forms and fast links to sounds. Children work in sequence and are able to break in different ways and make some connections to similar elements in other words. Growing expertise with phonological elements and some orthographic features also characterize the middle phase of a lesson series.

Later learning (indicated by *III*) involves more independence and fluency. Flexible word- and word-part processing happens rapidly—on the run—in reading and writing, even with multisyllabic words. In addition, children gain expertise with phonological and orthographic analysis and use of analogy. Perhaps not surprisingly, this latter description describes the complex problem solving I observed in proficient second-grade readers, although they were reading more-sophisticated texts than the first graders in Reading Recovery.

Taking words apart while reading— delving into section 12

Taking words apart while reading involves any word work done from continuous text in reading or writing. The bulleted list on page 125 of *Literacy Lessons Part Two* suggests many opportunities for becoming more expert at taking words apart, and few of them occur in isolation. Teachers should be sensitive to these opportunities across the lesson but beware of taking words apart unnecessarily, which could distract children from the meaning of the story.

"Most word work occurs on continuous text, using the particular child's known vocabulary as the reference

point" (Clay 2005b, p. 126). It is easier to learn how words work by examining those that are already known. If we help children work with the knowledge they are secure in, they will be able to link new experiences to their existing body of knowledge (Clay, 2005b). These opportunities support our aim for the child to "bring what he knows to bear on his attempts to read" (Clay, 2005b, p. 128). We glimpse this phenomenon of linking what is known to that which is new in Chase's comments at the opening of this article.

The importance of children being able to use what they know to problem solve became strikingly clear during my work with proficient second-grade readers. In one of the tasks I had administered, I asked two different children how they had solved the word *puncturing* in a text they had just read. Marcus said that he figured out *puncturing* because it was like the word *punching*, except for the middle part, which he explained was like *turn*. However, Rita told me she had figured out *puncturing* because it looked a lot like *punctuation*, except for the last part. Both children had made sophisticated analogies based on words in their own repertoires to solve this novel word *puncturing*, and both children were successful in their attempts. Using what one knows well is an efficient way to problem solve.

Early accomplishments include learning to break letters out of words (Clay, 2005b, p. 19–20) and breaking words apart (Clay, 2005b, p. 42–45). By taking apart known words, children learn how to look efficiently at letters or letter clusters within words, moving left to right. They also begin to sort out the concepts of *letter* and *word*. This early learning is not

intended to help children link sounds with letters, as they learn to do in the writing portion of the Reading Recovery lesson. Rather, it ensures that children learn to consistently look left to right. At first we help children break words letter-by-letter, and we ensure they perfect this way of looking. Before long, we introduce different breaks: inflectional endings and onset-rime. Within each of these activities, children must respect the directional sequence for our written language. At this point in children's learning, we are not expecting them to use this breaking for word solving, but in time, these breaks become familiar to them. We are encouraged to take opportunities to break words in other lesson activities from time to time (see step 5 Clay, 2005b, p. 45). Children may break the word anywhere, but we ensure that their eyes are moving left to right across the words.

I see two clear links between the behavior we are working to establish with these procedures and the actions of competent second-grade readers. First, by engaging in these procedures with our children in Reading Recovery, we can help establish a consistent way of looking (left to right). The accomplished Grade 2 readers always worked left to right; that movement pattern was rapid and invariable. Secondly, we are demonstrating useful ways to break words (at the inflectional ending and between the onset and rime). These second graders were flexible in their approach to taking apart words. Although there was no best way to break a word, onset-rime breaks and breaks at inflectional endings occurred frequently. Variety and use of efficient units were two hallmarks of their word solving.

Clay (2005b, p. 127–129) reminds us that children who are very familiar with breaking words apart in different ways may begin to "take words apart in reading" but that studying words in isolation and making analogies are later accomplishments. Because we are focused on accelerative progress, teachers need to be judicious about their teaching decisions, considering the individual child's competencies and the appropriateness of the word segments being attended to. The list at the bottom of page 127 (Clay, 2005b) provides a general guide for thinking about what is "easy to see" or "easy to hear." The observant teacher, armed with detailed knowledge of the child, will select opportunities for taking words apart that help extend the child's problem-solving repertoire.

