

Keeping the Promise—Leading the Way

Twenty Five Years of Reading Recovery in North America

Reading Recovery professionals in Canada and the United States mark the 25th anniversary of Reading Recovery in North America confident in their commitment to this early intervention and gratified by the unprecedented accomplishments realized for children, teachers, schools, and the academy of international scholars. The story of the implementation, success, and influence of Reading Recovery across North America is unique and unparalleled. It is a multifaceted and compelling history, eloquently detailed by our contributing authors. To present the rich commentaries and reflections offered by our many writers, the editors are devoting both issues of this year's journal to commemorate our anniversary. We are excited to include the perspectives of individuals from both within and beyond our Reading Recovery professional community. Collectively, they reaffirm our efforts and remind us of the ongoing challenges and important work ahead.

As we celebrate Reading Recovery in North America, we reflect on the remarkable legacy of Marie Clay and note how indebted we remain to her. Recognized as one of the most-influential literacy scholars of the 20th century, she demonstrated that children's lives and our lives could indeed be changed in profound ways. As a result, our history of Reading Recovery is a success story of keeping the promise of literacy success for our most fragile learners and leading the way to new possibilities through research, sustained commitment, and integrity.

To recount our history, to identify the influence of Reading Recovery on the wider academy, and to explore new directions, we have organized our authors' contributions in the following sections: The Legacy of Reading Recovery, Influence and Effectiveness, and Creating New Possibilities.

The Legacy of Reading Recovery

The legacy of our 25 years of Reading Recovery is linked directly to Marie Clay's life and work, and this is the subject of the recently published *Boundless Horizons: Marie Clay's Search for the Possible in Children's Literacy*. The co-editors, Billie J. Askew and Barbara Watson, present a synopsis of this book giving us a review of the unfolding story of Marie Clay's development and research of Reading Recovery. The authors trace the international growth of Reading Recovery and report that data for 2.5 million children have been documented over time around the world.

The key role that research has played in the validation and evaluation of all aspects of Reading Recovery is reviewed. Also highlighted are the experimental studies and explorations of factors related to literacy learning and implementation, and this body of research is described as unprecedented in the American context.

The legacy of 25 years of Reading Recovery in North America is a rich account of excellence. The standards of implementation and leadership structures established by Marie Clay and her model of evidence-based decision making will continue to guide us into the future. The authors conclude by forecasting that exciting possibilities will evolve as we continue to pursue Marie Clay's vision of excellence in keeping the promise and leading the way.

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- to struggling learners who reach grade-level expectations in literacy within 12 to 20 weeks and maintain their gains over time, a demonstration of closing the achievement gap;
- to struggling learners who, while making substantial improvements in literacy learning, are found in need of longer terms of support and complete Reading Recovery with documentation that informs ongoing planning;
- to teachers who are empowered by professional development that acknowledges that effective teaching is intellectual activity;
- to schools that benefit from cost savings through reduced rates of retentions and referrals to special education; and
- to schools that embrace an early intervention validated by the federally based What Works Clearinghouse for its research base and support for a causal link to student achievement.

Influence and Effectiveness

Resulting from Reading Recovery's rich legacy, including its national/international use and visibility, and from the practice of pursuing connections with other scholars and researchers, Reading Recovery educators have many associates. To explore the perspectives of scholars beyond our network, we invited several individuals to share their perceptions of Reading Recovery. Each author is insightful and informative.

In "Reflections from a Two-Decade Association with Reading Recovery," Anthony S. Bryk discusses three big ideas, or core ideas, of Reading Recovery that resonate with his observations of current needs for reform. First among these is acknowledgement of effective teaching as intellectual work, much more complex than scripting. He also states that Clay's organizational design was way ahead of its time. Perhaps his most-striking account is his first reaction to lessons observed at The Ohio State University. He was immediately focused on the children and what he saw made him think that Reading Recovery is special. Perhaps we could say he observed teachers keeping the promise for struggling readers.

W. Dorsey Hammond identifies Reading Recovery as the most-important initiative in literacy education in the past two decades in his article "The Critical Influence of Reading Recovery." He discusses four features that distinguish Reading Recovery, including its theoretical foundation, instructional procedures, teacher training, and community of teacher-scholars. He emphasizes the importance and benefits to children and the profession of one-to-one instruction, and he suggests that the impact of Reading Recovery professionals on school districts and the schoolwide curriculum are immeasurable. He reflects on the challenges met by literacy educators in the U.S. over the last decade and states his belief that Reading Recovery, with its strong research base, played a key role in responding with an alternative perspective. Perhaps this is an example of leading the way in the wider arena of literacy education.

