Uncovering What’s Under the White Tape: Reflecting on a Child’s Approximations Over Time
Leslie McBane
James R. Schnug
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Neuroscience Meets Reading Recovery
Bridie Raban

Learning Language: Run, Run as Fast as You Can
Jennifer Flight

Student Outcomes Among Strongest in 32-Year History
IDEC Annual Evaluation Report by Richard G. Lomax
My wish for you
Is that you continue

Continue
To be who and how you are
To astonish a mean world
With your acts of kindness

Continue
To allow humor to lighten the burden
Of your tender heart

Continue
To put the mantle of your protection
Around the bodies of
The young and defenseless

Continue
To ignore no vision
Which comes to enlarge your range
And increase your spirit

Continue
To dare to love deeply
And risk everything
For the good thing

Continue
And by doing so
You and our work
Will be able to continue
Eternally

Remembering Marie
RRCNA is proud to play a role in supporting the professionals who carry out Marie Clay’s work. As we reflect on her legacy, we offer this tribute published at the time of her death in 2007. Extracted from a longer poem entitled “Continue” by Maya Angelou, the words suggest how we might honor Dr. Clay through our daily efforts and ongoing commitment to children and teaching.
Teaching

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We begin this issue commemorating the 10th anniversary of Marie Clay’s death. “My wish is that you continue,” wrote Maya Angelou. Continue to astonish a mean world, to protect the young and defenseless, to enlarge your range, to increase your spirit, and to risk everything for the good thing.

Astonishing the world of researchers and educators, ensuring literacy success for young, struggling learners, supporting Reading Recovery in multiple languages around the world, implementing Reading Recovery and its redevelopments (e.g., Descubriendo la Lectura) with integrity and fidelity: This is Marie Clay’s legacy, an indelible signature of honor and success made ever so meaningful by the realization that millions of lives in multiple settings, cultures, and languages across the globe have been enhanced by her scholarship and leadership. Her quest was to determine what was possible, her discoveries and her contributions were revolutionary, and her commitment and efforts continued to the final weeks of her life.

Marie’s wish was for us to continue, and so we strive to follow her lead. We continue to pursue enlarging our presence in order to serve more children, conducting relevant research and critical inquiry, examining and refining our explanations, problem solving implementation concerns, and fiercely guarding the integrity of Marie Clay’s work to ensure fidelity to her process and procedures and to maintain effectiveness.

Continuing the study of Reading Recovery instruction, its implementation, and related research, as well as continuing the national evaluation of student results, are the foci of the articles in this issue. A recurring theme noted across these articles is reflection.

Leslie McBane, James Schnug, and Cheri Slinger share their interesting examination of children’s writing by exploring and hypothesizing the implications of patterns observed in children’s writing errors. In addition to their descriptions of the children’s writing, they share their discoveries and the lessons they learned about their students and their teaching. Their reflections of each child’s writing behaviors and ‘mistakes’ clarified the child’s control and emerging competencies and informed their instructional decisions. Taking time to complete systematic observations and reflect deeply was key to identifying each child’s strengths and to providing powerful instruction. They detail a process that teachers will want to replicate.

Jennifer Flight offers a rich account of an exploratory, informal research project with her student, an English language learner (ELL). Her instructional approaches, accounting for the child’s oral language development and honoring his cultural knowledge, and her descriptions of his performance and growth over a relative short period of time will be very helpful for Reading Recovery teachers instructing ELLs. One of her important suggestions is to study a child’s oral language closely and reflect. “There is much to learn when we become more observant and reflective with respect to what the learner can do” (p. 33). As noted by our authors looking at children’s writing, Jennifer’s reflections of observed learner strengths are critically important for creating powerful learning opportunities.

Our Implementation section features an article written by Mary Jackson, a retired site coordinator for Reading Recovery/Descubriendo la Lectura in a large, suburban district. She shares her reflections of the processes her team engaged in over time as they implemented these interventions, responded to changes within the district (e.g., a new superintendent), and addressed issues of sustainability. Her discussion is honest and echoes challenges others have experienced. Most helpful are her reflections for improvement as these offer important, proactive efforts to ensure a secure implementation.

Bridie Raban brings current research in neuroscience to our attention for ongoing reflection. She discusses discoveries that relate to literacy acquisition and instruction while cautioning readers of the many unknowns in this relatively new area of science. She links key concepts directly to Marie Clay’s theoretical perspective and Reading Recovery instructional procedures. This reveals how astute Marie Clay was in designing instruction based on a transformational perspective of cognitive development.

IDEC Director Richard Lomax shares exciting results in the annual evaluations of Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura. “In its 32nd year of implementation in 2015–2016, students in the intervention posted amongst the strongest outcomes shown thus far” (p. 53). The data confirm that our teachers are highly effective; they provide outstanding instruction to a diverse range of learners.

With our authors, our commitment to learning through research, reflection, diligent attention to program implementation, and effective teaching will strengthen and sustain Reading Recovery. In so doing, we will continue Marie Clay’s remarkable legacy and her wish for the gift of literacy for all children.
How to Submit Articles

Write for The Journal of Reading Recovery

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

Blind Peer Review Process

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

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

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

Submitting Articles for Publication

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

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

For questions about or help with the submission process, contact Vicki Fox, director of communications, at vfox@readingrecovery.org or call 614-310-7332.

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Uncovering What’s Under the White Tape: Reflecting on a Child’s Approximations Over Time

Leslie McBane, Southwestern Schools Reading Recovery
James R. Schnug, The Ohio State University
Cheri Slinger, Upper Arlington/Worthington Reading Recovery

Editor’s note: All children’s names are pseudonyms.

Alexander was perplexed. He stared down at the t in his writing book. A few minutes earlier he had decided to caption the climactic picture in Where are the Sunhats? (Randell, 1994) with the sentences Look Dad! I found your hat. When Alexander was ready to write the word found he said the word slowly, isolated the /f/ and wrote what appeared to be a t (see Figure 1).

Noticing Alexander’s perplexed look, his teacher, Jim, asked, “What’s the matter?”

“That’s not an f,” he announced.

Jim said, “Good for you! Do you know how to write an f?”

Alexander shook his head, “No.”

Jim reached for the lowercase letter f from a set of magnetic letters and placed it on the work page of Alexander’s writing book. “Here’s the letter you need.” Jim immediately grabbed the white tape dispenser, tore off a small piece and covered up the t.

“Oh yeah!” Alexander quickly wrote a lowercase f on top of the white tape.

Any teacher conducting the writing portion of a Reading Recovery lesson recognizes this scenario. The child monitors a mistake while writing his story; the teacher covers up the error with white tape and immediately teaches, demonstrates, or prompts for the correct response. The Reading Recovery teacher has at his disposal at least one roll of white tape that is standard issue, right beside other instructional materials such as magnetic letters and sentence strips. In any school year, it would not be hyperbole to suggest that miles of white tape are consumed as Reading Recovery teachers around the world scaffold children’s successful responding with all that they must coordinate as they write their daily, little stories or messages.

The incidence of white tape can become a source of reflection for the Reading Recovery teacher, and by uncovering what is under the white tape the teacher resolves to better understand a child’s emerging control and to anticipate the child’s responses for later lessons.
Clay clarifies why the Reading Recovery teacher uses white tape:

Allow the child to stop when he recognizes that something has gone wrong. That acknowledges his self-monitoring....If the child is too quick for you and the error is already on the page, mask the error some way. (2016, p. 84)

But it's not enough to simply allow white tape's use, because earlier in that same section of Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals, Clay challenges the teacher to “anticipate a child’s difficulty and offer help before errors occur” (2016, p. 84). This is a tall order, one that we struggle with in our own teaching, even as we continually seek to understand what the child controls and what we think the child will have difficulty with at the sentence, word, and within-word levels. The incidence of white tape can become a source of reflection for the Reading Recovery teacher, and by uncovering what is under the white tape the teacher resolves to better understand a child’s emerging control and to anticipate the child’s responses for later lessons.

In order to take up Clay’s challenge to anticipate a child’s errors while seeking to understand his ever-increasing control over his writing we will emphasize the following themes in this article:

• An error is an approximation that provides information as to what the child is paying attention to, and any error patterns signal the teacher how her teaching must change.

• The incidence of white tape in a child’s daily story can act as a measure of how in sync the teacher and child are, wherein the child successfully writes within his emerging level of control with his observant teacher providing that which he does not control.

Grounding Our Practice in Clay’s Position on Writing

The writing of a little story or message occupies the middle segment in a daily, 30-minute lesson. Writing follows the rereading of familiar books, including the second reading of yesterday’s new book and approximately 2 minutes of letter work. Story writing also occurs before the lesson’s new book is introduced by the teacher and read by the child with teacher assistance. Writing’s placement in the daily lesson is deliberate, as Clay argued that writing “prevents learners from neglecting or overlooking many things they must know about print, and reveals things about the learner’s way of working that their teachers need to know about” (2001, p. 18) in a slowed down process (1982).

Figure 1 illustrates an example of all that Alexander was trying to orchestrate on his writing page and work page when writing two simple sentences, including

• honoring serial order within the sentence and within words,
• using spacing,
• choosing punctuation,
• writing known words,
• learning new words,
• monitoring sound-to-letter relationships,
• organizing sounds heard in words to be written, and
• forming letters and aligning them one next to the other.

Writing therefore becomes a powerful venue for exploring aspects of print that the child used or overlooked during familiar reading while simultaneously priming him to orchestrate similar print demands when he has the chance to read his new book.

