LESSONS FROM MARIE CLAY

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Billie J. Askew

WHAT WORKS CLEARINGHOUSE

Reading Recovery: How Do We Rank?
Robert M. Schwartz

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Editor’s Corner

Mary Anne Doyle, Editor-in-Chief

Challenges to Reading Recovery educators are ever-present. Many relate to maintaining strong and growing implementations. Others arise from those who have limited understandings of the complexities of literacy learning and literacy processing theory, effective literacy instruction for the hardest-to-teach learners, and the power of early intervention.

In considering the range of challenges resulting from forces of change and growth, Clay (2005) has advised us of the need to be well prepared to explain what’s special about instruction that is individually designed and individually delivered, to communicate the sound rationales for instructional and assessment procedures, and to embrace complexity. Furthermore, she realized that because times and attitudes change, old explanations must be revisited to ensure they are “expressed in today’s language and situated in today’s policies and current issues” (p. 4). The authors contributing to this issue create a basis for enhancing understandings and explanations so key to preparing us to meet current challenges with effective responses.

Our first article, authored by Billie Askew, asks what’s so important about theory? Actually, Reading Recovery educators have a response to this question, as we understand that our assessment and instructional procedures are substantiated by Clay’s theoretical perspectives grounded in meticulous research. The rich discussions offered by Askew provide clear explanations of Clay’s journey as a researcher investigating and charting new discoveries. Most importantly, this review of literacy processing theory in relation to observing and teaching highlights key understandings to revisit and secure in order to be well prepared to effectively communicate rationales for all aspects of our early intervention. Strong implementations are built on strong rationales.

Jill Baker and Kathleen Brown offer an enlightening discussion of the work undertaken by administrators and teachers in a large urban district committed to supporting their Reading Recovery implementation and extending its influence to create and support a comprehensive literacy program. Their story details how they based actions on sound rationales by considering theories of effective leadership, literacy development, early intervention, professional development, continuous improvement, and accountability. Of special interest is their effective collaborations involving central office administrators, building principals, the teacher leader, Reading Recovery teachers, and classroom teachers in a well-conceived plan of system development and change. Their goals for a comprehensive literacy system took multiple years to accomplish, they have tackled multiple challenges, and their work is ongoing. The authors present an impressive demonstration of the power of shared commitment for the benefit of all children and offer implementation and planning strategies for others to replicate.

Even when our districts have well-developed models of literacy education accommodating all learners, educational policies mandated by state legislators create new challenges. A recent development for many has come in the form of laws and new state policies regarding dyslexia. Rachael Gabriel describes recent trends in dyslexia legislation observed nationally, discusses the dyslexia agenda, and examines its implications for educators of students with reading difficulties. This is of important concern to Reading Recovery. Therefore, Gabriel’s recommendation—that Reading Recovery educators address how and why Reading Recovery is a viable option for dyslexic learners by detailing its alignment with the criteria for dyslexia programs—is our newest challenge.

In an article reflecting on Clay’s (2005) advice regarding the need to express Reading Recovery theory and practice accounting for today’s language, policies, and current issues, I review Clay’s theory and related instruction to examine both the alignment and the differences observed between Reading Recovery (and Literacy Lessons) and dyslexia-specific instructional approaches. Clearly reinforced by this article is the appropriateness of Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons teachers serving any students identified for instruction who may be labeled, or considered, dyslexic.

Two authors present research-based evidence of effectiveness. First, Richard Lomax reports the 2016-2017 summary evaluation of Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura (DLL) implementations and shares a separate research brief examining whether successful Reading Recovery and DLL interventions result in fewer children needing to receive special education services after discontinuing. The results of these evaluations are positive: Students demonstrated outstanding literacy success following interventions; and, the number of discontinued students needing special education services following their interventions decreased substantially. An additional source of evidence is offered by Robert Schwartz. By applying What Works Clearinghouse procedures to the most recent research-based evidence, he concludes that Reading Recovery is “the only early literacy intervention with sufficient scientific evidence to justify adoption for the most at-risk beginning readers” (p. 64).

In summary, our authors offer valuable discussions highlighting literacy theory, effective implementation strategies, and current policy issues. We present this issue as a source of appropriate and persuasive content for your reflection. Following Clay’s advice, revisit your understandings, refresh your explanations, and respond to new challenges with confidence.

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3. Be sure the message is clear and has a consistent focus throughout.
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What’s So Important About Theory?

Billie J. Askew, Texas Woman’s University

When you trained in Reading Recovery®, did you have some struggles with taking on a different theoretical stance to literacy learning? I know I did! When I trained in 1987, this theory was revolutionary. We were still using basal readers—lock step—perhaps with little thought to the implications for the learners. Teachers may have felt secure with a program that basically said what to do and when, but we had little information about the ways in which children were learning.

When we talk about theory, a variety of ideas may come to our minds. We often associate the term with scientific theories. Yet we all have theories about everyday life. For example, if you are suffering from insomnia, you may consider such theoretical possibilities as drinking too much coffee at night, working at the computer until bedtime, worrying about things you can’t control, and so on. Those are theories based on your observed behaviors.

So why does literacy processing theory matter to Reading Recovery teachers? Do we sometimes focus on the teaching procedures (the what or the how) more than the theory behind the procedures (the why)? Do we feel more comfortable with faithfully following procedures than considering why a certain procedure may be appropriate at this particular time for this particular child? All of us have likely faced this struggle as we work with children in Reading Recovery.

In all my years of studying Marie Clay’s work, I found new insights when working on this article. I didn’t realize how many times she explicitly challenged us to keep theory at the center of all our decisions.

For example, in Change Over Time, she directed this message to us all.

Early intervention professionals need to ask more questions and get to even better theory in order to be more effective in their work. (Clay, 2001, 2015, p. 4)

And in By Different Paths to Common Outcomes, she explained her commitment to the reciprocal relationship between theory and practice.

I espouse a reciprocal relationship between theory on the one hand and teaching practice on the other. Practice informs theory and theory informs practice in a circular, continuing set of relationships. I have never seen much value in talking to teachers only about ideas that confirm their present practice. I have never believed in offering teachers watered-down versions of theories, because in my experience teachers like to get their teeth into the writings of those who challenge their expectations. (Clay, 2014, p. 210 or Clay, 1998, p. 196)

But when we talk about theories of learning, we are likely less comfortable. Although I recall taking a graduate course about learning theory many years ago, I don’t think I grasped the concept of a theory of learning until working with Clay’s theory of literacy processing in Reading Recovery.
And for those of you who are teacher leaders, this is Clay’s charge to you.

Those professionals who train RR teachers are called tutors or teacher leaders. They need to be able to lead teachers into discussions of the ‘why’ questions but their personal challenge is to become more articulate about what they understand by the term ‘literacy processing,’ the theory of reading and writing with which they work. Their discussions should be about the kinds of processing which might be developed in each of the components of the lesson. …For them to understand why current practices are recommended, and to decide whether variants threaten or might potentially increase the effectiveness of a learner’s learning, such topics must be part of professional discussions. (Clay, 2001, 2015, p. 232)

The Development of Clay’s Theory of Literacy Processing

The following historical summary is based largely on Marie Clay’s dissertation (1966) and on book chapters by Ann Ballantyne (2009) and by Noel Jones and Trika Smith-Burke (1999). When Marie Clay joined the faculty at the University of Auckland in the early 1960s, she began to think about a focus for her Ph.D. research. She was especially interested in children who were achieving poorly at school despite average intelligence and opportunity.

Reading methods in New Zealand in the early 1960s basically followed a word approach based on look-and-say methods which had replaced a predominantly phonics approach. In 1963, the New Zealand Ministry of Education introduced a new reading method focused on books reflecting interests of New Zealand children, using language similar to speech of New Zealand children, including both high-interest and basic vocabulary, discouraging teaching of words singly or in lists, and advocating that teaching need not precede reading. Does that sound like our transition in the 1980s in the U.S. — with the advent of Reading Recovery?

This new reading method in New Zealand coincided with Marie’s dissertation research. She looked closely at the reading behaviors of children during their first year of instruction and recorded precisely what features of the mature reading process were being developed. Because of her developmental perspective, she expected variety and complexity in young children’s responses to early literacy instruction and she decided to explore this diversity using observational methodologies.

Her major aim was “over the period of one year to record in detail the emergent reading behavior of a representative group of urban children who enter school and begin reading instruction at five years” (Clay, 1966, p. 9). Other aims included these very ambitious goals:

• to devise ways of recording in detail the reading behaviors of these children,
• to describe the variety of behavior found in and between individuals,
• to describe patterning in the complexity of the reading process,
• to describe the sequence of learning,
• to hypothesize the process of change in progress in reading,
• to see if reading failure can be detected before age six, and
• to see whether better ways of observing and diagnosing inadequate learning could be described for teachers. (Clay, 1966)

Many refer to Marie Clay’s theory of literacy processing as grounded theory. In fact, Jones and Smith-Burke (1999), suggested that “a more apt characteristic of her research, and perhaps the greater impact of her findings, concerns the concept of a grounded theory” (p. 265). A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. … It is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather one begins with an area of study and what is relevant is that area is allowed to emerge. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) (Cited in Jones & Smith Burke, 1999, p. 265.)

Clay’s research design allowed for observation of emerging tentative behaviors that progressed over time to become controlled secure knowledge. Using open tasks and making frequent observations made it possible to reveal the variability of individuals on their paths to literacy develop-
ment. Clay’s design was thoroughly grounded in the data from children who were systematically observed during the formative development of literacy acquisition (Jones & Smith-Burke, 1999).

You can see how her methodology of grounded theory played out. She started with questions, moved to collecting data, to translating the codes into concepts and those concepts into theory — then continuing the cycle with a variety of children and across multiple studies. Marie Clay was well aware of the significance of her findings; her research challenged assumptions about readiness and yielded observation tools and tasks that made possible the early detection of children having difficulties with literacy learning.

It wasn’t until the early 1970s that changes were seen in the educational environment in New Zealand. The Early Literacy Project (later known as the Early Reading In-service Course) was initiated and was an important precursor of the Reading Recovery project. Marie Clay was a member of the development committee and a consultant for the project. Her research was the source for several course components and the Diagnostic Survey was used to observe young readers more closely. Teachers then asked for help with children who were struggling, leading to the Reading Recovery Research Project, the field trials, and replication (see Clay, 2009).

Aspects of a Theory of Literacy Processing
Because this theory is complex, there are many overlapping aspects. Some are selected for attention in this section:

1. Observing processing behaviors
2. Marie Clay’s definition of reading
3. Complexity of a literacy processing theory
4. The learner’s strategic control over processing
5. Reading and writing continuous text
6. Reciprocity of reading and writing
7. Change over time
8. By different paths to common outcomes
9. Necessary features of instruction

1. Observing processing behaviors
Marie Clay’s theory of literacy processing is built on her rigorous observational methodology. And we are the beneficiaries of her unusual lens for observing the development of a literacy processing system in the children we teach (see Askew, 2009).

Observation is a hallmark of Reading Recovery — and has influenced educators around the world in thinking about an unusual lens to observe literacy behaviors in order to inform teaching. Think about the observation tools Reading Recovery teachers use and what they reveal about change over time in literacy processing behaviors. Observation of the learner tells us if instructional materials are at an appropriate level; if the child is building a meaning-based system, demonstrating strategic activity such as control of monitoring and problem solving; and if the child’s literacy learning is changing over time.

It is theory that decides what can be observed.
— Albert Einstein —

In a recent presentation by Peter Johnston (RRCNA, 2017), he quoted Einstein to make the point that whether you can observe a thing depends on the theory you use. In order to be effective in assessment, teachers need to have a strong theory of literacy development, held together by the big picture so they can attend appropriately to the various details of development. Marie confirmed in her research that we are able to observe these processes.

2. Marie Clay’s definition of reading
You are all familiar with Marie’s definition of reading. But were you aware that this definition was explored during her research in the early 1960s and was a core part of her original study?

While preparing this article, I reread Marie’s dissertation and was once again amazed by the genius of her thinking and research methodology more than 50 years ago. It was truly revolutionary. She demonstrated that literacy processing behaviors can be observed early on — she described how her data supported this definition. Think about how you can observe the literacy processing behaviors listed in her definition below:
Reading is a message-getting, problem-solving activity, which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practised. It is complex because:

- within the directional constraints of written language
- verbal and perceptual behaviours
- are purposefully directed
- in some integrated way
- to the problems of extracting sequences of information from texts

Clay’s research yielded evidence of the first three bullets above in emergent behaviors. Behaviors in the last four bullets are beginning to develop and are critical for reading progress; it is in these aspects that the child becomes a reader by reading (Clay, 1966). This is a conceptually loaded definition — worthy of careful discussion with your colleagues. Be sure to consider how assessment in Reading Recovery is tied to Clay’s literacy processing theory.

3. Complexity of a literacy processing theory

Marie Clay argued that her definition of reading was complex. The following quotes from Clay present a clear picture of the complexity of her theory of literacy processing.

In contrast to a simple theory of learning, such as one which rates the learning of phonemic awareness or some other single variable as the first significant thing to learn about literacy, RR’s complex theory of literacy learning supports the view that there are many parts of literacy processing which can be difficult for children. Different children have different strengths and weaknesses, and there may be many causes of difficulty varying from child to child. (Clay, 2001, 2015, pp. 300–301)

Even though a simpler theory may suffice for most children, I am certain that a view of complexity is the kind of understanding required to deliver results in an early intervention programme aiming to prevent subsequent literacy difficulties in as many children as possible. (Clay, 2001, 2015, p. 138)

We are all familiar with ‘simple theories of literacy acquisition.’ They continue to persist. In fact, across my 30 years in Reading Recovery, some literacy folks continue to challenge Clay’s complex theory without evidence. Although their challenges are frustrating to us, we are armed with evidence of complexity.

Think about what the reader can potentially draw from a complex model that aren’t available in a simple theory:

- current knowledge and understanding
- language competencies
- visual information
- phonological information
- knowledge of printing conventions

And the reader does this “in ways which extend both the searching and linking processes as well as the item knowledge repertoires” (Clay, 2001, 2015, p. 224).

In addition to what the reader can potentially draw from, Clay made the argument that many working systems work together to make literacy processing possible.

Theoretical arguments can be made for many working systems in the brain which

- search for and use verbal and perceptual information governed by directional rules;
- other systems which work on that information and make decisions;
- other systems which monitor and verify those decisions; and
- systems which produce responses.

Working in complex networks these systems make literacy processing possible. (Clay, 2001, 2015, p. 1; format altered for emphasis)

That’s quite a contrast to learning the sounds of letters in a prescribed order or a ‘Letter of the Week’ focus! Marie Clay had faith in teachers’ ability to work with a complex theory — and in their desire to do so.

If the reader thinks that a complex theory of literacy learning is too difficult for the classroom teacher, it gives pause for thought that classroom teachers across the world have become RR teachers who work with such a complex theory because it helps them to accelerate the progress of the children who are being left behind by their classmates for any number of reasons. (Clay, 2001, 2015, p. 138)
4. The learner’s strategic control over processing

Many of our conversations in Reading Recovery focus on the evidence of a learner’s strategic activity while reading and writing. We’re all familiar with terms Reading Recovery teachers use to describe child’s in-the-head behaviors such as strategic activity, strategic behaviors, reading work, processing, etc. In the general literacy field, however, often the term strategy is only relegated to the teacher, but our relegation to the child is crucial.

We know these are in-the-head activities initiated by the learner and we know that it is the learner who needs to pick up information, work on it, make a decision, and evaluate the result. And we know that the teacher can only tentatively infer the processes used by the child.

Early on, Marie wrote that it was surprising to many educators that there was no apparent emphasis on skill training in Reading Recovery. Her response revealed the theory behind the procedures.

The theory behind the procedures assumes that the big discovery task for the young reader is to find out what kinds of information exist in texts and what the reader has to attend to in order to extract that information (Clay, 1990b). … So the beginning reader has to learn

- to get meaning (another word for information) from texts;
- to discover how his or her oral language knowledge relates to texts;
- to work out how available syntactic awareness is relevant to reading tasks;
- to learn that existing phonological awareness can be applied to reading;
- to find out how visual information provides cues and facilitates processing of letters, clusters, words, phrases, and various print conventions, including tracking information, spacings, and punctuation; and
- to discover how many other things about books and the way they are presented help the reader. (Clay, 1991, pp. 67–68, format altered for emphasis)

That revelation was eye-opening to many educators. The emphasis was on the learner!

5. Reading and writing continuous text

Those who accept a simple theory of reading and writing generally focus on the items of language such as letters, words, and sounds before expecting children to read and write actual text. Yet the following quotes support Clay’s theoretical position of reading and writing continuous text.

Most written language occurs as continuous text, so the focal task for the learner is to problem-solve the messages of continuous text. That is another one of my assumptions. Teaching many words and letters in isolation before you allow the child to read or write a text does not seem like the appropriate learning context for laying down the foundational neural networks. (Clay, 2016, p. 6)

A theory of reading continuous texts cannot arise from a theory of word reading. It involves problem-solving and the integration of behaviours not studied in a theory about analyzing words. It must, however, explain the role of word reading and letter recognition within the theory of reading continuous text. (Clay, 2016, p. 16)

In addition, whenever possible the child will read and write continuous texts. He will not be diverted from printed texts to pictorial material or puzzles but will be taught what he needs to learn in the context of continuous texts. (Clay, 2016, p. 20)

Engage in a discussion with your colleagues about the following questions posed by Marie Clay:

- What is it about continuous text that challenges a reader or writer?
- What does a child have to do when reading or writing continuous text?
- What is the child likely to miss out on when the instruction places a heavy emphasis on letters, sounds, and words in reading or spelling, which steals all the child’s attention? (Clay, 2001, 2015, p. 5, format altered for emphasis)

6. Reciprocity of reading and writing

An important element in Marie Clay’s theory is her understanding that reading and writing yield reciprocal benefits.

Reading seems to help writing and writing seems to help reading, especially in the first year of literacy instruction. They work together reciprocally, one boosting the other. How? We may never explain how, in the brain, one activity boosts the effectiveness of another, but we can think how good car drivers
monitor the world through the windscreen and take in information from rear vision and side mirrors, using several sets of information to take appropriate action. The ways in which children explore print as they write and as they read somehow seem to give the young learner a better overview of the complexity of language in print. Some detail that has caught the child’s attention turns up again in a different kind of situation. (Clay, 2013, p. 102)

Clay summarized the benefits of learning to read and write simultaneously.

- In short, writing allows a slow analysis of detail in print;
- both reading and writing draw on the same sources of knowledge about letters, sounds, chunks, clusters, words, syntax (or grammar and sentence construction), the rules of discourse, and narrative structures and genre differences;
- gains in reading may enrich writing and vice versa; and
- dipping into a large pool of both reading and writing knowledge will help those with limited knowledge of the language, and may have cognitive advantages. (Clay, 2014, p. 154; 1998, p. 139; format altered for emphasis)

Clay, however, cautions that “this reciprocity does not occur spontaneously. The teacher must remember to direct the child to use what he knows in reading when he is writing and vice versa” (Clay, 2016, p. 23).

7. Change over time
How do most American educators measure a child’s literacy progress — with tests, book levels, benchmarks, measures of isolated reading/writing skills? Marie Clay argued for an alternative view of change over time in literacy achievement.

It is referred to as the ‘literacy processing’ view of progress during literacy acquisition. When we study how children work on texts as they read and write irrespective of how teachers are teaching, we arrive at a description of progress which is different. (Clay, 2001, 2015, p. 42)

We know that in Reading Recovery our view of children’s progress in reading and writing calls for us to observe on a daily basis the changes taking place as they engage with language in print. Take time to consider what your daily observations and records reveal about each child’s movement toward an effective literacy processing system. “The significant question at any stage of progress is not ‘How much does he know?’ but rather ‘What operations does he carry out and what kinds of operations has he neglected to use?’” (Clay, 1991, 2015, p. 313). It would be interesting to have a discussion with your colleagues about these two very different approaches to determining the progress of a young reader and writer.

8. By different paths to common outcomes
Marie Clay knew that children take on literacy knowledge in very different ways, recognizing that the explanations for difficulties are diverse (see Clay, 2014 and 1998). For example, consider the differences among children in language development, experiences with print and books, understanding of concepts about print, and the list goes on and on. Yet many instructional programs assume that all children acquire literacy in much the same way (Jones & Smith-Burke, 1999).

No one knows better than Reading Recovery teachers that children get to common outcomes by taking different paths. Diversity among learners includes much more than cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity.

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No one knows better than Reading Recovery teachers that children get to common outcomes by taking different paths. Diversity among learners includes much more than cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Too often we fail to acknowledge diversity in ways of learning. Just as in life, children take different paths to learning — especially when learning complex processes like reading and writing. Understanding the benefits and challenges of diversity among learners calls for a teacher who tunes in to the individual nature of the process of learning. This is especially vital when working with children experiencing difficulties in learning to read and write.
9. Necessary features of instruction

A significant difference between our complex theory of literacy learning and a simpler theory is the role of the learner and the role of the teacher. How often have we said in our past lives, “Well, I taught that” without asking “Did the child learn that?”

