Introducing New Intervention Status Categories for Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura Students

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Editor’s note: In keeping with Marie Clay’s writings, the author uses male third-person pronouns to refer to students and female third-person pronouns to refer to teachers.

This academic year (2020–2021) Reading Recovery® and Descubriendo la Lectura (DLL) educators are using a new set of exit status terms for categorizing students as they finish their Reading Recovery/DLL lessons. The decision to revise existing status categories was initiated in response to a call for change and resulted from thoughtful deliberations involving extensive evaluation and field testing. The purposes of this article are to report the processes undertaken to identify and adopt the changes; to introduce the new terms and discuss the categories; and to review concepts reflecting Clay’s (2001/2015, 2013, 2016, 2019) theories and recommended practices in relation to exiting Reading Recovery/DLL students from their individual interventions.

The exit status categories used by Reading Recovery/DLL educators represent their appraisals of students’ literacy achievement and performance at the time an individual’s access to lessons ends. The assigned category for those who have had a complete series of lessons represents a general indication of a learner’s abilities, performance, and instructional needs based on systematic observations; however, misinterpretations and confusions have been observed in the use of our terms.

Many have referred to Discontinued children when we have meant the intervention was discontinued successfully due to the learners’ accelerated achievement in literacy to levels commensurate with the average peers in their cohort and in their independence in directing their own learning. We consider these children capable of continuing to acquire literacy as a result of the instruction offered by their classroom teachers without ongoing, special support.

Recommended is the label we have assigned to all who, after a full series of lessons, have not acquired the literacy behaviors and levels of achievement deemed commensurate with those of the average peers in their cohort. They are all below the class average; however, they have also been found to vary widely in both their achievement levels and their instructional needs. Some are deserving of specialists’ assessments and immediate, ongoing specialist support; others have the literacy skills to survive and benefit from the classroom literacy program, albeit with supplementary support most often provided by the classroom teacher.

Reading Recovery/DLL teachers have accommodated for any confusions the labels may have created by working directly with the school literacy teams and classroom teachers to explain each student’s strengths and to advocate for the instructional setting and support needed by the student to ensure ongoing literacy development after Reading Recovery/DLL. Although this process has been effective, Reading Recovery/DLL educators have called for improvements in our practice, i.e., the terms used to label the learner’s exit status category.

New exit status categories should improve communication with classroom teachers, administrators, and parents on student strengths and levels of support needed.
The Change Process

During the 2019–2020 academic year, the North American Trainers Group (NATG) responded to the call for change by appointing a task force to explore alternatives and propose modifications. This task force was comprised of eight members with one representative of each of the four NATG standing committees, one DLL trainer, one member of the NATG Executive Committee, one member of the North American Reading Recovery Improvement Science Hub, and a chairperson — a representative set of U.S. trainers:

- Billie Askew, Texas Woman’s University
- Mary Anne Doyle, University of Connecticut
- Annette Torres Elías, Texas Woman’s University
- Descubriendo la Lectura
- Salli Forbes, Saint Mary’s College of California
- Executive Committee
- Mary Lose, Oakland University
- Research Committee
- Debra Rich, Saint Mary’s College of California
- Technology Committee
- James Schnug, The Ohio State University
- Teaching and Professional Development Committee
- K. Journey Swafford, Georgia State University
- Implementation Committee

Task force members studied Marie Clay’s theories, explored the practices of our international Reading Recovery colleagues, and developed alternative terms and categories. Initially, discussions were arranged with individuals who offered important insights. Jeff Brymer-Bashore, director of the International Data Evaluation Center (IDEC), provided perspective and explained that the data collection system could be redesigned to account for alternative and additional terms. Jennifer Flight, trainer, Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery, explained how Canadian Reading Recovery educators have implemented revised labels for exiting Reading Recovery students in Canada. She highlighted both the benefits they observed and challenges they encountered in doing so.

Preliminary suggestions were shared with U.S. trainers, and their input was helpful in refining descriptions and advancing the project. Practicing Reading Recovery/DLL teachers and teacher leaders were invited to review and evaluate the categories, which were defined for them in a descriptive document, and submit their reactions on surveys. These surveys were administered following 20 weeks of school, as the first round of instruction ended (January or February). Those participating in this activity included 101 teachers and teacher leaders from sites affiliated with the training centers at Oakland University in Michigan, Texas Woman’s University, The Ohio State University, and the University of Maine.