Exploring Teaching Interactions

Teaching children in Reading Recovery has provided numerous opportunities to observe children's developing literacy expertise and to hone my teaching and analysis. By reviewing carefully taken records, I can trace my teaching decisions and my students' paths of progress. I share some of the highlights in the following lesson excerpts.

Early learning
Early in Amber's lesson series I realized that I needed to help her increase her meager knowledge of letters (six at entry) and words and help her become strategic with those she already knew. Directionality, one-to-one matching, and locating words were important early accomplishments. Because initial letters are easy to see, they would provide a useful starting point for her word analysis. I knew that it would be easiest for Amber to use letter-sound knowledge if I helped her use her own associations with those letters. Data from the writing segment of her daily lessons, her alphabet book, and her reading vocabulary provided the exemplars I used as links in the following interactions from one of her early lessons.

Having difficulty recalling the name of the animal (a lizard) depicted in

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a familiar story, Amber paused and pointed to the picture.

Text—I see a lizard.

Amber: I see a— What's it called?

Teacher: (placing the magnetic letter *l* on the table in front of Amber) It's *lizard*. It starts like *like* (clearly stressing the /l/ sound of her known word *like*).

Amber: I see a *lizard*.

From Amber's behavior, I had hypothesized that she was searching her memory for the name of the animal, but to no avail. I placed the magnetic letter *l* in front of her to clearly draw attention to the first letter, which I wanted her to notice (see Clay 2005b, p.129 "Draw attention to first letters"). As I told her the word, I simultaneously demonstrated that this unfamiliar word *lizard* was like something she knew. I was establishing the idea that she can use something she knows to help her get to something new.

Later in the same lesson, Amber hesitated after correctly reading *supermarket*.

Amber: /s/, supermarket. Right?

Teacher: What would you expect to see at the beginning of supermarket?

Amber: S

Teacher: Okay, now see if it makes sense, too.

Amber: (rereads the sentence then nods in confirmation)

I wanted Amber to use her emerging letter-sound knowledge, which she demonstrated by articulating /s/, in conjunction with her strong use of meaning to check on herself.

Therefore, when she asked for confirmation, "Supermarket. Right?" I put the responsibility on Amber to use what she knew to take the initiative for checking that the word looked right and made sense. Knowing which information a child is able to use is essential before expecting her to check one kind of information against another.

Later in familiar reading, Amber read a story containing several animal characters. After reading one of the pages correctly, Amber explained a link she made.

Amber: (pointing under the *p* in *pig*) See? It's like *Palmer*. (her last name)

Teacher: Yes, it starts like a word you know—*Palmer*!

Impressed with this link to her last name, I replied in confirmation. This brief interaction contains several features that are generative to continued learning.

- Amber is bringing what she knows to bear on her reading attempts (Clay, 2005b, p. 128). The link is one that she retrieved because *Palmer*, her last name, was familiar to her.

- First letters are often easy to see and hear. Amber's comment is evidence that she is looking left to right, an essential movement pattern for our written code.

- Children will begin to attend to the things that we attend to if our instruction is clear and well-suited to the individual learner.

In each of the interactions shared from this lesson, I was careful to help Amber use something she knew as a link to foster this new learning. In addition, I was intentional in ensuring that the meaning of the story did not get lost as I drew attention to visual information. At this point in Amber's lesson series, I was also using the breaking activities beginning on page 42 of *Literacy Lessons* (Clay, 2005b) to help her habituate efficient left-to-right looking across known words.

The writing portion of the Reading Recovery lesson also supports word analysis. When children can write a word correctly, letter-by-letter, teachers can give them opportunities to do it again and again more quickly. In doing so, children are learning to pay close attention to scanning all the details of the word in order and recognizing those details as a pattern (Clay, 2005b).

Even in the earliest lessons, I worked to build Amber's writing vocabulary and produce known words more fluently. In Lesson 13, Amber composed the story, "I saw a monkey at the zoo." She wrote *I* and *a* fluently and had the opportunity to learn *at*. Constructing words in writing fosters the later visual analysis of words in text. These writing experiences would help her tackle future challenges in reading and writing.