As we consider our teaching as it relates to our theory, this quote may be helpful:

The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.
—Mark Van Doren—

Isn’t that what a skilled Reading Recovery teacher does? And her assistance must be directly tied to the child’s development of a literacy processing system.

If we are going to operate under a theory of literacy processing, shouldn’t we work from Marie Clay’s list of necessary features of instruction? Rather than risk summarizing these features, I will quote her words while modifying the format somewhat.

• 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 by 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 on mere correctness and habitual responses, and
  – would temporarily value responses that were partially correct for whatever they contributed toward correctness.

• The teacher would set the level of task difficulty 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.

(Clay, 2001, 2015, p. 225; format altered for emphasis)

This list is a virtual treasure trove for Reading Recovery teachers, offering an amazing discussion opportunity for professional development. Talk with colleagues about each necessary feature and what each one means for teaching moves. As you discuss each feature, talk about WHY each one is necessary.

To accommodate all of these necessary features of instruction, you will need to know each child very well and use all of the tools available to you in order to discover change over time in his literacy processing behaviors. And it will also be important to explore the ways you can facilitate the learning of each child in all parts of the lesson. So, there is a lot of in-the-head processing necessary for us as teachers!

And you are all familiar with Marie’s caution about our teaching remaining flexible and tentative. As we grow in our understandings of why our decisions may be helpful for a particular child at a given time, we will grow in our own independence to make tentative decisions and will be flexible in monitoring or evaluating our own decisions.

Again, the theory should guide our actions as in this quote:

In whatever way we conceptualize the processing systems ... they must be infinitely flexible and temporarily tentative during the acquisition of literacy. Such flexibility must be important for young learners because they do not yet understand the nature of the problems (see Spiro et al., 1987). Anything set in stone could become an impediment. (Clay, 2001, 2015, p. 103)

A discussion of what it means to be flexible and tentative is a must for Reading Recovery teachers.
A Final Challenge

In Mary Anne Doyle’s 2013 seminal chapter about Marie Clay’s theoretical perspective, she offered this important link to Reading Recovery:

Clay was astute in transitioning her theory to practice, making a remarkable difference for children, teachers, and schools. … The success of her Reading Recovery early intervention, substantiated internationally by ongoing analyses of student data, attests to the robustness of her theoretical perspectives of literacy acquisition, children’s learning, professional development, and systems design. (Doyle, 2013, p. 654)

As Reading Recovery professionals, we must continue to explore Clay’s theory — and look for answers to the ‘why’ questions. It’s what makes Reading Recovery so stimulating to us as learners. So, what are some of those questions?

• Why is each lesson component included in the framework? That’s a good beginning discussion.
• Then, for each teaching move ask, “Why am I making that decision?”
• What was the impact of that decision? Evaluate your decision.
• Challenge your colleagues by asking ‘why’ questions.
• Encourage your colleagues to challenge you with the ‘why’ questions.

Reading Recovery teachers need to know why they make the decisions they do — and be able to monitor and evaluate the impact of their decisions. Consider this quote with Marie Clay’s theory of literacy processing in mind:

The final test of a theory is its capacity to solve the problems which originated it.
— George Dantzig —

Marie Clay’s tireless inquiry and search for a theory to explain children’s literacy learning certainly has given us direction in our work with children and has the capacity to take us into the future.

I close with the words of Marie Clay about the role of the theory underlying Reading Recovery to prevent subsequent literacy failure.

When we search for early interventions which have sound theoretical arguments for claiming to prevent subsequent failure we are taking a developmental point of view. They must place importance on early experience as a foundation for later experience, as the seed from which complex systems develop, and they must pay close attention to the rapid day-to-day changes over time in children’s ways of processing information in print. …

Learners would need to be able to read and write texts relatively independently in ways that could lead to the learner taking on new competencies through his or her own efforts in the classroom. …

The aim is to enable eight-year old readers to develop the strategic base for the complex literacy processing with which they will need to engage as ten-, twelve-, or sixteen-year old readers. To avoid subsequent limitations an early intervention … must ensure that readers and writers become competent independent processors of new information and that they have ways of going beyond the known when necessary. A treatment programme must create a broad-based foundation of cognitive competencies with the potential to be self-extending at some later time. (Clay, 2001, 2015, pp. 219–220)

References


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**About the Author**

Billie Askew is professor emerita at Texas Woman’s University where she served as a trainer and director of the Reading Recovery Center. Billie worked for more than 20 years in public schools as a classroom teacher, reading teacher, Reading Recovery teacher leader, and administrator. She continues to actively support Reading Recovery as a trainer consultant to the Reading Recovery Council of North America and in many other roles.

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**About the Cover**

When Legend Stevenson entered Reading Recovery, he was a very reluctant reader who lacked confidence and skills needed to be successful. By the time his lessons were discontinued in the fall, however, he was very different. His Reading Recovery teacher, Johnie Cooke, remembers that he could read fluently and actually enjoyed reading, and that he extended his early gains and ended the year above grade level! His mother is grateful for Reading Recovery and continues to thank his teacher. Now a third grader at Adlai Stevenson Elementary School in Cleveland, Legend loves reading and wrestling, and he would like to be an artist when he grows up.
It was the beginning of the school year in August 2006, in St. Charles Parish, Louisiana — a small river parish located 25 miles west of New Orleans. I was just beginning my first year as a Reading Recovery teacher. A range of emotions filled me as I understood the potential impact my planning and instruction would have on my students.

Bryce Rochelle was a first-grade student at Norco Elementary in 2006. He was selected for Reading Recovery® and was assigned to me. Realizing the impact that I could make as I guided him along his path to literacy learning was both exciting and humbling. I remember Bryce as a curious child whose interests included everything active and outdoors. He enjoyed fishing, playing ball, running, and more running. Some family members even referred to him as “Mr. Activity.”

His initial interests in books and school took a backseat to other things. Bryce was a struggling reader. According to him, some of his memories were “not so great” back then; he had trouble reading and comprehending. He describes his early experiences with reading as “being a hassle” and remembers feeling scared and especially fearful of being asked to read in...
front of others. I recall his first lesson. He entered the room and opted to find a place under the table instead of sitting at it ready to read and write.

Bryce was ready. Although he had yet to discover the joy of reading and writing, it was my job to meet him where he was and show him how much potential he truly had. Following him along his path to literacy learning was my responsibility and, over time, he learned more about reading and writing. He preferred writing because “it was where I could write my thoughts and my memories down and no one could judge me for it, because it was my work and only my work.”

Because of Reading Recovery, Bryce learned to read and write. His reading and writing would continue to develop with every new opportunity. According to his mom, she was excited for him to be a part of the program, as she had faith and knew he would get the extra support he needed. This early intervention gave him the confidence to know that with effort, he could achieve whatever he set out to do.

Bryce shared that throughout school, he has always tried his hardest on homework, quizzes, and tests no matter what.

“Being a successful and fluent reader makes a great impression,” Bryce said. “If you are a great reader, you will be able to understand any problem to solve in any class.”

This confidence and perseverance has allowed him to accelerate and experience the success he worked for throughout school. Now a senior at Destrehan High School in Destrehan, LA, Bryce’s current course load includes AP calculus, AP biology, world history, and English IV. He proudly shares that he has made honor roll every year in high school. He has maintained steady grades, winning numerous academic awards while playing on the varsity baseball team. He even earned a spot on the first all-district team last year.

Today, his mother is most proud of the fact that he is a responsible, caring young man who takes his classes very seriously and strives to maintain good grades while balancing a busy athletic schedule. He expects to graduate with honors and anticipatest being awarded a TOPS (Taylor Opportunity Program for Students) scholarship to Louisiana State University where he has been accepted and will study engineering.

Bryce will be attending Louisiana State University to study engineering.

Allison Puissegur continues to impact students as a Reading Recovery teacher leader in St. Charles Parish Public Schools.
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The Long Beach Story
The story of the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) Intensive Intervention Model spans more than a decade. It illustrates how the interdependence between central office leaders and school leaders can be used to accelerate teacher skill development and confidence, build collective efficacy, and increase rates of student success.

Even after a 19-year commitment to maintaining a robust district Reading Recovery® program, the realization that Reading Recovery was having limited reach beyond the students it served created enough dissonance among LBUSD leaders to consider methods for broader impact. Did we want every classroom to be a place where a highly skilled teacher could deliver high-quality first teaching? Yes. Did we want every classroom to be a place where guided reading was implemented based upon Clay’s literacy processing theory? Yes. Did we want every school to have a system of intervention that moved Reading Recovery from a stand-alone program to an integrated part of a response to intervention (RTI) system? Yes. And we believed that our Reading Recovery staff had the expertise, experience, and tenacity to support the implementation of an intervention system that broadened the impact of their work in schools.

When reading about efforts to improve outcomes for students in urban school systems, it will be no surprise to learn that many efforts do not reach their potential because there is a lack of alignment between central office systems and the efforts of leaders and teachers in schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Malen, Ogwaa, & Kranz, 1990; Ravitch & Vittert, 1997). While central office staff and school staff are simultaneously working as hard as they can, their efforts do not support one another. According to a Wallace Foundation study (2010) on central office transformation, “...teaching and learning improvements at single schools and multiple schools depend not only on what happens in schools but on how school district central offices create and implement supports for change.” (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, p. 5).

It is with this research in mind that LBUSD has sought to change the implementation outcomes for students through its Intensive Intervention Model.

Based on our experiences, we believe that every district committed to changing the dynamic between central office and schools in service to students has the power to do so. With a shared vision for student success,
central office and school-based roles exist that complement one another and help create a culture of shared accountability and greater opportunity for student success.

The Intensive Intervention Model was developed after many years of individual LBUSD schools implementing Reading Recovery as an intervention for their students. In fact, 6,527 students were served over the course of 19 years prior to the implementation of the model. In support of schools, the LBUSD maintained its own Reading Recovery training center, staffed with a Reading Recovery teacher leader. During this same period of time, elementary school principals and support staff (i.e., counselors and psychologists) were trained in the development and use of RTI systems. Many other factors also had an influence on student achievement in the years leading up to the implementation of the Intensive Intervention Model and should be considered context for understanding the current chapter of the story. Most notably, LBUSD has long focused on high-quality first teaching, balanced literacy including guided reading, and high-quality job embedded professional development.

All of these aspects of district efforts were used to inform what became the Intensive Intervention Model.

LBUSD serves approximately 75,000 students across 54 elementary and K–8 schools, 15 middle schools, and 13 high schools. Currently the third largest district in California, the district’s students speak more than 40 different languages and approximately 20% of the students are English learners. Like many urban districts, a high percentage of students (69%) in Long Beach face the challenges associated with living in poverty.

These demographic factors contributed to the district’s decision to develop an Intensive Intervention Model as it strived to meet the needs of all students by maximizing the use of supplemental funds (e.g., Title I) during a budget crisis and building a model that it could replicate in different schools. In addition, since rates of student improvement varied across schools, the district desired to create a model that would specifically target and accelerate the rate of improvement in its highest need schools.

The model emerged in a district where the organizational culture can be described as one of continuous improvement that includes the regular collection and analysis of data, learning from one another across schools, collaboration between central office and schools, and a system of accountability that incorporates all stakeholders in monitoring the success of its work.

The Intensive Intervention Model includes three pillars summarized in Figure 1. Each pillar is considered critical to the model’s success. While individually the components will likely be familiar to many literacy educators, what may be different than other intervention approaches is the implementation of the three pillars in concert with one another. In its full use, the model is designed to positively impact student success across K–2 classrooms, while building the capacity of K–2 teachers to meet their students’ needs.

Coordination of services within and across the three pillars is essential to the success of the Intensive Intervention Model. Without it, all stakeholders are working in isolation and not coordinating their efforts to build a comprehensive literacy system. In the LBUSD model, it is the coordination of services, the commitment to communication, and the acknowledge-

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Figure 1. Three Pillars of LBUSD’s Intensive Intervention Model

**Reading Recovery**
- Early identification
- Short-term intervention
- Lowest-achieving first-grade students
- Full implementation

**Classroom Coaching**
- Small-group instruction (differentiation)
- Focus in Grades K-2
- Collaborative coaching
- Accountability

**Staff Development**
- Linking theory to practice
- Seamless instruction during whole group and small group and individual tutoring
- Build capacity
ment that “we all have a job to do” that have led to the model’s success. Each role (central office and school site) involved in implementing this model is summarized in Figure 2 and will be explained further.

**Central Office Leadership**

In order for all three pillars of the Intensive Intervention Model to be successful, central office leaders must play a crucial role. The support of the LBUSD superintendent, through allocation of funds and support of the vision, was paramount to this effort. The deputy superintendent of schools, who oversees early childhood efforts in the district, supports the alignment between preschool and the early elementary grades, as well as advocates for early intervention. She is actively involved in all aspects of the model, including serving as the district Reading Recovery site coordinator. Active involvement includes regular visits to Intensive Intervention sites, collaboration with the teacher leader, and analysis of program data in order to make informed decisions.

The office tasked with supervising elementary schools provides strategic support and input about the implementation of the Intensive Intervention Model. The assistant superintendent of elementary schools regularly participates in site walkthroughs and Reading Recovery principals’ meetings and facilitates communication across the division. All of these efforts are coordinated through ongoing communication and regular opportunities to meet and share ideas.

**The Role of School Principal**

In the LBUSD Intensive Intervention Model, the site principal acts as an accelerant to the success of the model. Building on the expectation that principals are instructional leaders, the school principal provides formal and informal feedback to both classroom teachers and coaches, closely monitors implementation efforts, and seeks observational data to use in planning professional development with the team. The principal connects the learning that is taking place within the intervention model to the professional learning of the staff at large and readily integrates the model as a component of their school action plans and improvement efforts. Principals who have experienced the model at their schools report tremendous growth in their own working knowledge around early literacy, enabling them to label effective early learning and intervention practices and to advocate for early intervention actions on their campuses. It is the school principal who ensures that this model becomes an integral part of the fabric of the school.

**The Role of the Reading Recovery Teacher Leader**

The role of the Reading Recovery teacher leader is multifaceted and goes beyond the coordination and implementation of the three pillars. The teacher leader’s expertise and experience with early literacy teaching and learning are valued and utilized in the district at large. The teacher leader attends and participates in ongoing professional development as an affiliated site with the Saint Mary’s College of California University Training Center. Apart from providing support, coaching, and training of Reading Recovery teachers, the teacher leader develops those Reading Recovery-trained professionals as literacy coaches and early literacy staff developers. This endeavor takes time and on-going training and coaching.
During training sessions, the literacy coaches have opportunities to collaborate, work through challenging issues at their school sites, study and use common coaching and staff development resources, and provide feedback on how to grow and improve the coaching and staff development components of the Intensive Intervention Model. As Askew, Pinnell, and Scharer (2014) state, “An effective comprehensive literacy system requires a high level of expertise among educators within the school. When children struggle with some aspect of learning, the teachers most expert in those areas should provide the intervention service” (p. 24). Training sessions with literacy coaches help to develop this expertise.

Two to three times a year, the teacher leader also provides early literacy training for central office staff and school site administrators, aligned with teacher learning. In addition to the content learning, these meetings provide opportunities for central office staff, principals, and assistant principals to learn from each other, share ideas and resources, and collectively move forward in building a comprehensive literacy system at school sites and within the district.

Bringing school site administrators and central office staff into the implementation of the model was another critical decision that helped build, grow, and strengthen the Intensive Intervention Model, as illustrated by coaching walk-throughs. Three times a year, central office staff, school site administrators, and the teacher leader observe the coaching component of the model in action. The coaching walk-throughs begin with a briefing conducted by the coaches who share the work they implement with assigned classroom teachers. Classroom observations follow this briefing, and the walk-through concludes with a debriefing by all participants. The classroom observations are focused on the coaching in action in a small group instructional setting. The debriefing portion of coaching walk-throughs allows all participants to share insights, ask questions, and suggest possible next steps to move their work forward. The coaching walk-throughs have also added a level of accountability for all participants.

Developing strong relationships and building trust among all stakeholders provide authentic opportunities to be vulnerable and transparent — and to take risks. Continuous improvement could not happen at an accelerated rate without the variables mentioned previously.

The use of data is an integral part of measuring our individual and collective work on improving early literacy teaching and learning at school sites and within our district. The teacher leader takes on the task of analyzing site, district, and state data for literacy growth for all students. For example, after careful analysis of Observation Survey tasks at the highest needs schools, Concepts About Print scores were noted as lagging. It was discovered that shared reading and interactive writing were not being used consistently, if at all. Training and coaching were provided to improve and remedy the situation. Across the Intensive Intervention Model, data is reviewed regularly to inform, improve, and refine the collective work of building a comprehensive literacy system at school sites and within our district.

The Role of the Reading Recovery Teacher/Literacy Coach

The role of the Reading Recovery teacher has expanded greatly in the Intensive Intervention Model. The
teacher supports and works with the highest need first-grade students by providing one-to-one literacy instruction using individually designed lessons. The second role is as a literacy coach, working with all K–2 teachers at a school site on early literacy teaching and learning, with special emphasis on guided reading. On a daily basis, these literacy coaches work in classrooms with their assigned teachers. In contrast to previous intervention models, a deliberate decision was made to focus Reading Recovery teachers on teacher development—leading to increased student achievement—rather than assigning the teacher to direct student intervention (e.g., pullout student support). Although the literacy coaches work with all students in the classroom setting, the highest-need students are given priority. The classroom teacher and the literacy coach work together to set goals for student achievement in literacy development and for the refinement of teaching practices.

Each week, the classroom teacher and literacy coach participate in a coaching cycle as illustrated in Figure 3. Since the role of the coach is not evaluative, the coaching cycle builds mutual accountability between the literacy coach and classroom teacher for refining teaching practices and moving the work forward. It is imperative that the literacy coach works on building a strong relationship with the classroom teacher in order to gain trust and earn respect; if trust and respect are missing, the work will be challenging, move at a slower pace, or even become stalled at times.

The third role of the Reading Recovery teacher is early literacy staff developer. This component of the model helps bring the theory and practice together for classroom teachers and school site administrators. K–2 teachers annually participate in 12 hours of early literacy professional development during release time from their assigned duties. The content of the professional development is linked directly to daily literacy teaching and coaching back in the classroom. This professional development allows classroom teachers to be better equipped to help all students in the classroom because they are learning the why and how behind early literacy best practices.

The Reading Recovery teachers/literacy coaches are important members of the RTI team at their school sites. Due to their daily and intense work with all K–2 students, they are equipped with data, daily teaching experiences, and observations to share. This information helps guide decisions and next steps for the most-in-need students at a school site. Brandon is an example of a student who was followed closely and provided support in Grades K–2. In kindergarten he was identified as being at risk for a myriad of reasons. In particular, classroom and district assessments revealed he was struggling with literacy development. In first grade, he qualified for Reading Recovery and his lessons were successfully discontinued. With regular support and monitoring, he entered second grade as a capable reader and writer and continues to do well in school both academically and socially. This success story was made possible due to the coordination of services, regular communication by all members of the RTI team, and the expanded sphere of influence of the Reading Recovery teachers.

### Figure 3. LBUSD Reading Recovery Teacher’s Weekly Coaching Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Set purpose for coaching</td>
<td>• Literacy coach models instructional strategy/best practice for classroom teacher</td>
<td>• Classroom teacher tries out instructional strategy/best practice</td>
<td>• Classroom teacher or literacy coach refines instructional strategy/best practice</td>
<td>• Reflect and plan for next steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Classroom teacher observes</td>
<td>• Debriefing after session</td>
<td>• Literacy coach observes and debriefs with classroom teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Role of the Classroom Teacher

All K–2 classroom teachers at an Intensive Intervention Model school participate in the coaching model and early literacy staff development. A central focus has been on the development of guided reading practices in all classrooms. Teachers work actively with their assigned literacy coach to refine early literacy teaching and learning in their classrooms. Since teaching is isolating by nature, most classroom teachers welcome the help, support, and guidance of a literacy coach. Initially, the classroom teacher and literacy coach work collaboratively to coordinate schedules, arrange the classroom setting for small-group instruction, set teaching and learning goals, examine data to form initial guided reading groups, and gather appropriate books to ensure daily implementation of guided reading. Furthermore, the classroom teacher participates in the weekly coaching cycle and professional development sessions described in Figure 3.

As the collective work has evolved, the skill set, successful experiences, and confidence of classroom teachers have grown immensely. The most important and exciting change for classroom teachers was seeing student literacy achievement improve. DeFord, Lyons, and Pinnell (1993) state:

> Providing high-quality instructional time for children at risk can be thought of as a safety net that captures children, offering more support at a critical time, so that they can fully profit from good, ongoing teaching in their school or district. That, in itself, will have impact on a system. With good coverage, almost all children can enter the world of literacy and begin early to use literacy in their learning of content. (p. 203)

Building capacity at a school site is one of the original tenets of the Intensive Intervention Model. Over time—with daily teaching of guided reading, effective coaching, and early literacy professional development—the majority of classroom teachers participating in the model have become instructional leaders at their sites, welcoming visitors and colleagues to observe their teaching. Many teachers have allowed their coaches or principals to video record them in order to be used as examples for other colleagues at their site. Another positive outcome resulted in the inclusion of classroom teachers and principals in the planning and delivery of early literacy staff development. These changes and outcomes could not happen without building strong relationships, consistent and effective early literacy teaching practices, professional development, accountability, and regular communication in all components of the Intensive Intervention Model.

