When we write, we read; when we read, we compose meaning. A wide body of research documents the reading–writing connection (see, e.g., Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000; Harste & Short, 1988; Pearson, 1990; Shanahan, 1980; Tierney & Pearson, 1983). Making this connection has important implications for all readers, and particularly for those who experience difficulty in learning to read and write.

Based on our work with children who struggle, we focus on reciprocal cognitive operations or strategies that draw on sources of knowledge used in both reading and writing (Clay, 1991; Rumelhart, 1994). These in-the-head decision-making or processing systems are what children use to make sense of how print works.

Our aim in this column is to explain teaching for reciprocity from a strategic processing perspective. We also provide some explicit language for teachers to use in helping children build common ground between reading and writing.

**Reciprocity: Strategic Processing**

What children do and say while reading and writing can provide evidence of their mental activity or higher order cognitive processing (Vygotsky, 1978). Close observations of young children learning to read reveal patterns of errors that provide a window into their strategic processing (Clay, 1991; Goodman & Goodman, 1994). Searching, monitoring, and self-correcting are strategic operations with particular significance for successful reading and writing (Clay, 2005). Searching is the mental action of seeking out information in print. Monitoring is checking on oneself throughout the process of reading and writing. Self-correcting means independently fixing one’s errors.

The cognitive processes used in reading are identical to those involved in writing (DeFord, 1994). As children read, they search, monitor, and self-correct work with reading and writing together” (Clay, 2001, p. 11). Struggling readers who do not have opportunities to write may struggle even more with literacy.

Children need to write for authentic purposes. In doing so, they move from ideas, to composing a message, to searching for ways to record their messages while monitoring their message production (Clay, 2001). Children need to become both author and audience by giving and receiving genuine responses that value their voices and choices. Through these interactions, they express themselves and construct identities (Dyson, 1997).
for and with meaning (semantics), structure (syntax), and graphophonic information (sound–letter–word patterns). As they write, children create social and imaginary worlds (Dyson, 1997), drawing on meanings in their lives (semantics). They use their oral language and knowledge of how writing in books and other texts sounds (syntax) to group words together and represent their meanings. They search for ways to express themselves using their knowledge of conventions of print and graphophonic information.

By observing the strategic activity of struggling learners while they read and write continuous text, common ground between reading and writing becomes evident. Table 1 presents examples of reciprocal processing behaviors that teachers may observe.

Teaching for Reciprocity
Explicit teaching to help students understand the reciprocal nature of reading and writing is a powerful tool for accelerating learning. To illustrate clear evidence of strategic, reciprocal processing, we share examples from John Paul (pseudonym), a first-grade student Nancy (first author) worked with in writing and reading.

Searching for Meaning
Writing. John Paul described how happy he was that it was his friend’s birthday. Nancy said, “Think about everything you said. You’re the author; what could you write about that?” John Paul orally composed “I like birthdays, and today is Brent’s birthday.” In composing, John Paul searched for meaning and structure to compose a message.

Reading. When he came to the sentence “The caterpillar was safe” in Beverley Randell’s (1995) Hedgehog Is Hungry, John Paul stopped at the word safe. His introduction to the book had provided him with an overview of the story, so he knew that the caterpillar was not going to be eaten. Nancy decided to help John Paul draw on his ability to search for meaning and structure. She asked, “Think about the story. What would make sense?” John Paul reread to search for meaning and then said, “Safe.”

In these examples, John Paul was able to search for meaning by drawing on his prior knowledge of the world and on information from and about the story. His teacher explicitly drew on meaning and structure as sources of information. Teachers often underestimate the power of language structure and default to graphophonic information. Struggling readers need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic processing</th>
<th>Writer</th>
<th>Reader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Searching for meaning</td>
<td>Generates ideas with an audience in mind</td>
<td>Uses print to construct meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring for meaning</td>
<td>Checks that the message makes sense</td>
<td>Checks that the message makes sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for structure</td>
<td>Anticipates the order of words based on how book language and oral language sound</td>
<td>Groups words together in phrases to represent the intended message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring for structure</td>
<td>Checks the order of words supporting the intended message</td>
<td>Rereads (out loud or holding the message in the mind) to check that the word order communicates the intended message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for graphophonic information</td>
<td>Uses knowledge of how letters, words, and print work to record the message</td>
<td>Seeks out graphophonic input from print in relation to meaning and structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring for graphophonic information</td>
<td>Checks and detects any discrepancies between anticipated message and graphophonic input</td>
<td>Checks and detects that the print represents the message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-correcting</td>
<td>Detects and corrects</td>
<td>Detects and corrects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1
Common Ground Between Reading and Writing
to recognize that their prior experiences and language are important sources of information they can use to search, monitor, and subsequently self-correct.

