



# An Overview of Descubriendo la Lectura

*Information is adapted from a longer document prepared by Descubriendo la Lectura trainers Yvonne Rodríguez and Cynthia Rodríguez, Texas Woman's University, with support from DLL teacher leaders.*

Descubriendo la Lectura (DLL) is the reconstruction of Reading Recovery in Spanish and is designed for first graders having difficulty learning to read and write in classrooms in which the language of instruction is Spanish. Children meet individually with a specially trained teacher for 30 minutes daily for an average of 12 to 20 weeks. During this short-term intervention, children make faster than average progress in order to catch up with their peers and continue to work on their own within an average group setting in their bilingual classroom.

DLL serves as a safety net for children having difficulty in any good bilingual classroom program. It also can serve as a pre-referral program for a small number of children who may need specialized longer-term help. Data collected on all children in both DLL and Reading Recovery provide compelling evidence of this intervention's effectiveness.

## A Brief History of Descubriendo la Lectura

Bilingual educators from Tucson, AZ, initiated Descubriendo la Lectura in 1988. Since that time, DLL has expanded to sites in several states across the U.S.

In 1996, a bilingual version of *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 1993; 2002) was published. The bilingual text, *Instrumento de Observación de los Logros de la Lecto-Escritura Inicial* (Escamilla, Andrade, Basurto, & Ruiz, 1996) was prepared, in collaboration with Reading Recovery developer Marie Clay, and is the assessment used with DLL students. The English version is often referred to as The Observation Survey and the bilingual version as Instrumento de Observación.

DLL trainers and teacher leaders have worked with Clay to design a reconstruction process. Teaching procedures (teacher prompts and examples) from Clay's *The Early Detection of Literacy Difficulties* (1985) were translated to Spanish in 1988 and were shared with teachers in Texas, Arizona, and Illinois for trial and development. Following publication of Clay's Reading Recovery *Guidebook* in 1993, each section was analyzed to identify procedures that needed reconstruction rather than simple translation from English to Spanish.

Refinement of the procedures is ongoing. With the publication of Clay's new *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part One* and *Part Two* in 2005, teaching procedures are once again in a reconstruction process. As procedures are reconstructed, they are disseminated by DLL trainers.

## Relationship Between Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura

The theoretical underpinnings of Descubriendo la Lectura and Reading Recovery are the same and are rooted in Clay's work. Issues of implementation, training, and teaching are parallel in Reading Recovery and DLL.

Literacy acquisition, however, is not exactly the same in English and Spanish. There are language-specific differences as well as socio-cultural differences in language use, such as the prevalence of code-switching in the North American context. Thus DLL is influenced by the field of bilingual

education as well as Clay’s research and theory. Following are the key issues underlying the differences between Reading Recovery and DLL:

- Spanish and English have different language systems (phonological, orthographic, morphological, and syntactic.). These differences lead to adaptations in the assessment tasks and teaching procedures.
- Training at all levels must reflect language-specific differences identified as significant in literacy acquisition.
- DLL children living in a bilingual environment are exposed to both Spanish and English from an early age. Teachers’ understanding of the cognitive and social implications of interacting language systems is important for effective assessment and teaching. For example, Spanish-speaking children in the U.S. develop the flexibility to communicate effectively in English, Spanish, and bilingual environments. This flexibility frequently reveals itself in code switching, i.e., changing from one language to another even within the same sentence.
- DLL implementation is geographically dispersed. High concentrations of Spanish speaking children and DLL teacher leaders are found in Texas, while other states have as few as two to five DLL teacher leaders. Without the proximity of a university training center with a DLL trainer, meeting standards for training and supervision requires commitment and creativity.
- DLL teachers need more specific preparation than their English counterparts. Along with the requirements for all Reading Recovery teachers listed in Section 4 of the *Standards and Guidelines of Reading Recovery in the United States* (2004), DLL teachers must be fluent in two languages, have successful bilingual classroom teaching experience, and be certified or nearing completion of requirements for certification in bilingual education. Because qualified bilingual teachers are scarce in most areas of the nation, school systems often face recruiting difficulties for DLL teachers.

