

## Adapting Early Literacy Techniques to Middle-School

### Students: A Case Study

John Burgin

University of Arkansas at Little Rock

*This case study is the result of a mother's request to help her twelve-year-old girl who was reading on a second grade level. After years of special education, and participating in "skill-centered" tutorials at a local Sylvan Learning Center, her daughter seemed to be making no progress. The author suggested using a more "child-centered" approach modeled after an intensive one-on-one intervention with first graders called Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993).*

*After daily 1.5 hour tutorials for a month, the student learned to read more strategically, and her reading level and writing ability grew tremendously. The purpose of the case study was to formally answer the mother's questions about the differences between skill-centered and child-centered intervention programs, and describe the methods the author used to coach the student. Ideally, this discussion will help parents make informed decisions, and provide educators with ideas for literacy interventions with middle-school students.*

This article is the result of a mother's request to help her twelve-year-old girl who had just finished fifth grade but was reading on a second grade level. In addition to three years of special education services, her daughter Andrea had been participating in tutorials once or twice each week for six months at the local Sylvan Learning Center (Sylvan Learning, 2006). Her daughter seemed to be making no progress, and did not want to go any more. She wanted me to look at Andrea's standardized test scores, special education records, and logs from her afternoon tutorial sessions at Sylvan. When she asked me what I thought, I told her that I was uncomfortable with the "skill-centered" workbooks that Andrea had been using, and that I believed in a more "child-centered" approach that uses direct assessments of reading strategies to plan individualized instruction.

When Andrea's mother approached me, I had just completed the yearlong Reading Recovery training (Clay, 1993), and I wondered if Reading Recovery techniques designed for an intensive one-on-one intervention with first graders could be adapted to work with older children. I agreed to work with Andrea almost daily

for a period of about a month. After she learned to read more strategically, Andrea's reading level and writing ability grew tremendously over the summer. I then realized that a case study about Andrea's situation might be valuable to parents and teachers with similar questions and concerns.

The purpose of the following literature review is to formally answer Andrea's mother's questions about tutoring. The differences between skill-centered and child-centered intervention programs are examined, and two child-centered methods of early intervention that have great potential to be adapted to middle school learners are described. Finally, the methods I used to coach Andrea are outlined. Ideally, this discussion will help parents make informed decisions, and provide teachers with ideas for interventions in middle-school education.

#### Types of Interventions

Students who have not made the transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" have a difficult time functioning in the middle school

classroom. If students have not developed strategies to manage unfamiliar texts independently by fourth grade, then social studies, science, and math texts are often too difficult for students to read. Problems are then compounded because poor readers avoid reading activities (Gaffney, Methven, & Bagdasarian, 2002). The more students struggle, the more likely they are to be referred for special education services, tutoring, or some other type of intervention.

The question for parents, special educators, and classroom teachers alike is the same: "What kind of intervention?" Different types of programs suggested in educational literature or in the popular press vary widely. Types of interventions seem to fall within one of two categories: "skill-centered" or "child-centered." Skill-centered programs emphasize mastering reading *skills* and succeeding on standardized multiple-choice tests that compare millions of children. Child-centered models emphasize shaping the *strategies* readers use to make sense of texts as they actually read.

### **Skill-Centered Interventions**

The commercial tutorial services widely available nationally are generally skill-centered. Sylvan Learning Centers (2006) offer subject-specific instruction, and beginning reading tutorials that cover phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and applied skills. "LearningRX" (2006) claims to "treat causes not symptoms." Instruction focuses on "underlying cognitive skills that enable the brain to process information – auditory skills, attention skills, comprehension, visual processing, memory, and problem solving."

Educational journal articles that advocate some type of skill-centered program are also common (Bucalos & Lingo, 2005; O'Connor, Bell, Harty, Larkin, Sackor, Zigmond, 2002; National Reading Panel, 2000). For example, "Success for

All" advocates structured lessons in phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Borman & Hewes, 2002; Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan & Wasik, 1992). Similarly, the "Spell Read Phonological Auditory Training (P.A.T.)" (Toresen, Rashotte, Alexander, Alexander, & McPhee, 2003) consists of 140 structured lessons divided into three phases. Teacher's manuals provide guidance for each lesson. Early lessons consist of 40 minutes of auditory and visual activities using non-words, 15 minutes of shared reading, and 7 minutes of free writing. Later lessons focus on vowel variants, consonant blends, and the development of fluency with polysyllabic words.