Amber was also learning to hear sounds in words, although she had not yet learned the lesson procedure of slowly articulating a word she wants to write and recording sounds in boxes. I supported her learning in Lesson 13 by making links to the few sounds and words she knew, as in this example with the word *monkey*.

Amber's story—I saw a monkey at the zoo.

Teacher: Mmmmonkey (stressing the first sound)

Amber: (no response)

Teacher: (with emphasis on initial /m/ sounds) Mmmonkey starts like Mmmom.

Amber: M! (records *M* in her story)

By deliberately emphasizing the initial sound and linking it to a word she knew, *Mom*, I gave Amber the opportunity to use her known word in a strategic way to begin to solve a new word in writing.

Final letters and syllable breaks

Final letters and inflections are often useful places to draw children's attention. Step two of "I can take words apart" introduces children to breaks at inflectional endings (See Clay, 2005b, p.43–44). Before long, children may be noticing these endings in words they encounter, as Jackson did while reading *Monkey on the Roof* (Clough, 2000) and *Just Like Daddy* (Asch, 1981).

Text—"Come down to me, Monkey," said Emma. "Here he comes," said Matthew.

Jackson: "Come down to me, Monkey," said Emma. "Here he comes," said Matthew. Hey, look! *Come* and *comes*. This one (pointing to comes) has an *s*!

Text: All day we fished and fished, and I caught a big fish…

Jackson: All day we fished and fished, and I caught a big fish. I get it! *Fish* and *fished*! (covering and uncovering the *ed* ending of *fished*)

Not only had Jackson noticed inflectional endings as he read; he seemed excited about his discovery.

Literacy Lessons suggests that teachers can support children's attention to visual features through questions which prompt them to look for familiar features of words and search for what they know (See Clay, 2005b, pages 111 and 133). A "scale of help while reading" (p. 132–133) helps us think about how to alter the level of support we give. Records of my interactions with Amber during the first reading of *One Cold Wet Night* (Cowley & Melser, 1980) reveal how I was supporting her visual analysis of inflectional endings and helping her use syllable-level breaks, which are easy to hear.

Text—I'm going to be warm tonight.

Amber: I'm— (stops at *going*)

Teacher: Do you know a word that looks like that?

Amber: Go…*going*! I'm going to be warm (rereads) I'm going to be warm

Teacher: What can you see that might help? (After a pause, teacher divides word with her finger, showing the segment *to*, then moves her finger away.)

Amber: to-n, tonight. I'm going to be warm tonight.

Teacher: Did that make sense?

Amber: (nods)

In these examples, I used two questions: "Do you know a word that looks like that?" and "What can you see that might help?" I called her to look at the word in text and search her own repertoire. Amber found

go and then was able to read the word *going*. The second interaction required a bit more support. I asked, "What can you see that might help?" Amber did not respond, so I quickly used my finger to divide the word. After finishing the book, I turned back to a page with the word *tonight*. I wanted to be more explicit about how she might find help within a word, and in this case I highlighted the syllable breaks. (See Clay, 2005b, p. 131, "Finding help within the word.")

Teacher: Clap *tonight*.

Amber: (clapping once per syllable) to-night

Teacher: Show me *to*

Amber: (divides the word with her finger so *to* is visible)

Teacher: Show me *night*.

Amber: (divides the word with finger so *night* is visible)

By deliberately articulating part of the word, I was calling her to hear a useful part, which she then located. This brief interaction, then, reinforced both hearing and seeing useful parts of words.

Amber's running record of this Level 6 text on the next day demonstrated that she was beginning to use some of these useful breaks. (Figure 1 depicts this part of the running record.) I was astonished to see that many of her reading behaviors were similar to those that proficient second-grade readers showed on much more sophisticated passages. Amber read in a phrased manner, particularly after working out some initial challenges on pages 3 and 4. Her approximations and substitutions were quite efficient too. In Table 2, I share my analysis of Amber's problem solving

Figure 1. Excerpt from Amber's Running Record

Cross-checking on information (Note that this behaviour changes over time)

Page	Title: One Cold Wet Night	Count		Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections — Information used	
		E	SC	E MSV	SC MSV
2	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓				
3	✓ w- / went ✓ out / outside sc ✓	1		Ⓜ Ⓢ Ⓥ	M S Ⓥ
4	✓ ✓ got / jumped sc in / into sc ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ to- / tonight ✓	1 / 1		Ⓜ Ⓢ v / Ⓜ Ⓢ Ⓥ	M S Ⓥ / M S Ⓥ
5	✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ / ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓				

on a portion of the story and explain how it relates to my observations of skillful second-grade readers.