These issues have important implications for DLL implementation, training, and teaching. A graphic provides the framework for considering these issues and provides the organizational structure for the remainder of this document.

Key Issues in Descubriendo la Lectura		
Implementation	Training	Teaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Models of bilingual education and transition to English instruction</li> <li>• Student selection</li> <li>• Teacher selection</li> <li>• Collaboration and communication</li> <li>• Evaluation and research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection of DLL teacher leaders</li> <li>• DLL teacher leader training</li> <li>• DLL teacher leader professional development</li> <li>• Selection of DLL teachers</li> <li>• DLL teacher training</li> <li>• Continuing contact for DLL teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment: <i>Instrumento de Observación de los Logros de la Lecto-Escritura Inicial</i></li> <li>• Teaching procedures</li> <li>• Books used with DLL children</li> <li>• Discontinuing process in DLL</li> </ul>

## Implementation Issues

- Models of bilingual education and transition to English instruction
- Student selection
- Teacher selection
- Collaboration and communication
- Evaluation and research

Descubriendo la Lectura can only be implemented in a site that has Reading Recovery. New sites must assess the strength of their existing Reading Recovery implementation before beginning DLL. New sites also need to assess their bilingual education model and its fit with DLL. Essential requirements for implementation of DLL are outlined below:

- Sites must employ or train their own DLL teacher leader or contract with a neighboring site for DLL teacher leader services.
- Native language literacy instruction in Spanish must be offered throughout first grade. Continued Spanish literacy development through third grade is strongly recommended.
- Sites must purchase a sufficient number of children's books (comparable to English sets) in Spanish to ensure that appropriate texts are available for each lesson.
- Sites must follow the *Standards and Guidelines* which include additional requirements for implementation of DLL.

Successful implementation of DLL requires understanding and ownership at the school and district level (e.g., site coordinator, bilingual coordinator, language arts coordinator, principals). *When sites have both DLL and Reading Recovery, teacher leaders must collaborate and share responsibilities for the total enterprise.*

### *Models of Bilingual Education and Transition to English*

There are several models of bilingual education in schools; these models have implications for the implementation of Descubriendo la Lectura. Models often represent conflicting theories about the nature and value of bilingualism for English language learners in U.S. public schools. Teacher leaders, teachers, and administrators involved in bilingual education and DLL must negotiate these conflicting theories as they try to make the best instructional choices for children. *The major consideration is ensuring that children are receiving their classroom literacy instruction in Spanish.*

The effectiveness of DLL in the U.S. is highly dependent on the goals and models of bilingual education within which it operates. Without a proper theoretical match between DLL and a carefully designed model of bilingual education, children may progress in Spanish literacy but not profit from the long-term benefits envisioned by Clay. The value of accelerated progress during DLL lessons may be obliterated by an immediate transition to English-only literacy instruction after the intervention or by placement in a Spanish reading program solely intended as a bridge to English. Such decisions jeopardize students' continued development of a self-extending system, which is under construction but not complete by the end of first grade.

While the ultimate goal is bi-literacy, students first need a strong foundation in their native language to ensure an effective transition to English literacy. *What misleads many educators is the notion of using a child's Spanish text reading level as the only guide to transitioning to total instruction in English.*

At some point following DLL lessons, students are expected to transition gradually to total English instruction. This presents practical and political issues because DLL operates in many districts where pressure for early transition is intense. The time of transition varies based on the school's language policy.

### *Descubriendo la Lectura Student Selection*

The standards for selecting children for Descubriendo la Lectura are the same as for Reading Recovery, including selection of the lowest-achieving children. In addition, students selected for DLL must be in a bilingual education program receiving Spanish reading instruction throughout first grade. They need adequate time to refine their developing literacy strategies. A strong oral language and literacy foundation enables bilingual students to make a seamless transition to English instruction.

### *Descubriendo la Lectura Teacher Selection*

Requirements for teacher selection appear in Section 4 of the *Standards and Guidelines*. Additional requirements for Descubriendo la Lectura teachers include successful bilingual classroom teaching experience and certification or nearing completion of certification in bilingual education. DLL teachers must demonstrate oral and written proficiency in both languages because the teaching materials are currently written in English and instruction is conducted in Spanish.