Teachers and Teacher Leaders Shared a Range of Advantages for Recommended Changes

- The new categories better represent the Reading Recovery students’ outcomes. I like the emphasis on processing.
- The new terms are meaningful, descriptive, and easy for non-Reading Recovery teachers to understand. I feel I can use these descriptions to share progress with classroom teachers.
- I much prefer ‘Accelerated Progress’ to ‘Discontinued.’ I feel it is much clearer to teachers and says what it means for students.
- ‘Progressed’ was a much-needed category. Clearly categorizes students who have made good progress, but still need extra support.
- Outside peers will better understand the progress our students make.
- These new categories should give the schools a better idea of what type of support (if any) is needed after the Reading Recovery instruction ends.
- This should ensure that students receive a more tailored and appropriate intervention, should they need it, after Reading Recovery.
- ‘Recommended’ becomes a much more serious category … showing immediate action should be taken to help students get back on track.
- Classroom teachers will better understand gaps the student has and how to provide assistance in the classroom.
The evaluative feedback submitted revealed their expectations of a range of advantages for the recommended changes. Their thoughts are displayed in the box on page 6.

The task force completed work in March 2020, submitting the recommended set of six exit status categories for use by both Reading Recovery/DLL teachers to NATG. The U.S. trainers approved the proposed set and determined that their use would become effective this year.

New Exit Status Categories
The new status categories are displayed in Table 1 showing how the new terms/categories align with prior categories.

The category Accelerated Progress: Achieved Intervention Goal replaces the label Discontinued. This exit status category is assigned to students who accelerate to levels of proficiency commensurate with the average students in their first-grade cohort. Because exiting from the intervention occurs as soon as students demonstrate attainment of this goal, this status category is correctly used for all accelerated students completing a full series of lessons (20 weeks of instruction) as well as for those reaching this goal with fewer than 20 weeks of instruction.

In place of a single category for Recommended, teachers now have two alternatives — either Progressed: Monitoring and Support Essential for Ongoing Literacy Progress or Recommended: Additional Evaluation and Ongoing Intervention Essential for Ongoing Literacy Progress. These two categories for students of varying levels of achievement needing ongoing support are to be assigned only at the end of a full series of lessons (i.e., following 20 weeks of instruction).

There are no changes to three categories: Incomplete, Moved, and None of the Above. Our teachers will continue their established practices for assigning students to these categories. Thus, if the access to Reading Recovery/DLL instruction ends before a child has received 20 weeks of instruction, e.g., the academic year ends thwarting the opportunity for a full series of lessons, and the student has not demonstrated accelerated progress, the category of Incomplete is assigned.

The Moved category is used for those Reading Recovery/DLL students who move away from the school before receiving a full series of lessons (20 weeks of instruction). None of the Above is the appropriate category for any Reading Recovery/DLL student removed from lessons due to unusual circumstances with fewer than 20 weeks of instruction. The rare decision to remove a student is made by someone other than the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher, e.g., the child is reassigned to kindergarten at the request of the parents.

To gain understanding of the changes in terms and the introduction of two categories replacing the former Recommended status category, the following discussion presents key concepts that were instructive to the task force.

Applying Clay’s Theory and Practice
As the task force explored and studied alternative status categories, all decisions were considered in light of Marie Clay’s theoretical perspectives. This was important to the task force as the goal was to improve our communication and use of terms, not to modify established practices of Reading Recovery or DLL. Valued sources of both theory and processes related to observing and interpreting literacy behaviors, discontinuing instruction, and making recommendations for the ongoing monitoring of students were our texts: Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals (Clay, 2016) and An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 2013, 2019).

Most importantly, Chapter 7 in Literacy Lessons continues to be the quintessential resource and is recommended to all Reading Recovery/DLL teachers reviewing their decision-making and end-of-intervention practices. The

| Table 1. Exit Status Categories for Reading Recovery/DLL Students in the United States |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| New Status Category           | Prior Status Category |
| Accelerated Progress:         | Discontinued       |
| Achieved Intervention Goal    |                   |
| Progressed: Monitoring and    | New Category       |
| Support Essential for Ongoing |                   |
| Literacy Progress             |                   |
| Recommended: Additional       | Recommended        |
| Evaluation and Ongoing        |                   |
| Intervention Essential for    |                   |
| Ongoing Literacy Progress     |                   |
| Incomplete                    | Incomplete         |
| Moved                         | Moved              |
| None of the Above             | None of the Above  |
change in terms for labeling intervention status categories does not change the essential processes described in this chapter.

