The publication of *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part One* and *Part Two* (Clay, 2005a, 2005b) marks a critical point in our ongoing learning and professional development as Reading Recovery professionals. Teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers have already been engaging in spirited conversations around the world as they have begun using *Literacy Lessons*. As we continue to refine our understandings about teaching and learning, it is important to refer to various writings in the areas of teaching, implementation, and research in Reading Recovery that support the messages in *Literacy Lessons*. With this goal in mind, I would like to recommend articles that have appeared in *JRR* since its initial publication in 2001 and are appropriate supplementary readings to Clay’s new work.

*Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals Part One: Why? When? and How?*

Reading Recovery as a Prereferral Intervention—The Second Positive Outcome


*Literacy Lessons* provides the educational community with rationales regarding why, when, and how Reading Recovery has to become part of a school’s literacy plan to address the needs of those children who find literacy learning difficult. The case of Reading Recovery as a second-chance intervention before students are referred for longer-term individual help is a powerful message that needs to be communicated to schools administrators and school personnel in general: “It [Reading Recovery] acts as a prereferral intervention and provides a diagnostic period of teaching to identify a small residual group of children who still need extra help and probably further specialist guidance” (p. 18). This case is also made in “Two Positive Outcomes of Reading Recovery: Exploring the Interface Between Reading Recovery and Special Education.”

Authors Noel Jones, Cliff Johnson, Robert Schwartz, and Garreth Zalud explore the value of Reading Recovery as a prereferral intervention which allows the majority of individually tutored children to construct literacy learning systems that enable them to work effectively in the classroom. The authors also outline the benefits of the second positive outcome of Reading Recovery—the efficient identification of those children who need further evaluation and continued limited-time or longer-term support. They highlight the need for Reading Recovery-trained professionals to become members of a team of specialist advisors including special education professionals to decide what are the most appropriate services for the learners who need specialized long-term services.

Student Selection/School Teams


School personnel are also reminded that Reading Recovery is designed to address the needs of the lowest 20–25% of first graders: “An early intervention should select the lowest achievers, not excluding any child in the classroom” (p. 22). For a supplementary reading that will assist school personnel in their decisions regarding the selection of children see “Selection of Children for Reading Recovery: Challenges and Responses.”

This 2005 article by Mary Lose and Eva Konstantellou presents the rationales for the selection of the lowest achievers for Reading Recovery service, responds to questions that often arise concerning the challenges to the inclusion of certain children, and discusses the student selection process and the role of the school team in this process.


*Literacy Lessons* underlines the importance of establishing strong school teams that are involved in decision making.
regarding the selection, ongoing progress, the ending of individual support, and the ongoing monitoring of children after they leave Reading Recovery. This point is eloquently made in “Building Ownership for Reading Recovery/Descubriendo la Lectura With School Teams, a 2004 article.

Authors Mary Jackson, Cathy Duvall, Rosetta Ford, Dianne Frasier, Connie Newman, and Kathryne Salinas draw from their 10-year experience at Fort Bend Independent School District, Sugar Land, TX, to explain how school literacy teams provide the focus necessary to sustain a quality implementation of Reading Recovery/Descubriendo la Lectura over time.

Individual Instruction

Clay also emphasizes the advantages of individual instruction: “One teacher per pupil is the only practical way of working with children who have extremely differ-

ent kinds of responses to the tasks of learning to read and write” (p. 21). The power of one-to-one teaching is also presented in the 2004 article, “Does One-to-One Teaching Really Matter,” by Billie Askew and Anne Simpson.

The authors conclude that both research evidence and practical experience tell us that one-to-one teaching is the most effective approach for young learners who are falling behind in first grade. One-to-one teaching benefits children because instruction takes place at an appropriate level and is based on the child’s current strengths and competencies; it benefits teachers because it allows them to select appropriate literacy tasks for each child and frees them from interfering factors of group dynamics; and it benefits schools because it helps them attain the basic goal of teaching every child at his or her level of proficiency.

Acceleration

Another key concept for the understanding of how Reading Recovery works is that of acceleration (pp. 22–24). For an in-depth analysis of the concept see the 2002 article, “Acceleration the Key to Reading Recovery Benefits,” by Noel Jones.