Given the similarity of Amber's reading behaviors in *One Cold Wet Night* and the reading behaviors of capable second-grade readers, it seems we can observe some signs of efficient word-level solving fairly early in children's lesson series. With careful observation and skillful support, teachers can help their Reading Recovery students extend their competencies on increasingly complex texts.

The writing portion of Amber's lesson during this timeframe provided additional opportunities for word analysis.

Amber's story—Me and my sister got chocolate milk at the mall. I spilled.

Amber wrote the high-frequency words in her story unaided (*Me, and, my, got, at, the, I*). In this lesson, I introduced the procedures for advanced learning in which Amber would have to attend to spelling in addition to the sounds of words (see Clay, 2005b, p. 77). To help Amber think about the letters she would expect to see in *sister*, I drew a box for each letter. In her attempt, Amber seemed to be working with a large

cluster when she wrote *sis* as a unit. She then recorded the *t* and paused. My verbal support helped her use a word she knew to finish writing *sister*:

Teacher: It takes two letters for *er*, like in *Amber* (stressing the *er* sound of her name).

Amber: E-R! (She fills in the last two boxes.)

Teacher: Does that look right?

Amber: Yep.

In the word *milk*, Amber easily recorded the first two letters, then I supported her with the hard-to-hear *l*. Amber showed her flexibility as she

Table 2. Analysis of Amber's Problem Solving and Relationship to Proficient Second-Grade Readers

Page 3 Text: He went outside. Then
Amber: He /w/ went out. outside. Then

My Analysis	Similiarity to Proficient Grade 2 Readers
/w/ went As Amber read, she quickly articulated the onset (first sound) of went, then solved the word in its entirety. This is efficient solving.	The onset-rime break was one of the most- frequently observed ways proficient second-grade readers took words apart. In every case, it was a rapid action.
out, outside (self-correction) Amber said *out* with a drop in pitch that seemed to indicate she had ended the sentence. When she made this substitution for *outside*, she seemed to have searched for and used a combination of meaning, language structure, and visual information. In fact, she used the entire first syllable of the compound word *outside* in her attempt. Despite the good fit with all these sources of information, Amber made a second attempt that resulted in a self-correction.	The vast majority of substitutions made by proficient second-grade readers were meaningful, syntactically appropriate, and visually similar to the word in text. Even though they made "good" substitutions, they frequently corrected their initial attempts. In addition, breaks between two halves of a compound word were common.

Page 4 Text: The horse jumped into the bed and said, "I'm going to be warm tonight."
Amber: The horse got, jumped in, into the bed and said, "I'm going to be warm to-tonight."

My Analysis	Similiarity to Proficient Grade 2 Readers
got, jumped (self-correction) Amber made a meaningful substitution that was structurally appropriate, then she probably noticed that *got* did not look right. Incorporating some visual information, her second attempt resulted in a self-correction right at the point of error.	Proficient second-grade readers consistently integrated meaning with visual and structural (syntactic) information as they read. Self-corrections often occurred immediately following the error.
in, into (self-correction) When taking the running record, Amber's pitch change and pausing led me to believe that *into* was a self-correction; however, it is possible she was taking the word apart. Again, Amber's initial substitution seems to indicate that she was integrating meaning, syntax, and visual information in print. More careful attention to visual detail probably led her to self-correct. *Into* is a compound word composed of two smaller words in Amber's reading and writing vocabularies.	When accomplished second-grade readers took apart multisyllabic words, they often paused briefly at the syllable break. In this case, the syllables also correspond to the two halves of a compound word. This type of breaking seemed to be efficient and successful for them.
to-tonight This attempt is just a bit different than her attempts with *outside* and *into*. Rather than stopping after saying the first part of the word, she elongated the vowel sound of *to* then said the entire word. The way she drew out the sound led me to hypothesize that she was in the process of solving the word, so I did not consider it a self-correction. (For clarification, see Clay, 2002, p. 63) Once again, Amber used an efficient breaking point to take the word apart. She worked at the syllable level for this compound word that begins with the known word *to*.	Breaking at the syllable level or between two parts of a compound word happened frequently with proficient readers in Grade 2. Sometimes readers paused briefly at the break, and at other times they elongated the first half of the word as shown here. This breaking seemed to be efficient and effective for them.