Getting Started

For a school or district that is committed to building a comprehensive literacy system, there are a number of ideas for getting started that may be helpful. Excellent resources that have been utilized over time in LBUSD include Promising Literacy for Every Child: Reading Recovery and a Comprehensive Literacy System (Askew, Pinnell, & Scharer, 2014), Systems for Change In Literacy Education (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001), and The Art of Coaching (Aguilar, 2013).

Beyond these foundational resources, districts should consider defining and recording their aspirations for what an early literacy system could accomplish. Figure 4 highlights some of the lessons learned in LBUSD.

Figure 4. Lessons Learned in LBUSD

- Always keep the children in mind and at the center of all decisions.
- Celebrate small and big changes.
- Communication at all levels is important.
- Examine many different types of data.
- Leadership at all levels is necessary.
- Building strong relationships is essential.
- Don’t be afraid to innovate and take risks.
- Change takes time.
- Be willing to change course if what you are doing is not working.
Implementation

look like in their district. Make time to take stock of current resources and personnel in order to see what is possible. Pilot ideas or model at a few schools first before expanding systemwide. Make a 3- to 5-year commitment to measure the model’s effectiveness — allowing the time and space to experiment, course correct, and grow from learning together. Select school sites eager to build a comprehensive literacy system in order to build momentum with early adopters. Choose and develop signature literacy instructional practices that can be shared across the system. Schedule regular time with all stakeholders to reflect, redefine, redirect and review the model or system for continuous growth. Finally, celebrate and acknowledge the group’s strengths and together work on areas for improvement.

Conclusion

As we reflect on our work over the past 8 years, we have learned a great deal about the ingredients of an intensive intervention system that positively influence individual students and support the capacity-building of an entire school and other schools within the system. A few of those lessons learned are summarized in Figure 4.

In a district that places such high value on continuous improvement, we find ourselves celebrating how far we have come in building a comprehensive literacy system and asking ourselves how to have an even greater impact on our students’ and teachers’ lives. We recognize that continuing to link the three tiers of intervention with the three pillars of the model is imperative. We must also continue to cultivate leadership at all levels, provide high-quality professional development for teachers and leaders while pushing ourselves to cultivate shared accountability that will ensure that our students benefit from our efforts. Clay (2014) concludes:

The matter of accommodating diversity and individual differences in learning paths is complex. We must keep our criteria relative and give assistance to the lowest achievers in any program. It is time for us to institutionalize early preventive intervention accessible to all children who need it, as part of the overall system of delivering education, and as the first step in a process of improvement of literacy learning at all levels of schooling. (p. 232)

In LBUSD, we will continue to strive to embody Dr. Clay’s vision.

References


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Understanding Dyslexia Laws and Policies

Rachael Gabriel, University of Connecticut

Over the past decade, 37 states have passed new legislation related to identification, remediation, and/or awareness of dyslexia in public schools. Even as a sense of urgency for legislative action regarding dyslexia has surged, debates about the nature, definition, diagnosis, and remediation of dyslexia still continue. For example, in 2016, two major literacy-related professional organizations, the International Literacy Association (ILA) and the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), engaged in a public debate over definitions of and implications for dyslexia as a learning disability label (see ILA 2016a, 2016b; IDA, 2016). The exchange between these two organizations is only one example of the larger push and pull of controversy and contradiction that surrounds dyslexia-related policies and practices. This creates enormous challenges for families and educators who aim to be fully responsive to student needs in a polarized and complex policy context.

In this article I describe current trends in dyslexia legislation, consider the significance of current policy and advocacy efforts, and discuss the implications of recent state policy changes for educators of students with reading difficulties.

Dyslexia Legislation: A Brief History

Reading instruction has been a focus of state and federal legislation in the U.S. for more than 50 years. Literacy and literacy rates are so often framed as public policy issues that reading instruction—particularly beginning reading instruction—is a popular focal point for education and social reform efforts alike. Though federal legislation in particular had been focused on funding literacy programs, assessments, personnel, and materials, legislation related to the teaching of reading has become increasingly specific and prescriptive. At the state level, reading-related legislation specifies everything from how and where teachers are prepared and certified to teach reading, to how and when students are taught and assessed.

Dyslexia, a specific form of difficulty developing literacy, was identified during the 19th century and named in 1887 by a German ophthalmologist named Rudolph Berlin. Though it was known in some form 130 years ago, the first state law to reference dyslexia specifically was passed only 30 years ago. This was a note in Louisiana statute within a package of legislation that required vision and hearing testing for children entering school. Since current understandings of dyslexia suggest that it cannot be diagnosed based on a vision or hearing test, one might consider the first modern law to be a 1990 addition to Title 2 of California’s education code, which encouraged teacher preparation programs to discuss dyslexia with preservice teachers. Over the next 20 years, only eight states passed laws that included the word dyslexia … In 2011 and 2012 alone, an additional 10 states added dyslexia-specific legislation.

Over 20 years, only eight states passed laws that included the word dyslexia … In 2011 and 2012 alone, an additional 10 states added dyslexia-specific legislation.

1 Several online resources can be used to track trends and changes in state dyslexia policies at the state level, including www.dyslegia.com, a website devoted to state and federal dyslexia and reading laws; and the International Dyslexia Association website’s legislation page, which includes a color-coded map showing patterns in the presence and coverage of dyslexia laws across states.
The recent swell in legislative activity has not led to uniform policies across states; however, the majority of U.S. states have considered and/or passed some or all of an identifiable package of legislation with a particular framing of dyslexia as a problem that can be remedied by public policy. Recent dyslexia-specific legislation can be understood along a continuum from least to most prescriptive policies (see Figure 1) with states falling at different points along the continuum with the passage of each new piece of legislation.

Of particular note when considering this framing is the work of a group called “Decoding Dyslexia, a parent-led grassroots movement” (Decoding Dyslexia, 2013). They have planted chapters in every state and several other countries and led lobbying efforts and letter-writing campaigns focused on a consistent set of policy goals, arguments, and statistics. Their five policy goals, displayed in Figure 2, appear either in part or in their entirety in nearly all new dyslexia legislation across the country. Therefore, their efforts seem largely responsible for the recent surge in legislative activity related to dyslexia.

The significance of each goal will be examined in the section that follows. By examining this set in detail, I argue that a particular set of terms and ways of thinking and talking about dyslexia are identified, and these provide insight into productive and ethical responses in the current policy context.

![Figure 1. Continuum of Current Dyslexia Legislation](image)

- **Exploratory Committee and Adoption of the IDA definition**: EXAMPLE: MN, MS, MO, NM, RI, UT, WA, WV (11 TOTAL)
- **Mandated assessment and intervention**: EXAMPLE: AL, AR, CT, HI, IA, KY, LA, ME (11 TOTAL)
- **Prescribed assessment and intervention and/or teacher training**: EXAMPLE: IN, MA, MS, NE, NJ, OH, OK, OR, VA (10 TOTAL)
- **Prescribed teacher training and student screening and intervention**: EXAMPLE: NC, NH, NV, AK, TX (5 TOTAL)

**#1. A universal definition of dyslexia**

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-5th edition (DSM-5), published by the American Psychological Association (APA), is the standard classification reference for mental disorders in the U.S., and it has no entry for dyslexia. The only instance of the word is where it appears as “an alternative term used to refer to a pattern of learning difficulties characterized by problems with accurate or fluent word recognition, poor decoding, and poor spelling abilities” (2013, p. 67), under the broader category of “specific learning disability.” Other resources that do include dyslexia often provide varying definitions and descriptions of it. Just as Vellutino pointed out that existing definitions of specific learning disability “were based more on social and political expedience than on any compelling research” (2010, p. 7), there is no official definition of dyslexia that is universally accepted by academics and researchers.
This is important to advocates because, without specific reference in the DSM-5, there is no official or authoritative definition or set of diagnostic criteria in the scientific or medical community. Therefore, criteria can vary across states, disciplines (e.g., neuroscience, linguistics, psychology), and even individual practitioners. A student given a dyslexia label by a pediatrician in one region based on parent reports may or may not qualify when assessed by an educational psychologist in another after neuropsychological testing, or when tested by a neuroscientist using brain imaging techniques. Though a range of assessments may be considered potentially appropriate—especially in combination—there is no single gold standard, definitive assessment system for diagnosing dyslexia in school settings. There is also some debate about whether dyslexia is separate and unique from other reading difficulties, or just one of a few possible patterns of reading difficulty (Spear-Swerling, 2016). This is why the first step to creating dyslexia-specific legislation is to identify and impose a universal definition.

The lack of consensus around definition and diagnosis creates challenging dilemmas for public school personnel — dilemmas which often create conflict between schools and parents. Many disability categories have specific diagnostic criteria which are conventionally applied by a school psychologist, pediatrician, or relevant professional in order to make an official diagnosis. When it comes to learning disabilities in general, or dyslexia in particular, it is not always clear which professional should make the diagnosis, or which criteria should be applied. Many professionals do not feel qualified to diagnose and are unsure of where to refer students (National Public Radio [NPR], 2016). Since schools are vulnerable to lawsuits when parents’ expectations for assessments and services are not met, it is common for educators to receive guidance or even direct orders not to discuss any disability label until an official diagnosis has been made. Parents often report that the school denied the existence of dyslexia, was afraid to diagnose it, or put off diagnosis for too long (Gabriel & Woulfin, 2017; NPR, 2016) either because no one was willing to name it in official communication, or because confusion within a school system led to delays in diagnosis.

Another layer of complexity is added when individual researchers or research organizations argue there is no meaningful distinction between dyslexia and ‘garden-variety’ reading disability — pointing out that the starting point for instruction should always follow the individual instead of the label, and that studies of dyslexic readers show that even those who carry the label and the genetic markers can be successfully remediated using techniques that can be applied to a range of reading difficulties (e.g., Gebauer et al., 2012). This has led to a backlash among parents and advocates against “dyslexia deniers” who do not deny that some students have great difficulty learning to read, but do deny that dyslexia is different from reading disability in general and/or that it should be synonymous with a particular approach to instruction/remediation.

In 1994, the IDA brought together a group of professionals to create and popularize a ‘consensus definition.’ Advocacy goal #1 is aimed at state recognition of an updated version of IDA’s consensus definition in order to assert legitimacy and authority through state statutes influenced by dyslexia advocates rather than professional diagnostic manuals published by academics and leaders of professional organizations (e.g., the APA). This definition is not without critics, but has gained substantial recognition in recent years. Once enshrined in state law, it may become a taken-for-granted given that dyslexia is a natural and incontrovertible phenomenon with agreed-upon characteristics and features.

**IDA’s definition**
The IDA defines dyslexia as “a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor

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**Figure 2. Five Policy Goals of Decoding Dyslexia**

**An Advocacy Agenda**

1. A universal definition and understanding of “dyslexia” in the state education code
2. Mandatory teacher training on dyslexia, its warning signs and appropriate intervention strategies
3. Mandatory early screening tests for dyslexia
4. Mandatory dyslexia remediation programs, which can be accessed by both general and special education populations
5. Access to appropriate “assistive technologies” in the public school setting for students with dyslexia

SOURCE: Decoding Dyslexia, 2013
spelling and decoding abilities” (IDA, 2002, n.p.). The definition goes on to note:

These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. The definition identifies the root problem as phonological, but notes that secondary difficulties with comprehension and exposure to text may also occur, which explains why students with dyslexia might have more limited vocabulary and background knowledge despite normal or advanced cognitive abilities. This narrows what counts as dyslexia and supports the idea that it is unique from other general reading difficulties. This definition also contributes to the construction of dyslexia as naturally occurring (biological) and undeniable because it has a particular origin rather than being a diagnosis of exclusion.

The inclusion of neurobiology connects the definition to research that has identified particular genetic markers and neuroimaging patterns that have been associated with dyslexia (cf. Elliott & Grigorenko, 2014; Pugh & McCulard, 2009; Cornelissen, Hansen, Kringelbach, & Pugh, 2010) which further legitimize the assumption that dyslexia is natural and incontrovertible phenomenon with agreed-upon characteristics and features. In practice, even neuroscientists conducting imaging studies warn about differences in diagnostic criteria used from one study to the next. Kalra (2014) notes:

The biggest challenge in understanding dyslexia is “equifinality,” the idea that multiple causes and pathways can lead to the same (or similar) situations. In dyslexia research, that means that at least a handful of underlying problems could result in a specific reading impairment. (n.p.)

However, the IDA definition uses language to construct a version of dyslexia that is singular, real, clear, and cannot be denied. Despite advances in neuroscience technologies, methods for diagnosing dyslexia are not always clear or common. Given the range of potential assessment tools, some states approve a specific assessment to standardize criteria across the state, or approve a menu or assessment options to offer some standardization and some professional leeway. It is important to know that the lists of approved assessments vary both in length and content (some do not overlap). Given the complexity of addressing a language or literacy-based disability, the best approach to diagnose likely includes multiple professionals, including (but not limited to) classroom teachers, reading specialists, school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and special educators. Indeed most state menus include assessments traditionally given by reading specialists, school psychologists, and speech-language pathologists. Each professional should bring a unique perspective on language and literacy and a set of unique assessment tools that can be used to identify a persistent pattern of difficulty associated with dyslexia across settings.

#2. Mandatory teacher training on dyslexia

Policy goals 2–4 are dyslexia-specific versions of existing legislation in most states related to reading/literacy as described above. A logical extension of the idea that dyslexia is universal is that there are agreed-upon approaches to instruction for students with dyslexia. Part of the argument of the IDA is that “popularly employed reading approaches, such as Guided Reading or Balanced Literacy, are not effective for struggling readers. These approaches are especially ineffective for students with dyslexia because they do not focus on the decoding skills these students need to succeed in reading” (IDA, 2017). Instead, they argue “What does work is Structured Literacy, which prepares students to decode words in an explicit and systematic manner. This approach not only helps students with dyslexia, but there is substantial evidence that it is more effective for all readers” (n.p.).

By arguing that Structured Literacy is best for all students, the organization positions its term, Structured Literacy, as the only or best solution for reading instruction, thus positioning its program accreditation as the only or best measure of teacher preparation programs. This contrasts with ILA which currently serves as the accreditation body for most university-based reading teacher/specialist preparation programs.
The move towards advocating for Structured Literacy rather than multisensory or Orton-Gillingham-based approaches was admittedly strategic. Hal Malchow, IDA president, writes:

The term “Structured Literacy” is not designed to replace Orton Gillingham, Multi-Sensory, or other terms in common use. It is an umbrella term designed to describe all of the programs that teach reading in essentially the same way. In our marketing, this term will help us simplify our message and connect our successes. “Structured Literacy” will help us sell what we do so well. (Malchow, 2012, n.p.)

Thus, the term is explicitly linked to a purposeful positioning of IDA’s brand(s) of reading instruction (Orton-Gillingham-influenced approaches such as Wilson Reading® and Barton Reading & Spelling System®) in order to sell it for use in teacher preparation and school settings. It also complicates the process of determining whether the approach is research-based. Since Structured Literacy is an umbrella term that has only recently been applied to a small set of similar approaches, there is no research base on its effectiveness — let alone one that suggests that Structured Literacy (or any approach) is effective for all students. As ILA has pointed out, there is limited evidence for the effectiveness of many of the approaches included under that umbrella (2016). Yet, mandating teacher training on dyslexia implies that current training is not adequate to prepare teachers to work with dyslexia and that something else is required (in this case Structured Literacy may be implied). This means that IDA will get to ‘sell’ Structured Literacy. The implications of states’ use of this term will be discussed below.

The last phrase of goal #4 “which can be accessed by both general and special education students” demonstrates the distancing of dyslexia from the stigma of disability in general and the inclusion of a wide range of students under the umbrella of dyslexia. Both are significant trends in the history of popular understandings of dyslexia (Elliot & Grigorenko, 2014). In fact, Texas requires that dyslexia be identified as a “health impairment” rather than a learning disability in order to distinguish it from any cognitive impairment. This positions dyslexia as a genetic difference rather than a disability, which may reduce some of the social stigma attached to special education services and students with disabilities.

Between the first two advocacy goals an interpretative repertoire for understanding dyslexia as natural and incontrovertible has been identified by examining the contexts of terms like neurobiological, structured literacy, and universal. This “dyslexia as natural and incontrovertible” (Wetherell, 1998) repertoire includes discussions of neuroscience and genetics, while minimizing or marginalizing those who question the definitions or boundaries of dyslexia.

### #3. Mandatory student screening

As understandings of dyslexia have evolved over the past 130 years, estimates of prevalence have varied dramatically. The inclusion of a student screening provision in new dyslexia legislation mandates ongoing efforts to screen public school children for reading difficulties. Dyslexia advocates have recently popularized the ‘1 in 5’ estimate which suggests that up to 20% of the population may have dyslexia, though most are undiagnosed. This implies that public schools have been missing significant numbers of students — casting public school personnel as either ignorant or negligent. Thus, a distrust of public schools is inherent in a construction of dyslexia that highlights liberal or open-ended prevalence statistics.

More modest estimates place prevalence at 5–10% of the population (Siegle, 2006). Given that 20% of school-age students are diagnosed with a learning disability, and 80% of students with learning disability labels were referred for difficulties related to reading, an estimate around 10% is far closer to current identification levels (National Center on
Learning Disabilities, 2017). So, more conservative estimates are more supportive of current practice in public schools and do not point to the need for new or additional testing. New legislation that requires screening for dyslexia is aimed at increasing the number of children with dyslexia labels and/or the confidence with which schools determine whether dyslexia is present by specifying particular assessments that schools should use. By questioning existing testing practices, advocates open the door for new/additional testing, which expands the market for companies that generate and collect such assessment data.

Some states go as far as specifying which assessments must be used, while others provide a menu of options for districts. In either case, the consequence of the interpretative repertoire that constructs dyslexia as a natural, universal, unique phenomenon creates a need for dyslexia-specific assessments to be applied to more children than ever before. Within this repertoire, the knowledge and effectiveness of public school educators is questioned and portrayed as lacking.

This suggests that the instruction available in special education settings is not viewed as sufficient and that students with dyslexia need dyslexia-specific programs (not just individualized instruction), which, according to IDA, means Structured Literacy.

As mentioned in the discussion of the definition of dyslexia, the inclusion of “all students,” even general education students, may be viewed as both an effort to make these approaches seem universal/universally good and a way of distancing dyslexia from special education/learning disabilities in general. If good instruction for students with dyslexia is good instruction for all students, then dyslexia does not separate a student from his peers as much as another disability label might.

#4. Mandatory access to dyslexia remediation programs

Similar to the two previously described goals, the provision for access to remediation programs lies over and above existing special education law which requires all students with all disability labels to have access to free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. Notice that the provision is not for “appropriate” or “least restrictive” programming or instruction, but to “dyslexia remediation programs.”

One function of an increase in dyslexia diagnoses might be that more students get more assistance earlier. Another is that it fuels a rapidly expanding market for dyslexia-specific assessments, tools, trainings, and techniques. Though increased access to a now booming marketplace of educational materials and services is good news in terms of awareness and accessibility of relevant tools, it also means options proliferate and may be difficult for parents and professionals to evaluate. For example, in a 2002 news article in Britain’s The Guardian, the mother of a child with a dyslexia label described the range of failed therapies she tried in order to minimize the effects of her son’s dyslexia. Based on the advice of parent groups and private providers, her trials ranged from diets to supplements; from visual and reflex therapies to muscle and nerve realignment (Bedell, 2002). No doubt some of the many therapies advertised as treatments for dyslexia have some benefit for some children—and even some scientific basis—but without consensus on diagnostic criteria, assessment, or intervention, it is nearly impossible to assess the efficacy of advertised treatments and cures or to police the claims of a growing dyslexia industry.

Nevertheless, frustrated with the speed and difficulty with which public schools diagnose or acknowledge diagnosis of dyslexia, parents continually turn to private providers for outside tutoring, assessments, and therapeutic experiences. This, perhaps more than the research base for any particular dyslexia remediation program, is the compelling reason for state legislators to act: When parents believe schools have failed to adequately diagnose and address
Dyslexia and the Law: What is Required, What is Implied?

Advocacy for recent dyslexia legislation has been strongly influenced and informed by groups like Decoding Dyslexia and the programs, terms, and repertoires espoused by the IDA. However, the letter of the law is in many cases less ideological than pragmatic, which means implementation efforts can be inclusive of a range of approaches.

In other words, though one might imagine that advocates had particular branded programs in mind, in many cases, the law leaves room for any program that can be described as a program for dyslexia remediation based on certain criteria. IDA describes Structured Literacy as instruction that is characterized by six criteria (Figure 3). Though these criteria were drawn from a specific set of branded programs that focus on explicit, systematic phonics instruc-

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**Figure 3. IDA Definition of Structured Literacy**

1. **Simultaneous, Multisensory (VAKT)** Teaching uses all learning pathways in the brain (i.e., visual, auditory, kinesthetic tactile) simultaneously or sequentially in order to enhance memory and learning.