Jones explores the concept of acceleration from four perspectives. First, he describes acceleration in terms of learning performance. To catch up with their peers in the classroom, children learn at a faster rate by developing self-regulation and a self-extending system that allow them to solve problems in reading and writing without teacher assistance. Second, he discusses teaching and implementation factors that seem to affect acceleration. They include one-to-one teaching, teaching that starts with the child’s strengths, integrating reading and writing, a high level of engagement in reading and writing continuous texts, and the teacher’s ability to design a series of lessons in response to the child’s competencies. Third, he explains acceleration as a learning phenomenon by referring to Clay’s complex theory of literacy processing which sees the child as the agent of learning, but also recognizes that a great deal of instructional support will be needed in order to allow the inefficient beginning learner to learn how to learn. Finally, he explores implications of accelerated learning in terms of the economic and social benefits to learners, schools, and school systems.
Reciprocity of Reading and Writing

Clay considers the reciprocal gains of reading and writing as another key factor that contributes to the effectiveness of Reading Recovery as an early intervention (pp. 27–28). We find an exploration of how both reading and writing contribute to the child’s learning about print in Mary Fried’s 2006 article, “Reciprocity: Promoting the Flow of Knowledge for Learning to Read and Write.”

Fried shares many examples of teaching that support the learner’s use of knowledge of writing during reading and vice versa. If children make the connection that letters represent the sounds you can hear and that letters give you some of the sounds so that you can read the word, they build up two-way pathways in the brain that enable them to make accelerated progress in both reading and writing.

Change Over Time in Teaching and Learning

Clay also addresses the issue of how children’s behaviors change during a series of individual lessons (pp. 47–51). Clay has grouped these changes into early, middle, and late phases of a lesson series in order to encourage teachers to think about how their own teaching needs to change in response to the continuous nature of the changes that children go through in their learning. This issue is also addressed in “Change and Opportunities for Learning,” a 2005 article by Julie Douëtil.

The author suggests that as children’s processing changes from simple to more complex, teachers need to be offering opportunities for learning that contribute toward the increasing complexity of the processing system. Douëtil has found that analyzing changes in running records—particularly in the areas of problem solving on words, self-correction, fluent reading, language structure, and engagement in the story—leads to an adjustment of teaching that supports the child’s ways of working on text over time.

Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals
Part Two: Teaching Procedures

The Complexity of the Theory/Brain Research
Clay emphasizes the complexity of her theory which conceives of the learner as building a neural network for working on written language. Children use their brains to work on certain things and to build complex processing systems. Clay has drawn upon new knowledge about brain functioning and has applied its findings to learning to read and write: “[The learner] has to learn the letters and the words, and their relationships to sound, but he also has to build and expand the intricate interacting systems in the brain that must work together at great speed as he reads text” (p. 102).


Lessons from brain research also inform Carol Lyons in the 2004 article, “Applying Principles of Brain Research to Maximize Every Child’s Learning Potential.” Lyons provides evidence from brain-based research that virtually every child is capable of learning how to read and write. Brain research has also established the social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of learning and the interrelationship among them. Lyons presents five fundamental principles about the workings of the brain and the educational implications for each. Understanding the plasticity and adaptability of the brain; that the brain is social and emotional; that emotions and thoughts interact, shape each other, and cannot be separated; that learning is a constructive process; and that children’s self-esteem determines their motivation to learn has profound educational implications, especially for children who struggle.


The complexity of Clay’s theory of literacy processing is illustrated powerfully in a description of how the reader brings together all sources of information in an integrated, flexible manner as he is working on text. In the 2002 article, “Phrasing in Fluent Reading: Process and Product,” Connie Briggs and Salli Forbes suggest that phrasing in fluent reading contributes to the process and to the product of effective processing.
Phrasing in fluent reading contributes to orchestrating strategic activities on familiar text and effective problem solving on novel text. The article discusses many factors that contribute to or interfere with fluent reading such as language structure, prior knowledge, speeded recognition, text selection, etc. Teachers should consistently monitor how reading sounds as an indication of the integration of all sources of information and the functioning of all processing systems.

Oral Language Development/Teacher-Child Conversations

The role of oral language development and of teacher-child conversations in the building of an effective literacy processing system are other major emphases in the revised procedures: “There are no quick ways to extend language but the best available opportunity for the Reading Recovery teacher lies in the conversations she has with the child in and around his lessons” (p. 51).


The fostering of oral language development and the power of conversation are topics that have also been explored in a number of articles in The Journal of Reading Recovery. In a 2004 seminal work on the structure of language that children use as they talk, read, and write, Clay comments on how language use may be expanded as children engage in all three activities through supportive interactions with adults.