Writing is a mirror process to reading, with reciprocal gains afforded the child who begins to use in his reading what he is monitoring when writing, (Doyle, 2013). In fact, the reciprocal gains from writing are immediately practiced when the child reads and rereads the emerging story he is cowriting with his teacher. Thus, white tape becomes a necessity so that the child has a predominantly conventional piece to read.

Critics of the writing portion of the Reading Recovery lesson suggest that the teacher is focused on accuracy when white tape is used and that a child’s writing errors do not have to be covered up in order to be read. They believe this practice will discourage the child from attempting to increasingly control and orchestrate the many levels of print demanded of him. We remind such critics that any story page in a daily lesson has an accompanying work page, where a child’s attempts and trials can be explored with the teacher in a risk-free environment and that Clay (2016) says our focus should be anticipating a child’s emerging control—preventing errors from getting on the story page—but errors will inevitably be made. And if errors are made, the child’s reading and rereading those errors serves no accelerative, reciprocal purpose.

The Reading Recovery teacher values the attempts on the child’s work page and any errors on the story page as evidence of what he might be pay-
Teaching attention to as well as what needs to come under more-sophisticated control. A Reading Recovery teacher does not consider a child’s attempt as wrong, but as an approximation that reveals an intentional move (Siegler, 2000) that becomes a springboard upon which to build. For example, when Alexander wrote what appeared to be a $t$ for an $f$, Jim realized that Alexander not only self-monitored he hadn’t written an $f$ but that his attempt was very close to the look of an $f$. Valuing approximations has a long history in the early literacy research and practice with emergent spelling (Gillet, Temple, Temple, & Crawford, 2012; Read, 1986) and emergent writing (Clay, 1975; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Graves, 1994; Sulzby & Teale, 1991). The Reading Recovery teacher honors what is right about the attempt while reflecting on how to build her instructional scaffold so that the child’s subsequent attempts will become increasingly sophisticated.

A child’s approximations over a few lessons also become a valued source for identifying patterns of strengths and needs. For example, Jim noticed similar types of letter formation approximations beyond the $t$ for $f$ in Figure 1 such as Alexander’s backward capital $D$ in the end position of $found$ that followed an accurately formed $d$ at the end of $Dad$, as well as a flowing $t$ in $hat$. Clay (2001) maintains that “the challenge for teachers is to understand what is going on before their eyes, as reading and writing come together to influence each other,” (p. 12) and that “often the child’s attention is not where the teacher expects it to be” (p. 19). When a teacher peels back the white tape on the recently written story page or analyzes approximations made on the work pages, she is taking up Clay’s challenge to understand in order to respond appropriately with what the child needs at that point. And respond the teacher must, either immediately or in the short-term.

It is not enough to simply analyze approximations but to respond to the child with what Clay (2001) called,

---

**Figure 1. Alexander’s Story and Work Pages — Lesson 22**

The top section is Alexander’s story page. A rectangular box indicates the presence of white tape over an approximation. The bottom left quadrant replicates Jim’s lesson notes. Boxed words indicate that these words were jointly analyzed in Elkonin boxes on the work page. Underlined words or punctuation were independently written. Circled items indicate that Alexander isolated the appropriate sound but was unsure of how to write the corresponding letter. Numbers indicate the order in which Alexander heard the sounds he wanted to write. The bottom right quadrant is a facsimile of Alexander’s work page used in conjunction with his story.
“astutely delivered teaching with a target that involves learning how to do something, do it better, do it faster, link it up to something, and prepare it for future independent use” (p. 31). Using case studies from our own teaching of children at various points in their lesson series as well as teacher leader field observations of Reading Recovery teachers, the remaining sections of this article document what we found when we peeled back the white tape on the story page and reviewed the approximations on the work page. We then illustrate our teaching responses.

Beginning to Look at Print During Early Learning

Sarah and Leslie began working together in the fall. From the start, Leslie noticed Sarah’s strong ability to maintain an introduced language pattern and an engaging willingness to work hard. Scoring in Stanine 1 on four of the tasks of *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2013), Sarah’s knowledge of print was very limited, but she was ready and eager to learn more (see Table 1).

Sarah wrote very little during the administration of the Observation Survey Writing Vocabulary task and Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words task, so Leslie had to scrutinize what *was* available and link Sarah’s correct responses as well as her approximations with her performance on all the other tasks. Leslie observed that Sarah viewed reading and writing as meaning-making activities. Sarah monitored with a known word, wrote her first and last name, and isolated and recorded a few sounds. Taken together, Sarah’s Observation Survey responses described a student just beginning to attend to print, with emerging evidence of attending to known words in books.

After completing the Observation Survey Summary of Sarah’s useful and problem strategic activity, Leslie tackled writing the predictions of progress (Clay, 2016). In *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*, Clay asks the teacher to consider what the child can do that is useful and to pay attention to problematic areas as well (p. 28). Leslie concluded that she must focus Sarah’s attention on learning to look at print while intensifying her teaching of letters and words so that Sarah would increasingly integrate visual information with the meaning and structure she already used when reading. Leslie recognized her initial teaching needed to be balanced between teaching for items and supporting Sarah’s strategic problem solving, as Leslie was concerned that she may be very tempted to focus too much on items for their own sake.

Table 1. Sarah’s Observation Survey Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Stanine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LI</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OWT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WV</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRSIW</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRL</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LI</td>
<td>Letter Identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OWT</td>
<td>Ohio Word Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Concepts About Print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WV</td>
<td>Word Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRSIW</td>
<td>Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRL</td>
<td>Text Reading Level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While crafting predictions of progress for Sarah, Leslie followed Clay’s directive to “put [her] current limita-

tions and what [she] finds difficult into an account of the path you think [she] might need to take” (2005a, p. 31). For example, Sarah was able to isolate a few sounds in words by saying them slowly, yet she could not represent those sounds with the corresponding letters. During Roaming Around the Known, Leslie valued Sarah’s contributions by encouraging her to say a word slowly and quickly supplying the corresponding letter for her. By sharing the task of writing many times in each Roaming Around the Known lesson, Sarah’s approximations became more and more refined.

Sarah wanted to write a book about her family, so she and Leslie began with pictures and the repeated pattern, *This is my mom,* [Mom’s first and last name]. *This is my dad,* [Dad’s first and last name] and so on. The last name was the only known word that Sarah wrote independently and she increased her fluency with this word each time she wrote it.

The instructional reconstruction, below, illustrates how Leslie scaffolded Sarah’s increasing control over analyzing and recording the first sound in *my* and subsequently writing the word, itself:

L: (writes *This is* for Sarah in her story)

L: Say *my* slowly.

S: /m/m/m/m/m/m/m/m/m/m/m/m/m/m/

L: That’s an *M* you’re saying. Let me show you what it looks like. (writes a lowercase *m* on the white board)

S: I want to write it! (writes *m* with a very long stick in the place where it needed to go in her story)
During Roaming Around the Known, Leslie valued Sarah’s contributions by encouraging her to say a word slowly and quickly supplying the corresponding letter for her. By sharing the task of writing many times in each Roaming Around the Known lesson, Sarah’s approximations became more and more refined.

L: That’s good! You wrote an *m*. (quickly takes some white tape and covers the top of the stick without comment and finishes the word and the sentence, allowing Sarah to write her family’s last name)

L: (writes *This is*, again, on a new page in Sarah’s story). Read to see what you want to say next.

S: (reads) This is...MY! I need to write *my*!

L: Would you like to see it?

S: Yes! (Leslie shows her the word on a previous page.)

S: Now cover it up! I don’t want to look! (Leslie covered the word and Sarah writes *my* with an appropriately sized stick and does so from then on.)

L: Your writing is easy to read and that word says *my*. What word do we need next? Let’s read and find out.

This was the first time the white tape made an appearance in Sarah’s lesson series. Interestingly, Sarah identified neither *M* nor *m* on the Letter Identification task from Clay’s Observation Survey, but she was able to isolate the initial sound in the word *my* and her first attempt at production had most of the features that make up a lowercase *m*, i.e., a stick and two humps. The use of the white tape seemed to silently focus Sarah’s attention on the size of the initial stick without the risky, overt teaching we should avoid during Roaming Around the Known. Instead of Leslie writing the *m* each time it occurred, Leslie’s use of the white tape seemed to focus Sarah on an aspect of the formation she needed to monitor the next time she independently wrote that letter.

By the end of Roaming Around the Known, Sarah had learned seven additional letter names and five words, effectively tripling her writing vocabulary. How did this happen? There are four possible explanations:

1. Telling and showing constituted effective teacher modeling.
2. Telling and showing fostered Sarah’s independence.
3. Sharing the task increased Sarah’s independent performance over time.
4. Connecting letter sounds to letter forms proved not to be that difficult for Sarah.

Given Sarah’s substantial progress during Roaming Around the Known, Leslie updated the predictions of progress for what Sarah needed to learn next and why. In writing, Leslie set three short term goals:

(a) learning and forming letters,
(b) establishing the task of hearing and recording sounds in words, and
(c) accumulating a writing vocabulary.