2. **Systematic and Cumulative** Multisensory language instruction requires that the organization of material follows the logical order of the language. The sequence must begin with the easiest and most basic concepts and progress methodically to more difficult material. Each concept must also be based on those already learned. Concepts taught must be systematically reviewed to strengthen memory.

3. **Direct Instruction** The inferential learning of any concept cannot be taken for granted. Multisensory language instruction requires direct teaching of all concepts with continuous student-teacher interaction.

4. **Diagnostic Teaching** The teacher must be adept at flexible or individualized teaching. The teaching plan is based on careful and continuous assessment of the individual’s needs. The content presented must be mastered step by step for the student to progress.

5. **Synthetic and Analytic Instruction** Multisensory, structured language programs include both synthetic and analytic instruction. Synthetic instruction presents the parts of the language and then teaches how the parts work together to form a whole. Analytic instruction presents the whole and teaches how this can be broken down into its component parts.

6. **Comprehensive and Inclusive** All levels of language are addressed, often in parallel, including sounds (phonemes), symbols (graphemes), meaningful word parts (morphemes), word and phrase meanings (semantics), sentences (syntax), longer passages (discourse), and the social uses of language (pragmatics).

SOURCE: International Dyslexia Association, 2017
tion, other instructional approaches might also fit or exceed these criteria.

Even though the term Structured Literacy was coined in order to rebrand and unify a collection of approaches, its definition could apply to any approach that can claim the 10 bolded words as descriptors. Educators with expertise in approaches such as Reading Recovery® should be prepared to articulate how their approach qualifies as “structured” but also “research-based.” Indeed, Reading Recovery has clearest claim for a research-based designation based on a review by the federal government (What Works Clearinghouse, 2013) as well as a long track record of success outside of programs most closely associated with Structured Literacy. All invisible pedagogies with a track record of success outside of programs will require some explanation and demonstration in order to show how they fit in the current policy climate.

Reading Recovery and other programs will need to build a case for inclusion as viable options for dyslexia-specific policies. All invisible pedagogies with a track record of success outside of programs will require some explanation and demonstration in order to show how they fit in the current policy climate.
The prescriptiveness of dyslexia policies varies across states, but the majority leave room for a range of approaches, provided that educators can make the potential of these pedagogies visible by engaging with the emerging vocabulary of dyslexia.


**About the Author**

Dr. Rachael Gabriel is an associate professor of literacy education at the University of Connecticut. She is the author or editor of five books for literacy teachers and education researchers and serves on the editorial boards of journals focused on literacy, education research, and policy. Dr. Gabriel’s research interests include teacher development and evaluation, as well as literacy instruction, interventions, and related policies. Her current projects investigate supports for adolescent literacy, disciplinary literacy, and tools for teacher evaluation.
Communicating the Power of Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons Instruction for Dyslexic Learners: An Ethical Response

Mary Anne Doyle, University of Connecticut

Recently, more and more schools with implementations of Reading Recovery® and/or Descubriendo La Lectura (DLL) and/or Intervention Préventive en Lecture Écriture (IPLÉ) and Literacy Lessons™ have faced challenges justifying their literacy interventions in light of recent policies mandated by dyslexia-specific legislation. Rachael Gabriel's article (p. 25 in this issue) provides us with understandings of the (a) origins of the most recent surge in legislated actions; (b) attributes of the dyslexia advocacy agenda and specific mandates for screening, remediation, and teacher training; and (c) suggestions for productive and ethical responses in the current policy context.

Gabriel suggests that the current legislation addressing issues of dyslexia enacted in multiple states appear, for now, to allow for a range of approaches to meet the instructional needs of dyslexic learners. However, she also highlights the necessity to clarify the potential of any alternative pedagogy for dyslexic learners in direct terms. She suggests that if “educators take up, negotiate, and engage with the specialized vocabulary and ways of understanding dyslexia” (2018, p. 33), the results may be positive for all educators striving to ensure that every child becomes a reader.

Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons (presented in this article as Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons) educators have demonstrated remarkable, evidence-based success teaching reading and writing to children experiencing difficulty acquiring beginning literacy in multiple languages (May, Sirinides, Gray, & Goldsworthy, 2016; What Works Clearinghouse, 2013). They have engaged with special education teachers to address the needs of learners presenting diverse challenges by forging implementations of Literacy Lessons, Clay’s (2015b, 2016) recommended treatment for children in special education. They do this with success and without compromising the theory and practices of Clay’s literacy intervention. It therefore appears that communicating the efficacy of Marie Clay’s theory and interventions in relation to policies for dyslexic learners is an essential response given the current milieu of policy changes. This is a responsible way to create understandings that equip teachers, schools, and parents with knowledge of and confidence in the power of Clay’s intervention for any child struggling with beginning reading and writing. It confirms that Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers demonstrate the “expectation that schools will try to succeed with all children” (Clay, 2015b, p. 219).

This discussion seeks to navigate the terrain of dyslexia advocates presented by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) and detailed by Gabriel (i.e., the specialized vocabulary, concepts, and theoretical implications) and present Clay’s theory, interpretation, possible alignment, as well as clear differences, while reinforcing the appropriateness of her instructional and screening procedures for all struggling learners — including dyslexic learners. What are possible alignments? What are points of divergence?

Guiding Questions

Advocates of dyslexia-specific instruction state that dyslexia is treatable, that identifying dyslexic learners early in their schooling and providing early interventions are advantageous as the impacts of intervening early are better for younger children; that identification relies on screening measures; that instruction must be individualized; that there is one best method for teaching dyslexic readers and that is Structured Literacy instruction with its focus on
systematic phonics instruction; and that practices must be supported by evidence (Gabriel, 2018; IDA, 2017). Discussion of the following questions guides the exploration of their perspectives and agenda in relation to Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons:

1. What is the perspective of Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons educators regarding the inclusion of dyslexic learners in Reading Recovery or Literacy Lessons interventions?

2. Why is Clay’s literacy processing theory of reading and writing acquisition advantageous for struggling readers, including dyslexic learners?

3. How might Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons teachers communicate their pedagogy and make their instructional procedures apparent (i.e., visible) in response to the principles of dyslexia-specific instruction?

At the first-grade level, children having the most difficulty with literacy learning in their age cohort are served in Reading Recovery, DLL, or IPLÉ. Beyond first grade, children in need of individual instruction to acquire a literacy processing system in English, including English language learners and older children who may have received Reading Recovery lessons in Grade 1, are served in Literacy Lessons. (See Endnote 1 for sources describing Literacy Lessons and its effectiveness). For the purposes of this article, the term Reading Recovery will be used repeatedly to represent the theory and procedures created by Marie Clay for her early intervention in multiple languages (English, Spanish, and French) and Literacy Lessons for her instructional treatment offered special education students. (While Literacy Lessons is also available for English language learners and the suggested references provide information about their treatment, they are not the focus of this discussion.)

1. What is the perspective of Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons educators regarding the inclusion of dyslexic learners in Reading Recovery or in Literacy Lessons?

When one asks about the appropriateness of including ‘dyslexic’ children in Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons, we must offer an unequivocal, affirmative response. Indeed, we might question how this label (dyslexic) was determined and suggest that an individually designed series of lessons would provide rich diagnostic information to assist with determining the appropriateness of such a label. To be sure, Clay would have issues with both the current, consensus definition of dyslexia—as it is not defended in the research literature—and with identification of learners’ needs on the basis of screening assessments alone. Additionally, she would challenge the practice of using a label that suggests all learners’ difficulties are similar and mandates one path to literacy acquisition.

In contrast, Reading Recovery is a ‘response to intervention’ offered to the lowest-achieving children in their first-grade cohort irrespective of their personal circumstances, assigned labels, school history, or perceived deficits. In considering the appropriateness of Reading Recovery for learning disabled (LD) children, Clay states that “Reading Recovery is an intervention

• which does not depend on a discrepancy concept,

• which does not depend on a discrimination between LD children and other poor readers, and

• which does not depend upon a discrimination between organic-produced and event-produced behaviours.” (Clay, 1987; 2007, pp. 62–63)

Dyslexia is defined as a specific learning disability that is naturally occurring, or neurobiological (organic-produced) (IDA, 2002). Therefore, Clay’s Reading Recovery, inclusive of all the lowest struggling learners, is an appropriate intervention for dyslexic learners in the first grade. Literacy Lessons is also an appropriate treatment for dyslexic children in elementary grades who are struggling to secure an initial literacy processing system. (The grade levels of Literacy Lessons children vary; annual reports suggest that they are ordinarily in Grades 2–4).

Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons offer individually planned and individually delivered instruction that “provides the intensive care that results in the fastest recovery of a normal trajectory of progress for any child” (Clay, 2016, p. 19). Our teachers plan lessons accounting for the learner’s specific strengths and limitations in regard to literacy processing and “devise tasks which lead the particular individual with particular patterns of responding slowly and gradually from where he or she is towards the fully operative model of normal reading behaviours which is the goal” (Clay, 1987; 2007, pp. 60–61). This commitment to individual, responsive instruction for students receiving either an early intervention (Reading Recovery)
or a later treatment to establish a literacy processing system (Literacy Lessons) is shared widely by many educators addressing the special needs of struggling learners. (See IDA, 2016; Vellutino, 2010).

More importantly, Reading Recovery, with its period of up to 20 weeks of individual instruction, serves as a pre-referral for further assessment and ongoing, special support. This decision is based on documented performance collected in the context of diagnostic teaching over an extended period of time, and this is a more reliable approach to the identification of learner needs than screening measures listed on state policy documents that provide a sampling of literacy competence.

In respect to screening and instruction, Clay (2016) reports that two variables considered important in the research of children with difficulty learning to read are phonological awareness and speed of naming letters. Litt (2003) examined outcomes on such measures for children served in Reading Recovery and reports that a “large number of children entering with low scores on either phonological awareness or naming speed, or both, did successfully complete their series of lessons. Their performance on all measures changed significantly between entry and exit, and they retained good scores in a short-term follow-up study. Reading Recovery teachers were able to design individual lessons for the children and at exit from the intervention many of them no longer counted as having a ‘deficit’” (Clay, 2016, p. 171).

The following discussions of Clay’s literacy processing theory and related instructional procedures provide clarification and assurances of how powerful Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons are for dyslexic learners. An additional goal is elaboration of Adam’s (1990) evaluation of Clay’s theoretically based intervention offering instruction that “has been methodically designed to establish and secure the whole complex of lower-order skills on which reading so integrally depends” (Clay, 2015b, p. 412).

2. Why is Clay’s literacy processing theory of reading and writing acquisition advantageous for struggling learners, including dyslexic learners?

Clay’s literacy processing theory is distinctly different from the theory of reading and instruction promoted by advocates of the dyslexia agenda. Concomitantly, Clay’s theory of learning and her developmental view of learners experiencing transformational changes over time in early reading and writing performance also differ from the apparent underlying theories of those embracing dyslexia-specific approaches to instruction. To understand the advantages of Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons for participating children, including dyslexic learners, it is important to review and contrast the alternative theories and clarify the benefits of instruction reflecting a complex theory.

According to the consensus definitions of dyslexia and dyslexia-specific instruction that IDA has promoted and which now appear in state legislation (Gabriel, 2018, p. 28), the critical factor in labeling a reader dyslexic is a specific learning disability that is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities (IDA, 2018; Gabriel). Thus, advocates of dyslexia-specific programs seek to mandate Structured Literacy approaches, the plethora of which offer explicit, systematic, phonics instruction (letter, sound, and word learning) delivered in a standard way as the only approach to beginning reading instruction for dyslexic learners.

Structured literacy approaches reflect a critical, or single, variable theory of literacy acquisition (visual information) and a deficit model of learning and remediation, i.e., a singular focus on the perceived deficit. The curriculum—a one-fits-all curriculum—is carefully sequenced, and the expectation for the learner is mastery of content that progresses in a logical and fixed order, step by step, i.e., from simple to more challenging. This instruction aims to remediate the child’s deficit in phonological processing, and new content is consistently reviewed to aid memory. Monitoring for mastery of new learning is indicative of a behaviorist’s theory of learning.

In contrast, Clay’s (2015b) literacy processing theory is a complex theory that includes both reading and writing. It accounts for many parts of the brain engaged in scanning print, perceiving information, integrating information from all available sources (visual, motor, auditory, verbal), and making decisions that serve reading for meaning. Clay describes this in-the-head activity as complex networks of working systems, or neural networks, or cell assemblies “which search for and pick up verbal and perceptual information governed by directional rules; other systems which work on that information and make decisions; other systems which monitor and verify those decisions, and systems which produce responses” (Clay, 2015b,
The neural networks (perceptual and cognitive systems) for literacy do not exist before the child is introduced to beginning reading and writing. These networks are constructed by the young reader as a result of reading and writing meaningful, continuous texts with appropriate teacher support. This is the case for all literacy learners.

Clay’s theories of literacy processing and instruction are based on her extensive explorations of young learners who, after 1 year of school, had successfully gained reading and writing proficiency. In regard to their specific reading behaviors, this research revealed that successful readers worked sequentially across text giving detailed attention to phrase, word, letter, cluster, and letter-sound possibilities, and used information from story, sentence, and between-sentence sources. Such research findings could not be accounted for by a theory of progress in reading which explains the behavior in terms of increasingly rapid recall of words, or increasing automaticity. No fixed top-down or bottom-up sequence was detected. When the readers switched to problem-solving mode they entered the problem from any one of several information sources. (Clay, 2015b, p. 52).

This research confirms the complexities of literacy learning, the discovery of unique, individual paths to success that dispel notions of a standard curricular plan for all learners, and the very different reasons/causes for learning difficulties. Thus, Reading Recovery instruction aims to assist all struggling learners to acquire the knowledge and processing abilities of average beginning readers. Teachers expect diverse challenges and are equipped to accommodate instruction for each individual. (See Askew, p. 5 in this issue.)

With understandings of complexity, Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers support readers in developing and strengthening processing behaviors, including how to predict, monitor, search, cross-check, confirm, and evaluate while reading. Novice readers “cannot do this within a narrow strategy of sounding out words or mere memory for known words” (Clay, 2015b, p. 198). Nor will such strategic behaviors result from the reading of contrived, controlled texts.

When reading for meaning, the learner’s decision making, or processing (e.g., predicting, searching, monitoring, confirming), involves the use of multiple information sources. As Clay (2015b) explains:

[T]he reader 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. (p. 224)

Thus, Clay’s theories of literacy processing, literacy acquisition, and instruction reflect the complex nature of literacy and give attention to multiple variables (processing variables and knowledge sources) including, but not limited to, the single variable of visual information. Clay offers an example of such processing in the following report of one young reader’s thinking, analyzing, and discovery of meaning in reading about something eating ‘the fresh green leaves.’

“The child said: ‘… the f- fish … fresh
Now what could be fresh?’
She looked at the illustration.
Returning to the print and sounding out the letters she said, ‘gr … ee … green leaves.’
Returning to the beginning of the phrase she combined her findings:
‘… the fresh green leaves.’

To describe this reading as a left-to-right sounding out of the phonemes in words is to ignore how the reader used different kinds of information to get the message from that text” (Clay, 2015b, p. 121).

Visual information (i.e., knowledge of the alphabetic principle, phonological information, and decoding skills) is important, and the development of phonological awareness and acquisition of knowledge of letters, clusters, sounds, syllables, words, and decoding strategies are addressed with each learner daily in both Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons. This instruction is offered within the decontextualized component of the lesson (the time designated for letter and word work), as well as during the writing component of the lesson, and during each text reading activity (familiar rereading, the running record book, the new text). The goals of this instruction include both the acquisition of items of knowledge (letter features, letters, chunks, clusters, syllables, words, phrases, and punctuation) that give “the reader access to all other
Reading Recovery instruction aims to assist all struggling learners to acquire the knowledge and processing abilities of average beginning readers. Teachers expect diverse challenges and are equipped to accommodate instruction for each individual.

Extending the learner’s knowledge of items is the foci of instructional procedures addressing letters of the alphabet, introducing multiple ways to break words into letters or clusters of letters, and multiple ways to analyze words in text, i.e., taking words apart while reading. More specifically, teachers

- teach letters
- develop phonemic awareness daily in writing
- attend to the sounds of individual letters (especially when they are hard-to-hear sounds)
- teach how to use known words to construct new words in writing
- encourage flexible use of letter-sound relationships, and
- celebrate the use of chunks of information. (Clay, 2016, p. 148)

The specific content and word analysis strategies taught are based on research revealing the analyses employed by competent readers during text reading (Clay, 2015b; Kaye, 2006). Clay (2016) confirms that the behaviors of proficient readers showed that “their complex neurological networks operate on word-solving in diverse ways” (p. 149) most often relying on chunks, or clusters of letters. They do not apply a narrow, letter-by-letter sounding out process to identify words; rather, proficient readers analyze words in flexible ways to identify a broad range of words, including those with sound sequences predictable from the letters, words with alternative letter-sound correspondences, and words “better described as orthographic or spelling sequences rather than sound sequences” (Clay, 2016, p. 143). To support flexible word analyses abilities needed for real reading and writing (i.e., spelling), Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers engage students in reading authentic texts and writing personal stories. These goals present a clear point of divergence with the phonological-deficit approach that reinforces students’ acquisition of predictable sound-symbol relationships by controlling texts, as in contrived texts.

Reading Recovery teachers do give substantial attention to developing phonemic awareness and the process of linking sound sequences to letter sequences, defined by some as phonics instruction (Clay, 2016). They realize that this task involves coordinating two complex sets of operations — sound sequence analysis of spoken words and visual letter sequence analysis. These tasks are

sources of information” (Clay, 2015b, p. 173) as well as the integration of this new information in working, or processing, systems that support reading for meaning.

Instructional attention to the visual side of literacy extends across the series of lessons in procedures addressing: locating responses, learning to look at print, letter identification, taking words apart while reading, and breaking which sharpens perception (Clay, 2015b, 2016). The initial and essential learning for literacy development is referred to as foundational by Clay (2016) and focuses on the novice reader learning

- how to assemble stories
- that print can be written
- that attention must follow the rules of direction
- that symbols have only one orientation
- how to switch attention out to the page and back into the head
- how to work with complex information and come to decisions. (Clay, 2015b, p. 137)

Additionally, important early, perceptual learning that supports decision making involves “movement left to right across words and lines of print, and matching oral and visual patterns” (Clay, 2015b, p. 122). Thus, from the earliest reading experiences, the learner’s visual perception (adjusted for the acts of reading and writing), and knowledge of the visual features of printed language (directionality, orientation, sequential presentation of letters within words, words within sentences), and one-to-one matching support proficient processing. Monitoring, confirming, self-correcting on the basis of these rudimentary understandings may be observed in the oral reading of texts at the easiest levels of beginning reading.
addressed within the daily writing activities that provide a focus on the sounds of discrete phonemes within words and how to represent them in print. This establishes phonemic awareness.

The task of Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words supports a consistent, first-to-last analysis of words. Breaking words into letters or letter clusters contributes to “a general awareness of how to attend to words and to the understanding that words are made up of certain letters in a fixed order” (Clay, 2016, p. 169). As a result of these activities, the child learns to

• analyse the sounds of a word he needs to write
• attend to the sounds within words while he is reading them, and eventually
• link the analysis of letters and letter clusters in a word he is scanning from left to right, with a word he is hearing in his head (from beginning to end). (Clay, 2016, p. 145)

To help struggling learners acquire complex neural networks for processing text, teachers base instruction on each individual’s profile of strengths, the child’s competent systems, and known information, while supporting new tentative learning (Clay, 2015b). Thus, the instructional model “works on the assumption that strengths must be enlisted to support whatever is difficult and that what is difficult has to be learned” (Clay, 1997; 2007, p. 61). In regard to planning for instruction addressing visual information and word analysis skills:

• The child’s current skills should determine the sequence.
• The word segments attended to should be those used by good readers at this level of learning to read.
• The sequence should be determined by psychological rather than logical factors. (Clay, 2016, p. 147)

Thus, instruction that builds new learning on the individual’s existing proficiencies creates a psychological curriculum that is supportive of accelerated learning.

Teachers create opportunities for this development and learning by choosing texts carefully and scaffolding judiciously. They understand that the perceptual and cognitive systems are constructed by the learner as a result of his independent efforts in reading and writing texts of appropriate challenge. Thus, teachers work from a constructivist theory of learning. Knowing that they cannot teach the learner how to orchestrate the complex neural systems for processing, they serve as co-constructors who support the child’s learning through their interactions and contingent teaching (Doyle, 2015). This is in stark contrast to a curriculum implied by a deficit model of the learner and the need to teach for mastery of literacy-related skills in a defined sequence, reflective of a behaviorist’s theory of learning.

Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers embrace Clay’s developmental view of learners and thus, the literacy processing behaviors observed on the earliest levels of text reading are acknowledged as the “foundation for later experience as the seed from which complex systems develop” (Clay, 2015b, p. 219). Over time, what appear initially in running records of oral text reading as primitive strategies for processing print become more and more effective, approximating the behaviors of a mature reader. Thus, the model of progress for the constructive learner is one of transformations, or change over time, in competencies observed in reading and writing demonstrated by more effective and more independent efforts.