### *The Remedial Model of Assessment*

The type of assessment educators use to diagnose problems is a concrete example of the fundamental difference between the skill-centered and child-centered models of intervention. The results of standardized multiple-choice tests are often used to design skill-centered instruction. Ideally, students then do better on the skills the test measures: phonetic skills, auditory discrimination, vocabulary, comprehension, etc. The purpose of the test is to assess what the child does *not* know, and then teach them that content or skill – a remedial model.

Advocates of a child-centered approach argue that standardized multiple-choice test items require behaviors that only correlate with reading ability, but the items do not directly measure the fluid act of reading itself (Farr & Carey, 1986). Therefore, multiple-choice assessments are "indirect" measures of reading ability, and instructional programs based on multiple-choice tests teach behaviors that are "like" reading. Completing workbook activities are unlikely to generalize to the process of making sense of text – reading.

Child-centered methods are also assessment driven, but the purpose of the test is opposite. Child-centered programs

rely on informal assessments like the Reading Miscue Inventory (Goodman, Short, & Burke, 1987) that directly describe the strategies readers use to make sense of text as they read. The purpose of these assessments is to understand what the child *does* know, and then instruction is built upon the child's existing knowledge. Specifically, instruction is focused on demonstrating, prompting, and coaching students while they are actually reading or writing texts. This exercise creates a "scaffold" between known information and new information (Dorn & Saffos, 2001).

### *Child-Centered Interventions*

Advocates of a child-centered model of reading intervention object to the simplistic model of literacy exemplified by skill-centered programs (Goodman, 1996), and the horse-race mentality of selecting the one "best" intervention (Pearson, 1997). Rather than teaching reading as a set of isolated skills to be mastered, or adopting one-size-fits-all programmed materials, advocates of student-centered models believe that teachers should use literature and writing activities to build readers' ability to problem-solve when they get stuck.

In this context, the teacher's decision-making rather than the program's materials is the key to success. Two intervention models that are based on this belief are the Retrospective Miscue Analysis (Goodman & Marek, 1996), and a program for beginning readers named Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993). Both interventions' methodologies are based on an analysis of "reading miscues."

### *Reading Miscue Inventory*

A Retrospective Miscue Analysis (RMA) intervention is based on an analysis of a reader's mistakes or "miscues" called the Reading Miscue Inventory (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1988). As text is orally read, the administrator uses a pencil to mark on a parallel copy of the story in a

way that describes what reader does when they get stuck. They mark word or sound substitutions for text words, words inserted, omissions of text, self-corrections, and repetitions of text words or lines in a sentence. An analysis of the patterns of reader's miscues creates a "window into the reading process" that can be used to plan instruction.

Goodman found that some miscues disrupted the meaning of the text, and others did not. Once a text is marked with reader's miscues, the administrator of the test asks a series of questions about each miscue:

Did the miscue result in a semantically/syntactically acceptable sentence?

To what degree did the miscue retain the grammatical function of the text?

To what degree did the miscue retain a semantic relationship to the text?

To what degree do miscues look or sound like the text's words?

Does the reader use the strategies of repeating text and/or self-correcting?

The answer to these questions enables the administrator to describe the cueing systems the reader is using or ignoring when they read text: meaning, syntax, or visual. The "meaning" cueing system refers to when a reader uses their past experience or the context of the story to figure out an unknown word. Readers use "syntax" cues when they repeat a line to build context, or produce a miscue that still results in a syntactically correct English sentence. When a reader substitutes sounds for the letters of unknown words, or substitutes whole words that look a lot like the text word, they are using "visual" cues.

Strong readers use multiple cueing systems to produce "high quality" miscues that are visually similar to the actual text and respect the meaning and syntax of the text sentence ("like" for "love"); weak readers tend to depend on one system exclusively (sound-it-out) and their miscues do not help them comprehend the text.

### *Retrospective Miscue Analysis*

In general, an RMA uses the results of a Reading Miscue Inventory (RMI) to discuss the quality of miscues with readers. Then during oral reading the teacher coaches and prompts readers to try more effective strategies. Over time, readers learn to monitor their own comprehension, and use multiple cueing systems to problem-solve as they read. Readers then develop a “self-extending literacy processing system” (Clay, 1993) that enables them to read-to-learn independently.

