Collaborative Inquiry: Our Path to Learning and Improvement
Amy Smith, Beth Magsig, and Amy Emmons

Initiating a Network’s Renewal: Charting the Development of Reading Recovery’s Networked Improvement Community
Chad R. Lochmiller and Jennifer Karnopp

What to Teach? Supporting Strategic Processing at the Earliest Text Reading Levels
Mary K. Lose

Learning Letter-Sound Relationships: Evidence and Practice
Sinéad Harmey and Sue Bodman

2018–2019 National Report: Data Again Show Strong Impact on Student Learning
Jeffrey Brymer-Bashore

LitCon
National K–8 Literacy & Reading Recovery Conference

Join the homecoming of childhood literacy leaders! Learn from the leading voices in education and be the first to know about current research and the most innovative practices in childhood literacy.

with keynote speakers

Jeffery Williams  Cornelius Minor  Gerry Brooks

January 30 – February 2, 2021
in Columbus, Ohio

find details and register at
www.literacyconference.org

Powerful, research-based professional development designed to support literacy educators

Choose from more than 100 sessions focused on classroom teaching, intervention, leadership, coaching, and children’s literature, including featured speakers:

Anthony Muhammad  Gravity Goldberg  Mary Howard
Wiley Blewitt  Sharrocks Hoddie  Colleen Cruz
Pernille Riggs  Sherry Kinzel

plus Reading Recovery speakers

CC Sales  Sue Duncan  Jennifer Flight
Mary Fried  James Schmog

Special Anniversary Section Featuring Reflections and Highlights of Historic Progress

Reading Recovery® Council of North America
500 W. Wilson Bridge Rd., Suite 250
Worthington, OH 43085

Our vision:
We ensure the competencies necessary for a literate and productive future for children learning to read and write.

Phone 614.310.READ (7323)  Fax 614.310.7345
Visit Us Online www.readingrecovery.org

The Journal of Spring 2020
Vol. 19 No. 2

Reading Recovery®

Reading Recovery Council of North America
EVERY CHILD HAS THE RIGHT
to live a literate life every day, in every classroom.

— Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

“ ”

Your work as a teacher of literacy is worthwhile and important because it transforms the lives of students.
Teaching
What to Teach? Supporting Strategic Processing at the Earliest Text Reading Levels .............................................. 5
Mary K. Lose

Reading Recovery Intervention for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Teaching Melissa to Read ........ 17
Annie Opat, Garreth Zalud, John Wheeler, and Amy Clements

Implementation
Initiating a Network’s Renewal: Charting the Development of Reading Recovery’s Networked Improvement Community .................... 27
Chad R. Lochmiller and Jennifer Karnopp

Wonderfully Disruptive Messages from Reading Recovery .................. 35
James R. Schnug

Research
IDEC Evaluation Report 2018–2019: Data Again Show Strong Impact on Student Learning .................................................. 46
Jeffrey Brymer-Bashore

Learning Letter-Sound Relationships: Evidence and Practice .............. 55
Sinéad Harmey and Sue Bodman

Collaborative Inquiry: Our Path to Learning and Improvement ............... 67
Amy Smith, Amy Emmons, and Beth Magsig

Special Anniversary Section: Celebrating 35 Years of Excellence .............. 80

RRCNA
President’s Message
Lessons Learned Inform the Future ........................................... 103
Karen Scott

Executive Director’s Message
Passion, Energy, Commitment .................................................. 105
Billy Molasso

Council News ........................................................................ 106

Advertisers
Heinemann page 16, inside front cover, inside back cover
MaryRuth Books page 25
Editor’s Corner

Patricia L. Scharer, Editor-in-Chief

Celebrating 35 Years: Change, Change, and More Changes!

We have so much to share with our readers that this issue is much larger than usual! The subtitle of this column emphasizes change, a theme across this issue. First, the spread of COVID-19 across North America has disrupted our typical publication so, for the first time, this issue is totally electronic. We know some readers will miss having the paper version but hope that this format also enables you to take this celebration issue of JRR with you on your iPad, phone, or laptop (when it is safe to move outside your home, of course). In addition, we encourage you to share this issue with other interested educators so they can learn more about Reading Recovery. The 35th anniversary is a great time to do just that! How about leading an online study group? It’s time to share Reading Recovery widely and the electronic version of JRR is just the ticket!

Celebrating Teaching

Strategic processing is central to Clay’s theory of early literacy. But, helping a child to develop strategic processing is a challenge for every Reading Recovery teacher. Mary Lose’s article, “What to Teach? Supporting Strategic Processing at the Earliest Text Reading Levels,” reminds us that teaching for strategic processing begins right away in Reading Recovery lessons. Her article offers an important discussion of how Wood’s theory of contingent teaching can inform our decision making. The article is rich with student examples to challenge our thinking. The second teaching article is a rich description of how Reading Recovery lessons supported a child on the autism spectrum with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Opat, Zalud, Wheeler, and Clements describe how specific decisions by the teacher based on the student’s needs moved her from not attending to print to successfully reading Level 14 texts while demonstrating literacy processing strategies.

Celebrating Our Networked Improvement Community

In the fall 2019 issue of JRR, readers learned of changes Reading Recovery professionals considered while taking an inquiry approach to improvement and expansion (Forbes, Askew, Flight, & Embry, 2019). This exciting work, begun with intense study at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, continues with the development of a Reading Recovery Networked Improvement Community (NIC). Chad Lochmiller and Jennifer Karnopp, from Indiana University Bloomington, describe how Reading Recovery leaders have created a NIC based on new learning about improvement science. We anticipate that an article about this work will be a regular feature in JRR. As you read James Schnug’s article, “Wonderfully Disruptive Messages from Reading Recovery,” consider how Schnug’s work aligns with the goals of those working in the NIC — he fully positions “disruptions” as important changes we need to consider for Reading Recovery students to grow and Reading Recovery to grow.
Celebrating Scholarly Successes
Our research section begins with the IDEC report from Jeff Brymer-Bashore about the strong, consistent impact Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura have on early literacy. Sinéad Harmey and Sue Bodman then offer an important discussion of phonics in Reading Recovery lessons. They extensively reviewed research on phonics and linked key findings and recommendations to Reading Recovery procedures in a helpful chart. Harmey and Bodman challenge all Reading Recovery professionals to describe phonics instruction during lessons as systematic rather than “when needed” arguing that, in fact, Reading Recovery students learn both intensively and systematically about letters, sounds, and how they work. The final research article began at a dining room table as three teacher leaders collaboratively worked through their data. Their multiyear partnership led to important changes in professional development learning and impressive changes in student achievement as well.

Celebrating an Amazing Anniversary
This issue marks the culmination of JRR’s yearlong celebration of Reading Recovery’s 35th birthday in the U.S. We have had so much to celebrate! First, the professors from The Ohio State University who worked initially on the implementation of Reading Recovery in North America—Gay Su Pinnell, Carol Lyons, and Diane DeFord—reflect on the past 35 years as Reading Recovery moved from a small project in Columbus, OH, to the longest lasting intervention for struggling first-grade students. Mary Anne Doyle's article, “U.S. Reading Recovery’s International Presence,” positions North America within the larger international Reading Recovery presence. Readers will learn about the International Reading Recovery Trainers Organization (IRRTO) and the contributions of literacy professionals around the world. Then, each university training center in North America highlights individual contributions to Reading Recovery and early literacy, followed by a descriptive and visual timeline of Reading Recovery in the past 5 years. Our party ends by reflecting on the 35th Anniversary Luncheon Celebration during the 2020 National Conference. The keynote address by Gay Su Pinnell is both historical and forward thinking about how to make a difference in the next 35 years. Two former Reading Recovery students, a high school junior and a successful businessman, brought the audience to their feet as they shared the impact of Reading Recovery on their lives. The luncheon was the perfect opportunity to again say “thank you” to Jady Johnson who was given a special Excellence in Service Award for the 16 years she led the Reading Recovery Council of North America.

Happy reading!

Reference
How to Submit Articles
Write for The Journal of Reading Recovery

Every Reading Recovery teacher, teacher leader, administrator, site coordinator, and parent has a good story to tell. Please consider sharing your Reading Recovery experiences, ideas, and surprises by writing for The Journal of Reading Recovery (JRR). We need to hear from you because readers have told us they want to hear more about people like themselves—especially those on the front lines working with children.

Blind Peer Review Process
The Journal of Reading Recovery is a peer-reviewed and refereed publication issued twice annually to members of the Reading Recovery Council of North America. All submitted manuscripts will be read by the editors to determine suitability for publication. Authors will receive an acknowledgment when the submission is received and will be notified via email of the editors’ decisions.

JRR uses a blind review process allowing only editors and editorial staff to know the names of the authors. The article will be sent to the appropriate section editor who will monitor a peer review process by a team of reviewers. Editors will send authors feedback from reviewers and, if necessary, specific suggestions for revision.

Guidelines for Authors
1. Select a topic of interest to our Reading Recovery audience.
2. Write clearly, concisely, and use an active voice.
3. Be sure the message is clear and has a consistent focus throughout.
4. Include dialogue or samples of children’s work when possible.
5. Articles will be edited to fit space and style requirements; published length ranges from short anecdotes to longer, more technical articles.
6. RRCNA publications follow the style designated by the most-recent edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.

Submitting Articles for Publication
All manuscripts, feature items, photos, and original artwork must be submitted electronically (see website for photo and artwork requirements) via email to vfox@readingrecovery.org.

For original manuscripts, please follow the most-recent APA style guidelines. Manuscripts must be double-spaced and should be no more than 30 pages (excluding reference list, tables, and figures). No identification of the author(s) and affiliations should appear anywhere in the manuscript, including running headers and footers. A cover page identifying corresponding and contributing authors, affiliations, and email contacts should accompany the manuscript.

For questions about or help with the submission process, email vfox@readingrecovery.org.

Copyright Notice
© 2020 Reading Recovery Council of North America (RRCNA). All rights reserved.

The Journal of Reading Recovery (ISSN 1538-6805) is published by the Reading Recovery Council of North America as a service to its members. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Requests for reproduction of articles must be made in writing by letter to Publications Permissions, Reading Recovery Council of North America, 500 W. Wilson Bridge Rd., Suite 250, Worthington, OH 43085, or online at https://readingrecovery.org/rrcna/journals/reprint-permissions/

Advertising provides product and service information to RRCNA members and helps defray the cost of publishing. Acceptance of advertising does not imply RRCNA endorsement of any products or services.

All RRCNA publications are copyrighted. Reading Recovery and the book and globe logo are registered trademarks of The Ohio State University in the United States.

ADOPTED FEBRUARY 2019
What to Teach? Supporting Strategic Processing at the Earliest Text Reading Levels

Mary K. Lose, Oakland University

Author’s Note: In this article, Reading Recovery® teachers also refers to Literacy Lessons™ teachers. All names are pseudonyms.

Introduction
Young learners come to literacy with different experiences and strengths and do not respond to every literacy task in exactly the same way (Clay, 1998/2014). Consequently, their teachers must instruct in ways that are tailored precisely to the child. The challenge for Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons teachers is to make optimum use of lesson time and teach in ways that focus on what the child needs to learn “how to do next” in terms of strategic processing. At the same time, teachers must provide the “just right” amount of support for the child, encouraging independence and without doing for the child what they can manage for themselves. Easy to say, but much harder to put into practice.

In every lesson, the goal is to help each child build an effective literacy processing system in which they independently monitor their own reading; search for information using meaning, language structure, and visual information in print; notice their errors; take unprompted action to correct those errors; and problem-solve flexibly (Clay, 2015; Doyle, 2019; Konstantellou & Lose, 2016). As the child engages in this range of strategic actions over time, their processing systems become stronger and more efficient enabling them to read increasingly complex texts with fluency, accuracy, and a focus on meaning.

Reading Recovery teachers sensitively observe and note the child’s use of meaning (M), structure (S), and visual (V) information sources on their running records and lesson records. Yet, this alone is not sufficient to inform teaching. Teachers must go beyond mere observation to “… search for better explanations of how children are producing those behaviours” (Clay, 1991/2015, p. 232). Ultimately, to respond effectively to children, teachers must probe further, beyond their observational records, to generate hypotheses that help explain what led to the child’s decisions to do “this vs. that.” Engaging in this inquiry in every lesson with every child will increase and strengthen the quality of our one-to-one teaching and support the formation and extension of children’s processing systems for literacy.

The specific focus of this discussion is how to get the literacy processing system underway in early text reading levels. Examples of children’s reading work are shared to focus on self-monitoring and self-correcting in early reading.

An Early Literacy Processing System
To illustrate a literacy processing system in action, notice how one young learner, Rachel, reads a Level 8 text, A Friend for Little White Rabbit (Randell, 1994), during one of her Reading Recovery lessons:

Text: Little white duck, little white duck. Please will you play with me? said the little white rabbit.

Rachel: Little white bunny [pauses, quickly rereads] little white, /b/ bird [repeats “bird” in a whisper], /b/-uck, duck [quickly self-corrects, rereads, and continues reading accurately].

Now, consider this analysis of Rachel’s reading:

- First, Rachel provided a meaningful and grammatically correct attempt. However, the words bunny and duck are visually dissimilar.
- Second, after pausing as if to notice, Rachel reread up to the error, then articulated a first sound /b/ for the letter d, perhaps an indication
of a b/d confusion although her substitution of bird for duck is meaningful and grammatically correct.

• Third, she initiated a search of the letters to the end of the word (-uck) and read buck, a further indication of a possible b/d confusion.

• Fourth, she quickly substituted duck to self-correct, perhaps resolving the b/d confusion while also concluding that although buck was somewhat relevant, it did not resemble the illustration and fit the text’s meaning.

• Finally, she reread from the beginning to confirm her self-correction and continued thereafter to read accurately.

Essentially, Rachel searched, monitored, and self-corrected independently to make all sources of information match. She attended to language structure (the reading is grammatically correct or sounds right) and visual information (the reading uses letter-sound correspondences and orthography to make everything look right), all with a focus on meaning (the reading makes sense). Importantly, Rachel also reread to confirm her self-correction without prompting to do so. Reading with attention to this combination of information sources and taking the initiative to confirm the reading are indicators of Rachel’s decision making as she persistently works toward a resolution.

Essentially, Rachel searched, monitored, and self-corrected independently to make all sources of information match. She attended to language structure (the reading is grammatically correct or sounds right) and visual information (the reading uses letter-sound correspondences and orthography to make everything look right), all with a focus on meaning (the reading makes sense). Importantly, Rachel also reread to confirm her self-correction without prompting to do so. Reading with attention to this combination of information sources and taking the initiative to confirm the reading are indicators of Rachel’s decision making as she persistently works toward a resolution. Although Rachel’s processing is still rudimentary, it will become more efficient over time as she reads and writes progressively complex texts with increased flexibility. Rachel’s reading is a good example of an independent strategic processing system in action—the teacher’s goal for Rachel in her early literacy lessons.

It is the process of working with a range of information sources and the child’s thinking as they work on information at the point of difficulty that are essential and lead to the development of an effective literacy processing system. For the most struggling young literacy learners, that processing system is dependent on expert teaching. The teacher must tune in to the child’s reading (and writing) behaviors in order to

• create hypotheses to explain the behaviors that can be tested and responded to “in the moment,”

• reflect upon the child’s responses to plan for instruction, and

• arrange opportunities for their future learning.

As Clay (1991/2015) states:

The teacher has a general theory in her head about children’s responding. This is a theory she should check against what she is able to observe and infer from the individual child’s responding, and which she should be prepared to change if the two are in conflict. (p. 233)

**Expert Teaching: Contingent and Responsive to the Child**

Fundamentally, for learners like Rachel, assembling an effective literacy processing system will require the most expert teaching (Lose, 2007a). Instruction that is contingent and responsive to each child’s developing competencies is evident in our work with children during lessons and addresses three contingencies to inform our interactions with a child (see Figure 1). Wood (2003) identified these critical contingencies as

• temporal contingency (if and when to intervene),

• instructional contingency (how to support the activity and at what level of support), and

• domain contingency (what to teach or focus on next).

According to Wood (2003), tutoring has its origins in the basic human need to provide help when encountering a person who is struggling. Wood describes helping as essential to the survival of the species: an investment in the person that helps them adapt to their environment. In Wood’s view, contingent tutoring is based on the principle that the tutor works at an appropriate level that will ensure success, perhaps interacting only minimally to help the learner successfully complete the next step in a task.

To deliver contingent instruction requires viewing these contingencies holistically; each contingency is important for the learner’s next action (see Lose, 2007b).

Additionally, a graphic representation of the contingencies that comprise Wood’s theory of contingent support for learning is presented in Figure 2. In a theory of contingent teaching, the “sweet spot” or perfectly contingent interaction is achieved when the temporal, domain, and instructional contingencies converge. In other words, when a child encounters difficulty, the teacher

• decides if and when to intervene,

• decides what to teach or focus on next in response to the particular child’s current competencies, and
provides the just right amount of support for the problem solving required of the child at this point in time while also considering how best to help the child transfer this new learning to other similar literacy tasks.

Importantly, the elements of contingent teaching are not predetermined or fixed. As Clay (2016) asserts, “There are no set teaching sequences: there is no prescription to teach this before that” (p. 1). Reading Recovery lessons are optimally effective when the teaching is responsive to the individual learner. Thus, the responsibility for the child’s opportunity to learn rests squarely with the teacher whose commitments have been described by Clay (2001/2015), as follows:

• The teacher would make maximum use of the existing response repertoire of each child, and hence every child’s lessons would be different.
• The teacher would support the development of literacy processing by astute selection of tasks, judicious sharing of tasks, and varying the time, difficulty, content, interest and method of instruction, and type and amount of conversation within the standard lesson activities.
• The teacher would foster and support active constructive problem solving, self-monitoring and self-correction from the first lesson, helping learners to understand that they must take over the expansion of their own competencies. To do this, the teacher would focus on process variables (how to get and use information) rather than

---

**Figure 1. Elements of Contingent Support for Learning with Application to Reading Recovery Teaching**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporal Contingency</th>
<th>Instructional Contingency</th>
<th>Domain Contingency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deciding if and when to intervene</strong></td>
<td><strong>Deciding how to support an activity and at what level</strong></td>
<td><strong>Deciding what to teach and what to focus on next</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of the 30-minute lesson time:</td>
<td>• from least supportive defined as “General Verbal Intervention” (e.g., “Why did you stop?” or “Try that again”)</td>
<td>The teacher combines knowledge about the child’s use of information sources and the child’s strategic actions combined with the teacher’s understanding of Clay’s theory of literacy processing to inform teaching decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• timing of responses (e.g., waiting a few seconds before telling the child a word, or helping a child right away if they do not have the information needed to help themselves)</td>
<td>• to most supportive defined as “Demonstrates Action” (e.g., to teach for cross-checking, a teacher rereads for the child and says “Father Bear went down to the” [pauses and points beneath the first letter in word and taps on the picture] “river. Could it be river? R. Yes, it could!”)</td>
<td>Addressing the domain contingency requires knowing what items (letters, sounds, words, etc.) the learner has accumulated and how they use this information for strategic actions in text reading or writing. (e.g., self-monitoring, searching, cross-checking, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• pace of the responding (e.g., slow, moderate, fast)</td>
<td>Instructional Contingency resembles Clay’s (2016) “Scale of Help” (pp. 152-153).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** See also Lose, 2007b, Table 1.

---

**Figure 2. Wood’s Theory of Contingent Support for Learning**

- **DOMAIN** What to teach and what to focus on next
- **INSTRUCTIONAL** How to support activity and at what level
- **TEMPORAL** If and when to intervene

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Instructional</th>
<th>Temporal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What to teach and what to focus on next</td>
<td>How to support activity and at what level</td>
<td>If and when to intervene</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
on mere correctness and habitual responses, and would temporarily value responses that were partially correct for whatever they contributed towards correctness.

- The teacher would set the task difficulty level to ensure high rates of correct responding plus appropriate challenge so that the active processing system could learn from its own attempts to go beyond current knowledge. (p. 225)

For Reading Recovery educators, instruction referred to by Clay (2001/2015) as “intensive contingent teaching” (p. 225) is understandably difficult and requires “moving flexibly around the teaching procedures described in Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals, Second Edition as they work with children every day” (Clay, 2016, p. 1). As such, our teaching requires

- embracing a theory of the constructive learner;
- working with each child’s strengths;
- sensitively observing the child’s literacy acts;
- keeping daily and weekly records of the child’s responses and responding history;
- noting how it changes over time to inform instruction; and
- applying Clay’s teaching procedures as designed, with precision, and tailored to the child. (Clay, 2016; Doyle, 2015)

With all of the aforementioned conditions to inform instruction in place, effective Reading Recovery teachers make the teaching of the lowest-performing young learners look relatively seamless. Occasionally, when surprised by a child’s responses during text reading, teachers are able to respond in ways that best support the child’s solving and what they need to learn how to do next in terms of strategic action. Consider for example, Patrick’s reading of the Level 11 new book, Mushrooms for Dinner (Randell, 1996). In this story, Mother Bear wants to add mushrooms to the family’s meal. Baby Bear proclaims that he is good at finding mushrooms, conducts a search of his surroundings, but is unsuccessful locating any until he climbs a tree and spots them from his aerial view. Baby Bear then proceeds to gather the mushrooms and present them to his Mother, who compliments her son’s ingenuity.

Patrick’s teacher, Ms. Schieltz, noted how intently he focused on the illustration depicting Baby Bear atop the tree gazing at the mushrooms below. He seemed particu-

larly fascinated by Baby Bear’s resourceful solution to the problem of finding mushrooms and read the text below with gusto. If you were Patrick’s teacher, how would you respond to his reading and why?

Text: They are beautiful mushrooms. You are a clever little bear.

Patrick: They are beautiful mushrooms. You are a climber little bear.

Ms. Schieltz is pleased that his reading integrates all three sources of information. His substitution of climber for clever is meaningful, sounds right and looks right both at the beginning and ending letter clusters of the word. Previously Patrick’s attention to visual information was limited only to the first cluster of letters in a word. At this point, Ms. Schieltz must decide whether to intervene and, if she does, what she will attend to, how, and with what level of support. Not wanting to disrupt Patrick’s fluent and mostly accurate reading, she decides to withhold comment (temporal contingency) until he finishes reading. After a brief exchange about the story, she acknowledges his effective reading (“It was good the way you read this”); offers him a chance to detect his error (“Did anything trick you?”); and plans to teach according to his response. What she knows about his patterns of responding thus far (integrates all three sources of information and attends mostly to the initial letter or letter clusters, but neglects to search further using additional visual information) is outlined in the transcript below.

Ms. Schieltz: Baby Bear found the mushrooms after all…

Patrick: He climbed the tree and saw them. Bears can do that!

Ms. Schieltz: They sure can. (turning to the page with his climber/clever substitution) Over here it was good the way you read this. Did anything trick you?

Patrick: (rereads, pauses at clever, but does not take the initiative to problem solve or self-correct)

Ms. Schieltz: I’m glad you stopped. (acknowledging the self-monitoring) What did you notice? (inviting him to search)

Patrick: (rereads and self-corrects) It’s supposed to be clever. (pointing at the word)
Ms. Schieltz: Yes. How did you know?

Patrick: This. (pointing to the cl at the beginning of the word)

At this point, Ms. Schieltz decides to highlight Patrick's solving, rather than focusing on mere accuracy. Although she isn’t entirely certain if Patrick simply recalled the word clever that has appeared in several of the other stories he has read up to this point, or if indeed he is going beyond the beginning letter/s to conduct the search that results in his correction, Ms. Schieltz concludes there is enough information thus far that will help her teach for the more-complex solving that Patrick will need to do to advance his processing system further. She responds “Yes, you made it look right at the beginning. And what else do you see?” Patrick then points to the -er ending and adds, “Yep, it’s clever.”

In an effort to further verify Patrick’s noticing and to ensure his transfer of this new and more-sophisticated searching behavior, Ms. Schieltz hands him a small masking card and adds, “Yes, and you can show yourself all the parts.” Patrick moves the card left to right to reveal the parts of the word that correspond to his articulation, cl-ev-er. Ms. Schieltz acknowledges Patrick’s work stating, “I’m glad you were looking closely” and adds “remember to do this when you’re reading so that everything looks right.”

Ms. Schieltz then makes a note on her lesson record to watch for this and other signs of Patrick’s similarly developing strategic behaviors that will be important as texts become longer and more complex. She also notes where, in the other lesson activities—for example writing, the cut-up story, or the isolated word work at the white board—she can further support Patrick’s new word analysis skills. Finally, she also plans to consult Clay’s teaching procedures that will support her decisions about what to teach next in terms of strategic action in text reading, in writing, and in the other parts of his lessons.

This precisely tailored instruction requires rapid decision making on the part of the teacher and is key to contingent teaching:

- Knowing if and when to intervene or respond (temporal contingency).
- If responding, determining what to focus on or teach (domain contingency).
- Modulating the level of support in response to the child (instructional contingency).

At the same time, all the contingencies are considered holistically for optimum effectiveness and so as not to undermine the child’s initiation.

Deciding what to teach or focus on next (domain contingency) can challenge even the most skilled teacher. In the example above, Ms. Schieltz wisely focuses on Patrick’s substitution of climber for clever and teaches first for self-monitoring. In contrast, if she had focused first on fostering “further visual searching” she would have removed the opportunity for Patrick’s self-discovery and ultimate self-correction.

Observations of Reading Recovery teaching have suggested that too many times we are anxious to teach for the searching action (often visual searching within words) without inviting the child to find their own errors first, thus ensuring that the child is less involved in the discovery process that is central to their learning. (Anderson & Kaye, 2016; Schwartz, 1997). As Clay (2016) reminds us:

> It is important for teachers to notice self-monitoring because the process is a general one required in all reading and because the child’s half-right, half-wrong behaviours help the teacher to decide what to teach next [italics added for emphasis]. If the child resolves the problem we call it self-correction. (p. 134)

Thus, Ms. Schieltz provided Patrick the chance to self-monitor first; he did so; and, he subsequently corrected his error. This self-discovery and the personal reward derived from the self-correction increase the likelihood that Patrick will be able to conduct this type of more sophisticated searching action to solve words in the future.
on texts of increasing complexity and ultimately further strengthen his developing literacy processing system. There are several options for teaching presented by Clay in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (2016) that could inform the domain or what to teach Patrick at this time. Ms. Schieltz decided what to teach Patrick based on his responding history and his responses in the scenario above, with application to Clay’s teaching procedures. The primary task and the challenge for Ms. Schieltz and all of us who work in Reading Recovery is to apply Clay’s teaching procedures effectively and in response to the particular child.

**Application and Analysis of Clay’s Teaching Procedures for Text Reading: Support for the Individual Child**

We now turn our attention to some of Clay’s teaching procedures for text reading. The complex theory upon which Reading Recovery is based and the rationales that support Clay’s teaching procedures, and their application to an individual child (2016) at a particular time, both within lessons and across the child’s series of lessons comprise the domain contingency or “what to teach.” To explore this contingency, we will now focus on teaching during text reading with reference to two (among the many) “Reading Recovery (teaching) Procedures” in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (Clay, 2016). The procedures presented below are designed to support the child’s self-monitoring and self-correcting. Even though these procedures identified below are presented separately, in actual practice we sometimes respond using more than one teaching procedure in our work with children (for example, teaching for the child’s self-monitoring and another strategic action combined) as illustrated in the transcripts and analyses below.

**Teaching for self-monitoring in text reading**

See *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (Clay, 2016), pp. 134–135. According to Clay (2016), the emergence of self-monitoring is a highly significant signal of effective strategic activity and it “must be continually adapted to encompass new challenges in texts” (p. 134). Likewise, the monitoring (that leads to self-correcting) appears to arise “from an awareness, however vague, that there is supposed to be a neat fit between the reader’s knowledge and the words in print, and as readers work on the several messages of the
text—the story, and semantic, syntactic, visual or phonological information—they discover things that do not fit with what they have just read. Sometimes the child follows an error with a protest but does not succeed in making the self-correction” (Clay, 2001/2015, p. 185).

As children read their first books—simple stories with one and two lines of text—they use their knowledge of language and the world to make links between the pictures and the print. Self-monitoring is observed in children’s early reading behaviors; attending to print in a left-to-right direction and using some known letters and known words along with ensuring their reading makes sense. In the absence of self-monitoring in early reading, the teacher provides explicit demonstrations. For example, the teacher might use a pointer or show the child how to use their finger to establish a one-to-one match. She might reread a sentence and sound the first letter of a challenging word or ask, “Can you hear this letter?” (Clay, 2016, p. 133). Teaching for self-monitoring succeeds when the teacher’s demonstration builds on what the child can contribute to their own solving.

In this scenario, Elana is reading the simple (Level 2) book Sally’s New Shoes by Annette Smith. On every page, the book’s main character, Sally, tells the reader about all the things she is going to do in her new shoes (I’m going to walk in my new shoes; I’m going to run…, jump…, and so on). Each page is accompanied by an illustration that clearly supports the text’s meaning and repeated pattern. Elana’s reading proceeds smoothly until she comes to the text depicted below. The illustration that accompanies the page shows Sally in a pirouette and Elana substitutes spin for the word dance. Her teacher, Ms. Brooke, must decide if and when to intervene and how. And, if she chooses to intervene, what will she teach for in terms of strategic activity? Ms. Brooke's response to Elana's self-monitoring is illustrated in the transcript below:

Text: I’m going to dance in my new shoes.

Elana: I’m going to spin (frowns, but takes no action to self-correct, continues reading) in my new shoes.

Ms. Brooke: You tried to work that out. (reinforcing the self-monitoring attempt)

Elana: This. (pointing to dance, but neglects to reread and self-correct)

Ms. Brooke: Ah huh. What else could it be? (inviting a prediction of what the word could be based on her oral language)

Elana: Dance?

Ms. Brooke: Does it look right at the beginning? (using a masking card to reveal the first letter)

Elana: Yes. Dance. (then rereads accurately from the beginning of the sentence as if to confirm)

Ms. Brooke: So, it has to make sense and it also has to look right. (summarizing the teaching in an effort to support the child’s transfer)

In this scenario, Ms. Brooke has decided that teaching in support of Elana’s self-monitoring is the most important focus of her teaching at this time. Essentially, the child who self-monitors is poised to participate more fully in their own learning and benefit from good instruction. Even though Elana was unable to self-correct after she monitored, Ms. Brooke’s acknowledgment of her noticing (“you tried to work that out”) provides the encouragement young learners like Elana need to continue to check on themselves while reading. As well, Ms. Brooke’s use of the masking card to reveal the initial letter—combined with the reminder that making sense is also required—are the canvas upon which Elana can focus her attention and confirm her prediction using her knowledge of oral language. Ms. Brooke’s explicit teaching in this and other early lessons lays the important foundation for Elana’s assembly of a processing system for literacy.

Yet, attending to self-monitoring is not reserved only for early lessons. Rather, it is a focus of our work with children throughout their lesson series as they read higher level texts. Because she attended to it in early lessons and Elana was successful, Ms. Brooke can now do less teaching for self-monitoring and expect Elana to self-monitor independently. She can then prompt Elana “Were you right?” or “Try that again” (Clay, 2016, p. 135). Following is an example of Ms. Brooke’s attention to self-monitoring in a later lesson at the end of Elana’s first reading of A Friend for Jasper (Dufresne, 2004), a more complex text (Level 18) with less supportive illustrations:

Text: It was time for a nap. Jasper scratched at the door.

“Do you want to go out, Jasper?” asked Mom.
Mom opened the door. Out went Jasper, and out went Sweet Face right after him. “Look after Sweet Face, Jasper,” said Mom.

Elana: 
It was time for a nap. 
Jasper crouched at the door. (continues reading accurately…) “Look /ʃ/ after Sweet Face, Jasper,” said Mom.

Ms. Brooke withholds comment (temporal contingency) until after Elana finishes reading the rest of the chapter and responds.

Ms. Brooke: Did something trick you on this page?

Elana: (glancing at the text, immediately points to scratched) This one. (rereads to self-correct)

Ms. Brooke: Ah huh. I’m glad you were looking closely. (makes note of the successful solving and resolves to arrange opportunities for additional work with words in isolation of similar complexity)

Elana’s reading is fluent and accurate except for the two errors above, one of which resulted in an immediate self-correction (/ʃ/, after). Elana’s substitution of crouched for scratched uses all three information sources. The substitution is meaningful and grammatically correct, shares some visual similarity in the middle of the word, and incorporates the same sequence of letters (-ched) at the end of the word. The first letter, ‘c’ (crouched) is a mismatch for the letter ‘s’ (scratched). Even though Elana’s attention to monitoring has become much more advanced over time, there are still opportunities for Ms. Brooke to continue to teach for strategic processing in later lessons on more-complex texts in both reading and writing. She plans to find places in every lesson activity (isolated word work, solving words in writing, the cut-up story, etc.) that will continue to support Elana’s developing processing system.

Teaching for self-correcting in text reading

Clay (2001/2015) states that self-correction is “evidence of one kind of executive control developed and mobilised by readers to keep them on track” (p. 186). Self-correction appears early in children’s speech as they stop, start, refor-
Devon's teacher, Ms. Blakely, wisely acknowledges his self-monitoring and uses a prompt (“check it”) that she knows Devon understands, suggesting that she believes Devon will be able to resolve the dilemma (“wocean” for water) without further assistance. Ms. Blakely’s hunch is correct, for Devon quickly rereads and self-corrects to make all sources of information match. Not content to accept mere correctness however, Ms. Blakely proceeds to capitalize on Devon’s added strategic actions—the self-correcting and the confirming—and summarizes those actions with reference to Clay’s teaching procedures in *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (2016) as illustrated in the transcript below:

Ms. Blakely: Were you right?
Devon: (nods yes)
Ms. Blakely: How do you know? (probing for evidence that Devon’s attempt goes beyond mere guessing and to inform her subsequent teaching)
Devon: This. (pointing to the picture, an indication that meaning is used)
Ms. Blakely: And, is there any other way we could know? (preparing him to use additional visual information he is aware of and has neglected to use)
Devon: (pointing to the word water) It has this (pointing to w) and this. (pointing to -er)
Ms. Blakely: I’m glad you made it look right at the beginning and at the end. And now it also makes sense. (summarizing Devon’s action)

Clearly, Ms. Blakely’s teaching is contingent on Devon’s responding and addresses the domain or what to teach contingency as informed by Clay’s teaching procedures for self-correcting. It is also important to note that Ms. Blakely’s invitation to self-correct was issued after first acknowledging Devon’s self-monitoring (glancing at his teacher when reading, “wocean”). Devon self-corrected (water) and then confirmed that the word looked right at the beginning (w) and at the end (-er). Also, Ms. Blakely summarized and complimented Devon’s actions—attending to both the meaning and the visual information—in an attempt to further ensure that they would be repeated again and with increased speed. Finally, Ms. Blakely considered where else in Devon’s lessons, besides text reading, she could teach for and support these similar strategic actions.

Summary and Recommendations for Teachers
In conclusion, the challenge for every Reading Recovery teacher is to support the child’s development of a strategic processing system for literacy. This requires expert teaching with a focus on what the child can do currently and what the child needs to learn how to do next. Essentially, our teaching needs to be precisely tailored to the child and astutely timed and delivered in response to the child to optimally support their independent strategic action. To do this, teachers need to keep tasks easy enough for the child to notice their errors and self-correct during early reading. Essentially, our contingent teaching—if and when to intervene, what to focus on in our teaching, and how to support the child—is critical to getting the child’s literacy processing system underway from earliest lessons.

Equally important is an acknowledgment of the constructive child. We value each child’s strengths, their developing understandings and the range of experiences that have contributed to their current grasp of literacy, and tailor our instruction accordingly. As such, we assume a noticing, not judgmental stance, always remaining tentative and nimble in our interactions with the child. We respect each child’s idiosyncratic responding and know that understanding the child’s perspective will help us teach in ways that enable the child’s contributions to their own learning and ultimate happiness.

Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness of teaching in Reading Recovery and to sustain our teaching commitments to every child in early text reading, I invite all of us to consider one or more of the following recommendations.

*Sensitively observe and document each child’s current control over literacy processing.*
It is essential to collect and analyze the wealth of data gathered from our daily and weekly records of text reading and writing to inform our understandings of what children know and how they know it, and use this information to make the most facilitative and contingent teaching moves. None of us would embark on an unfamiliar miles-long solo journey by car without the benefit of a functioning navigation system. An absence of detailed daily records and the opportunity to use those records to guide our teaching disadvantages both the teacher and child.
Develop hypotheses to be checked continuously to inform our work with children.

As Clay cautions:
Treating behavior (what the child is doing) and cognition (what the child is thinking) as explanatory alternatives is not helpful for understanding teaching interactions. Both teacher and child exhibit behaviors and both operate on cognitions. The teacher has a general theory in her head about children’s responding. This is a theory she should check against what she is able to observe and infer from the individual child’s responding, and which she should be prepared to change if the two are in conflict. (Clay, 1991/2015, p. 233)

Understand that a child is responding as best they can at the moment and ask ourselves: What led the child to respond in this way or that?

Teach in support of the child seated alongside us in today’s lesson, not just the child we wish he would become in the future.