She drew these goals from Sarah’s Roaming Around the Known performance as well as from chapter 2 “Changes teachers might observe during lessons” in Clay’s *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* where she states:

The child learns to compose a message to be written. The child works on directional and spatial rules, learns to form letters, learns to hear the phonemes in words, monitors all aspects of the task and begins to build a writing vocabulary. (2016, p. 46)

In Sarah’s first lessons out of Roaming Around the Known, the work pages in the writing book and the use of white tape on the message page chronicled the focus of instruction. Peeking under the white tape uncovered Sarah’s approximations and the times Leslie did not catch the lapses before they occurred. Letter formation issues accounted for much of the white tape, and because another goal was to build Sarah’s writing vocabulary, Sarah’s initial approximations and increasing control of words were on full display.

Lessons 14 and 15 illustrated this cycle of increasingly sophisticated approximations and the work that still needed to be done (see Figures 2 and 3). Sarah’s expertise with horses led to many stories about her favorite animal, as seen in both these messages. The word *can* occurred in Sarah’s reading but this is the first time
the word came up in writing. Leslie asked her if she could write the word can since she had read it or if she needed to see it in one of her books. Sarah produced cad. Leslie responded, “You’re nearly right!” and covered the d with white tape. “This is what it looks like,” Leslie said and wrote can on the work page. Sarah wrote it twice on the work page and then said she was ready to put it on the message page. Figure 2 shows what she worked on (circled) with Leslie and what she initiated independently (underlined). Spacing, a few known words, and dominant sounds were all signs of progress. Sarah was taking on lots of new learning quickly.

Lesson 15 told a different story (see Figure 3). Now Sarah was responsible for hearing and recording sounds in words using Elkonin boxes (Clay, 2016), writing several known words, attending to spacing, maintaining the message, and writing letters efficiently and legibly. It proved too much for her. For example, Sarah’s work page in Figure 3 illustrates that Sarah needed to shore up can as a known word, sort out the difference between a v and u when writing up, and choose the lowercase f needed during the sound analysis for lift. Clay (2005b) described this difficulty as the “pebble in the pond” effect when she wrote:

> There will be fluctuations in performance. We are constantly urging the child to lift his performance and add new knowledge. This will challenge some old knowledge… This weakens the system temporarily until it strengthens again at a higher level of complexity. (p. 63)

In just 14 lessons, though, Sarah learned how to write several new words in every detail as well as how to solve a word using a sound analysis. She attended to letter formation and was able to record her message in a way that was easy to read. Leslie had to take all of these demands into account as she planned for the next few days of teaching. How could she value the good work that Sarah was doing and allow time for the consolidation of newer learning?

One of the procedures Leslie needed to employ with more regularity was

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**Figure 2. Sarah’s Story and Work Pages — Lesson 14**

The top section is Sarah’s story page. A rectangular box indicates the presence of white tape over an approximation. The bottom left quadrant replicates Leslie’s lesson notes. Boxed words indicate that these words were jointly analyzed in Elkonin boxes on the work page. Underlined words or punctuation were independently written. Circled items indicate that Sarah and Leslie jointly produced the word or letter/sound relationship. The bottom right quadrant is a facsimile of Sarah’s work page used in conjunction with her story.
“to write known words faster” (Clay, 2016, p. 89). Just because Sarah demonstrated that she could write *can* and *horse* in Lesson 14 did not mean that Leslie should expect that those words would be quickly written in Lesson 15. In fact, the white tape used in Lesson 15 revealed that *horse* was not under the same level of independent control as it had been in Lesson 14.

At this point in Sarah’s lesson series, recent words such as *can* and *horse* fall on Clay’s (2016) scale of knowing as either “successfully problem-solved” or “easily produced but easily thrown” (p. 75). Clay maintained that the teacher should create opportunities on the work page for the child to practice words coming under more independent control. In Sarah’s case, *can* needed to be written multiple times on Lesson 15’s work page while *horse* needed to be trialed only once before these recent words were written quickly and independently. It is this repeated action that moves a child from helpful approximations to correct responding with little attention. The focus on getting known words under fast, independent control paid a dividend by Lesson 16 when Sarah wrote, *I like brushing my horse’s tail. My horse’s tail is pretty.* Sarah wrote *horse* correctly each time and was free to give her attention to other aspects of the writing task. Leslie learned a valuable lesson as well, i.e., preparing for overlearning has a big payoff as a springboard to better independent performance while consolidating new learning.

### Mid-Program Writing

Maria was a quiet first grader with a shy smile who always seemed eager to come to her Reading Recovery lesson. An English learner who had started at the school in kindergarten, she was being considered for special education testing when Jim picked her up for Reading Recovery service. It was around Lesson 27 when Jim realized that something was not quite right when it came to Maria’s writing progress, but he could not put his finger on it.

Maria’s Observation Survey scores were higher than his other students’ at point of entrance, and at Lesson 27, Maria was already instructionally reading at Levels 8–9. Jim was encouraged at the level of indepen-

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**Figure 3. Sarah’s Story and Work Pages — Lesson 15**

The top section is Sarah’s story page. A rectangular box indicates the presence of white tape over an approximation. The bottom left quadrant replicates Leslie’s lesson notes. Boxed words indicate that these words were jointly analyzed in Elkonin boxes on the work page. Underlined words were independently written. Circled items indicate that Sarah and Leslie jointly wrote the word. Numbers indicate the order in which Sarah heard the sounds she wanted to write. The bottom right quadrant is a facsimile of Sarah’s work page used in conjunction with her story.
dence she exhibited daily when reading as well.

When Jim reviewed her writing samples and the accompanying lesson records over the previous five lessons, he saw a similar level of independence in Maria’s writing:

- She heard and recorded most consonants and many vowels in left-to-right sequence. This was expected progress, as Maria entered Reading Recovery with a score of 29 out of a possible 37 on the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words task of the Observation Survey. Jim realized in his reflection, though, that the continual use of sound boxes was quite easy for Maria and he should be using letter boxes on the work page at this point.
- She was regularly learning new words. (See Table 2 for Maria’s progress with word learning at this point in her lesson series.)
- Letter formation was fluent and letters were appropriately sized.
- She consistently spaced between her words and ended her sentences with periods.
- After a small bit of conversation around a personal experience, Maria was able to orally produce a short sentence or two that could be written.

From Lessons 22–26, Jim had only used three pieces of white tape, and when peeling back two of those pieces of white tape, he saw a pattern that he checked out over her previous writing samples. Maria sometimes switched out an uppercase letter with a lowercase equivalent, or vice versa. For example, in Lesson 24, Maria independently wrote HAPPY instead of happy or when prompted which word should start her sentence in Lesson 25, She or she, Maria chose the latter. Jim knew that in future lessons, he would be more deliberate when prompting her to think about which letter case she should use. This seemed an easy-enough, short-term teaching goal.

It was almost a point of honor with Jim that this lack of white tape meant he was anticipating possible errors before Maria could make them. For example, in Lesson 22, Maria paused after the i when writing the word with. Jim said, “Do you know the two letters that end with? I’ll show you.” Then Jim directed Maria to write with three times on her work page.

Something about her writing progress was still niggling Jim. He turned to Clay’s (2016) “Changes teachers might observe during lessons” in Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals (p. 44). He compared these broad observations to Maria’s writing progress and determined that she was well into Stage II of those descriptors. When Jim read, “The messages composed are more complex and varied,” (p. 46) for Stage III, it spurred him to review the syntactic complexity of Maria’s daily writing.

- She tended to write one or two short, simple sentences. (See Table 3 for examples.)
- Over the last five lessons, her little stories comprised, on average, five words.
- On average she quickly and independently wrote 65% of the needed words.
- The remaining words written were analyzed for sounds in a left-to-right order and recorded with the appropriate letters, with very little support provided by Jim.

### Table 2. Maria’s Writing Vocabulary – Mid-Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th>Week 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>down</td>
<td>will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fell</td>
<td>fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his</td>
<td>he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3. Maria’s Stories – Mid-Learning

| Lesson 24 | She was happy. |
| Lesson 25 | I fell down. I ride fast. |
| Lesson 26 | I crash and cry. |

### Table 4. Maria’s Stories After Jim’s Shift in Teaching

| Lesson 28 | The bus was loud because the bus driver open the door. |
| Lesson 29 | The turtle said, “Stand up!” |
| Lesson 30 | The net will fall down. He said, “Help!” |
| Lesson 31 | The mouse help the lion, and she eat the net. |
| Lesson 32 | The lion get out. The lion is happy. “So am I,” said the mouse. |
Most of her stories were about personal experiences.

Maria’s accumulated writing vocabulary was mainly comprised of short, single-syllable words that tended to be sound regular.

Jim realized to his mounting dismay that the very lack of white tape and approximations on the work page, when combined with a review of his lesson record notations were signaling the answer to Maria’s lack of writing progress. And the responsibility for this lack of progress rested with Jim.

Writing at this point in Maria’s program was too easy for her, and Jim had to decide how to raise the challenge. The answer lay in giving Maria a chance to write about the books she was successfully reading—books that used different, more complex syntactic structures that she did not necessarily use in her emerging English constructions surrounding a recent, personal experience. As an English learner, Maria was orally producing, at most, five or six words in a single utterance, and those words she said tended to be words she could now write. But if the conversation that started off the writing portion of the daily lesson centered on the books she was successfully reading, might the syntactic complexity of the writing start to change? Jim decided to find out by asking Maria in subsequent lessons to show him her favorite page of her running record book and then tell him about that page. Table 4 documents the improved results. Though the number of words in any sentence remained few, the quantity of talk dramatically increased and Jim noticed the following:

- Multisyllable words were increasingly available for sound analysis and orthography study within letter boxes, e.g., turtle, lion.
- Conventions such as quotation marks and dialogue writing were jointly analyzed.
- High-frequency words such as said were added to her writing vocabulary.