The task force found the following topics germane to making exit decisions and in identifying and interpreting evidence of progress in literacy:

1. Emphasis on literacy processing
2. Two positive outcomes of Reading Recovery/DLL instruction
3. A full series of lessons
4. Teaching for acceleration

**Emphasis on literacy processing**

“The term *literacy processing* is used for mental activities initiated by the child to problem-solve the puzzle of getting the messages from a text, or putting messages into texts” (Clay, 2019, p. 34). With the goal of scaffolding development of effective literacy processing systems for reading and writing, teachers provide their Reading Recovery/DLL students with “lessons directed to making them constructive — to actively process information, to find and relate information from different sources, to bring it together, construct a decision, and monitor the effectiveness of that decision” (Clay, 2016, p. 129). Thus, in reading and in writing, the student can potentially draw from all his or her current understanding and all his or her language competencies, and visual information, and phonological information, and knowledge of printing conventions, in ways which extend both the searching and linking processes as well as the item knowledge repertoires. Learners pull together necessary information from print in simple ways at first . . . but as opportunities to read and write accumulate over time, the learner becomes able to quickly and momentarily construct a somewhat complex operating system which might solve the problem. (Clay, 2001/2015, p. 224)

Clay (2013, 2016, 2019) notes that as the student gains processing proficiency from his many opportunities to write personal messages and read materials that both match his strengths and offer appropriate challenge, his oral reading behaviors allow inferences of complex processing strategies and reveal he is able to

- monitor his own reading and writing;
- anticipate a possible syntactic structure;
- search for different kinds of information in word sequences, in longer stretches of meaning, and in sound-letter sequences;
- discover new things for himself;
- cross-check one source of information with another;
- repeat as if to confirm his reading or writing so far;
- use all sources of information together on the first attempt;
- self-correct errors taking the initiative for making decisions or getting words right in every respect; and
- solve new words by these means.

These in-the-head actions are observed becoming more efficient as a result of instruction supporting the constructive learner.

In essence, the reader engages in “assembling perceptual and cognitive working systems needed to complete increasing complex tasks” (Clay, 2001/2015, p. 269–270). When we confirm that the learner is self-reliant with self-monitoring and self-correcting strategies in both reading and writing, we infer that the student is operating in ways that put him on track to become a competent reader and writer with a self-extending system for literacy learning well underway. We are confident that he will manage the instructional demands of his classroom without ongoing, ancillary support, and his reading and writing experiences will be self-tutoring (Clay, 2001/2015, 2016).

Reading Recovery/DLL teachers use daily running records to assess a reader’s literacy processing strategies, including what he knows, what he attends to, how he solves problems, and what he overlooks (Clay, 2013, 2019). The teacher’s daily analyses of the reader’s behaviors and any errors, including her observation of patterns of responses and the occurrence of self-corrections, provide evidence of the reader’s early processing behaviors evolving into more efficient, decision-making, strategic behaviors over time.

At exiting the intervention, the successful student’s levels of reading and writing proficiency are expected to equal those of children making average progress in his class. However, levels of achievement are only one focus of our decision-making and the final, formal assessment. Scores, or the text read at an instructional level, alone do not reveal the learner’s literacy processing strengths. The teacher’s analyses of the student’s oral reading of pas-
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Sages of increasing difficulty, as recorded on the running records, are essential. This is because the important confirmation of an effective literacy processing system, or ability to work proficiently and flexibly with information in print, provides evidence that “the learner can continue to learn to read by reading, and to learn to write by writing” (Clay, 2013, 2019, p. 36).

Two positive outcomes of Reading Recovery/DLL instruction
Reading Recovery/DLL teachers have the joyful experience of providing our most vulnerable, young learners struggling to acquire early literacy with individualized instruction daily. This is the “intensive care that results in the fastest recovery of a normal trajectory of progress” (Clay, 2016, p. 19) in reading and writing development.

The fast progress, resulting in a level of achievement equivalent to that of an average learner within the child’s cohort, is described as accelerated learning, a goal of Reading Recovery/DLL instruction. This progress for a Reading Recovery/DLL child connotes more than a specified level of achievement. It also indicates that the child has acquired effective processing systems for reading and writing, is capable of independent problem solving, and demonstrates ability to continue making good progress without the individualized support of the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher. The term/category Accelerated Progress: Achieved Intervention Goal reflects these learner accomplishments. Clay (2016) refers to this success as the first positive outcome of the Reading Recovery/DLL intervention.

Reading Recovery/DLL teachers find that all children benefit from the teachers’ intensive, individualized support; however, some children are found deserving of specialized instruction in reading and writing following Reading Recovery/DLL to ensure their ongoing development. For each of these children, the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher has documented observations of performance that provide keys to planning subsequent supports and ongoing instruction. The identification of learners in need of specialized instruction following their opportunity to learn coupled with rich, diagnostic information is the second positive outcome of the Reading Recovery/DLL intervention (Clay, 2016).