Ask: What does this child need to learn how to do next to expand their current processing system? The child who does not yet have early behaviors under control (e.g., consistently neglects one-to-one matching or doesn’t yet control serial order within words) is unlikely to benefit from teaching that focuses on greater complexity (e.g., searching for letter clusters within multisyllabic words). Understandably, we all want children to make rapid progress. But pushing children through material that is too difficult will decelerate, not accelerate, the child’s literacy processing development. When the material is too difficult, the child’s ability to construct their own learning is thwarted.

Determine what’s next in this child’s learning that will foster the continued development of a processing system. Aim to teach in ways that are generative, so that the child can transfer new learning to novel contexts and develop a self-extended system for literacy.

Value the child’s unique contributions to their own noticing and attempts to problem solve.
The child’s noticing is a first step toward their self-correction (or self-teaching) and enables greater participation in their own learning. Specifically, prioritize teaching for the child’s self-monitoring in early text reading so that they are more likely to consistently self-monitor as they read increasingly complex texts. As Clay (2016) reminds, “Effective monitoring is a highly skilled process constructed over many years of reading. It begins early but must be continually adapted to encompass new challenges in texts” (p. 134).

Keep tasks easy enough.
Tasks pitched at a too-challenging level distract the child, compromise their ability to focus attention and discover for themselves, and result in the child’s discouragement.

Record our lessons and transcribe our interactions with children.
Ask: Did I create opportunities for the child to self-monitor or did I monitor for the child? Likewise, after monitoring, did the child initiate some additional strategic action (cross-checking, searching, confirming) or did I come in too quickly and remove opportunities for the child’s additional action? Did I provide space for the child’s own discoveries and if the tasks became too challenging for the child, did I offer appropriate and timely support?

Always focus on child happiness and ensure that it is central to every lesson.
A child who is secure and happy with their work is more likely to participate fully in learning and benefit from our instruction. Therefore, establish a learning climate that builds on what the child does well and let this be your guide for teaching. As Lyons (2003) affirms: “Emotions and thoughts interact, shape each other, and cannot be separated” (p. 176). Fundamentally, child happiness is synonymous with child learning.

Clearly, there are myriad factors that, taken together, support each child’s literacy learning, yet none is more important than the responsive teacher working sensitively alongside the individual child. As Clay (2016, p. 195) so eloquently reminds us:

And in the end it is the individual adaptation made by the expert teacher to that child’s idiosyncratic competencies and history of past experiences that starts him on the upward climb to effective literacy performances.
References


Children’s literature cited


About the Author

Dr. Mary Lose is a professor in the Department of Reading and Language Arts and director and trainer of the Reading Recovery Center of Michigan at Oakland University, Rochester, MI. Mary’s research interests focus on the theory behind effective practice in literacy intervention work with young children and the acceleration of learning through contingent teaching, the foundation for which is informed teacher decision making. She has published in the major journals in her field and serves as a section editor for *The Journal of Reading Recovery*. 


Heinemann is proud to be the US distributor of Marie Clay’s work. To influence new generations of teachers, the Marie Clay Literacy Trust is refreshing her most important books. Marie’s words remain untouched, while the Trust has updated references and surrounding features as appropriate.

- **Concepts About Print**
  - What has a child learned about the way we print language?
  - Marie M. Clay
  - Second Edition
  - ISBN: 978-0-325-09280-5 • $20.00

- **Running Records for Classroom Teachers**
  - Marie M. Clay
  - Second Edition
  - ISBN: 978-0-325-09279-9 • $18.75

- **Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals**
  - Marie M. Clay
  - Second Edition
  - ISBN: 978-0-325-07455-9 • $27.50

- **An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement**
  - Marie M. Clay
  - Fourth Edition
  - ISBN: 978-0-325-11251-0 • $33.00
Reading Recovery Intervention for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Teaching Melissa to Read

Annie Opat, Emporia State University
Garreth Zalud, University of South Dakota
John Wheeler, East Tennessee State University
Amy Clements, Dakota Valley School District

Author’s Note: Melissa is a pseudonym.

Introduction
Melissa was excited to begin first grade. Regrettably, however, Melissa’s neurodevelopmental disorders eroded that excitement. Melissa demonstrated behaviors consistent with diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) while attending preschool. ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by difficulties in social and reciprocal communication, repetitive patterns of behavior, and perseverative interests in behavior, and perseverative interests in approximately 1 in 59 children (Baio, Wiggins, Christensen, et al., 2018). Given the challenges associated with communication, some children with ASD will experience difficulties in learning if teachers are not responsive to their individual learning strengths in their design and delivery of tasks. Therefore, at the early age of 3, Melissa was placed on an individual educational plan (IEP) with goals related to social and fine motor skills as well as speech and language. Melissa’s occupational therapy needs included necessary attention to fine motor skills and sensory regulation (self-calming activities) and strength building.

As Melissa progressed to first grade, academic achievement goals were added to her IEP requiring additional services for math, reading, and writing. At the beginning of first grade, her IEP reading goals related to decoding, accuracy, and fluency. Melissa often became distracted during reading activities and her oral reading displayed invented text. IEP goals for writing included formulating and composing complete sentences and correct usage of upper and lowercase letters. Melissa’s oral language was a strength. She spoke in complete sentences, used appropriate vocabulary, and asked relevant questions in conversation. However, Melissa struggled to attend to instruction; moreover, she frequently displayed defiant, counterproductive behaviors such as resistance toward instructional support in both the classroom and resource room settings. In order to attenuate defiance and improve responsiveness, medical professionals regularly modified Melissa’s treatment and medications. Educators and medical professionals collaborated to adjust instruction for Melissa in the classroom and resource room. Nevertheless, Melissa was one of the lowest literacy achievers in the first-grade class. Clearly, her situation was complex and compelling. Melissa’s behavioral and medical treatments were constantly changing; however, the lack of progress in literacy warranted special consideration.

The district psychologist, occupational therapist, special education teacher, classroom teacher, reading specialist, Reading Recovery® teacher, and principal considered Melissa’s situation and constructed a dual-faceted plan. The plan included ongoing placement in the special education program plus concurrent, individualized instruction in literacy provided by the Reading Recovery teacher. Melissa’s Reading Recovery intervention began at mid-year. The school team was confident in their decision that Reading Recovery would facilitate literacy growth as well as provide response to instruction information useful for ongoing planning.

Critics of Reading Recovery may pose this salient question: Is Reading Recovery suitable for a young child with diagnoses of ASD and ADHD?
Unequivocally, the answer is yes. By its very design, Reading Recovery is intended to be inclusive — to encompass every single student who falls in the category of most at risk for reading failure. Alternately stated, it does not exclude such students for any reason. This fundamental tenet is attributable to the mindset and dispositions of Dr. Marie Clay (2005), founder of Reading Recovery. She decisively expressed this pivotal element of the program:

As a preventive intervention, Reading Recovery does not discriminate when selecting children for extra help. A prior classification of diagnosis of emotional problems, learning disability, attention deficits or double deficits problems would not exclude them from selection for a period of diagnostic teaching. If they are in the lowest 20 percent of the age cohort who entered school with them, then the first step in a sequence of help is to work with them to try to develop a reading and writing process that could help them work in ordinary classrooms. (p. 178)

The Reading Recovery teaching procedures are clearly, carefully, and thoughtfully designed. As an individually responsive intervention, Reading Recovery lessons are tailored to the learner—shaped by analyses of the child’s strengths and prior knowledge—in order to progress and elevate performance. Lessons begin with a focus on realistic accomplishments; they align with the student’s particular strengths. Building on this basic starting point, the progression gives rise to the student’s literacy development. The inherent goal centers on solid advancement of each student’s reading and writing within the shortest possible timeframe (Clay, 2016).

As expert teachers, Reading Recovery professionals are singularly qualified to deliver this intervention. Through intense education and rigorous mentor-based training, they acquire advanced skills specific to reading instruction as well as insightful understanding relevant to helping each child succeed. Moreover, these educators maintain expectations for success, anticipating that the lowest-achieving children will learn to read and write (Lyons, 2003).

Not surprisingly, children with ASD are commonly reported to experience difficulty with comprehension. Contributing factors vary but could include inability to decode words, difficulty with word meanings, lack of prior knowledge and experiences related to content, language difficulty, and insufficient understanding of affect — the emotional context of a passage (Wheeler, Mayton, & Carter, 2014).

Moreover, cognitive issues manifest as behavioral issues. Children with ADHD struggle with sustained attention. Once focused, they are often readily distracted—and classrooms are full of distractors (noise, movement, transitions, etc.). Such students preferentially attend to nonproductive stimuli, including environmental clutter, as opposed to books and relevant educational resources. And finally, they require a high degree of structure, teacher monitoring, and support.

As well, students with ASD present behavioral issues independent of those influenced by cognitive issues. Many are afflicted with sensory dysfunction; reactions to stimuli, such as noises and light, can be extreme. These children typically grapple with language—not only verbal expression, but also responses to communication (both written and spoken). They may feel threatened by changes in expectations, rules, and surroundings. In addition, most lack executive functioning skills, or the ability to plan and complete multistep projects.

To address the myriad challenges, Carnahan, Williamson, and Haydon (2009) formulated operational guidelines. These instructional recommendations closely align with teaching procedures and practices espoused by Reading Recovery. Teaching procedures, offered by Clay (2016) accommodate for the most severe learning needs and give teachers multiple strategies for incorporating techniques to support unique challenges, such as those presented by Melissa. Examples in Table 1 validate this assertion.

**Teaching Melissa**

Because Melissa was diagnosed not only as having ASD, but also ADHD, treatment for both conditions was essential. Melissa’s severe ADHD symptoms and defiant behaviors were treated with medication. Evidence-based practice points to the efficacy of positive behavior supports paired with medication as warranted by a physician with consent of her family.

Challenging behavior manifests a function or need for the learner; it is often triggered by environmental events and results from skill deficits on the part of the learner (Wheeler & Richey, 2018). To succeed in instruction, Melissa required intervention to attenuate her behaviors. During the school day, a resource teacher and a
teaching assistant in the classroom provided Melissa with behavioral supports in accordance with IEP goals of staying on task and redirecting challenging behaviors. A weighted vest, fidget toys, visual prompts, and other items were employed to accommodate her learning and behavior support needs. Melissa received movement or sensory breaks during which she could pull a wagon weighted with several items, use a massager to rub her arms, engage in wall push-ups, sway on a swing available in the resource classroom, or jump on a mini trampoline. She also was allowed quiet time to help circumvent overstimulation.

In the context of Reading Recovery lessons, several different supportive actions and assistive devices proved helpful to Melissa. A weighted vest was always available. Sometimes she laid it across her lap; at other times she wore the vest. Wiggling was merely a part of her physical needs. Consequently, she was allowed to wiggle. When excessive movement jeopardized work completion, the Reading Recovery teacher placed a hand on Melissa’s back and applied gentle pressure as a form of reassurance and to reduce unwanted excessive movement. A rubber cushion placed on the chair better accommodated Melissa. Propelled by her excitement or need to move, Melissa periodically jumped up and started pumping her arms. In such instances, she was afforded an opportunity to engage in movement through small breaks from the lesson. After these brief breaks, she was typically ready to resume work.

The Reading Recovery teacher insightfully anticipated Melissa’s challenging behaviors and points of struggle. Melissa’s Reading Recovery teacher had to know and understand Melissa’s behavioral repertoire and skillfully detect oncoming changes in mood. Provision of positive comments or redirection to prevent unwanted behavior tremendously improved the lesson outcome. These well-timed strategies simultaneously averted unwanted responses and promoted cooperative behavior. Some of the challenging behaviors Melissa displayed during lessons included yelling, poking, pinching, squeezing, making faces, and pushing books away. Usually, a single small break was sufficient to allow Melissa to regain focus and resume work. Some days she needed multiple small breaks, and the Reading Recovery teacher accommodated her needs.

Given the language and communication challenges experienced by learners with ASD, challenging behavior is understandable; it can serve one of many functions. It may evidence the need for escape, a drive to modulate sensory input, and/or enable access to social or tangible reinforcers. Melissa’s behavior was linked to reaching her limit for a given day. Thus, the need to escape the task, perhaps due to fatigue and sensory input overload, occurred occasionally. Typical learners can sometimes communicate their level of frustration in more appropriate forms. Teaching learners with ASD compels an understanding of the purpose these behaviors serve. Once identified, a behavioral support plan aimed at management of triggers will prove instrumental to learning. A concomitant focus on positive replacement behaviors is equally valuable (Wheeler & Richey, 2018).

Positive student-teacher relations along with a concerted focus on each student’s individual strengths are paramount in Reading Recovery. Capitalizing on Melissa’s oral language strength propelled expressive dialogue and was a valuable resource for writing stories (Clay, 2001). She also exhibited command of the language structures found in early level texts. Additionally, throughout the individual lesson series, the Reading Recovery teacher and Melissa established a trusting relationship. The teacher intercepted and offered ways to solve without giving “a told.” Melissa felt empowered through her own solving and successful reading and writing. Reading Recovery teachers observe children’s responses and help them acquire the necessary experiences and skills for literacy success and maintain a positive environment conducive to their ongoing success. Reading Recovery teachers are expertly trained to tailor lessons to fit the needs of identified children (Lyons, 2003). Melissa urgently needed individualized instruction to gain...
Table 1. Guidelines for ASD Modifications and Reading Recovery Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidelines for ASD Modifications</th>
<th>Reading Recovery Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use visual props such as icons or pictures paired with words to support instruction.</td>
<td>For example, an individualized alphabet book created by the Reading Recovery teacher is used to support the development of letter knowledge. The child’s alphabet book is a record of the child’s links to letter names and corresponding sounds (Clay, 2016, p. 65).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use color-coding with text. If a child knows the intent of coding, color can be used to effectively draw attention.</td>
<td>For example, in text reading, a green sticker may be used to cue the starting point. A colored line on the left side of a page might be used to provide assistance with orientation for complex text (Clay, 2016, pp. 52-53).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use gestural cues with text.</td>
<td>To facilitate one-to-one matching while reading, the Reading Recovery teacher may assist the student with a helping hand in order to establish the link between print and the spoken word, to regulate looking at specific letters or clusters, and to reinforce written language directional requirements for reading (Clay, 2016, p. 53).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use modeling and/or demonstration before the child attempts a task. Allow the child to see the task performed by the teacher.</td>
<td>Reading Recovery consistently begins with teacher demonstration. The teacher first describes and demonstrates the task; then performs the task along with the student; and, finally, calls on the student to independently complete the task. When teaching a letter, for example, the Reading Recovery teacher might first demonstrate its formation, then work with the child to trace the letter, then guide the child’s hand as they write the letter, and, ultimately, direct the child to construct the letter without assistance (Clay, 2016, pp. 64-68). Gradually transfer the task to the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use priming, or previewing. For example, this includes introducing and exposing material to the child before reading.</td>
<td>Reading Recovery teachers always provide introductions to new books that are supportive enough to ensure a successful first reading of the text and the child orient themselves to the story. Introduce the child to the book so that a few things in the book will provide opportunities for new learning. Ensure that prior knowledge (meaning), language processes, and visual processes can work together while reading (Clay, 2016, pp. 115-117).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide explicit directions.</td>
<td>The Reading Recovery teacher uses the most explicit and concise language to help the child understand a task. They ensure that the child knows how to proceed before a prompt is given. Prompting language conveys maximum information with the fewest words so as not to confuse the child (Clay, 2016, pp. 140-141).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use pre-correction techniques.</td>
<td>Reading Recovery teachers anticipate what a child might do and prevent unwanted literacy behaviors from occurring (Clay, 2016, p. 182). They anticipate what will be challenging for a child and respond to them before the unwanted response begins. For example, pronoun references are particularly difficult for some children. Therefore, a Reading Recovery teacher might help the child understand who is being referenced when introducing the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When teaching individual words, connect them to real text.</td>
<td>When introducing a new story, the Reading Recovery teacher makes the child familiar with new vocabulary or concepts and words and phrases of language he might never have heard. The teacher must plan for the child to have in his head the ideas and language he needs to complete the reading (Clay, 2016, pp. 114-115).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching

 confidence and literacy knowledge. Her Reading Recovery teacher expertly individualized learning opportunities and provided necessary interactions required for effective learning. Initially, Melissa struggled with the Reading Recovery lesson framework and persisted in many off-task behaviors. To respond to Melissa’s unique needs, the teacher provided a chart that served as a visual display of the lesson framework—a pictorial representation of each part of the lesson. As each component was completed, Melissa “checked it off” with a marker. This simple scaffold enabled Melissa to get through the entire lesson framework.  

Reading Recovery Lessons

Reading texts

Melissa began Reading Recovery lessons in January and initial testing revealed that she was not consistently attending to print. She could read a simple text with a repeated sentence pattern (e.g., Text Levels 2–3). She also knew many letters of the alphabet, identified a number of words in isolation, and was able to hear sounds in words. These were initial strengths to build on; however, her strengths were items of knowledge and she needed instructional support to develop a literacy processing system. Learning to look at print was an essential initial goal of the teacher’s planning and her predictions of progress.

During Roaming Around the Known, Melissa gained new behaviors as a result of the teacher’s careful modeling, including consistent left-to-right directional movement and more consistent one-to-one matching. Also during this time, Melissa’s Reading Recovery teacher created rich opportunities to engage Melissa in genuine conversations around her reading and writing activities. As indicated in Table 1, “talking” and “conversing” are a feature of ASD guidelines and an essential element of Reading Recovery teaching. Melissa enjoyed conversations with her Reading Recovery teacher, and throughout the series of lessons their conversations promoted Melissa’s engagement and enthusiasm in literacy and learning. Table 1 addition-
ally displays many of the techniques the teacher used to support Melissa’s learning of essential, early behaviors. Early lessons (reading at Levels 2–5) revealed that Melissa was using meaning and structure at point of difficulty with less attention to visual information, limited monitoring of visual information, and little self-correction behavior. A small card was used to prompt Melissa where to start reading, assisting her with attention to print. Melissa used this card as needed. As she learned to look at print more consistently and attend to visual information to read a precise message (reading at Levels 7–9), she monitored all sources of information more consistently, and evidenced more self-correction behaviors. Increasingly, these self-corrections revealed greater attention to additional visual information. Eventually, Melissa began to read with accuracy and phrasing, and steadily increased her self-correction rate. As she became more successful analyzing visual information (more-complex words), she was more consistent in using all sources of information, monitoring and self-correcting most errors (e.g., Level 12).

Ultimately, Melissa learned to attend to and monitor all sources of information; scan more complex words on-the-run and read them successfully; and self-correct at a high rate. She displayed reading enjoyment and identified favorite characters in books that captured her attention and excitement. Gilbert the pig was an emergent favorite. She also loved the Bella and Rosie book series plus additional books that involved talking animals. Melissa talked about these stories enthusiastically revealing excellent comprehension of these texts. At the end of her access to Reading Recovery lessons, near the end of the school year, Melissa’s Reading Recovery teacher shared the following statement of Melissa’s progress and performance:

By the end of Reading Recovery she was utilizing many strategies, such as rereading, using the first sounds, chunking, and self-monitoring to make it look right as well as make sense. I truly felt like Melissa finally saw herself as a reader by the end of Reading Recovery. Before, it was just something she avoided.

Writing and composing
Melissa’s daily story composing revolved around her favorite texts. Examples from early to later lessons include these:

- Gilbert the pig got a broken leg.
- Gilbert punched Bella in the face.
- Gilbert the pig ran to Fat Cat.
- Baby Bear scares Father Bear and Mother Bear.
- Baby Bear is getting taller like Hector.
- Gilbert is a special pig. He got married to Miss Pig.
- Gilbert is happy because he likes the farmer.

Writing and the writing task with her Reading Recovery teacher, including sharing the completion of sound and letter boxes, provided the essential support for Melissa to gain confidence in her writing. She enjoyed composing and writing stories of her favorite characters and, over time, she was able to write more-complex sentences. Her Reading Recovery teacher’s observations of Melissa’s increased comfort with risk taking suggest that Melissa was becoming a more independent learner:

Early in lessons she realized that the writing would be a shared activity between us, and that encouraged her to take a few more risks and not lose her patience as much. Finding that fine line between pushing her to apply her own skills and giving her assistance was likely more important with Melissa than any other student I’ve taught. I knew she needed to learn to view writing as a positive activity and not a negative one.

In her writing, as well as in reading, the Reading Recovery teacher’s attention to linking word learning to pertinent and meaningful information to Melissa seemed an important aspect of her progress. For example, learning about taking words apart by breaking the word farmer into chunks (farm-er) was important to Melissa due to her fascination and motivation to read and write stories about Gilbert the pig. Additional support for Melissa linked to the reciprocity of writing and reading and included her attention to letter sorts, taking words apart, and linking word learning to words of special meaning to her.
Melissa’s reading and writing progress
To examine Melissa’s progress in reading and writing, her pre- and post-lessons Observation Survey results are displayed in Figure 1. The Observation Survey (Clay, 2013) reveals that Melissa began lessons reading on Text Level 3. She tested at Level 14 at the time her lessons ended. This growth was substantial even though her reading in this test situation did not reach a level commensurate with her first-grade peers. It is important to share that at this same time, Melissa’s classroom teacher was finding her successful in guided reading lessons at Level 16, and her Reading Recovery teacher found her successful at Level 17 in texts of high interest if given an effective book introduction. These indicators confirm that Melissa had made substantial progress as a result of the instruction her Reading Recovery teacher provided. Most importantly, Melissa enjoyed reading, especially any stories that included her favorite characters and topics.

At the conclusion of her Reading Recovery lessons, Melissa wrote 55 words on the Writing Vocabulary task (see Figure 1), displaying substantial growth in writing vocabulary (see Figure 2). On this task, as on the Word Test, the Concepts About Print task, and the HRSIW task, Melissa’s scores were at stanine 5, or at average in comparison to learners her age.

Prior to beginning lessons in January, Melissa’s learning was stagnant and spiraling lower due to her frustration, her behaviors, and her overall difficulty in focus and engagement with learning. With her Reading Recovery teacher, Melissa made remarkable growth in her literacy learning, and as lessons ended, she exhibited effective literacy processing strategies in the context of both lessons and in her classroom.

Summary of learning
Melissa, a child deemed one of the lowest literacy learners in her school and identified with ASD and ADHD, made substantial progress and demonstrated new literacy behaviors at the close of her Reading Recovery lessons. Identified early...
for special education, Melissa is an example of a child for whom Reading Recovery has made a substantial impact on her literacy acquisition. The Reading Recovery teacher’s observations, her responsive teaching, and her insightful selection of high-interest materials contributed positively to Melissa’s improved focus on learning and success in reading and writing.

Through individualized lessons and decisive interactions in Reading Recovery, in concert with the teamwork of the resource teacher, speech pathologist, classroom teacher, and occupational therapist, Melissa received support to promote her literacy learning. The entire educational team recognized Melissa’s progress and confidence in literacy. Melissa truly embraced the role of reader and writer. She learned to experience reading and writing in a positive, meaningful way — building on her individual needs and strengths with the help of a highly responsive skilled Reading Recovery teacher. Ultimately, Reading Recovery positioned Melissa for a brighter future.

**Conclusion**

A child’s status at the beginning of a literacy intervention does not allow for an accurate prediction of outcome. But, Reading Recovery—with its individualized instruction coupled with teaching expertise—optimizes the possibility of success. The Reading Recovery intervention provided Melissa the opportunity for relevant activities and a degree of autonomy (Johnston, 2012). Melissa developed critical understanding through carefully designed, individualized lessons prescribed to fit her needs by her Reading Recovery teacher. She was fully engaged, an advantage for her learning. This assertion applies to all students determined to be at risk, including those with autism. Indeed, no child need be excluded from an opportunity to learn and grow (Clay, 1991; Clay, 2015; Lyons, 2003). The opportunity for individualized instruction by a specialist Reading Recovery teacher is the critical component for helping challenging learners realize literacy success.

Finally, although Melissa’s access to Reading Recovery lessons ended as she was promoted to second grade, it was important to continue monitoring her progress and offering her classroom teacher support and advice. If her school had a Literacy Lessons™ teacher, Melissa might be a candidate for ongoing individual instruction from the Literacy Lessons teacher to ensure her ongoing development as a proficient reader and writer (Konstantellou & Lose, 2009; Lose & Konstantellou, 2017).

**References**


About the Authors

Dr. Annie Opat is director and trainer of Reading Recovery at Emporia State University. She has served as chair and vice-chair of the NATG Teaching and Professional Development Committee and has co-chaired the Teacher Leader Institute for several years. Currently, she chairs the Foundation for Struggling Readers at RRCNA. Opat has presented at numerous regional Reading Recovery and early literacy conferences, the International Literacy Association, and Literacy Research Association. Her current research interests include striving readers and alternative pathways of learning using multimodal methodology.

Dr. Garreth Zalud is a professor in the Curriculum and Instruction Division of the School of Education at The University of South Dakota, where he directs the Reading Recovery training center and teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in literacy. He has been a Reading Recovery trainer for more than 23 years. Dr. Zalud has published and presented at numerous international and national conferences.

Dr. John Wheeler currently serves as professor of special education and graduate program coordinator in the Department of Educational Foundations and Special Education at East Tennessee State University. Since 1979 he has established himself as a university educator, applied researcher, and college-level administrator, including past service as a dean. His teaching and research interests have centered on the design of instructional and behavioral supports for children with autism and their families and in building capacity in schools. Wheeler’s research has resulted in the publication of numerous refereed articles, book chapters, and books. He has served as principal investigator and director on federal and state funded grant projects.

Amy Clements currently teaches Reading Recovery, reading interventions, and small-group reading lessons to K–3 students at Dakota Valley Elementary in southeast South Dakota, where she has been teaching since 1996. She has experience teaching reading, including as a classroom teacher, since 1987, and has worked with students from kindergarten through Grade 6.
New from RRCNA

Special collections of your all-time favorites from the Scott, Foresman and Company Reading Unlimited Series

COLLECTION 1
Pat’s New Puppy • The Missing Necklace • The Lion’s Tail • Catch That Frog • Ten Little Bears

NOW EXPANDED WITH 7 NEW TITLES IN COLLECTION 2
The Pot of Gold • Three Little Pigs • The Great Big Enormous Turnip • Happy Faces
The Bus Ride • The Baby Monkey • The Little Knight

MEMBER PRICE $7 EACH BOOK
BUNDLE AND SAVE! GET ALL 12 TITLES FOR $79!

Reading Recovery Testing Packet

All 23 individual books shrink wrapped in one packet. PDF file of book introductions and replacement text for leveled text reading passages provided via a link in your email purchase confirmation.

MEMBER PRICE $30
Initiating a Network’s Renewal: Charting the Development of Reading Recovery’s Networked Improvement Community

Chad R. Lochmiller and Jennifer Karnopp, Indiana University Bloomington

Editor’s Note: This is the second in a series of articles published in this journal about Reading Recovery and improvement science. See Forbes, S., Askew, B., Flight, J., & Embry, J. (2019).

Colleagues from Reading Recovery® convened in Columbus, OH, to initiate a networked improvement community (NIC) in summer 2019. This group sought to use principles of networked improvement science (Bryk, Grunow, Gomez, & LeMahieu, 2015) to identify problems of practice and develop promising but small-scale changes that would strengthen the work of Reading Recovery teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers. The group was motivated to engage in this process to identify the most impactful teaching strategies to support the needs of struggling first-grade readers and to do so without fundamentally altering the trademarked one-to-one instructional model that has come to define Reading Recovery. The group’s work was informed by Clay’s perspective that effective teaching requires teachers to work in response to the needs of the learner and “make effective decisions, moment by moment, on the evidence of the child’s responses during the individual teaching sessions” (Clay, 1994, p. 124). Indeed, the group agreed to maintain a state of perpetual inquiry and to make calculated adjustments in response to evidence. These principles are foundational to Reading Recovery and align with the key tenets of improvement science.

In this article, we describe the initial efforts to launch the Reading Recovery NIC, with a particular focus on the establishment and formalization of a network hub, an entity designed to carry out and, over time, coordinate continuous improvement efforts as capacity for this work grows. The NIC and its Hub will use the principles of improvement science as a basis for improving practices within Reading Recovery.

Improvement Science and Networked Improvement Communities

Broadly, improvement science involves the systematic application of small-scale tests carried out within the context of rapid Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles (Bryk et al., 2015). These cycles are designed to test small, measurable changes that are often embedded within the context of existing processes, tools, or practices. The improvement science process helps organizations to identify problems deemed important to frontline users (i.e., Reading Recovery teachers), and situates improvement activities within a specific system, seeking to minimize variation in implementation—and thus outcomes—through iterative tests of change.

A NIC is an intentionally designed entity that adopts, as its primary focus, a common problem of practice. NICs facilitate social learning for network participants as well as support the coordination of improvement activities relative to a specific and widely shared aim (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011). Four characteristics distinguish these communities from other organizational structures (LeMahieu, Grunow, Baker, Nordstrom, & Gomez, 2017). According to LeMahieu and colleagues, a NIC

- focuses on a specific shared aim that articulates what members hope to accomplish and why.
- adopts a systems perspective that situates problems related to the aim in their full complexity. NIC actions reflect a shared theory of improvement that defines the change ideas to be introduced and how they contribute to the achievement of the aim.
- introduces and examines change ideas in a disciplined manner though PDSA cycles.
- works in a coordinated manner and documents the work, gathering evidence to illuminate the conditions under which changes ideas are effective.
Given the diffuse nature of a NIC, a Hub charged with coordinating improvement activities is paramount. The Hub’s coordination includes building processes that guide improvement efforts as well as monitoring improvement activities launched throughout the broader community. A robust analytics infrastructure is critical to this work. In broad strokes, the network Hub serves as a source of technical guidance and collaboration (Bryk et al., 2015) and it does not function like a traditionally conceived governing body. Often the Hub’s work begins by helping members of the network articulate a problem of practice that can be addressed through the subsequent development of PDSA cycles. Importantly, the initiation of a NIC and development of a Hub is not a linear process (Russell, Bryk, Dolle, Gomez, LeMahieu, & Grunow, 2017). Rather, it often occurs in response to a specific challenge that emanates from within a particular organization.

NIC Initiation Within the Reading Recovery Network

We joined the Reading Recovery Hub as a consulting team in August 2019, following a request from Dr. Billie Askew, founding executive sponsor, and Dr. Salli Forbes, founding director. The request indicated the need to provide technical assistance and coaching support in four key areas:

1. Assist the Hub in formalizing a new organizational identity and establish norms that would invite collaboration and problem solving.
2. Assist in narrowing the problem(s) the Hub would begin solving.
3. Assist in developing administrative processes and procedures to guide the solicitation and development of PDSA cycles outside the Hub’s immediate scope of influence.
4. Formulate a long-range work plan that defined both what the NIC would accomplish in the next 2 or 3 years to support codifying funding and capacity requirements, as well as set an agenda for the slow scaling of improvement activities.

This article stems from our reflections on the initial development of the Hub—the first step towards NIC initiation—which occurred from August 2019 to January 2020. This description is situated and partial as the Hub’s work is still underway. In this article, we discuss the development of norms; the process of identifying a shared problem of practice; developing a theory of improvement; and learning the process of improvement science. We close with a reflection on the Hub’s work to date and lay out important next steps to move this work forward.

Importantly, the Hub’s current work builds on prior efforts to identify important problems which began in 2017, with support from the network of university training centers and trainers. Through conversations facilitated by Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 49 Reading Recovery colleagues from a variety of institutional contexts focused on two challenges: (a) variation in student outcomes and (b) growing and sustaining our work (Forbes et al., 2019). These challenges have animated much of the network’s discussion about improvement and serve as the basis for the Hub’s ongoing work. The Hub has continued elements of this conversation throughout the 2019–2020 academic year.

Development of norms

A critical first step in the Hub’s initiation involved developing social norms that nurtured positive and trusting relationships which could then facilitate collective learning (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011). In a network setting, social norms serve as the bedrock of the entire community, define its collective identity, and establish ‘rules of road’ that make it a distinct social space focused on improvement activities. From the outset, members of the Hub expressed a strong desire to work in a cohesive manner. Thus, during the first PDSA clinic held in Columbus, OH, we helped the Hub define norms (see Table 1) that would nurture individual and group behaviors necessary for sustained conversations about improvement. We have revisited these norms at the beginning of every meeting since. These norms outline individual and group commitments to ways of interacting and recognize that—above all else—the Hub’s work focuses on the needs of children served by Reading Recovery. By January, members of the Hub reported notable differences in their culture that invited new ways of working and collaborating because of the establishment of these norms. Indeed, as one member remarked, “When we come into this space, we leave our roles at the door and focus on the work.” Over time, Hub members have become increasingly comfortable challenging each other’s assumptions about the possible causes of network-related problems as well as assumptions behind potential change ideas. These exchanges have fueled renewed understanding about the purpose of Reading Recovery practices and the intent of standard operating processes.
In addition, members of the Hub defined a set of non-negotiables, which may be of particular interest to the readers of this journal. Non-negotiables are attributes of Reading Recovery that are so ingrained in its institutional identity that Hub members felt that changes in these areas would fundamentally alter the nature of the program. These non-negotiables, which now guide all conversations about change ideas, include

- a commitment that Reading Recovery will remain a one-to-one reading intervention designed to serve the lowest-performing students in first grade;
- a strong conviction to maintain Reading Recovery’s unique identity and honor its theoretical and empirical basis; and
- a commitment to working with a perpetual state of inquiry, a reference to Marie Clay’s (2015) own epistemological perspective.

Defining these non-negotiables has enabled the Hub to engage in initial discussions about the challenges facing the broader network and change ideas that might respond to them. More importantly, these non-negotiables have helped to relieve a sense of anxiety about how far changes might go in reshaping features of the landmark program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. North American Reading Recovery Improvement Science Hub Norms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I commit to …</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a positive attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining focused on the mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking clarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being prepared and participating fully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assuming positive intent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, members of the Hub defined a set of non-negotiables, which may be of particular interest to the readers of this journal. Non-negotiables are attributes of Reading Recovery that are so ingrained in its institutional identity that Hub members felt that changes in these areas would fundamentally alter the nature of the program. These non-negotiables, which now guide all conversations about change ideas, include

- a commitment that Reading Recovery will remain a one-to-one reading intervention designed to serve the lowest-performing students in first grade;
- a strong conviction to maintain Reading Recovery’s unique identity and honor its theoretical and empirical basis; and
- a commitment to working with a perpetual state of inquiry, a reference to Marie Clay’s (2015) own epistemological perspective.

Defining these non-negotiables has enabled the Hub to engage in initial discussions about the challenges facing the broader network and change ideas that might respond to them. More importantly, these non-negotiables have helped to relieve a sense of anxiety about how far changes might go in reshaping features of the landmark program.

**Formalizing the Hub within the Reading Recovery network**

Early work of the Hub also included the development of an operating charter that articulated the Hub’s relationship to four central entities in the Reading Recovery network:

1. North American Trainers Group (NATG)
2. Reading Recovery Council of North America (RRCNA)
3. Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery (CIRR)
4. Project Advisory Board at The Ohio State University (OSU)

The concept of a charter is widely discussed in improvement research as an important precursor for sustained improvement activities (Langley et al., 2009). In the case of the Reading Recovery network, the operating charter positions the Hub within the broader Reading Recovery network that has the autonomy to engage in improvement work. This autonomy is important as improvement cycles occur quickly and the process will not function if delayed by hierarchical organizational arrangements. The operating charter also specifies the conditions within which the Hub can undertake these activities relative to the network’s existing governance arrangements. Though the operating charter grants the Hub autonomy to explore possible change ideas, NATG retains authority to formally approve and adopt changes in Reading Recovery practices, policies, or training developed by the Hub.

**Clarifying the focus of improvement**

A NIC rests on the clear articulation of a shared improvement problem understood by all members so that they can engage in solving the problem. Thus, throughout the fall of 2019, members of the Hub worked to articulate a clear and widely shared improvement problem as reflected in a fishbone diagram, which is an improvement science tool used to help identify root causes. This, in turn, supported the development of an aim statement and corresponding theory of improvement as reflected in a driver diagram, which collectively identifies specific points of leverage and possible change ideas. Importantly, initial discussions developed through the Phase 1 work with Carnegie (Forbes et al., 2019) led to a new understanding that school boards, superintendents, and others had conflated
varied results with ineffective performance. Members of Phase 1 determined that the decline in Reading Recovery implementations was partly the product of these varied results. In these discussions members defined results broadly to include both the number of students being discontinued as well as other markers tracking Reading Recovery’s growth.

Through successive conversations, the Hub increasingly focused on instructional strength as an important explanatory factor in both fishbone problems identified (variation in results, and growing and sustaining our work). Indeed, prior evaluation research (May, Sirinides, Gray, & Goldsworthy, 2016), pointed to variable instructional strength as a predictor of student outcomes in Reading Recovery, concluding that stronger and more intentional instruction resulted in students being discontinued from the program at higher rates. Members of the Hub determined that it was the ability to identify patterns in a child’s reading and writing behavior that ultimately explained the teacher’s success or difficulty. Instructional strength was thus predicated on the teacher’s ability to describe and make inferences about the child’s literacy processing system as represented by these patterns and respond to this system in their instruction. This definition of instructional strength is important for two reasons. First, it specifies teachers and teacher leaders as frontline users and indicates that improvement challenges will likely involve making changes in key aspects of their work. Second, it defines an area within which the Reading Recovery network can take direct action to solve the problem without redefining the children for whom Reading Recovery is designed or removing children from the intervention while in progress.