Figure 4 illustrates the shift in challenge Maria was taking on when Jim simply asked her to tell him about her favorite page in the books she was reading. Jim noted that not only was she able to transition easily to letter boxes, but that he was getting more
opportunities to show Maria how words worked. For example, after Maria took *mouse* to fluency on her work page, Jim prompted her to write *house*, analyzing how that new word looked and sounded like *mouse*.

Jim also resolved to let Maria try out an attempt on the work page and not simply jump in to provide the part she was unsure of. He thought back to Lesson 22 when she partially wrote *with* and how he had quickly provided the ending, assuming that part was too hard for her when he should have simply asked her to write *with* on the work page in order to determine what she could do.

Maria taught Jim that the lack of white tape and approximations on the work page might signal that the writing is too easy and that opportunities must be scaffolded for richer conversation that could be written down. Jim found that for Maria, conversation around a favorite book provided the requisite richness in her program, and that the primitiveness of her writing was as Clay (1998) says, “transformed as new concepts are learned and new pieces of information are added to the design in a kind of kaleidoscopic reshuffle” (p. 141).

Moving Into Later Learning

When Cheri, the teacher leader, started to explore the relationship of white tape and late learning, she went to one of her Reading Recovery teachers, and asked to observe and videotape a child who was moving quickly toward the end of her lesson series. Jane was highly effective and a typical Reading Recovery teacher; she was a life-long learner and eager to help in this mini-study. Jane selected her student Emma for the in-depth look at writing. From a quick glance at Emma’s writing book it was obvious that there was an absence of white tape near the end of her lesson series. So why was this? Cheri speculated on many possibilities. Was the lack of white tape because Emma had started to become more self-regulated in monitoring her message and problem solving words on the run? Did she keep the meaning of the message in mind as she wrote so that she had the correct, subsequent word or verb tense in her mind before the pencil hit the paper? In word solving, did she have a sense of knowing what she knew and knowing when she needed to give special attention to solving a word (i.e., Did she quickly and independently go to the work page if needed)? In short, had Emma learned to be self-regulated and in control of the complex acts involved in writing?

Cheri also speculated, as Jim did in his analysis of Maria’s writing, that there was not enough complexity in Emma’s writing; therefore, her performance was all in her actual zone of development (Vygotsky, 1978) and required no new learning. Which of the speculations was the answer? Cheri started the process of making sense of the child’s responses under the white tape and on the work page.

As Cheri prepared to observe Emma and closely look at her writing, she started by thinking about what Clay (2016) identified as expectations for late learning (p. 46). We would expect that the child would create longer, more complex and interesting messages and compose on the run. We would also expect the child to be active and constructive, writing more, writing more fluently, and attempting new words independently using a sound analysis with an increase use of common spelling patterns. She would also self-monitor her writing more.

When Cheri looked at Emma’s classroom writing samples for December and early January, she saw many of the signposts of progress. Emma exhibited a “voice” in her writing and wrote for an audience. For example, her classroom story about Thanksgiving was complete with grandfather’s joke-telling and eating pumpkin pie for breakfast. Another piece of writing was a cumulative daily journal of “elf sightings in the classroom” along with her reactions. Her messages had indeed become longer with more-complex structures, such as the use of adverbial phrases and complex vocabulary. Clay (2016) supports checking on the student’s classroom writing as a way to know what Emma’s teacher expected of her as well as preparing Emma to perform well in the classroom.

Emma’s stories in Reading Recovery were similar to the classroom writing.
She often wrote stories with a beginning, middle, and end and used different styles of writing, including directions for completing a task and persuasive writing about what makes a snow day great (see Figure 5). She had fluent control over the practical aspects of story writing and was increasing the complexity of her writing. So Cheri ruled out the notion that the writing had been too simple.

Viewing the video clip confirmed this fact and gave more information about Emma. During the sentence writing, My mom is a visitor at the school. She is going to do the finger prints, Emma monitored the composing on the run and used capitalization and punctuation correctly. But more importantly, a pattern of teacher and student behaviors became visible. Jane always allowed the child the opportunity to initiate problem-solving attempts and if Emma hesitated as her marker was at the work page, Jane directed her with the quick and simple question, “What do you know about that word?” That’s all it took for Emma to get to work. But most of the time the teacher never interacted with word solving until after Emma initiated an attempt on the work page and had time to confirm or reject her try. The teacher always praised for approximations and allowed Emma to feel in control. This pattern of teaching/learning interactions had fostered independence and accelerated learning.

Jane also prompted a variety of ways to problem solve when she responded to Emma’s attempts. For example, she provided letter boxes when Emma wrote figr for finger or asked Emma to clap the parts for visitor. Jane even asked Emma to “Think about how that word looks in books” when Emma wrote duw for do.

To see more examples of writing and to help determine what might be Jane’s next step for instructing Emma, Cheri looked at two writing book entries done two weeks after the videotaping and analyzed the work pages of those samples. Table 5 and Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the word-solving actions Emma used during these two lessons. Emma wrote her known words quickly while learning new, high-interest and high-frequency words such as angel, your, and put. There were several ways that Emma worked with words that showed signs of self-regulatory behavior. When she was unsure of a word, Emma quickly tried it on the work page and con-

Figure 5. Emma’s Story and Work Pages for Why a Snow Day is Great

| 1. Have a snowball fight  |
| 2. Build a snowman.        |
| 3. Make a snow angel.  |
| 4. Drink hot cocoa.       |
| 5. Watch movies.          |
| 6. Play hide and seek in the house. |

This story was written over 2 days. The top section is Emma’s finished story. Jane did not have to use white tape. The bottom two quadrants are facsimiles of the work pages used during the story writing. Note Emma’s close approximations for words such as seek, movies, build, and fight.
firmed or rejected it. Therefore there was no need for white tape on the story page.

There were also multiple attempts at words on the work page, e.g., drink, pool, hook, and water. The process of getting to hook was especially interesting (Figure 6) because she used a sound analysis and a visual analysis before utilizing word analogy with the known word look.

Sometimes, Jane provided more direct support. For example, during the attempt to write drink, Emma wrote Drinc (Figure 6). Jane responded by writing two alternatives on the work page: drinck and drink. Emma chose the correct spelling. This was an effective interaction because Emma, who usually made multiple attempts at words and was developing good visual memory of words, had only made one attempt here. It also reinforced the value of making multiple attempts.

As Reading Recovery teachers and teacher leaders, we regularly reflect on our teaching and ways to improve it. As the teacher leader, Cheri took a good look at the times the teacher had to tell Emma how the word looked. These types of teacher tolds are summarized in Table 5, and Cheri analyzed them to see if there were sound rationales for this type of teacher demonstrations or if there might have been alternative teaching moves that could keep Emma as independent as possible. The teacher’s decision to give Emma the word your and have her learn it, after Emma had written yoar was a helpful teacher told. It was a high-frequency word that Emma needed to know.

Other teacher tolds, such as watch for wach and movies for mu/moves were also helpful teacher demonstrations since these words had what Clay (2016) refers to as “unusual features of letter-sound relationships” (p. 103).

But there was something nagging Cheri about some of the other words the teacher wrote for Emma after her initial attempt: fit/fit, bot/boat, first/first, wrms/worms.

Emma solved most of these words using a sound analysis. In late learning, though, teachers expect children to use more word analogies and more

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**Figure 6. Emma’s Story and Work Pages for How to Catch a Fish**

This story was written over a few days. The top left quadrant is Emma’s story page. Jane did not have to use white tape. The remaining three quadrants are facsimiles of the work pages used during the story writing. Note Emma’s close approximations for words such as first, next, pool, your, and worms. In the lower left quadrant, note how Emma used multiple invented spellings to attempt hook but ultimately used word analogy (look) in order to successfully produce it.
orthographic information in addition to sound analysis. The child has accumulated a rich inventory of known writing and reading vocabulary that are springboards for links to new, similar words that he wants to write. Clay (2016) says, “He now has to think about sounds (phonology) but he also has to think about spelling (orthography) — and he learns to juggle these two things” (p. 100). Perhaps if Jane had prompted, “Do you know a word that sounds like boat?” Emma might have responded with coat. And this same prompt might have helped link night with fight. In addition, letter boxes would give Emma a cognitive framework to think about the way the word looked, not just the way it sounded. For example, Cheri expected Emma to know that there should be a vowel in words when she wrote frst but perhaps it might have been more helpful for Emma to think about the visual spelling pattern for the murmur diphthong in first. Using letter boxes, she might have tried first, or first, or even, first.

Cheri concluded that the scaffold of letter boxes would help Emma think more about visual aspects in many of her approximations. When looking through Emma’s journal, it became apparent that Jane had only provided letter boxes over a 2- to 3-week period with limited opportunities to use them to analyze words at this point in Emma’s program. So while Emma was making great progress, using letter boxes with more words or prompting more often for analogies would have helped Emma to attend more to spelling patterns. These types of teacher support would be generative in Emma’s future word solving.