Among the students demonstrating the second positive outcome are many who have made substantial gains in reading and writing and do present evidence of effective literacy processing systems under construction. This is revealed in analyses of their oral reading behaviors that show awareness of effective, strategic problem solving, self-monitoring, and self-correcting. However, this reader lacks the proficiency and independence deemed necessary to ensure that the genesis of a self-extending system is secure. This learner will require instructional support and monitoring by his classroom teacher to ensure his ongoing development. The appropriate exit status category for this learner is Progressed: Monitoring and Support Essential for Ongoing Literacy Progress.

There is another, small number of students whose learning does not accelerate in spite of the intensive, individual attention of the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher. They may have struggled to secure foundational literacy skills; they may have demonstrated confusions requiring the teacher to adjust instructional procedures. They will have made limited progress in reading and writing and, after 20 weeks of instruction, remain deserving of ongoing, specialized assessment and instruction. This “help should be made available immediately to ensure that what has been learned so far will not be forgotten” (Clay, 2016, p. 19). At exiting, these students are categorized as Recommended: Additional Evaluation and Ongoing Intervention Essential for Ongoing Literacy Progress.

A full series of lessons
Reading Recovery/DLL teachers cannot predict a child’s progress on the basis of observed literacy behaviors at the initiation of lessons. Nor can we predict end-of-intervention status at any specified time during the lesson series,
e.g., after several weeks of instruction. Rather, the teacher follows the child and supports the learner’s path to literacy by building on his strengths and designing “each part of every lesson to target the cutting edge” (Clay, 2016, p. 18) of his learning, adapting learning opportunities for the child as warranted. Therefore, each student’s series of lessons is unique; acceleration rates for individuals vary; and the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher’s decision making at the time of exiting is based on observations of the individual’s progress.

As soon as learners exhibit the independence and proficiencies in reading and writing that suggest ongoing, satisfactory progress in their classrooms without the individual support of the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher, the series of lessons is discontinued irrespective of the number of weeks of lessons completed. However, every Reading Recovery/DLL student is entitled to a full series of lessons, and no Reading Recovery/DLL child is to be exited from the intervention with less than 20 weeks of instruction unless he has reached the intervention goal (Accelerated Progress). This is most essential for any learners exhibiting ongoing confusions and the need for long-term support to secure effective literacy processing systems for reading and writing.

Impacting the number of lessons and weeks of instruction a student requires in Reading Recovery/DLL is his rate of learning and the expectation that all Reading Recovery/DLL students are capable of accelerating their learning in order to catch up with peers. Achieving acceleration takes precedence in Reading Recovery/DLL; therefore, the intervention is not defined by a circumscribed timeline. Reading Recovery/DLL teachers should never extend lessons to 20 weeks unless the child requires this instructional time.

Teaching for acceleration
Teaching for the accelerated learning of each Reading Recovery/DLL student is an imperative. Reading Recovery/DLL teachers accept this responsibility and know that to achieve this goal, they must design “a superbly sequenced series of lessons,” (Clay, 2016, p. 20) for each student, never waste learner time, and make expert decisions that allow the child to make leaps forward in achievement (Clay). This not only allows the student to catch up with his peers; but, when a student’s acceleration results in his exiting the intervention with less than 20 weeks of instruction, it allows earlier entry for the next, lowest student. This creates important access to increased learning time for that student, and perhaps access to the intervention for an additional number of students in an academic year.

When acceleration is compromised and a student does not respond in ways that confirm he is making expected progress, the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher must take immediate action. This may include re-examining assessments of the child, critiquing teaching decisions, adjusting instruction, and inviting Reading Recovery/DLL colleagues to engage in problem solving and to observe lessons. These steps, with more specific recommendations, are fully described by Clay (2016) who advises teachers to take action within the first weeks of instruction if observations suggest that acceleration is challenged. (See Chapter 6 of Literacy Lessons for a detailed discussion of appropriate teacher actions.) Clay asserts that taking such steps are “usually sufficient to overcome the child’s lack of progress” (p. 168) and allow him to experience accelerated progress going forward. The student will once again be on his way to catching up with his peers and attaining the intervention goal.

Teaching for acceleration is an important instructional goal for all teachers to revisit often. If Reading Recovery/DLL teachers give thoughtful attention to the accelerated learning of all students, they may be able to help most students achieve Accelerated Progress; avoid a tendency to settle for some progress in place of accelerated progress; and avoid increased numbers of students exiting Reading Recovery/DLL in the Progressed category after 20 weeks of instruction.