**Searching for Graphophonic Information**

**Writing.** Perhaps the most obvious process shared by reading and writing is searching for graphophonic information. When John Paul wanted to write the word *birthday*, he sounded /b/-/b/-/b/ before appealing to Nancy. Nancy said, “Say it slowly and think about what you would expect to see.” John Paul searched for graphophonic information, slowly articulated the first part of the word, and wrote “brth.” He then monitored his attempt, stopped, looked at Nancy, and said, “That doesn’t look right.” Then he self-corrected by inserting an *i*.

**Reading.** Returning to *Hedgehog Is Hungry*, John Paul came to the word *hungry* and stopped. To make reciprocity explicit, Nancy said, “Think about how you say words slowly in writing. That will help you in reading.” John Paul then said “hun-gry,” separating the syllables as he searched for and located graphophonic information on the page. Nancy said, “Good work. You made that look right.”

These examples show how John Paul was able to search in writing and reading for graphophonic information by linking phonological and orthographic information and then self-correcting.

**Supporting Learning With Powerful Tools**

Teachers need to use explicit language that helps children connect reading and writing. This language serves as a scaffold, supporting interactions with children and helping teachers to learn from observations of students. Table 2 presents parallel teaching moves for reading and writing and suggests specific language to use during small-group or individual instruction. The table serves as a starting point for reciprocity with children; it is not meant as a comprehensive list. As teachers interact with children and respond to them as readers and writers, they will create additional opportunities to support reciprocity.

### Table 2

**Teaching for Reciprocal Processing in Reading and Writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic process</th>
<th>Teaching reading</th>
<th>Teaching writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Searching for meaning</td>
<td>(Based on genre, title, cover illustration, etc.), what is this story about? Think about the story. What would make sense?</td>
<td>Encourage genuine conversations. What do you want to say? What will the reader need to know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring for meaning</td>
<td>Did that make sense?</td>
<td>Reread and check. Is that what you wanted to say?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for structure</td>
<td>Reread and try something that would sound right.</td>
<td>You said.... What can you write about that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring for structure</td>
<td>You said.... Can we say it that way?</td>
<td>Reread and check. Is that the way you want it to sound?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for graphophonic information</td>
<td>What do you know about that word? Think about writing. What would the letters (or word) say if you were writing?</td>
<td>Say the word slowly and think about what would look or sound right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring for graphophonic information</td>
<td>Try that again and make sure it looks right.</td>
<td>Run your finger underneath the word. Say it slowly. Does it look right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-correction</td>
<td>You thought about the story and went back to make it look right. I like the way you are thinking.</td>
<td>You went back and decided the word wasn’t quite right, and then fixed it. You were really thinking about your message.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching reading and writing as reciprocal processes is a powerful tool for supporting struggling learners. Furthermore, making explicit connections to searching, monitoring, and self-correcting exponentially increases children's opportunities to develop parallel processes for reading and writing. As teachers explore this reciprocal relationship in the classroom, they will be surprised at how children learn more quickly as they begin to make connections (Clay, 2001; DeFord, Lyons, & Pinnell, 1991). When you teach reading and writing together, it is a two-for-one deal—a deal we simply cannot pass up.

References


Literature Cited

Anderson teaches at Texas Woman’s University and tutors children in the Denton Independent School District in Denton, Texas, USA; e-mail nanderson@twu.edu. Briggs teaches at Texas Woman’s University, Denton, USA; e-mail cbriggs1@twu.edu.

The department editors welcome reader comments. Connie Briggs teaches at Texas Woman’s University, Denton, USA; e-mail cbriggs1@twu.edu. Catherine Compton-Lilly teaches at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA; e-mail comptonlilly@wisc.edu.