Cheri learned much from the careful observation of Emma and her teacher, Jane, during the writing component and through the close analysis of writing samples and the work page. She saw that evidence of self-regulatory behavior during late learning can replace the need for white tape. She also discovered that there are certain teaching and learning behaviors that especially supported independence and accelerated learning in writing. Cheri learned there is great value in establishing a pattern of teacher/student interactions where the teacher allows the child to initiate attempts for words on the work page; that this allows the child to self-confirm or reject as part of word solving. This process of active child initiation and confirming does not just magically happen because it is late learning. The teacher has to prepare the ground carefully for this type of independence. She has to value, demonstrate, and scaffold flexible problem solving while accepting and praising approximations, all while removing herself as much as possible from over-managing the task (Ballantyne, 2014). And, of course, the teacher has to value and provide opportunities for the composition of longer, more complex stories written in a variety of genres. Making this a seamless transition from middle to late learning takes focused observation, reflection, and intentional teaching.

### Final Thoughts

Over time, a Reading Recovery child’s emergent approximations in writing become increasingly sophisticated. In this article, we have attempted to demonstrate how her approximations provide insights as to what she controls, and that her teacher must be looking for patterns of control in her errors under the white tape and on the work page. As Clay (2016) maintains:

> When children are novice readers their cognitive processes used for reading [and writing] are being formed, undergoing changes from less expert to more expert...Sensitive and systematic observation of behavior is really the only way to monitor gradual shifts across imperfect responding … (p. 44)

We also have provided examples of contingent teaching that resulted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Emma’s Word Solving During Writing Over Two Lessons</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word-Solving Action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes known words quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts on practice page and quickly self-confirms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learns new words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes multiple attempts and self-corrections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts once, followed by a teacher told</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts and teacher gives alternatives from which Emma chooses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple attempts followed by a teacher told</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mu, mooves/movies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
from the signals of control the child provided us. Lyons, Pinnell, and DeFord (1993) have suggested that such contingent teaching is a “catalyst to advance the concepts the child is developing” (p. 145).

Ultimately we highlight the importance of continually peeling back the white tape, challenging its use in daily lessons, and studying a child’s attempts on the work page as practices for rich teacher reflection that will produce accelerative teaching during the lesson’s writing component.

References

Children’s Books Cited

About the Authors

Leslie McBane is a Reading Recovery teacher leader in the greater Columbus, Ohio area, where she serves the sixth largest district in the state and several suburban districts. Prior to becoming a teacher leader in 2001, she was a Literacy Collaborative coach and also taught kindergarten for several years.

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Cheri Slinger is a Reading Recovery teacher leader for the Worthington and Upper Arlington City Schools in the greater Columbus, Ohio area. After 12 years of teaching in the primary grades, she was trained as a Reading Recovery teacher in 1987 and became a teacher leader in 1998.
Learning Language – Run, Run as Fast as You Can

What might be possible in 3 weeks of Reading Recovery lessons?

Jennifer Flight, Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery, Western Region

Editor’s note: Collin is a pseudonym.

Introduction
As Reading Recovery teachers, each child with whom we work teaches us more about our own teaching. I will tell you the story of my work with Collin, an English language learner (ELL). Collin’s gift to me was guiding me to observe language and search for ways to provide opportunities for accelerated English language learning. Working together in Reading Recovery lessons was an opportune time to support Collin in learning English and acquiring literacy. In this article, I will share observations of language learning and reflect on what may have helped to accelerate Collin’s use of spoken English. Based on my own learning, I will present some recommendations for working with ELLs.

Many ELLs are taught to speak, read, and write in English in the context of Reading Recovery lessons. Quick, efficient language development is a priority for Reading Recovery and classroom teachers, literacy coaches, English language teachers, and others who are supporting children with limited English language in a school setting. Cazden states, “[O]ne condition essential to education must remain the same: to communicate, to understand, and be understood” (1988, p. 76).

Many questions come to mind when thinking about ELLs. How does the teacher support the child in learning to communicate? To understand? To be understood? Krashen (1983) suggests that language acquisition takes place when the learner is exposed to language that is comprehensible and contains, $i + 1$. The $i$ represents the language the learner currently controls and the $1$ represents language that is just slightly more complex or the next step (p. 43). How might the Reading Recovery teacher make the language of storybooks comprehensible?

Understanding the power of linking speaking, reading, and writing is key to the work of the Reading Recovery teacher. How is it possible for a teacher to begin to make such links when a child is not speaking, reading, or writing in English? What can a teacher do to support the develop-
ment of oral language in the context of the Reading Recovery lesson? Clay states:

It is powerful to harness the established power of children’s oral language to literacy learning from the beginning, so that new literacy knowledge and new oral language processing power move forward together, linked and patterned from the start. *(Children with the least preparation for literacy learning need such an integrated approach if they are to catch up to their classmates.)* *(2015c, p. 95)*

How can oral language be a resource to support reading and writing when oral language is limited?

**About Collin**

I selected Collin for Reading Recovery lessons based on his overall lowest scores on An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement *(Clay, 2013)* in his Grade 1 cohort. At initial testing, Collin had been in Canada for 3 months, having immigrated from China. Neither of his parents spoke English, and a Chinese dialect was spoken at home. Collin communicated effectively in his first language. He attended language classes on Saturdays and was beginning to learn to read and write in Chinese. His sister described him as always talking. She spoke some English and played the role of translator for the school.

At school, Collin had been identified as being a child needing language support, but no additional language supports were available. In the classroom, Collin was not able to engage in typical classroom activities. He was unable to understand directions, he did not speak, and he was easily distracted by interesting objects on walls and shelves and by actions of other children in the classroom. Collin was not speaking in his classroom, not even single word utterances.

Meeting Collin in his classroom before our first lesson, I asked, “How are you?” to which there was a very long pause and he eventually responded, “No.” I assumed that was his way of telling me “I don’t know what that means.” Communication was going to be a challenge and Reading Recovery lessons would provide an opportunity for Collin and me to work together for 30 minutes every day to explore what might be possible for his language and literacy learning.

**An Exploratory Research Project**

Considering the need for this integrated approach, I thought about extending Collin’s oral language competencies. Before beginning Collin’s lesson series, I designed a research project to explore what might be possible in terms of accelerated language development. Given intensified teaching in the area of oral language for 15 lessons or 3 weeks, I wanted to observe change in Collin’s use of language. Some of the procedures I planned to try in these 3 weeks were not typically part of Reading Recovery lessons but were included specifically for my research. The project began with Roaming Around the Known, Lesson 1.

Given the project confines of 15 lessons, I used a pretest, posttest design to attempt to answer the question, How does an ELL’s control of oral language structures change in relationship to the storybooks that he is able to read after 3 weeks of Reading Recovery lessons?

For the pre- and posttest assessments, the Observation Survey tasks and the Burt Word Reading Test *(New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1981)* were used, as are typical in Canada for assessing and selecting children for Reading Recovery lessons. The Burt Word Reading Test is a page on which there are 110 words. The child reads and/or makes attempts at reading the words until 10 consecutive errors are made. In scoring the test, the child’s “level of attainment is placed within an age band” *(Clay, 2013, p. 99)*. In addition, three language-specific tasks were administered:

1. **Record of Oral Language** *(Clay, Gill, Glynn, McNaughton, & Salmon, 2015)*; the child repeats sentences and the “ability to handle selected grammatical structures” is assessed *(p. 9)*

2. **Biks and Gutches** *(Clay, 2015b)*; provides evidence of grammatical rules a child can use through the anticipation of what comes next in text *(i.e., verbs, plurals, and possessives)*

3. **A modified assessment of oral language based on the child’s retelling of a familiar story, the Tell Me task** *(New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2000)*

Within the context of the first 10 lessons of Roaming Around the Known, the treatment was to intentionally read, talk about, and retell complex stories; stories of much greater complexity than the language Collin had demonstrated he could use and understand. This applied treatment was presented alongside the more typical tasks of sharing books and
writing stories. Beginning in Lesson 11 the shape of a typical 30-minute Reading Recovery lesson was used.

The applied treatment of repeated readings of the same story—at a more-complex level than the child uses—discussion about the story, and retelling of the story might be explained by a cognitive perspective which supports second language learning: “Interacting, noticing, processing, and practicing” (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 114). Each story listened to, talked about, and retold was an opportunity for Collin to interact with meaningful language. Retelling stories provided meaningful, interactive practice in the task of storytelling.

Initial Assessment Data

The Observation Survey tasks provided some evidence of what Collin knew about reading and writing (Table 1). On the Concepts About Print task, he identified the front of the book, knew that print contained the message, demonstrated left-to-right movement across text, and identified upper- and lowercase pairs, but he was not able to one-to-one match. He identified 35 letters; almost all were matched upper- and lowercase pairs. On the Clay Word Reading task, he read the word I which was known as a letter. On the Burt Word Reading Test, he said four/for as part of a counting sequence (the word for happens to be the fourth word in the row). He wrote his name, a friend’s name (Colin spelled with a single l), and I. He heard and recorded five dominant sounds. He was assessed at Text Level 0 having recalled a dictated sentence of three words. On all tasks, the scores were at Stanine 1.

Record of Oral Language

For the Record of Oral Language task (Clay, et al., 2015), the child is asked to repeat sets of sentences that have been graded for difficulty. Collin accurately repeated three of the Level 1 sentences including Sally is staying at home, Mary is going to town, and Here are some more fish. Although he was not using more than three-word utterances in speech, as was evident from his dictated sentence, he was able to repeat statements of greater complexity.

Biks and Gutches

The Biks and Gutches task (Clay, 2015b) prompts the child to orally “fill in the blanks,” filling in what would be the next word in the story. The responses are analyzed to see which inflections or word endings the child is able to use. Collin could fill in the blanks and add the inflections to the following italicized words:

- The boy has this book and this book. He has two books.
- The big girl can mot the ball with her foot. Say ‘mot.’ What does she do? She mots the ball.
- When the ball rolls very fast she can stop it with both her feet.