Discussion of the Evidence for Making Exit Decisions
The Reading Recovery/DLL teacher’s important source of guidance for making exit decisions as a student’s individual lessons end is Chapter 7 in Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals (Clay, 2016). The following discussion highlights key directions from this chapter in order to relate decision-making processes to the three exit status categories discussed above.

The Reading Recovery/DLL teacher’s observations and records of daily lessons, including analyses of daily running records, offer initial indications of the student’s prog-
ress in reading and writing, including behavioral evidence of processing systems for reading and writing. Reading Recovery/DLL teachers also confer with classroom teachers and with this input plan any support and/or specific instruction that will ease their student’s transition to the classroom. For accelerating students who may not need a full series of lessons, teachers summarize their observations on the “Recommendations for Discontinuing the Lesson Series before Final Assessment” sheet which is shared with the classroom teacher and the school literacy team (Clay, 2016). The formal, final assessment is then conducted.

An Observation Survey of Early Achievement (Clay, 2013, 2019) is administered to Reading Recovery students at exiting. DLL students, who are instructed in Spanish, are administered the Instrumento de Observación de los Logros de la Lecto-Ecritura Inicial (Escamilla, Andrade, Basurto, & Ruiz, 1996). These two surveys are parallel in tasks (Clay’s six observation tasks), in administration and scoring standards, and in resulting scores and indicators of progress. Therefore, in the following discussion the term Observation Survey references both instruments.

The Observation Survey is the assessment used for all Reading Recovery/DLL students as their interventions end, before or at 20 weeks of instruction. It serves as a check on the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher’s observations (Clay, 2016). The Observation Survey is a sound, valid assessment and when administered as designed yields reliable evidence for decision making. Thus, intervention status categories are most often confirmed by analyses of the student’s performance on the six tasks: Letter Identification, Concepts About Print, Word Test, Writing Vocabulary, Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words, and Text Reading.

Clay (2013) designed the Observation Survey to allow “an emphasis on the operation or strategic activities that are used in reading and writing rather than test scores or disabilities” (p. 34) alone. Therefore, while scores for each individual task are recorded, the teacher additionally summarizes evidence of the ‘useful’ and ‘problem strategic activity’ (a) with text, (b) with words, and (c) with letters. Before exploring this process further, it is helpful to review understandings of stanine scores, the scores reported for each task.

**Stanine scores**
The six separate tasks of the Observation Survey vary widely in terms of the demands on the student, the conditions of testing (timed vs. not timed), and the resulting raw score point ranges. This is an understandable condition of an observation tool designed to “allow children to work with the complexities of written language” (Clay, 2013, 2019, p. 13) by assessing both items and processes. However, interpretation of performance across tasks on the basis of raw scores is difficult and impractical. For this reason, raw scores on each task have been converted to stanine scores which are easily interpreted and compared.

Stanine scores are standard scores derived by redistributing the raw scores for any test/task across the normal curve in 9 groups. Stanine scores range from 1 (the lowest score) to 9 (the highest score) and the mean stanine score is 5. One advantage of the stanine scores is that they allow teachers to interpret a child’s results in comparison to an appropriate random sample, that is, children in the same age or grade cohort. This reveals how a student fares in comparison to his age group, or grade level. In addition, because all scores are placed on the same scale, scores from the different types of tasks can be compared. Consideration of the highs and lows of the student’s performance profile, composed of the stanine scores for the six tasks, provides a guide for both selecting and exiting Reading Recovery/DLL students and for planning instruction. Finally, stanine scores resulting from multiple administrations of the Observation Survey can be compared allowing interpretations of a learner’s progress over time.

Clay (2013, 2019) has suggested the anticipated, perhaps temporary, literacy progress that may be observed among students within four discrete groups defined by ranges of stanine scores. For the purposes of our decision making, the task force adapted these ranges creating the following four progress groups. Generally, students with stanine scores in the range

- 5–6 are able to participate successfully in literacy activities expected of the average learners in the grade cohort;
- 7–9 are ready for more complex tasks and challenges that are beyond those expected of average learners in the grade cohort;
• 3–4 are challenged by activities expected of an average learner in the grade cohort and will require very specific teacher support; and
• 1–2 are struggling with literacy tasks and deserve intensive, specialists’ support in order to make progress.