Darrell Morris writes that Reading Recovery has had a profound influence on beginning reading instruction in the United States in his article "Reading Recovery: Foundational Ideas." He notes that 25 years ago, Marie Clay's perspectives challenged all prevailing practices for struggling readers. Instructional support was withheld, remediation was delivered in small groups, and teachers of struggling readers did not receive specialized training. In discussing Reading Recovery's alternative practices, he stresses the importance of individual, intensive, early intervention delivered by well-trained teachers. He is most direct in rejecting small-group instruction for at-risk beginning readers by stating that such an approach "defies common sense, experience, and a mountain of research evidence." His commentary reminds us of valuable, necessary, implementation components needed to ensure the promise of literacy success for at-risk learners.

Also featured in this section are stories showcasing the proven influence of Reading Recovery on struggling readers and their families, and of the proven effectiveness of vintage Reading Recovery teacher training sites in the U.S. and Canada. We are so pleased to share their successes. It is a special joy to reconnect with Dante Marshall, one of the first Reading Recovery children in North America, and now a new father.

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- by redeveloping Reading Recovery in Spanish and French for learners who engage in beginning literacy instruction in the native language of their homes and communities;
- by demonstrating accountability through data collection and analyses;
- by exploring redesign issues through ongoing research and problem solving;
- by setting a high standard for educational research;
- by demonstrating the powerful link between research and practice;
- by creating new possibilities through explorations of the application of Clay's theory and research to a wide range of individuals, including English language learners and learners with special education needs; and
- by committing to ongoing research exploration.

Creating New Possibilities

Included in this section are contributions that provoke self-reflection and challenge, offer suggestions for working with parents and English language learners, and report on current explorations of the wider applications of Reading Recovery theory and practice.

In her article, "A Teacher's Observation Survey," Susan O'Leary describes the potential of teachers' habits or powers of observation, awareness, and communication to evolve and heighten. She explores the many aspects of observing closely by relating interesting examples and shares the exciting effects of her close observations and enhanced communication on her teaching. She creates understandings of new possibilities for teachers and these include the ability to realize new levels of effective teaching.

Patricia A. Edwards and her co-authors, Leah Porter and Rebecca Norman, suggest how to create new possibilities for working with parents and helping them participate productively in their children's literacy development. Their article, "Strategies for Increasing the Role of Parents in Reading Recovery," reviews key concepts and research and concludes with very specific suggestions for helping Reading Recovery teachers plan effectively to accommodate parents' needs and engage them in ways that ensure success for children.

Cynthia Rodríguez-Eagle and Annette Torres-Elias address the important possibilities that Reading Recovery instruction creates for English language learners. In their article, "ELLs in Reading Recovery," they establish understandings of language development and second-language acquisition, and they delineate the ways Reading Recovery instruction and assessment are supportive of the language and literacy growth of ELLs. They offer specific recommendations for approaching reading and writing instruction and as a result, create deeper understandings and offer helpful direction to Reading Recovery teachers.

In their article, "The Promise of Clay's Theory of Literacy Processing: Training Literacy Lessons Intervention Specialists," Eva Konstantellou and Mary K. Lose introduce the exciting possibilities created by Marie Clay's vision of supporting the literacy development of a wider range of children in need of individual instruction. They present both the historical perspective and the theoretical rationale for training specialist teachers in Literacy Lessons. They explain that the training of intervention specialists is the focus of current development and research by a number of Reading Recovery training centers across the U.S. As this work continues, standards for training, instruction, and implementation will be developed, and the Reading Recovery community will have a new, exciting opportunity leading the way in demonstrating Clay's conviction that all children can learn.

Keeping the Promise

We invite you to enjoy this special issue of *JRR*, a celebration of 25 years of Reading Recovery excellence and the many individuals who have demonstrated remarkable commitment to keeping the promise and leading the way. We offer our efforts and this issue to support your work, to recognize your achievements, and to encourage your ongoing commitment to exciting, future possibilities.

— The Editors

The JRR editorial team wishes to acknowledge the many contributions of Salli Forbes who has served as Implementation Section editor of the journal since its first issue in 2001 and has been a vital member of our team, always committed to excellence. Her expertise, creativity, and awareness of key concerns have ensured that each issue—including this one—was the best our team could produce.



We thank Salli for her 9 years of outstanding editing and special support, and we are pleased that she continues as chair of the RRCNA Communications Committee.