Learning the process of improvement

While the charter defined the Hub’s scope of influence and clarity about the problem provided greater direction for the Hub’s scope of work, Hub members required further opportunities to learn the improvement science process. Thus, through a series of face-to-face PDSA clinics held in Columbus, OH, members of the Hub have continued to engage in sustained professional learning about the improvement science process as well as the tools used to complete different parts of the process. Through these meetings, members worked to develop skills ranging from problem identification to the use of practical measurement. These skills are critical to the successful implementation of improvement science and reflect one of our core assumptions about how to effectively initiate a NIC. These assumptions include that members of the network, particularly those in Hub roles must

- possess a well-defined understanding of the structured inquiry process before initiating PDSA cycles throughout the larger NIC;
- act as guides for the larger improvement process and thus must be prepared to lead, coach, and support this process on several levels;
- know how to help others identify a problem of practice, complete a fishbone diagram, articulate a clear aim statement, develop a driver diagram to articulate a compelling theory of improvement; and
- design effective PDSA cycles using appropriately specified practical measures.

Members of the Hub have learned that the improvement science process is complex and requires a significant commitment of time and analytic skill. Foremost, the process begins with a clearly articulated problem of practice that is relevant to users and engaging to the individuals who will carry out the improvement work.

Determining a theory of improvement

The Hub determined that variation in instructional practices likely predict how well Reading Recovery teachers support students and thus help them recover a normal reading trajectory. To unpack this problem, members conducted a root cause analysis (RCA). This analysis allowed members to identify all of the potential causes for a particular problem that they could respond to without engaging other entities within the network. In addition to the completion and review of a fishbone diagram, RCA requires the development of a theory of improvement. One of the primary reasons that interventions or changes introduced in an organization often fail is that users do not fully consider the origin or structure of the problem. Improvement science seeks to overcome this challenge by investing considerable time defining the problem in a clear and actionable way. This has been a key learning for the Hub members during their work this year.

Members of the Hub defined a tentative theory of improvement corresponding with their understanding of the problem. This theory explains the relationship between the aim specified by the Hub and the specific change ideas that they intend to test. In response to this theory of improvement, members articulated a series of...
possible change ideas that became the basis for their ongoing improvement cycles. Notably, their change ideas are largely situated within processes, practices, and tools that are widely used by Reading Recovery teachers and teacher leaders. An important motivation for their work is to identify practices that can be minimally amended but produce significant improvements in student outcomes—in other words, to introduce small changes with significant leverage.

One striking aspect of the Hub’s learning has been recognizing how variable the use of common Reading Recovery processes and tools appear to be, even among members of the Hub who are seasoned professionals with many years of experience. Given this variation, members used process maps to unpack existing practices from beginning to end. These maps have revealed compelling differences and similarities that motivated many improvement-focused conversations. Figure 1 illustrates one perspective uncovered in one Reading Recovery standard work process. Producing these maps enabled members to see how even small differences in process among Hub members prevented them from seeing the problem clearly and thus posed a barrier to formulating a change idea that could potentially solve the problem. Due to the breadth of the Reading Recovery network, such activities as process mapping will likely be critical in order to clarify differing understandings. Indeed, for the Hub, this activity has proven to be one of the most informative in terms of understanding variation across the United States, between the United States and Canada, as well as between and among teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers.

Testing Change Ideas
After formulating a clear understanding of the process, members of the Hub have identified possible change ideas. These ideas, which are specific and small in scale, serve as the basis for successive PDSA cycles. Unlike changes that are broad in scope, members are working from the premise that changes should be easily introduced in practice without the need for significant new training or professional development. The ideas are meant to scale over time as mounting evidence gained through successive PDSA cycles suggests that they are effective under diverse conditions. A medical analogy may be useful in describing this approach. Instead of beginning with a surgical intervention, doctors often adopt less aggressive means first and respond to evidence (i.e., patient health data) to determine their next steps. As data warrants, they adopt additional interventions depending on their patient’s progression toward full recovery. In improvement science, members function with a similar perspective and are, in effect, using the same approach. Their work incorporates small changes that are adjusted based on evidence produced through PDSA cycles. This stepwise progression enables the members to determine what works under which conditions. It also prevents making changes that yield staggering failures which could be detrimental to the program model and the students it serves. Indeed, this approach mirrors the thoughtful way of working adopted by Reading Recovery teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers in their daily practice.

A central learning for members of the Hub has been distinguishing between traditional outcome measures (e.g., percentage of students being discontinued) versus practical measures that can be used to inform the network’s learning (e.g., student’s accuracy and self-correction rates, teacher perceptions of literacy processing behaviors, etc.). The Hub’s preliminary conversations focused on the rate of students being discontinued as the primary outcome measure. This outcome is important but likely mediated by other factors. In contrast, practical measures link directly to the work of the users and therefore pre-
dict whether a change idea is being implemented in an appropriate or timely manner. It can be assumed that a positive change in a practical measure will lead to a positive change in outcome measures. Hub members have thus begun to realize that achieving a stated outcome in Reading Recovery ultimately requires focused attention on mediating factors and practical measures that have typically not been examined systematically.

One of the most important learnings for the Hub has been its recognition that the frequency and repetition of patterns in teacher practice is likely an important measure for consideration. Data for these measures did not exist before the Hub began its work. Thus, members started their improvement effort by developing a rubric to gather baseline information. As one example, the rubric measured to what extent the teachers referenced aspects of literacy processing theory in their summaries of the day’s lesson on running records. This information provided Hub members with an opportunity to learn about and reflect on practices. More importantly, it enabled them to understand how variation in these practices was likely contributing to different outcomes. Hub members are now iterating this change idea through successive PDSA cycles to gather more information with which to inform the development of future change ideas. As Park and Takahashi (2013) note, a PDSA cycle can focus on specific changes to practice, processes or tools, or frameworks that organize knowledge. In the Hub’s case, there is evidence that they are working across these areas through their initial PDSAs.

Taking Stock of the Experience to Date

Looking at the Hub’s experience to date, several findings appear to be significant. First, much like any newcomer to improvement science, members of the Hub initially struggled to identify the challenges facing the Reading Recovery system and their causes. Hub members’ initial perspectives were wrapped in understandings of individual roles (e.g., teacher, teacher leader, and trainer) instead of the Reading Recovery practices that defined work between teachers and students. Breaking free from this perspective has enabled members to see the work of the network in new ways and to envision possibilities for small-scale changes that can be introduced. Indeed, this learning reflects the shift toward user- and problem-centered thinking that is central to the work of improvement science. This means considering the work of teachers as the basis for the Reading Recovery enterprise and scaling up to include supports provided by teacher leaders and trainers.

Second, through the improvement process, Hub members have developed a shared understanding of the Reading Recovery processes related to the problem they are trying to solve. This clarity has allowed members to understand sources of variation that had previously perplexed and often obscured the ‘real’ causes of the problem. Interestingly, none of the problems identified by the Hub have, as of yet, required making fundamental changes to the Reading Recovery program model. Instead, members of the Hub have focused on changes that eliminate sources of potential variation in work processes which are used by Reading Recovery teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers.

Third, learning how a PDSA should be structured requires understanding the distinction between traditional experimental research and improvement research. In experimental research the aim is to determine whether an intervention works under generic conditions. This allows the researcher to claim with confidence that an intervention truly contributed to the observed outcome. In improvement research, variation is the problem that we seek to address in order to achieve coherence in practices that contribute to the aim. Understanding this distinction is essential for a well-designed and executed PDSA cycle and yet is an opaque aspect of improvement work.
Moving Forward

The process of designing and launching their own PDSA cycles has created a sense of momentum for members of the Hub. This momentum reflects not only their hard work throughout the first half of the academic year but also the deepening relationships and respect that are vital for social learning. As the work progresses, members are now considering how to formalize improvement activities so that they are accessible to the entire Reading Recovery network. This reflects a recognition that users who are new to improvement science will require both an orientation to the process and access to tools, resources, and other guidance that help the network carry out this work.

In response, the Hub has started developing infrastructure to support other colleagues who will become part of the NIC. Part of this infrastructure includes extensive use of cloud-based technology and routine use of a social learning platform called Slack, that integrates email and file sharing into a single communication stream. This commitment to readily accessible web-based tools reflects the Hub’s desire to facilitate real-time communication that will link participating groups across the diverse Reading Recovery network.

Beyond infrastructure, the Hub has also begun developing standard operating procedures related to membership and future growth. These procedures include membership selection and onboarding, communication strategies with external and internal constituencies, as well as protocols for meetings in both face-to-face and virtual formats. While these may seem like relatively simplistic tasks, they are important for a growing NIC. Adding new members, in particular, represents one of the most important priorities for the Hub. Social relationships are central to network learning and the spread of innovations (Pittaway, Robertson, Munir, Denyer, & Neely, 2004). Further, new members address capacity constraints which could limit how quickly the Hub is able to define, execute, and learn from improvement cycles. Not surprisingly, members have taken considerable care in determining how to bring new members into the Hub as well as the process they would use to make these decisions. They determined that the best approach to member selection was to ask: What capacity does the Hub need to undertake its improvement work? This moved the conversation away from the belief that the Hub needs to be a representative body toward one that acknowledges that the Hub and the larger NIC exist to respond to a particular problem. The most recent solicitation for new members produced more than 20 applications using a modified process.

Onboarding members and preparing them for improvement work requires determining the information that new members will need to ensure that they are fully informed about the Hub’s culture and work. Initially the Hub decided to initiate the onboarding process through a 30-minute welcome session where the current co-directors, Jennifer Flight and Amy Smith, share the norms of the Hub, speak to the culture that Hub members work in, and apprise the new members about steps they can take to become familiar with the Hub’s current improvement work. Central to this process is a request that new members read Learning to Improve (Bryk et al., 2015) as well as become familiar with the improvement designs described in The Improvement Guide (Langley et al., 2009). This process is currently being examined and enhanced through a PDSA cycle.

Scaling the Hub for Reading Recovery’s Renewal

With an infrastructure and work processes in place, the Hub will be ready for its next chapter which will involve scaling to engage others within the Reading Recovery network. Scaling represents an important developmental stage for the Hub and is likely the one with the greatest potential to shift the Reading Recovery network’s current trajectory. Preliminary conversations among Hub members have begun to envision this stage. First, and most importantly, the core group of committed Hub members will remain. In addition to leading PDSA cycles, members also plan to work in collaboration with other elements of the network to facilitate PDSAs that are aligned with the Hub’s network-level goals. These new PDSAs will be housed in smaller, user-focused teams and centered on identifying and solving specific problems which may be related to working with students, initial or ongoing training, and addressing concerns of district leaders and/or other constituencies beyond the network.

The Hub will also need to consider how best to interface with existing governing bodies so that promising ideas are approved for formal adoption. The charter allows the Hub to conduct improvement cycles, however, to make these changes part of Reading Recovery’s standard operating processes, the Hub needs a mechanism to relay infor-
mation about successful change ideas to NATG. This will likely require negotiating a shared understanding of indicators of improvement (i.e., how do we know that a change is more than promising). A timeline for formal adoption will also be important. Most importantly, the engagement of NATG will support testing on a large scale allowing for a rigorous examination of promising changes.

Finally, in addition to formal communications to Reading Recovery governing boards, the Hub will need to engage in two-way communication with the larger Reading Recovery network and external constituencies. Already the Hub has drafted a communication plan and has begun informal communication through an independent Twitter account (@RRNA_HUB). In addition, there is a commitment to regularly connect with outlets recognized in the Reading Recovery network, including routine publication in this journal. The Hub now needs to determine how to solicit ideas from members of the Reading Recovery network to enable the Hub to learn from the network. It is critical that conversations about improvement challenges are informed by real-time, front-line perspectives.

Ultimately, this has been a period of significant progress for the Hub. The members have taken important steps toward the establishment of an NIC that serves the needs of the Reading Recovery network and supports expanded use of improvement science as a common approach to improvement. They have done this work in a way that engenders a collegial, problem-focused, solution-driven way of working. Most importantly, they have undertaken this effort with a commitment to igniting Reading Recovery’s long-term renewal and engaging its members in a perpetual state of inquiry that, above all else, keeps the focus of its improvement work on the needs of the first-grade students that the program serves.

**References**


Wonderfully Disruptive Messages from Reading Recovery

James R. Schnug, The Ohio State University

Author’s Note: This article was adapted from the author’s keynote address at the 2017 Reading Recovery Council of Michigan Institute. All children’s names are pseudonyms.

Introduction
Over the 35 years of Reading Recovery® implementation in the United States, we have wonderful messages to share related to how low-progress first-grade children can make accelerated progress within 12–20 weeks of service. Our messages can and should continue to disrupt how researchers, administrators, teachers, and parents think about children who struggle to learn to read after 1 year of instruction.

In this article, I highlight three such messages:

1. A struggling first grader can make accelerated progress, reaching average levels of his classroom within a short amount of time.

2. The teacher teaches for the child’s accelerated progress; not a packaged program, set of materials, gimmicks, technology, or procedures.

3. The school is responsible for preventing reading failure, organizing effectively to minimize the number of children who will need long-term, intervention services.

Upon first reading, you might agree that these are wonderful, positive messages, but these messages should also be considered disruptive at many levels. If not, the messages have the potential to become so comfortable and familiar that they end up reverberating in an echo chamber where we don’t continually challenge ourselves and others as to the potential and limitations of our work with the most fragile of learners. For example, as a Reading Recovery trainer who continues to teach children, I consider my teaching “disruptive,” but I can consider the adjective, disruptive, as positive, so that each time a child sits down next to me, I am attempting to disrupt this child’s learning trajectory and to disrupt that trajectory for the better. Conversely, if the child isn’t progressing as I had thought, then my teaching needs to be disrupted, so that the child can accelerate his learning.

In the remaining sections of this article, I will attempt to explain how each of these three messages above have the potential to be wonderfully disruptive, while ultimately emerging as messages that can resonate with hope for our future work together with children who are struggling to learn to read.

A Struggling Reader Can Make Accelerated Progress
A struggling first grader can make accelerated progress in a short amount of time. Using An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 2013), the teacher identifies the lowest 20% of the first-grade cohort and from that cohort selects the children who need the intervention the most. In the standard amount of delivery time of 12–20 weeks, most of the children accelerate their progress, reaching average levels of reading achievement by the end of the intervention.

Maria was one such child. She started her daily, one-half hour lessons with me reading at Text Level 3, and after 46 lessons over 12 weeks, Maria successfully exited the Reading Recovery intervention reading Level 14.

We often describe children’s progress by using raw scores and stanines. Why don’t we instead disrupt our comfort with numbers and remind ourselves what those numbers are actually describing. For example, when Maria entered Reading Recovery, she read At the Zoo (Scott Foresman, 1979) at her instructional level, i.e., at 90 percent word accuracy or higher. Figure 1 illustrates a representative page from that book. Maria quickly picked up on the repetitive structure and heavily used the pictures, never pointing.

After 46 lessons over 12 weeks, Maria read George the Porcupine (Scott Foresman, 1979) at her instructional level. See Figure 2 for a representative page from this book. Maria was reading George the Porcupine without her finger as well, but she was very focused on the text, problem solving if she got stuck, and phrasing the passage with expression.

Implementation
Implementation

The Journal of Reading Recovery
Spring 2020

36

The child requiring help with early reading and writing has been making very slow progress and has been dropping further and further behind his peers. In order to catch up he will have to progress faster than his classmates for a time. (p. 19)

Of course, we do use numbers in Reading Recovery that can quickly show this faster progress for groups of children. For example, Figure 5 summarizes the 2018–2019 United States cohort on text reading progress. This graph is produced by the International Data Evaluation Center (IDEC) (2019, p. 17). Figure 5 is like an old family photograph even though it contains a graph summarizing last year’s national data. Those of us in Reading Recovery recognize the trajectory of those lines, the slopes of which have been remarkably similar in the United States, year-after-year, these past 35 years.
The graph describes average progress on the level of books that four cohorts of children read last school year. In Figure 5, search for the blue line’s starting point on the left-hand bottom of the graph. That point is where the fall cohort started the 2018–2019 school year reading, on average, compared to the green line that represents the national random sample of first graders’ starting book level. The red line represents that average reading progress of the second round of children who were picked up for service mid-year, while the average progress of the children who were tested for Reading Recovery but not selected for service is represented by the purple line. The children selected for the intervention in the fall who successfully left Reading Recovery mid-year read, on average, the lowest level of text at the start of the school year.

At this point, track the blue line on Figure 5 to the point where it intersects with the green line. For children who successfully discontinued from Reading Recovery at mid-year, that steep slope of the blue line from September to mid-year demonstrates accelerated progress for children on standardized text level passages. At mid-year, the children who successfully exited the intervention were reading, on average, what the national random sample was reading and reading higher levels of books compared to the tested not instructed children. That fall cohort acceleration is replicated in the red line for the children who were picked up mid-year for Reading Recovery service.

Note the flatness of the red line up to the point the children entered mid-year into the intervention compared to the line’s steep climb in the second half of the year when these children were being served.

The graph in Figure 5 further reveals that even after the fall entry children successfully left the intervention mid-year, they continued to make progress, though not at the same rate as when they were in Reading Recovery. That upward blue line from mid-year to the end of the school year shows continued progress, but it still distances us from what the children are accomplishing without the daily one-to-one intervention. When Maria (discussed, above) successfully exited mid-year from the intervention she was reading *George the Porcupine*, a Level 14 book. At the end of the year, she was reading *No Children, No Pets* (Scott Foresman, 1979), a Level 24 book, at her instructional level. A representative page from the book is found in Figure 6.

Once again, Maria’s progress vividly exemplifies what a child can accomplish during her time in Reading Recovery as well as what they continue to accomplish after the intervention is over.

Clay (2016) reminds us how such accelerated progress happens: “The child will get one-to-one teaching, and the lessons will start with his
strengths and proceed according to what he is able to learn about reading and writing” (p. 20).

After reading that quote, I am reminded of Mitchell. He entered his series of lessons with me focusing only on the pictures and using the repetitive patterns of his earliest books. Those were his strengths with which he started. After 16 lessons involving 8 hours of contact time, or the equivalent of one workday, a watershed moment occurred when a teacher, like me, could say, “Now it begins. His trajectory toward reading failure has been disrupted.”

During Lesson 16, Mitchell read Wake up, Dad (Randell, 1994), a funny story of how the family tries to wake up Dad, who prefers to remain asleep. Mitchell read the book the previous lesson, after I introduced it to him. During his second reading of the book, I took a running record, using the standardized shorthand to capture Mitchell’s oral reading. On page 12 of that book the text reads, Look Mom! Look at Dad! Mitchell read, Mom for Look, then immediately self-corrected and read on until he arrived at the word at where he read Dad for at and is for Dad. Not satisfied, Mitchell tried again, Look Dad, but then he self-corrected, at Dad. He even reread that second sentence, perhaps confirming he had read accurately.

Mitchell began with a strong sense of what the book was about and as his reading indicates, he persistently looked closely at the print in order to self-monitor and independently and successfully problem solve. The equivalent of 8 contact hours earlier, Mitchell pointed to the picture when I asked him where I should start reading. Just 8 contact hours later, his eyes were no longer riveted on just the pictures.

Clay (2016) writes, “Acceleration is achieved as the child takes over the learning process and works independently, discovering new things for himself...The child must continually push the boundaries of his own knowledge…” (p. 20). For Mitchell, Lesson 16 was the point where he was starting to “push his boundaries.”

Across the nation, Clay’s literacy processing theory is operationalized on a daily basis with the Marias and the Mitchells who are enrolled in Reading Recovery. It is a theory that insists on beginning where the child is, so that the child increasingly “takes over the learning process.” Clay (2016) explains further:

…we create networks in the brain between things we see (print on the page) and things we hear (the language we speak). Messages flow in and out of those networks. In the context of reading and writing this is often called literacy processing. (p. 5)

With opportunities to successfully read texts that are pitched to the child’s instructional level; with opportunities to explore how print works in the daily writing of little stories; with opportunities to problem solve and self-correct; with opportunities to talk about the books he’s reading; with opportunities to be challenged but not overwhelmed for 30 minutes each day, the child increasingly takes over his learning, accelerating toward success.

So, the message that a struggling first grader can make accelerated progress in a short amount of time is wonderful. This first message also should be wonderfully disruptive to people’s views of what low-progress children can accomplish when they see samples of dramatic progress such as Maria’s writing or listen to Mitchell’s extensive, independent, and successful reading of Wake up, Dad or study those familiar graphs of the national cohort’s progress. Unfortunately, over the years that I have been involved in Reading Recovery, I have heard disruptive responses that cannot be described as “wonderful.” For example: “Well, Maria doesn’t do that with me in her reading group!” or “Mitchell isn’t reading that level of book with me!”

Responses like these indicate that a child’s accelerated progress in Reading Recovery is also disrupting the expectations of our classroom teachers, school support staff, and administrators. How might we answer these challenges?

I suggest two words: “Why not?” Those two words disrupt the assumption that might influence some of our colleague’s responses, an assumption such as, “Maria can do that because she works with you, but she can’t do that when she’s not with you.” So when the Reading Recovery teacher replies, “Why not?” those two words not only disrupt the colleague’s assumption, but it reestablishes the child’s progress as that which cannot be dismissed so easily.

“Why not?” It opens up a needed, sometimes uncomfortable discussion with our colleagues. It opens up a chance for all of us to try to figure out how the child’s progress in the intervention can increasingly emerge in the classroom as well. Perhaps it means a visit to the classroom to see the child in action or inaction. Perhaps it means the classroom teacher will arrange a visit to the
Reading Recovery lesson. Perhaps it will mean that the Reading Recovery teacher and classroom teacher will commit to regular contact to discuss the child’s progress. There are many ideas for collegial discussion, but it begins with two words, “Why not?” Reading Recovery (Clay, 2016) makes two, and only two claims:

1. The Reading Recovery early intervention was designed to accelerate literacy acquisition for most of the children falling into the lowest 20 percent of literacy learners after a year of school.

2. It also acts as a pre-referral intervention and provides a period of diagnostic teaching to identify a small group of children who still need extra help and probably further specialist guidance. (p. 15)

Last year across the nation, IDEC (2019) reported that 70 percent of the children who received a full program of 12–20 weeks in Reading Recovery successfully discontinued from the program; 30 percent were recommended for further help.

I have taught children who were recommended for further help. Even though I think that their time with me was a useful, pre-referral opportunity, and even though I could confidently recommend them for further service in the school’s response to intervention (RTI) process, there is the disruptive reality for me that these children did not make accelerated progress. Clay’s (2016) words are still rattling around in my head as I think about these children: “If a child is a struggling reader or writer the conclusion must be that we have not yet discovered a way to help him to learn” (p. 165).

Earlier in this article, I highlighted Maria’s accelerated progress. Her series of lessons gave her a way to help her learn. But those of us in Reading Recovery know that there will be a small cohort of children for whom the intervention will not produce accelerated learning, and Clay’s quote above leads me into the next wonderfully disruptive message.

The Teacher Teaches for Accelerated Progress

The teacher teaches for the child’s accelerated progress — not a program, set of materials, gimmicks, technology, or procedures. It is with a highly trained, early literacy interventionist that a struggling child can progress and progress quickly.

Early literacy researchers, Elizabeth Sulzby and William Teale (1984) used a Russian word, obuchenie, to describe what they found occurring during storybook time between a parent and a child. It means “teaching” and it also means “learning.” The term assumes that it is very difficult to separate teaching from learning; that what is happening between an adult and a child in the moment is an intricate ebb and flow. The child contributes what he can, and the adult builds off of that. Over time, the child increasingly takes over that which is happening between heads at first. I am a couple years shy of 40 years in education, and I have yet to observe a curriculum, set of materials or books, procedures, or piece of technology that can match the dynamic of obuchenie.

Sarah came into Reading Recovery unable to read any words on the Ohio Word Test or Slosson. She could write two words, to and mom. She was able to read the book, Mom (Randell, 1996) a Level 1 book, only after I read it to her, modeling pointing to the words. In early lessons, one of Sarah’s short-term goals was to build up a small core of known words that she could use to self-monitor her reading as well as to learn how to learn words.

During Lesson 14, Sarah was rereading a familiar book that she and I had co-written together during the first 10 lessons of her intervention, the time in the program referred to as Roaming Around the Known. I took those handwritten pages and typed them up into a readable text entitled, Sarah Grows Food, a nonfiction book that lists the many vegetables she and her family grow in their background garden. A different vegetable was listed on each page within a repeating structure, e.g., “We grow tomatoes.”

Over our time during Roaming Around the Known when the book was being co-written, Sarah increasingly controlled the writing of the word grow. She watched me in the first lesson write it; then she copied it during the next lesson. By the time the fourth page was co-written, she was writing the word grow without a model.

Now in Lesson 14, the book is back as an old favorite, and I decided that I was going to use a procedure, “Locating a Known Word,” to promote an early behavior that helps the child recognize print information from what was probably for Sarah just a bunch of squiggles and lines.

After Sarah successfully read this familiar book, I framed the word grow and asked, “What’s this word?”
Implementation

She accurately identified it, and then I asked her to write *grow* on a nearby dry erase board without any model. She wrote *grow* easily but with a backwards *r*. She had never written *r* like that. At that point, I showed her a representative page from her book and asked her, “Are you right?” hoping at that point that Sarah would self-monitor the reversed *r* she had written when comparing it to *grow* in her book. But Sarah nodded her head that she was right. Then I said, “Something’s wrong,” as I reached for the magnetic letter *r*. At that point Sarah replied, “Oh!” and erased the inverted *r* and produced the proper form.

Sarah could identify the word *grow* quickly. I assumed she could also write *grow* because she had done so independently just a few lessons earlier. But she wrote that backward *r* and that had not happened in earlier lessons. Did I explicitly teach her how to write *r*? I don’t think so because she had written it correctly in earlier lessons. I simply prompted her—“Something’s wrong”—which started the scanning of her attempt, looking for anything that was amiss. She controlled the writing of the shape of the letter *r* but for some reason, the directionality in Lesson 14 was reversed. I pulled out that magnetic letter *r* but was that model explicitly teaching or was it her learning? As soon as she saw the model, she quickly realized what was wrong in her attempt and fixed it.

I think this description of a few seconds in Sarah’s early lessons approaches what is meant by the concept of obuchenie. Given how Sarah responded to my prompts, I came in and I backed off based on how she responded. The goal was to keep her in control of her reading and writing behavior and inserting myself just enough so that I didn’t get in the way of her progress.

I will admit, though, that I know how to get in the way of the child’s learning. I know how to impede a child’s accelerated progress such as Mitchell’s, whom I wrote about earlier in this article.

Mitchell was reading *My Accident* (Giles, 1996) for the first time. The boy in the book retells his experience of a skateboard accident that ends him up in the hospital with his arm in a cast. On each page the boy remembers where he goes from the time he falls to the time he arrives back home. For example, on page 2, the narrator says, “Here I am, on the skateboard.”

In my book introduction, I played off of Mitchell’s strength for using the pictures to get meaning when he reads. Using the pictures, we tracked how the boy was in the ambulance, then at the hospital, then in the x-ray room, etc. Mitchell could also use a repetitive pattern to track the print, word-by-word, with his finger. So, as part of my introduction to this new book, Mitchell and I orally rehearsed the repetitive pattern, “Here I am...” and on I asked him to read that pattern on page 2. Then I turned the book over to him to read.

On page 2 Mitchell read *Look at me,* instead of *Here I am.* He stopped, reread, and self-corrected it all, *Here I am,* on my skateboard. This was similar self-correction behavior that I documented on his running record of *Wake up, Dad* which I described earlier in this article. When Mitchell arrived on page 4, he invented, again, *Look at me,* but this time Mitchell continues on the ground. That oral reading replicated good English word order and made sense with the picture. Given that Mitchell self-corrected this invention on page 2 earlier, I prompted him to try page 4 again, that something was wrong. He repeated *Look at me,* on the ground. I took him back to page 2, his successful page, and prompted him, “Read this page again.” Mitchell read, *Look at me on my skateboard.*

As his teacher, I realized that I had to change my teaching quickly. Below is a list of everything I think I did or said over the first reading, each time Mitchell read *Look at me* instead of *Here I am* — which he reliably did on almost every page:

- “Could this word be *Here* or *Hat*?”
- “Check that word. (pointing with my pencil) It’s not *Look.*”
- “*Here I am...* You say it. Now you read this page.”
- “Before you read, find *Here.* Now read.”
- “Say, *Here.* What would be the first letter you would expect to see in the word *Here*?”
When Mitchell had struggled through to the end of the book, and he had once again, read Look at me instead of Here I am, I was exasperated. I thought I was pitch perfect with all the prompts I listed above. Why was he still inventing? Why wasn’t he looking closer at the print like he had originally done on page 2? Why wasn’t he doing that accelerative self-monitoring and self-correcting he demonstrated recently when he read the book, Wake up, Dad? I might have answered these questions by blaming the child, but the harder reality is that my teaching at that point need to be disrupted.

I remember half-saying to myself as I put away that book at the end of the lesson, never to return. “Well THAT was a hard word.” As Mitchell got up to leave the lesson, he pushed in his chair and responded, “That was a REALLY hard word!”

I imposed on Mitchell the need to learn that word Here, with that book, during that lesson. I imposed what I thought he needed to learn, and I taught, but he didn’t learn. Obuchenie was not present. Clay (2016) writes:

For thousands of children entering Reading Recovery annually, acceleration is an outcome of sound teaching in the first few weeks of the lesson series … However for some teachers and some children this does not seem to happen. There is only one position to take in this case. The lesson series is not being appropriately adapted to this child’s particular needs. (p. 165)

If the teacher is the hope for the child to make accelerated progress, then if the hope isn’t being realized; it’s the teacher who must adjust. It’s the teacher who must adapt.

It’s too easy to say or think of a child who isn’t making accelerated progress in the following ways:

- “Well, no one is helping him at home.”
- “His classroom teacher doesn’t get it.”
- “You know, his sister had Reading Recovery.”
- “He just doesn’t have language.”
- “I am going to need a full 20 weeks with him because he’s so low.”
- “He’s probably dyslexic.”

Those aren’t wonderfully disruptive responses. Those are disruptive responses that place the problem on the child, when Clay is quite clear where the locus of the problem resides.

There is an entire chapter in Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals (Clay, 2016) that leads off with a section entitled, “When acceleration is compromised…” And it is not the child who is doing the compromising. In that section, one of Clay’s recommendations is to seek help from a colleague. I have learned to seek help earlier than later when I start thinking the child sitting next to me isn’t progressing like I thought he would. I invite in another colleague to review my records and observe my teaching and the child’s responses. I often find that my colleague will find what Clay calls, “blind spots,” (p. 166) and will work with me to make adjustments to my teaching.

Therefore, if a child is not making accelerated progress, it is up to the teacher to disrupt the teaching and adjust it with the help of colleagues. Nonetheless, there is the reality each and every year that some children won’t benefit from our efforts, that the hope for accelerated progress was not realized.

Anthony Bryk, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, challenged the Reading Recovery community to think about the children who don’t make accelerated progress. In a January 2016 article in the Educational Researcher, “Accelerating How We Learn to Improve,” Bryk suggested that the Reading Recovery community move beyond external and internal research that repeatedly confirms that the intervention works, “on average” for the vast majority of children enrolled in the intervention. Bryk recognized Reading Recovery’s effectiveness, but in his article he also recognized the reality that in some schools, Reading Recovery wasn’t successful, that some children didn’t achieve accelerative progress. Bryk challenged us to focus more on why.

A few years ago, a teacher leader and I were analyzing the annual progress of Reading Recovery children in text reading levels in two buildings. Children in both buildings started below the national average of text reading level for full-program children that year. Both schools’ children progressed in their ability to read increasingly complex books. In one of the buildings, the Reading Recovery teachers posted a growth of 17 book levels for their children on average, while the other building’s teachers posted an increase of 9 levels. Both
buildings are in the same district where the majority of the Reading Recovery children successfully discontinued from the intervention.

Bryk challenges us to ask in such districts, “What is going on in that building that produces such accelerative progress of 17 book levels?” Conversely, we also have to ask, “What is going on in that building where accelerative progress wasn’t achieved?”

Such questions disrupt the Reading Recovery network’s focus on district discontinuing rates or large-scale quasi-experimental studies that consistently show that Reading Recovery works, which it does. Rather, these new questions challenge us to try to understand why Reading Recovery is working in some buildings with some teachers and some children and why it isn’t working in other buildings, with other teachers and other children. It bears repeating what Clay (2016) said, “If a child is a struggling reader or writer the conclusion must be that we have not yet discovered a way to help him learn” (p. 165).

The Reading Recovery community in the United States and Canada has taken up Bryk’s challenge by establishing a network improvement community to explore how we can help as many children as possible learn and to no longer content ourselves with “on average.” (For a description of this effort see Forbes, Askew, Flight, & Embry, 2019; Lochmiller & Karnopp, p. 27 in this issue). Though the second, wonderfully disruptive message maintains that the hope for any child’s accelerated progress rests with the teacher, the teacher should not be alone in challenging herself why that progress stalled. Rather, in coordination with the Reading Recovery network, it is the school’s responsibility to try to understand what was working and what wasn’t working. And that leads me to the final, wonderfully disruptive message.

The School is Responsible for Preventing Reading Failure

The school is responsible for preventing reading failure, organizing effectively to minimize the number of children who will need long-term support.

Prior to Bryk’s challenge to the Reading Recovery community back in January 2016, Clay (2016) had already recognized in earlier guidebooks that schools provide variable levels of support to prevent reading failure:

> We know that children learn at different rates. How do we shift children from one level of competence to another? These questions are related to the quality of instruction given to school entrants. There are great variations between schools in how they manage this path of progress. (p. 10)

I like to think that all school personnel recognize that preventing reading failure in our schools should be a group effort, that no one person is responsible for that prevention in any one building. That’s the wonderful part of this third message. There are dedicated personnel, school teams, evaluators, and coaches. Each year, in each building, there is much time and talent dedicated to reducing reading failure. But there isn’t always a coordinated effort to prevent reading failure within a building or a district. Here are three examples that reveal a lack of coordination.

In one district 4 years ago, the teacher leader and I discovered a pattern in the 15 buildings that were implementing Reading Recovery. On average, the children in Reading Recovery across the district entered far below the national average of full program children on the Letter Identification task from the Observation Survey (Clay, 2013). Every building’s children made remarkable progress when it came to their ability to identify their letters over their time in Reading Recovery. (As there is a finite number of letters to learn, it is expected that the children will be able to identify all their letters within a short amount of time, i.e., there is a ceiling effect on this task.) The Reading Recovery and classroom teachers should be commended, especially in those buildings whose children seemed to come into the intervention with very low knowledge of letters. However, the fall entrance scores on Letter Identification should disturb the buildings’ teams that are focused on preventing reading failure. Why did the Reading Recovery children in all these schools start in the fall with such low letter knowledge? Those in this district that organize to prevent reading failure might ask, “Should we be doing something different in our kindergarten classrooms, and can we change the instruction to address this pattern? How can we coordinate and organize an effort to turn around this pattern? Our kindergarten teachers need to be at the table to help us explore this pattern and coordinate a response to this data.”

Missed Reading Recovery lessons is another example of a lack of coordi-
nation in a school’s plan to prevent reading failure. Clay (2016) is clear: “When daily individual teaching is not achieved, the quality of the teaching and the outcomes of the intervention will be seriously affected” (p. 21).

In one district I worked with a few years back, the teacher leader and I discovered that the average number of lessons missed for all children served that year was almost 20. That equates to 1 month of Reading Recovery instruction. That average number includes the children’s absences or unavailability as well as the teachers’ absences or unavailability. What was most concerning though was that almost half of the missed lessons—the equivalent of almost 2 weeks of daily instruction—was because the teachers were “unavailable” to teach. They weren’t sick or away from the school building for personal reasons. I inquired as to why teachers were unavailable for such a lengthy period of time. I was told that many of them were being pulled to help monitor the mandated state testing in the district’s classrooms. How do we respond to that?

Pulling the most highly trained early literacy interventionist to help monitor a state test is like asking the brain surgeon to cancel her surgeries for 2 weeks, so that she can help the hospitalists round on the general surgery floors. To be clear, state tests need monitors. It’s the law in many states, but the decision makers in this district must recognize what it means to reassign a highly qualified early literacy interventionist to a lower level, albeit mandated, educational task. First, it’s not cost effective. One would simply have to cost out the Reading Recovery teacher’s salary and benefits for 2 weeks of daily service, and I can guarantee the decision makers that they have paid an exorbitant amount of money for one test monitor. Cheaper solutions surely can be found to this problem.

Second, and more importantly, these teacher reassignments negatively impact any accelerative progress the children were accomplishing, prior to the start of the state testing.

Clay (2016) speaks to this lack of coordination:

Reading Recovery lessons must occur daily. In that way even the child who cannot remember from day to day can be helped. The teacher acts as the memory of what his response was yesterday, and prompts him accordingly. At the same time principals must protect the teacher’s daily access to her students in the interests of achieving the greatest progress in the minimum number of lessons. (p. 21)

My example, above, was extreme. It is disturbing that these teachers’ unavailability was so high in this one district, but the larger point I am trying to make is that the district, building, or team must agree that missed lessons work against the prevention of reading failure and is cost exorbitant. School personnel are responsible to minimize missed lessons, whether due to the child’s excessive absences or, as in my example, teacher unavailability.

