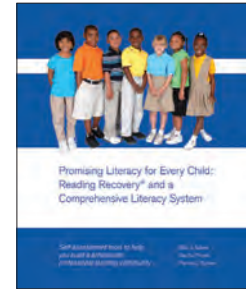


Tools Help Guide Journey to Comprehensive Literacy System

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It's nothing short of amazing how those involved in Reading Recovery can move from idea to fruition in such a short time.

This article is the story behind *Promising Literacy for Every Child: Reading Recovery and a Comprehensive Literacy System*, the latest resource published by RRCNA. It was just a glimmer of an idea during strategic planning last spring and has now fully emerged as a coilbound guide to help districts assess their literacy instruction and design a comprehensive literacy system with the help of their Reading Recovery professionals.

The guide was published just in time for each person at the 2014 National Conference in February to receive a complimentary copy. Members unable to attend the Conference received a copy by mail. In addition, RRCNA shipped multiple copies to each university training center in the U.S. and regional center in Canada. Additional copies are also available for purchase at the online RRCNA Store.

We hope this article will answer some basic questions as you embark on your journey to a professional learning community. We've also produced an online video with much of the same information. See page 67 in this issue for more about the new guide.

Why is it important?

This guide was inspired by the many schools and districts that have Reading Recovery and have documented strong student achievement because they used the expertise of Reading Recovery-trained teachers to create a professional learning community. We have all heard stories about how Reading Recovery training enabled teachers to accomplish so many other professional goals — guiding professional development for teachers, serving on school and district literacy committees, and moving into curricular and administrative positions. But, there are few articles, chapters, or books describing how this happened.

At a time when implementation decisions are often made based upon mythical sound bites such as “Reading Recovery is expensive” or “Teachers only work with four children,” those at the strategic planning retreat recognized an opportunity to correct such myths and further describe the value of Reading Recovery implementation by focusing on how Reading Recovery professionals can provide much more than four 30-minute lessons each day. We wanted to reframe information surrounding implementation decisions by documenting the value of a Reading Recovery-trained teacher well beyond the children taught individually and in small groups to include expertise to inform district curriculum development, provide professional development for teachers, and impact classroom instruction.

The guide is based upon the belief that you can build a comprehensive approach by extending the reach of the Reading Recovery teacher, and by creating professional development based on the foundational principles of Reading Recovery:

- A powerful system of assessing and monitoring the progress of young children
- Teachers who recognize their responsibility to analyze data, make precise teaching decisions, and relentlessly pursue student learning
- Demonstration that low-achieving children can learn in a short period of time, altering perceptions and expectations of teachers, and enhancing self-esteem and self-efficacy of children
- Expert literacy educators who work with the lowest-achieving children in Grade 1 and, in additional roles, with a range of other children across grade levels
- Highly qualified literacy professionals who collaborate with and support classroom teachers and the school literacy team as valued members within a community of learners
- A systemic approach to early identification and early intervention for struggling literacy learners (a good fit with response to intervention)

- Reduction in retentions and referrals
- Reduction in achievement gaps across racial/ethnic, economic, and language groups
- A partnership among educators who collaborate about individual children, analyze problems and engage in shared decision making related to literacy learning

How did it come about?

There were two simultaneous initiatives planned to support the design of the guide which intersected at times to create the guide. Billie Askew and Gay Su Pinnell volunteered to work together to conceptualize the guide which would be influenced by a study done by Patricia Scharer, Peter Johnston, Salli Forbes, and Janice Van Dyke. The study began as Reading Recovery trainers nominated districts that had successful comprehensive literacy systems and had Reading Recovery teachers or teacher leaders. The research team then conducted interviews with 15 teachers, superintendents, curriculum coordinators, and teacher leaders from four districts in different states. With the support of RRCNA staff, the two initiatives came together just in time for the National Conference.

What's behind the title?

Promising Literacy for Every Child came from Reading Recovery's goal for every child to learn to read and write. We had many discussions about the word promising — what were we actually promising? We can certainly promise to commit to decisions that will provide the very best instruction for every child. We can

promise to work with all stakeholders who make decisions at every level, from the individual classroom teacher to the school board member. And, we certainly believe that this guide is promising for the educators who use it to think through their own situations and create comprehensive literacy systems. The goal is not only for every child to read and write, but to become a reader and writer for life! We believe every school's teachers want this for their students and are hoping that this guide helps design a plan that results in this success.