Examining the Evidence
Reading Recovery/DLL teachers have multiple sources of data to synthesize as they consider the learner’s progress in Reading Recovery/DLL lessons. As detailed in Chapter 7 of Literacy Lessons, these include their daily interactions and observational records (lesson records and running records) which detail the learner’s path to literacy and changes in writing and reading proficiencies over time, observations of the child engaged in classroom activities, and classroom teachers’ reports of progress and needs. The final appraisal of the child’s progress, including anecdotal and assessment data, and the determination of a child’s exit status are also discussed with and agreed to by the school’s literacy team. The following explanations are presented to help with the process of examining the data, evaluating the student’s performance, and determining his intervention status category. This discussion is organized in relation to the three exit status categories: Accelerated Progress, Progressed, and Recommended.

EVIDENCE

Accelerated Progress: Achieved Intervention Goal

At exiting, the learner achieving the Accelerated Progress intervention goal exhibits effective processing systems for reading and writing at levels of proficiency that suggest he is able to participate successfully in the classroom literacy program with peers of average achievement levels. He is considered able to solve challenges in reading and writing independently, discover new things for himself, and continue to strengthen and extend his literacy processing systems without individual support (Clay, 2016). Important evidence of current achievement levels and behaviors indicative of effective literacy processing is revealed on the Observation Survey. The student’s performance on the tasks assessing items of information as well as analyses of behaviors recorded during oral reading of passages of increasing difficulty provide evaluative data. In addition to the results of Observation Survey testing, the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher’s daily lesson records and observations of the student in the classroom are additional sources of evidence.

Observation Survey stanine scores. Students achieving the goal of acceleration are expected to achieve stanine scores of 5 or higher on most, if not all, of the Observation Survey tasks. (Remember, a stanine score of 5 is the mean score attained by the random sample, indicative of average performance). However, interpretations of text reading levels require additional considerations. For example, “the exit level will need to be matched to the rising levels of proficient readers as the school year progresses” (Clay, 2016, p. 189) and also equal the text level used for the instruction of peers making average progress. In some schools, that level may exceed the level found at stanine 5. Most importantly, the student must have been afforded sufficient opportunities to read higher text levels in order to consolidate processing proficiencies on longer and more complex texts. For these reasons, the instruc-
tional text level recommended by Clay (2016) for the Accelerated Progress student about to exit the intervention is level 16.

While teachers may elect lower exiting levels for reasons that are defensible for their contexts, Clay’s caution regarding exiting students at lower reading levels is critically important. “Reading Recovery children who exit at low levels face a high risk of not maintaining good progress.” If a child’s lessons series is discontinued at or below Level 12 one cannot be confident about his subsequent progress” (Clay, 2016, p. 189). There is no, one fixed text level that will guarantee success (Clay, 2016); therefore, the exiting decision is made with many factors in mind and important among these are the reader’s processing strengths.

**Literacy processing behaviors in reading and writing.** The literacy processing behaviors required for meeting the goal of acceleration are the independent, successful problem-solving strategies applied by the student in writing personal messages and in reading texts on the Observation Survey. The Reading Recovery/DLL teacher must confirm that the student will continue to make progress in literacy benefiting from the classroom program without ongoing individual support.

The running records of texts, in particular texts read at an instructional level, yield behavioral evidence of the student’s processing. Analysis of the oral reading allows inferences of how the student works with information in print (meaning, structure, visual) and reveals evidence of behaviors that signal effective processing while reading for meaning. Such behaviors include anticipating, linking, searching, cross-checking, monitoring, confirming, evaluating, and self-correcting. The oral reading sounds successful and fluent, and the student understands what he is reading.

To examine processing during writing, the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher refers to observations gleaned during authentic writing experiences. In writing stories during daily lessons, the student will compose messages that are increasingly longer, more varied, and more complex (in comparison to his writing in the earliest lessons). He will write known words quickly, solve unknown words he wants to write in a variety of ways, discover new things in writing, and show increasing independence in both composing and in recording his personal stories.

**Informal, anecdotal evidence.** Additional indicators of the student’s proficiency may include observations made during daily lessons. The Accelerated Progress student takes initiative, orient himself to new tasks and texts, makes new discoveries in reading and in writing, persists at difficulty, and knows when to seek help. The classroom teacher’s observations are an additional source of evidence of the student’s performance and success and are important to record.