One final example of a lack of coordination to prevent reading failure is worth exploring. As a university trainer, I annually receive requests from school building administrators to waive a United States standard that one Reading Recovery teacher is assigned four daily teaching slots. The request is usually for the teacher to reduce her daily load to two children. When asked why, the reply is invariably, “We need the teacher to see more children in small groups.”

Now on the one hand, that reply reveals something positive. The administrator recognizes the teacher’s high level of training and expertise and wants that expertise available for more children.

However, this request to teach fewer Reading Recovery children is not an effective response for preventing reading failure in that building. First, the larger question underlying the administrator’s request has not been addressed. “Why are there so many more children who need service?”

There could be a myriad of compelling reasons, but the building or dis-
strict personnel need to understand those many reasons so that there can be a comprehensive and coordinated effort from all personnel, not just the Reading Recovery teacher.

Second, the request to teach fewer children ignores the large caseload the teacher already maintains. In the United States, most Reading Recovery teachers teach four children daily with the remaining day’s duties going toward small group instruction. In the 2018–2019 school year, IDEC (2019) reported that in the United States the Reading Recovery teacher taught on average almost 50 children in 1 year, 8 of whom received the intervention. That’s a lot of preparation, monitoring, assessing, and record keeping. For many of these teachers, one wonders if the law of diminishing returns isn’t already in operation.

Finally, a request to teach fewer Reading Recovery children ignores the reality that this early literacy intervention specialist knows how to corral the benefits of a one-to-one setting in order to get accelerative reading progress in a short amount of time, an expertise that cannot effortlessly transfer to other learning contexts such as small-group instruction. Clay (2016) speaks to this argument: “When a teacher is faced with a group of children, she inevitably makes compromises as she selects a next move for the group...by some averaging of joint or group needs” (p. 18).

The best Reading Recovery teacher cannot hope to teach for accelerated progress in the small group that she could teach for in daily, individualized lessons. To back up that statement, Reading Recovery teachers should think back to their first grade, small group reading levels at mid-year, that time of the year when fall’s Reading Recovery children were discontinuing. What book levels were the first-grade children reading in these small groups as compared to the book level for the discontinuing children at mid-year? There probably was a big difference, i.e., the text levels of the small groups of children were much improved from the start of the school year but were much lower than the text levels of the Reading Recovery children who were now leaving their intervention, returning to average reading levels of their first-grade classrooms. Reading Recovery teachers should share this discrepancy in book levels with colleagues when asked to teach more children in small groups, while also reminding colleagues and decision makers that the small groups at mid-year were comprised of first-grade children who weren’t the lowest progressing children in the fall.

Though the intent is to utilize the teacher’s expertise for more children by requesting that a teacher teach fewer children in Reading Recovery, such a trade-off squanders the school’s coordinated goal to reduce the number of children who will need long-term service.

Though the intent is to utilize the teacher’s expertise for more children by requesting that a teacher teach fewer children in Reading Recovery, such a trade-off squanders the school’s coordinated goal to reduce the number of children who will need long-term service. This final, wonderful message—that the school is responsible for preventing reading failure—is at first reading a “no-brainer,” and that well-meaning and dedicated professionals are committed to doing this. My examples reveal, though, that a lack of coordinated understanding of what it means to prevent reading failure when Reading Recovery is one of the early interventions can negatively disrupt any building’s or district’s efforts.

From Comfortable to Disruptive

A struggling first grader can learn to read in a short amount of time. The hope for that child’s success rests with the Reading Recovery teacher who teaches for accelerated progress. Finally, the teacher is part of a coordinated, collegial effort that is responsible for preventing reading failure in that building.

As I wrote at the beginning of this article, these three messages are familiar to most of us, but when revisited as wonderful and disruptive, I tried to shake out these messages from whatever comfortable blanket you and I had wrapped them in. I admit that the messages were so familiar that they had stopped challenging me to see the power of what happens when we sit down next to a child who is struggling to learn to read and how that power can be realized or compromised.
The three messages have one thing in common: They keep the focus on where it belongs... on the child. A child is involved, so we want to do better. A child is sitting next to us, and we want to disrupt this child’s march toward illiteracy. That’s wonderful, isn’t it? And if we have to disrupt our thinking for the better as we work together with this child, then so be it.

Editor’s Note:
From Reading Unlimited: “At the Zoo;” “George the Porcupine;” “No Children! No Pets!” © 1979 by Savvas Learning Company LLC, or its affiliates. Used by permission. All Rights Reserved.

References


Children’s Literature Cited

About the Author
Dr. James Schnug is a Reading Recovery trainer with The Ohio State University. First trained as a teacher leader in 1987, he served in that role at the Ashland University/ Mansfield City Schools training site in Ohio. He retrained as a Reading Recovery teacher in 2010, after serving as a tenured Ashland University faculty member for over 20 years. In 2010, Jim became the project administrator for the Reading Recovery: Scaling Up What Works i3 grant and ultimately trained as a trainer for the New York University Reading Recovery Project in New York City.

About the Cover
As an English-language learner, Christopher extended oral language as well as his literacy knowledge. His Reading Recovery lessons with Mrs. MacNaughton were discontinued after a full program. Now in third grade, Christopher continues to be a hard worker and a quick learner. His teacher shares that he is always willing to go above and beyond in everything he does!
Data Again Show Strong Impact on Student Learning

Jeffrey B. Brymer-Bashore, The Ohio State University, International Data Evaluation Center

This report features the results of the 2018–2019 school year for the Reading Recovery® and Descubriendo la Lectura interventions in the United States. As described herein, Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura have continued to maintain strong outcomes, both in terms of progress across the length of the intervention, and as contrasted against comparison groups. These results are also comparable to those of the 2017–2018 school year (Brymer-Bashore, 2019).

Summary of Reading Recovery Outcomes

Characteristics of participants

During the 2018–2019 school year, Reading Recovery was implemented by 15 university training centers responsible for overseeing the intervention in schools located in 42 states (as shown in Table 1). More than 32,000 first-grade children were selected to participate in the one-to-one intervention. These children received the intervention from 4,157 Reading Recovery teachers who were supported by 253 teacher leaders in 207 training sites serving over 900 school districts. There were a total of 2,778 schools implementing Reading Recovery, and these schools were located in urban (25.9%), suburban (35%), and rural areas (39.1%). Demographic information for the participating Reading Recovery students reveal that 52% were boys and 68% were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Children represented different ethnic backgrounds including 57% White, 18% Hispanic, 16% African American, 2% Asian American, 1% Native American, and 6% representing either multiple races or other ethnic backgrounds.

The professional experiences of Reading Recovery teachers participating in the annual data collection process include a mean of 20.7 years of teaching experience and a mean of 8.8 years teaching Reading Recovery and/or Descubriendo la Lectura. On average, these teachers taught 7.5 Reading Recovery children during the current school year and 41.4 children beyond their Reading Recovery load. Thus, accounting for all teaching roles/assignments during this academic year each teacher taught an average of 48.9 children.

Results

The assessment used in this analysis of outcomes for Reading Recovery was An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Observation Survey) (Clay, 2013). This was administered to Reading Recovery students, a random sample of comparison students, and a sample of tested-not-instructed (TNI) students at fall, mid-year, and year-end. TNI students were those students considered for Reading Recovery, tested with the Observation Survey in the fall and again at mid-year, but not selected to receive Reading Recovery by the middle of the school year. They were also tested at year-end and comprised a second comparison group. Of the students who received a complete series of Reading Recovery lessons (n = 24,483, 76% of all served), end-of-intervention outcomes were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entity</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University Training Centers</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Training Sites</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Systems</td>
<td>921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Buildings</td>
<td>2,778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Leaders</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>4,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Recovery Students</td>
<td>32,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random Sample for RR</td>
<td>2,483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tested-Not-Instructed for RR</td>
<td>5,282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Some students in the Control Group of the random assignment study did not receive Reading Recovery. Their data are excluded from results in other tables in this report but included here.
• 71% (n = 17,358) reached at least average levels of reading and writing achievement and their intervention programs were successfully discontinued.

• 29% (n = 7,125) made progress but did not demonstrate proficiency at average levels of reading and writing. These students were recommended for consideration of additional interventions.

Of the total group of students selected for Reading Recovery services (n = 32,434), 25% (n = 7,951) were not able to receive a full intervention for the following reasons:

• 74% (n = 5,871) were still in lessons at year-end without enough time in the school year to complete the intervention.

• 13% (n = 1,027) moved during the school year while still enrolled in lessons.

• 13% (n = 1,053) lessons were concluded early at the discretion of the school.

Three critical questions

These data were further examined to explore three critical questions regarding the impact of the Reading Recovery intervention.

The first question is whether Reading Recovery students who made significant progress and reached average levels of literacy performed better by the end of the school year than they would have if they were not provided the intervention. For this question, the average Observation Survey scores of spring entry discontinued Reading Recovery students were compared to the Observation Survey scores of TNI students.

The second question is whether Reading Recovery students who made significant progress and reached average levels of literacy performed better by the end of the first grade, as compared to all other first-grade children who did not receive the intervention. To help answer this question, the average Observation Survey scores of discontinued Reading Recovery students were compared against all random sample students.

The third and final question is what kind of effect the Reading Recovery intervention had on students who made progress but didn’t quite reach average levels of literacy performance, and what additional services were recommended for these children. As with the previous questions, the average Observations Survey scores will be examined, but this time only data from recommended students will be used and will be compared to discontinued students’ data. Additionally, data about post-Reading Recovery recommendations will be examined.

Figure 1 shows the mean Observation Survey Total Scores for both discontinued and recommended Reading Recovery students served first (fall entry) during the school year, Reading Recovery students served second (spring entry), random sample students, and TNI students. The fall entry students were split into two groups, discontinued (n = 7,879) and recommended (n = 6,581). Spring entry students include only discontinued (n = 4,039) students. Only students with valid scores at all three tests points were included in the analysis.

As in past years, the students selected for fall entry into Reading Recovery services have the lowest Observation Survey scores. When these students are split into two groups based on mid-year outcomes, the recommended students start the school year, on
For this year’s report, IDEC further explored the data to examine three critical questions regarding the impact of the Reading Recovery intervention.

average, with the lower Observation Survey scores than discontinued students. The spring entry and the TNI groups have similar and slightly higher fall scores, with the random sample students having the highest Observation Survey scores at the start of the year.

Question 1 — Did Reading Recovery students who made significant progress and reached average levels of literacy close the literacy achievement gap by the end of first grade, as compared to all other first-grade children who did not receive the intervention?

To answer question one, the growth of the fall entry discontinued students and the spring entry discontinued students were compared to the random sample students. As stated earlier, the random sample students start the school year with the highest Observation Survey scores, well above both categories of discontinued students. By mid-year, fall entry discontinued students have made accelerated growth and have surpassed the random sample students on the Observation Survey. Spring entry discontinued students made some growth during this time, but not nearly as much. By the end of the school year, spring entry discontinued students have received the intervention and have closed the remaining gap between them and the random sample. Our fall entry discontinued students have continued to learn on their own, in the classroom, and finish the school year with comparable scores on the Observation Survey as the random sample students. Hence, the data show that the Reading Recovery intervention helped successfully close the gap for these two categories of students.

Question 2 — Did Reading Recovery students who made significant progress and reached average levels of literacy perform better by the end of the school year than they would have if they were not provided the intervention?

For the second question, data from the spring entry discontinued students were compared to the TNI students. These student groups were purposefully selected because they were very similar at the start of the school year. Looking at Figure 1, in the fall, both of these student groups had very similar average Observation Survey scores (-.07 effect size, indicating a negligible difference). In the first part of the school year, neither group received the Reading Recovery intervention. By mid-year we can see that TNI students had a higher average Observation Survey score (-.3 effect size, a small difference in favor of the TNI). Spring entry discontinued students received the intervention and by the end of the school year, they had a much higher average Observation Survey score (.57 effect size, a medium difference in favor of the spring entry discontinued). Therefore, the data show spring entry discontinued students benefited from the intervention and accelerated past the TNI students to catch up to the random sample, while a moderate gap still exists between the TNI and random sample students (-.45 effect size).

Question 3 — What kind of effect did the Reading Recovery intervention have on students who made progress but didn’t quite reach average levels of literacy performance, and what additional services were recommended for these children?

For the last question, two sources of data were examined. The first involved the typical comparison of average Observation Survey scores. The second involved data about what kind of recommendations were made for students who didn’t reach average literacy levels. Starting once again with Figure 1, in the fall, when comparing fall entry discontinued students to fall entry recommended students, the recommended students are clearly starting lower than their discontinued counterparts on average, although there is overlap in the distribution of scores which makes it difficult to predict which students will benefit most from the intervention.

Both groups received the intervention and made accelerated progress (as characterized by the steep slope to their lines), but by the middle of the school year the recommended students had not quite reached average levels of literacy and had not caught up to the random sample like their discontinued counterparts. It might be tempting at this point to think the intervention failed these students. It is actually quite the opposite. The Reading Recovery intervention had a significant impact on narrowing the achieve gap between these students and the random sample. Additionally, now school literacy teams know that these children need a more long-term intervention and have a wealth of
data from Reading Recovery teachers to make informed decisions about what to try next.

To complete the analysis of the third question, we examined the data in Table 2 that shows what recommendations were made for the fall entry recommended students after Reading Recovery. The majority of students, 67% \((n = 4,808)\), were recommended for either small-group literacy or an intervention other than special education. Another 24% \((n = 1,684)\) were recommended for literacy-related special education services. The remaining 9% \((n = 633)\) either had some other action recommended or IDEC was missing data about the recommendation.

Table 2. Post-Reading Recovery Recommendations for Fall Entry Students, 2018–2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>row%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continued monitoring in the classroom with no further literacy intervention</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small-group literacy instruction or intervention other than special education</td>
<td>4,808</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral for literacy-related special education services</td>
<td>1,684</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention in grade for literacy-related reasons</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these actions describe the recommendation</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,125</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 shows the results for the same five groups across the same three time points for Text Reading Level. The general trend as shown in Figure 2 is similar to that for the Observation Survey Total Score in Figure 1. The Reading Recovery discontinued students (both fall and spring entry) at year-end testing had not totally caught up to the random sample students. Note, however, that Reading Recovery discontinued students (both fall and spring entry) had reached grade-level expectations and had nearly achieved the text reading level of the random sample students.

Figure 2 also shows similar results when comparing the spring entry discontinued students to the TNI. Both students start at similar text level. By mid-year the TNI students have pulled ahead. But once the spring entry discontinued received the intervention, they accelerated ahead of the TNI students and met grade-level expectations. At the end of year, a noticeable text level gap still existed between the TNI and random sample students. Note that this gap had hardly changed from fall to year-end.

Further analyses examined the means and magnitude of mean differences (effect sizes) at fall and year-end testing between all Reading Recovery discontinued students and the random sample or TNI students. Tables 3 and 4 display the Observation Survey Total Score and individual Task Scores of fall entry and spring entry Reading Recovery discontinued students pooled together as compared with the random sample and TNI students respectively. For both tables, the far-right columns denote the effect sizes in terms of standardized mean differences. (Positive values indicate that the Reading Recovery...
The effect size measure utilized was Cohen’s $d$ (Cohen, 1988; Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012) which can be thought of in the metric of a standard deviation. Thus, a value of $d = +1.00$ would indicate that the Reading Recovery children had a mean score of one standard deviation above the comparison group. A common standard to judge $d$ is that .2 is a small effect size, .5 a medium effect size, and .8 a large effect size.

As displayed in Table 3, mean Reading Recovery students’ fall scores on all measures were substantially lower than the random sample, with medium to very large effect sizes (ranging from -.39 to -.84). By year-end testing, there were relatively small effect sizes in favor of the Reading Recovery students (ranging from .04 to .18), except for Text Reading Level (-.08). Thus the Reading Recovery sample began substantially below the random sample in the fall and by year-end had surpassed them on all but the Text Reading Level measure.

Table 3. Mean Fall and Year-End Total Scores with Effect Sizes for Successfully Discontinued Reading Recovery and Random Sample Students, 2018–2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation Survey Task</th>
<th>Discontinued</th>
<th>Random Sample</th>
<th>Effect Size ($d$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Year-End</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>392.7</td>
<td>550.8</td>
<td>437.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Reading Level</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Vocabulary</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Identification</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Word Test</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts About Print</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fall and year-end test scores for Reading Recovery discontinued students (fall and spring entry combined) and TNI students are shown in Table 4. In fall testing, the Reading Recovery sample Total Score mean and individual task means were all lower than the comparison TNI group’s scores, with effect sizes ranging from -.16 (small) to -.42 (medium). By year-end testing, the Reading Recovery students had surpassed the TNI students on all measures, with effect sizes ranging from .17 (small) to .58 (medium). Thus, the Reading Recovery sample began in the fall substantially below the TNI sample and by year-end had surpassed them for all measures.

In addition to these results, examination of the national data reveal the following outcomes of interest:

- First, on the Observation Survey Total Score, the discontinued students demon-
strated acceleration from the 23rd percentile in the fall to the 45th percentile at year-end.

- Second, in regard to classroom teachers’ reports of their reading group placements of Reading Recovery students, the discontinued students’ placement in average or higher reading groups increased from 17% in the fall to 84% in these groups by year-end.

- Third, only 2% (N = 339) of all discontinued Reading Recovery students (N = 17,335) were referred to and placed in special education services in large numbers.

These are indications of the efficacy of the Reading Recovery intervention. At year end, discontinued students (a) have accelerated their literacy learning and have demonstrated performance within an average range on the Observation Survey Total Score; (b) have moved to the average, above average, or well above average reading groups; and (c) are not found to be referred for special education services in large numbers.

**Summary of Descubriendo la Lectura Outcomes**

**Characteristics of participants**
The Descubriendo la Lectura intervention—the reconstruction of Reading Recovery in Spanish—is designed for first graders who receive their initial literacy instruction in Spanish. Table 5 provides details about participation in Descubriendo la Lectura in the United States. For the 2018–2019 school year, 496 Descubriendo la Lectura children were instructed by 81 teachers. These Descubriendo la Lectura students attended 81 schools in 28 school districts located in 8 states. These teachers were supported by 29 teacher leaders. In addition, of all Descubriendo la Lectura students served, 47% were boys, 97% were Hispanic, and 95% qualified for free or reduced lunch. The schools these students attended were located in urban (49.3%), suburban (44.8%), and rural areas (6%).

Trained teachers had a mean of 18.8 years of teaching experience and 7.7 years of Descubriendo la Lectura and/or Reading Recovery teaching experience. On average, these teachers taught 5.8 Descubriendo la Lectura children during the current school year, and 29.3 children beyond their Descubriendo la Lectura load. Thus, accounting for all teaching roles/assignments during this academic year, the teachers instructed an average of 35.1 children.

**Results**
The assessment used in this analysis of outcomes for Descubriendo la Lectura was *Instrumento de observación de los logros de la lecto-escritura inicial* (Instrumento de Observación) (Escamilla et al., 1996). This was administered to both participating Descubriendo la Lectura students and a random sample of students for comparison purposes.

To secure a random sample, all Descubriendo la Lectura schools randomly selected four students and administered the *Instrumento de Observación*. This random sample was the only comparison group available for the current analyses.

---

**Table 5. Participation in Descubriendo la Lectura in the United States, 2018–2019**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entity</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University Training Centers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Training Sites</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Systems</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Buildings</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Leaders</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DLL Students</td>
<td>496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random Sample for DLL</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tested-Not-Instructed for DLL</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Some students in the Control Group of the random assignment study did not receive Descubriendo la Lectura. Their data are excluded from results in other tables in this report but included here.

Descubriendo la Lectura schools had last collected TNI data in 2011–2012, but due to very small samples in subsequent years leading to unstable average scores, IDEC has not continued ongoing, annual TNI testing and related data analyses.

Of all students served in Descubriendo la Lectura, 35% (n = 170) reached the average reading levels of their peers and thus were discontinued successfully. Another 29%
(n = 146) were recommended for further evaluation, 2% (n = 10) moved, and 30% (n = 148) received incomplete interventions. Of the students who completed the intervention (both discontinued and referred students), 54% were discontinued.

For further analyses, the random sample students’ scores on the six tasks of the Instrumento de Observación were combined to create a Total Score (with a 0- to 800-point range) that reflects literacy development throughout the school year. This parallels the processes applied to Reading Recovery data described earlier.

Among the fall entry, spring entry, and random sample groups, the largest growth from fall to mid-year on the Instrumento de Observación Total Score was for the fall entry discontinued Descubriendo la Lectura students (see Figure 3). From mid-year to year-end, the largest growth was for the spring entry discontinued Descubriendo la Lectura students. Together these results indicate that the greatest gain for all students observed was during the respective Descubriendo la Lectura intervention periods. Spring entry discontinued students and random sample students showed approximately the same gain from fall to mid-year. However, from mid-year to year-end, the spring entry discontinued Descubriendo la Lectura students outgained the random sample.

The fall entry recommended students also made substantial gains during their time in Descubriendo la Lectura. From fall to mid-year, the growth these students made was second only to the fall entry discontinued students. As seen in Figure 3, even though these students started much lower than their peers, they were able to noticeably narrow the gap on the Instrumento de Observación by mid-year and almost catch the random sample students.

Similar to our previous analysis, the progress these students made is considered a success. A significant gap has been closed and now school literacy teams have extensive data on these students provided by Descubriendo la Lectura teachers, data that will allow them to make appropriate recommendations for more intensive support for these students. Table 6 shows the recommendation made for these students. The majority, 86% (n = 126), were either recommended for small-group literacy instruction/nonspecial education intervention, or referred to special education for literacy services. The remaining 14% either received continued monitoring in the classroom or some other type of service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>row%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continued monitoring in the classroom with no further literacy intervention</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small-group literacy instruction or intervention other than special education</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral for literacy-related special education services</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these actions describe the recommendation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>146</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Mean Instrumento de Observación Total Score for Descubriendo la Lectura Students with Completed Interventions (fall and spring entry), and Random Sample Students in the United States, 2018–2019
The trend for Text Level scores (see Figure 4) was very similar to the Total Score trend. By year-end testing, both fall and spring entry Descubriendo la Lectura students had substantially surpassed the scores on both measures as compared to the random sample group. In other words, both Descubriendo la Lectura groups began the school year behind the random sample, but caught up to and exceeded the random sample group by the end of the year.

In Table 7 are the mean scores and effect sizes (Cohen’s $d$) for fall and spring entry Descubriendo la Lectura discontinued students combined, as well as the random sample students at both fall and end-of-year testing. In fall testing, the Descubriendo la Lectura sample, Instrumento de Observación Total Score mean, and individual task means were all lower than the comparison random sample group with effect sizes ranging from -.17 (small) to -.56 (medium). By year-end testing, the Descubriendo la Lectura students had surpassed the random sample students on all measures, with effect sizes ranging from .35 (small) to .69 (medium). Thus, the Descubriendo la Lectura sample began the fall substantially below the random sample and by year-end had surpassed them on all measures.

Other results noted in the data include the following:

- First, on the Instrumento de Observación Total Score, the discontinued students have accelerated their learning as shown in their progression from the 23rd percentile in the fall to the 58th percentile at year-end.
- Second, when considering the classroom reading group placements assigned by their teachers, the discontinued students’ placements increased from 12% in the average or

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumento de Observacion Task</th>
<th>Discontinued Fall</th>
<th>Discontinued Year-End</th>
<th>Random Sample Fall</th>
<th>Random Sample Year-End</th>
<th>Effect Size ($d$) Fall</th>
<th>Effect Size ($d$) Year-End</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>464.1</td>
<td>582.5</td>
<td>483.4</td>
<td>558.2</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Análisis Actual del Texto</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escritura de Vocabulario</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>-0.49</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oír y Anotar los Sonidos en las Palabras</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identificación de Letras</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prueba de Palabras</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>-0.56</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptos del Texto Impreso</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
higher reading groups in the fall to 95% in such groups by year-end.

• Finally, less than 1% \((N = 1)\) of all discontinued students \((N = 169)\) were referred and placed in special education following the intervention.

These are additional indications of the efficacy of the Descubriendo la Lectura intervention, as discontinued students (a) have accelerated their literacy learning and have achieved an average Total Score at year-end; (b) have been advanced to the average, above average, or well above average reading groups; and (c) are not referred for special education services in large numbers.

The results reported here for the Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura interventions, as well as prior results (e.g., Brymer-Bashore, 2019), indicate that Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura continue to be amongst a very small number of educational interventions with strong impacts on student learning in the United States. Now in its 35th year of implementation in 2018–2019, students receiving these interventions continue to generate strong outcomes.

Strong effects such as these would not be possible without the continued commitment of our Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura trainers, teacher leaders, and teachers, who consistently seek to improve their teaching craft. The efforts of these educators continue to result in outstanding literacy success for participating students.

References


About the Author
Jeff Brymer-Bashore is the director and co-principal investigator at the International Data Evaluation Center where he has worked for more than 18 years. With a degree in mathematics from The Ohio State University, he specializes in designing and managing large-scale data collections systems. When not working with data, Jeff is a DJ and children’s entertainer.


---

**2021 Reading Recovery Teacher Leader Institute**

Tuesday–Friday, June 15–18
DoubleTree Hotel Oak Brook near Chicago

Learn with your peers about improvement science, collaborative inquiry, the use of data including on-demand reports and site reports. Also: new teacher leader session, DLL teacher leader professional development, IDEC update, and more.

**Required Professional Development for Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders**

Reading Recovery Trainers and Reading Recovery Site Coordinators Should Also Attend

---

Watch for registration information in late November 2020
Learning Letter-Sound Relationships: Evidence and Practice

Sinéad Harmey, University College London Institute of Education, United Kingdom
Sue Bodman, University College London Institute of Education, United Kingdom

Author’s Note: This article is based on a presentation at the 2019 International Reading Recovery Institute, Auckland, New Zealand.

In this article, we explore recent research about phonics teaching, the interdependent skills needed to access phonics teaching, and consider synergies between the findings from these studies and Reading Recovery® teaching procedures. First, we set the scene by discussing definitions and raise some issues regarding the efficacy of different ways of teaching phonics, particularly in relation to Reading Recovery. Next, we review some recent research about the role of phonics in learning to read and how it fits with Reading Recovery teaching procedures. Two of these studies were conducted in the context of Reading Recovery. Finally, given that it has been established that successful integration of Reading Recovery in a school (May, Sirinides, Gray, & Goldsworthy, 2016) demands a collective understanding of the pedagogy of Reading Recovery, we consider some of the current challenges in aligning classroom teaching of phonics and Reading Recovery. We hope that providing a broad overview of the issues will facilitate better professional conversations about the principles and practices of Reading Recovery and build collective understanding of the role of phonics in learning to read.

Defining Phonics and Its Role in Reading Recovery

In every Reading Recovery lesson, teachers aim to support children to develop expertise in linking “what his eyes are attending to and what he is saying” (Clay, 2016, p. 142). That being said, searching for, deciding, and linking visual information to sounds in an efficient manner that makes sense and fits with the author’s message involves complex processes of self-monitoring (Schwartz, 1997). So, while we focus on supporting children to link letters (graphemes) and the sounds (phonemes) that they represent in this article, we acknowledge that this process is but one facet of an incredibly complex process.

Stahl, Duffy-Hester, and Stahl (2006) in an article titled “Everything You Wanted to Know About Phonics (But Were Afraid to Ask)” suggested that one of the key issues is that “a lot of people are talking about phonics but in different ways” (p. 338). The lack of clarity identified is further confounded by the fact that beliefs about how phonics should be taught depends very much on how one defines and understands the process of learning to read. Indeed, it will come as no surprise to readers that the beliefs held about how children learn to read, and subsequently how best to support reading development has historically been the topic of “vociferous argument” (Castles, Raste, & Nation, 2018, p. 5).

In order to demonstrate the divided opinions about what constitutes phonics, we provide four contrasting definitions (see Table 1). We chose these definitions as they highlight the disparities in the field.

There are three tenets common to all four definitions:

1. Phonics is a method or element of the teaching of reading.
2. Phonics should teach children the relationships between letters and sounds to support reading.
3. That there should be a systematicity to phonics teaching.

However, whilst all using the terms “phonics” and “systematic,” the authors do not use them in a consistent way. Mesmer and Griffith (2005) consider phonics as both a linguistic system and a method of instruction. Bowers and Bowers (2017) appear to suggest that phonics operates at the level of letter-sound correspondence but not spelling patterns whereas Treiman (2018) suggests that it can be used to teach spelling. Both Mesmer and Griffith and Treiman refer to the phoneme or sound first and yet phonics is print dependent. For Treiman, systematic refers to the level of the systematicity of the spelling system, whereas others (e.g., Castles, Raste, & Nation, 2018) refer to the standardized order for exposing all young learners to grapheme-
phoneme correspondences. For the purpose of this article, we suggest that part of Mesmer and Griffith’s definition is helpful: “an educational practice for teaching learners the relationships between letters and sounds” (p. 367).

“Systematic” means following a well-ordered plan, methodical in procedure and marked by thoroughness (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020). Although systematic phonics instruction is generally reported as more effective than non-systematic phonics instruction (Wyse & Goswami, 2008), it would seem that the evidence for this is inconclusive (Bowers, 2020). There is also some disagreement on how to be systematic (Wyse & Goswami) and exactly what that means. Most commonly, systematic approaches to teaching phonics are synthetic (where teaching focuses on articulating the individual sounds associated with the grapheme and blending, or synthesizing them together) or analytic (where teaching starts with whole words and focuses on strategies to segment those words into chunks as well as the individual phonemes associated with a grapheme and includes attention to rime patterns and word parts as well as individual letter-sound relationships) (Lewis & Ellis, 2006). Both analytic and synthetic approaches are referred to as systematic because they imply a consistently followed order of instruction and that early reading instruction should focus exclusively on letter-sound relationships. It is often claimed that synthetic is more effective than analytic phonics (Rose, 2006) but evidence for superiority of synthetic phonics over any other approach has not been empirically proven (Torgerson, Brooks, Gascoine, & Higgins, 2019).

How teaching should differ for children who have received systematic phonics teaching in the first year of school but, despite this, have failed to make progress in literacy learning is even less clear. Di Stasio, Savage, and Abrami (2010) found that an analytic phonics approach provided superior results for children from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. In contrast, Machin, McNally, and Viarengo (2018) found that the long-term effects of synthetic phonics washed out for most children but that they persisted for children from low-SES backgrounds and who spoke English as an additional language. However, they were not comparing the method to any other approach. Bowers (2020), when appraising systematic reviews that considered the efficacy of various phonics approaches with different groups of at-risk readers, argued that there simply is not enough evidence to support any one particular teaching method. In summary, it seems that the lack of clarity about how phonics is defined extends to how it should be taught (Stahl, Duffey-Hester, & Stahl, 1998).

It is clear there is a lack of evidence for the superiority of any phonics approach and, in particular, there is a lack of evidence to support the primacy of a particular approach for children who have not responded to classroom teaching. In many countries where Reading Recovery is implemented, however, policy dictates a specific approach to the teaching of phonics. In England, for example, Reading Recovery teachers are frequently called upon to advocate for the theoretical base for Reading Recovery and how it aligns with national curriculum guidance stipulating a classroom focus on synthetic approaches using decodable texts. Indeed, Chapman and Tunmer (2019) have argued that Reading Recovery teaching is not aligned with “contemporary approaches to literacy

<p>| Table 1. Definitions of Phonics |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mesmer and Griffith (2005)</td>
<td>A system for encoding speech sounds into written symbols and an educational practice for teaching learners the relationships between letters and sounds and how to use this system to recognize words. (p. 367)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2018)</td>
<td>Systematic phonics refers to reading instruction programmes that teach children the relationship between graphemes and phonemes in an alphabetic writing system. (p. 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowers and Bowers (2017)</td>
<td>A method of teaching reading that focuses on sub-lexical grapheme–phoneme correspondences with little or no reference to other constraints on spelling. (p. 125)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treiman (2018)</td>
<td>Phonics instruction teaches that the spellings of words encode the phonemes within them by virtue of systematic links between letters or groups of letters and phonemes. (p. 2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
instruction” (p. 266). In the next section, we challenge this assertion and consider the alignment of and synergies between Reading Recovery and “contemporary” approaches to phonics teaching.

Reading Recovery and Contemporary Approaches to Phonics Teaching: A Complex Perspective

Does Reading Recovery teach or emphasize the importance of letter-sound relationships and are teaching procedures in line with “contemporary” approaches to phonics teaching? When looking at Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals (Clay, 2016), the term “phonics” doesn’t appear in the table of contents or the appendix. Might this be why some conclude that phonics is not taught or emphasized in Reading Recovery lessons? It is important to reflect on why Clay might have avoided using the term. She argued that the act of “linking sound sequences to letter sequences is NOT a simple problem of what theorists, researchers and teachers call ‘phonics’” (Clay, p. 143) but a more complex interaction between brain and eye, gathering information contained in letter-sound relationships to activate both phonemic and phonological processing.

In Reading Recovery, a population of children experiencing difficulties in literacy development (who have perhaps not yet experienced success in organizing their perception of and attention to print) have to learn

- to distinguish arbitrary symbols like letters,
- to hear and distinguish different sounds,
- to link the visual symbols they see with sounds that they hear,
- and to do this from left to right (a visual task) and from beginning to end (an auditory task). (Clay, 2016 pp. 143–145)

In line with her complex cognitive literacy processing theory, Clay is clear that what one might think is a simple act—using letter-sound information—is in fact, a complex process. Children identified for Reading Recovery have unique perceptual profiles. Each child potentially has distinct understandings of directional rules of print, is familiar with different words and letters, and has different conceptual awareness of print. To profit from phonics teaching, they need to learn (a) how to look at print, (b) what to look for in print, (c) how to link what they hear and see, and (d) to do this during the act of reading and writing.

Developing speed and automaticity in these processes allows children to actively begin to monitor initial attempts; cross-check sources of partial information; and increase “his awareness of the different kinds of information in print and leads to better quality responses” (Clay, 2016, p. 130). In other words, teaching phonics in Reading Recovery involves personalizing teaching for every child by considering what he already knows and what he can perceive and attend to; this supports the child to act in order to develop awareness.

In the next section, we review key findings from research in the four areas listed above and consider how they align with Reading Recovery teaching procedures. We chose empirical studies, syntheses, and practice guides to provide readers with a synopsis of the research evidence available. We use a table (see Table 2) to summarize key points and draw on Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals (Clay, 2016) to describe the Reading Recovery teaching procedures. We also refer to the recent practice guide, Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade (Foorman et al., 2016). This practice guide was authored by experts in literacy research and commissioned by the Institute for Educational Sciences. It contains recommendations based on a comprehensive review of contemporary approaches to literacy teaching that have been empirically proven to support development of foundational skills in reading.

Synergies Between Recent Research and Reading Recovery Teaching Procedures

How to look at print

According to the simpler definitions we described in the previous section, phonics involves teaching the
relationship between symbols and sounds. However, in order to identify the symbols, a child has to look at print in such a way that allows access to the visual information that they have perceived. As Clay (2016) wrote “reading begins with looking and ends when you stop looking” (p. 48).

It has been well established that print knowledge or print skills predicts later reading success (Anthony & Lonigan, 2004; Hammill, 2004; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). In fact, Kaderavek, Justice, McGinty, and Kaderavek (2012) have established that there is a causal relationship between print knowledge and later literacy skills. In other words, knowledge about how print works contributes to later literacy development.

This recent body of research supports the attention paid to conceptual awareness of print concepts in the Reading Recovery series of lessons. This begins with establishing conceptual awareness of print (Clay, 2013) at the beginning of the series of lessons, leading to learning about direction and further support for the child to locate what to attend to (Clay, 2016). Also supportive of these teaching procedures, Justice and Ezell (2004) determined that print referencing can support emergent literacy skills. Print referencing refers to:

- noticing and naming print concepts,
- actively working to develop children’s concept of word,
- ability to track across print,
- knowledge about the functions and conventions of print,
- part-to-whole relationships in words, and
- engaging in meta-linguistic conversations about print.

This fits well with Reading Recovery teaching procedures and how the language of prompts is used to support children to build conceptual awareness of print.

When a child begins Reading Recovery lessons, his teacher ensures that he works with the few words or letters that he knows, creating successful active encounters with print knowledge. The key thing to note here is active; this is essential if interaction between eye and brain is to be forged. As letters and words are systematically introduced and learned through encounters with new texts, both read and written, the child is supported to develop increasingly skilled ways of using print information.

### What to look for in print: Letters

Supporting children to learn to recognize letters is essential. Indeed, alphabet knowledge is the best predictor of later reading ability (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Piasta & Wagner, 2010). In England, the majority of children entering Reading Recovery will have been taught to identify letters by sound, whereas in the United States children will probably have been taught to identify by alphabet name. Ellefson, Treiman, and Kessler (2009) found, in a comparative study of both educational contexts, that neither approach provided an advantage in terms of later literacy development. In an experimental study, Piasta and Wagner (2010) found that learning letter names and sounds at the same time had more favorable results in terms of letter learning and recommended that teachers needed “to vary their alphabet instructional practices according to the skills with which children enter their classrooms” (p. 340).