Another variation of a RMA is to have students in the middle grades form groups and discuss their own reading miscues. Students in the group take turns taping themselves reading. Group members then mark a parallel transcript, and categorize the miscues the volunteer made. The emphasis is on two things: classifying miscues into a low or high quality category, and problem solving using miscues the group judged to be low quality.

The discussion is centered on the cues the volunteer could have used to figure out an unknown word. For example: re-reading the line to build context for the unknown word; looking for common spelling patterns within the word to help sound across a word; and/or thinking about what is happening in the text and substituting a word in the sentence that makes sense. Problem solving with peers and adults helps young readers monitor their own comprehension and helps them to self-correct miscues independently.

### *Reading Recovery*

Reading Recovery (RR) is an early intervention program that is also based on the analysis of reading miscues. Like the RMA, RR instructors are trained to use miscues to coach readers to use more effective strategies. In addition to miscues, RR teachers are trained to use student’s spelling approximations to plan prompts and “assisted writing” activities. Unlike the RMA, teacher certification in RR requires

an intensive year of training. During this time, teachers learn to observe children’s literacy behaviors and design individualized instruction, and trained “Teacher Leaders” coach novice RR teachers while they work with children.

RR is designed to be a short-term one-on-one intervention for first-grade children who are struggling. The rationale for targeting first grade children is to catch problems early and avoid more costly interventions like special education. RR teachers meet with students 30 minutes per day, every day, for 70 days or *fewer*. Ideally, the child develops a self-extending system during this time, and will be successful in their classroom-reading group. The content of the lessons changes daily, the prompts teachers use evolve and change, but the routine of each 30 minute lesson is very predictable.

1) The child re-reads a few stories that are very familiar. The teacher prompts for fluent reading, and one or two selected miscues are discussed when the child is finished reading.

2) The child then reads a story that was introduced the previous lesson. Rather than prompt students, the teacher records miscues to be later analyzed and used to plan prompts, select new texts, and plan “make-and-break” activities.

3) Teacher and student use magnetic letters to make-and-break words that have predictable English spelling patterns. Early lessons build quick recognition of letters, and the spelling patterns of common words (i.e. the “an” or the “it” part in words like “man” or “sit”). Later lessons tend to focus more on using the onset and rime of known words to make unknown words (i.e. “st” from “stay” and the “ack” from “back” can be broken apart to make “st-ack.”).

4) Next, the participants cooperatively construct a written message. The child orally constructs one or two sentences about what they are reading, or something important that has happened to them recently. The child writes what they

can and the RR teacher either adds parts that the child cannot, or helps the child make-and-break words they cannot spell on the “practice page” (the back of the last page used). The text is then written on a sentence strip, the teacher cuts it up into parts (whole words or word parts constructed on the practice page), and the child puts the sentence strip back together.

5) The lesson concludes with the introduction of a new text at the student’s “instructional” reading “level.”

#### *Introducing Leveled Texts*

The books used for the RR program are “leveled” (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999; Pinnell & Fountas, 2002); that is, they range in difficulty from a 1-80 or A-Z (beginning to about 8<sup>th</sup> grade level). The texts systematically build in the complexity of the vocabulary, sentence structure, and text pattern. RR teachers use a variation of a miscue analysis called “running records” (Clay, 1993) to calculate accuracy rates, describe the student’s reading strategies, and plan instruction.

Texts that students read below an accuracy rate of 90% are within a reader’s “frustration” level; texts students read at an accuracy rate of 96% are at the student’s “independent” level; and texts between that range the range of 90 and 96 percent are within the student’s “instructional” level. Specifically, the text presents enough challenges to provide the teacher with opportunities to coach or prompt the student to work through problems without presenting so many challenges that the child becomes frustrated.

When introducing a new text to a child, the RR teacher uses a variety of discussion techniques to help the child use their background experience to comprehend the new text, and provide a context for problem solving with unknown words. For example, the child is asked to use the picture on the book cover and the title to make predictions about what the story is about. The teacher then leads the

child through a “picture walk” in which the child uses the pictures to make inferences about what is happening. The teacher also asks the child to talk about their own experience in similar situations, and takes a few moments to discuss proper nouns and other words that may be a challenge the child.

Next, the teacher provides a short synopsis of the story and sets a purpose for reading; for example, “Read the story to find out how Johnny solves his problem with [something specific to the story].” As the child reads the new story the teacher prompts the child to use multiple cueing systems when they get stuck. Finally, the teacher checks for comprehension by asking the student to re-tell the story, and praises the child for a few specific instances where the child successfully self-corrected following a miscue.