worked on the final sound and considered her options:

Amber: (hesitating at the last box) C or K?

Teacher: What would look right?

Amber: K. (fills in the letter *k*)

This brief interaction indicates that Amber knew there were two possible ways to represent the sound at the end of *milk* and that she could search her personal store of knowledge to decide which looked right. She had probably seen the word *milk* before, and she may have had an idea that *c* rarely appears at the end of an English word.

To write the word *mall*, I asked Amber to search her personal repertoire and find a word that might help her:

Teacher: Do you know a word that sounds like *mall*?

Amber: Ball! (She proceeded to write *mall*, needing no further help.)

Amber easily made the analogy from the word *ball*, which she knew well. The word *spilled* was a bit more complex. Rather than drawing boxes to support her attempt, I chose to help her use another word she knew:

Teacher: If you know *will*, then you can write *spill.*

Amber: (writes *will*, then writes *spill*)

Teacher: What ending will turn *spill* into *spilled*?

Amber: E-D (records the inflectional ending *-ed*)

In the writing portion of this lesson, Amber had the opportunity to quickly produce known words, use

known words to get to new words through analogy, learn more about orthography, and construct new words by analyzing sounds and thinking about what would look right. The shift toward working with clusters is a notable sign of progress related to taking words apart. Her facility with tackling a new word by relating it to a known word was a new accomplishment that would support her problem solving in reading and writing.

Compound words, analogies, and surprises

When I observe carefully and capture children's comments, I get valuable insight about what they are noticing. We do not have to teach children everything they need to know; they learn from daily interactions with text, as Aiden taught me as he read *Blackberries* (Randell, 1996).

Text—Mother Bear's blackberries went into this basket.

Aiden: (reading correctly) Mother Bear's blackberries went into—Hey, *into* is *in* and *to*!

He had discovered a compound word! The fact that he noticed how the word was constructed would fuel his future efforts.

Aiden was also noticing that some words sounded alike, as in this example from *The Three Little Pigs* (Van Lille, 1995).

Aiden: *Sticks* is like *bricks*.

Teacher: What do you mean?

Aiden: It rhymes.

Teacher: Yes, they do rhyme!

At the end of that book, I wrote *sticks* and *bricks* on a small white board so Aiden could see that they also look similar; they share the same rime.

I helped him make a link between what he could hear and what he could see in these words. These connections would be generative to taking words apart in reading and constructing words in writing.

On another day, while reading a story in which a lost bear climbs up a tree (Randell, 1996), Aiden asked an insightful question that opened another window into his thinking.

Text —I'm lost, but I'm good at climbing.

Aiden: I'm lost, but I'm good at climbing. It's *climbing*, right? It has a *b*?

Teacher: That's surprising. We can't hear the *b*. Does climbing make sense, though?

Aiden: Yes. (He continues reading the story.)

That was not Aiden's first experience with silent letters, but it may have been the first time he realized that a *b* could be silent. Aiden was uncovering some of the irregularities of our language.

Growing independence

As children become more-proficient readers, they develop more ways to problem solve and become quicker at accessing the information they need. These progressions are evident in Griffin's records from the middle and latter parts of his Reading Recovery lesson series.

Griffin had recently become adept at working with inflectional endings. His quick self-correction of *paint* for *painted* and the way he broke *lifted* into two parts (*lift-ed*) indicated that inflectional endings were fairly easy to work with. I supported Griffin when he stopped at the word *began*:

Griffin: (stops at the word *began*)

Teacher: Look for something that will help you.