What is included?

The guide begins with an introduction and overview to help readers consider what we can learn from Reading Recovery relevant to comprehensive literacy systems. Included are the characteristics of Reading Recovery, theoretical principles underlying Reading Recovery, and an overview of the guide. The introduction concludes with the first of four "Promises in Practice" case studies focusing on the four districts participating in our study. Jason Hillman describes the 6-year journey in his school — from about 40% of students scoring at the proficient level on state assessments to nearly 100%.

The next three sections of the guide contain self-assessment tools intended to create conversations that build a shared vision of literacy learning for the whole school or district. In section I is an inventory focusing on identifying what is currently happening at each grade level, identifying strengths, and setting goals for improvement. Four essential beliefs are offered and described so that educators can list strengths and create goals.

Those four beliefs include

- involving children in active, constructive learning while reading and writing authentic texts;
- expecting educators in all roles to participate in high-quality, ongoing professional development to increase their expertise and student learning;
- understanding the importance of creating learning communities of educators with a shared vision for literacy education; and
- ensuring that schools function as collaborative communities where people engage in rich conversations that support data analysis, problem solving, and the creation of the most-effective ways to support student learning.

Section II describes six components of a comprehensive literacy plan and offers tools for educators to assess their stage of development in each of six areas:

- Evaluating the professional learning community in your school
- Evaluating/selecting classroom literacy programs for primary grades
- Evaluating literacy assessment and progress monitoring tools
- Selecting/evaluating literacy interventions
- Evaluating the literacy leadership team
- Evaluating family and community initiatives



The new comprehensive literacy guide was introduced at the 2014 National Conference, where every attendee was given a complimentary copy.

The first tool to assess the professional learning community in the school is in the form of a rubric, with descriptors for each characteristic ranging from ‘just beginning’ to ‘proficient’ and is based on the Professional Learning Community Continuum by Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour (2002). The other five components have Likert scale rubrics to score from 1 (very little evidence or rarely) to 5 (substantial evidence or consistently). Analyzing the data from these rubrics will identify the current status of each component and help to determine goals for improvement.

Section III, “Designing Your Comprehensive Literacy Plan,” provides a framework for goals and forms to help you develop action plans and timelines. By working through the data collected in section II, teams can move into designing a literacy plan complete with action steps, timeline, point person(s), and evidence of progress.

Two appendices complete the guide. Appendix A offers basic information about Reading Recovery and a list of websites for further information. Appendix B offers brief case studies of three of the four districts participating in our study. When you read the studies, it’s important to recognize that there truly were multiple paths to common outcomes!

Anything special?

One of the unique features of this guide are the “Promises in Practice” case studies and quotes from case study interviews. Every few pages you will see a photograph of an educator we interviewed and a salient quote from their interview. We see these quotes as a way to both encourage other educators and also put a “face” on the process of designing comprehensive literacy systems. We truly appreciate the 15 educators who were willing to be interviewed and identified in this guide. We know you’ll enjoy reading about their journeys!

Another special feature is that the tools printed in the guide are also available on the RRCNA website as downloadable Word documents. This way, you can collect your data electronically and also share through email. We hope that the combination of print resources and online tools will support the design process.

How should we use it?

The guide is designed to be flexible based on a school or district’s unique needs. Even though sections are numbered and there are six components, you can “choose your own adventure” while using the guide. For example, you may want to start with section I but then select just one or two of the components in section II to focus on based on the data collected in section I. Or you may want to move right into the six components.

The intensity of using the guide may vary as well. Perhaps you will want individual schools to complete the self-assessments in section I and then come together at the district level to decide the next steps. This could be a year-long or even multiple-year collaboration. Literacy improvement is a process that improves over time and builds upon strengths, so leaders need to be able to adapt and use it based on their unique strengths. No matter where a school is in the process, leaders and their learning team can proceed with the process!

References

- Eaker, R., DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2002). *Getting started: Reculturing schools to become professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.