**Classroom setting following intervention, ongoing monitoring.** The Accelerated Progress student is expected to continue making progress in literacy that matches the development of the average learners engaged in the classroom literacy program supported by the classroom teacher’s ongoing instruction. This instruction offers opportunities to engage with appropriately leveled materials with guided support, to read engaging texts independently, and to write personal stories frequently. The classroom teacher’s observations of ongoing progress will confirm that the student demonstrates (a) success in reading texts of increasing difficulty with 90% accuracy; (b) successful literacy processing behaviors and independent problem solving in reading and writing; (c) increasingly longer, varied, and more complex writing samples; (d) an expanding reading vocabulary; (e) an expanding writing vocabulary; and (f) motivation to pursue literacy tasks. While it is anticipated that the school literacy team will be helpful in supporting the child’s transition, the classroom teacher is asked to ensure the conditions of instruction.

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**EVIDENCE**

**Progressed: Monitoring and Supplemental Help Essential for Ongoing Literacy Progress**

This exit status category includes students who after a full series of Reading Recovery/DLL lessons, i.e., 20 weeks of instruction, have not reached the rigorous standards of Accelerated Progress. This category is a positive outcome of the intervention.

The students achieving this exit status category have made measurable progress in reading and writing; however, they have not attained levels of achievement matching those of their average peers. They demonstrate awareness of effective literacy strategies for reading and writing; however, they require ongoing instructional support to strengthen efficient and independent problem solving. Their current
strengths and proficiencies, considered under construction, do not meet the rigorous level demanded to ensure ongoing development without continued, additional instructional assistance. Monitoring and supplemental help are essential for ongoing literacy progress.

**Observation Survey stanine scores.** Students categorized Progressed achieve stanine scores of 3–4 on most Observation Survey tasks. A range of stanine scores may also be found and reveal higher stanines in several specific tasks, including assessments of item knowledge (e.g., Letter Identification). A stanine score below average is observed on the Text Reading task. The specific text reading level read at an instructional level (90% accuracy) may be level 8, 10, or higher with evidence of literacy processing behaviors under construction. An additional consideration in assigning the category is the rising levels of readers as the school year progresses (Clay, 2016).

**Literacy processing behaviors in reading and writing.** Analyses of the running records of the Observation Survey texts yield evidence indicative of literacy processing behaviors under construction. At the instructional level, the student reads for meaning and attends to all information sources in text (meaning, structure, visual); however, limitations are noted. For example, the reader’s use of visual information may be limited to the initial letter, or he is unable to scan and analyze multisyllabic words successfully. Processing behaviors inferred from oral reading may include anticipating, linking, searching, cross-checking, monitoring, confirming, and self-correcting; however, he may exhibit inconsistencies and he does not exhibit the independent problem-solving strategies required of a reader approaching an average level of achievement.

Writing strengths and needs will vary widely among students categorized as Progressed. The primary source of evidence of the student’s writing behaviors is the observations made by the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher during the writing component of daily lessons. Evidence revealing the student’s composing strengths, word-solving strategies, and independence in writing is found by examining teacher notes of the student’s behaviors, including attempts to record words and all successful, independent solving, as well as the length and complexity of the messages.

**Informal, anecdotal evidence.** The Reading Recovery/DLL teacher’s observations of the Progressed student in the classroom offer evidence of the child’s level of independence in the classroom setting; indication of the child’s ability to engage in the literacy activities offered in the classroom; and direction for planning the type and amount of essential support needed to ensure his ongoing literacy progress. The classroom teacher’s assessment and awareness of the child’s instructional needs are critical.

**Classroom setting following intervention, ongoing monitoring.** The Progressed student’s progress is contingent upon (a) daily instruction in literacy materials approaching, but below, text levels in the average range of challenge for the grade and (b) supplementary help. Depending on the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher’s final assessment, this help may be provided by the classroom teacher who gives the student additional assistance with reading and writing tasks. Or, the supplementary help may involve a literacy specialist who is available to work with the student in a small group for a specified amount of time. The Reading Recovery/DLL teacher may also support the student by creating occasional opportunities to read and/or write together focused on specific objectives, i.e., increasing fluency in reading.

The classroom teacher’s observations will provide evidence of the student’s continuing development by attending to evidence of growing proficiency: reading increasingly challenging texts at 90% accuracy in instructional settings; demonstrating more proficient literacy processing behaviors in all text reading; and problem-solving challenges independently in reading and in writing. Evidence of expanding reading and writing vocabularies and the composition of longer, more varied, more-complex stories will also be observed. The student will persist and take initiative, work at difficulty with increasing independence and success, and demonstrate motivation to read and write.