In “Talking, Reading, and Writing,” the author challenges teachers to plan instruction that links oral language and writing and reading from the start. Clay offers a wealth of suggestions to teachers who work individually with children to prevent literacy learning difficulties. She asks teachers to create a rich context for language learning; to increase language learning opportunities; to understand that children learn language easily through conversation; to consider what things make a child reluctant to speak; to recognize the importance of reading aloud to children; to create the need to produce language; to arrange for sources of new language; to realize that repeating language is not enough; to think about which language structures are easier to learn; to understand how children discover new rules and find when to use them; to understand how children learn the order of words and structures in English; to appreciate how children learn to say the same things in different ways; to encourage the use of alternative constructions; and to consider the impact of overloading the child’s grammar.

Three other articles have presented evidence from instructional contexts that shows how children expand their language use while developing strong processing systems in reading and writing under the guidance of sensitive, observant teachers:


Janice Van Dyke researched ways in which teachers engage children in conversations during the writing component of Reading Recovery lessons, and presented findings in “When Conversations Go Well: Investigating Oral Language Development in Reading Recovery,” published in 2006. Findings suggest that when Reading Recovery teachers take advantage of daily opportunities to interact personally with students and reformulate the students’ utterances, they assist them in increasing the complexity of their language.


In the 2006 article, “Getting a Story for Writing by Using Familiar Text,” Robin Peirce describes a project in New Zealand which examined teaching practices during the
writing component of the Reading Recovery lesson, in particular the task of assisting children with limited control of oral language to compose a story. It was found that the familiar stories became conversation starters that helped improve the quality and quantity of the talk and of the writing over time.

Ways of Solving Words for Writing

In the Part Two section on solving words in writing Clay remarks, “Each change in the child’s control calls for an adjustment in what the teacher does” (p. 59). Adjustments in teaching that occur in the context of solving words in writing are explored in “Powerful Teaching Interactions in Writing: Lessons from Reading Recovery Teachers.”

In this 2005 article, authors Allison Matczuk and Stan Straw applied Wood’s theory of contingent teaching to examining how 10 Reading Recovery teachers interacted with their students during the recording of the story. They looked at Wood’s three dimensions of contingent tutoring to document the teachers’ ways of teaching. The first dimension, the what to teach, refers to the different ways in which teachers support young learners in solving words in writing. These ways include analyzing new words by hearing and recording their sounds, using what you know to get to new words, and knowing how to produce a word fluently in all its detail. The authors observed single word-solving methods or a combination of solving approaches in the records they obtained. The second dimension of tutoring, the how to teach, refers to the five levels of support offered to children during the recording of the story, from the least supportive (general verbal intervention) to the most supportive (tutor demonstrates action). The third dimension of teaching, the when to teach, refers to if and when teachers intervene to assist the student. The study found that students who made rapid progress were given more wait time for problem solving.

Bringing It All Together

The importance of all of the above concepts in *Literacy Lessons* for teaching and for the effective implementation of Reading Recovery is presented with clarity and forcefulness in Marie Clay’s 2005 article, “Stirring the Waters Yet Again.” The article was adapted from a keynote presentation delivered at the National Reading Recovery & K–5 Classroom Literacy Conference celebrating the 20th anniversary of Reading Recovery in the United States.

Clay started by affirming the value of the high-quality, professional development model of Reading Recovery and the teachers’ superb teaching, but used this celebratory occasion to share observations and concerns about what had not yet been accomplished. She identified the following needs: The need to expand to serve more children and raise the barrier higher to serve between the lowest 25–30% of the age cohort; the need to rethink our explanations by making sure they are expressed in today’s language and situated in today’s current issues (i.e. sources of information, strategic activities, prereferral intervention, discontinuing the lessons); the need to explain what’s special about instruction that is individually designed and individually delivered; and the need to address implementation concerns (incomplete series of lessons, summer breaks, first- vs. second-round children). She ended by offering her perspective on instructional links between talking, reading, and writing. She reiterated the importance of using the *Record of Oral Language* as an assessment tool that helps us think about children’s oral language development and its links to reading and writing.

References


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**JRR Editorial Team**

New faces join the *JRR* editorial staff with this issue. Mary Anne Doyle (seated, center) takes over the editor-in-chief duties, while Eva Konstantellou (seated, right) is the new teaching section editor. Continuing as section editors are Salli Forbes, (seated, left) implementation; Anne Simpson, (standing, left) research; and Marsha Studebaker, (standing, right) RRCNA.