Griffin: *be*, *began* (and he continues reading)

This prompt directed Griffin to examine the word, search his personal store of knowledge, and make his own link. Although I did not specifically direct his attention to a particular part of the word, he found *be* then said *began*. Later in the same book I heard him solve *beside* on-the-run in the same manner, with just a slight pause after the first syllable (*be-side*). My records indicated that he was learning from his own efforts, and my support for taking words apart was primarily verbal at this point in his lesson series.

Griffin worked efficiently with useful word parts while writing as well. Several of his comments during the writing of the following brief story indicate that he was working in segments as he wrote, finding useful clusters and making his own links.

Griffin's story—My mom put red sparklings on the stockings.

Griffin: My mom put red (silently writes each word) Sparklings—I know it starts like Spiderman!

Teacher: (draws a box for each letter in *sparklings*)

Griffin: (silently writes *sp*, then begins to say the word) sp-ar A-R (records *ar*) /k/ /l/ *ings* (He correctly records the rest of the letters in the boxes while articulating.)

I was excited to hear him say and record the word *sparklings* in clusters

as he worked. This behavior will serve him well with other complex words he has to write, and it complements the kind of solving he may need to do when encountering an unusual word in reading.

Griffin continued writing *on the* and then came to *stockings*.

Griffin: *Stockings* sounds a lot like *sparklings*.

He had made an interesting observation about how words sound alike, probably referring to the final syllables of *stockings* and *sparklings*, and possibly to the first sound as well. He needed support to hear the *t* in the *st* blend, but recorded it easily after I articulated the word with emphasis. He quickly recorded the *o*, then filled in *ck* as a unit, and finished by fluently writing the cluster *ings*. Over time, Griffin had learned to search independently and make his own links. I think about the prompt I had often used, "Do you know a word that sounds like that?" Griffin appeared to be asking himself that question and answering it!

Toward the end of his lessons Griffin wrote stories that were several sentences in length, often working without boxes. He occasionally tried out a word on his work page and if it did not look right, he produced an alternative spelling and judged whether it looked better. Supported by an extensive reading and writing vocabulary, he was flexible in his approach. He read in a fluent, phrased manner and worked quickly at the syllable level to solve words: *be-side, be-tween*, and *happ-ens*. He solved *kernels* on his own by breaking it into three useful segments: *k-er-nels*. At this point, my support was no longer needed to remind him to find something he knew or to show him how those

words worked. He used his finger only occasionally to break words, usually using just his eyes as proficient second-grade readers do.

Putting it All Together

After focusing so intently on taking words apart, I have to remember to keep the bigger picture in mind. There is much more to reading and writing than noticing letter clusters. Good readers are able to direct their attention in different ways when reading continuous text (Clay, 2005b, p. 126).

- letter feature
- letter level
- cluster or letter sequence
- word level
- phrase level
- sentence level
- passage level

We want to be sure that our students can go back and forth among these levels easily—pulling together the information they need—to understand and enjoy the message as they read and write. Children who have frequent, successful opportunities to read and write continuous texts will be working well with all of these levels.

Early attention to directional movement is critical to children's later success in taking words apart, as is the establishment of early concepts about words and letters, and the ability to break words letter by letter or in clusters. As teachers, we also need to recognize and build upon each student's strengths in reading and writing. Our carefully planned demonstrations and support around continuous text will allow children to take on new

learning, becoming more independent and efficient at looking at print and taking words apart. Teaching and learning work in concert, so we challenge ourselves to make excellent teaching decisions that will foster students' accelerative progress. If we keep our aim in mind, knowing what good readers do, we can support our students' continued learning. Studying *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part One* and *Part Two* (Clay 2005a, 2005b), making careful observations, and reflecting on our teaching with our records and with colleagues will support our continued learning as well.

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About the Author

Elizabeth (Betsy) Kaye is a Reading Recovery trainer at Texas Woman's University. She has been involved in Reading Recovery since she trained as a teacher in 1988–89, and has also worked as a special education teacher and a classroom teacher. She currently serves on the RRCNA Board and the executive committee of the North American Trainers Group.