Celebration time! This year in many locations throughout North America, plans are being made to celebrate 30 years of Reading Recovery as an extraordinary, successful educational innovation, and The Journal of Reading Recovery is joining the celebration.

This issue of JRR is the first of two commemorating Marie Clay’s influence and sharing information about Reading Recovery’s foundational principles that have made life-altering differences to over 2.2 million children in the U.S. and nearly 200,000 in Canada, as well as to thousands of teachers’ professional lives across a span of 30 years.

Can Reading Recovery still be called an innovation after 30 years? I think so. Synonyms for innovation include the terms change, revolution, improvement, and transformation. Reading Recovery continues to be all those things. In a global educational environment that seems to value top-down initiatives focusing on high-stakes testing and commercial programs, Reading Recovery stands as an innovative antithesis.

Reading Recovery is innovative in the concept of investing in teacher knowledge and decision making, which supports a focus on teaching children, not programs. Ann Ballantyne, in her article, “Five Foundational Ideas: Still at the Cutting Edge,” shares theoretical concepts and principles that are central to the design and practice of Reading Recovery, which make all the difference in outcomes for children.

The idea of observing children, based upon their abilities rather than deficits, continues to be innovative. In an article about teaching procedures for assembling cut-up stories, Betsy Kaye and Mary Lose help us understand more clearly how observing children’s competencies can result in the most-struggling readers becoming independent problem solvers.

Another way that Reading Recovery is seen to be innovative is in its systems approach to implementation that facilitates change and includes a redirecting system for staying relevant. The infrastructure of Reading Recovery facilitates change not from a top-down approach, but from a theory of practice. In his article, “Large-Scale Reform in Literacy and Math: Rethinking Strategy in the Light of International Evidence,” Andy Hargreaves shares international examples of large-scale reform efforts. He discusses the challenges of large-scale reform and cautions that “instructional change efforts need to be focused and gradual” (p. 28). Reading Recovery professionals know that when implemented with fidelity, over time, and with hard work, Reading Recovery can become the impetus of change within a comprehensive literacy approach for a school or district.
Central to the change process, and still somewhat innovative in education today, are the concepts of collaboration and communication. At the heart of Reading Recovery is the relationship between one child and one teacher. In a systems approach, these one-on-one relationships can foster exponential collaboration and communication among teachers, administrators, and policymakers that have synergistic and lasting effects.

One example that many of us can relate to is a story about three teachers in New York whose work in Reading Recovery has fostered professional growth and friendships spanning 20 years. Another article included in this issue is the delightful autobiography by Beverley Randell about how her relationship with Marie Clay and her work contributed to the writing of many leveled readers that have supported children’s learning around the world.

Marie Clay’s literacy theory continues to contribute to the way researchers and practitioners think about early literacy. Billie Askew writes about Clay’s influence on the assessment of young children, and Lea McGee shares how Clay’s scholarship has contributed to early childhood education in the United States.

Reading Recovery has been proven to be an effective, early literacy intervention based on over 30 years of evidence; it is important to remember the past. This special issue includes a beautifully illustrated foldout timeline representing the highlights and milestones of Reading Recovery in North America.

It is also important to celebrate the present. The latest What Works Clearinghouse report substantiates Reading Recovery’s effectiveness, and the outcomes of the first year of the Investing in Innovations research study shows that Reading Recovery can be scaled up with success. Reading Recovery will continue to be an innovative intervention until the theoretical understandings and practices that are known to serve Reading Recovery children and teachers well become integrated into comprehensive approaches to support literacy learning for all children. There is still more work to do. But for today, let’s celebrate 30 years of EXCELLENCE!