A significant implementation challenge is the scarcity of qualified bilingual teachers in the U.S. Because of this scarcity, administrators find the decision to remove a good bilingual teacher from the classroom extremely difficult. Careful consideration of staffing models in relation to local needs is essential. For example, choosing the model that places DLL teachers in bilingual classrooms for part of the day will help the campus retain bilingual teachers in the classroom.

### *Collaboration and Communication About Descubriendo la Lectura*

Collaboration and communication among stakeholders is especially important when implementing Descubriendo la Lectura. Shared understandings and ownership must be built among district administrators, particular those with leadership in bilingual education, literacy education, federally funded programs, special education, and curriculum and instruction. School principals and classroom teachers (in English-speaking as well as bilingual classrooms) also must be part of the planning and implementation processes. The relationship between the model of bilingual education adopted in districts and schools and the implementation of Reading Recovery requires careful consideration and collaboration. A valuable communication resource is a university training center that trains DLL teacher leaders. DLL trainers at the center are able to assist with the challenges of implementation and collaboration.

### *Descubriendo la Lectura Evaluation and Research*

Descubriendo la Lectura teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators at every site systematically collect and report data on every child to the National Data Evaluation Center (NDEC) located at The Ohio State University. (Visit the NDEC Web site at [www.ndec.us](http://www.ndec.us).) Data submission is a requirement for all sites using the Reading Recovery trademark. Data reported to NDEC is processed and returned to teacher leaders. Each site gets comparable reports for DLL and Reading Recovery if numbers are large enough to warrant analysis. DLL data must be interpreted with caution when numbers of students and teachers are small.

An early study of the effectiveness of Descubriendo la Lectura (Escamilla, 1994) provided evidence for the potential of DLL. In the study DLL students significantly outperformed a control group on all measures of the Spanish Observation Survey. Looking at the subsequent performance of DLL students, Escamilla, Loera, Ruiz, and Rodríguez (1998) found that DLL was having a positive impact on Spanish-speaking students in much the same way Reading Recovery impacts

English-speaking students. In Grades 2 and 3, former DLL students were reading at text levels equivalent to or above their peers. The researchers cautioned that research on subsequent performance of DLL children must consider political and social realities related to instruction for bilingual children.

## Training Issues

- Selection of DLL teacher leaders
- DLL teacher leader training
- DLL teacher leader professional development
- Selection of DLL teachers
- DLL teacher training
- Continuing contact for DLL teachers

Training in Descubriendo la Lectura can take two forms for teacher leaders and teachers, both requiring university credit:

1. Initial training includes a full academic year of training paralleling that of Reading Recovery.
2. Bridging from being a Reading Recovery teacher or teacher leader to being a DLL teacher or teacher leader requires an additional year of training. It begins with a 2-week institute but continues throughout the school year.

The training of teacher leaders is substantively different from that of teachers. Only registered DLL trainers can provide initial or bridging training for DLL teacher leaders. Only registered DLL teacher leaders can provide initial or bridging training for DLL teachers. Ongoing DLL staff development (professional development for teacher leaders and continuing contact for teachers) must be provided, respectively, by registered DLL trainers or teacher leaders.

### *Descubriendo la Lectura Teacher Leader Training*

#### **Selection of DLL teacher leader(s)**

The standards for selection of Descubriendo la Lectura teacher leaders are the same as those for Reading Recovery teachers with **two additional requirements**: (See Section 5 in the *Standards and Guidelines*.)

- They must have successful teaching experience in a bilingual classroom.
- They must have completed or be near completion of requirements for bilingual certification.

#### **Training of DLL teacher leaders**

The two ways to train a Descubriendo la Lectura teacher leader are outlined below.