Teaching identification using both sound and letter name fits with the teaching procedures in Reading Recovery to work for flexibility in that children will (a) “learn to discriminate all of the letter shapes” (Clay, 2016, p. 62), (b) know all letters rapidly, and yet (c) “learn (in English) that sometimes a letter has a one sound and in other contexts in can have a different sound” (Clay, p. 69). Instructional practices to support this learning involve use of a personal alphabet book, sorting magnetic letters in every lesson, and writing.

### What to look for in print: Words

Whilst knowledge of letter-sound relationships is crucial, knowledge of words is also helpful when reading unknown words (Ehri, 2007). Knowing many words and how they work enables children to use and apply their knowledge of letter-sound relationships and develop the flexibility that is demanded when reading or writing in English. This is supported by the recent recommendations of Foorman et al. (2016) who recommended that when children have knowledge of a few letters, they should be supported to apply this knowledge in texts and that increasing word recognition would better facilitate recognition of further words and parts of words in new and novel contexts.

As well as knowing words, children also need to know how to analyse words, know how words work, and be able to construct and take words apart while writing and reading (Clay, 2016, p. 155). It is clear that early decoding difficulties predict
### Table 2. Key Finding/Recommendations from Research: Alignment with Reading Recovery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How to Look at Print</th>
<th>Reading Recovery Teaching Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Findings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Recommendations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Print knowledge predicts early reading success. (Anthony &amp; Lonigan, 2004; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008)</td>
<td>- Learning about direction. (p. 50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Print skill is a robust predictor of later reading ability. (Hammill, 2004)</td>
<td>- Locating what to attend to. (p. 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There is a causal relationship between print knowledge and later literacy skills. (Piasta et al., 2012)</td>
<td>- Learning how letters make up words. (p. 71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Print referencing by teachers supports emergent literacy. (Justice &amp; Ezell, 2004)</td>
<td>- Engage in talk about letters and words. (p. 73)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What to Look for in Print: Letters</th>
<th>Reading Recovery Teaching Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Findings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Recommendations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Alphabet knowledge is the best predictor of later reading ability. (Piasta &amp; Wagner, 2010)</td>
<td>- Foster fast/rapid visual access to print through language. (p. 61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Six variables correlate and predict later literacy achievement, including alphabet knowledge and rapid automatic naming of letters and objects. (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008)</td>
<td>- Involve several modes of learning. (p. 176)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Writing supports letter learning. (Hindman, Wasik, &amp; Erhart, 2012)</td>
<td>- Use writing to support letter learning. (p. 175)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use magnetic letters to support letter learning. (Foorman et al., 2016)</td>
<td>- Engage in letter sorts using magnetic letters. (p. 63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use alphabet books focusing on upper and lower case letters. (name and sound) (Piasta, Purpura, &amp; Wagner, 2010)</td>
<td>- Provide a personal alphabet book with various forms of the letter. (p. 65)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What to Look for in Print: Words</th>
<th>Reading Recovery Teaching Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Findings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Recommendations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The ability to read words from memory frees attention and expands readers’ knowledge of spelling-sound regularities. ( Ehri &amp; Rosenthal, 2007)</td>
<td>- Extend word knowledge. (p. 69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Decoding difficulties predict later reading difficulties. (Snowling &amp; Hulme, 2012)</td>
<td>- Continue to build a reading vocabulary. (p. 153)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teach regular and irregular high-frequency words so that students can recognize them efficiently. (Foorman et al., 2016, p. 28)</td>
<td>- Develop a reading vocabulary. (p. 133)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work in isolation and in context of text (Foorman et al., 2016) or in combination. (Suggate, 2016)</td>
<td>- Develop a writing vocabulary. (p. 89)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linking What is Seen and Heard</th>
<th>Reading Recovery Teaching Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Findings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Recommendations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Phonological awareness is both a precursor and consequence of reading. (Snowling &amp; Hulme, 1994)</td>
<td>- Attend to words in isolation. (p. 157)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teaching spelling improves reading. (Graham &amp; Hebert, 2010)</td>
<td>- Engage in systematic analysis of words in isolation—known, spoken, learning in reading and writing. (p. 156)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teach student to manipulate segments of sound in speech starting with syllables and move to phonemes using Elkonin boxes to support instruction. (Foorman et al., 2016)</td>
<td>- Take words apart while reading. (p. 147)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applying Knowledge Gained from Phonics Teaching in the Context of Reading and Writing Continuous Text</th>
<th>Reading Recovery Teaching Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Findings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Recommendations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teaching that contains the reading and writing of connected text is effective. (Burroughs-Lange &amp; Douëtil, 2007, 2008; Hurry &amp; Fridkin, 2018; Schwartz, 2005; D’Agostino &amp; Harmey, 2016; Sirinides, Gray, &amp; May, 2018)</td>
<td>- Familiar reading. (p. 111)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Children should read connected text daily both with and without constructive feedback.” (Foorman et al., 2016, p. 31)</td>
<td>- Running records. (Clay, 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Writing messages. (p. 82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- New book. (p. 112)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Later literacy difficulties (Snowling, 2014). Again, the teaching procedures to extend word knowledge, take words apart while reading, and attend to words in isolation align with the evidence of Foorman et al. (2016).

**Linking seeing to hearing: Phonological awareness**

The development of phonological awareness is, without doubt, related to later reading ability (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Phonological awareness is both precursor and consequence of reading (Snowling & Hulme, 1994). The evidence in this regard is unequivocal and it is well-established that many children who are experiencing persistent specific learning difficulties in reading have an underlying phonological processing difficulty (Snowling, 2014). So, what teaching can support this aspect of literacy development? Snowling, in a recent review of interventions for dyslexia, stated that early interventions need to include instruction in “linking letters and phonemes through writing and reading from texts” (p. 10).

In Reading Recovery lessons, there is focused attention to the development of phonological awareness and Clay (2016) clearly stated that “all Reading Recovery children should begin at the beginning” (p. 95) of a set of sequenced procedures that include hearing syllables, slow articulation, oral segmentation of sounds in words, and use of Elkonin boxes in writing to further support children’s linking of sounds to symbols from simple (sound boxes) to complex (spelling boxes) spelling patterns (see Table 2). These procedures mirror exactly the recommendations of Foorman et al. (2016). In addition to this, the use of writing as a vehicle to support the development of spelling ability has reciprocal gains in reading (Graham & Hebert, 2012).

**Using knowledge during reading and writing**

There is ample evidence that literacy interventions need to include reading and writing of connected or continuous texts due to the established efficacy of interventions like these:

- Reading Recovery (Burroughs-Lange & Douetil, 2007, 2008; Hurry & Fridkin, 2018; Schwartz, 2005; D’Agostino & Harmey, 2016; Sirinides, Gray, & May, 2018),
- The Interactive Strategies Approach (Gelzheiser, Scanlon, Vellutino, Hallgren-Flynn, & Schatschneider, 2011; Vellutino & Scanlon, 2002), and
- Responsive Reading Instruction (Mathes et al., 2005).

Common to all of these interventions is the presence of using and applying knowledge from phonics teaching in the reading and writing of connected text. The conclusion that children should “read connected texts daily both with and without constructive feedback” (Foorman et al., 2016, p. 32) fits well with the teaching procedures in Reading Recovery. This conclusion was, in fact, informed in part by the empirical evidence provided by studies conducted in the context of Reading Recovery. In Table 2, we provide a summary of key research findings and recommendations, aligning them with Reading Recovery procedures from Clay (2016).

In the next section, we highlight two recent studies that have been conducted in the context of Reading Recovery in order to provide evidence of effectiveness. We focus on studies that measure cognitive skills which, theoretically, should be improved by phonics teaching (phonological awareness, decoding, and letter identification). We chose these articles as they provide specific evidence about the areas of learning discussed in this article and are co-authored by the first author of this article.

D’Agostino and Harmey (2016). This is the only meta-analysis of research on Reading Recovery internationally (the previous meta-analysis by D’Agostino and Murphy (2004) considered U.S. studies only). A meta-analysis is a systematic review of the literature in a certain domain that combines all the results from a number of studies, deemed as high-quality, into one result: an effect size. An effect size allows a researcher to provide an estimate of the size of the impact of an intervention or the relative importance of the findings (Fritz, Morris & Richler, 2012). A useful way to interpret effect size is to consider whether the effect is small, medium or large. Furthermore, Coe (2002) suggested that effect size is a helpful statistic to consider what percentage of a comparison group whose results would lie below an average person in the treatment group.

This study (D’Agostino & Harmey, 2016) includes results from all experimental studies of Reading Recovery and any quasi-experiment where baseline equivalence (similarity) across groups (treatment or control) was documented. They found that the overall effect for Reading Recovery...
was $g = .59$, which is a medium effect. Further analysis, which is of particular relevance to the examination of the efficacy of Reading Recovery, is that the authors separated the results by literacy domain tested (e.g., print knowledge, decoding, phonological awareness) (see Table 3).

Given that Reading Recovery is provided to the lowest 20% in terms of literacy learning, this analysis demonstrates that, following a series of lessons, children who had received Reading Recovery scored higher than approximately 60% of the control or comparison groups on measures of phonological encoding (hearing and recording sounds in words), phonological awareness, word reading, decoding, and letter identification.

Harmey and Anders (2018). In this study, Harmey and Anders (2018) examined two consecutive years of annual monitoring data for all children taught in Reading Recovery in England who sat a statutory phonics screening check. The phonics screening check (PSC) is a word reading assessment with 20 real words and 20 pseudowords. Pseudowords are said to be a purer test of decoding, given that children cannot use vocabulary knowledge or prior experience with the pseudowords to support word reading.

This check is taken at the end of Year 1 in English schools. Harmey and Anders found that of the children who were yet to have Reading Recovery, only 19% passed the PSC. This rose to 45% of those who were at a midpoint in their series of lessons, whereas 75% who had completed Reading Recovery passed the PSC. This is almost equivalent to the national average of 82% who complete the check successfully (Department for Education, 2018). These results are important, not only for Reading Recovery teachers in England, but also for colleagues in South Australia where the PSC has recently been validated for use as a screening tool (Hordacre, Moretti, & Spoehr, 2017) and in other educational contexts given its compatibility with other screening instruments used internationally.

Sharing Understandings About the Teaching of Phonics: Implementation Issues

We began this paper by considering briefly some of the issues related to what phonics is and the best ways to teach it. We then considered synergies between recent research on phonics teaching and Reading Recovery, as well as research conducted in the context of Reading Recovery. Acknowledging the importance of school-wide shared understandings, values and beliefs to support high levels of school-wide commitment and fidelity of implementation (May et al., 2016), we conclude by offering some reflections that can be used to inform professional conversations to build shared understandings of Reading Recovery principles, followed by some questions to consider when liaising with classroom colleagues.

Children identified for Reading Recovery have already experienced a classroom phonics programme and now require a different response. One of the key assumptions of Reading Recovery is that schools in which the intervention is implemented are providing a “sound curriculum for early literacy learning” (Clay, 2016, p. 9). Therefore, children who are served by Reading Recovery will have experienced phonics teaching in the classroom. Given that Reading Recovery is implemented across the world, we know that despite different approaches to literacy teaching and learning in different countries there remains a cohort of children who, for whatever reason, still have difficulties learning to read and write after good classroom teaching, including phonics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Percentage of control group who would be below an average person in treatment (Reading Recovery) group (Coe, 2002)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall effect</td>
<td>.59*</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonological Encoding</td>
<td>.70*</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonological Awareness</td>
<td>.58*</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Reading</td>
<td>.45*</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decoding</td>
<td>.45*</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Identification</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* from D’Agostino & Harmey, 2016, p. 37
When discussing the efficacy of the teaching of phonics, we argued that the discussion must move beyond “what works” to “what works in which circumstances and for whom” (Pawson & Tilley, 1997, p. 2). There is a profound difference between these two questions:

1. What phonics teaching works in classrooms where lessons are conducted in whole class and/or small groups for children making typical progress in literacy learning?
2. What phonics teaching works in an early literacy intervention for children experiencing the most difficulty in literacy learning who have not responded to classroom teaching?

As researchers and practitioners debate phonics teaching and the efficacy of different phonics approaches, the differences between these two questions are often overlooked. In Reading Recovery, teachers work with children experiencing literacy difficulties who have already experienced classroom teaching, not children at average levels of literacy attainment in a classroom setting. Supportive of the importance of this distinction, The National Reading Panel’s seminal report, whilst providing clear guidance that systematic phonics is a key tenet of effective classroom teaching, also concluded that systematic phonics “did not help children labelled ‘low achieving’ poor readers” (in Bowers, 2020, np). We suggest that any discussion regarding phonics and Reading Recovery must consider the population for whom the intervention is intended and their previous learning history.

Reading Recovery professionals need to talk about the teaching of letter-sound relationships in Reading Recovery in ways that are accessible to classroom colleagues.

There is a danger in talking about teaching of the alphabetic code in Reading Recovery as “incidental” or “only when needed” as it may be understood as disorganised or lacking in rigour. Suggesting that Reading Recovery teachers do not think carefully about how a child uses letter-sound relationships in reading and writing contexts is not accurate. Children are not taught in an ad hoc manner, provided with support for using letter-sound relationships only at the point of error. “Systematic” isn’t a word commonly used to talk about a Reading Recovery teacher’s decisions to support, for example, the expansion of letter knowledge; we suggest that it would be helpful to do so. Reading Recovery teachers plan methodically for the interrelated learning involved in letter identification and letter knowledge, including explicit and systematic teaching of letter-sound relationships; those associated with single letters (/k/ with the letters c and k, for example), as well as with groups of letters (igh, ou and oo, for example). This learning happens across the lesson, in both isolation and in text reading and writing.

It cannot be that there is only one effective plan for teaching letter identification and letter knowledge, since programmes evaluated as “systematic” have differing teaching sequences (for example, Read Write Inc, Jolly Phonics, Sound Discovery, Wilson Fundations). These schemes are evaluated as systematic because they move from simple letter-to-sound associations to more complex. They also provide a teaching sequence that allows children to start applying letter knowledge to make words very quickly, giving attention to how frequently the graphemes appear in print and spoken language. We argue that the approach in Reading Recovery is also systematic. In classroom programmes, being systematic is implementing what is considered to be the optimum teaching sequence for all children whatever their existing knowledge, language background, and stage of directional attention.

“Systematic” isn’t a word commonly used to talk about a Reading Recovery teacher’s decisions to support, for example, the expansion of letter knowledge; we suggest that it would be helpful to do so.

In Reading Recovery, being systematic means observing closely in order to design a teaching sequence that makes optimum use of what each unique learner brings to the task and assessment evidence of previous experience of the alphabetic code. Part of being systematic means teachers ensure that existing and new letter knowledge is applied within the wider context of the child’s literacy processing. This is a stated focus for Reading Recovery lessons.

Clay signals the importance of systematically adapting to each pupil. For example, as more similar letters are introduced, teachers are asked to “[o]bserve carefully as you make these changes” (Clay, 2016, p. 64). Clay’s background in developmental
psychology convinced her that repeated structured observations in an authentic context to document knowledge and skills was needed to provide reliable information to inform teaching. This systematic observation allows the teacher to consider the efficacy of her instruction and recalibrate responsively.

A Reading Recovery lesson is full of opportunities to observe and create a systematic response and systematically test hypotheses. One example, the running record, provides insight into how a child brings together sources of information and how the alphabetic code is used as part of that problem solving. This information is used to analyse which letters are well known and can provide a supportive context to introduce new or less well-known letters. Analysing running records also involves considering how a child problem solves in order to consider how effectively and automatically words are synthesised from left to right. This underpins systematic planning for opportunities to learn about constructing words and taking words apart. In the same way that classroom programmes are designed for application of knowledge, so the aim of personalising instruction is for the child to learn about how words work and be able to use this awareness whilst reading and writing.

Beliefs about literacy learning in general influence how the term “phonics” is conceptualized and used.

For some, literacy learning is understood as a simple task: skills and items of knowledge added one by one; each letter learned representing the same perceptual and cognitive task to each and every learner; progress measured solely by scores. At some future point, it is thought, when print information can be accessed fast and fluently, comprehension is achieved. If this were a satisfactory description of what happens as children learn to read, then phonics might be seen as having a dominant, if not exclusive role in early teaching interactions. Proponents of this view might interpret the absence of the word “phonics” in the theoretical base for Reading Recovery as a serious deficit, one that causes concern over the quality of instruction provided. However, Clay proposed a different view of learning — one where problem solving as well as correct responding contribute to progress. She called this “a ‘transformation’ model of progress” (Clay, 2001, p. 50), where it is the interactivity between cognition and perception that creates progress. The drawing together of sources of information and decision making that occurs (both consciously and subconsciously) become increasingly speeded and sophisticated. Running records taken over time provide evidence of this change.

In a constructive view of literacy progress, encounters with new and novel ways of using the alphabetic code in meaningful contexts strengthen the processing system, not weaken it (Clay, 2016). That is not to say that “phonetic knowledge” is not fundamental. Knowledge of the alphabetic code is of prime importance and needs to be sufficiently fluent and flexible that it can be integrated with multiple sources of information: meaning, syntax, print, and language (Bodman & Smith, 2013). Reading Recovery lessons offer many opportunities for phonetic knowledge to be learned and applied, but there is so much more to developing fast and fluent use of the alphabetic code. Without some understanding of literacy learning as transformation, how Reading Recovery procedures give thorough attention to gaining and applying phonetic knowledge may be hard to see.

So, how can Reading Recovery practitioners build collective and school-wide understanding of the role of phonics in learning to read and how it is used to support those experiencing the most difficulty in literacy learning? The following questions aim to bring to the fore the importance of considering the classroom context when talking about learning letters and sounds with classroom colleagues.

- What sorts of phonics instruction have children received in school before they begin Reading Recovery? How will that influence the vocabulary you use when discussing progress?
- Do classroom curricula suggest “additive” or “transformation” models of progress? What challenges might that create?
- What patterns of strengths and difficulties do you notice as you assess children for inclusion in Reading Recovery? What are the implications for Reading Recovery lessons and for liaison with school literacy teams?
- How and when do you communicate information about how the children you teach link what is seen and what is heard? Might conversations about how a child uses letters and sounds, during the series of lessons and when a child exits
Reading Recovery, support ongoing progress and the transition during discontinuing?

• Is your teaching of letter-sound relationships rigorous and systematic? How do your observations and recordkeeping provide the information needed without needing to repeatedly check up on what is known?

• How do you use running records to plan systematic teaching of letter-sound relationships? Do you record not only the words you went back to work on, but your observations of how the child responded to this teaching?

Conclusion
The debate over how best to teach reading is not a new one. As Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2018) commented, this has continued for the past 200 years and, no doubt, will continue as educators seek to support all children to become confident readers. Within that debate exists many misunderstandings about what phonics is and what the research evidence suggests about effective teaching. Professional conversations must revolve around facts, which we hope we have provided in this article. They also need to consider the particular needs of those who are struggling to become literate even after good classroom teaching.

References


About the Authors

Dr. Sinéad Harmey is a national leader for Reading Recovery and lecturer in literacy education based at the International Literacy Centre, UCL Institute of Education, London. Her research interests include describing young children’s literacy development (particularly in writing), early literacy assessment and intervention, and teacher professional development. These interests are rooted in her experiences as a primary teacher, Reading Recovery teacher and teacher leader, and in higher education. Her teaching focuses on literacy development and difficulties and research methods in early years and primary education. She has worked in Ireland, the United States, Malta, and the United Kingdom. Her current research focuses on understanding more about individual differences in writing development, teacher practices in writing instruction, and the link between theory and practice in literacy assessment and evaluation.

Dr. Sue Bodman is a national leader for Reading Recovery at Reading Recovery Europe, UCL Institute of Education, London. Previously working as a classroom teacher, Reading Recovery teacher, teacher leader, and teacher adviser, she now teaches masters and doctoral programmes in the areas of literacy development, literacy difficulties, and research methods as well as her work in Reading Recovery. She also works with teachers, teacher educators, and publishers in many international contexts including China, Turkey, Denmark, England, Ireland, Scotland, and the Middle East. Sue’s research interests and publications include teacher education, continuing professional development for teachers, language development, literacy learning in bilingual settings, and literacy interventions. She is passionate about supporting teachers to reflect on research evidence on how children learn and what that means for their teaching.
Collaborative Inquiry: Our Path to Learning and Improvement

The Story of Three Teacher Leaders at a Dining Room Table with a Mountain of Data

Amy Smith, Madison County Public Schools, Richmond, KY
Beth Magsig, Fayette County Public Schools, Lexington, KY
Amy Emmons, Fayette County Public Schools, Lexington, KY

Introduction

The Reading Recovery® training model privileges learning derived from observation, discussion, and negotiation within communities of practice (Schwartz, 2006). Ironically, as teacher leaders, we applied these principles to teaching and learning but failed to systematically apply them to our study and use of data. And, while we shared our conclusions from the data with teachers, we weren’t engaging them in the analysis. Essentially, prior to 2016, analyzing and summarizing our annual outcome data was a solitary endeavor, one we did on our own. Our “go it alone” approach was necessitated, largely, by the annual end-of-year mad dash to submit data and write site reports for our university training center (UTC). For a while, this worked well enough as our outcomes were steady and respectable. But, at some point, we realized being “good enough” was not enough. To achieve better outcomes, we had to learn better ways to engage with and use our data. To make learning to do this easier, we needed a space for shared inquiry and discussion (Pinnell, 1994).

In summer 2016, sitting at a dining room table, we chose a new path — a collaboration to help us use our data to improve student outcomes. Although we were uncertain about where to start or where the path might lead, we knew we were on it together. In this article, we describe this 3-year collaborative journey (2016–2019), including the questions we asked to understand our data, our analysis of problems, and the action steps we took to support teacher learning. Moreover, we share some of the many positive quantitative and qualitative outcomes which far exceeded our expectations. While written from the perspective of teacher leaders, our goal is to share our process as a way to engage all Reading Recovery professionals in data analysis aimed at improving teaching and student outcomes.

Year 1 (2016–2017): Discontinued Students

Examining data and theory

Our sites are located in the central and south-central parts of Kentucky, and the districts we serve range from a large urban district to small, rural independent districts. Between our two sites, we work with 7 districts, 43 schools, 74 teachers and approximately 485 Reading Recovery students. Although our total number of teachers and students remained fairly constant from 2016–2019, we had at least one training class each year of the project, continuously shifting the actual teacher participants and their average years in Reading Recovery. Our implementation reflects the ever-changing and highly varied conditions in which Reading Recovery exists.

Until summer 2016, none of us had ever seen any other site’s data, and our only basis for comparison was national and state averages. In essence, we had little idea how good—or how much better—our data could be. It was slightly better than the averages we were comparing ourselves to, but what does that actually mean? This left us with an unclear sense of our success or what else might be possible. We were highly motivated to understand more about our data, knowing that each number represented a human life. Every non-discontinued child was an opportunity; each was our responsibility. At the same time, it was humbling to share numbers.
and percentages that are often used to classify programs and professionals as good or bad. Our relationship and common purpose gave us confidence to take this crucial step. So, at the dining room table, three teacher leaders sat together and shared our site reports, in their entirety. Within this mountain of numbers and figures and displays, we saw similarities and differences in our outcomes. We also found strength in each other’s data that our own site lacked. We wondered, together, what the differences we saw in our data meant and how we could join forces to support improvement in both sites. Acknowledging that we were unsure about many aspects of data analysis enabled us to let down our guard and abandon worries about being right or wrong. Dropping the pretense of certainty gave us a tentative, learning-focused stance that we maintain to this day. Through the simple acts of sharing our data and initiating dialogue, we became a collaborative team of individuals as invested in each other’s success as we were in our own.

Our data sharing elicited many strengths and several opportunities for improvement. Among the latter was stagnation in our two sites’ discontinuing rates, both of which began to stall in 2014. We could see a macro-level problem, but still did not understand it well enough to improve it. Unfortunately, the typical questions we asked to guide our analysis of outcome data revealed little substantive information about our stagnant outcomes:

- Is there a clear relationship between teacher experience and student outcomes?
- Is there a difference in fall or entry scores between students with different outcomes?

Although these questions are based upon logical assumptions, they did not reveal any specific differences that we could connect to student outcomes. Thus, while we did not find the solutions to our stagnant discontinuing rate in the answers to these questions, we discovered something important about our next steps toward improvement. We learned that even if the answers to any one of these questions had pointed us toward a specific problem, there would still be more questions to ask in understanding how to address the problem. Dr. Clay (2013) emphasized the role of asking effective questions in reading:

> Good readers reduce their uncertainty about what they are reading by asking themselves very effective questions as they read; they know when they are more or less on-track. On the other hand, poor readers ask themselves rather trivial questions and waste their opportunities to reduce their uncertainty. (p. 14)

Although this quote describes readers’ abilities to make sense of their reading, it also captured our need to ask effective questions to make meaning out of data. From this perspective, Clay’s thinking broadens the purpose of data analysis. In essence, the purpose is not simply to find a problematic data point and pose a solution. The goal is to unearth the stories being told by the data. We needed to ask better questions about our data in order to understand those stories.

In the summer of 2016, we attended a session by Mary Fried at the International Reading Recovery Conference in Vancouver, Canada. In her session, she shared a study she co-authored (McGee, Kim, Nelson, & Fried, 2015) which examined change over time in first graders’ strategic action while reading. Her explanation of their study gave us new insight into discernible patterns within running records that might signal positive and less productive paths of progress. It also gave us more-precise language to describe individual errors and error episodes in which students took multiple actions. We were particularly interested in findings she shared related to characteristics of students who made text level gains but didn’t enact the same types of problem-solving actions as those who were successful at the end of first grade. In her talk, Fried described “the close enough students” who were seemingly satisfied with relatively close approximations. Her statement gave us a label for a problem we had noticed but didn’t understand. We knew we had clusters of students who accelerated and were painfully close to reaching the class average but did not discontinue. Further, we wondered if we had students who did discontinue, but whose problem solving, upon closer inspection, more closely resembled the students in their study who did not fully achieve grade-level expectations. Whereas our previous tendency was to see a broad problem (e.g., stagnant discontinuation rate) and immediately generate solutions, Fried’s presentation shifted our thinking. Instead of showing us solutions, it gave us new ways to investigate the possible contributors to a general problem.
As a result, we returned to our data with a new question aimed at exploring the outcomes of students within each status category. For this inquiry, we focused on three groups of students in particular:

1. Students whose lessons were discontinued made substantial progress and fully caught up to their peers in both reading and writing.
2. Students who were recommended for additional intervention made some progress but did not fully catch up to their peers after 20 weeks of lessons.
3. Students whose lessons were incomplete at the end of the year made some progress but were still in Reading Recovery at the end of the school year.

We asked this question about these student groups: “How many students in each status category ended their programs at each text level?” This question gave us a way to explore smaller groupings of students and search for potentially meaningful patterns within the data. Using our Student Data Summary, we displayed end of program text levels for students in each status category. Although our two sites differ in many ways, the answers to this initial question revealed startling similarities. Specifically, we noticed clusters of students like those Fried had described, including

- students recommended for further intervention who ended their programs at Text Levels 6–9,
- students with incomplete programs who reached at least Text Level 12 but not grade-level average, and
- students who were discontinued at lower text levels than the classroom average.

What is interesting about this inquiry sequence was how redisplaying the data by exit text level illuminated something that was always in our data, but invisible in the aggregate. While we were delighted to see something new, we were daunted by the breadth of possible starting points listed in the above findings. They all seemed important … but where to begin?

We found guidance in an article by Jeff Williams (2016), “Bringing Our ‘A’ Game: Getting to Acceleration and Higher Levels of Text.” In this article, he presents a compelling discussion about text levels as indicators of success and the importance of student opportunity to work on complex texts. We knew from our analysis of end of program text levels that we had some discontinued students slightly below or just at grade level or slightly below at exit. We wondered about the implications of these data for sustained learning and also about the possible instructional conditions from which the data emerged. We hypothesized that we, and our teachers, needed to explore our data to more clearly understand both our text level trends and the problem-solving patterns within discontinued students’ running records. To glean more evidence, we posed new questions:

- Do discontinued students continue to make gains in text reading level following their lesson series?
- Do discontinued students have enough exposure to complex texts within lessons?
- Does the problem solving of discontinued students, at exit, reflect a working system that enables them to solve more complex texts without further support?

What is interesting about this inquiry sequence was how redisplaying the data by exit text level illuminated something that was always in our data, but invisible in the aggregate. While we were delighted to see something new, we were daunted by the breadth of possible starting points listed in the above findings. They all seemed important … but where to begin?

We found guidance in an article by Jeff Williams (2016), “Bringing Our ‘A’ Game: Getting to Acceleration and Higher Levels of Text.” In this article, he presents a compelling discussion about text levels as indicators of success and the importance of student opportunity to work on complex texts. We knew from our analysis of end of program text levels that we had some discontinued students slightly below or just at grade level or slightly below at exit. We wondered about the implications of these data for sustained learning and also about the possible instructional conditions from which the data emerged. We hypothesized that we, and our teachers, needed to explore our data to more clearly understand both our text level trends and the problem-solving patterns within discontinued students’ running records. To glean more evidence, we posed new questions:

- Do discontinued students continue to make gains in text reading level following their lesson series?
- Do discontinued students have enough exposure to complex texts within lessons?
- Does the problem solving of discontinued students, at exit, reflect a working system that enables them to solve more complex texts without further support?
These new questions were the first we asked to explicitly link our outcome data (e.g., students discontinued at various text levels) to questions answerable through analysis of student and teacher-level records (e.g., evidence of problem solving). In other words, while we had asked many questions about our outcome data and engaged in various analysis-based experiences with teachers, this time we connected the data to the purpose of our analysis in an intentional way. In doing so, we gave our teachers a path to exploring their lesson-level data in search of explanations for macro trends in our site outcomes. After all, improving student outcomes derives not from interpreting data, but from improving the instructional moves teachers make within lessons. We now had a starting point to engage our teachers in inquiry.

Engaging teachers in data analysis
Since our inquiry centered around problem solving and complex texts, we turned to McGee and colleagues’ 2015 research to support a deeper analysis of how our students’ problem solving changed over time. We sought deeper understandings of patterns and trends within these records that might help us improve student outcomes. We started the 2016 school year with an ongoing professional development (OPD) to introduce teachers to the McGee et al. (2015) study, including the authors’ descriptions of errors and error episodes. Heeding Fried’s advice from her conference session, we asked teachers to bring the records of a discontinued student and a non-discontinued student who had reached at least Text Level 10. They used an analysis tool we created, based upon the study, to record and categorize reading behaviors at Text Levels 5, 7, 9 and the highest text level achieved. The following questions drove the teachers’ exploration:

- Do records of discontinued students show evidence of the problem-solving action that typify grade-level readers? In short, do they indicate evidence of a self-extending system?
- How do the problem-solving patterns evidenced in records of discontinued students differ from non-discontinued students who made significant progress, yet stalled?

Teachers noticed the same patterns of responding in their children that McGee et al. (2015) described. Although we could likely write an entire article about these patterns, a few seemed particularly significant. For instance, they saw movement from single actions to more complex error episodes in both groups of students. They noted the point of divergence, wherein discontinued students moved gradually away from typical action chains to more flexible problem-solving actions, including greater attention to visual information. Non-discontinued students did not. Importantly, this analysis also gave teachers a way to notice students whose lessons were discontinued but who exhibited less flexible problem solving. The ensuing dialogue also gave us an opportunity to build greater, shared understanding of terms we use frequently such as independence, flexibility, integration, complexity, and self-extension.

Using this analytical tool to look for evidence of problem solving was not difficult to do retrospectively and with an entire set of running records from the previous year. Using this tool in real-time, however, required practice. Instead of our standard approach in which two different teachers brought students behind the glass at each OPD, we asked the same two teachers to bring the same two children at every session that fall. We began each session by analyzing the child’s recent running records, using a guide we adapted from the study (see Figure 1).

Following the lesson, we added evidence from our observations and wrote predictions of progress (Clay, 2016) for each child. Writing predictions together had the added benefit of helping all of our teachers learn more about what is often a challenging process. We recorded our tentative hypotheses and next steps on charts to track our thinking and learning. This recursive process allowed time for teachers to link together quantitative data (e.g., text level growth) with their emerging understanding of qualitative indicators of student progress (e.g., problem-solving actions). Most importantly, it allowed us to explore the decisions each teacher made in response to these data, deepening our understanding of responsive teaching moves.

What we learned and how we improved
When the three of us reconvened in July 2017 to reflect on our work, we began with our observations of how coherent and productive our prior year OPD seemed to be. Targeting a specific problem and providing repeated opportunities for teachers to work together analyzing student records had elicited powerful conversations and robust learning. According to Lyons and Pinnell
(2001), interactions such as these promote “... shared meaning and perspectives [that] result in deeper understanding” (p. 231). Indeed, dedicating this time for discussion and inquiry with colleagues proved exceptionally beneficial to our teachers and their students. At the same time, we were surprised that our outcome data didn’t reveal substantive improvement in the number of students in each status category. After much discussion aimed at trying to discern “what we did wrong,” we realized that progress toward our goal was not answerable through the question we were asking: “Did more students discontinue?” Therefore, we asked a new question: “In light of our focus in OPD, what might constitute evidence of improvement, and where in our quantitative data might we look to find it?”

The data we needed to explore in order to answer this question were the same data that showed us our original problem: exit and end-of-year text levels for discontinued students. Again, we displayed these data to search for trends within actual numbers of discontinued students who reached each text level; in particular, those who met or exceeded standard grade-level expectations. Within these data, we found our first evidence of improvement. Specifically, we had very few discontinued students who did not reach at least Text Level 16 at either interval, and we had many more who read at least Text Level 20. Further, we did not have a single instance of a mid-year discontinued student who failed to increase their text level between exit and end of the year. And, while average text levels for discontinued students were still slightly below the random sample at both mid-year and the end of the year, the gap was much smaller between the two groups. The quantitative improvement in Year 1, albeit slight, reinforced our observations of teachers’ growth in analyzing and describing change over time in problem solving. So, rather than feeling defeated by not fixing every problem in a single year, we returned to our data with a “What’s next?” mentality.

**Entry Points to Inquiry**

- Redisplay some of your data (e.g., exit text reading level) for students within a particular status category (e.g., recommended) to help you find subgroupings of students and/or patterns that are obfuscated by an average. This process will help you identify specific entry points for additional inquiry and clear action steps for improvement.
- Generate new questions through which to explore the patterns you find, perhaps categorizing those by things you directly control, tangentially influence, and those that are beyond your reach. The goal is to use your data to build deep under-
standing about problems; be cautious in moving too quickly toward solutions.

• Search for areas of strength, and partial strength, within your data (e.g., discontinued students and/or students who made substantial progress but were not discontinued) and analyze, more deeply, the conditions under which such progress occurred. By locating and studying things you’re doing well, or partially well, you may find a high-leverage opportunity to make fast improvement.

Year 2 (2017–2018):
Recommended Students

Examining data and theory
Our teachers’ enthusiastic response to our repeated opportunities to analyze running records in OPD made us certain we should continue this type of analysis. As we explored our outcome data, we found other high-leverage opportunities for improvement in the persistent number of students who were recommended for additional service or had incomplete programs. Although we felt reasonably sure that any action steps that we took could be mutually beneficial to students in both categories, we rationalized that focusing on students with a full program gave us more time to impact learning.

Our current status categories have limitations, in that they assign one label to groups of students whose progress often varies greatly. Thus, we needed to ask questions that provided more understanding of the learning trajectories of recommended students both during and following their Reading Recovery lessons.

Specifically:
• How many recommended students ended their program at Text Level 5 or below?
• How many recommended students ended their program at Text Levels 6–9?
• How many recommended students ended their program at Text Level 10–12?
• How many recommended students, who ended their program at mid-year within each text level range, reached at least Text Level 12 by the end of the year?

Redisplaying our text level data to answer these questions gave us an actual number of students within each text level range. This served two purposes: It (a) broke a large category (e.g., recommended) into smaller units for analysis and (b) enabled us to calculate percentages of students within text level bands. This elicited groupings of recommended students:

• Around 40% of our students recommended for further intervention ended their programs at or below Text Level 5.
• 30% of our students recommended for further intervention ended their programs at Text Levels 6–9.
• Around one-third of students recommended for further intervention who ended their programs at Text Levels 7–9, reached at least Text Level 12 by end of year.

Although these discoveries did not generate an immediate solution, they gave us a new way to explore the variation of outcomes for students within a single status category. As we pondered the meaning of these data in relation to these students’ lack of progress toward grade-level proficiency, we wondered, together:

• What contributes to a full-program student ending the program below Text Level 5? Under what circumstances is this happening? What patterns might we find within running records and/or lesson records to help us?
• Why do we have clusters of recommended students who make initial progress, only to plateau at mid-processing levels? Under what circumstances is this happening? What patterns might we find within running records and/or lesson records to help us?
• Many students who were recommended for further service after 20 weeks continued to move up text levels between mid and end of the year. What can we infer about the child’s problem-solving system and/or opportunities we missed to make instructional decisions that may have fostered more accelerated progress during their programs?