This ability to read and write successfully with relative independence creates the opportunity for the learner to take “on new competencies through his or her own efforts,” (Clay, 2015b, p. 219), and this is the genesis of a self-extending system. Most importantly, the self-extending system leads to ongoing development following the period of individual instruction, and Clay refers to this as the “required insurance for subsequent progress” (p. 219).

In regard to development of efficient processing of visual information specifically, Schwartz & Gallant (2011) suggest that efficient visual processing is the end point of a
complex learning and development process. (See Endnote 2). What teachers expect and monitor are changes over the series of lessons in the learning of new information and items which expand the information sources (e.g., visual language information), and most critically, enhanced proficiency in

- knowing how to use this knowledge to read and write new messages, and
- knowing how to expand the literacy processing system while doing this. (Clay, 2015b, p. 219)

In summary, a direct response to the question regarding the appropriateness of instruction accounting for a complex theory of literacy for all struggling learners is offered by Clay (2015b):

Literacy professionals across countries operate effectively using a skills-based, surface behavior approach; my argument is that a theory of literacy processing is, to date, more helpful for teachers of young children having severe difficulty learning to read and write. (p. 235)

This is due not only to the complex, neural development that instruction reflecting her complex theory supports but also in the realization that instruction supporting a literacy processing system is both transferable to the classroom context and preventative of ongoing, learning difficulties, “not merely a temporary catch-up on items known or skills mastered” (Clay, 2015b, p. 236).

Thus, Clay’s theories of literacy, literacy acquisition, learning, and instruction reflect the complex nature of literacy and instruction that gives attention to multiple aspects of proficient reading, not the single variable of visual information (learning letters, sounds, and words). Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons interventions offer children access to

- one-to-one lessons tailored to the child’s unique profile of strengths and needs;
- instruction addressing complex, in-the-head literacy processing strategies for reading and for writing;
- development of literacy processing and word analyses skills (including phonics) used by average-progress readers and transferable to classroom literacy programs;
- acceleration of learning allowing students to achieve substantial progress and for Reading Recovery students to catch-up with their first-grade peers; and
- acquisition of a self-extending system of learning that is crucial to preventing future difficulties.

These attributes not only align with the demands of Structured Literacy (e.g., individualized with attention to decoding skills) but also establish a broad-based foundation of neural processing systems, or cognitive competencies, both “preventive of subsequent difficulties” (Clay, 2015b, p. 217) and critical to literacy growth beyond early reading/writing. Thus, Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers offer the instruction that the National Reading Panel (2000) described as the most beneficial in their summary statement: “By emphasizing all of the processes that contribute to growth in reading, teachers will have the best chance of making every child a reader” (p. 2-97).

3. How might Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers communicate their pedagogy and make their instructional procedures apparent (i.e., visible) in response to the principles of dyslexia-specific instruction?

The following discussion presents a review of six principles of Structured Literacy detailed by IDA (2018) and Gabriël as requisite attributes of instruction for dyslexic literacy learners and suggests how Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers may consider each component in relation to Clay’s literacy processing theory and instructional procedures. The goal is to make Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons pedagogy “visible by engaging with the emerging vocabulary of dyslexia” (Gabriel, 2018, p. 33) in efforts to identify corresponding perspectives. This comparison also extends descriptions of the principles in order to account for the complexity of a literacy processing theory and Clay’s alternative theories of learning and literacy acquisition. This discussion is a helpful way to demonstrate how and why our interventions meet and even exceed the intent of an instructional approach deemed critical for dyslexic learners. For the purposes of this review, the order of presentation is Comprehensive and Inclusive, Diagnostic Teaching, Direct Instruction, Systematic and Cumulative, Synthetic and Analytic, Simultaneous and Multisensory.

The components of each principle, as detailed by the IDA (2018) and presented by Gabriel (2018, p. 31), are repeated initially followed by discussion of corresponding concepts apparent in the theory and pedagogy of Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons.
Comprehensive and Inclusive

Structured Literacy
All levels of language are addressed, often in parallel, including sounds (phonemes), symbols (graphemes), meaningful word parts (morphemes), word and phrase meanings (semantics), sentences (syntax), longer passages (discourse), and the social uses of language (pragmatics).

Reading Recovery
This definition resonates with our understandings of the language hierarchy and Rumelhart’s interactive theory of reading depicting simultaneous, parallel processing of the range of information sources available to the reader (Rumelhart, 2013). As the beginning reader gains awareness and proficiency, in-the-head working systems scan and integrate information from all levels of the language hierarchy when processing text. Therefore, giving more value to any one level of the linguist’s hierarchy of language information is unproductive and may be misleading. The notion of ‘often in parallel’ used in the definition above is unclear as “Rumelhart proposed that information from more than one source is needed to confirm and reject hypotheses arising from any single source” (Clay, 2015b, p. 122). “It is agreement across information sources that confirms a good decision and incongruity that signals the need for more searching, confirming, and perhaps correcting” (Doyle, 2013, 647).

Reading Recovery teachers provide support for learners to acquire new knowledge (i.e., letter and word knowledge, syntactic knowledge, semantic knowledge) and to “gradually come to know how and when each kind of information can help with decisions” (Clay, 2015b, p. 111) from the earliest lessons. Thus, instruction is intentionally comprehensive and inclusive. The growing accumulation of language knowledge and its integration in working systems to process text is evaluated daily on running records which allow for the analysis of the reader’s use of semantic, structural, and visual information. Comprehensiveness, in the Reading Recovery context, is further exemplified by instruction that is “directed to a curriculum of psychological processes (perceptual and cognitive), linguistic competencies and social practices for working with written language” (Clay, 2016, p. 15).

Diagnostic Teaching

Structured Literacy
The teacher must be adept at flexible or individualized teaching. The teaching plan is based on careful and continuous assessment of the individual’s needs. The content presented must be mastered step by step for the student to progress.

Reading Recovery
Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers provide individualized, one-to-one instruction in a series of lessons paced and sequenced for each child according to an initial assessment (An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement, Clay, 2013, see Endnote 3), daily assessments (e.g., running records), records of known items (letters and words), charts depicting quantities of known items, and close observations of reading and writing behaviors recorded daily. On the basis of such information, teachers adapt instruction moment-to-moment as needed to support accelerated learning. Progress is revealed as learners move through a gradient of texts of increasing difficulty demonstrating growing proficiency in processing texts effectively and independently, and this progress is monitored and recorded daily and weekly. In regard to specific content to be mastered step by step, teachers do not rely on a set curriculum but rather build on each individual’s strengths to support the development of an effective processing system for reading and for writing. This reflects a model of literacy acquisition valuing the learner’s changing and developing competencies to problem solve during reading and writing, in place of a compendium of skills to be mastered in a fixed sequence.

Reading Recovery teachers consider all lessons in a child’s series of lessons to be diagnostic and to provide specific records of learning and depictions of strengths and needs critical for decision making, leading to recommendations for a child following this early intervention. This includes the recommendation for ongoing specialist support. The record of performance over time is a more reliable document of a child’s performance than a sampling of performance collected on a screening measure administered once. This recommendation is supported by Vellutino (2010) whose studies revealed the importance of “using an intervention-based approach to diagnostic assessment and equally strong support for the use of early intervention as a means of preventing long-term reading difficulties in children who might otherwise be classified as ‘reading disabled,’” (p. 7).
Direct Instruction

Structured Literacy

The inferential learning of any concept cannot be taken for granted. Multisensory language instruction requires direct teaching of all concepts with continuous student-teacher interaction.

Reading Recovery

“First, in strict definitional terms Reading Recovery is not a program of direct instruction because it aims to improve the in-the-head processing initiated by the child in reading and writing activities (on the basis of behavioral evidence) and does not begin with a set curriculum to be delivered ‘directly’ by the teacher” (Clay, 1994, p. 132). However, Reading Recovery teachers do not leave the child’s discovery of new knowledge to chance; rather, they offer substantial assistance to support new learning. They provide explicit lessons, demonstrate tasks to avoid complex teacher talk and ensure understanding, engage learners in guided practice, observe performance, provide feedback, and scaffold as needed. This approach to instruction, performance assisted by a more knowledgeable other, reflects theoretical understanding of the child constructing his own learning through quality interactions with expert teachers (Clay, 2015b).

Moreover, there is a specific structure to each lesson. Teachers adhere to a standard framework for lessons which ensures daily attention to the subcomponent skills (e.g., letters, words, features of words, word analysis) and a broad-based range of problem-solving strategies in a literacy processing model (Clay, 2015b). Importantly, the lesson activities “accommodate the changes in teaching that are needed as the children become more competent” (p. 221). Instructional foci, text materials, specific activities, and expectations are adjusted on an ongoing basis to match the learner’s increasing competencies in both reading and writing.

Systematic and Cumulative

Structured Literacy

Multisensory language instruction requires that the organization of material follows the logical order of language. The sequence must begin with the easiest and most basic concepts and progress methodically to more difficult material. Each concept must also be based on those already learned (i.e., cumulative). Concepts taught must be systematically reviewed to strengthen memory.

This description suggests that instruction is systematically planned according to a logical ordering of content reflecting the language hierarchy; and thus, the initial focus is on the smallest features of print, individual letters, i.e., their identity and their sounds. The goal is mastery of the content with the expectation that many items must be memorized by the learner.

It appears that this perspective of a systematic approach to phonics instruction is further clarified by the following details stated by Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn (2003) in their document, Put Reading First:

Effective programs offer phonics instruction that

• helps teachers … instruct children in how to relate letters and sounds, how to break spoken words into sounds, and how to blend sounds to form words;
• help students understand why they are learning the relationships between letters and sounds;
• helps students apply their knowledge of phonics as they read words, sentences, and text; helps students apply what they learn about sounds and letters to their own writing; can be adapted to the needs of individual students, based on assessment;
• includes alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, and the reading of text. (p. 16)

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers are trained to be expert observers and proficient planners of appropriately sequenced instruction, and they control the specific content of daily instruction addressing letters, sounds, phonetic principles, and word analysis. They base the organization of instruction addressing visual information on each individual child’s current, observed strengths and competencies. In that instruction engages the individual’s strengths to introduce new learning, the sequence is ordered by psychological (i.e., within the learner) rather than logical, pre-determined factors, such as a curriculum of phonics objectives delivered in a set sequence. In this way, instruction accommodates each individual by aligning the teacher’s support with the learner’s specific, unique needs.
Teachers give extensive attention across the series of lessons to establishing the learner’s understandings of phonemic awareness and facility with the alphabetic principle, i.e., acquiring sound-symbol relationships and applying this knowledge in reading and writing. Of paramount concern is development of visual knowledge and visual processing strategies used by good readers at this level of literacy development. This is in sharp contrast to delivering a compendium of discrete skills.

Within the various sets of procedures addressing access to and use of visual information, specific sequences of instructional foci are identified by the following labels: Early learning, Beyond the earliest levels, Later learning, Later in the learning sequence, or Later as the child gains control. A succinct presentation of changes in respect to letter and word identification and letter-sound analysis is found in Clay’s outline of changes teachers might observe and address from early (I) to middle (II) to late lessons (III) summarized below.

Discriminating all the letters and developing fast recognition:

I. The child learns to identify letters by some means. He breaks up known words (from reading or writing) into letters and identifies some of these. He is also learning that letter orientation and the order of letters in words are important.

II. Fast recognition of letter-forms with fast linking to sounds is observed. The child breaks up words into single letters, letter clusters, onsets and rimes, and larger chunks. He notices that the same letters or clusters are found in different words so can begin to use analogy.

III. The child rapidly identifies letters embedded among others. He understands more about how letters and letter clusters make up words and is able to use this knowledge to take words apart in flexible ways, on the run and on his own. (Clay, 2016, pp. 45–46)

Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words; Using sound-to-letter links that becomes consistent and rapid:

I. The child gets some phonemes, at first in any position, but shifts to hearing the initial sound and searches for the first letter.

II. Most consonants are heard and the child knows most letters. Now he usually works left to right on letters and first-to-last on phonemes. He is gaining independence on regular spellings.

III. The child is able to hear most phonemes in words without help. He uses phonological analysis and demonstrates increasing awareness of regular orthographic features. He notices consistencies in the way the sounds of language are recorded. (Clay, 2016, p. 46)

Additional examples of careful sequencing of instruction are found in discussions of specific procedures for most instructional procedures. Examples are found within each of the following in the text, Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals (Clay, 2016):

- Introducing new material, keeping tasks easy (p. 36)
- Establishing foundational behaviors (pp. 49–59)
- Expanding knowledge of print (pp. 59–76)
- Establishing ways of solving words for writing (pp. 86–101)
- Using known words to construct new words (pp. 105–106)
- Developing an effective processing system (pp. 133–142)
- Taking words apart while reading (pp. 146–164)

Further refinements to ensure an appropriate sequence in teaching word analyses skills, based on generalizations gleaned from the research of early literacy (Clay, 2015b), are these understandings:

- Initial letters can usually be the starting points for a child’s detailed analysis of words, although final letters do capture a child’s attention (the spaces between words make the first and last letters easier to see).
- Inflections added to words are easy to recognize.
- An early achievement must be to attend left to right across a word.
- Consonants are quite easy to deal with, although sometimes hard when clustered.
- It is easy to discriminate the from hippopotamus and not necessarily easy to discriminate the from her.
• There are some very hard-to-hear consonants and some rather hard vowel patterns to be learned. (Clay, 2016, p. 147)

There is one important distinction regarding any recommended sequences for Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers, and this is the important need to be responsive to each individual child, basing instruction on the observed strengths, and teaching for acceleration. “Teaching is an immediate consequence of some prior behavior of the child” (Clay, 2016, p. 24); and therefore, instruction reflects the teacher’s decisions regarding the next step in an individual’s path to literacy, based on behavioral evidence, and this does not entail adherence to a prescriptive curriculum.

What part does memory play in a child’s journey to reading and writing proficiency during early literacy acquisition? On one hand, literacy processing is “much more complicated than identifying a word by recalling it from a memory bank” (Clay, 2015b, p. 79). Rather than relying on memory, the learner must work flexibly to solve words for reading and writing, and instruction focuses on helping learners discover ways to analyze, identify, and write words using flexible strategies. On the other hand, “[p]oor recall must be overcome, otherwise the earliest, easiest and most basic linking of oral language with print will be very difficult for the child.” But, “[r]emembering is more than just recalling. … It is about decision-making on a complex task” (Clay, 2016, p. 176).

Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers have a range of procedures to support the needs of learners who find it hard to remember, and it starts by catching the attention of the learner’s brain. “What it has attended to (and acted upon) is what the brain is likely to remember” (Clay, 2016, p. 176). A primary goal is helping the child establish personal approaches to learning how to learn and remember (a letter, a word), and this instruction aims not only at securing memory of specific items but also at establishing independent strategies for the child’s ongoing attempts to add new content to memory.

**Synthetic and Analytic**

**Structured Literacy**
Multisensory, structured language programs include both synthetic and analytic instruction. Synthetic instruction presents the parts of the language and then teaches how the parts work together to form a whole. Analytic instruction presents the whole and teaches how this can be broken down into component parts.

**Reading Recovery**
Word analysis skills developed in Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons are those used by proficient, young readers in the act of reading authentic, meaningful materials. Because this research reveals that proficient readers do not analyze words in text by sounding out letter-by-letter (Clay, 2015a, 2015b; Kaye, 2006), synthetic sounding out procedures for decoding words in text are not expected or reinforced. A sequential sound analysis of words is accomplished in writing activities using specific procedures referred to as Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words.

Further delineation of instruction strengthening the young reader’s facility with the alphabetic principle is offered by Doyle and Forbes (2003) in a response to recommendations presented by the National Reading Panel. (See Endnote 4). Key points from that article helpful in considering this issue include these:

• Reading Recovery instruction accounts for the complex prerequisite learning needed for efficient visual analysis, extends the study of phonic elements beyond basic letter-sound associations, integrates the use of letter sequences and sound sequences with the full range of information sources available in text in order to develop the learner’s literacy processing system, and includes attention to the power of writing. (pp. 8–9)

• Attention to letter work and word work (analysis) comprises one component of the daily lesson; however, this work is not confined to isolated, decontextualized activity. Reading and writing activities offer productive opportunities to reinforce letter identification, sound analysis, etc. (p. 10)

• Reading Recovery instruction gives direct attention to building extensive knowledge of the letters of the alphabet (e.g., visual perception, identity, sound) and focuses on use of letters and the sounds of letters in both reading and writing. (p. 12)

• In addition, instructional activities with words build extensive phonological awareness that includes phonemes (single letters or sounds), onset and rime, and syllables. As a result of explicit and systematic
word study, learners gain control of letters, dia-
graphs, clusters, prefixes, suffixes, root words, and
multisyllabic words. (p. 12)

Analytic instruction, using analogy to analyze unfamiliar
words, is introduced and supported.

This process is initiated by using predictable letter-
sound sequences, the specific letter clusters known by
the child. The teacher bases instruction on analyses
of the child’s known words and known letter clusters
revealed in both reading and writing activities and
also observes the child closely to confirm what the
learner is attending to and gaining from the teacher’s
demonstrations. Gradually, the teacher engages the
child in working with harder analogies. The child
continues to manipulate magnetic letters, to work
with the known flexibly, and to gain important gen-
eralizations for analyzing words. (Doyle & Forbes,
2003, p. 13)

Clay (2015b) suggests that as proficient readers analyze
words in larger units, recognizing clusters of letters, these
units are processed as a single pattern and this allows
faster visual processing.

Awareness of a wide range of phonological information is
developed in Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons in con-
cert with growing facility with the full range of knowl-
dge sources available in text (letter features, letters,
letter clusters, words, language structure, and semantics).
Instruction is based on daily assessments, accommo-
dates for individual’s previous learning and current needs,
accounts for prerequisite behaviors and concepts, and
shifts the instructional focus from items to strategic
processing immediately.

Simultaneous and Multisensory (VAKT)

Structured Literacy
Teaching uses all learning pathways in the brain (i.e.,
visual auditory, kinesthetic, tactile) simultaneously or
sequentially in order to enhance memory and learning.

Reading Recovery
Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons differ from multisensory
programs (e.g., Orton-Gillingham) in design; and therefore,
the label multisensory is not generally associ-
ated with them. However, Reading Reading/Literacy Les-
sions teachers are cognizant of when and how to engage all
learning pathways to the brain via the simultaneous use of
multisensory avenues. There are clear purposes supported
by neuroscience and related to ensuring the learner’s focus
and attention by engaging in experiences that create nov-
ely, interest, and motivation (Lyons, 2003; Rabin, 2017).

Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers approach the
instruction of both items and processes using multisensory
techniques (VAKT) to enhance learning and memory. The
following from Doyle and Forbes (2003) provide an
example of this in teaching letters of the alphabet:

- The instructional procedures allow teachers to
  accommodate for learners’ needs by using multisensory
  approaches to organize and adjust the process
  of visual exploration. Applying research in the
  development of perceptual processes in early child-
hood, Clay (2015a) suggests that teachers provide
  guided practice in using movement (of the hand)
  and language (verbal descriptions) to learn letter
  formation, and this fosters remembering. (p. 10)

- Magnetic letters are used to facilitate grouping and
categorizing activities, important tasks for promot-
ing the rapid discrimination of letters needed for
text reading (Clay, 2015b). A range of materials
(e.g., multidimensional, multicolored, felt letters)
and mediums (e.g., pens, chalk) are suggested to
allow over-learning and flexibility. (p. 10)

Likewise, the engagement of multiple sensory avenues are
suggested in procedures for isolating discrete phonemes to
complete a sound analysis using Elkonin boxes, scanning
a word in serial order supported by movement, learning
new words by rehearsing their construction using multi-
colored magnetic letters, attending to and manipulating
word parts on a vertical surface (e.g., a prefix or suffix),
finding and using chunks of information on words in
isolation or in text, taking words apart while reading by
manipulating a masking card, and reassembling a cut-up
sentence. To involve multiple pathways, Clay (2016)
suggests teachers

[c]reate varied learning opportunities that involve
looking, hearing, saying, manipulating, moving,
changing colours, changing pens and pencils, chang-
ing textures, changing surfaces (horizontal and verti-
cal), and changing books. (p. 176)

A closely related concept, which also involves many
regions of the brain working together, is the use of move-
ment to support mental processing (Lyons, 2003). To
clarify, Lyons states that by directing a child’s attention through movement as in the following examples, a teacher can support and speed up a child’s development of literacy skills:

- taking the child’s hand and pointing his finger to guide the directional behavior across a line of print;
- guiding the child’s movements to write his name;
- clapping the child’s hands to help her hear syllables in a word;
- guiding the child’s hand while providing a verbal description of movement she is using to form a letter. (p. 38)

Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers have clear, research-based reasons for enriching many instructional procedures with multisensory techniques and understand the central role of movement in literacy learning discussed by Lyons.

Summary
This article addresses challenges raised by Gabriel resulting from recent legislative initiatives creating new state policies for the literacy education of dyslexic learners. The descriptions of theory and instructional procedures are presented to make Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons pedagogy ‘visible’ to others and to communicate the efficacy of Clay’s work for all struggling readers, including dyslexic learners. Since recommendations forthcoming from the IDA, which are driving policy decisions, identify phonics-based instruction as the best and only method for teaching reading to dyslexic students, this discussion has highlighted the emphasis placed on visual information within the instructional procedures applied by Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers.