Collin demonstrated some understanding of creating plurals by adding s in addition to the use of an irregular plural.

The Tell Me task

A modified version of the Tell Me task, part of the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s School Entry Assessment (2000), was used as an additional means of assessing language. The Tell Me task was designed to be administered in a classroom within a small-group setting. I administered the task in the one-to-one context of the Reading Recovery lesson and I selected the storybooks to be used.

Two fairytales were chosen for this task, one for the pretest and one for the posttest. This genre was selected because a similar story structure is evident across texts. The same book was read to the child three times over the course of 3 days. The first 2 days I read the story and initiated talk about the story and encouraged the child’s participation. The illustrations were used as a support. On the third day, I read the story to the child and then the child had an opportunity to give an unsupported retelling. The retelling was audio recorded and transcribed. The Tell Me Record Sheet on page 10 of the assessment prompts the teacher to reflect on six areas related to the child’s use of language: comprehension, sentence structure, vocabulary, organization, description, and content. For assessment purposes, the pretest was administered the third lesson in the known and the posttest administered in Lesson 15.

<table>
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<td>Burt Word Reading Test Score</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Vocabulary Score</td>
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The Intervention…
Thinking About
Supporting Language Use

In preparation for Roaming Around the Known lessons with Collin, I gave special attention to thinking specifically about oral language learning. In addition to supported and shared reading of Level 1, 2, and 3 books and shared writing of stories together, the Tell Me task procedure was used with storybooks in each 30-minute lesson for the duration of this project. Given that the Tell Me task procedure involves reading and talking about a book, the task easily became a daily activity within Roaming Around the Known lessons. Listening to higher level stories, talking about the stories, and retelling stories which were of much greater complexity than Collin’s speech, in addition to repeating the process with the same book over 3 consecutive days, became an integral part of the first 15 lessons. The Tell Me task was used as a daily treatment in the lessons. This was an activity I had not systematically included in Roaming Around the Known lessons with previous students.

In Clay’s words, my teaching emphasis was, “Put your ear closer, concentrate more sharply, smile more rewardingingly and spend more time in genuine conversation . . . create opportunities for them to talk, and talk with them” (Clay, 2015a, p. 69). This emphasis was top of mind when thinking about telling stories, reading stories, and writing stories. Although I knew I would need to use my own language to support Collin’s language development, key would be the opportunities for Collin to talk and for me to listen. Opportunities for me to listen and observe language came through the Tell Me task, noting longest utterances, and the composing of stories for shared writing.

The Tell Me task
Transcribing oral language samples into print has advantages, being able to “see” language, and disadvantages, you cannot capture the prosodic features of language: intonation, tone, stress, and rhythm. In reading and talking about The Gingerbread Man (Smith, 1997) over the three exposures prior to Collin’s retelling, my “reading voice” was very expressive to reinforce Collin’s ability to access structure in his own retelling of the story. Listening to the audio recording of the retelling you would note Collin’s fluency, intonation, tone, stress, and rhythm. Imagine, “You can’t catch me I’m the gingerbread man” in a singsong voice. Collin had an understanding of how stories sound with groups of words coming together in phrases with expression and ease.

The retelling of The Gingerbread Man was transcribed, which made Collin’s use of language visible. Language strengths not evident in the more-formal assessment tasks now became available for reflection. After just three Roaming Around the Known lessons, Collin demonstrated control over some English language structures.

Review Collin’s retelling of The Gingerbread Man (Figure 1). Ask yourself, What do you know about the structures of the language he uses? What is easy? What is he working on? What concerns you most? Consider the vocabulary used (pronouns, verbs, and nouns). Are there language strengths that would support choosing and introducing new books for Collin to read?

Collin’s retelling illustrates many emerging language strengths, a few follow:

- He uses language to tell a meaningful story.
- He puts words together into quick short three- and four-word phrases.
- He appropriately uses repetitive phrases/sentences from the actual text.
- He works to get the structure to sound right, on pp. 6–7, fast …ter.
- He usually identifies the speaker.
- At difficulty, he works to retrieve vocabulary words, “Because gingerbread man don’t, don’t know water.”

The Tell Me Record Sheet provides a framework for reflecting on a child’s use of language, with categories of sentence structure, vocabulary, organization, description/expression, and content. Responses are scored on a 4-point scale: 1 = none, 2 = basic (the least complex), 3 = plain, and 4 = developed (the most complex). Collin scored basic in each category for his retelling of The Gingerbread Man, as shown in Table 2.

Collin’s retelling of The Gingerbread Man was a celebration. In just three lessons there was considerable change in the language that Collin was able to use to retell a story. After 15 lessons the change was even more substantial. Review Collin’s posttest retelling of The Little Red Hen (Giles, 1997) (Figure 2). You might ask yourself, What do you know about the structures of the language he uses? What is easy? What is he working on? What new language strengths have emerged? What concerns you
### Figure 1. Lesson 3 — Retelling of *The Gingerbread Man*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Collin’s Retelling</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>Once upon a time, there was a little old man and a little old woman. One day, the little old woman made a gingerbread man. She gave him a head, two arms, and two legs. She gave him two eyes, a nose, and a mouth.</td>
<td>They a woman and pick a, in the woman.</td>
<td>Points to the woman in the picture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>The little old woman put the gingerbread man into the oven to bake. Soon the little old man said, &quot;I can smell gingerbread baking. I will see if the gingerbread man is ready to eat.”</td>
<td>I. I think the woman put the over there because smell over there.</td>
<td>Points to the oven in the picture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>Out jumped the gingerbread man. He ran across the room and out the door as fast as he could go.</td>
<td>Gingerbread man jump in the roo-, put you in the door. And go, go, go.</td>
<td>Shows a jumping motion with finger and the path the gingerbread man takes to the door.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Stop! Stop!&quot; called the little old man.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Loud with expression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The gingerbread man laughed at them. &quot;Run, run, as fast as you can. You can’t catch me, I’m the gingerbread man.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>The little old man and the little old woman ran fast. But the gingerbread man ran faster.</td>
<td>Be, Because da run fast-ta, gingerbread man run fast-ter.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-11</td>
<td>The gingerbread man ran on and on. He met a cow.</td>
<td>Cow, Stop! Stop! I will eat you.</td>
<td>Loud with expression. Sings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Stop! Stop!&quot; called the cow. &quot;I want to eat you!”</td>
<td>Gingerbread man talking, you can’t catch me I’m a gingerbread man.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The gingerbread man laughed at the cow. &quot;Run, run, as fast as you can. You can’t catch me, I’m the gingerbread man.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>The gingerbread man ran on and on. He met a horse.</td>
<td>Come meet the horse. Stop! Stop! I will eat you. You can’t catch me I’m a gingerbread man.</td>
<td>Loud with expression. Sings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Stop! Stop!&quot; called the horse. &quot;I want to eat you!”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The gingerbread man laughed at the horse. &quot;Run, run, as fast as you can. You can’t catch me, I’m the gingerbread man.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-15</td>
<td>The gingerbread man came to a river. He stopped. He could not get across.</td>
<td>Because gingerbread man don’t, don’t know, water. Fox in, in, time in, time in my tail.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A sly old fox came up to him. &quot;I will take you across,” the fox said. &quot;Climb onto my tail.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-17</td>
<td>So the gingerbread man climbed onto the fox’s tail.</td>
<td>Climb me tail. Tim talking, climb on my back. Climb in my nose.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Gingerbread man!” called the Fox. “You are too heavy for my tail. Sit on my back.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So the gingerbread man climbed onto the fox’s back.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Gingerbread man!” called the fox. “You are too heavy for my back. Sit on my nose.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>But when the gingerbread man sat on the fox’s nose, the fox tossed him up into the air. Snip! Snap!</td>
<td>Up ... down. Snip! Snap!</td>
<td>Giggles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>The fox gobbled him up. And that was the end of the gingerbread man.</td>
<td>Fox is yummy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
most? Consider the vocabulary used (pronouns, verbs, and nouns). Are there language strengths that would support choosing and introducing new books for Collin to read?

Collin’s retelling illustrates many emerging strengths, including the following:

- He consistently identifies the speaker.
- He uses “storybook” language.
- He substitutes a meaningful known vocabulary word for an unknown word, *seed/wheat*.
- He self-monitors and self-repairs his speech, working to make language structures more conventional, e.g. “I eat, want, I want eat. I want to eat.”
- He uses many more words to retell this story when compared to the first example.
- He uses an expressive storytelling voice to add meaning to the story and a sense of character to the dialogue.

In 15 lessons, Collin is able to use language, intonation, and expression to tell a meaningful and engaging story. Collin’s language use on the retelling of *The Little Red Hen* has become increasingly more sophisticated and in most areas of language use, there is a shift from basic to plain, as noted in Table 3.

Collin’s ability to use language in retelling stories has changed over the 15 lessons. This language used in retelling stories alone is not sufficient to gain a sense of how a child is able to use language to communicate, understand, and be understood. One must also consider language the child is using to communicate his own ideas.

**Longest utterances**

Clay suggests to teachers, “If we keep note of the longest sentence we have heard him use, we can update it when a longer one comes along. Length of utterance is a reliable indicator of growth in early oral language” (2016, p. 79).