**EVIDENCE**

*Recommended: Additional Evaluation and Ongoing Intervention Essential for Ongoing Literacy Progress*

This exit status category is assigned to the small number of children for whom immediate, additional evaluation and ongoing intervention are essential to ensure literacy progress as lessons end. All sources of evidence reveal that the student has found it hard to accelerate even though the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher has adjusted instruction to overcome the learner’s challenges to making progress.
Observation Survey stanine scores. Students categorized Recommended achieve stanine scores of 1–2 on most Observation Survey tasks. A range of stanine scores may be found and reveal higher stanines on several specific tasks (e.g., Letter Identification). A stanine score well below average is observed on the Text Reading task. The specific text reading level read at an instructional level (90% accuracy) may range from 0–7 with limited evidence of effective literacy processing behaviors.

Literacy processing behaviors in reading and writing. Depending on the level of text read with 90% accuracy, analyses of the running records accompanying texts on the Observation Survey yield observations of rudimentary literacy processing behaviors. Although variations will be observed among this group of learners, many will apply what they know demonstrating control of directionality, one-to-one matching, and locating known words (even if a small set). Evidence of the learner’s control of foundational learning may additionally reveal monitoring, searching, evaluating, and self-correcting on the basis of these early behaviors. The reader may have some awareness of information sources in print (meaning, structure, visual); but, he will not demonstrate proficient processing or effective problem-solving strategies in the independent, testing context.

The source of evidence for judging the student’s message writing (composing and recording) is found in records of observations made by the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher during the writing component of daily lessons. Attention to the student’s compositions (noting length and variety), use of basic concepts of print (directionality, spatial layout), letter formations, use of the working page to analyze sounds in words, and success solving words using a range of strategies leads to identification of both achievements and instructional needs.

Informal, anecdotal evidence. Evidence confirming the need for immediate, specialist assessment and intervention is suggested by the student’s performance and interactions in the classroom setting. A wide range of individual behaviors are expected, and we cannot provide a comprehensive list here. Often, the student will make progress in the Reading Recovery/DLL setting; but, he will not make progress in the classroom. The classroom teacher may report that he appears to find learning tasks confusing, is unable to follow directions independently, appears insecure in taking actions, and requires repeated exposure to acquire any new learning. All observations suggest the need for immediate evaluation and intervention beyond the classroom to enable the child to continue to make progress in literacy.

Classroom setting following intervention, ongoing monitoring. The instructional planning for the Recommended student requires the attention of the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher, the classroom teacher, and the school’s literacy team. With the diagnostic information gathered during 20 weeks of individualized teaching, coupled with his performance on the Observation Survey, the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher provides essential information for this planning. These recommendations for literacy instruction are augmented by additional, specialist’s evaluations and an ongoing intervention is planned. For some learners and if available, Clay’s Literacy Lessons™ intervention may be the recommended intervention as this will continue individual instruction focused on literacy processing.

Ongoing Monitoring of Progress: Needed by All Reading Recovery/DLL Students

The ongoing monitoring of the progress of every exiting student is a responsibility of every Reading Recovery/DLL teacher. For each individual, the “transition to only classroom support must be made in such a manner that progress continues” (Clay, 2016, p. 186). Thus, for all students, even for those reaching Accelerated Progress status, “[i]t is very important for the school to arrange to monitor progress in some regular way” (Clay, 2016, p. 192).

At the student’s exiting, the plan should be established and indicate how the school literacy team, the classroom teacher, and the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher are to contribute to monitoring the student’s progress and take action in response to any challenges to the student’s ongoing success in literacy. Clay (2016) offers a range of actions that Reading Recovery/DLL may take to support students, including

- scheduling a few individual lessons with the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher to check on progress or focus on an observed need;
• providing occasional, individual sessions with the Reading Recovery/DLL teacher to revisit familiar learning and bolster the child’s confidence and motivation; and

• assessing oral reading every two weeks on texts used for classroom instruction and discussing these running records with the classroom teacher.

(Clay, p. 192)

Monitoring of all exited students may also lead to the need for additional support for the student by the classroom teacher. Possibilities include

• providing additional support with new tasks or routines;

• assisting with directions for completing tasks and making expectations clear;

• focusing daily instruction on the child’s strengths in literacy processing; and

• ensuring that instruction occurs at the appropriate level with focus on supporting the learner’s ongoing construction of complex literacy processing systems.

Finally, the monitoring of Recommended students, who require intensive intervention beyond the classroom, will involve all those who support the student with coordination by the school literacy team.

Summary
In summary, the new intervention status categories offer descriptive labels that the task force suggests represent an improvement in our Reading Recovery/DLL practice. It is our sincere hope that Reading Recovery and DLL professionals will find the new exit status categories beneficial in their work and in their communications with classroom teachers, administrators, and parents.

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 has served as the consulting editor for the Marie Clay Literacy Trust and has assisted with the 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.

References


