

Influence of Marie Clay in Europe

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For historians, the name Runnymede has a special significance as the site, in 1215, of the signing of the Magna Carta and the birthplace of British democracy. How appropriate, then, that the nearby Runnymede Education Centre should be the birthplace of Reading Recovery in Britain. As a result of Marie Clay's visit to Cambridge University in the late 1980s, the authorities sent an experienced educator from Runnymede to New Zealand to become the U.K.'s first Reading Recovery tutor, and the first teachers were trained there in 1990.

England

The impact of that venture was far reaching. In England controversy raged over standards in literacy, and the startling success of the lowest-attaining children in Reading Recovery served to highlight a widespread malaise in the teaching of literacy, especially for disadvantaged children. Reading Recovery was a catalyst in the decision to implement a national strategy for literacy in England, and a significant influence in the design and implementation of that strategy. The effect was, initially, to shift attention and resources away from low-attaining children to classroom literacy, leading to several very lean years for Reading Recovery.

Clay's advice was to safeguard teachers' and children's learning experience in Reading Recovery, and to secure the effectiveness which made Reading Recovery unique. In 2006, government plans were announced to support schools to implement Reading Recovery, with the aim of increasing the numbers of children served more than tenfold by 2011.

Northern Ireland

Educators in Northern Ireland were quick to spot the potential in Reading Recovery to change the life chances of vulnerable children. The province was still, at that time, suffering the effects of years of civil strife. Authorities there were among the first in Britain to train tutors, with the goal of placing a Reading Recovery teacher in every primary school. The implementation in Northern Ireland proved highly effective and, as in England, impacted far beyond the children for whom it was designed. The expectation that young children could and should write independently created a sea-change in the way writing was taught in classrooms. In Reading Recovery training groups many professionals had their first experience of coming to know, collaborate with, and trust individuals from across the religious and social divide.

Scotland and Wales

By the mid 1990s, Reading Recovery was available in schools in Scotland and Wales, and finally crept over the border into the Republic of Ireland. This brought new challenges, and a tutor working between the north and south commented on the need to carry two currencies, two mobile phones, and an international driving licence. Once again the evidence of what is possible in Reading Recovery impacted both on classroom teaching, especially the early teaching of independent writing, and on expectations for children in poverty.

Denmark

Since 2002, a redevelopment of Clay's work has been under way in Denmark, bringing Reading Recovery to Danish children and schools. The enormity of the task, supported every step along the way by Clay herself, brings home the scope, complexity and intricate design of Reading Recovery. Already the work is bearing fruit in progress made by children and in the professional learning of teachers and teacher leaders.