Collin began lessons not yet speaking in his classroom, he dictated a three-word idea on the initial assessment, and rapidly his utterances became longer and more meaningful, with his sentence length ranging between 5 and 19 words. Table 4 presents a sampling of the longest utterances and the context in which each utterance was generated. Think about the interactions which support the more understandable utterances.

Most of the longest utterances were generated from conversations about books that we had read together. The utterances about books were typically easier to understand as the grammatical structures were closer to conventional English. Sometimes, the structures of the books were used in new ways. For example, “‘Here is a red balloon for you,’” said the clown.” was used in speech as “Here painting for you, said the mom.” The use of props to act out stories was helpful in adding meaning to vocabulary used in oral language structures.

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**Table 2. Pretest Tell Me Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tell Me Record Sheet Descriptors</th>
<th>Examples and Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Sentence Structure</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconnected labels for objects, actions, events, and characters</td>
<td>Climb me tail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The old woman talking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Climb on my back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Climb in my nose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labels, nouns, pronouns, and verbs.</td>
<td>Pronouns: I, you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Present tense verbs: climb, come, run, is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Future tense verb: will eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlinked picture by picture or page by page</td>
<td>Collin talks about each picture and moves through the book, page by page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Description/Expression</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited description of events and characters</td>
<td>Collin told the story using expression and intonation. He partially sang the gingerbread man’s song. He mentions some characters and sometimes who is speaking, but this is not consistent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g., to note the cow is speaking: “Cow. Stop! Stop! I will eat you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Content</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One main point</td>
<td>Collin tells the story describing what happens, but lacks details that would help the story to flow from one event to the next.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 2. Retelling of *The Little Red Hen*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Collin’s Retelling</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>Once upon a time, there was a little red hen. She lived on a farm with a duck, a dog, and a pig. One day, she found some wheat.</td>
<td>Because dog in here and pig is here and duck here. The, There were found the seed.</td>
<td>'Found the seed' sounds like fallin asleep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>“I will plant this wheat,” said the little red hen. “Who will help me?” “Not I,” quacked the duck, and she went away to swim in the pond. “Not I,” barked the dog, and he went away to run in the field. “Not I,” grunted the pig, and he went away to roll in the mud.</td>
<td>And, and ta- there were talking, who will help me plant the seed? Not I quacked the duck, to not help you. And not I quacked the dog and not help him. And not I grunt the pig. Not help you.</td>
<td>“Not I” with emphasis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>“Then I will do it myself!” said the little red hen. And she did. Soon the wheat began to grow. “I must water the wheat,” said the little red hen. “Who will help me?”</td>
<td>Can do myself. And tim do this. And who will help me plant the seed?</td>
<td>Upward inflection for ‘myself’ to add emphasis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>“Not I!” quacked the duck from the pond. “Not I!” barked the dog from the field. “Not I!” grunted the pig from the mud. “Then I will do it myself!” said the little red hen. And she did.</td>
<td>Not I grunt the duck, and not I grunt the pig, not I grunt the pig. Ta- talking. Do myself, said the little red hen. I, Tim- did it. Because everyone not help him.</td>
<td>Quick expressive phrases. ‘Ta-’ might be ‘her’. ‘Tim’ might be ‘him’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-11</td>
<td>Soon the wheat was ready to cut. “I must cut the wheat,” said the little red hen. “Who will help me?” “Not I!” quacked the duck. “Not I!” barked the dog. “Not I!” grunted the pig. “Then I will do it myself,” said the little red hen. And she did.</td>
<td>Who help me cut the seed? Not I grunt the duck. Not I grunt the pig. Not I grunt the duck. Not I grunt the dog.</td>
<td>Collin self-corrected duck/dog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>“I must make the wheat into flour,” said the little red hen. “Who will help me?” “Not I!” quacked the duck. “Not I!” barked the dog. “Not I!” grunted the pig. “Then I will do it myself,” said the little red hen. And she did.</td>
<td>Who help me plant the seed? It’s flour. And everyone not help you and not help you, and ta- little red hen talking, I did it. OK. I did it and she did it and ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*continues*
Using small figurines, Collin was able to act out “I eat my lunch and Meow Meow eat my lunch and jump in the window.” Utterances composed without a concrete shared experience, e.g. personal experiences were sometimes lengthy but difficult to understand. Siraj and Asani (2015), describe the most-effective interactions as “sustained shared thinking” in which the adult plays the role of scaffolding the child’s thinking through “encouragement, simplifying the task, reminding the child of the goal, making suggestions and modeling answers” (p. 405).

**Writing stories together**

The written story begins with a conversation between teacher and child from which the child determines the message to be written. “There is high motivational value in self-composed messages rather than a dictated task or a message drawn from the teacher’s mind, and the child can draw upon established speaking competencies to compose messages for writing” (Clay, 2015c, p. 33). Written messages are then read and reread. All parts of the Reading Recovery lesson work together to build language.

As my goal was to collect oral language samples, I did not make intentional attempts to correct grammatical structure. In conversation, I would use the grammatically correct structure. Collin would sometimes revise the language structures of the oral composition as the story was being recorded. Figure 3 presents a sample of the stories written in the first 15 lessons, all representing Collin’s spoken speech. The context and conversation before writing are presented. Think about the context and the interactions which support the writing of the more understandable stories. What has Collin learned about telling stories? What are his language strengths? Challenges?

Similar to the most understandable longest utterances, the compositions that were easiest to understand came from a shared understanding of a story or through working together.

---

**Figure 2. Retelling of *The Little Red Hen* continued**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Collin’s Retelling</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14-15</td>
<td>“I will bake some bread with this flour,” said the little red hen. “Who will help me?”</td>
<td>Tim- who help me … plant the flour seed. Is bread, not … everyone not helping.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Not I!” quacked the duck.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Not I!” barked the dog.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Not I!” grunted the pig.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So the little red hen baked the bread herself. When the bread was baked and ready to eat, the little red hen took it out of the oven.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-17</td>
<td>“Who will help me eat the bread?” asked the little red hen.</td>
<td>[long pause after the page turn] And this, who help me eat my bread? That is ... going tim water. I eat, want, I want eat. I want to eat. In, said, going in the water, not going in the water, and dog is not running and going in, not running. And I want to eat. I want in, pick, I want to eat. In, Ta- talking, tim-go, going in the mud, no, out in the mud because ...</td>
<td>Self-monitoring and self-correcting of oral language structure on the run. Self-correcting the use of in/out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I will!” quacked the duck, and she came out of the pond.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I will!” barked the dog, and he came out of the field.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I will!” grunted the pig, and he came out of the mud.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>“Oh, no you will not!” said the little red hen. “You did not help me plant the wheat, water the wheat, cut the wheat, make the flour, or bake the bread. So I will not let you eat the bread.”</td>
<td>Oh not you no. You, you not help me plant the seed. Water and seed and cutting and seed and flour and eat.</td>
<td>Quite a firm expressive voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>“I will eat it myself,” said the little red hen. And she did!</td>
<td>I do it myself. Little red, I eat myself. And she did.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to create story language using props. He is able to compose sentences with complexity through

- repeating phrases, e.g. “so love, so love;”
- using the conjunction and to join together two ideas, “Meow Meow jumped out the window and walk and walk;”
- using the language of storybooks, e.g. “said mom” and “said the mommy;”
- using prepositional phrases, e.g. “in the gym” and “out the window;”
- working at reordering the words of phrases, e.g. “My mother is love butterfly rainbow” reworked to “My Mommy so love, so love rainbow butterfly;” and
- connecting personal experiences to ideas read in books.

Additionally, the concept of word became understood. In the first five lessons I clearly demonstrated the placement of spaces between words