##### *Initial training*

Reading Recovery and DLL teacher leader training occurs concurrently (whether or not the trainee has had previous Reading Recovery/DLL experience). Because teacher leaders in training have the advantage of being released from district responsibilities for a full academic year of university work, they can take on the complexities of two language systems simultaneously. The initial training model must occur in a university training center with a registered DLL trainer. A year-long program of academic and field-based graduate course work includes the following:

- Instrumento de Observación training/Observation Survey training
- Field experiences in both English and Spanish

- Experience with both DLL and Reading Recovery students throughout the year (expectation of two rounds of students)
- Instruction in the theory and practice of both Reading Recovery and DLL (special seminars for each language)
- Experience with teaching teachers during the DLL summer bridging institute (helping teachers and teacher leaders-in-training under direction of DLL trainer)

#### *Bridging for Descubriendo la Lectura teacher leaders*

*Bridging* previously trained Reading Recovery teacher leaders to Descubriendo la Lectura is the alternative to the initial training model. The process begins with a 2-week summer institute at a registered university training center for DLL. A national bridging institute application is available from a DLL university training center or by contacting the Reading Recovery Council of North America (RRCNA), a membership organization that supports Reading Recovery and DLL, at [www.readingrecovery.org](http://www.readingrecovery.org). The training continues throughout the following academic year as the teacher leaders begin their work in DLL.

*During teacher leaders' bridging year, they do not have a DLL training class but concentrate on teaching children using DLL procedures.* They maintain four teaching slots, working with two children in English and two in Spanish. Throughout the bridging year, a DLL university trainer has continuous communication with and makes a site visit to the teacher leader. The following year the teacher leader is eligible to have a DLL teacher training class.

In addition to the course content and objectives outlined for bridging teachers, bridging for teacher leaders includes issues of implementation and training related to DLL. During this training DLL teacher leader trainees will

- guide the talk during two DLL teaching sessions,
- participate in facilitating the discussion after the lesson,
- participate in school visits with DLL teachers, and
- problem solve implementation issues in schools.

### *Professional Development for Descubriendo la Lectura Teacher Leaders*

Professional development is essential for both Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura teacher leaders. Participation in ongoing DLL training is particularly critical because of its continuing development and refinement.

Professional development requirements for DLL teacher leaders are the same as for Reading Recovery teacher leaders. The *Standards and Guidelines* require that teacher leaders participate in professional development opportunities for Reading Recovery and DLL teacher leaders sponsored by the university training center.

Meeting the professional development standards for DLL can present a problem in areas where there is no DLL university trainer nearby. Teacher leaders must assume responsibility for identifying advanced training and conference options each year. The opportunities include

- preconference sessions at the National Reading Recovery & K–6 Classroom Literacy Conference,
- Teacher Leader Institutes for DLL,
- advanced institutes offered by a DLL trainer, and

- DLL professional development sessions conducted at university training centers with a DLL trainer.

DLL teacher leaders should plan professional development in consultation with their university training centers. The RRCNA Web site ([www.readingrecovery.org](http://www.readingrecovery.org)) when notified by planners will provide dates and contacts for DLL professional development opportunities. Networking and sharing information from professional development with colleagues is important to the success of DLL implementation.

## *Descubriendo la Lectura Teacher Training*

### **DLL Teacher Selection**

Selection standards for Reading Recovery teachers apply also to Descubriendo la Lectura teachers. DLL teachers have two additional requirements: (See Section 4 in the *Standards and Guidelines*.)

- They must have successful teaching experience in a bilingual classroom.
- They must be a certified bilingual teacher or be nearing completion of requirements for bilingual certification.

Teachers who have not completed the requirements for bilingual certification find training difficult due to lack of theoretical background.

### **Training of DLL Teachers**

The two ways to train Descubriendo la Lectura teachers are explained below.

#### *Initial training for teachers*

Initial training must be *either* Reading Recovery or DLL because teaching in two languages would be too difficult. Training in both languages concurrently would require them to take on challenging new theories and teaching procedures, while at the same time becoming fast and efficient in the use of language-specific texts, prompts, and scoring conventions. Teacher leaders, on the other hand, can be expected to teach in two languages during initial training and thus prepare for initial Reading Recovery/DLL certification at the same time.