Up to this point, our analyses of outcome data focused almost completely on student outcomes and growth across entire sites. Other than patterns of missed lessons or identifying teachers with very low outcomes, we had not asked specific questions about outcomes and growth patterns within school or teacher-level data.
Thus, we posed a new question: Are there patterns of lower-performing students (either by status category or on exit text levels) or student growth within schools or with specific teachers? To explore this question, we looked at outcomes and growth at the school and teacher level using the Reading Recovery School Data Comparison Sheet, the Reading Recovery Teacher Data Comparison Sheet, and the Observation Survey Scores by Schools report. These reports suggested the following:

- Recommended students were more highly concentrated at particular schools and/or with particular teachers.
- Students with incomplete programs were more evenly distributed across schools and teachers.
- Growth on individual Observation Survey tasks for full-program students varied widely across schools and teachers.

Although growth disparities were neither shocking nor revelatory, the degree of disparity and where it occurred was stunning. Many schools and teachers with high-entry students were achieving substantially less growth and lower ending text levels. This finding was invisible to us in the aggregate, particularly for teachers with high discontinuation rates. In essence, our attention had been so focused on recommended students served by teachers with very low outcomes that we had missed some patterns of limited growth and outcomes for particular students served by schools and teachers with good, or even great, overall discontinuation rates. We began to wonder if we had two distinct yet interrelated problems: (a) urgency around acceleration and (b) intentional teaching to foster rapid, sustained, and maximal growth, for some students in particular.

A 2016 evaluation of Reading Recovery by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) gave us an additional perspective from which to consider our data and the interrelationships of teacher actions and student outcomes (May, Sirinides, Gray, & Goldsworthy, 2016). We wondered if the authors’ model of instructional strength, defined as “the extent to which a teacher instructs for maximum learning in every lesson,” (p. 83) might give us insight into characteristics of highly successful Reading Recovery teachers. They posited instructional strength as a function of teaching that was both deliberate and dexterous; in other words, careful preparation aligned with evidence of student strengths and needs (deliberateness), and nimble response to students within the lesson (dexterity). Williams (2016) mapped instructional strength onto Clay’s vision for us as Reading Recovery professionals: “Clay’s vision called us to design superb lessons. Not so-so lessons. Superb. To do this, we must bring all that we know to the table to design lessons that cause meaningful shifts for the learner” (p. 8).

To design “superb” lessons, our teachers had to recognize and understand how to both interpret and respond to patterns in student problem solving. Our analysis in the prior year’s OPD was aimed toward interpretation. Although this was crucial, we wondered how to help our teachers more explicitly link the decisions they made in lessons to problem solving evidenced in their student records. Further, we needed to build shared understanding of what it meant to be deliberate and dexterous and how to make decisions that were responsive to student needs.

**Engaging teachers in data analysis**

Our 2017 OPD included another analysis of prior-year students. Because students who were recommended for further intervention constituted a high-leverage target, we asked teachers to bring the records of a full-program student whose progress was significantly less than their discontinued peers. For comparison, they also brought the records of a discontinued student. The goal was to explore student records to build greater understanding of the concepts of deliberate and dexterous teaching moves and find ways to improve our instructional strength. Whereas our 2016–2017 analyses focused heavily on running records, this time we asked teachers to bring an entire set of student records so we could learn more about quantitative growth trajectories from week to week and across a child’s program. We began with the daily attendance forms and weekly records of reading and writing vocabulary and asked teachers to explore the following:

- What patterns of acceleration do you notice in text reading level, writing vocabulary, and reading vocabulary in recommended students?
- How do these differ from students whose lessons were successfully discontinued? Are there clear points of convergence and/or divergence within the growth trajectories?
• What might you infer from these data from the perspective of student processing and/or teacher decision making?

Although only a first step in a comprehensive analysis, these questions revealed much about patterns in acceleration. Specifically, we saw patterns of students who spent weeks in single text levels and slowly accumulated new words in both reading and writing. The records of reading and writing vocabulary also showed patterns of fragile learning, with strike-throughs and erasures of words teachers “thought were known.” The weekly records also revealed another glaring trend: Lagging acceleration was particularly pervasive in the first half of many children’s programs. Digging deeper into acceleration in the first few weeks, we noticed a major point of divergence between the two groups between entry and the end of week 5. Although entry data was quite similar for recommended and discontinued students, students who were eventually discontinued showed substantial increases on Text Reading Level and known words during that 5-week period. Although we weren’t quite sure what was happening to cause this, we knew whatever it was started almost immediately. These findings generated powerful discussions about teacher responsiveness from the very first lesson, situating the role of teacher urgency within deliberate and dexterous decision making (May et al., 2016). This finding reinforced again that the only mechanism to improved student outcomes was improved teaching. In this way, our teachers began to relate patterns in their data to their own instructional strength.

To further understand the problem-solving actions relative to the quantitative patterns we unearthed in students’ attendance records and weekly records of reading and writing vocabulary, we returned to McGee et al. (2015) to analyze change over time in actual problem solving. We used an analytical tool created by McGee and Fried (2015) and adapted by Williams (2016) that moved us beyond our initial depiction of their categories. Using this tool to categorize evidence of student error behavior, we asked the following questions:

• What patterns of acceleration and errors/error episodes are evidenced in running records of recommended students?
• How do these patterns mirror and/or differ from students whose lessons were successfully discontinued?
• What can be inferred about student processing (either strengths or challenges) from these analyses?

During their analysis of running records of recommended students, teachers noticed a variety of patterns: no attempts followed by a teacher telling the word (a told), more teacher told in general, gross visual discrepancies that were not monitored, and persistent attempts that had gross visual discrepancies based upon first letter cues. Although most records evidenced some complex error episodes (McGee et al., 2015), there was a noticeable lack of multiple attempts or substitutions that weren’t whole words. These analyses generated illuminating discussions about independence, consolidation, and learning to take action at difficulty.

This led us to a new question: For both recommended and discontinued students, which teacher decisions may contribute to these patterns and/or resolve them? To explore this question, we looked more closely at lesson records for both recommended and discontinued students and thought about the teachers’ priorities and decisions (e.g., teaching points, word work, book choice, orientation) in relation to the problem-solving actions we noticed in the running records. We also searched for similar patterns in student writing, something we had neglected to this point. One pattern that emerged was a noticeable difference in self-monitoring between the two student groups. Further, teacher notes and lesson priorities seemed highly focused on fixing errors very early on, perhaps neglecting to secure the child’s system for finding the errors. Anderson and Kaye (2016) warned about teaching that too quickly merges monitoring and solving, potentially rendering both systems less effective. We began to think that this tendency within our teaching was a high-leverage opportunity to improve the trajectory for many of our non-discontinued students (and perhaps all students). Throughout 2017–2018, we used our OPD to explore student lesson records, running records, and writing samples to deepen our understanding of self-monitoring, in particular. Moreover, we included readings (e.g., Anderson & Kaye, 2016; McBane, Schnug & Slinger, 2017) to explore teaching decisions in reading and writing that foster self-monitoring.

What we learned and how we improved

In summer 2018, we returned to the dining room table with our data. To our delight, the data revealed an increase in our full-program discontinuing percentage and a substantial decrease in the number of recommended students who exited the pro-
gram below Text Level 6. We also saw continued progress toward our Year 1 goal of discontinued students exiting at higher text levels. In fact, for the first time, our discontinued students met or surpassed the random sample students on Text Reading Level at mid year. We had momentum! We also had many areas identified for improvement; in particular, while our overall data were better for full-program students, our percentage of students with incomplete programs was not decreasing. In fact, it increased slightly in one of the two sites. Thus, understanding more about students with incomplete programs became our next step.

**Research**

**Entry Points to Inquiry**

- Explore student growth at specific junctures within the lesson series (e.g., first 5 weeks; weeks 5–10) and analyze both the problem solving and the teaching decisions evidenced in running records, lesson records, and writing samples within that span. Formulate hypotheses about the relationship between teacher decisions (e.g., lesson priorities) and the child’s progress (e.g., text level and problem solving in reading and writing). With a colleague, discuss the patterns you notice and how they inform your thinking about teaching and/or student learning.

- Conduct similar analyses with students across status categories and describe what you learn about the child’s problem solving and contingent teacher decisions. You might pay close attention to a specific aspect of a literacy processing system (e.g., self-monitoring), that is a strong indicator of eventual student outcomes.

**Year 3 (2018–2019): Students with Incomplete Programs**

**Examining data and theory**

Since our goal was to understand conditions that may contribute to students with incomplete programs, we reflected on what we already knew based upon prior inquiry. Basically, the number of weeks and lessons was almost identical for second-round discontinued and students with incomplete programs. Although we had also explored entry text levels among different student groups as a possible explanation in 2016, we returned to our data to see if these group scoring patterns had changed over time.

As before, our data showed very little difference between these students at entry on Text Reading Level. However, students whose lessons were discontinued achieved far more growth than students whose lessons were incomplete, despite receiving nearly the same number of lessons. We wanted to learn more about this seemingly meaningful pattern of entry and exit text levels. Our exit data showed us the increase in text level (how much students improved in text level); however, we needed to describe these data to have a clearer understanding of the rate of increase in text level (e.g., how fast they accelerated).

Thus, a new question emerged: On average, what is the rate of acceleration on text reading level of second round discontinued and students with incomplete programs? Using data for mid-year entry students, we created a table that showed the average entry and exit text level for mid-year entry students whose lessons were discontinued and those with incomplete programs. We subtracted the entry level from the exit level (for each group) to calculate the overall Text Reading Level gain while in the program. Then, we divided the gain by the number of weeks served. This calculation showed us the increase, which we referred to as “rate of acceleration” per week (see Table 1). We were stunned to find that the rate of increase per week was more than double for discontinued students. More confounding was the fact that entry scores for both groups were not nearly as dissimilar as exit scores.

Something was happening within the instructional process for mid-year entry students that we did not yet understand. And, although the rate-per-week increase we found was just an average, there was something important about having a way to quantify a concept as nebulous as acceleration. While we would never impose rules (e.g., “A text level per week, or else!”), having a better sense of how quickly successful students accelerated gave our teachers something important to notice. After all,
to change the trajectory for these children, teachers had to notice and respond to potentially negative patterns in their data.

Engaging teachers in data analysis

Our revelations around acceleration patterns sent us in search of new ways to interact with teachers and their data. We wanted to understand, call attention to, and circumvent slow progress. Although we were focused on mid-year entry students, logic dictates that there is some relationship between the length of first-round programs and our percentage of students with incomplete programs. Although Anderson and Kaye (2016) used the terms “finding and fixing” to refer to students, we respectfully borrowed their idea to illustrate our rationale for our next action step. In essence, teachers had to notice (find) the problem, and understand it, before they could solve (fix) the problem. We needed a better process to draw teachers’ attention to patterns of acceleration and their instructional response to those patterns. After all, the only way to improve outcome data is to improve our teaching moves during the intervention.

For nearly two decades, the teachers in our sites shared monitoring forms with the teacher leaders at monthly ongoing professional development. While this practice was important, it was too slow and delayed teacher leader guidance. Seeking a more efficient process, we explored online platforms to share weekly attendance forms as a mechanism to support student progress in real time. We converted our standard attendance form into a Google Sheet (Figure 2) and uploaded those to a shared drive so each student’s data was accessible to individual teachers and teacher leaders. We wanted to promote continuous dialogue with teachers about positive and problematic patterns in student acceleration. Thus, we established conditional formatting rules to highlight specific data (e.g., missed lessons, accuracy percentages below 90%, low self-correction ratio), visually elevating them to capture teacher attention. In a sense, our document illuminated important data to provide visual signals, including potentially important patterns in acceleration.

Online documentation gave us effective, real-time opportunities to collaborate with teachers. It also provided insight into possible contributors to stagnant student outcomes. Because early acceleration was such a focus, we were quick to point out (using the comment function within our documents) acceleration patterns in both text level and writing vocabulary. The power of these online discussions is difficult to overstate. Using real-time data gave us an opportunity to help teachers notice patterns and respond to them.

Throughout the 2018–2019 school year, we used our time in OPD to address patterns, problems, and common confusions that emerged from our conversations with teachers around their online data. As teachers engaged in conversations about data and instructional decisions, they demonstrated trust in each other. Their collaborative discussions built shared understanding of problems and opportunities for improvement. Further, the continuous dialogue both online and within OPD gave greater purpose to our exploration of the CPRE report (May et al., 2016). It seemed that exploring the concepts of deliberateness and dexterity through the lens of our real-time data gave us a clearer way to see and understand our problems. More importantly, it gave us opportunities to reflect upon teaching moves that might address these problems.

What we learned and how we improved

When we returned to the dining room table in summer 2019, we had confidence and clarity that eluded us at the beginning of this journey. Over 3 years, we learned to pose better questions about data, conduct analyses to answer those questions, and apply our learning from these analyses to formulate action steps toward improvement. While engaging in this collaborative inquiry has been challenging and circuitous, we allowed ourselves to be vulnerable as colleagues and create a space to ask questions without fear of being “wrong” or missing something important. We celebrated successes with one another, gained confidence from each one, and celebrated growth, no matter how small. Lyons and Pinnell (2001) posited, “Learning something difficult builds self-confidence and motivates you to seek additional challenges” (p. 3). Indeed, instead of fear or frustration, our successes helped us embrace new risks and view failure as an opportunity to learn and do better. As a collaborative team, we developed agency for constructing our own meaning from our data.

Most crucially, engaging in this work helped us achieve our goals of improving student outcomes. In fact, our 2018–2019 data revealed we not only met, but exceeded, our initial goals. Although the actual percentages differ from site to site, those also differed at the onset of this project. Since this story is about a shared journey, we’ve chosen to combine
our outcomes to illustrate our collective success.

These data (see Table 2) illustrate improvement across all student groups and every problem we explored in OPD. While we still have a myriad of opportunities to improve and many problems to solve, this work has given us a clearer path toward doing so. These student outcomes are massively important, and, after all, children’s success is our endgame. However, this story is about learning. Some of our learning was new, but some of it was deepening our understanding of things we had learned before. Specifically, we now have much greater clarity about Dr. Clay’s message: “If a child is a struggling reader or writer the conclusion must be that we have not

---

**Figure 2. Sample Online Student Attendance Form**

---

**Reading Recovery Data Form**

**2019-2020**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Week #</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>TH</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>% ACC</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>WVac</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8-26-19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Roaming</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-2-19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Roaming</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-9-19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-16-19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-23-19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1:1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-30-19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1:3</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-7-19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14-19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1:3</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-21-19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>TU</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1:1</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-28-19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1:1</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-4-19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>99</td>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-11-19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-18-19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-25-19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>99</td>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-2-19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>LI</th>
<th>OWT</th>
<th>CAP</th>
<th>WV</th>
<th>HS</th>
<th>TL</th>
<th>% ACC</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>WVac</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Program Totals

- Total # of Lessons: 51
- Total # of Weeks: 14
- Total # of CA: 5
- Total # to TA: 2
- Total # of CU: 0
- Total # of TU: 2
- Total # of RR Lessons Missed: 9
- # Ch Absent Year: 

-- Comments: 

---

**Status Codes:**
- D: Discontinued
- R: Recommended for Action after Full Program
- M: Moved
- I: Incomplete Program at Year End
- NoA: None of the Above (Please Explain)
yet discovered a way to help him learn” (Clay, 2016, p. 165). In other words, identifying and understanding the problems in our data was essential; but, improvement rests upon our ability, as teachers, to make superb decisions for individual children.

**Entry Points to Inquiry**

- To help yourself become more sensitive to the quantitative signals of acceleration in real-time, look closely at the growth trajectories of students within and across different outcome groups (e.g., discontinued, recommended, incomplete). With a colleague, explore the purpose of our quantitative data (e.g., text reading level, self-correction ratio, writing vocabulary) and how it may inform your understanding of a child’s progress.
- Most importantly, explore the implications of these data for your decision making within lesson series. Do not restrict your analysis to students who make slow progress. This is important for our work with all students, regardless of their rate of acceleration or outcomes. For instance, examining the records of a discontinued child might reveal how you maximized, or overlooked, opportunities to make the child’s lesson series even more efficient.

**In the End (And Looking Forward)**

One of the beliefs we hold dear in Reading Recovery is that each child’s literacy journey is unique. Indeed, our job is to work alongside children as a knowing guide, no matter how circuitous or idiosyncratic their path. Our system provides similar support from trainer to teacher leader, and from teacher leader to teacher. While individual paths may differ, we are never supposed to be on them alone. Facing challenges that we weren’t sure how to address on our own is what brought us together at the dining room table. This account of our work reveals the learning and improvement we experienced by coming together as colleagues.

Still, ours is but a single example of teacher leader collaboration and inquiry. The questions we asked, reports we sought for guidance, conclusions we drew from our analyses, and actions steps we employed in response to our findings are neither the only nor maybe even the best options. While not a roadmap, our story depicts the complexity of our work as Reading Recovery professionals and the importance of exploring the inextricable relationship between student data and teacher decision making.

It is our privilege as teacher leaders to share this story, but it does not belong to us. It belongs to our teachers. They have followed us down every path—including some that led to dead ends.

---

**Table 2. Change in Student Outcomes Across Sites (2016–2019)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Change in Student Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discontinued</td>
<td>Increased our full-program discontinuing rate by 5% and 11% with 85% and 92% of full-program students discontinued in 2018–2019.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased our overall discontinuing rate for all students served by 5% and 13% with 70% and 74% discontinued overall in 2018–2019.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased the mid-year and end of year text levels for discontinued students so the average at both intervals met or exceeded random sample students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students whose lessons were not discontinued (Recommended or Incomplete)</td>
<td>Reduced our recommended students by 1% and 9% with only 12 students recommended for further services following a full program in 1 of the 2 sites at the end of 2018–2019.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduced our percentage of students with incomplete programs by 5% and 7% with only 15% and 10% of students with incomplete programs at the end of 2018–2019.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduced the percentage of recommended or incomplete students who exited their programs below Text Level 6 by 30% from 2016–2019.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased the percentage of non-discontinued students who ended the year at Text Level 12 or higher; over 50% of students recommended and incomplete students ended 2018–2019 in this range.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and cul-de-sacs—with fearless vulnerability, unwavering trust, and a steadfast commitment to their children. Their open-minded approach to learning and their willingness to do this challenging work exemplifies what is possible for individuals within a community of practice (Schwartz, 2006; Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). In 2016 we asked ourselves, “Where and how do we start?” and in each of the 2 years subsequent, “What should we do next?” Sitting here today, in 2020, our question is, “What else might be possible for us?” Our answer: “Working together ... anything.”

References


About the Authors
Amy Smith is a Reading Recovery teacher leader in Richmond, KY, where she serves both suburban and rural districts. Prior to becoming a teacher leader in 2001, she was a primary classroom teacher in a university laboratory school and a Spanish-immersion magnet school. Amy has served as a member and chair of the RRCNA Advocacy Committee and on the board of directors as presidential appointee. She is currently the president-elect of RRCNA. Amy also serves on the North American Reading Recovery Improvement Science Hub, and was recently named Hub co-director.

Beth Magsig is a Reading Recovery teacher leader with Fayette County Public Schools in Lexington, KY. She completed her Reading Recovery teacher training in 2006 and became a teacher leader in 2014. Prior to her Reading Recovery training, Beth spent 6 years as a primary grade classroom teacher. Beth achieved National Board Certification in 2011 and is currently serving on the Literacy Lessons Advisory Committee for RRCNA. In addition to sharing her knowledge at local conferences, she has presented at the Reading Recovery Teacher Leader Institute in 2015 and 2019.

Amy Emmons is a Reading Recovery teacher leader in Lexington, KY, where she works with Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons teachers in both urban and suburban schools. Prior to her initial training as a Reading Recovery teacher in 2006, she taught kindergarten and first grade in a Title I school. Amy completed her National Board Certification in Literacy: Reading-Language Arts/Early and Middle Childhood in 2010. She is a frequent presenter at the RRCNA national conference, sharing her expertise in sessions for both the classroom and Reading Recovery strands. Additionally, she has presented at the Reading Recovery Teacher Leader Institute, most recently in 2019.
Officially launched during the 2020 National Conference, the 35th year of Reading Recovery in North America began with the 2019–20 school year. This special section continues the celebration.

Reflections on 35 Years of Reading Recovery in North America
Gay Su Pinnell, Carol A. Lyons, and Diane DeFord

U.S. Reading Recovery’s International Presence
Mary Anne Doyle

Training Centers Help Ensure Fidelity and Sustainability
Current trainers share brief histories and significant contributions

The Fourth Decade in North America — 2015–Present
Highlights and milestones from the past 5 years of Reading Recovery

— 35th Anniversary Luncheon Celebration —

Learning How to Make A Difference
Gay Su Pinnell

Former Students Share Successes
Seamus Bruns and Chris Graham

Jady Johnson Receives Special Excellence in Service Award
Presented by RRCNA President Karen Scott
Celebrating 35 Years

Reflections on 35 Years of Reading Recovery in North America

Editor’s note: For this celebration of the 35th anniversary of Reading Recovery in the U.S., we asked the three professors from The Ohio State University who worked to implement Reading Recovery in Ohio and establish training centers across the U.S. to reflect on this momentous occasion.

Gay Su Pinnell
Professor emeritus and trainer emeritus
The Ohio State University

As we celebrate 35 years of Reading Recovery in the U.S., it’s fitting to reflect on how Marie Clay’s words have influenced our work. Marie Clay was a precise user of words. She thought carefully and deeply about her choices of vocabulary. Her publications were crafted with an eye to clear communication with her readers. You notice this as you read her work, but as you enter Reading Recovery training, you become even more aware of Clay’s words and your own. Marie’s attention to language over the years brings one idea to clarity: language communicates thinking and, in turn, shapes thinking.

Many of us over our years of study have found that Clay’s thoughtful consideration of language pushes us to deeper thinking and even new ideas. I’ll mention just a few examples. When we became involved in Reading Recovery, the word acceleration made an impact — not a new word but one being used in a new way to shape our expectations. We were always proud of the “progress” that our students made. But students who are lagging behind along the trajectory of literacy learning must do more than that. They must accelerate to reach the usual trajectory; otherwise, the paths will be parallel rather than converging and the gap will remain (or widen) as the years go on. That inspiring concept strikes to the heart of the purpose of what used to be called “remedial” education. Students must catch up and keep going; teachers make it happen.

Let’s try another word: strategy (later spoken by Clay as strategic actions). That word was extensively used in literacy education usually to refer to a set of teaching moves or a new study system. Clay moved our use of strategy to a consideration of the complexity of the human brain as the child becomes literate. She also wrote about how the combination of a few items and a powerful strategy truly support a self-extending system. Becoming literate is building a complex system of strategic actions rather than acquiring pieces of knowledge, such as phonograms, one at a time. Yes, the young reader does accumulate these items but learning accelerates through using information to process continuous text.

There is room for one more — conversation, an ordinary, day-to-day word. But in Clay’s work, it becomes a description of the powerful teaching interactions in which the teacher listens very carefully (and “notices”) the learner before responding in a way that will focus attention on the information he needs or an action to take. This way of working alongside the child provides succinct and precise guidance but keeps the control within the learner’s actions. It supports the strategic actions that build the system. The young learner is active in problem solving, using all of the sources of information available to him, and processing a text with proficiency and comprehension, every day. There are many more words that Clay has helped us use in a thoughtful way, revealing new insights into teaching. That is one of her greatest gifts.

Carol A. Lyons
Professor emeritus and trainer emeritus
The Ohio State University

Congratulatory greetings to the Reading Recovery community of administrators, university trainers, teacher leaders, and teachers on our 35th anniversary in North America. This is a major and significant accomplishment for all involved in the implementation of Reading Recovery because for the last 35 years, over 2.4 million children who were at highest risk of not learning to read in first grade have learned how to read. This feat could not have been achieved without 35 years of careful research and excellent teaching.

As a primary and special education teacher for 8 years before starting graduate school, I learned first-hand how difficult it is to teach struggling children how to read. It wasn’t until 1979, when I heard Marie Clay lecture at Ohio State, that I began to understand the complexities of learning in general and becoming literate.
Successfully teaching three children labeled “learning disabled” and “language/developmentally delayed” during my Reading Recovery training year in 1985–1986 convinced me that Reading Recovery works. Why? Because teachers have learned what the reading and writing processes look like over time; how to carefully observe and respond to children’s developing growth and behaviors; how to develop rationales for their decisions; and why it is important to accelerate a child’s progress so that they can catch up and join in with their successful peers. Most importantly, daily interactions with struggling first-grade readers have helped teachers to better understand and address the emotional side of learning and the idiosyncratic needs of struggling readers.

Finally, to Reading Recovery teachers everywhere … Your efforts are oftentimes not known, recognized, or appreciated, but the children you reach and teach will be forever thankful. You have prevented them from experiencing a lifetime of frustration and reading failure. On behalf of all the struggling children who have had Reading Recovery and their parents and families, thank you for making such a big difference in their lives forever.

Diane DeFord
Distinguished professor emeritus
The University of South Carolina

From my first observation of a Reading Recovery lesson early in 1985, I was captured by the astonishing progress a young reader could make with the skillful tutelage of an accomplished teacher. I could see how the teacher’s keen observations, use of supportive language, and the lesson framework that focused on both reading and writing was integral to the progress he had made. My professional journey through Reading Recovery, begun in the fall of 1985, has been the highlight of my career. It has fed my intellectual growth, deepened my theoretical understandings, impacted my teaching of children and adults, and influenced the research I’ve done. I believe the future of Reading Recovery is in the capable hands of its teachers, teacher leaders, university trainers, researchers, and school administrators who each contribute to the quality of each implementation and the results we’ve achieved. We all owe our success to the genius of Dr. Marie Clay who developed this highly effective educational innovation.

In celebration of the 35th anniversary of Reading Recovery in North America, I was asked to contribute to this special issue of *The Journal of Reading Recovery*. As I reread my most treasured materials, I was struck by three themes that continue to impress me: Innovation, Endurance, and Effectiveness.

Innovation is woven throughout Reading Recovery’s history: (a) from Marie’s initial research in 1966; (b) her assessment tools, originally published in 1972; (c) the research and development that led to Reading Recovery instructional procedures and professional education program; and (d) the body of research that has sustained Reading Recovery to this day. Endurance is seen in our consistency of service to schools and the growth we have achieved. Effectiveness is proven by the research that documents the quality of the results we achieve with children, teachers, and schools.

With every Reading Recovery event I attend, every lesson I see, and every new article I read, I am awed that I was granted the opportunity to participate in and personally benefit from my involvement in Reading Recovery. This comprehensive approach to literacy instruction is advancing changes in each educational system we enter, and for each child we touch. For that, I am thankful.
U.S. Reading Recovery’s International Presence

Mary Anne Doyle, University of Connecticut

Our reflections of the 35th anniversary of Reading Recovery® in the United States highlight stellar, unparalleled accomplishments in the history of literacy education in America. Imagine an innovation enjoying such endurance in our nation during times of ongoing ‘reading wars’ and quests for the ‘quick fix’ that will ensure that ‘no child is left behind.’ Reading Recovery educators have forged a unique, different path and present a remarkable story — validated by data. Resultantly, we have advanced our nation’s commitment to supporting all learners in realizing their full potential, unbridled by equal access to high-quality educational opportunities, most essential of which is literacy. For children struggling to acquire beginning literacy, Reading Recovery educators have provided the powerful instruction that ensures their access to this basic civil liberty.

While the distinction and contributions that mark Reading Recovery’s anniversary nationally are the primary foci of our current celebrations, Reading Recovery holds a prominent place on the international stage. Hence, our national story contributes to and extends an international story of development and success. There is a reciprocal relationship between international Reading Recovery implementations, and this is by design, one of Marie Clay’s goals.

The purpose of this discussion is to explore Marie Clay’s vision for the international presence of Reading Recovery, to detail Clay’s structures for international development and strength, and to highlight the collaborative role enjoyed by our U.S. Reading Recovery network. Our international story further enhances the celebrations of our remarkable, national accomplishments.

Initial International Connections

When pioneering educators at The Ohio State University invited Marie Clay to join them in Columbus to launch the inaugural Reading Recovery training class in the U.S., they were initiating international exchange, collaboration, and exploration. At that time, Reading Recovery was well underway in New Zealand and was being introduced to educators in Australia. Clay’s reaction to these new ventures, beyond New Zealand, was cautious optimism. She was very aware of the differences in mores, policies, practices, and attitudes in each new, national entity, and she recognized that such differences presented challenges to be addressed as each new intervention was initiated.

Questions included:

- Would the training for teachers be adequate?
- What implementation modifications would need to be made to accommodate for different contextual and educational factors?
- Would it work?

Identifying our nation’s unique needs, Clay determined what modifications to her systemic innovation were acceptable and what procedures had to be maintained to ensure that the replication was grounded in the established research. “Using a process of accommodation, she found adaptive ways to implement Reading Recovery without lessening the high standards that lead to optimal results for both teachers and children” (Doyle, 2009, pp. 292–293).

The answers to the initial questions of Reading Recovery’s effectiveness in the U.S. were resoundingly positive. Our Reading Recovery teachers profited from their training and achieved intervention goals. From the earliest years of implementation, annual evaluations of their student data confirmed the efficacy of Clay’s program design, including teacher training and implementation strategies. Thus, exploration of the transfer of this early intervention from New Zealand to the U.S. confirmed remarkable success and promise for international exchange and collaboration guided by astute and informed planning.

As the international presence of Reading Recovery grew to encompass additional English-speaking nations, Clay built on the models of success in New Zealand, Australia,
and the U.S. to inform these ventures. Hence, Reading Recovery teachers in each nation deliver the same Reading Recovery intervention with appropriate modifications to accommodate for the respective national, academic, and cultural realities. Their success, confirmed by annual data evaluations, reveal Reading Recovery works! This revolutionary intervention strategy, replicated across settings and countries by many teachers under different educational policies, creates new possibilities for children struggling to acquire initial literacy (Clay, 2001).

In writing about factors that contributed to the international success of Reading Recovery, Clay (2009b) asserted that “Reading Recovery professionals have learned how to hold fast to principles, practices, and rationales while at the same time allowing for variability in the education practices and beliefs and change over time in society” (p. 222). More generally, Clay (2001) suggested that design features key to the success of Reading Recovery in the U.S. and all other international contexts include

- guidelines for program delivery.
- a long period of training that prepares teachers to be decision makers.
- lesson components that support perceptual/cognitive processing.
- a complex theory of literacy learning.
- a theory of constructive individuals pushing the boundaries of their own knowledge, rather than group led through each step by a teacher. (pp. 299–301)

Hence, accommodating for these features has involved all of us in

- operating Reading Recovery implementations according to our standards and guidelines for Reading Recovery in the U.S. developed by trainers and updated on an ongoing basis;
- ensuring that all Reading Recovery training is high-caliber, graduate-level coursework delivered over an academic year — followed by continuing professional development opportunities for all Reading Recovery professionals;
- applying Clay’s Reading Recovery instructional procedures, designed to reflect her literacy processing theory, with fidelity and consistency; and
- observing and honoring each learner’s unique strengths, scaffolding instruction to ensure the learner’s construction of new learning, and creating a unique path to success for each child in one-to-one settings.

Clay observed that adherence to these key factors, directing both implementation and instruction, were essential to guard against ineffective, unproven practices that would jeopardize children’s chances of learning (Clay, 2009b). This has remained true for our 35 years of Reading Recovery.

Clay’s problem solving of U.S. issues led to very specific structures and practices for us. Among these are the establishment of university training centers (UTCs) and the acquisition of a U.S. trademark for Reading Recovery. Our UTCs are directed by trainers and serve as the coordinating unit for Reading Recovery training, implementation, monitoring, expansion, and research. This work involves both local and national concerns. Then and now, our university trainers offer the research capacity to conduct both the rigorous self-evaluations necessary to examine the effectiveness of the national implementation and ongoing investigations of complex issues that contribute to the development of new understandings.

Trainers, faculty members at a UTC, are responsible for providing the advanced, university course work that individuals pursue to secure the qualifications and expertise to fulfill the role of teacher leader. They instruct trainees in research, practical knowledge, and leadership to prepare them to train teachers effectively and to engage with their administrators and the public in explaining and advocating for Reading Recovery. Trainers also play an important role in supporting the professional learning of teachers and monitoring the implementation at all levels “to prevent massive change so that it no longer fulfills its promise” (Clay, 2009b, p. 239). As needed, this monitoring leads to problem solving with teacher leaders and administrators to ensure that the intervention will remain powerful and be sustained.

The need to seek a U.S. trademark for Reading Recovery, which is held by The Ohio State University, became important to protect Reading Recovery from look-alike, substitute programs. The trademark is an assurance of quality and protection for our schools from any program deviations to Clay’s research-based Reading Recovery. In effect, Clay knew “how destructive unlimited variants and poor training could be to an intervention which had dem-
onstrated that children who were hard to teach could succeed under a special set of conditions” (Clay, 2009b, p. 239).

Our innovation now in its 35th year is an exemplar of successfully sustaining an intervention’s effectiveness and relevance by adhering to standards for implementation and instruction with fidelity. This unwavering commitment to excellence and integrity by implementing Reading Recovery as designed is the practice that will ensure the ongoing, powerful impact of Reading Recovery in the U.S.

Organizing for International Collaboration

While working globally and supporting the successful expansion of Reading Recovery to three continents, Clay promoted international collaboration. She valued international communication and she realized the benefits accrued by sharing research, implementation challenges, and successful problem solving across borders.

For example, when U.S. educators launched Reading Recovery in Ohio, the experiences of the New Zealand and Australian educators were beneficial prototypes. Then, the successful processes for initiating Reading Recovery in the U.S. became models for the initiation of Reading Recovery in the U.K. (Burroughs-Lange, 2009). With Clay’s guidance, the successful redevelopment of Reading Recovery in Spanish (Rodriquez, 2007) established the processes followed by Reading Recovery professionals engaged in redeveloping Reading Recovery in French (Canada), Danish, and currently Maltese (Malta).

For many years (1983–2001), Clay served as the liaison, ambassador, proponent, and problem solver of Reading Recovery internationally. At the same time, her vision was to create a leadership body and structures that would weave the separate, national Reading Recovery entities into an international collaborative charged with sustaining Reading Recovery around the world. In this way, Clay transferred her global role(s) for Reading Recovery implementations to the international trainers in a well-planned way. This led to the establishment of the International Reading Recovery Trainers Organization (IRRTO) launched in 2001. Per Clay’s design, IRRTO “guides, supports and monitors every participating Reading Recovery intervention in each language in which it is available (at present, in English, Danish, French, and Spanish)” (Clay, 2016, p. 4).

IRRTO members are the trainers affiliated with all trademark Reading Recovery implementations across the globe. This organization’s leadership is vested in an elected executive board of five trainers giving equal representation to five countries. Currently, members of the board include Prudence Smith (Australia), Allyson Matczuk (Canada), Christine Boocock (New Zealand), Susan Bodman (the United Kingdom/Europe), and Elizabeth Kaye (the United States). They are supported by Executive Chair Mary Anne Doyle.

With Marie Clay’s guidance, IRRTO developed structures and procedures to assure that Reading Recovery professionals sustain implementations of Reading Recovery internationally, address ongoing change and development, and ensure that Reading Recovery’s future remains dynamic (Doyle, 2009). The specific functions of the executive board as detailed by Clay (2016) are:

- To conduct ongoing monitoring of Reading Recovery by requesting annual reports of national data collection from each of the five national trademark holders.
- To respond to challenges to the implementation of Reading Recovery at the international level and to specific national issues if these have international ramifications according to IRRTO’s set of standards.
- To support ongoing research in order to provide direction for change and growth in Reading Recovery through international collaboration and investigation.
- To consider ramifications for IRRTO member countries of a significant body of research findings.
- To consider recommendations for changes in policy, implementation, and/or practices of Reading Recovery on the basis of international collaboration and research.
- To oversee international developments including the introduction of Reading Recovery in a new country and/or re-development of Reading Recovery in another language. (p. 4)

IRRTO is designed to serve all professionals engaged in Reading Recovery. Therefore, each professional engaged in the U.S. trademark program has a direct connection to the benefits and services of IRRTO through their local teacher leader and UTC. The international trainers, IRRTO members, meet approximately every 18 months; they present an international institute for all Reading Recovery professionals and their colleagues every 3 years. Each international institute has been very successful, and
participants have reported valuing the unique opportunities to meet and engage with international colleagues in Reading Recovery. The U.S. trainers have hosted this institute in Maui (1992), Palm Springs (1995), and Baltimore (2007). The 2022 institute will also be held in the U.S.

Sharing International Discoveries

As Clay envisioned, the opportunities for international collaboration have promoted shared problem solving and beneficial discoveries resulting from the exploration of common challenges. In the earliest years of Reading Recovery’s expansion, Marie Clay monitored international developments and ensured communication of new learning across the global network. Several examples of discoveries of importance to all Reading Recovery educators relate to instructional and implementation practices (Clay, 2009b) and include the following:

- Discovery of the consistency in the amount of time needed for a child’s series of lessons, culminating in the learner’s independent, proficient literacy processing, to average from 12 to 20 weeks.
- Discovery that children’s learning did not show any differences across countries, except for those associated with age or created by different classroom programs and learning opportunities.
- Discovery that discontinuing rates depend on a number of factors, including whether daily lessons are delivered in addition to the length of the school year.
- Discovery of the challenges in training teachers due to their hidden assumptions about literacy and learning that indicate important foci of training.
- Discovery of the potential cost effectiveness for the education systems as approximately two thirds of those receiving the intervention are returned to average levels of performance in all the countries offering Reading Recovery.

