

Origin and Evolution: Reading Recovery in New Zealand

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“By the end...we had a well-documented miracle full of surprises.”

In this way Marie Clay described the first 2 years of pioneering work (1976–77) developing a literacy force that would change the lives of countless children worldwide. We feel immensely privileged to have had such an exceptional person as one of our own. Marie Clay always acted as both a mentor to and ardent champion of Reading Recovery in New Zealand.

The history is significant; from research to practice, after just 1 year. The highly successful field trial in five schools in 1978 was followed the next year by implementation in 50 schools. The results were similar to those achieved during the research trial. The accelerated rates of progress made by children receiving the novel intervention quickly attracted the attention of senior educational administrators who supported the training of a further 50 teachers. By the end of 1980, Reading Recovery was in more than 100 schools; it was strongly under way.

Growth and expansion continued, leading to the spread of Reading Recovery nationwide in 1983. The following year marked the beginning

of its remarkable adoption across the world.

The ensuing years in New Zealand have seen the implementation, funded continuously by the Ministry of Education, maintaining its high level of effectiveness, with the result that about 200,000 children have been helped and more than 7,000 teachers trained. In 1984, the Ministry began national data collection and monitoring. Annual statistical reports continue to be available on its website (www.minedu.govt.nz).

In 1999, a Ministry of Education Literacy Task Force acknowledged the strengths of Reading Recovery, and stated that it must remain an essential feature of New Zealand’s education system. From their recommendations a Ministry of Education research project was commissioned to explore the implementation of Reading Recovery, particularly in relation to Maori and Pasifika children. This independent, comprehensive investigation was carried out by the New Zealand Council of Educational Research (www.nzcer.org) in 2005. The report found Reading Recovery to be valued and well-established in New Zealand schools. Schools considered it a cost-effective intervention, operating well and working effectively for all

children. Case studies of schools where Reading Recovery was strong indicated that with a school-wide commitment to the prevention of literacy difficulties, and Reading Recovery as an integral part of their comprehensive literacy strategy, all children who need help are able to receive it.

Currently the trainers support a team of 28 tutors who train around 300 teachers annually and provide ongoing professional development for about 1,200 trained teachers. The longevity of Reading Recovery in New Zealand and the introduction of the new publication have resulted in the phenomenon of increasing numbers of former Reading Recovery teachers retraining.

What of the future? The challenge is to build on the success by continuing the delivery of very high-quality training and teaching, and by keeping on working towards Marie Clay’s vision—ensuring full implementation in all schools.

More information on Reading Recovery in New Zealand can be found at www.readingrecovery.ac.nz.