#### *Adapting Reading Recovery Techniques for Older Children*

The program I designed for Andrea had the same basic elements as a reading recovery lesson: 1) re-reading familiar text; 2) taking a running record and discussing miscues; 3) making-and-breaking words 4) assisted writing; and 5) discussing new texts; making connections; then modeling, prompting, and coaching the use of strategies while the child reads orally.

But the lesson cycle I used differed from a RR lesson in that the lesson was a more fluid cycle of orally discussing texts, reading texts, and writing about texts. For example, “making and breaking” words was a byproduct of this cycle rather than a separate activity at a specific time. Another difference was that we attempted to complete the cycle twice each lesson by reading at least two chapters of a novel and writing chapter summaries.

Nonetheless, both programs were based on the same principles. Much like the relationship between speaking and listening, both programs were designed to harness the interplay between reading and

Reading Goals
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Don't point to words; use index card under the line</li> <li>2. When you get stuck reread the sentence and make the first letter sound of the word you do not know.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Don't skip words unless attempted</li> <li>b. Read past the word and say something that makes sense</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Use your finger to cover parts of words and find parts of words you know to help you sound across. Pay attention to endings</li> <li>4. Make text sound like talk               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Read phrases not words</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

Writing Goals
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use your finger, make spaces between words.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Go to the next line if don't have room</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Reread to make sure it makes sense               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Check word endings</li> <li>b. Use caret to add words if you forgot one</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Spell words in the best way you can               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Say the word slowly</li> <li>b. Use practice page to see if it looks right</li> <li>c. Break words into chunks and sound across</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Try different kinds of sentences               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Write in phrases (in the box, by the door)</li> <li>b. Use "because" and time-order words</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

Figure 1. Andrea's Reading and Writing Goals

writing strategies (For example, the similarities between the process of spelling and decoding an unknown word). Both RR and my intervention plan relied on models, prompts, and teaching points that were tailor-made to the learner's needs based on informal reading and writing assessments.

Although the cycle I used was not a one-to-one match to a RR lesson, I use the RR descriptors of each element of the lesson as headings in the following narrative to highlight the common underlying theory. Regardless of difference in the lesson sequence, direct assessments of reading behaviors are critical to creating individualized goals, and planning instruction.

#### *Using Assessment to Create Goals and Plans for Instruction*

The standardized test scores the school district provided suggested that Andrea was reading at approximately the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level. I listened to her read and took running records; I had her read grade-level word lists, and I asked her to re-tell the story she read in writing. The results of these assessments agreed with the school district's diagnosis, but the data I gathered also generated concrete information that could be used to plan instruction.

While reading a level 34 text (beginning of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade), Andrea read word-by-word with little fluency. She rushed through the text rarely pausing, skipping words inadvertently, and ignoring word endings. Her primary strategy was to substitute whole words for text words regardless of meaning (harder for hundred; below for borrow; flood for falsehood; meal for metal; abdominal for automobile). She never repeated a line, and rarely attempted to self-correct or "sound-out" words. Consequently, her comprehension was poor; and her retelling of text events was incomplete, full of misconceptions, and sequentially confused.

Likewise, her writing was almost unintelligible. Even she could not always read what she had written. She was in a hurry. Her spacing between words and letters was irregular; she left out words, and her spelling made it difficult to understand her message (She omitted word endings, and invented spellings or substituted one word that looked similar to the one she wanted).

The goals designed for Andrea's intervention were remarkably similar for both reading and writing. Goals and sub-goals were introduced one at a time after she began to use the strategies associated with earlier goals.

*Rationale, Materials, and Format for Tutorial*  
Like a Reading Recovery program, I

wanted to meet with Andrea almost every day, or at least as many continuous days as possible. This was necessary to gain momentum and develop interest in the novels as soon as possible. Unlike a 30 minute RR lesson, the tutorial lasted for an hour at first; later, we took an hour and 20 minutes per session to make more time for independent silent reading and independent writing.

The first novel took 10 days in June to complete. The second novel took 6 days as a tutorial and three days independently. Novel three was read independently in July. Four days in August were used to introduce novel four and reinforce strategies before Andrea finished it independently over three days; and novel five required two days of introduction and ten days of independent reading. The intervention consisted of a total of 22 days of instruction, and 16 days of independent reading over the two-and-a-half months of the summer break.