Content, standards, and guidelines for yearlong teacher training in DLL parallels Reading Recovery teacher training. (See Section 4 of the *Standards and Guidelines*.) The training year begins with assessment training using the Instrumento de Observación. Daily tutoring begins following the selection of the lowest students using standard procedures. Teachers in training are expected to work with eight Spanish-speaking children over the course of the year. The DLL teacher leader who conducts the weekly inservice sessions has been specifically trained to integrate the theory and practice of Reading Recovery and its Spanish reconstruction.

#### *Bridging for teachers*

The university training course known as bridging prepares teachers who have been initially trained in Reading Recovery to teach in Descubriendo la Lectura (and vice versa). The differences in teaching in a different language are far more complex than simple translation of language and procedures. Learning to teach effectively for literacy acceleration in a second (different) language requires time and practice as well as information. Teachers making the shift from one language to another need to work for a sustained period of time under the tutelage of a teacher leader or trainer with expertise in both Reading Recovery and DLL. Therefore, teachers trained in Reading Recovery or in DLL must have an additional year of training to implement the program in another language.

Teachers must develop understandings not only of the language itself, but also how the language is used—becoming aware of the subtle differences in language structure and use. Simple translation of language and procedures does not work. Effective teachers in either language are sensitively attuned to differences in the reading acquisition process across languages.

Teachers can be bridged by a local DLL teacher leader or may attend a national bridging institute. (Contact RRCNA or a DLL university training center for a national bridging institute application.)

The bridging format requires the teacher to

- attend an initial 2-week bridging institute using the materials and procedures required in the language to which the teacher is bridging;
- work throughout the year with a minimum of two students in the language to which the teacher is bridging and two additional students in the other language;
- receive three units of university academic credit for the activities of the bridging year;
- receive at least one field visit from a DLL teacher leader during the bridging year;
- participate in at least two teaching sessions in the language to which the teacher is bridging;
- participate in training class discussions in the language of lessons taught; and
- submit records, videos, and other data to the DLL teacher leader monitoring the bridging.

Course objectives for bridging teachers to DLL include the following:

- Learn to administer and use the Instrumento de Observación.
- Review and discuss research that impacts the implementation of DLL.
- Identify perceived similarities and differences between Reading Recovery and its reconstruction in Spanish.
- Develop an understanding of how first and second language acquisition affects literacy development.
- Become familiar with the book features at different levels to facilitate leveling books and developing books that can be used in lessons.
- Discuss and practice implementation procedures that are specific to DLL.
- Participate in teaching sessions (observation and practice) in the language to which the teacher is bridging.

### *Continuing Contact for Descubriendo la Lectura Teachers*

Requirements for continuing contact are essentially the same for Descubriendo la Lectura and Reading Recovery teachers. (See Section 4 of the *Standards and Guidelines*.) If registered in both Reading Recovery and DLL, teachers must collaborate with the appropriate teacher leaders to provide a continuing contact schedule that is balanced between English and Spanish. Teacher leaders responsible for providing continuing contact in either language must be registered as a teacher leader in that language.

## Teaching Issues

- Assessment:  
*Instrumento de Observación de los Logros de la Lecto-Escritura Inicial*
- Teaching procedures
- Books used with DLL children
- Discontinuing process in DLL

### *Assessment: Instrumento de Observación de los Logros de la Lecto-Escritura Inicial*

A bilingual version of the Observation Survey has been available since 1996 and has been widely used across the United States. In this version, the text is primarily in English with examples and prompts/instructions to the child in Spanish. The Instrumento de Observación also contains a detailed historical overview and rationale for the reconstruction process.

A standard list of text titles is used to ensure the consistency and integrity of Descubriendo la Lectura data in the assessment of text reading. DLL teachers need the texts required for assessment of text reading.

Currently, DLL is seeking a publisher for a completed full Spanish version for use in Spanish-speaking countries (Rodríguez, 2000). The availability of the bilingual version and the full Spanish version will allow teachers to use the version they find most useful.

Teachers who have had prior training in the Observation Survey need full assessment training in Instrumento de Observación as well. Important differences between the English and Spanish versions include adaptations for code-switching and different conventions for scoring.

