

Marie Clay—A Tribute to An Enduring Scholar

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Dame Professor Marie Clay devoted her working life to understanding early reading development. Her PhD (1966) was focused on young learners' self-correcting behaviours whilst reading continuous text, and her observations gave shape to a unique set of descriptors. Across the world she was one of the first to indicate the complex nature of young children's processing activity as they used multiple cueing systems to reach resolutions to text challenges.

She illuminated the ways in which young children draw on a range of strategies to solve text problems. Marie was one of the first people to identify this range of activity more than 40 years ago. She identified and distinguished visual from linguistic strategies, and further differentiated syntactic and semantic processes. These powerful foci enabled scholars across the world to raise awareness of the sophistication of young learners and to take notice of their endeavours. Error analysis from this time became a positive arena for study, with Running Records a corner stone of Reading Recovery practice.

Let me share a guiding quotation from Marie's work:

Observation of children suggests that they do not learn about language on any one

level of organisation *before* they manipulate units at higher levels. (Many teaching schemes imply that this is so.) When they know a few letters they can produce several words, and with several words they can make a variety of sentences. ... A simplification achieved by dealing firstly with letters, then with words, and finally with word groups may be easy for teachers to understand but children learn on all levels at once.

What Marie has to say here, more than 30 years ago, is profound. What she is identifying is the complexity of children's learning about language on all levels at once. Immediately, we see the powerful way in which she has translated theory into practice. Her Reading Recovery procedures take every opportunity to work at all levels "at once," giving teachers and children the opportunity to interact across the linguistic and visual strategies to solve the challenges of both known and unknown texts.

Here we see the brilliance of Marie's devotion to her work. Her theoretical insights have always been profound. What has made them world class is the ways in which she has turned them into practice, a practice that has crossed international boundaries and boundaries of language. The transla-

tion of her theoretical insights into a powerful and enduring set of practices is a tribute to Marie's ability to identify theoretical perspectives and translate them into practical procedures that support young learners.

Reading Recovery is an immense tribute to Marie's work across decades of theoretical considerations. Reading Recovery captures every aspect of Marie's work and makes available to Reading Recovery teachers a manageable set of activities to support young literacy learners. She has put in place a whole training and support program to ensure that young learners are initiated appropriately. Internationally, Reading Recovery is a program that speaks with one voice and continues to share a perspective across nations.

My own scholarship owes much to that of Marie Clay.

Her insights into the processes of young literacy learners have illuminated my understandings and my appreciation of practice. I am profoundly indebted for Marie's ability to translate theory into sound practice. She has created a network of international practice that has influenced the lives of millions of children across the world. This is truly an accomplishment at the highest level. Being an academic is one thing, being



Marie Clay: An Honored Mentor, Colleague, and Friend

a change agent for positive outcomes as well, is a great gift.

Marie, your great good humour, your patience with book signing and photos, your ability to continue to explain complex processes, and your determination to keep young literacy learners in focus, is a tribute to you as a scholar of the highest order.

Thank you, Marie Clay, for all you have done and all your work will do. Your work will endure because it is sound, it is powerful, and it is transcendent. Your life's memory will be supported and continue by those who acclaim your worth and value. Reading Recovery will support thousands of children, and through you, their memories will persist and succeed in ways that are remarkable.

Marie Clay, we value your insights, your ability to process theory into practice, and your support across nations for young literacy learners.

Your life will never be forgotten. Your genius and legacy will live on.

Remembering Marie

I stood in a long line waiting for Dr. Clay to sign my green and white Guidebook. As I got close, I could feel the nervousness rise inside of me. I had to say something to her, but what? I knew she was genius, and I was almost in her presence. ... I finally mumbled, "You changed my life." She touched me on my hand and said, "Just keep teaching those children." I will, Dr. Clay, I will!

Scott Mackin, Wisconsin

Marie Clay was both a dear personal friend and a renowned and highly respected leader of our profession. She served as president of the International Reading Association in 1992–93. Her wisdom and calm leadership moved the association and the profession forward. She will be sorely missed in so many ways. Thank you, Dame Marie!

Alan and Susan Farstrup, Delaware

Knowing Dr. Clay was like having a celebrity as a friend. Her approachable demeanor put me at instant ease. At the same time, her deep intellect and wisdom filled me with awe. Once when presenting at an AERA conference with Dr. Gay Su Pinnell, I shivered when I heard Dr. Clay would be attending the session. As I began speaking, I noticed her welcoming, affirming smile. I realized at that moment that I had a fan—not a judge—in the audience. That experience and my Reading Recovery training as a teacher leader were the impetus for my doctoral studies and subsequent book publication centered on the distinctive professional development needs of veteran literacy teachers.

Mary Anne Johnson, Massachusetts

Marie Clay was an exceptional human being. Her professional contributions are well known; but having worked with her, I have the greatest respect for her as a friend who encouraged, supported, gave credit where it was due, and never let us down. She was a friend to every tutor, teacher, and small child struggling to read.

Robin Peirce, New Zealand

May Marie Clay continue to look down upon all the teachers of struggling readers and sprinkle a bit of magic to help us help them become lifetime readers.

Suzanne Rea, Texas