These discoveries, based on observations documented repeatedly in settings across the globe, were beneficial in “providing a guideline within which to shape our expectations and policies” (Clay, 2009b, p. 233) and in confirming the soundness of decisions related to many implementation factors. The related guidelines have remained key to both established and new Reading Recovery implementations in all instances.

The discoveries that have had the most relevance for us all are those verified by the formal studies conducted by Marie Clay and by an international body of researchers who have studied key questions for over 35 years. Marie Clay has shared that the earliest studies of the Reading Recovery intervention addressed her question: “What is possible when we change the design and delivery of traditional education for children that teachers find hard to teach?” (Clay, 2009a, p. 98). Conducting both developmental studies examining instructional and training procedures and field studies verifying exciting outcomes with children, Clay established the evidence-based foundation upon which all subsequent implementations around the world have been built. Resultantly, we are confident that Reading Recovery is an optimal early intervention in literacy education. The theoretical base for Reading Recovery is robust and is supportive of our understandings of how children learn, how teachers can teach, and how a delivery system can be designed and launched in a wide array of settings (Doyle, 2009).

Most importantly, Marie Clay engaged in and inspired continuous attention to new questions and new issues. Her challenges to the international network of trainers include investigations that not only guide implementation and redesign processes, but also extend theoretical understandings of literacy processing and children’s literacy learning changing over time.

Marie Clay engaged in and inspired continuous attention to new questions and new issues. Her challenges to the international network of trainers include investigations that not only guide implementation and redesign processes, but also extend theoretical understandings of literacy processing and children’s literacy learning changing over time.
Since the early years of our implementation, Reading Recovery investigations have been conducted by our national Reading Recovery trainers as well as a number of interested researchers unaffiliated with our network. Likewise, important and informative research of Reading Recovery has been conducted by colleagues in international settings. The result is a research base of the practices and outcomes of Reading Recovery that has “been used to continuously develop and refine Reading Recovery professional practice, optimizing the outcomes of local implementations everywhere” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 162). Schwartz summarizes this body of research as follows:

- Carefully controlled experimental studies that show the efficacy of Reading Recovery in lifting students’ literacy achievement in schools.
- Evaluation studies conducted annually by each national authority that show replication of results across thousands of education settings.
- Evaluation research documenting the sustained effects of Reading Recovery instruction and the reduction of achievement gaps among subgroups of learners.
- Meta-analyses and large-scale independent assessments of the body of research arising from Reading Recovery confirming its positive effects.

A newer avenue of international research and development was introduced with Clay’s (2005a, 2005b) publication of Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals, Parts 1 and 2. For the first time, Marie Clay confirmed the appropriateness of applications of Reading Recovery instructional procedures with two new sets of learners struggling with early literacy acquisition. These groups include special education students and English language learners, including students beyond Grade 1, up to age 9. The international Reading Recovery trainers were charged with establishing the standards and strategies for this Literacy Lessons™ intervention for their respective countries.

Clay (2016) detailed required parameters for new standards for Literacy Lessons including the requirement for an appropriate trademark in each participating nation. To date, the U.S. trainers have developed, explored, and monitored Literacy Lessons training for teachers and instruction for students making it possible for sites across the country to engage in this venture. They are also examining annual data collected on all participating students to explore the effects of the implementation. Our exciting work is available to inform our international colleagues as other Reading Recovery sites in other nations launch new implementations of Literacy Lessons. The problem solving shared by our international network will enhance implementation efforts and extend understandings of Literacy Lessons.

In summary, international exchanges provide beneficial opportunities for shared explorations, learning, and identification of new issues and research directions. Ongoing research, conducted internationally by trainers and others, must continue to inform and direct new developments.

**Future Directions**

Our national Reading Recovery, 35-year celebration is enhanced by the story of our international presence. The reciprocal nature of our collaboration and exploration with the global network of Reading Recovery professionals has enriched our work and offers promise for the future.

My response to questions about the future of Reading Recovery has always been that our future is secure because I trust Marie Clay’s processes— the carefully designed system, the strong research base, the ongoing monitoring of annual data, the evidence-based decision making, and the commitment to professional learning. Clay (2001) attributed our international success to the central tenets of Reading Recovery: tentativeness, flexibility, and problem solving. These qualities are found in how national leaders have negotiated solutions to all implementation challenges as well as how teachers have designed series of lessons for individual learners. The continued success of Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons rests on our strong foundation created with Marie Clay and supported over 35 years with unwavering commitment to Reading Recovery’s theoretical base and research evidence.

The story of Reading Recovery, derived from our national and international efforts, details an unparalleled demonstration of a successful educational innovation on an international scale. In varying contexts found in the range of countries served, with diverse populations of students, Reading Recovery educators have successfully reduced early literacy learning difficulties. Likewise, for those students served by a redevelopment of Reading Recovery in Spanish, French, or Danish, the results are equally strong. We are therefore afforded a global view of Reading Recovery that both enhances shared understandings and informs ongoing inquiry.
The International Reading Recovery Trainers Organization formalizes our international network and provides leadership and guidance by collaborating across national entities, responding to issues, supporting growth and development, and exploring new research directions. Ongoing research efforts are needed to continue the quest for understanding multiple theoretical and implementation issues and to maintain our relevance. An exciting initiative launched by our U.S. Reading Recovery educators involves applying the investigative processes of improvement science (Bryk, 2015) to explore a range of implementation issues. U.S. and Canadian colleagues are engaged in this work; their efforts and their findings will be an important contribution to Reading Recovery internationally and continue the reciprocal relationship and sharing that Marie Clay envisioned.

In summary, the inquiries conducted by researchers within and beyond our Reading Recovery network will combine to form a vast resource of understandings and insights key to the dynamic future of Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons. This quest and future discoveries will sustain Marie Clay’s rich legacy and refine understandings that enlighten the world as to: What is possible? May the celebrations continue!

References

About the Author
Dr. Mary Anne Doyle is chair of the International Reading Recovery Trainers Organization Executive Board and is a past president of the Reading Recovery Council of North America. She is the consulting editor for the Marie Clay Literacy Trust and assists with the ongoing republication of Clay’s many texts. Dr. Doyle is a Reading Recovery trainer emeritus, former professor of education in the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut, and former director of Reading Recovery in Connecticut. Her interests include early reading and writing development, literacy assessment, and literacy instruction. She is a former editor-in-chief of The Journal of Reading Recovery and has served as an area editor of the Journal of Literacy Research.
Training Centers Help Ensure Fidelity and Sustainability

Current U.S. trainers share brief comments on the history and significant contributions made by their university training centers, presented in chronological order by the year established, and followed by the Canadian network of regional training centers.

The Ohio State University — 1984
Trainers: Jamie Lipp, Lisa Pinkerton, Jim Schnug

Reading Recovery® was introduced in the United States through The Ohio State University (OSU) by two professors—Gay Su Pinnell and Charlotte Huck—who traveled to New Zealand to meet Marie Clay and learn more about the intervention. That same year, Marie Clay and Barbara Watson came to Ohio to train Dr. Pinnell as the first university trainer, three teacher leaders, and 13 teachers from Columbus City Schools. The rapid expansion of Reading Recovery across the U.S. was led by Dr. Pinnell, along with Drs. Carol Lyons and Diane DeFord. Marie Clay requested that OSU hold the trademarks for both Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons™ in the United States. OSU is one of two university training sites training university trainers. In 2010, OSU was awarded a $54 million grant to scale up Reading Recovery across the U.S. The grant required matching funds of $9 million for a total of $63 million. OSU has trained 58 teacher leaders who have trained 3,270 teachers who worked with 206,600 Reading Recovery students.

Ongoing collaboration with school districts and OSU faculty led to the development of a project to train building-level coaches to support primary teachers which was initially called Early Literacy Learning Initiative. Later, capacity to train coaches for upper grades and middle school was added and the name changed to Literacy Collaborative. Another significant project emerging from OSU’s work with Reading Recovery was the design of KEEP BOOKS, inexpensive yet interesting little books designed for young readers using natural language.

Clemson University — 1989
Trainer: C.C. Bates

Throughout its almost 30-year history, the Clemson University Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Training Center (CUTC) has remained committed to working with teacher leaders and teachers to support literacy teaching and learning. As a result, close to 100,000 children have been served by Reading Recovery professionals in South Carolina. The CUTC’s geographic location has always presented some challenges. Positioned in the northwest corner of the state, it is not centrally located. To this end, the CUTC has examined ways in which it can provide virtual professional learning for teachers regardless of their proximity to Clemson University. In recent years, the CUTC has explored various technologies for virtual coaching. While virtual coaching has not replaced face-to-face coaching, it has proved to be an alternative and cost-effective way to provide job-embedded support for teachers and students. Additionally, the center has built an extensive virtual professional learning library that

National Louis University — 1988
Trainers: Mary Ann Poparad, JaNiece Elzy

Through initial teacher leader preparation and continuing professional networking, the National Louis Reading Recovery Center for Literacy has supported early literacy teaching and learning networks that have reached nearly 100,000 first-grade children over the last 30 years. In recent years, through a collaboration with other UTCs and under the Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy Model, the center developed a regional literacy leadership network; created K-12 literacy coach training courses; and designed a system for providing technical assistance around school improvement processes, curriculum development, and instructional intervention services that included Reading Recovery. Through the National Louis University-Tampa campus, the UTC established a Reading Recovery leadership network of 10 teacher leaders and site coordinators representing five major Florida school districts. Currently, the UTC supports 38 teacher leaders for Reading Recovery, Descubriendo la Lectura and Literacy Lessons in 120 school districts and four states (Florida, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin).

National Louis University — 1988
Trainers: Mary Ann Poparad, JaNiece Elzy

Through initial teacher leader preparation and continuing professional networking, the National Louis Reading Recovery Center for Literacy has supported early literacy teaching and learning networks that have reached nearly 100,000 first-grade children over the last 30 years. In recent years, through a collaboration with other UTCs and under the Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy Model, the center developed a regional literacy leadership network; created K-12 literacy coach training courses; and designed a system for providing technical assistance around school improvement processes, curriculum development, and instructional intervention services that included Reading Recovery. Through the National Louis University-Tampa campus, the UTC established a Reading Recovery leadership network of 10 teacher leaders and site coordinators representing five major Florida school districts. Currently, the UTC supports 38 teacher leaders for Reading Recovery, Descubriendo la Lectura and Literacy Lessons in 120 school districts and four states (Florida, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin).
hosts a number of in-depth modules for K–2 and Reading Recovery teachers. These asynchronous resources allow teachers the opportunity to reflect and return to them as needed, accommodating their busy schedules and providing access to professional learning 24/7. The CUTC continues to operate in partnership with Clemson University, the South Carolina Reading Recovery Advisory Council, and the South Carolina Department of Education. This unique and longstanding partnership continues to support the implementation of Reading Recovery in the state.

**Texas Woman's University — 1989**

Trainers: Connie Briggs, Elizabeth Kaye, Annette Torres Elias, Nancy Anderson

Texas Woman’s University (TWU) began offering credit for Reading Recovery teacher classes in 1989–1990 and hosted its first class of teacher leaders in 1990–1991. TWU is one of two UTCs to train university trainers, and it is the only UTC to train Descubriendo la Lectura (DLL) trainers and teacher leaders. Across the last 30 years, TWU has trained more than 20 trainers (including 6 for DLL), more than 220 teacher leaders, and well over 35,000 Reading Recovery teachers. TWU supports and values the relationships with their school district partners. The network’s robust implementations of Reading Recovery, DLL, and Literacy Lessons reach across the country, presently serving students in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Washington, Colorado, and New Jersey.

TWU’s trainers are actively engaged in research, including studies related to Reading Recovery/Descubriendo la Lectura effectiveness, critical topics in early literacy teaching, effectiveness of blended learning environments for Reading Recovery training, dyslexia, and longitudinal studies of students’ subsequent literacy progress. Trainers have worked to strengthen and sustain Reading Recovery by taking active leadership positions in the North American Trainers Group, the Reading Recovery Council of North America, the International Reading Recovery Trainers Organization, and the Reading Recovery Improvement Science Hub.

Children’s continued literacy success fuels the work of the TWU Reading Recovery Center, and TWU is grateful for the opportunity to work in partnership with thousands of dedicated educators to ensure all young children learn to read and write.

**Lesley University — 1990**

Trainer: Irene Fountas

Since its inception 30 years ago, the Lesley University Center for Reading Recovery has become partners with hundreds of schools to assure access and equity in literacy for every child. The center was built on the early work of Don Holdaway, scholar in residence at Lesley and close colleague of Marie Clay. He created a partnership with Lesley and the Cambridge Public Schools to develop early childhood lab classrooms so teachers could observe children learning to read by reading joyful books in whole-group and small-group contexts. His strong encouragement to bring Reading Recovery to the schools fueled the decision for Lesley to become a UTC for Reading Recovery in 1990.

The underlying theoretical principles of Reading Recovery and its significant impact precipitated attention to the potential of partnerships in changing the trajectory of progress for the lowest-achieving students and improving the literacy outcomes of all the students in the system.

With colleagues from The Ohio State University, the center focused on research-based practices in elementary classrooms and piloted a small-group intervention to work alongside Reading Recovery in other elementary grades. This led to broader research and the development of comprehensive literacy approaches to literacy improvement. The Teacher Quality Study, led by Tony Bryk with The Ohio State University and Lesley University as partners, shed new light on the role of coaches in supporting effective instructional practices that lead to improved student outcomes.

With a continued focus on equity and access for every child in the system, the center team has engaged in providing professional learning for administrators, coaches, teacher leaders, specialists, and classroom teachers and engaging them in cycles of inquiry to take small steps in the journey of improvement. Realizing the critical role of collective efficacy and the need to build professional and social capacity, the UTC will continue to advocate for Reading Recovery as an essential element of a plan that addresses the success of every child.
**Georgia State University — 1991**  
Trainers: Sue Duncan, Cliff Johnson, Katie Kurumada, K. Journey Swafford

Since 1991, Georgia State University (GSU) has been a regional Reading Recovery university training center. In that time, 81 Reading Recovery teacher leaders and 300 Reading Recovery teachers have been trained and have served more than 75,000 students. Currently, the UTC supports Reading Recovery implementations in Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Anguilla.

In addition, the UTC supports the improvement of classroom (Successful Start, Literacy Coaching), small group (Comprehensive Intervention Model), and other one-to-one (Literacy Lessons, Literacy Processing Specialists, HEROES) initiatives. GSU trainers have provided countless professional development opportunities for inservice teachers around the region and the Uyavula Reading and Writing Project in Cape Town, South Africa.

**Oakland University — 1991**  
Trainer: Mary Lose

With 13 Reading Recovery sites, 3 of which were established in the last 3 years and 1 additional new site forthcoming, the Oakland University (OU) Reading Recovery Center of Michigan has been a leader in early literacy intervention services for Michigan for almost 30 years. Since its establishment in 1991, the OU center has trained over 1,500 teachers of Reading Recovery and, since 2006, a combination of 174 Literacy Lessons and Literacy Support teachers. Grounded in Marie Clay’s literacy processing theory, these educators have positively impacted literacy teaching and learning statewide and have reached over 115,000 young learners in daily one-to-one literacy lessons.

Noteworthy among the UTC’s recent accomplishments are Reading Recovery’s successful review by the Michigan Department of Education and its inclusion on the state’s list of research-based effective literacy instruction professional learning programs, thus providing schools and districts with a choice of continuing development opportunities that adequately enhances teacher quality and advances their capacity to implement research-based literacy instruction. Equally impressive are the scholarly publications of OU’s Reading Recovery faculty on topics of literacy research and policy that have appeared in the nation’s leading professional journals including *The Elementary School Journal, Journal for the Education of Students Placed at Risk, Reading Research Quarterly, The Journal of Educational Psychology, The Journal of Reading Recovery, and The Reading Teacher*. The UTC looks forward to another 35 years of success supporting teacher and teacher leader development on behalf of young children and their literate futures.

**University of Maine — 1992**  
Trainers: Mary Rosser, Lori Taylor

A comprehensive model for continuous school improvement includes powerful classroom instruction along with a broad range of literacy interventions, providing multiple layers of differentiated instruction for learners PreK to Grade 12. Since its inception in 1992, the University of Maine Reading Recovery Training Center has expanded to include Maine Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy, a model for school improvement targeting classroom instruction, as well as a Comprehensive Intervention Model for Grades K-12. Currently, the Maine UTC serves children and teachers in school districts in 15 of Maine’s 16 counties, through 9 Reading Recovery sites.

Teacher leaders in Maine provide initial training and ongoing professional development in a variety of literacy interventions that include and reinforce Reading Recovery, in order to support schools in meeting the needs of all students, across the grade spans. The portfolio of literacy intervention trainings includes Literacy Lessons for special educators and ELL teachers, small-group interventions for Grades PreK–5 that include a dyslexia intervention within a literacy processing framework, and literacy intervention designs for Grades 6–12. Additionally, teacher leaders provide training for classroom teachers in literacy processing, to support students in general education settings. The Maine team has designed specific variations of literacy processing including Building Foundations for Literacy: Literacy Processing in PreK and K and Literacy Processing in Middle and High School Settings, where the theory and practice is applied to various age group needs to support learners in developing effective reading and writing processes.

**Saint Mary’s College — 1993**  
Trainers: Adria Klein, Deb Rich, Salli Forbes

Saint Mary’s College Reading Recovery University Training Center has a long history of service with focus on early literacy programs. The only university training center in continuous operation since the beginning...
of the program in California in 1993, teacher leaders and teachers from over 20 states have received training at Saint Mary’s College. At this time, training is offered in Reading Recovery, DLL, and Literacy Lessons; and 55 active teacher leaders support 41 sites located in 12 states affiliated with the UTC. Four new teacher leaders are in training, plus one reactivating teacher leader — all of whom are opening new district sites in the next year. The UTC has two full-time trainers, one quarter-time trainer, and two affiliated trainer emerita.

During the 2018–2019 academic year, 5,141 children received literacy instruction from Saint Mary’s affiliated teachers and teacher leaders. Supporting learners who bring a diversity of experiences is celebrated as a strength of the center. Children attend school districts that range in size from rural districts of less than 100 students to large urban centers of nearly 1.5 million students. In addition to children who receive lessons in Spanish through DLL, 25 additional languages are spoken in the homes of children. The Saint Mary’s College Reading Recovery Center has had teacher leader training classes in 26 of the 27 years.

**Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania — 1993**

*Trainer: Janet Bufalino*

In 1993, Dr. Janet Bufalino entered trainer training at OSU. Funded by a state grant, her training was delivered by five extraordinary literacy educators: Gay Su Pinnell, Diane DeFord, Carol Lyons, Mary Fried, and Rosemary Estice.

Bufalino began her role as trainer at the Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania University Training Center in 1994. During her tenure, she has trained 78 teacher leaders who in turn trained approximately 4,253 teachers in the states of Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. The literacy department faculty members have continually showed support for Reading Recovery. In fact, another literacy faculty member, Dr. Cheryl Slattery, is a trained Reading Recovery teacher.

One memorable event occurred in 2008 when Pennsylvania Secretary of Education Dr. Zahorchek, a proponent of Reading Recovery, earmarked $5.7 million to train Reading Recovery teacher leaders and teachers. During the 3 years of the grant, 42 teacher leaders and 151 teachers from across Pennsylvania were trained.

**The University of South Dakota — 1996**

*Trainer: Garreth Zalud*

The Reading Recovery Training Center at the University of South Dakota began training Reading Recovery teachers and teacher leaders in 1997. The UTC is staffed by one person, Dr. Garreth Zalud, who has been the center’s director since it started. Dr. Zalud has prepared Reading Recovery professionals who have worked in schools in South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, Minnesota, Montana, and Wyoming. Since its start, more than 79,000 children have benefited from the lessons provided by the teachers and teacher leaders who have affiliated with the UTC. Work has contributed to the research knowledge base regarding the effectiveness of Reading Recovery with indigenous children. Additionally, the center has provided numerous professional development opportunities to Reading Recovery stakeholders in the region throughout the years.

**Emporia State University — 1998**

*Trainer: Annie Opat*

Transforming teaching to lead emergent literacy learners in successful literacy processing is the ongoing mission at Emporia State University. Since 1998, Emporia State has supported over 23,000 children striving to learn reading and writing. Training teacher leaders, Reading Recovery, and Literacy Lessons professionals through intense graduate courses provides essential observation and theoretical study to help students achieve accelerated learning. Additionally, ongoing professional development and feedback during Reading Recovery teacher visits promote decisive, contingent teaching, thus increasing success and sustained progress.

Districts utilizing Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons provide the best intervention for their lowest-achieving literacy learners with approximately 78% achieving above average or higher reading performance. Potential reduction of referrals and placements in special education is also observed, with 97% of Reading Recovery students not referred for special education.

Reading Recovery serves as part of a comprehensive approach for the lowest-achieving children and is supplemental to good classroom instruction. Literacy Lessons for special populations of students beyond first grade, specifically special education and English language learners, are interventions that Emporia State University is proud to
support, lead, and expand. Sustained success of the best early intervention available — a toast to 35 years of helping children achieve!

**The University of Kentucky — 2001**

Trainers: Judy Embry, Lindy Harmon

In 2000–2001, Dr. Judy Embry, under the direction of Dean Shirley Raines, College of Education, completed her trainer coursework at Texas Woman’s University and returned to establish a Reading Recovery university training center within the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development (CCLD) at the University of Kentucky. Governor and First Lady Fletcher and key legislators observed Reading Recovery lessons and small-group instruction in Frankfort. The Read to Achieve Act of 2005 provided additional funding to statewide literacy grants adding hundreds of intervention teachers to assist struggling readers throughout the Commonwealth. From 2008–2015—with bipartisan support from Governor and First Lady Beshear and Senators Dan Kelly, Jack Westwood, Robert Stivers, and others—the UTC continued to champion literacy efforts for the children of Kentucky through Read to Achieve and Reading Recovery.

Under the leadership of Dr. George Hruby, executive director of CCLD, the center received an i3 Grant to train 245 teachers and 5 teacher leaders in 223 schools and 118 districts. In 2011–2012, Dr. Lindy Harmon, under the direction of Dean Mary John O’Hair, College of Education, completed her trainer coursework at The Ohio State University.

The UTC continues to expand research with Literacy Lessons for teachers of special education/English language learners, Carnegie improvement science, technology to enhance professional learning, and increasing collaboration with classroom teachers. Across the past 19 years, the center has supported the implementation, professional learning, and student services for 45 teacher leaders, 1,286 teachers within 483 schools in 132 districts and 253,716 students.

**Regional Training Centres in Canada**

First introduced in Ontario and Nova Scotia in 1988, Reading Recovery expanded across Canada and is now implemented in 6 provinces and in the Yukon Territory. In 2017, Canada also introduced Reading Recovery to the Cayman Islands in the Caribbean.

During the past year, 1,200 teachers and 61 teacher leaders served students in 1,064 schools and more than 60 school districts. Since the introduction of Reading Recovery in Canada, more than 200,000 students have benefited.

The Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery (CIRR) is a charitable organization that works collaboratively with wide-ranging and diverse educational communities and holds the royalty-free license for Reading Recovery in Canada. The CIRR was created in 1992 and formally opened in 1993 at the University of Toronto through a partnership with Scarborough Board of Education and the university faculty. Prior to this time, Canadian teacher leaders trained at the National Reading Recovery Centre in New Zealand or at The Ohio State University in the United States.

Donna Jean Forster Gill is the executive director and Sheila Barnes the current president of CIRR, which is comprised of four regions currently served by these Reading Recovery trainers:

1. **Central Region**, established 1992 in Ontario
   Trainer: Janice Van Dyke

2. **Western Region**, established 1995 in Manitoba
   Trainers: Allyson Matczuk and Jennifer Flight (also Caribbean implementation)

3. **Atlantic Region**, established 2000 in Nova Scotia
   Trainers: Yvette Heffernan, Lisa Harvey, and Gretchen Gerhardt

4. **Mountain Pacific Region**, established 2009 in British Columbia
   Trainer: Christine Fraser

As Canada is a nation of two official languages—English and French—two bilingual trainers support the imple-
mentation of Intervention préventive en lecture-écriture (IPLÉ)—Reading Recovery in French—for Francophone and French Immersion students across the country.

Among the memorable achievements:

• Nova Scotia began offering Reading Recovery in 1998. With a change in government it was dropped in 2011, but with another change in government was reintroduced in 2015. Since then, Nova Scotia has committed to ensuring equitable access to Reading Recovery and IPLÉ through the training of two additional trainers and six additional teacher leaders in 2019. Every school in Nova Scotia now has access to Reading Recovery.

• In the autumn of 2014, the first Reading Recovery Training Centre to serve a First Nations community opened. Staffed by a First Nations teacher leader, the centre provides support to Grade 1 students in Manitoba’s First Nations Schools, as well as professional development to teachers from Peguis and other nearby Manitoba communities. A second centre was added in 2017.

• In 2015–16, the CIRR and the Canadian trainer team were able to implement an alternative trainer training plan and train two new trainers in Canada. The team was again able to do this in 2018–19 and 2019–20. This approach to training new trainers has been invaluable in adding to the strength of Reading Recovery and IPLÉ.

FREE to RRCNA Members in the e-Learning Center Until July 1

Explore Marie Clay’s guidance in a NEW video learning session!

Building Independence in Writing is the second session in the Deepening Reading Recovery Expertise online series from RRCNA

This new session focuses on messages about writing from Marie Clay and follows the “Building Independence in Reading” session. Both draw from the second edition of Literacy Lessons for Individuals for guidance.

Read, view video clips, discuss with colleagues, and strengthen your understandings in both training classes and ongoing professional development sessions.
The Fourth Decade in North America — 2015–Present

As Reading Recovery® enters the fourth decade of providing high-quality professional development for teachers and expert, responsive teaching for children, Marie Clay’s publications continue to guide research and practice. New areas of study and service include Literacy Lessons™ training for special education teachers, teachers of English learners, and others who work with special populations; investigation of technology for distance learning in training and supervision of Reading Recovery teachers; and an expanded leadership role for Reading Recovery trained teachers in professional learning communities and school comprehensive literacy efforts.

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015, even greater emphasis is placed on evidence-based instruction. The legislation reduces the role of the federal government, giving states greater flexibility and control over education policy as they transition to full implementation by 2017. Reading Recovery ranks among the highest of all elementary reading interventions and programs meeting Strong Evidence of Effectiveness Standards under ESSA.

In March 2016, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) releases Reading Recovery: An Evaluation of the Four-Year i3 Scale-Up. Findings from “one of the most ambitious and well-documented expansions of an instructional program in U.S. history” show the $55 million Investing in Innovation (i3) scale-up of Reading Recovery was “highly successful.” A total of 3,747 teachers were trained, serving 61,992 students in one-to-one lessons. In addition, these Reading Recovery-trained professionals taught 325,458 students in classroom or small-group instruction. The randomized control trial study of immediate impacts in the scale-up schools—among the largest such studies ever conducted—revealed medium to large impacts across all outcome measures and a 131 percent higher growth rate over the national average rate for first-grade students.

In Canada. Canadian implementations continue to grow during this decade — even beyond its geographic borders. New teacher leaders train to expand Reading Recovery in Nova Scotia and a new Teacher Leader Training Centre opens in Vancouver to support the Mountain Pacific Region. Two trainers are trained within Canada for the first time through a collaborative plan with trainer training centers in the U.S., Texas Woman’s University and The Ohio State University. This training plan is replicated in 2018–2019 to train two trainers for the Atlantic Region and in 2019-2020 to train one trainer for the Central Region, Ontario. Vintage sites celebrate milestone anniversaries, and the Caribbean Region is established in the Cayman Islands, offering Reading Recovery to all elementary schools in the country.

North American Trainers Group. Reading Recovery leadership is focusing on the future as the second half of this decade unfolds. In 2018, NATG engages Anthony Bryk and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to explore principles and practices of improvement science as a way of operating within the Reading Recovery network. Trainers, RRCNA Board members, representative teacher leaders, teachers, site coordinators, school administrators, university deans, and researchers (IDEC and other) launch this work with Bryk at the Foundation in Palo Alto, California. NATG and RRCNA leaders consider improvement science as a way of identifying and addressing challenges within the network in a systematic and productive way. Trainers continue their professional development with the leaders of the improvement science effort, the Hub, and the improvement science consultant to create research efforts aimed at ensuring a promising future for Reading Recovery in North America.

Recognition of Reading Recovery’s proven positive effects on student outcomes continues with new and updated reports from the What Works Clearinghouse, National Center on Intensive Intervention, National Center for the Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance for the Institute of Education Sciences, and others in the U.S. and Canada.

Yet despite the stellar findings, Reading Recovery continues to face past criticisms of the ‘Reading Wars’ and the latest “science of reading” arguments that extend even beyond the intervention — attacking many proven and well-respected reading programs. The Reading Recovery network continues to respond with data, facts, and the millions of Reading Recovery success stories of the past 35 years in North America.
2015 — A teacher and teacher leader use technology to stay in close communication. Exploration of the issues and potential uses of technology in Reading Recovery training, professional development, school visits, and ongoing communication is underway.

2016 — Reading Recovery: An Evaluation of the Four-Year i3 Scale-Up is published in March. Findings from “one of the most ambitious and well-documented expansions of an instructional program in U.S. history” show the $55 million Investing in Innovation (i3) scale-up of Reading Recovery was “highly successful.” A total of 3,747 teachers were trained, serving 61,992 students in one-to-one lessons. In addition, these Reading Recovery-trained professionals taught 325,458 students in classroom or small-group instruction. In August, The What Works Clearinghouse reviews the final single study report and finds it meets standards without reservations with at least one statistically significant positive finding and at least one finding showing strong evidence of effectiveness (ESSA Tier 1).

2015 — In Canada, 12 new teacher leaders are being trained for the 2014-15 year; 6 of them in the Atlantic Division to expand Reading Recovery in Nova Scotia. Here, Canadian trainers Janice Van Dyke, Allison Matczuk, and Yvette Heffernan meet with Jeremy Burman, keynote speaker at the 2014 CIHR Conference. In addition, two trainers are trained in Canada for the first time.


2016 — Attorney Dante Marshall (left), one of the first children in the U.S. to receive Reading Recovery lessons, joins RRCNA President Lindy Harmon and Executive Director Jady Johnson for a My Brother’s Keeper event at the White House. Reading Recovery was among 33 evidence-based program models and interventions invited to the MBK Showcase and was one of only 6 with strong evidence of effectiveness that address the core tenets of the initiative.

2015 — In Canada, 12 new teacher leaders are being trained for the 2014-15 year; 6 of them in the Atlantic Division to expand Reading Recovery in Nova Scotia. Here, Canadian trainers Janice Van Dyke, Allison Matczuk, and Yvette Heffernan meet with Jeremy Burman, keynote speaker at the 2014 CIHR Conference. In addition, two trainers are trained in Canada for the first time.

2016 — A special themed issue of the Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk, released in January, focuses on advances in Reading Recovery research. The articles examine student motivation and achievement, effectiveness, scaling, and sustaining Reading Recovery.

2016 — Canada opens a new Teacher Leader Training Centre in Vancouver to support the Mountain Pacific Region.

2017 — Canada expands to the Cayman Islands, establishing the Caribbean Region and offering Reading Recovery to all elementary schools in the country.

2017 — Two more Marie Clay books are updated with second editions: Concepts About Print and Running Records for Classroom Teachers.

2016 — Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals (2nd ed.) is published by the Trust, combining the original 2005 two-part guidance into one volume.
2017 – The National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII) again recognizes the evidence-proven effectiveness of Reading Recovery for students who struggle in learning to read and write. An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement, the screening tool central to Reading Recovery’s evaluation and instruction and used widely by classroom and specialist teachers and researchers, again receives the highest possible ratings on the Academic Screening Tools Chart. Reading Recovery also retains high marks on the updated Academic Intervention Tools Chart.

2018 – A National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) report finds that 9 of the first 67 completed i3 grant evaluations — including the Reading Recovery Scale-Up — met What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards and found evidence of adequate implementation fidelity and positive impacts on student academic outcomes. Of the four scale-up interventions in the report, only Reading Recovery met both short and long-term goals of i3 and adequately represented the population served.

2018 – Canada celebrates anniversaries of vintage sites at Cariboo-Chilcotin (20), and Manitoba (25), where a second Reading Recovery Training Centre opens just 4 years after the first centre.

2018 – During the 2017-18 year, 1,203 teachers are trained, and two new trainers are training in Nova Scotia for the 2018-19 year. As implementations continue to grow, the Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery releases A Principal’s Guide to Reading Recovery in Canada, a new online publication.

2018 – RRCNA provides resources to share with classroom teachers, special education teachers, administrators, and parents detailing responses to critics of Reading Recovery. Resources correct misconceptions and illustrate how Reading Recovery instruction is appropriate for all struggling first-grade readers, including those who may be identified as dyslexic.

2018 – NATG trainers engage Anthony Bryk and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to explore principles and practices of improvement science as a way of operating within the Reading Recovery network. Focusing on identifying and addressing challenges in a systematic and productive way, the work continues with Phase Two beginning in 2019-20.

2019 – Jady Johnson retires after 16 years as RRCNA executive director and, after a nationwide search, Billy Molasso is named to the position in August.

2019 – A National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) report finds that 9 of the first 67 completed i3 grant evaluations — including the Reading Recovery Scale-Up — met What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards and found evidence of adequate implementation fidelity and positive impacts on student academic outcomes. Of the four scale-up interventions in the report, only Reading Recovery met both short and long-term goals of i3 and adequately represented the population served.

2019 – Canadian anniversary celebrations continue with York Regional District School Board in Ontario (25), and Prince Edward Island (20). Also in Ontario, one trainer is in training during the 2019-20 year.

2019 – Incorporating the 2016 single study i3 report (reviewed but not yet included in the WWC report), Reading Recovery ranks highest based on research evidence of effectiveness among the top 25 programs with What Works Clearinghouse beginning reading reports. Positive or potentially posting ratings are shown across all four outcomes — alphabets (phonics and phonemic awareness), fluency, comprehension, and reading achievement.

2020 – RRCNA provides resources to share with classroom teachers, special education teachers, administrators, and parents detailing responses to critics of Reading Recovery. Resources correct misconceptions and illustrate how Reading Recovery instruction is appropriate for all struggling first-grade readers, including those who may be identified as dyslexic.

2020 – The 2020 National Reading Recovery & K-6 Literacy Conference celebrates the 35th anniversary with a special luncheon featuring Gay Su Pinnell as guest speaker. The 4-day event offers outstanding professional development and for the first time includes a Middle Grades Institute for educators in Grades 5-8.
Celebrating 35 Years

Anniversary Luncheon Special Guest Speaker Gay Su Pinnell

Learning How to Make a Difference

If we begin at the real beginning, in a little house on the campus of the University of Auckland, Reading Recovery is closing in on its fifth decade of service to a particular group of children — the youngest in school and the most vulnerable. They exist in a demanding environment where they find it hard to know what is expected of them. Somehow, they are not “keeping up” and they don’t know why. Families are equally bewildered. They need to “recover” a satisfactory trajectory of progress so they can thrive in a classroom rich with literacy and in a world where there are demands for a high level of literacy.

Picture it — the 1970s, (one of my favorite decades). Marie Clay and her colleagues were watching a teacher working with a child behind a one-way glass screen. They described in detail the teacher’s moves and the child’s responses. They noted evidence of shifts in learning. They challenged each other and engaged in analytic thinking about teaching and learning.

Clay was an expert observer of young readers’ behaviors. She received prestigious awards for her detailed observational studies of young children’s interactions with print. At the request of teachers and the national department of education in New Zealand, she created the Diagnostic Survey, a checkup at age 6, after the child in New Zealand had completed 1 year of schooling. I took this training electronically, and that’s how I was able to learn running records and teach it in my classes. Later I had the honor of learning it again and the orange Early Detection was my guide. (The first version predated even me.)

Technology wasn’t at a peak in New Zealand. The first 30 minutes was a tutorial on how to use a cassette tape recorder. But professional inquiry and noticing children’s behavior were at a peak and stayed there.

Every teacher in New Zealand learned to individually administer the Diagnostic Survey and the effect was that of a volcanic eruption. They could see better, see more, as they worked with children. They could identify children who were confused. And, they challenged Clay to help them with the children who were confused, who weren’t becoming literate on a normal trajectory. These children were bright, intelligent, but something was going wrong. What can we do? That was the challenge for Marie and her colleagues and the reason they spent so many hours watching through the one-way screen.

Marie was a special education teacher and a cognitive psychologist. She knew the field and the repertoire of teaching approaches. With expert teachers, they tried every technique and approach. The remarkable results were documented through careful research; they were reproducible across New Zealand, then Australia, then the United States, Canada, Great Britain. They were reproduced in Spanish, French, and Danish.

Marie said afterwards that what she and her researchers left out of the lesson framework was as important as what they kept in it. They tried 45-minute lessons and found them no more effective than shorter ones. What they boiled it down to was an extremely effective, tight, fast-moving 30-minute, daily lesson that could save a child’s life. And, it inspired nations of literacy teachers.