### *Teaching Procedures*

The theory of reading underlying Descubriendo la Lectura and Reading Recovery is the same. Some teaching procedures, however, have been reconstructed to reflect linguistic differences. As explained earlier, great care has been taken to develop and trial procedures for Spanish-speaking children. Currently, DLL trainers and teacher leaders are making procedural changes based on Clay's new *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (Clay, 2005).

### *Book List for Descubriendo la Lectura*

The Descubriendo la Lectura Book List is compiled using the same process as in Reading Recovery. Currently more children's story books are available in Spanish than ever before. Despite improvement, however, finding high-quality beginning books for assessment and instruction remains a challenge. Escamilla's comments regarding this issue are as relevant today as they were in 1996 (p. 31):

"Major considerations for reconstruction of ... [running records] into other languages must include the availability of children's books written at varying levels of difficulty in languages other than English. Or, if books are going to be adapted from English to other languages, cultural authenticity and relevance become issues and must be considered. *Translations that are purely literal in their nature may create cultural (and linguistic) confusions and/or conflicts...*" (emphasis added)

### *Discontinuing Process*

Descubriendo la Lectura has the same rigorous criteria for discontinuing lessons as Reading Recovery. Lessons are discontinued when a child no longer needs the supplementary support and has acquired a system of strategic activities to continue to learn from his own attempts to read and write, can read a text that an average child in Grade 1 at that time can read, and can write a couple of sentences independently with only a little help from the teacher.

The *Standards and Guidelines* require that children continue to receive reading instruction in Spanish at least through first grade, and recommend that Spanish language reading instruction continue through third grade. In theory, a child's opportunity to continue developing a self-extending system in Spanish reading should not be interrupted by the decision to discontinue lessons. In reality, however, it often is.

Discontinuing decisions in DLL are influenced by the district's bilingual education model and transitional goals. The pressure to transition to English-only instruction frequently overrides other educational considerations. Given this pressure, educators tend to underestimate the value of a firm foundation in native language literacy. Because students discontinuing lessons in DLL are reading at a high level, classroom teachers may mistakenly assume that they are ready for transition to English reading. Compensating for this practice, DLL teachers or teacher leaders may advocate continuing lessons longer than otherwise.

Thoughtful and close communication between DLL and classroom teachers is a priority. Together they can ensure informed decisions about the relationship of discontinuing to optimal literacy development in Spanish and English. Across the first 3 years of school, students will gradually transition to English literacy and should not be presented with either/or literacy instruction.

## Final Comments

Descubriendo la Lectura offers the promise of effective early literacy intervention for children learning to read in their native language (Spanish). Evidence across years of implementation and thousands of children demonstrates that DLL prevents long-term literacy problems for many children and provides extensive data about children who may need additional services.

Descubriendo la Lectura, as Reading Recovery, fits the new IDEA legislation that encourages early intervening services (EIS) and response to intervention (RTI). Although there are implementation challenges, the efforts provide a tremendous benefit to Spanish-speaking children in their early years of literacy instruction.

## References

- Clay, M. M. (1985). *The early detection of reading difficulties*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann .
- Clay, M. M. (1993a). *An observation survey of early literacy achievement*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. M. (1993b). *Reading Recovery: A guidebook for teachers in training*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. M. (2002). *An observation survey of early literacy achievement* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. M. (2005). *Literacy lessons designed for individuals part one and part two*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Escamilla, K. (1994). Descubriendo la Lectura: An early intervention literacy program in Spanish. *Literacy, Teaching and Learning: An International Journal of Early Literacy*, 1(1), 57–70.
- Escamilla, K., Andrade, A. M., Basurto, A. G. M., & Ruiz, O. A. (1996). *Instrumento de observación de los logros de la lecto-escritura inicial*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Escamilla, K., Loera, M., Ruiz, O., & Rodríguez, Y. (1998). An examination of sustaining effects in Descubriendo la Lectura programs. *Literacy Teaching and Learning: An International Journal of Early Reading and Writing*, 3(2), 59–81.
- Rodríguez, Y. G. (2000). *The translation of Marie Clay's An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement from English to Spanish*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas Woman's University.
- Standards and guidelines of Reading Recovery in the United States* (4th ed. rev.). (2004). Columbus, OH: Reading Recovery Council of North America.