The selection of the novels to be read was critical. Selections needed to be at the right level to challenge Andrea, and hold her interest. When children first make the transition to chapter books, proper nouns become one of the most difficult roadblocks. Sequels and series remove this barrier because the student's knowledge of people, places and things carry over to the

next book, and more working memory is free to focus on other challenges. Beverly Cleary's trilogy of *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* (1965), *Run Away Ralph* (1970), and *Ralph S. Mouse* (1982) were selected because they were all level 34's and they appealed to Andrea's interest in motor scooters (she had one), and pets (she kept gerbils).

In August, the difficulty of books went up to levels 38 & 40 respectively with Beverly Cleary's *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (1983) and the sequel *Strider* (1991) to which she also had a connection because, like her, the main character's parents were getting a divorce and the book revolved around a dog (she had a lap dog).

#### *Using Book Introductions to Make Texts Familiar*

At first, *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* was above Andrea's instructional level, but the sliding level of support (model, prompt, coach) I provided during early lessons enabled her to progressively take more responsibility for the text. In order to build context and interest in the novel, I read the first two chapters of while Andrea took notes in categories: settings, characters, and problems. We talked about the relationships between settings; we located settings on a map; and we discussed similar

Substitutions	Tolds	Sounds/parts
<u>Beautiful</u> Beauty	Reassuredly	R ←
<u>Speed</u> Sped	Obviously	Exssss/except SC
<u>Ignore</u> Ignorance	Spokes	Ad-mit-ed*
<u>Grabbed</u> Grasped	Momentum	Dis-gust-ed*
		Br-isk-ly*
		Sc-old-ed*
		Re-son-ably

Figure 2. Andrea's Miscues from *Mouse and the Motorcycle* (Cleary, 1965), Chap. 4 pp. 44-45, approximately 150 words

people and places we had experienced.

I talked about the text out loud as I read. I made outrageous predictions (I'll bet Ralph gets poisoned by the manager!); and I asked myself plot questions (I wonder why he did that.). During the next few chapters, I read as many as 10 pages looking for a place to stop where Andrea would have to read a few pages to find the answer to a question: "How did Ralph get out of the trash can?" or to confirm a prediction: "I'll bet the boy's mom finds him in the trash can."

The end of a chapter usually provided a stopping place. After each chapter, we discussed miscues, and then cooperatively wrote an event summary for each chapter (which will be covered in detail in a later section). After the first few chapters, these event summaries served as a "familiar reading" text that began each session. Text read as homework served as the familiar text I used to take a running record at the beginning of each lesson.

### *Running Records*

After Andrea read over her event summaries and the list of her reading goals at the beginning of each new session, I had her read about 150 words from whatever pages she was assigned to read as homework, and took a Running Record. Unlike a typical Running Record, I prompted her to problem solve while reading. Rather than making lines of checks, marking miscues and analyzing the types of miscues later, I sorted miscues directly into miscue categories as she read. Refer to Figure 2

In each category, I recorded miscues using the Running Record convention of writing the student's attempt over the text word. I noted "Substitutions," "Tolds" (a few words I told her to help her regain momentum after a previous miscue), and "Word Parts" (attempts to sound across a word, or find parts she knew to make an attempt). Notes for self-corrections (SC), repetitions of text lines (arrow w/ R), and

prompts (asterisk) were marked directly on the list. The "Word Parts" column also provided a place for me to visually prompt Andrea by writing words in parts with dashes between clusters of letters. This process provided a scaffold for her to sound across words using parts of words and sounds she knew.

After the running record, Andrea and I discussed the quality of her miscues much in the same way that students participate in a Retrospective Miscue Analysis group. For example, three of the four "substitutions" were "high quality" that made sense in the context of the story and did not necessarily need to be corrected. For example in Figure 2, "ignore" for "ignorance" actually changed the meaning, but the other three retained meaning even though they were not grammatically correct.

In the "Sound/Parts" column, she successfully sounded-out a word once, figured out four words with prompts, and one word she independently problem-solved using blends and common word-patterns she knew. Following our discussion of the miscue list, we went back to places in the text where she got stuck or had been told a word, and I attempted to coach her through these passages. Our discussion of miscues took about 5 minutes.

Over time, the prompts I used while she read shifted from me to her own self-prompting. For example, the most common prompt I used was "Did that make sense?" By the second novel, she began to talk to herself as she read. She said things such as "That didn't make sense." Or when I would start to write a prompt for her, she would grab my pencil and say, "Don't tell me."