The foundation of Reading Recovery is deep. It is rooted in Clay’s theory of reading as highly complex brain activity. The reader is intelligent and active; she uses everything at her disposal — language, perception of the world, grapho-phonemic information, the sounds of language, intonation patterns — to move through a written text with on-the-run problem solving, accuracy, and understanding. I first read Clay’s Reading: The Patterning of Complex Behavior as a graduate student the night before my 3 days of qualifying exams — not the first time I’ve read all night; it shifted my thinking and my writing on those exams. But not as much as Reading Recovery training.

There, I was deeply involved in my own observations of children with a direct connection to my teaching. The result was humbling, but the connection with my colleagues and the deep discussions we had were most important. I have to say that an almost equally important outcome of Clay’s work in Reading Recovery is the teacher training. We observe each other — not to critique but to challenge ourselves to analyze the teaching and learning. It was unique; it is unique. We take our work seriously.
In doing so, each of us enters the world of those early researchers. We stand beside them.

We have learned to look, to observe behaviors in detail, to learn what they know and need to know, and to act in response within a structured experience that involves real reading of engaging texts, writing and work with words—all of this tailored to the individual child.

We pieced together five different grants, including a distinguished professorship for Clay. And so to Columbus, OH, where a screen was waiting for Marie and her colleague Barbara Watson—a real screen, like a window screen. You see people here had never called glass a screen. But, it was soon rectified and we set out to accomplish miracles. We got very excited with our results, perhaps too much early on, but it was impossible not to be thrilled. And colleagues joined us from all over North America.

I am sometimes credited with bringing Reading Recovery to Ohio. But the hero of Reading Recovery in Ohio is someone you may not have heard of if you are “young.” G. Robert Bowers, associate superintendent of education in Ohio, brought Reading Recovery here and thus was instrumental in spreading it across North America. He was the guy who communicated, who made tough decisions, who acquired and superintended the money. He saw us through the first challenging years and advised me for years after that. What did I do? I told him about it. He saw the potential immediately. So, one day at the end of a meeting, when he said “Let’s do it.” I knew something would happen.

The future was uncertain then. It is uncertain now and always will be. Literacy researchers and educators are a fiercely divided community. We have critics. Marie’s work has been criticized—even attacked—by every side in this great debate. I think that is because she is so hard to categorize; she sees learners as using letters and sounds, using meaning, using content knowledge, noticing patterns, using syntax to make sentences work like language, and many other sources of information. Her theory is complex.

Of course, our greatest criticism is not philosophical but cost related. And our greatest challenge is to look at our own work with critical eyes. We must make our work fulfill its promise; and I believe it can. Marie said to us many times, “Pick up the stones and look at the creepy craw-ly things underneath.” A group is working hard to put improvement science to work in Reading Recovery and I hope many of you will become involved.

My assignment here is not to read the future but to look back and reflect. What is important about Reading Recovery? Why does it deserve a place in literacy education history and a place in the future? In addition to the obvious contribution of teaching so many thousands of initially at-risk children to read, I offer two.

Marie taught us how to look—really look—and notice. She gave us a new lens for the detailed observation that helps us make teaching decisions, those moves that result in shifts for the learner. It’s amazing.

And, she taught us to feel the power of our teaching. We learn through teaching; we are amazed to see evidence that we are making a difference every day. One of the first articles on Reading Recovery in the U.S., written by Mary Fried, Rose Mary Estice, and me, was titled “Learning How to Make a Difference.” I wish that for every teacher.

These two contributions are priceless, and they are life-lasting. Classroom teachers, administrators, parents and grandparents, once you have the eye, you can’t escape noticing, and you don’t want to. Awareness creates a moral imperative. Once you know that powerful teaching is possible; you must work to provide it to every child and constantly work to make it better.

I thought of Marie when I read this poem by the beloved Ohio poet Mary Oliver who died last year. The title is When Death Comes; I won’t read it all, just the end.

> When it’s over, I want to say: all my life I was a bride married to amazement. I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms. When it’s over, I don’t want to wonder If I have made of my life something particular, and real. I don’t want to find myself sighing and frightened, Or full of argument. I don’t want to end up simply having visited this world.

Mary Oliver didn’t simply visit this world. Neither did Marie M. Clay. And if you have taught even one child to read, neither did you.

Congratulations! I hope the next decade is as amazing as the last four.
Seamus Bruns
Good Afternoon. My name is Seamus Bruns and in 2009 I was a first-grade student at Colonial Hills Elementary School in Worthington, OH. I was falling behind my peers in learning to read and write. Luckily, Worthington Schools had been implementing Reading Recovery for over 30 years. In the fall of 2009, I started Reading Recovery with (now) Dr. Jamie Lipp, but who I will always know and refer to as Mrs. Lipp.

Despite finding reading and writing to be challenging at the time, my parents and teachers described me then as a sweet and bubbly kid who had a happy go lucky attitude. I remember enjoying my time with Mrs. Lipp. We were reading lots of books and I quickly began to feel like a reader. And I was a reader! In just 13 short weeks I was discontinued from Reading Recovery. That means I became a confident reader and a writer in just 47 short lessons. That is just 23.5 hours of instruction when you break it down!

I remember Mrs. Lipp challenging me with high expectations and supporting me to take risks in reading and writing. I also remember that my classroom teacher, Mrs. Samantha Fell, spent a great deal of time talking about me with Mrs. Lipp. Mrs. Fell is now the Reading Recovery teacher at Colonial Hills Elementary. I remember Mrs. Fell coming to see me in a Reading Recovery lesson and Mrs. Lipp coming to see me reading in the classroom. It’s like they were working together — and looking back now, that’s exactly what they were doing. Mrs. Lipp tells me they were “problem solving my strengths and difficulties.” I also know that Mrs. Fell, my classroom teacher, provided me with an excellent learning environment. She was also an awesome teacher.

I was lucky enough to have two teachers so committed to my learning that they would stop at nothing to see me succeed. And succeed I did!

Since those days of Reading Recovery, I have had many great things happen in my life. I never again received reading intervention after first grade in Reading Recovery. I scored Accelerated when taking the 3rd grade Reading Assessment, doing the same again in 6th and 9th grade for English. Right now, I am a junior at Thomas Worthington High School. I have earned several distinct academic honors as a high school student. I just found out I am being inducted into National Honor Society! I have also been identified as gifted in reading, inducted into the Spanish National Honor Society, and was a Bronze Key Recipient, earning recognition for receiving a 3.5 GPA or above for 3 consecutive semesters in high school.

Nowadays, I would like to think I am still that happy go lucky kid. I like soccer and golf and I am beginning to explore my college options. I’ve thought about Penn State, Miami University, or maybe The Ohio State University. Maybe I’ll be an accountant. Maybe I’ll be a teacher. I’m not quite sure yet. What I do know is that when I was
6 years old I became a reader. After that, anything was possible.

I want to say thank you to my teachers, Mrs. Lipp and Mrs. Fell, who gave me such wonderful opportunities to learn. Thank you to my parents who always believed in me, then and now. Coincidentally, my mom now works at Colonial Hills and supports one Reading Recovery student with homework. The program has meant a lot to her, too. And thank you to Worthington Schools for valuing Reading Recovery, so that kids like me can go on to do great things. Reading Recovery works — and I am a real life example of that!

Chris Graham

In 1989, I was a first grader at Olde Sawmill Elementary, in Dublin, OH, and I had two big problems: One of them was that I sat out most recesses for cussing. The second problem was that I couldn’t read.

Mrs. Barnett was my lovely first-grade teacher. Unfortunately, my normal day included sitting at my little table and Amy Blankenship saying, “Mrs. Barnett, Chris said a cuss word.” And just like that — no recess. It was rough not being able to quote Back to the Future’s Doc Brown at will.

Not much later in the year, I was introduced to Mrs. Lowery. I was told I’d be taken out of the classroom and I couldn’t have been more excited. We started to hang out and immediately my reading started to improve. It didn’t take a whole lot of time. It seemed like no time at all. I remember sitting down with my mom one night and I read her, the whole book, A Fly Flew By, which was about 42 pages. My mom was just ecstatic, and I was ecstatic.

Shortly thereafter, I went back to Mrs. Lowery and we sat down and she showed me a chart. Then she said, “You know, when we started, you were here. You were towards the bottom of the first graders, and now you are towards the top of second graders.” And I thought, “This is amazing. This is so great.” And then she told me we were done.

Now, there were only two things that I like at school: Mrs. Lowery and Amy Blankenship. It was wild transformation, because now I knew how to read. But I was still a huge troublemaker. And I remember, later on that next year, Amy told me, “Chris, I would like you, if you just wouldn’t get in trouble so much.” It was then that I knew our love wasn’t meant to be.

My schooling from that point on was being the class clown. I had the most detentions, most Saturday schools, and was definitely disruptive. Teachers would say things like “doesn’t pay attention” or “disorderly” on all of my grade cards.

However, the beautiful thing about Reading Recovery is that sometimes literacy lays dormant. Teach a child to read, and it might not seem like a lot has happened. There’s a compounding effect of literacy.

About 20 years after Mrs. Lowery kicked me out, I started a small business, Chris Graham Mastering. And my goal was to have people send me their records; I would make them sound better, then release them, and money would be involved. I tried this. I built a website and it took off really, really fast but I couldn’t handle it because I had no idea how to run a business.

A friend of mine mentioned a book called The Four Hour Work Week. I picked it up and I read it. As my business changed overnight, I finally felt like I knew what I was doing. I built systems for my company that gave me free time to read more books. I did that and I didn’t stop. I read 60 or 70 business books after that and business exploded and was growing 30% per year.

Eventually a friend of mine invited me to cohost a podcast with him called “The Six Figure Home Studio.” Through
it, we give business book reports to people in the recording industry and talk to them about how to get more customers and to keep their customers happy, and how to grow their business. Essentially, it’s a reading podcast.

I get tagged on Instagram all the time with stories of listeners who are reading books. Listeners who probably wouldn’t have read a book that year had it not been for our podcast promoting reading as the best way to grow their businesses.

I’m a reading advocate in my industry now, and it’s been wild to see people’s reaction to catching the bug of learning that they are in control of their own destiny because they can buy a book, learn about a problem, and can fix it.

We live in a tough time right now. A lot of people are on opposite sides of a lot of different fences. Alexander Hamilton is famous for saying that the safe keep of democracy is the education of the people. At its core, education is literacy. It is because literacy can lay dormant. You can teach a kid and he can get all Cs like I did. Then he can graduate and rediscover books and become successful through literacy 20 years later.

If you look at democracy as a machine and you want to improve it, there’s one knob — literacy. If we turn that up, it will impact every aspect of our society. I encourage you that the work that you’re doing truly matters — not just for the kids, but for our society. Literacy can change everything. It might take 20 years after these kids learn it, but there’s a compounding effect to the work that you do. A kid who goes out and has literacy has the world open to them. Anything is open to them.

The work you do matters. And it impacts us and it’s relevant to democracy surviving. It’s essential. Thank you.

The work you do matters. And it impacts us and it’s relevant to democracy surviving. It’s essential. Thank you.

Jady Johnson Receives Special Excellence in Service Award

A special award was presented to Jady Johnson, retired executive director of RRCNA, in recognition of her significant contributions to the work of the Council. Johnson led RRCNA for 16 years and throughout that time, she strived to help others understand the power of Reading Recovery for students, teachers, and schools, and how it could influence schoolwide literacy more deeply.

The award was presented during the anniversary luncheon by RRCNA President Karen Scott who stated: “Jady believes that all of us in Reading Recovery have reason to celebrate and be grateful for the opportunity to do this life-changing work. She worked tirelessly for the teachers, for the children, for all educators, and for our entire community. The foundation she built continues to influence the direction of the organization. To show our appreciation, it is a pleasure to present the 2020 Excellence in Service Award to her for her extraordinary service and dedication to the Reading Recovery community. It goes without saying that it is well deserved.”

Community and Corporate Supporters
Crowne Plaza • Drury Inn & Suites • Experience Columbus • Fern Company
First Merchants Bank • Greater Columbus Convention Center
Hampton Inn & Suites • Hyatt Regency Columbus • PSAV • Pressworks

Star Supporters – Literacy Publishers
Heinemann • Kaeden Publishing • MaryRuth Books, Inc.
Richard C. Owen Publishers, Inc. • Scholastic Education

Our thanks to the sponsors of the 35th Anniversary Luncheon Celebration of Reading Recovery
President’s Message

Lessons Learned Inform the Future

RRCNA President Karen Scott

Reading Recovery® has been helping struggling readers for 35 years, and it has been my privilege to participate in the Reading Recovery and comprehensive literacy community for more than 25 years. This wonderful community has impacted me both professionally and personally. One of my Reading Recovery mentors, Linda Dorn said it well:

"Literacy learning is complex — not only for our children, but for us as well. As teachers, we are constantly learning and experiencing transitions that reflect our new understanding. The children in our classrooms need us to work together as a team to support them on their pathway to literacy. Systemic change lies in our understanding of how our children learn and in our ability to problem-solve with colleagues who work with our children, who share our common experiences, and who speak our language of literacy." (Dorn & Jones, 2012, p. 181)

Recently, my work with improvement science and the Reading Recovery Hub has reminded me that as we learn and understand, we grow. I suspect Marie Clay would have been front and center. Working with the Hub is truly one of the highlights of my professional career. Almost 20 years ago, Gay Su Pinnell and Carol Lyons asked themselves: "What if we could create more and better ways for teachers to learn from their own teaching? What if we could provide high-quality, ongoing professional development and coaching for literacy teachers that result in improving their students' achievement?" (Pinnell & Lyons, 2001, back cover). Learning requires ownership, self-regulation, problem solving, and reflection. The Hub work represents this.

Often the question I ask of others is: Are we a learned community or a learning community? Reading Recovery and comprehensive literacy are about learning. Our theories are tentative. Our focus is about how we can inform our teaching.

And I always try to remember that we don’t work alone, but in collaboration using conversation to support our work in an environment of reflection and responsiveness. It is about how we study the needs of the child that changes the trajectory of success for the young learner and for the teacher. Our collaboration creates a social community with a shared responsibility for student learning. When the child is successful, the teacher is successful, and the school is successful. And then we have succeeded.

The opportunity to collaborate with many individuals in the Reading Recovery network continues to enhance my professional and personal life. Look around you. How many friends have you made in this network? We share a common focus. We know that our work makes a difference. If we dialogue you will often hear me talk about the impact that Linda Dorn made on me professionally and personally. Her unconditional support and love supported
me in the many transitions I have made in life. Dorn (2015) told us that “minds of educators can be changed only through authentic mutual experiences grounded in relevant events” (p. 6). Collaboration allows me to question, observe, and network. We are better in our work because of our collaboration.

Less than 30 years ago, Meichenbaum and Biemiller (1998) wrote:

What will it take to change the way students are taught? What will it take to close the learning gap? We don’t need to overwhelm teachers with a long list of new methods to try. Rather we believe what is needed is a theoretical model that explicates the teaching and learning process; a model that will allow the integration of multiple teaching methods, and that will challenge educators to rethink their efforts. (p. 59)

It is critical for all of us to remember that every child is different. They learn at a different pace, they come from different backgrounds, and they have different interests. Marie Clay (2014) said it best: “If children are to achieve common outcomes after two-three years in school it will be necessary to recognize that they enter school having learned different things in different ways in different cultures and communities” (p. 1).

Reading Recovery and comprehensive literacy have truly made me look at children in a wonderful way — recognizing their strengths and knowing that we have the knowledge and power to change their learning. We don’t have a “one size fits all.” Rather, we tailor instruction to the specific child. We change the child’s future. It is about the child. This truly adds to the joy of our work.

The challenge for us for the next 35 years is to honor our legacy and continue to be the learning community that collaborates and honors the uniqueness of each child. We can change the trajectory. It is about us offering the positive message to others that can transform the future.

The question we all should ask is, “Why not Reading Recovery? Why not comprehensive literacy?” Our expectations must be high for all learners including ourselves. Let us continue to hold ourselves accountable for high levels of performance. It is about children and their future.

References

RRCNA Board of Directors Election Results
We are pleased to share results of the recent election for terms beginning July 1, 2020.

Vice President Maeghan McCormick
Jackson County Schools
Jackson, MI

Secretary Mary Lou Petters
Charleston County School District
Ravenel, SC

Teacher Representative Janet Irving
Sarasota County Schools
Sarasota, FL

Teacher Leader Representative Helen Proulx
Saint James-Assiniboia School Division
Winnipeg, Canada

Trainer Representative Debra Rich
Saint Mary’s College
Sumner, IA (Moraga, CA)
As we continue to confront challenges in our daily work, I am fortified with the knowledge that Reading Recovery® has continued for more than 35 years, helped millions of struggling readers, shared knowledge with a new generation of educators, and spread our message of how well Reading Recovery professionals assist our schools and communities.

Our community has a lot to celebrate as we experience our 35th anniversary of Reading Recovery in North America. Our intervention continues to be impactful on our students, and we have data as a true evidence-based program to demonstrate it. Our community explores opportunities to enhance our work with different populations, from IPLÉ to DLL, to Literacy Lessons™, to continually improving our daily practice of Reading Recovery with students who need that extra enthusiasm and support. Our leadership structures are filled with strong, passionate, and dedicated professionals who truly believe in the work of the organization and Reading Recovery.

In February, I joined my first national conference in Columbus. Brought to you by RRCNA, the newly minted LitCon: National K-8 Literacy & Reading Recovery Conference is the largest homecoming of leaders in childhood literacy in North America, and will continue to advance our field, enhance our skills, and mobilize our community as we work to help struggling readers. The passion, energy, and commitment to literacy learning I saw and felt in our few days together in Columbus was especially important given the things that started happening just a month later. That time together in Columbus further energized me to do what I can to support you in your work over the coming months.

I continue to be impressed and inspired by the sincere dedication of our members as they work with struggling readers. Our communities are experiencing an unprecedented challenge with shelter-in-place and stay-at-home orders. Our school communities are especially impacted in fundamental ways that are different from other professions and fields of work. As educators, we each miss our daily connections with our students, and worry about how this time will impact our students — today, tomorrow, and next fall. The work it takes to help readers to improve their literacy skills is difficult, sometimes frustrating, but also so incredibly rewarding. I encourage each of us to support our students as best we are able and lean on each other for more than just problem-solving advice, but also for emotional connection and support. Together, we can and will get through this.
Pioneer Valley Books
Pioneer Valley Books is dedicated to producing the highest-quality books for early literacy learners. Their books have been carefully written to support students in gaining control over early reading behaviors and in becoming strategic in their approach to print. Books have highly supportive pictures, carefully selected reading vocabulary, easy sentence structure, and they are specifically designed to help children gain fluency and independence in their reading. Pioneer Valley Books funded two scholarships this year. Jill Scott, Anderson County Schools, Anderson, TN, is pictured with Michelle Dufresne (Right). Not pictured is Sharee Barrus, Washakie County School District No. 1, Worland, WY.

Hameray Publishing Group and the Yuen Family Foundation
Hameray Publishing Group is dedicated to publishing innovative literacy materials for today’s educators by combining a sound research-based approach with cutting edge classroom solutions. The Yuen Family Foundation—a private charitable organization—in conjunction with Hameray Publishing Group funded one teacher leader award. Donors Christine and Ray Yuen are pictured with Meg Dyck (center), Douglas County Schools, Castle Rock, CO.

MaryRuth Books
MaryRuth Books offers instructional, clever books that provide reading practice using photos and illustrations to facilitate word recognition and engage the young reader. MaryRuth Books is the proud publisher of the Danny series of children’s books that not only provide reading practice, but also support the development of a lifelong love of reading. MaryRuth Books provided one teacher leader award. Jennifer Ladd, RSU 9, Farmington, ME, is pictured with donor Mia Coulton (right).
2020 National Conference Awards

Tenyo Family Foundation funded 10 National Conference awards. Founded by the late Sophie Tenyo, the foundation supports charitable, religious, scientific, literary, and educational endeavors for the public welfare and well-being of mankind. Pictured left to right are Monica Gallagher, Edmonson County Schools, Smiths Grove, KY; Stacey Mandel, Boulder Valley School District, Lafayette, CO; Robyn Brislin, Fayette County Public Schools, Lexington, KY; Kristi Craven, Liberty County School System, Midway, GA; Aimee Sexton, Metcalfe County Schools, Edmonton, KY; Ashley Davis, Oldham County School District, Crestwood, KY; and Donna Leiter, Dublin City Schools, Dublin, OH. Not pictured are Shauna Gourley, McClean County Unit 5, Bloomington, IL; Janet Irving, Sarasota County Schools, North Port, FL; and Jessica Klinker, Aspire Public Schools Central Valley, Stockton, CA.

The Geri Stone Memorial Fund was established to remember the leadership of Geri Stone, who passed away in 2002. Geri Stone was one of Michigan’s first Reading Recovery teachers and served as the Reading Recovery teacher leader for the Livonia, Farmington, and Utica Public School Systems. The fund provides financial awards to help continue the work of Geri Stone and of RRCNA’s vision to “ensure that children who struggle in learning to read and write gain the skills for a literate and productive future.” Pictured left to right are BreeAnn Brushaber, Michelle Porter, and Nicole Allen, Michigan Center School District, Michigan Center, MI; Bobbie Barrier, Wayne County Schools, Monticello, KY; Carla Cresswell, Nevada Community School District, Nevada, IA; and Lisa Cave, Nevada Community Schools, Ames, IA. Not pictured are April Cornelius, Central Lee School District, Keokuk, IA; Christina Recktenwald, Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, KY; and Katie Terry, West Monona Community School District, Onawa, IA.
The Minnesota Professional Development Fund was established in memory of Diane Holum, former Reading Recovery teacher leader to honor her commitment and passion for Reading Recovery and literacy and learning. Pictured left to right are Tina Dickinson, Orono Public Schools, Long Lake, MN, and donor representative Kendra Tlusty.

SongLake Books hand selects and organizes books from a variety of companies into leveled book sets for guided reading and Reading Recovery. Collections include a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction genres, are culturally diverse and gender fair, and especially target at-risk readers. Benjamin Ley, San Francisco Unified School District, San Francisco, CA, is pictured with donor Sarah English.

Blueberry Hill Books were written by a certified Reading Recovery teacher and carefully designed to enhance a child’s strategic thinking and develop comprehension skills. Recurring characters inhabit stories filled with humor and excitement in the leveled storybooks. Pictured left to right are Kaye Hendricks, Logan County School District, Russellville, KY, with donor Patricia Harrison.

Rose Mary Estice Memorial Fund was established in memory of Rose Mary Estice, one of the original Reading Recovery teachers trained at The Ohio State University in 1984-85. An ardent supporter, Rose Mary provided leadership during the early days of RRCNA and continued to serve in many capacities throughout her career. Theresa Jones, Gahanna Jefferson Schools, Gahanna, OH, is pictured with donor representative Mary Fried (right).

RR Books offers a variety of fiction and nonfiction leveled books specifically designed for beginning readers with a goal of providing quality, affordable books for young children. Molly Hollister, Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, KY, is pictured with donor Matt Bonnell.
Dr. Julie Olson Literacy Professional Development Fund was established in honor of Dr. Julie Olson, retired director of ISD 196 elementary education and Reading Recovery site coordinator, to honor her commitment and passion for Reading Recovery, literacy and learning. Two awards were funded for the 2020 National Conference. Pictured left to right are Stacey Chaloux, ISD 196, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Egan, MN, Teresa Douglas (donor representative), and Keri Flaskerud, ISD 196, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Egan, MN.

Debby Wood Professional Development Fund was established in memory of Debby Wood, teacher leader in Prince George’s County, MD. Debby received an RRCNA grant to attend the National Conference and always looked forward to the excellent professional development. Denise Hawkins, Prince George’s County Public Schools, Capital Heights, MD, (center) is pictured with donor representatives Kathy Hardman (left), and Tiffany Garner.

Teacher Leader Professional Development Award was funded by the generosity of trainers and teacher leaders during the 2019 Teacher Leader Institute. Pictured is Jennifer Pruitt, Dyersburg City Schools, Dyersburg, TN.

Thanks to our generous donors for funding a total of $74,000 in awards for the 2019-2020 school year.

Teacher Leader Training Awards
Generous donors and advocates contributed a total of $50,000 to help train new teacher leaders for the 2019–2020 school year. These awards are granted to school districts that have demonstrated a commitment to continue Reading Recovery and selected a suitable teacher leader candidate.

National Conference Professional Development Awards
All members are eligible to apply for annual $1,000 awards to help fund registration, travel, hotel, and meal expenses associated with National Conference attendance.

Watch your email and the website for 2020-2021 opportunities!
The 2019–20 Officers and Board of Directors of The Reading Recovery Council of North America

President
Karen Scott
Ozark, MO

President-Elect
Amy Smith
Richmond, KY

Vice President
Leslie McBane
Columbus, OH

Past President
Jeffery Williams
Solon, OH

Treasurer
Lindy Harmon
Lexington, KY

Secretary
Mary Lou Petters
Ravenel, SC

Debbie Baker
Versailles, KY
Teacher Representative

Sheila Barnes
Cornall, PE, Canada
Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery Representative

Hollyanna Bates
Frisco, CO
Teacher Leader Representative

Shari Butcher
Blacklick, OH
Teacher Representative

Emmanuel Caulk
Lexington, KY
Partner Representative

Felicia Cumings Smith
Louisville, KY
Partner Representative

Craig Carson
Ozark, MO
Presidential Appointee

Sue Duncan
Atlanta, GA
Trainer Representative

Judy Embry
Lexington, KY
North American Trainers Group President

Salli Forbes
Cedar Falls, IA
North American Trainers Group Past President

Steven Foreman
Zanesville, OH
Site Coordinator Representative

Laura Kingsley
Sarasota, FL
Site Coordinator Representative

Carmen Lipscomb
Denton, TX
Descubriendo la Lectura Representative

Allyson Matczuk
Winnipeg, MB, Canada
North American Trainers Group Vice President

Maeghan McCormick
Jackson, MI
Teacher Leader Representative

Robert Muller
Chicago, IL
Deans Representative

Lisa Pinkerton
Columbus, OH
Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Inc. Representative

Gay Su Pinnell
Columbus, OH
Founding Director

Don Pope-Davis
Columbus, OH
Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Inc. Representative

Debra Rich
Sumner, IA
Presidential Appointee

Lori Taylor
Orono, ME
Trainer Representative
Announced at the 2020 National Conference, the Foundation for Struggling Readers (formerly the Reading Recovery Fund) raised funds to support the development of early literacy scholars and practitioners who guide struggling readers.

Development Committee Chair Annie Opat and Executive Director Billy Molasso kept attendees engaged with raffle drawings and fundraising updates during each general session.

Many thanks to all who stopped by the Foundation booth to donate, play games, and enter the 50/50 raffle drawing. A total of $27,254 was raised for the Foundation! Special thanks go to Pioneer Valley Books for their generous matching gift of $10,000.

We thank all of our generous donors for your support as we launched the Foundation for Struggling Readers. Keep an eye on your email for important announcements regarding applications for financial awards to help with costs to attend the 2021 conference.
Scott, Foresman Reading Unlimited Children’s Books Now Available from the RRCNA Store

Last winter, Pearson granted RRCNA exclusive rights to reprint the popular Scott, Foresman & Company’s Reading Unlimited children’s books. These timeless, engaging stories have been cherished by Reading Recovery teachers and students for decades. Each title offers the variety in text complexity, text layout, and language structure that helps develop flexible readers.

Our original collection started with five titles, but due to popular demand, seven additional titles have recently been added.

Collection 1
The Lion’s Tail
Catch That Frog
Pat’s New Puppy
Ten Little Bears
The Missing Necklace

Collection 2
The Pot of Gold
Three Little Pigs
Happy Faces
The Bus Ride
The Baby Monkey
The Little Knight
The Great Big Enormous Turnip

The Reading Unlimited collections are available at the RRCNA Store, where you can also purchase the Scott, Foresman Testing Packets. See page 26 in this issue for more information and pricing — for RRCNA members only!

Day of Learning Ends with Snacks and Prizes at Annual RRCNA Membership Meeting

After a full day of learning, RRCNA members gathered for snacks and fun during the 2020 Annual Membership Meeting. The agenda of this year’s gathering, held on Monday, February 10, highlighted the important work of RRCNA’s standing committees. And as always, door prizes were awarded to dozens of lucky winners! A special thank you to exhibitors who donated door prize items: Blueberry Hill Books, Booksource, Eaglecrest Books, Hameray Publishing Group, Hand2Mind, Heinemann, MaryRuth Books, Pioneer Valley Books, Read Naturally, RR Books, Red Canoe Books, Richard C. Owen Publishers, Inc., SongLake Books, Stop Falling Productions, and Townsend Books.

Helping you stay engaged with powerful, free online PD

Now is the time to see for yourself what RRCNA’s e-Learning Center is all about! You’ll find videos on a wide range of topics, featuring 45- to 90-minute sessions recorded during recent National Reading Recovery and K-6 Literacy conferences. Topics range from parts of the Reading Recovery lesson to small group literacy, coaching, writing, word work, and much, much more.

If you’d like to earn PD credit after watching a session video, simply complete a brief quiz and generate a certificate that can be emailed to your teacher leader or administrator, showing how productively you’re spending your day while working at home!
Reading Recovery teacher leaders from across the country nominate individuals to receive this annual prestigious award. It is given to recipients who display a strong commitment to expand and maintain Reading Recovery’s high standards and who make significant contributions to its implementation beyond the local level. This year, the recipient is Kristine Griffor, assistant superintendent for elementary instruction for the Troy School District in Troy, MI, since 2015. The award was presented during the opening session of the 2020 National Reading Recovery & K-6 Literacy Conference.

Griffor took action to establish Troy as its own Reading Recovery site and significantly expanded the district’s Reading Recovery services. Due to its expanded intervention services with Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons, the district has seen several of its students, formerly classified as “special education,” now achieving literacy success in the classroom and no longer in need of special education services. Long-range plans for the district serving 12,000 students include continuing to expand the district’s intervention services and investments in teacher expertise.

Prior to her current role, Griffor served as the director of curriculum in Warren Woods, MI, from 2010–2015, where she first worked in partnership with Oakland University to implement Reading Recovery. She oversaw a strong Reading Recovery implementation and added Literacy Lessons to the district’s literacy learning opportunities for at-risk students. In 2016, the Warren Woods-Macomb Area Reading Recovery Site was established.

Kris Piotrowski, Reading Recovery teacher leader from the district, submitted the nomination package that highlighted Griffor’s extensive work in supporting and growing Reading Recovery in Michigan and beyond.

I believe literacy is a right for all students. Leading systems of comprehensive literacy changes the lives of children and sets them on the path of the joy of learning.

— Kristine Griffor
Exceptional Speakers Help Celebrate 35 Years of Reading Recovery

The nation’s premier K-6 literacy conference, dedicated to improving literacy, connected educators from around the world and created momentum in the reading community. Nearly 2,100 Reading Recovery professionals and other educators took part in this rich learning experience February 8-11, 2020 in Columbus, OH.

More than 100 professional development sessions provided research-based literacy instruction that balanced theory with practice. In addition, Preconference Institutes offered even more in-depth experiences. Six institutes were offered, including a new outreach to middle school educators in Grades 5–8 led by Penny Kittle. The rich learning in sessions was enhanced by special interest group meetings, where small communities with the same interests were created to address information they need. Groups were established for literacy coaches, Literacy Lessons professionals, DLL educators, and Reading Recovery site coordinators. General sessions and a packed exhibit hall also added to conference excitement.

Many literacy leaders contributed congratulatory videos that were shown during general sessions and in other locations throughout the conference. The pinnacle of the celebration was a special anniversary luncheon where Gay Su Pinnell outlined 35 years of accomplishments and looked toward the future and the possibilities that it will bring. Two former Reading Recovery students also shared the impact of Reading Recovery on their lives. You can read all their comments in the Special Anniversary Section, beginning on page 80 in this issue.

CONFERENCE KEYNOTES

ABOVE – Dr. Adria Klein (center), nationally recognized author and literacy expert, explained that moving from best practices to next practices is the only way to empower our students to be future ready. RRCNA Executive Director Billy Molasso and Karen Scott, RRCNA president and chair of the 2020 National Conference, joined Adria before Sunday’s opening session.

UPPER LEFT – Douglas Reeves, an expert in school leadership, provided a roadmap on how to create school change to make an immediate impact on student results and educational equity in Monday’s keynote.

LOWER LEFT – Nikki Grimes, award winning children’s author and poet, demonstrated the power of poetry. Nikki also shared how verse can be used to motivate students to read and write and to enhance the culture of the classroom by creating a sense of community.
ATTENDEES SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES

“As someone not trained in Reading Recovery, this conference included valuable information that I could easily implement in my kindergarten classroom. The conference was appropriate for anyone who teaches children to read!”

“Attending the 2020 conference has been the most valuable professional development that I have attended in my 17 years of teaching primary grades. My mindset has been changed forever. This experience has taught me to be very intentional in all and everything that I teach.”

“I am so happy to be back! The conference is truly a time of renewal and energizing ourselves as educators. The conference allows like-minded, best practice, lovers of literacy, persons dedicated to educating our future readers, opportunities to sharpen our instruction and add to our knowledge base. I am so glad to have had the opportunity to attend.”
The Last Word

Real Teachers
When I took one of my Reading Recovery students to a behind-the-glass session, I introduced her to my teacher leader. The next day, she questioned me about why I had a teacher. I told her that she helps me to learn more so that I can be a better teacher. Several weeks later, we were in the middle of a lesson when my student suddenly turned to me and asked, “So, are you a real teacher yet?”

— Joni Robinson, Ohio

Finding New Happiness
Monday: Michael comes to my room for RAK 1. As he steps in the door, he begins crying. He cries through most of the lesson saying, “I’m not smart. I can’t read.” No matter how much pumping up I do, I can’t get him to get over that hump, and he’s sad the whole time.

Tuesday: Michael comes to my room for RAK 2. Today there are no tears and he works through the lesson. At the end, when I tell him he had a great day, I only get a little smile.

Wednesday: Michael comes to my room for RAK 3. He has the biggest smile on his face and says, “I’m so happy.” Expecting an answer about something in class or at home, I asked why he was so happy. “Because I’m in here,” he replies. Made my day!

— Anonymous

Getting Out of Bed
I was introducing the book Wake Up, Dad (Rigby PM Reader) to one of my students. He enjoyed watching as each child in the family tried to get Dad out of the bed. As the book built to the ending, the little boy turned to me and said with a knowing smile, “I know why Dad doesn’t want to get out of the bed.” To which I responded, “Why?” His reply: “Because under that blanket he’s naked!”

— Janet Holbrook, California

Partners in Excellence — Our Associate Members

RRCNA offers a special associate membership level to companies that provide the books, assessment materials, and resources you need for your lessons and classrooms. Our associate members support Reading Recovery through generous sponsorships, grants, donations, and by exhibiting at Reading Recovery conferences throughout North America. When you visit their booths, be sure to say “thank you for all you do for Reading Recovery!”
IN A SCHOOL THAT IS ALIVE
with literacy, there is one critical element—
classrooms filled with great books.

– Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

“A”

A vision for learning … now a REALITY

For more information, visit fountasandpinnell.com/fpc.
Collaborative Inquiry: Our Path to Learning and Improvement
Amy Smith, Beth Magsig, and Amy Emmons

Initiating a Network’s Renewal: Charting the Development of Reading Recovery’s Networked Improvement Community
Chad R. Lochmiller and Jennifer Karnopp

What to Teach? Supporting Strategic Processing at the Earliest Text Reading Levels
Mary K. Lose

Learning Letter-Sound Relationships: Evidence and Practice
Sinéad Harmey and Sue Bodman

2018–2019 National Report: Data Again Show Strong Impact on Student Learning
Jeffrey Brymer-Bashore

LitCon
National K-8 Literacy & Reading Recovery Conference

Join the homecoming of childhood literacy leaders! Learn from the leading voices in education and be the first to know about current research and the most innovative practices in childhood literacy.

with keynote speakers

Jeffery Williams  Cornelius Minor  Gerry Brooks

Choose from more than 100 sessions focused on classroom teaching, intervention, leadership, coaching, and children’s literature, including featured speakers:

Anthony Muhammad  Gravity Goldberg  Mary Howard
Wiley Blevins  Sharonsky Helle  Colleen Cruz
Perwille Bipp  Sherry Kinzel

plus Reading Recovery speakers

CC Sales  Sue Duncan  Jennifer Flight
Mary Fried  James Schnog

January 30 - February 2, 2021
in Columbus, Ohio

find details and register at
www.literacyconference.org

Spring 2020 Vol. 19 No. 2

LitCon
National K-8 Literacy & Reading Recovery Conference

Join the homecoming of childhood literacy leaders! Learn from the leading voices in education and be the first to know about current research and the most innovative practices in childhood literacy.

with keynote speakers

Jeffery Williams  Cornelius Minor  Gerry Brooks

Choose from more than 100 sessions focused on classroom teaching, intervention, leadership, coaching, and children’s literature, including featured speakers:

Anthony Muhammad  Gravity Goldberg  Mary Howard
Wiley Blevins  Sharonsky Helle  Colleen Cruz
Perwille Bipp  Sherry Kinzel

plus Reading Recovery speakers

CC Sales  Sue Duncan  Jennifer Flight
Mary Fried  James Schnog

January 30 - February 2, 2021
in Columbus, Ohio

find details and register at
www.literacyconference.org

Spring 2020 Vol. 19 No. 2