In communicating the pedagogy of Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons in terms associated with the Structured Literacy approach, with the goal of ensuring understanding, it is ethical to delineate both corresponding aspects and clear differences. It is additionally important to confirm that Marie Clay’s literacy processing theory is firmly rooted in extensive research of the reading and writing behaviors of proficient learners acquiring initial literacy. Clay’s carefully planned pedagogy, which is dependent upon the observations and skills of carefully trained teachers, is designed specifically for struggling readers. Because instruction develops cognitive and perceptual systems for processing print, careful and supportive attention is given to complex aspects of literacy acquisition. Each individual’s strengths and needs receive careful consideration and each child receives an individualized series of lessons. This creates the ‘intensive care’ that is so powerful in addressing the needs of any learner and in assuring parents and teachers.

Dyslexia-specific programs are promoted to strengthen a perceived deficit in the learner — poor phonological coding. … Clay’s complex literacy processing theory is multifaceted and accounts for complex, neural working systems for reading and writing involving all available information sources.

The initial assertion of this article is that there is no question about the appropriateness of Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons for teaching children considered dyslexic to read and write and for meeting the demands of new policies. Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers offer profound opportunities for any child struggling to acquire initial reading and writing proficiency. Clay was very clear that labels should not deter children from early intervention irrespective of the severity of their challenges; and in fact, the substantial period of diagnostic teaching is advantageous both for preventing early failure and for identifying children at risk of ongoing literacy difficulties and in need of special education services. In regard to specific learning disabilities (and the possibility of organic, constitutional factors which the definition of dyslexia implies), Vellutino references Clay’s perspective and affirms that Reading Recovery “holds promise for distinguishing between experiential and constitutional causes of reading difficulties” (Vellutino, 2010, p. 11).

Vellutino (2010) asserts that it is one-to-one tutoring that maximizes educators’ decision making in regard to clarifying learners’ difficulties and needs. Furthermore, compelling evidence of the success Reading Recovery teachers have experienced with children considered learning disabled is presented by Lyons (2003) and appears to be now accumulating for older readers in the data of Literacy Lessons children taught by special education teachers.
(See Briggs & Lomax, 2017). Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons strive to establish reading, writing, word analysis, and spelling abilities commensurate with those of proficient learners of beginning reading. These instructional foci correspond directly with the foci of Structured Literacy instruction. Further comparisons of the description and components of Structured Literacy instruction with Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons reveal a number of shared perspectives, listed in Table 1. Both advocate responsive instruction addressing the needs of individuals (and Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers offer this in one-to-one settings); a commitment to providing intervention as early as possible; and specific training for teachers delivering the instruction. Additionally, corresponding perspectives appear in surface features of the six principles of Structured Literacy instruction (e.g., comprehensive, responsive, diagnostic, systematic, and cumulative). However, critical differences are also very clear and result from the divergent theories of literacy, learning, and instruction underlying these interventions, also summarized in Table 1.

Dyslexia-specific programs are promoted to strengthen a perceived deficit in the learner — poor phonological coding. Resultantly, instruction centers on one primary objective: The mastery of phonics. The focus is thus restricted to a single variable in the intricate array of neural processing and information systems constructed by learners gaining access to literacy. While the principles identified indicate that the instruction is individualized, diagnostic, and multisensory, the curriculum is narrow and prescriptive and attention to literacy processing that creates independent problem-solving strategies and the potential for self-tutoring are not apparent.

Clay’s complex literacy processing theory is multifaceted and accounts for complex, neural working systems for reading and writing involving all available information sources. Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers are able to observe and identify the idiosyncratic ways that children process information and then engage their strengths to support their construction of effective neural networks for reading and writing. This focus on multiple, complex variables (which also include all aspects of visual information and phonics) leads to the learner’s construction of strategic processing systems, or working systems, which are self-tutoring, or self-extending, and ensure ongoing development and growth. Thus, the learner’s competencies in reading and writing are transferable to the classroom program. To achieve such cognitive competencies, Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers apply and adapt a wide range of instructional options.

In summary, Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons teachers offer struggling learners one-to-one instruction tailored to each child’s unique profile of strengths and needs, instruction addressing complex literacy processing in reading and writing from the earliest lessons, development of decoding

### Table 1. A comparison of alternative perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structured Literacy Instruction</th>
<th>Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Similarities</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intervene Early</td>
<td>Intervene in First Grade (RR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualized Instruction</td>
<td>Individualized/One-to-One Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive to the Individual</td>
<td>Responsive to the Individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandatory Teacher Training</td>
<td>Mandatory Teacher Training</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Differences</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Single Variable</td>
<td>Complex Theory</td>
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<td>Logical Order/Sequence</td>
<td>Psychological Order/Build on Strengths</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mastery of Skills</td>
<td>Cognitive Competencies/Self-extending System</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word Analysis: Phonics</td>
<td>Word Analysis: Skills and Integration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deficit View of Learners</td>
<td>Developmental View of Learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviorist Theory of Learning</td>
<td>Constructivist Theory of Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
skills used by average-progress readers and integrated in complex working systems for literacy, acceleration of learning, and literacy behaviors that are preventive of ongoing difficulties. Some children will be found in need of additional services following their intervention; but, their teachers, intervention specialists, school psychologists, and parents will have extensive details and data to guide and inform their decisions regarding next steps. Such results are the hallmark of best practices for learners, their parents, and our schools.

Endnotes

1 See the following articles in The Journal of Reading Recovery to learn about the Literacy Lessons treatment: the design, the implementation, the research, and anecdotal case studies: Briggs & Lomax (2017); Harmon & Williams (2017); Konstantellou & Lose (2009); Lose & Konstantellou (2017).

2 Schwartz & Gallant (2011) clarify understandings of Clay’s perspective of a developmental model of the acquisition of effective word recognition skills. In referencing the ongoing debate of meaning-based versus code-based approaches to early reading, they astutely argue that Clay’s change-over-time, developmental view of “initial word-recognition learning and instruction renders the debate moot and leads to more productive approaches to instruction” (p. 235). This view is especially important in determining powerful instruction for any learners struggling to acquire literacy.

3 While this article does not discuss the Observation Survey (Clay, 2013) in detail, it is helpful to note that this instrument was reviewed by the National Center on Response to Intervention and received the highest possible ratings for validity, reliability, and classification accuracy.

4 Doyle & Forbes (2003) and Forbes & Doyle (2004) offer a review of Reading Recovery pedagogy in response to instructional recommendations for early literacy instruction reported in two documents published by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000). Review the discussions of alphabetics (i.e., phonemic awareness instruction and phonics instruction) and related issues to learn how closely linked these are to the current discussions of dyslexia-specific instruction, e.g., explicit, systematic phonics appropriately sequenced.

References


About the Author

Dr. Mary Anne Doyle is a Reading Recovery trainer, professor of education in the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut, and director of Reading Recovery in Connecticut. Dr. Doyle is the consulting editor for the Marie Clay Literacy Trust and assists with the ongoing republication of Clay’s many texts. Her interests include early reading and writing development, literacy assessment, and literacy instruction. She is editor-in-chief of The Journal of Reading Recovery and has served as an area editor of the Journal of Literacy Research. She is chair of the International Reading Recovery Trainers Organization Executive Board and is a past president of the Reading Recovery Council of North America.
# IDEC Evaluation Report 2016–2017

## Results Again Show Strong Impact on Student Learning

Richard G. Lomax, The Ohio State University, International Data Evaluation Center

This report shares the results of Reading Recovery® and Descubriendo la Lectura in the United States for the 2016–2017 school year. As described herein, the interventions 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 2015–2016 school year (Lomax, 2017).

## Summary of Reading Recovery Outcomes

### Characteristics of participants

During the 2016–2017 school year, Reading Recovery was implemented by 17 university training centers responsible for overseeing the intervention in schools located in 42 states (Table 1). More than 38,000 children were selected to participate in the one-to-one intervention. There were 4,863 teachers trained in Reading Recovery who delivered the intervention, with support from 274 teacher leaders in 220 training sites serving over 1,000 school districts. There were 3,190 schools implementing Reading Recovery.

The Observation Survey was administered to Reading Recovery students, a random sample of comparison students, and tested-not-instructed (TNI) students at fall, mid-year, and year-end. As shown in Table 1, a total of 2,885 random sample students and 6,153 TNI students were tested.

The following demographics describe the Reading Recovery participants from 2016–2017. Of those students, 54% were boys, 70% were eligible for free or reduced lunch, and there were considerable Title I children (77% schoolwide Title I, 23% individual Title I). Children represented different ethnic backgrounds, including 57% White, 19% Hispanic, 16% African American, 2% Asian American, 1% Native American, and 5% representing either multiple races or other ethnic backgrounds. School locations were in 27% urban, 33% suburban, and 40% rural areas.

For the Reading Recovery students:

- 17% \( (n = 6,518) \) were still in lessons at year-end without enough time in the school year to complete the intervention.
- 4% \( (n = 1,400) \) moved during the school year while still enrolled in lessons.

Of the remaining students who completed the intervention \( (n = 29,491) \):

- 72% \( (n = 21,165) \) reached at least average levels of reading and writing as their intervention programs were successfully discontinued.
- 28% \( (n = 8,326) \) made progress, but not at a sufficient enough level to reach average levels of reading and writing.

The latter students were recommended for consideration of additional intensive intervention. Most notable were 5,665 who were recommended for small-group literacy instruction or intervention other than special education, and 1,835 who were recommended for literacy-related special education services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entity</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Training Sites</td>
<td>220</td>
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<tr>
<td>States</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>School Systems</td>
<td>1,038</td>
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<td>School Buildings</td>
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<td>Teacher Leaders</td>
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<td>Reading Recovery Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Random Sample for RR</td>
<td>2,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tested-Not-Instructed for RR</td>
<td>6,153</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.
The professional experience of the trained teachers consisted of the following:

- Mean 20.6 years of teaching experience
- Mean 8.8 years of Reading Recovery and/or Descubriendo la Lectura teaching experience
- Taught from 1 to 9 Reading Recovery children on a daily basis (mode = 4), while teaching a mean of 7.6 Reading Recovery children across the school year, and a mean of 39.9 children in other teaching roles, for a mean total of 47.5 children

**Results**

Two comparison groups were utilized—the random sample and the TNI sample—which helped to address two critical questions on the effectiveness of Reading Recovery. The first is whether Reading Recovery students reach average levels of literacy achievement at the end of first grade as compared to all other first-grade children who do not receive the intervention. Here the average Observation Survey scores of Reading Recovery students were compared against all random sample students (the Observation Survey being one metric for literacy achievement level). A second question is whether Reading Recovery students performed better at the end of the intervention than they would have performed if they were not provided the intervention. Here the average Observation Survey scores of Reading Recovery students were compared against the TNI students’ scores.

The Total Score scale of the Observation Survey was created based on 2009–2010 random sample student data (including the random sample students who received Reading Recovery). Students’ Observation Survey scores on all six tasks from fall, mid-year, and year-end were used to create the total measure. The six tasks are Text Reading Level, Writing Vocabulary, Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words, Letter Identification, Ohio Word Test, and Concepts About Print. Instead of using the Observation Survey scores of each student from the three time points, the random sample was divided into three randomly assigned groups, and the fall, mid-year, or year-end Observation Survey scores were chosen from each group, respectively, to represent an independent sample of students from the three time points during the school year. The six tasks were treated as partial credit ‘items’ in a Rasch-based item response theory (IRT) analysis to convert the total raw scores to log-odd values ranging from approximately -4 to 4. Those values were then converted through a linear transformation to create the final 0 to 800-point scale. As student scores were from various test points during the school year, the scale reflects yearlong growth. Thus, for example, a Total Score of 500 indicates the same literacy achievement level at any time point. Additional details on the Observation Survey (e.g., scale construction, reliability and validity evidence, normality, equal interval scales, unidimensionality) are described in D’Agostino (2012) and D’Agostino, Rodgers, and Mauck (2017).

Figure 1 illustrates the mean Total Scores for successfully discontinued Reading Recovery students served first (fall entry) during the school year, Reading Recovery students served second (spring entry), random sample students, and TNI students.
From mid-year to year-end, the average growth rate of the Reading Recovery fall entry students was slightly less than the average random sample growth rate over the same period, but the two groups finished the year at about the same achievement level and both groups were considerably higher than TNI students.

Only students with valid scores at all three tests points were included in the analysis. As in past years, the TNI group had a slightly higher fall mean score relative to fall and spring entry Reading Recovery students, but not as high as the random sample students.

Consider first the fall entry Reading Recovery students. By mid-year, these students had a greater mean gain than spring entry, TNI, and random sample students. Thus, the fall entry Reading Recovery students—whose mean Observation Survey score was the lowest of all groups—was the highest by mid-year. From mid-year to year-end, the average growth rate of the Reading Recovery fall entry students was slightly less than the average random sample growth rate over the same period, but the two groups finished the year at about the same achievement level and both groups were considerably higher than TNI students.

Consider next the spring entry Reading Recovery students. These students had a smaller fall-to-mid-year mean gain than TNI students. This was to be expected, as this group does not receive the intervention until the second half of the school year. Thus during the fall, the spring entry students serve as an additional control. Once they begin their intervention in the second half of the year, spring entry students had the largest growth rate. In addition, the fall entry, spring entry, and random sample means were approximately the same at year-end testing, indicating that the Reading Recovery students had caught up to their random sample peers.

Figure 2 shows the results for the same four groups across the same three time points for Text Reading Level. The general trend as shown in Figure 2 is quite similar to that for the Observation Survey Total Score. Note, however, that the Reading Recovery discontinued students (both fall and spring entry) at year-end testing had reached grade level and nearly achieved the text reading level of the random sample students.

The means and magnitude of mean differences (effect sizes) at fall and year-end testing between the Reading Recovery students and the random sample or TNI students were considered next. Tables 2 and 3 display the total 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-hand columns denote the effect sizes in terms of standardized mean differences (positive values indicate that the Reading Recovery mean was greater than the comparison mean.
Note that 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.

During fall testing, mean Reading Recovery scores on all measures were substantially lower than the random sample, with medium to very large effect sizes (ranging from -.41 to -.11). By year-end testing, there were relatively small effect sizes in favor of the Reading Recovery students (ranging from -.01 to .17), except for Text Reading Level (-.19). Thus, the Reading Recovery sample began in the fall substantially below the random sample and by year-end had surpassed them for all but Text Reading Level. More specifically, the effect size changes from fall to year-end were as follows: Total Score (1.04), Text Reading Level (0.72), Writing Vocabulary (0.83), Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (0.78), Letter Identification (0.52), Ohio Word Test (1.26), and Concepts About Print (0.85). Thus, the Reading Recovery sample, as compared to the random sample, increased by approximately one standard deviation unit from fall to year-end across the measures (an average effect size change of 0.86).

The fall and year-end test scores for Reading Recovery discontinued students (fall and spring entry combined) and TNI students are shown in Table 3. In fall testing, the Reading Recovery sample Total Score mean and individual task means were all lower than the comparison TNI group, with effect sizes ranging from -.19 (small) to -.52 (medium). By year-end testing, the Reading Recovery students had surpassed the TNI students.

### Table 2. Mean Fall and Year-End Total Scores with Effect Sizes for Successfully Discontinued Reading Recovery and Random Sample Students, 2016–2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation Survey 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>395.5</td>
<td>552.9</td>
<td>441.8</td>
<td>552.8</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
<td>0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Text Reading Level</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>-.91</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Vocabulary</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>-.81</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>-.65</td>
<td>0.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter Identification</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>-.41</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Word Test</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>-1.11</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts About Print</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>-.68</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3. Mean Fall and Year-End Total Scores with Effect Sizes for Successfully Discontinued Reading Recovery and Tested-Not-Instructed Students, 2016–2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation Survey Task</th>
<th>Discontinued Fall</th>
<th>Discontinued Year-End</th>
<th>Tested-Not-Instructed Fall</th>
<th>Tested-Not-Instructed 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>395.5</td>
<td>552.9</td>
<td>414.3</td>
<td>534.0</td>
<td>-.43</td>
<td>0.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Text Reading Level</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>-.50</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Vocabulary</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Identification</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Word Test</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>-.52</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts About Print</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>0.60</td>
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</table>
students on all measures, with effect sizes ranging from .17 (small) to .60 (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. More specifically, the effect size changes from fall to year-end were as follows: Total Score (0.95), Text Reading Level (0.95), Writing Vocabulary (0.82), Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (0.75), Letter Identification (0.36), Ohio Word Test (0.95), and Concepts About Print (0.85). Thus, the Reading Recovery sample, as compared to the TNI sample, increased by nearly one standard deviation unit from fall to year-end averaged across the measures (an average effect size change of 0.80).

A few other results should be noted. First, on the Observation Survey Total Score, the discontinued students moved from the 25th percentile in the fall to the 49th percentile at year-end. Second, when considering classroom reading group placement, the discontinued students increased from 16% in the average or higher reading group in the fall to 85% by year-end. Finally, in terms of special education services received, the pool of discontinued students had included 1,407 special education students when Reading Recovery began, and this number was reduced to 146 when Reading Recovery ended. These are additional indications of the efficacy of the Reading Recovery intervention, as discontinued students (a) move to the middle of the distribution on the Total Score, (b) move to the average, above average or well above average reading groups, and (c) are much less likely to need special education services.

Strong effects such as these would not be possible without the strong commitment of 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.

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 4 provides details about participation in Descubriendo la Lectura in the United States. For the 2016–2017 school year, 504 children were instructed by 70 teachers. These Descubriendo la Lectura students attended 72 schools in 28 school districts located in 8 states. These teachers were supported by 27 teacher leaders. Fifty-six percent of Descubriendo la Lectura students were boys, 97% were Hispanic, 94% qualified for free or reduced lunch, and there were considerable Title I children (86% schoolwide Title I, 14% individual Title I). Schools were located in 60% urban areas, 32% suburban areas, and 8% rural areas.

For students served in Descubriendo la Lectura, 44% reached the average reading levels of their peers and lessons were successfully discontinued. Another 24% were recommended for further evaluation, 2% moved, and 26% received incomplete interventions. Of the students who completed the intervention (both discontinued and referred students), 65% were discontinued. Of the referred students, of note were 84 recommended for small-group literacy instruction or intervention other than special education, and 18 for literacy-related special education services. Trained teachers had a mean of 19.2 years of teaching experience and 7.9 years of Reading Recovery and/or Descubriendo la Lectura teaching experi-

<table>
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<tr>
<td>University Training Centers</td>
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<td>Teacher Training Sites</td>
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<td>States</td>
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<td>School Systems</td>
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<td>School Buildings</td>
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<td>Teacher Leaders</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>DLL Students</td>
<td>504</td>
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<tr>
<td>Random Sample for DLL</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tested-Not-Instructed for DLL</td>
<td>0</td>
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</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.
These teachers taught from 2 to 8 children on a daily basis (mode = 4), while teaching a mean of 6.9 children across the school year, and a mean of 24.2 children in other teaching roles, for a mean total of 31.0 children.

**Results**

Two students per participating Descubriendo la Lectura school were administered the Instrumento de Observación in fall, mid-year, and at year-end in half of the schools randomly assigned. Those students combined represented the random sample. 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 did not conduct Descubriendo la Lectura TNI testing. Descubriendo la Lectura random sample students’ scores on the six tasks of the Instrumento de Observación were utilized, as was done for Reading Recovery students, to create a 0 to 800-point Total Score measure that reflected literacy development throughout the school year.

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 Descubriendo la Lectura students (see Figure 3). From mid-year to year-end, the largest growth was for the spring entry students. Together these results indicate that the greatest gain was during the respective intervention periods. Spring entry Descubriendo la Lectura and random sample students showed approximately the same gain from fall to mid-year. However, from mid-year to year-end, the spring entry...
Descubriendo la Lectura students outgained the random sample. The trend for Text Reading Level (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 5 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 Descubriendo la Lectura 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 -.42 (medium) to -.82 (large). By year-end testing, the Descubriendo la Lectura students had surpassed the random sample students on all measures, with effect sizes ranging from .19 (small) to .46 (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.

More specifically, the effect size changes for the Descubriendo la Lectura students and random sample from fall to year-end were as follows: Instrumento de Observación Total Score (1.08), Analisis Actual del Texto (1.01), Escritura de Vocabulario (0.84), Oir y Anotar los Sonidos en las Palabras (0.85), Identificacion de Letras (0.74), Prueba de Palabras (1.00), and Conceptos del Texto Impreso (0.82). Overall, the Descubriendo la Lectura sample, as compared to the random sample, increased by nearly one standard deviation unit from fall to year-end averaged across the measures (an average effect size change of 0.91).

In fall testing, the discontinued students moved from the 24th percentile in the fall to the 53rd percentile at year-end. Second, when considering classroom reading group placement, the discontinued students increased from 15% in the average or higher reading group in the fall to 97% by year-end. Finally, in terms of special education services received, the pool of discontinued students had 247 in special education and this was reduced to only one when Descubriendo la Lectura lessons ended. These are additional indications of the efficacy of the Descubriendo la Lectura intervention, as discontinued students (a) move to the middle of the distribution on the Total Score, (b) move to the average, above average or well above average reading groups, and (c) are much less likely to need special education services.