### *Making and Breaking Words*

The "make-and-break" portion of a RR lesson comes after the running record. In my adaptation of the model to an older child, constructing and deconstructing words was continuous across the lesson. Making-and-breaking words began when

we discussed miscues from the running record. It continued during the writing portion of the lesson on the “practice page” when she could not spell a word, and when I wrote prompts for Andrea while she read new texts. Unlike a skill-centered model, Andrea’s word knowledge was built on a series of “teachable moments” that were tailor-made to the text we were reading and her background knowledge.

#### *Oral, Choral, and Silent Reading of New Text*

After a book was introduced and Andrea had enough context to read the text without frustration, I still continued to read large portions of the text. This kept the novel moving quickly and provided me with an opportunity to model the strategies I wanted Andrea to use when she got stuck. For example, a) I stumbled and repeated lines of text; b) I used my finger to show her familiar parts of unknown words; c) I pointed out quotation marks, and I used different voices for characters (like talk); d) I pointed out how the author used commas, and I read in exaggerated phrases (In the box . . . there was . . . a toy car.)

After the first novel, I began to fade from the process. The reading of new chapters in the novels took a variety of forms. I read orally to Andrea; she read orally to me while I coached her through the text using the practice page to write prompts for her; we read chorally (at the same time) to work on fluency; and she read text silently. I also assigned text for her to read as homework. At first, I assigned a few pages, later a whole chapter, and finally whole novels.

Regardless of the format for reading the novel, Andrea and I continuously made predictions and discussed personal connections to the text that included people, places and situations that reminded us of other texts, settings, and life experiences. These conversations were then formalized while writing an event summary after each chapter.

#### *Constructing a Written Response to Each Chapter with Assistance*

Constructing event summaries was a natural progression from reading a text chapter. They served as a comprehension check, helped her develop writing strategies, and provided another opportunity to make-and-break words. During early lessons I very actively assisted Andrea to compose a chapter event summary. Later, I faded from the process and primarily served as a critical reader. By the end of the summer, I was simply a person she called to talk about a new book she had read.

At first, Andrea’s written texts were virtually unreadable. She had a hard time planning her space. She left words out and had irregular spaces between letters, words, and lines of text. The content of her writing was also problematic. She had a hard time making simple summary statements. Instead she wanted to list details in an odd sequence and never re-read to make sure it made sense. As mentioned earlier, these problems were reduced to a list of goals that she read each day before she wrote a chapter summary in her journal.

During early lessons, we talked about each chapter. I would then restate her observations until we agreed on a statement. While she wrote, I prompted her if she forgot to make a “finger space” between words, or if she tried to smash words into the end of the line. After each sentence, she read what she had so far, and I taught her to use a caret if she forgot to put in a word. We paid particular attention to word endings because she rarely used any. When she could not spell a word, I used the practice page to write prompts for her to construct parts of familiar words, to sound across words and write down what she heard, or to find the word in the novel.

During later lessons, our discussions were more specific to the text rather than the transcription process, and I would

physically leave the room while she wrote the message. She took pride in the fact that I would find no missing word endings, words smashed together, or odd spacing within words when I came back. Within the first ten sessions, the quality of her chapter/event summaries grew tremendously. Below are examples from the first chapter and the twelfth. Although her use of commas was excessive in the Session 12 example, she constructed the summary independently, and I did not correct her because the content was strong, and this was the goal we were working toward.

Session 1: The Gridley's checked into the Mt. View Inn. An old smelly hotel in California. A mouse named Ralph was spying on the Gridley's. (Prompted)

Session 12: Ralph planned, to use the dog, to get his owner, out of bed, to use the elevator, so Ralph could go to the first floor, to get the aspirin, for Keith. Ralph had to get the aspirin, and the car, in the elevator, before the man came back. Keith's door was shut, so Ralph left the motorcycle, and squeezed under the door, with the aspirin. (Independent)

### **Conclusions: Indications of Success**

Indications of Andrea's success were many; some were quantifiable, but most were anecdotal. At the beginning, a level 34 text was at her level of frustration; by the end of the summer she read a level 40 text independently. My primary goal for Andrea was for her to *choose* to read independently. After the first 16 lessons, she went away to a summer camp for a month and read the third novel in the mouse and the motorcycle series independently. Andrea also demonstrated progress in writing during camp. She wrote her mother a letter that her mother claimed was the "first time I could read anything she had written."