### Table 5. Mean Fall and Year-End Total Scores with Effect Sizes for Successfully Discontinued Descubriendo la Lectura and Random Sample Students, 2016–2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumento de Observación 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>466.7</td>
<td>580.2</td>
<td>491.2</td>
<td>569.4</td>
<td>-.68</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analisis Actual del Texto</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>-.82</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escritura de Vocabulario</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>-.59</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oir y Anotar los Sonidos en las Palabras</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>-.54</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identificacion de Letras</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>-.42</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prueba de Palabras</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>-.54</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptos del Texto Impreso</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>-.61</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

These results, as well as prior results (e.g., Lomax, 2017), indicate that Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura continue to be among a very small list of educational interventions with strong impacts on student learning in the United States.
In the 33rd year of implementation in 2016–2017, students receiving these interventions continue to generate strong outcomes. On the Observation Survey Total Score for both Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura, the average discontinued student caught up to and surpassed the average of the random sample.

Strong effects such as these would not be possible without the strong commitment of 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
Dr. Richard G. Lomax is director of research for Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura and professor emeritus of educational studies at The Ohio State University, where he was previously associate dean for research and administration in the College of Education and Human Ecology. His research primarily focuses on multivariate analysis and models of literacy acquisition. He has published textbooks and in diverse journals including *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Parenting: Science and Practice*, *Understanding Statistics: Statistical Issues in Psychology, Education and the Social Sciences*, *Violence Against Women, Journal of Early Adolescence, The Journal of Negro Education, International Journal of Computer Science in Sport*, and *International Journal of Sports Medicine*. Named an AERA Fellow, he has served as a Fulbright Scholar on three different occasions; worked on numerous funded projects; and received several teaching, research, service, and book awards.

REQUIRED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR READING RECOVERY TEACHER LEADERS

June 12-15 in Louisville, KY

2018 Reading Recovery Teacher Leader Institute

Polishing the Diamond: Refining the Tools in Your Teacher Leader Toolkit
Examining Outcomes for Special Education Students in Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura

Richard G. Lomax, The Ohio State University, International Data Evaluation Center

Editor’s note: This is the second in a series of Research Briefs illustrating an analysis of IDEC data beyond the annual summary report. Our goal is to initiate further discussion and analysis.

The focus of this brief is on the percentage of successfully discontinued Reading Recovery® and Descubriendo la Lectura students receiving special education services, both prior to and after the intervention. In other words, the research question is whether a successful intervention results in fewer children needing to receive special education services.

From other IDEC reports (e.g., Lomax, 2017), the data show overwhelmingly that students in Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura are brought up to grade level in their reading. That is one positive outcome and the most cited. This outcome suggests that children whose Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura lessons are successfully discontinued are better positioned for passing a statewide third-grade reading test (a gatekeeping assessment for future educational placement in many school settings).

An outcome not often considered is whether the intervention can decrease the percentage of children needing special education services. Sources agree that the cost and number of students receiving special education services continues to increase annually. For example, in California just over 1 in 10 students are receiving special education services. According to a 2017 report by the National Education Association (NEA), the average cost per pupil in special education is over $9,000 more than students in regular education. Obviously, the percentages and costs vary by state, district (and thus student demographics), as well as severity of need. Nevertheless, reducing the percentage of students receiving such services can decrease overall cost per pupil, and also decrease other barriers to school and career success.

For the current analysis, the Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura databases were examined for the last 5 school years (2016–2017, 2015–2016, 2014–2015, 2013–2014, 2012–2013) for students who have successfully discontinued from both interventions. The results are shown in Table 1. Across the 5 most recent years of data collection (a) the percentage of successfully discontinued Reading Recovery students receiving special education services decreased from 6.0% to 0.6%, and (b) the percentage of successfully discontinued Descubriendo la Lectura children receiving special education services decreased from 5.1% to 0.3%. Thus, across the interventions, there was a decrease of about 5% in children needing special education services.

To put this positive outcome into a different perspective, there were approximately 125,000 successfully discontinued students in these interventions across the 5 school years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Reading Recovery Before</th>
<th>Reading Recovery After</th>
<th>Descubriendo la Lectura Before</th>
<th>Descubriendo la Lectura After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016–2017</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015–2016</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014–2015</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013–2014</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–2013</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of those, 7,444 children needed special education services prior to the intervention, while only 756 children needed special education services after the intervention. Assuming an extra $9,000 cost per pupil of special education (NEA, 2017), this results in a savings of over $60 million in a single academic year just for those students. In short, the cost of a 20-week intervention of Reading Recovery or Descubriendo la Lectura will be substantially less than the additional cost of special education beyond first grade (especially since special education services follow most children for multiple grades). It would be wise to consider these savings when costing out Reading Recovery or Descubriendo la Lectura in your school or district.

References

Partners in Excellence – Our Associate Members
RRCNA offers a special associate membership level to companies that provide top-quality goods and services to the Reading Recovery community. 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 at the next conference, be sure to say “thank you for all you do for Reading Recovery!”
In September 2017, I noticed a change in the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) website. An initiative of the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the WWC reviews and assesses research evidence for educational programs, products, practices, and policies. For the first time, they were ranking the 220 literacy interventions they had reviewed in order of their effectiveness. This ranking seems like an attempt to make the WWC research reviews more helpful for school districts and administrators looking for evidence-based practices, as called for in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) or the previous No Child Left Behind legislation.

Because an organization like the WWC cannot advocate for any particular program, it isn’t apparent in their reviews or rankings how exceptional and strong the evidence is for the effectiveness of Reading Recovery. My goal in this article is to help education decision makers see that Reading Recovery is one of the very few interventions with sufficient evidence of effectiveness to justify implementation. To accomplish this, I detail the WWC criteria for ranking research-based interventions, show how the most recent Reading Recovery research (May, Sirinides, Gray, & Goldsworthy, 2016) would influence these rankings, and provide additional effectiveness evidence that goes beyond these rankings.

When I first noticed the WWC rankings, Success for All® was at the top of their list and Reading Recovery was ranked fifth. I was surprised by these rankings since I had recently read and compared (Schwartz, 2016) the independent evaluations of the Investing in Innovation (i3) scale-up grants awarded to these two interventions. I also knew that the WWC was aware of how much stronger the Reading Recovery research evidence was than that for Success for All, since they had published single study reviews of both grants’ final reports. The Reading Recovery review showed a large effect on standardized measures of word reading skill and comprehension, while the Success for All review showed a small effect on word reading and no impact on students’ comprehension.

Because WWC rankings did not match my reading of the research, I contacted the WWC help desk to ask how they determined their rankings. They quickly responded to my question, referring me to the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Version 3.0 (Appendix B). Unfortunately, these procedures describe how WWC prioritizes interventions for review or updating of previous intervention reports, but not how they rank the effectiveness of interventions they have reviewed. The next day, when I clarified that I was interested in how WWC ranked the effectiveness of the interventions listed under the Literacy topic area, they responded that their staff were considering my question and would prepare a response.

Incorporating the results of the What Works Clearinghouse single study review of the i3 final report would move Reading Recovery to the first spot in WWC ranking of effective interventions.

This took a bit longer. A month later, I followed up on my inquiry. They responded that they were still looking into it and would get back to me as soon as possible. Another month passed. No word. When I checked the WWC website at the end of November, however, the rankings had changed. Reading Recovery was ranked third, and Success for All had moved down the list to tenth.

Since I still did not know the basis for these ranking, I contacted WWC again. Here is their December 1, 2017 email response:

Thank you for following up. The WWC has resolved the issue with how interventions are organized in the Find What Works tool. The list of interventions is sorted by the number of outcome domains with positive effects. If there is a tie between two interventions (that is, the evidence for both interventions demonstrates positive effects in the same number of outcome domains), then the tie is broken.
by considering the following factors (in order): 1) The number of domains with positive or potential positive effects; 2) The number of studies meeting WWC design standards; and 3) The number of students in studies meeting WWC design standards.

The WWC Procedures Handbook Version 4.06 describes the process for developing intervention reports. We encourage you to read the handbook to learn more about this process. Periodically, the WWC revisits interventions to examine all new research that has emerged since the report’s initial release. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and the WWC select which reports to update based on an annual prioritization process. If an intervention report is selected, the WWC screens and reviews new studies. However, we are unable to review all of the interventions with updated research.

After reviewing any additional studies, the WWC will release an updated intervention report. If some of the new research meets design standards, the summary measures (effect size, improvement index, and rating) may change. Please note that new research on an intervention does not guarantee the WWC will update an intervention report.

Please let us know if you have additional questions about the process of developing and updating intervention reports. (personal communication)

**Updating the Evidence**

In Reading Recovery’s July 2013 intervention report7 we had positive ratings in the Beginning Reading outcome domains of alphabetics and reading achievement, and potentially positive ratings in the two other Beginning Reading domains — comprehension and reading fluency. Figure 1, a partial table from page 25 of the Procedures Handbook, Version 4.0 shows their criteria for a positive or potentially positive rating. To determine how the Reading Recovery scale-up research (May et al., 2016) would influence our domain ratings and intervention ranking, I applied the WWC criteria. WWC’s single study review found May et al.’s study to meet their design standards without reservations and have a significant positive effect on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) comprehension measure. The significant positive effect size in this domain would increase our rating in comprehension from potentially positive to positive. This one change would move Reading Recovery to the first spot in WWC ranking of effective interventions.

The i3 research (May et al., 2016) has many other elements that would establish Reading Recovery’s top ranking in the WWC list of effective interventions. For example, the report includes a subgroup analysis for the 19% of the sample classified as English Language Learners (ELL). May et al. report large impact estimates for this group on the Observation Survey Total Score, the ITBS Total Score, ITBS Reading Words, and Comprehen-
sion subscales. WWC last reviewed Reading Recovery in the ELL topic area in December 2009. At that time, they reported “no studies of Reading Recovery® were found that fell within the scope of the ELL review protocol and met WWC evidence standards.”

Whether this new information results in positive or potentially positive ratings for alphabetics, comprehension, and reading achievement in the ELL topic area depends on issues related to replication. May et al. could be considered as one study or as four replications of the effectiveness findings. This multiyear study reports results on large independent random samples of first-grade students taught by different Reading Recovery teachers from different schools in each of four school years. As indicated in the WWC rating criteria, a positive rating requires two or more studies, which in turn depends on whether each replication is considered a study. Replication of research findings across independent samples is rare in fields like medicine, psychology, or education (Open Science Collaboration, 2015). It should be valued in the WWC ratings (IES, 2016). Additional positive ratings in the ELL topic area would be important because WWC adds the number of positive ratings across topic areas in determining their ranking of an intervention’s effectiveness.

The reading fluency domain has the largest effect size in the Reading Recovery 2013 WWC intervention report. Despite this large effect, the fluency domain is rated as potentially positive because WWC found only one study that met their standard, Schwartz (2005). The fluency measure they used from this study was the Text Reading Level subtest from An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 2013). A number of studies reviewed by WWC presented data on Text Reading Level, but WWC was concerned that this measure might not have the measurement characteristics necessary to calculate an effect size from the usual parametric formula. Schwartz was able to provide the raw score on this measure to WWC so they could do a non-parametric estimate of the effect size. This analysis produced the large effect and potentially positive rating in the Reading Recovery 2013 intervention report.

D’Agostino, Rodgers, and Mauck (2017) address issues that have been problematic in previous research using Clay’s Observation Survey. They provide a Rasch transformation for both the Total Score and the Text Reading Level measure to ensure an equal interval scale. May et al. (2016) used this transformation in their analysis of the Observation Survey Total Score, but they don’t report results on the subscores that WWC previously considered as measures in the alphabetics, comprehension, reading achievement, and fluency domains.

Schwartz and Lomax (in preparation) are currently conducting a secondary analysis of these subscores from the i3 data. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and effect size calculations for Text Reading Level raw scores and scale scores across the 4-year i3 study. This table provides the evidence that WWC needs to increase the fluency rating from potentially positive to positive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>855</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Test Mean</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Standard Deviation)</td>
<td>(4.8)</td>
<td>(3.7)</td>
<td>(4.7)</td>
<td>(4.2)</td>
<td>(4.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Test Scale Score Mean</td>
<td>492.0</td>
<td>435.5</td>
<td>488.7</td>
<td>425.0</td>
<td>489.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Standard Deviation)</td>
<td>(39.5)</td>
<td>(64.5)</td>
<td>(44.7)</td>
<td>(77.1)</td>
<td>(44.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw Score Effect Size</td>
<td>+1.46</td>
<td>+1.24</td>
<td>+1.28</td>
<td>+1.33</td>
<td>+1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale Score Effect Size</td>
<td>+0.88</td>
<td>+0.83</td>
<td>+0.81</td>
<td>+0.84</td>
<td>+0.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Much Evidence is Enough?

In education, as in medicine, there is a strong push to use methods and interventions that have demonstrated effectiveness in clinical trials. Still, evaluating this evidence is complex. The National Cancer Institute provides physicians with levels of evidence related to five different topic areas. Although the criteria vary across these areas, they usually include some evaluation of the strength of the study design and the outcomes measured. In evaluation of cancer treatments, a measure of mortality reduction is stronger than an indirect measure like tumor response rate. Similarly, in literacy research a measure of text comprehension or general reading achievement should be considered stronger than a measure of phonological awareness that may later lead to reading comprehension gains. When Reading Recovery’s intervention report is updated to include the May et al. 2016 study, the evidence will demonstrate positive ratings in all the Beginning Reading domains.

Although WWC uses a count of the number of positive ratings an intervention can demonstrate to rank effectiveness, these ratings and ranking alone are not sufficient to justify implementation decisions. The IES (2016) considered the highest evidence level to be based on an “independent evaluation of a fully-developed education intervention with prior evidence of efficacy, when implemented by the end user under routine conditions” (p. 5). This evidence is further strengthened by sufficient diversity in the sample to ensure appropriate generalizability. The May et al. study meets all these scale-up design conditions and replicates the effectiveness findings in each of 4 years using 2 different methodologies.

The findings shown in the May et al. study reflect lessons learned over 40 years of supporting the professional learning of teachers and the implementation efforts of administrators as Reading Recovery has scaled up in five countries. Successfully implementing this early intervention/prevention model for the most at-risk beginning readers requires considerable effort (Briggs & Honchell, 2016). If your school or district is committed to supporting these students, the combination of design elements, replication, effect size estimates, and domain ratings makes Reading Recovery arguably the only early literacy intervention with sufficient scientific evidence to justify adoption decisions.

The combination of design elements, replication, effect size estimates, and domain ratings makes Reading Recovery arguably the only early literacy intervention with sufficient scientific evidence to justify adoption for the most at-risk beginning readers.

Endnotes
(All web addresses as accessed January 5, 2018)


3 Review of Reading Recovery: An evaluation of the four-year i3 scale-up https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Study/32027

4 Scaling up the Success for All model of school reform: Final report from the Investing in Innovation (i3) evaluation https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Study/32024


9 PDQ® Levels of Evidence https://www.cancer.gov/publications/pdq/levels-evidence
References


About the Author

Dr. Robert Schwartz is an emeritus professor in the Department of Reading and Language Arts at Oakland University in Rochester, MI. He is a past president of and current research consultant for the Reading Recovery Council of North America. His research interests include self-monitoring in beginning reading, early literacy intervention, research design, and professional development for literacy teachers. In the What Works Clearinghouse 2007 review of 887 studies from 153 beginning reading programs, Dr. Schwartz’s Reading Recovery research was one of only 27 studies that met WWC’s standards without reservations. He can be reached at rschwart@oakland.edu.

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The progress of my Reading Recovery student Ben had stalled. After the summer holidays, he continued his lessons series as a carryover student in Grade 2, but something had changed. He seemed reluctant to leave his classroom, and I was struggling to reengage his interest. At the end of a school day, I dropped by Ben's classroom to talk about my concerns with his teacher, Mia. She generously put aside what she was doing and actively listened to my somewhat rambling report. Mia picked up on some of my descriptions of Ben's reading and writing behavior; she had observed similarities in the classroom. Together we created a richer profile of Ben's responses than either of us would have come up with individually. Then, we decided on a coordinated plan of action. When Ben encountered reading work in Reading Recovery, his first action was to ask for help. Mia observed that his first response to reading work in classroom guided reading lessons was to ask a classmate for help. Our plan was to support him in trying something first before asking for help—leading him to take self-monitoring action and experience the satisfaction of solving challenges by himself.

Mia and I continued to check in with each other on Ben’s literacy development. Sometimes those conversations were brief but always powerful. One day as I passed Mia’s class on the way to the gym she called out, “Ben did some great self-correcting today.” I was able to use that information later in our Reading Recovery lesson to reinforce the same behavior and link it back to his classroom reading.

Those powerfully helpful conversations with Mia came from my uncertainty on how to proceed with Ben. In their book, Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School, Hargreaves and Fullan describe the benefit of sharing our uncertainty with colleagues.

[Uncertainty] is what makes teaching interesting, variable and challenging—a job that is different every day. But uncertainty encountered alone, in enforced isolation, is uncertainty magnified to unhealthy proportions, because teachers must figure out how to deal with all the uncertainty on their own with no feedback, advice, or support. If you are alone and uncertain, you get anxious. And if you are anxious, like a deer in the headlights, you are likely to become rooted in the spot or ‘stuck.’ (2012, p. 107)

Consulting colleagues when stuck is nothing new to Reading Recovery teaching. Actions to take when acceleration is compromised are clearly laid out in Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals (Clay, 2016). Reading Recovery teachers are guided to “seek insights from colleagues” beginning with consultation with the classroom teacher, “about what you have noted for shared problem solving” (p. 167). In my own practice, I had been quick to consult within my Reading Recovery network and bypass the classroom teacher’s perspective on the problem at hand.

A network that welcomes different perspectives is the basis for powerful conversations and a wealth of opportunities.

In Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives, Peter Johnston describes thinking and working together in a cohesive way.

Individual minds are nurtured in the conversations—the interactive thinking—of the community. Thinking well together leads to thinking well alone. But by thinking together, I don’t mean just the rational logic of the conversations. The emotional and relational support we provide for each other in the process of thinking together is equally important to the development of individual minds. (2012, p. 96)
A network that welcomes different perspectives is the basis for powerful conversations and a wealth of opportunities. Conversations with Mia changed my approach to problem solving around children who were hard to accelerate, and my understanding of the power in bringing different perspectives into the discussion.

Listen to Gay Su Pinnell’s ideas in the Promising Literacy for Every Child webcast on comprehensive learning and available on the RRCNA website. She reminds us that conversation is a tool of learning within an environment of mutual support. And she says that no matter how expert you might be, you can always get better by talking about your work and listening as others talk. Powerful conversations.

Read the archives from the monthly RRCNA twitter chats that bring together different perspectives for powerful discussion around a topic. I recently read through the “Effectively Using Job Embedded Professional Development” chat, where educators from a variety of backgrounds and geographical locations shared ideas and links. Here are just a few responses to the question, “What are some of the benefits of ongoing, job-embedded professional learning?” all of which reminded me of my collaboration with Mia:

- We build an environment for reflections.
- Takes time to build trust but it is worth it.
- Sometimes small shifts lead to the greatest impact.
- Makes us think and talk about teaching, set goals, learn/plan observe.
- Relevant to the work we do every day.
- Understanding comes from taking a zoom lens to our teaching.

Among my many wonderful experiences at the 2018 National Conference was the opportunity to talk to attendees about where they were from and why they chose to attend. On the first day, I met a group of first-time attendees from Mississippi, distinguished by the bring pink ribbons on their name tags. We talked about their work, about educators we admired, and about our expectations for powerful professional learning in the days ahead. At the end of the conference I met them again. One of the group gave me her pink ribbon and said that she would be back next year; she was no longer a first-time attendee. I look forward to meeting up in 2019 and continuing our conversations!

And as my term as RRCNA president comes to a close, I thank each of you for being part of a community that contributes to the powerful conversations that help each of us grow as educators. You have enriched my life.

References

A Reading Recovery trainer in Canada, Janice is currently doing research on children’s written language development after Reading Recovery.
Executive Director’s Message

It Only Takes a Minute

RRCNA Executive Director Jady Johnson

If you had to describe Reading Recovery to an influential school decision maker in just 1 minute, what would you say? How would you take best advantage of the opportunity?

RRCNA provides a variety of materials in the Members Only Resource Center to help you with messaging and increasing the visibility of Reading Recovery in your school, district, and community. So, I referenced the resources for outreach and came up with this:

“Reading Recovery is a short-term early intervention for first-grade students having difficulty with reading and writing. Students work one-to-one with a specially trained teacher in daily 30-minute lessons for only 12 to 20 weeks.

Reading Recovery works! Student achievement is accelerated, with measurable results in just weeks, not years.

Reading Recovery is a thoroughly researched and proven early literacy intervention. Data is collected on every student and our results have been consistent for decades. More than 70% of Reading Recovery students read at grade level after a full series of lessons.

We all know that the best investment for struggling students is knowledgeable teachers. Reading Recovery’s trademarked standards assure high-level teacher expertise for schools.

And, because of their deep understanding of literacy theory and practice, Reading Recovery-trained teachers become experts for their schools. By consulting with teacher and administrator colleagues and sharing their professional knowledge, the whole school benefits!”

Okay, I’ll be honest. It takes me a minute and 10 seconds to say that! But, you get the point.

What if you had the chance to do a presentation at a community meeting – Rotary, Kiwanis, your chamber of commerce? Or, maybe you have the opportunity to speak to your school board or a parent group. We have PowerPoint templates and tech notes just for you! You can use them as they are, or drop in information of your own.

You can download 4-page overview brochures on Reading Recovery, Descubriendo la Lectura, and Literacy Lessons; fact sheets that cover common questions, What Works Clearinghouse rankings, basic facts and figures; and case studies on successful implementations.

You’ll also find:

- “Dear Principal” letters on topics identified in the i3 final report
- Formatted enewsletters for administrators on a variety of topics
- Customizable note card, introduction letter, trifold brochure
- Professional photos for websites and print materials
- Short streaming videos on professional learning, RTI, and lesson progress; and interviews with administrators

How about reaching out to your state legislator or a member of Congress? View or download the 30-page Advocacy Guide with information and suggestions.

These messages and resources were developed in concert with school decision makers, Reading Recovery professionals, and marketing experts to help you tell YOUR Reading Recovery story. In the coming weeks, we’ll be adding more administrator videos both here and on the Reading Recovery Works site.

As always, we would love your ideas and suggestions for additional resources that would be useful. Let us know — we are here to support your work!
Fund Challenge Total Tops $22,000

Attendees at this year’s National Conference united in literacy success to donate to the Reading Recovery Fund Challenge. About 200 donors were able to raise just over $11,000, with a generous match by Pioneer Valley Books raising the total beyond the $22,000 mark.

RRCNA Development Committee Chair Annie Opat and Kentucky Principal Gerry Brooks brought some fun to the challenge via video and on stage. With her roots in Kansas, Annie urged donations to avoid an appearance from the ‘Wicked Witch of the West.’ Pioneer Valley Books President Michele Dufresne, along with Bella and Rosie, also joined the fun on stage after Gerry’s video suggestion that the dogs may have run off with the money.

The Reading Recovery Fund allows RRCNA to continue its work supporting education policy, adequate school funding, meaningful professional development, ongoing research, and outreach to decision makers. We thank our generous donors for their support of Reading Recovery.

Our Continued Thanks to Hameray and Kaleidoscope Series Authors

Over the last 7 years, Hameray Publishing Group and the authors of its Kaleidoscope Collection have donated sales revenue and royalties totaling $69,077 to RRCNA. These leveled readers were written by a group of experienced Reading Recovery teachers, teacher leaders, literacy coaches, and reading specialists — all members of RRCNA. Each year at the National Conference, Hameray President Kevin Yuen and his parents, Ray and Christine Yuen, have presented a check to RRCNA Executive Director Jady Johnson. Many thanks are extended to the authors listed below and to the Yuens!

Susan Antonelli
Elaine S. Belay
Nancy R. Brekke
Agatha Brown
Gregory H. Brown
Lillian Burriss
Natalie Byerly
Lucretia Cahill
Sharyl M. Calhoun
JoAnne Demetrio
Karen B. Diaz
Paula Dugger
Jamie A. Duncan
Rebecca Gibson
Heather Goodacre
Anita Goodwin
Janelle Green
Geraldine Haggard
Carolyn M. Harding
Samantha Harris
Heather S. Hill
Jane Hunter
Kimberly A. Hurley
Gaynell R. Jamison
Rhonda Johnson
Christine Jojola
Jean Marie Junis
Lisa Burnet Killebrew
Amy Klopfenstein
Elizabeth L. Larrabee
Patti Lindsay
Reva Lobatos
Melissa Martin
John T. McCarrier
Rhonda McDonald
Mary McHugh-Mullane
Jo Beth McKee
Debra G. Moeller
Rita Nicolussi
Liza O’Neal
Gennifer Paul-Fetterman
Miguel Perez-Soler
Sharon R. Powell
Tracy Rawles
Molly J. Reed
Lisa A. Richardson
Jacqueline Russo
Mary McHugh-Mullane
Jo Beth McKee
Debra G. Moeller
Rita Nicolussi
Liza O’Neal
Gennifer Paul-Fetterman
Miguel Perez-Soler
Sharon R. Powell
Tracy Rawles
Molly J. Reed
Lisa A. Richardson
Jacqueline Russo

Susan Sellers
Rebecca L. Shoniker
Jan Shoupe
Elaine M. Simpson
Andrew Sommer
Steven V. Steele
Sandra S. Veach
Maren Wallenberg
Susan G. Weaver-Jones
Kimberly Ziemann
2017-18 Teacher Leader Scholars

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 contributed $15,000 to fund one teacher leader scholarship. Erin Nock, Farmington Public Schools, Farmington, CT, is pictured with donor Ray Yuen.

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. The proud publisher of the Danny series of children’s books that provide reading practice and support the development of a lifelong love of reading, MaryRuth Books provided one $15,000 teacher leader scholarship. Pamela Slone, Kentucky Valley Education Cooperative, Hazard, KY, is pictured with donor Mia Coulton (left).

Pioneer Valley Books

Pioneer Valley Books is dedicated to producing the highest-quality books for literacy learners, 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 are specifically designed to help children gain reading fluency and independence. Pioneer Valley Books provided one $15,000 teacher leader scholarship. Recipient Allison Cummins, Bricolage Academy, New Orleans, LA, is pictured with donor Michele Dufresne (left).

Five $15,000 teacher leader training scholarships will be awarded for the 2018–2019 training year. The James P. Verhalen Family Foundation is providing two scholarships, joined by Hameray Publishing Group/Yuen Family Foundation, MaryRuth Books, and Pioneer Valley Books each offering one scholarship.

Read complete requirements and criteria on the RRCNA Grants and Scholarships webpage, then download and submit applications by May 31, 2018.
Tenyo Family Foundation offered 12 grants. The Foundation was founded by the late Sophie Tenyo to support charitable, religious, scientific, literacy, and educational endeavors for the public welfare and well-being of mankind. Recipients are (standing left-to-right) Erin Klopstad, Nevada Community School District, Nevada, IA; Zamara Johnson, Oldham County School District, Crestwood, KY; Sandee Coward, Sarasota County Schools, North Port, FL; Heather Brewer Allen, Bullitt County Public Schools, West Point, KY; Rachel Armstrong, Paoli Community Schools, Paoli, IN; (seated left-to-right) DeeDee (Debora) Verlinde, York Region District School Board, Newmarket, Ontario, Canada; Kelly Russell, Jefferson County School District, Louisville, KY; Charla Mason, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Nashville, TN; Jeffrey Timberlake, Boston Public Schools, East Boston, MA; Catherine Schoon, New Haven Unified School District, Union City, CA; Carol Heeren, DC Everest Public School District, Ringle, WI; and Aimee Sexton, Metcalfe County Schools, Edmonton, KY.

Debby Wood Professional Development Grant was established in memory of Debby Wood, who served as a teacher leader in Prince George’s County, MD. Debby was a past recipient of an RRCNA grant to attend the National Conference and always looked forward to the excellent professional development. The recipient is Robin Baudoin, Prince George’s County Public Schools, Seabrook, MD.

KEEP BOOKS are designed as a school/home book program that addresses the need for inexpensive, but interesting books for young children to read at home. Books include a wide variety of high-interest titles at reading levels appropriate for preK through Grade 2 and are developed to help children learn effective reading strategies. KEEP BOOKS provided two grants. Lisa Silva (left) and Lauren Johnson (right), both of Beaufort County Schools, Chocowinity, NC, are pictured with Marsha Levering of KEEP BOOKS.
Blueberry Hill Books are 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. *Julie Sardo*, Sarasota County Schools, North Port, FL, is pictured with donor Patricia Harrison (left).

**RR Books, LLC** is an educational publisher located in Reading, PA. They offer a variety of fiction and nonfiction leveled books specifically designed for beginning readers. Their goal is to provide quality, affordable books for young children. *Sarah Dubensky-Obando*, Rochester Community Schools, Rochester, MI, is pictured with donor Matt Bonnell.

SongLake Books hand selects the best books from the best companies and organizes them into leveled book sets for guided reading and Reading Recovery. Book collections include fiction and nonfiction selections with a variety of genres at each level and are culturally diverse and gender fair. Titles are hand-picked to target children of all ability levels, especially at-risk readers. *Jessica Hancock*, Wayne County School District, Monticello, KY, pictured with donor Sarah English (right).

Rose Mary Estice Memorial Grant 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. *Michelle Rentsch*, Southeast Local School District, Ravenna, OH, is pictured with donor Ernie Estice.
Teacher Leader Professional Development Grants were funded by the generosity of trainers and teacher leaders during the 2017 Teacher Leader Institute. The Bring Your Bling Silent Auction raised funds for two teacher leader grants. Recipients are (left) Tammy White, Montgomery County Schools, Mt. Sterling, KY; and Christy Germany, San Juan Unified School District, Citrus Heights, CA.

Geri Stone Memorial Fund Grants and Scholarships were established by family members and friends in memory of Geri Stone’s leadership and work as a Michigan Reading Recovery teacher leader. Grants and scholarships are awarded to Reading Recovery professionals to help offset the cost of training, professional development, school supplies and projects, and other literacy efforts.

Individual recipients include Beth Delano, Oxford Community Schools, Oxford, MI; Claire Zari, Gwinnett County School District, Sugar Hill, GA; and Lisa Kaemming, Chelsea School District, Chelsea, MI.

Team recipients from Turrill Elementary School, Lapeer, MI, are Steve Smith, Cheryl Smith, and Beth Shemanski.

Team recipients from Schickler Elementary School, Lapeer, MI, are Karen Allen, Amy Duncan, and Kelly Vangel.

Watch your email and the website for 2019 grant opportunities!
Book List Grows with 158 New Titles

The Reading Recovery Book List Committee recently approved 158 new titles from Capstone Classroom, MaryRuth Books, Pioneer Valley Books, RR Books, and Shine On. That brings the total to 6,173 titles, including 1,317 Spanish titles. Members can create and print customized lists by title, level, publisher, and other custom sorts in the Members Only Resource Center. To view or print a list of new books, click on “New Book” from the Book List search screen.

Ever wonder how a book makes it on the list? The book leveling process is ongoing, with each review cycle spanning about 15 months. Books are submitted by publishers and undergo an initial screening by the North American Trainers Group Teaching and Professional Development Committee. Publishers are asked to submit 25 copies of selected books for field testing with Reading Recovery teachers and students — an average of 200 titles during each leveling cycle. Teacher-leveled books are then analyzed by Book List Chair Dr. Janet Bufalino and approved by the Committee. This painstaking process ensures that the books listed meet the highest standards of quality for Reading Recovery teaching.

Live Twitter Chat Highlights Meeting

A guided tour of RRCNA’s social media platforms, ending with a live Twitter chat, highlighted this year’s meeting of more than 200 members and guests. Hollyanna Bates, Colorado teacher leader and host of our monthly #rrchat, guided Tweeters and introduced emcees Maryann McBride and Barbara Schubert. Generous exhibitors donated dozens of prizes including little books, classroom resources, gift certificates, and more. Thanks to Abrams Learning Trends, Capstone, Engage Literacy, KEEP BOOKS, Magic Spark Literacy, MaryRuth Books, Okapi, Pioneer Valley Books, RC Owen Publishers, Read Naturally, Silver Lady, SongLake Books, Townsend Press, and Writing Out of the Box.

We Welcome Your Thoughts

Do you like sharing opinions with your fellow educators? Do you enjoy expressing yourself through the written word? If so, we have the perfect outlet! Everyone is welcome to submit a post to the RRCNA Connection blog on virtually any topic, from reflection and opinion to teaching tips and anecdotes. To learn more about the blog and how to submit a post, click on “Blog” in the yellow header at the top of the website homepage.
Excellence in Literacy Leadership Awards

Reading Recovery teacher leaders from across the country nominate individuals to receive this prestigious award. It is given annually to individuals not trained in Reading Recovery who have displayed a strong commitment to expand and maintain its high standards, and who made significant contributions to implementation beyond the local level. Three individuals were recognized at the 2018 National Conference in February.

**Dr. Amanda Alexander**  
*Chief of the Office of Elementary Schools*  
*Washington, DC*

Dr. Alexander provides leadership and vision for the district’s elementary schools and supervises a team of instructional superintendents. She also oversees Head Start and early childhood programs.

The daughter of a former kindergarten teacher began her own career teaching kindergarten in Washington, DC, and later served as an assistant principal in New York City where she first witnessed the powerful impact of Reading Recovery. Returning to Washington, she led literacy initiatives as a principal, instructional superintendent, and deputy chief of elementary schools. The compelling story of Reading Recovery in the nation’s capital is attributed solely to her creative and strategic genius.

“She celebrates and shares the successes, helps problem-solve any challenges, digs deeply into the data, and advocates passionately for ensuring that Reading Recovery will be available for all first graders who need it.”

She lays the foundation for fidelity of implementation — from hiring trained Reading Recovery teachers, to securing a donation from a private foundation for training teachers and a grant to obtain books and materials, to reaching out to The Ohio State University for guidance and a Maryland site for teacher leader support. DC became a registered site affiliated with OSU in November 2016, and a new training facility is under construction and will be ready for this fall’s training class.

And the efforts are already demonstrating positive effects. Site data improved significantly with a gain of 24 percentage points in 2016–17, and is expected to reach national average this year. Classroom instruction is improving in Reading Recovery schools. And early literacy is now front and center in the District’s strategic plan, with a 5-year path to full implementation of Reading Recovery.

“My relationship with the leaders in Reading Recovery is unbreakable,” said Teacher Leader Linda Randall. “We will make sure every child leaves first grade as a fluent reader!”

**Dr. Dean Baker**  
*Superintendent of School Administrative District 49*  
*Fairfield, ME*

For nearly 3 decades, Dr. Dean Baker has provided clear and progressive leadership to schools in Central Maine. He is widely recognized for implementing this successful intervention and is unique among Maine superintendents for having direct responsibility for student curriculum.

And his commitment to Reading Recovery is unwavering. With the guidance and support of Reading Recovery’s founder, Marie Clay, he met with state officials and established one of the first Reading Recovery training sites in Maine. He hosted the governor and education commissioner at the center’s opening in 1993, and as site coordinator, he worked with area superintendents to support teacher leader and teacher training.

He immediately restructured the Title I department, replacing technicians with literacy specialists and insisting that everyone successfully complete Reading Recovery training. He hired staff to fully implement each of his elementary schools and has maintained that level of implementation for decades by shifting staff and hiring replacements — ensuring that every student needing Reading Recovery receives it. Since opening, the training center has hosted more than 24 training classes for area teachers, including those in other districts.
“Dr. Baker's commitment has been unwavering for over a quarter of a century,” said Teacher Leader Whendy Smith. “His effective leadership provided for strong system designs, and his unconditional support has provided implementation longevity. There have been many times that he was approached with new initiatives and competing demands for funds, but he redirected any creative thinking back to the core business and the standards of Reading Recovery.”

He has held firm his unwavering belief of maintaining an instructional system design that meets young students where they are and intervenes early with good, quality literacy support. That belief has sustained the high-quality implementation of Reading Recovery at the University of Maine Training Center, at the state level, at training sites, and at the local level for all first-grade students in Maine. Dr. Baker works from a moral compass. Her has been the single constant — always relied on to make strong, informed decisions in the best interest of every member of the team, at every level of implementation.

Veronica Brady
Senior Vice President for Philanthropy
Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Venice, FL

Veronica Brady first heard about Reading Recovery from Keith Monda, former president of Coach Inc. and an early financial supporter of Reading Recovery at The Ohio State University training center. The enthusiasm generated during a lunch meeting of a county educator, a Reading Recovery expert, a local philanthropist, and Veronica was hard to contain. Within 2 weeks of that May meeting, Veronica had raised the necessary funding and received approval to help start Reading Recovery in three Title I schools in Sarasota. Thanks to her commitment, ongoing leadership, fund-raising efforts, and contributions of her time and effort, the district has grown from 3 schools and 6 Reading Recovery teachers to 23 schools and 34 teachers in just 2 years.

Her role as the external coordinator and fund-raiser for this effort hasn’t stopped there. With a passion to reach more children beyond the regular school year, she and Keith designed a program that stipends Reading Recovery teachers to work with students in need at summer camp sites. She actively reaches out to encourage and guide other Florida districts to explore implementation of Reading Recovery. She presented a session titled “Implementing an Intensive Intervention: How Innovation, Partnerships and Philanthropy Can Transform a District” during the Florida Reading Association's Annual Conference, which led to requests for future presentations. She spearheaded the efforts at Gulf Coast Community Foundation to create a “playbook” outlining steps other communities can take to bring Reading Recovery to their districts.

Veronica’s collaborative efforts to provide Sarasota’s teachers, teacher leader, and schools with the necessary ongoing support has a direct correlation to the district’s successful outcomes. Sarasota County’s site data have shown positive results, with 85% of students who received a full program successfully discontinuing their lessons in 2015–16 and growing to 86% the following year.

“From the inception, Veronica has worked diligently to reach numerous stakeholders and to spread the word about the powerful effects of Reading Recovery,” said Teacher Leader Lisa Fisher. “The benefits reach not only the students, but also impact the Reading Recovery teachers, the collaborating homeroom teachers, the school as a whole, and the families of the children themselves. Her significant contributions to Reading Recovery's implementation in Florida impacts lifetime trajectories.”
Four days of professional development sparked the enthusiasm of more than 2,000 educators who shared their passion for learning and literacy instruction.

Keynote Speaker Mary Fried (center) kicked off the Conference on Sunday by exploring how Literacy Lessons opens the doors of learning for specialist teachers, reaching a wider range of children with identified special needs. Pictured with Mary are Jady Johnson, RRCNA executive director (left) and Janice Van Dyke, RRCNA president and chair of the 2018 National Conference.

Monday Keynote Speaker Ellin Keene explained how to fully engage students and the relationship between engagement and understanding. She also greeted attendees during her book signing following the general session.

Keynote Speaker Pat Cummings wrapped up the Conference by illustrating the love of reading and curiosity in her own life and how it can turn young readers into lifelong explorers.

Special thanks to our generous sponsors for their support.
Attendees spread the word on social media

Terry Thompson
@TerryThompson

I’m always moved by how #NCCBUS #rccna2018 gatherings are like family reunions for my learning brain and teaching heart, reminding me of the power of intensive and intentional instruction, kid watching, and PD. @rccna.org

Sandy Brumbaum
@SBrumbaum

What an amazing group of #readingrecovery T's. What an amazing conference! #nccbus Thank you @rccna.org for all the learning. Thank you @SJVUSD1 for the opportunity to learn together and grow our thinking! #rccna2018

Tiffany McConnel
@McTOM5

A1: How can you pick just one?? Every session has stretched my thinking in some way! #rchat #nccbus

Broward LITERACY
@BrowardLiteracy

Literacy team from BROWARD, FL learning so much at #NCCBUS about engagement and creating independent readers from these amazing literacy experts! @USenavello @DrJannrichardson @Dingravity @Ellinekeene

There was a buzz of excitement throughout the conference that provided research-based literacy instruction and balanced theory with practice. Attendees left with new understandings to support effective literacy instruction that increases student achievement.

Speaker Douglas Reeves (above) challenged administrators in the day-long Leadership Institute to redefine educational accountability by providing high-impact leadership.
Cold Shoulder
A Reading Recovery student and I had been sitting very close together enjoying some familiar reading. When it was time for her running record book, I (without realizing), shifted my body away from hers so that my left shoulder was slightly blocking my face. I noticed her glancing over at me while she read the first few pages while I took the running record. Eventually she stopped, turned to me and said, “Oh, I get it. When I read these books it is like you are invisible.” Why, yes. Yes, it is.

Jamie Lipp  
Reading Recovery Trainer-in-Training  
Pickerington, Ohio

The First K
David completed reading *Henry’s Choice* today and I shared with him he had just read his first K! He responded with, “Is that a 401K?” After I laughed out loud, I realized it actually was a deposit in his retirement fund for life!

Julie Duke  
Reading Recovery Teacher  
Norcross, Georgia

In His Own Words
Isaac and I were having a conversation about the story he had finished reading and I asked if he’d like to write about it and he said quite quickly, “No — I want to say this! ‘I am doing good learning and I am proud of me.’” Clearly Reading Recovery has had an impact on him well beyond reading and writing!

Lisa Blanc  
Reading Recovery Teacher Leader  
Santa Clara, CA

Our readers say The Last Word column in *The Journal of Reading Recovery* is one of their favorite things to read. We need more of your great Reading Recovery stories. So take a minute to share one of your favorite moments with all our readers.
Just send a quick email to Communications Director Vicki Fox: vfox@readingrecovery.org
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Keynote Speakers
C.C. Bates  Lucy Calkins

Preconference and Featured Speakers
Irene Fountas  Gay Su Pinnell  Adria Klein  Mary Fried  Mary Lose  Nell Duke  Jan Richardson

Register at 2018 Conference Pricing Until July 1!
rrcna.org/conferences