But the most important piece of evidence Andrea had achieved her goals

happened after she came back from camp. We spent four lessons working with Dear Mr. Henshaw. After the fourth lesson, she stayed up late that night to finish it independently because "I had to find out how it ended!" Although Andrea was not on "grade level" at the end of the summer, her attitude had changed about reading, and she had developed the ability to "read-to-learn," or what Clay (1993) would call a self-extending literacy processing system. Every child is unique, and by no means am I suggesting that the specific methods I used with Andrea will work with every child. Certainly the generalizability of this case study is limited by Andrea's status as a middle-class white female with a supportive parent. She was also unusual in that she was verbally articulate and comfortable talking with adults. Nonetheless, my documentation of Andrea's growth is a good example of designing a child-centered program of study. It also demonstrates how a few "confusions" or habits can damage a child's performance and confidence, and how child-centered coaching can make a difference in a relatively short period of time.

### **References**

- Borman, G. D., & Hewes, G. M. (2002). The long-term effects and cost-effectiveness of Success for All. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24(4), 243-266.
- Bucalos, A. B., & Lingo, A. S. (2005). Filling the potholes in the road to inclusion: Successful research-based strategies for intermediate and middle school students with mild disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children Plus*, 1(4) Article 1. Retrieved December 20, 2005 from <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol1/iss4/1>.
- Clay, M. (1993). *Reading Recovery: A guidebook for teachers in training*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

- Education.
- Cleary, B. (1983). *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. New York, NY: Avon Books.
- Cleary, B. (1982). *Ralph S. Mouse*. New York, NY: Avon Books.
- Cleary, B. (1970). *Runaway Ralph*. New York, NY: Avon Books.
- Cleary, B. (1991). *Strider*. New York, NY: Avon Books.
- Cleary, B. (1965). *The mouse and the motorcycle*. New York, NY: Avon Books.
- Dorn, L., & Soffos, C. (2001). *Shaping literate minds: Developing self-regulated learners*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Gaffney, J. S., Methven, J. M., & Bagdasarian, S., (2002). Assisting older students to read expository text in a tutorial setting: A case for a high-impact intervention. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 18: 119-150.
- Goodman, K. S. (1996). *Ken Goodman on reading: A common sense look at the nature of language and the science of reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Goodman, Y. M., Watson, D., & Burke, C. (1988). *Reading miscue inventory: Alternative procedures*. New York: Richard C. Owen.
- Goodman, Y., & Marek, A. (1996). *Retrospective miscue analysis: Revaluing readers and reading*. Katonah, NY: Richard C. Owen.
- Farr, R., & Carey, R. F. (1986). *Reading: What can be measured?* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (1999). *Matching books to readers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- LearningRX, Inc. (2006). Homepage. Retrieved September 13, 2006, from <http://www.learningrx.com/center2/whatislearningrx/index.htm>
- National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Washington, D. C.
- O'Connor, R. E., Bell, K. M., Harty, K. R., Larkin, L. K., Sackor, S. M. & Zigmund, N. (2002). Teaching reading to poor readers in the intermediate grades: A comparison of text difficulty. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(3), 474-485.
- Pearson, P. D. (1997). The first grade studies: A personal reflection. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 32, 87-92.
- Pinnell, G. S., & Fountas, I. C. (2002). *Leveled books for readers grades 3-6*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann
- Sylvan Learning, Inc. (2006). Homepage. Retrieved September 13, 2006 from <http://www.educate.com/homepage>.
- Slavin, R. E., Madden, N. A., Karweit, N. L., Dolan, L. J., & Wasik, B. A. (1992) *Success for All: A relentless approach to prevention and early intervention in elementary schools*. Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.
- Torgesen, J., Rashotte, C., Alexander, A., Alexander, J. & McPhee, K. (2003). Progress toward understanding the instructional conditions necessary for remediating reading difficulties in older children. In B. Foorman (Ed.), *Preventing and remediating reading difficulties: Bringing science to scale* (pp. 275-297). Timonium, MD: York Press, Inc.

John Burgin, Ph. D.  
 University of Arkansas at Little Rock  
 2801 S. University  
 Little Rock, AR 72203  
 jsburgin@ualr.edu 501-952-5160

Dr. Burgin is an assistant professor of early childhood education at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Previously, he was a Reading Recovery teacher and reading specialist in the public schools for 20 years.