Table 3. Posttest Tell Me Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tell Me Record Sheet Descriptors</th>
<th>Examples and Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic – Unconnected labels for objects, actions, events, and characters</td>
<td>And not I quacked the dog and not help him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain – Short, simple sentences with ideas linked only by “and” or “and then.” Some description.</td>
<td>I do it myself. Little red, I eat myself. And she did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labels limited to a set of descriptor words</td>
<td>Found the seed/wheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grunt the duck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grunt the pig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grunt the dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain Organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labelling, or retold page by page or picture by picture with repetition of linkages.</td>
<td>Talks about each picture and moves through the book, page by page, using “and” and “because” to connect ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain Description/Expression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events, character, time, place, reason explained with some expression.</td>
<td>Story is told using expression and intonation. Some character names are used. Repetition of some structures heard in the two shared readings of the text prior to the assessment. He is very expressive and firm in telling the end of the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain Content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or three main points.</td>
<td>The story is told describing what happens, but lacks some vocabulary that would help the story to flow from one event to the next. Example: plant/grind, plant/bake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Longest Utterances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Longest Utterance</th>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I jumping the ball up to the ball.</td>
<td>A conversation before writing. He loves gym so I asked him to tell me about what he liked to do in the gym.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Here painting for you, said the mom.</td>
<td>A conversation after reading the book, Balloons, level 2. I asked him what he would give to his mom. He said, “Cookie and painting”. I asked him, “How would you say it to your mom?”</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ya, because the mouse so small pick and pick.</td>
<td>About the Tale of the Turnip. He used the word pick for pulled. He looked carefully for the mouse on every page and knew that the mouse was important to the story.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I in the bus, you a over there, in the bus and you can’t find-a me.</td>
<td>I told Collin that I had come looking for him in the morning and I couldn’t find him (he was gone on a field trip). He thought this was very funny.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I eat my lunch and Meow Meow eat my lunch and jump in the window.</td>
<td>In the conversation before and during writing. We used props: a house with windows that opened and closed, a cat and people.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Him stay chrysalis and push and push and push out.</td>
<td>Collin came into the lesson very excited because in his classroom, the students had just put caterpillars into houses. He articulated the life cycle of the butterfly from caterpillar to butterfly.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 3. Shared Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Context/Conversation</th>
<th>Shared Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3      | T: I know you like gym. Tell me about what you like to do in the gym.  
C: 1, 2, 3, jump up ... come down. I jumping the ball up to the ball. Up to the sky. Jumping and jumping a ball.  
T: Where do you bounce the ball?  
C: in the gym. | Jumping the ball in the gym. |
| 4      | After reading the book, *Balloons,*  
T: What would you like to give your mom? (Mother’s Day was the following Sunday).  
C: Cookie and painting.  
T: How would you say this to your mom?  
C: [no response]  
T: [prompted with] “Here is a ...”  
C: Here painting for you, said the mom. | Here painting for you, said mom. |
| 6      | We had read *The Lazy Pig.*  
T: When you are hungry, what do you love to eat?  
C: I love to, I love to eat ... and eat that and apple and bread and mommyn talking, eat lunch.  
Talking, OK. Talking, come on. Come on eating. [Collin seemed to have difficulty finding appropriate vocabulary words]  
T: Let’s write what Mom says. | Come on eat lunch said the Mommy. |
| 10     | Collin went on a field trip.  
T: We should write a story about the bus.  
C: Yup.  
T: Tell me about the bus ride.  
C: Because I seen the bus too loud.  
T: It was too loud?  
C: Her bus too loud because I going in the back. This bus is too loud because I go to park. ...  
T: How could we say that in a story?  
C: Because everyone talking ...  
T: Let’s write it.  
C: Everybody in the bus is too loud. | Everybody in the bus is too loud! |
| 13     | I introduced props to help tell the story about his cat Meow Meow. I needed to increase my understanding.  
C: I eat my lunch and I go to sleep. (in response to table and bed props)  
T: Should we write about eating lunch or going to sleep.  
C: (continued to talk adding Meow Meow to the story)  
T: What will we say first?  
C: Meow Meow jump in the window. ... Remember be careful.  
Note: the -ed ending on jumped is audible in the reading. Replaced ‘in’ with ‘out’ on re-reading. It now matches actions made with the props. | Meow Meow jumped out the window and walk and walk. |
| 15     | T: You were telling me your mom loves butterflies.  
C: So love, so love  
T: Tell me more ...  
C: My mommy talking ...  
T: What does your Mommy say?  
C: Is so core.  
T: So colourful?  
C: So core [worked on saying ‘colourful’]  
T: How should we say this as a story?  
C: My mother is love butterfly rainbow. My Mommy so love, so love rainbow butterfly. | My Mommy so love, so love rainbow butterfly. |
and by Lesson 6, he was beginning to put spaces between most words independently. After 15 lessons, Collin had become a teller of stories who worked to make his messages understandable to others.

**Reading books**

Working in the known, Collin was encouraged to actively participate in reading books. Through supportive conversation that highlighted vocabulary and language structures, Collin began lessons reading Level 1 and 2 texts with repetitive language patterns. While Collin was reading these books with independence, I read Level 3 and 4 books to him and encouraged his participation in conversations about these stories, keeping the meaning of the stories at the forefront. In Lesson 11, my support shifted to introducing Level 3 books without reading aloud the book first. Collin easily moved into reading Level 3 stories. Collin eagerly initiated conversation about the books he had read and he connected objects and animals in the stories to his own experiences. For Collin and me, the stories in the little books were a shared experience that supported shared understanding. The little books were venues to support oral language use and practice.

Reading Level 1, 2, and 3 books provided Collin with opportunities to practice using simple language structures. In Reading Recovery lessons, we work to make connections between spoken language, reading, and writing. Clay suggests, teachers “should find ways to prepare their pupils ahead of time to work with new, unexpected, and unusual structures. Teachers should read aloud to students the language that is new to them. Get the new phrase or sentence: to the ear (listening), to the mouth (saying), to the eye (reading), and to the written product (creating text)” (Clay, 2014, pp. 128–129). You might review the Tell Me retellings, longest utterances, and writing samples with a view to what Collin has appropriated from the independent and shared reading of little books. Key to my work with Collin was the integration of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

**After Just 15 Lessons …**

After the first 15 lessons, the Observation Survey tasks were readministered by an independent assessor. The Observation Survey tasks all illustrate growth (Table 5). Collin was able to read a Level 4 story (seen once) in the easy/instructional range with expression and at a good pace. He repeated three vocabulary words multiple times in the reading, perhaps playing with the sound of the word, listening to see if it sounded right, or visually checking to see if what he was saying was matching what he was seeing. On the Concepts About Print task he was insistent on telling the story before it was read by the teacher. He had learned that using the pictures to tell the story before reading was a supportive means of rehearsing language and gaining meaning. His reading and writing vocabularies had increased substantially, and he was able to hear and record more sounds in words as well.

The Record of Oral Language task provided evidence of growth in language structures. Collin’s score increased from three to five sentences repeated accurately. To assess the language that he was able to repeat back in the sentences, I looked for evidence of change in grammatical components of language. I counted the number of articles, adjectives, nouns, verbs, pronouns, and adverbs that were correctly repeated. This analysis is not suggested in the Record of Oral Language but it was a way of looking for patterns and checking on progress (Clay et al., 2015, pp. 31 and 34). The Level 2 sentences of the task were too difficult, so only Level 1 sentences were analyzed according to grammatical components (Table 6). On the posttest, Collin controlled all of the articles, prepositions, and adverbs in Level 1 sentences. He was able to repeat more adjectives, nouns, and pronouns. His score on verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Pre- and Posttest Observation Survey Summary Scores</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Book Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.C. 1:xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Identification – 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts About Print – 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clay Word Reading – 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burt Word Reading Test Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Vocabulary Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words – 37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
went down by one item. The greatest increase in score (+5) was in the use of pronouns. The Level 2 and 3 books Collin was reading used the pronouns I and you, where the Record of Oral Language sentences used me, he, she, her. These pronouns were read to Collin in the fairytales used for the Tell Me task.

The Biks and Gutches assessment provided evidence of few changes in Collin’s language control (Table 7). On the posttest, he accurately used an irregular plural noun, seaweed, as well as two pronouns, their and himself. The minimal change in score may be reflective of the fact that the little books Collin had been reading did not contain the grammatical language assessed.

The Tell Me task provided the most evidence of change in language use. Table 8 presents a transcript of the pre- and posttest retellings. On the initial assessment, Collin used a basic sentence structure, for example, “Climb me tail” to describe the fox asking the gingerbread man to climb on his tail. On reassessment he used the phrase, “You not help me plant the seed.” This was the Little Red Hen speaking to her unhelpful friends. The posttest retelling uses pronouns (you, me) and articles (the seed) in an acceptable structure. Vocabulary was also used more effectively. For example, on the initial assessment, he said, “Because gingerbread man don’t, don’t know water.” Collin was searching for a way to describe how the gingerbread man could not swim. Collin controlled more story-specific vocabulary on the reassessment. He described the work that the Little Red Hen had done, “You not help me plant the seed. Water and seed and cutting and seed and flour and eat.” The posttest illustrated Collin’s increased control of repetitive story structure, linking one page to the next to tell the story as a connected idea. The retelling of the posttest sample was more fluid due to the use of the conjunction and which was not used at all in the initial sample. Collin was also self-monitoring and self-correcting his own language structures in the posttest retelling. For example, “I eat, want, I want eat. I want to eat.” The posttest retelling was longer in length due to the use of repetition (part of the structure of these fairytales) and Collin’s increased control over vocabulary.

Discussion
In designing this exploratory project, I set out to answer the question, How does an ELL’s control of oral language structures change in relationship to the storybooks that he is able to read after 3 weeks of Reading Recovery lessons? Collin began lessons with very limited English language use. By Lesson 15, his oral language structures were much more complex than those of the Level 1–3 books he had been reading in lessons. He had more consistent control of the basic sentence structure of subject/verb/object. This is a structure he had been reading in his little books. He began to use the article the more appropriately. He used pronouns of greater complexity than those in the little books. He used prepositional phrases and had an understanding of some abstract vocabulary (e.g., in/out). Collin began to control the use of a verb in every sentence and began to use some simple past tense –ed verbs. Inflectional endings were challenging, but there was some evidence of beginning control (-s, -ing, -ed). The content of Collin’s stories,

Table 6. Pre- and Posttest Assessment of the Record of Oral Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Articles – 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective – 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun – 19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbs – 16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronouns – 12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepositions – 3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs – 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Pre- and Posttest Assessment Scores of Biks and Gutches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Reassessment</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plurals</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-Person Singular Verb Present</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb Simple Past</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Participle</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronouns, Possessives, Adjectives</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
including retellings, conversations, and writing began to include more details and descriptive vocabulary. The more-developed story structure makes it easier for the listener or the reader to understand Collin’s message. Considering Cazden’s statement, “[O]ne condition essential to education must remain the same: to communicate, to understand, and be understood” (1988, p. 76), Collin was well on his way to this goal. After 15 lessons, Collin became a user of the English language.

**Recommendations for supporting students with limited control of English language**

A teaching emphasis on oral language, centered around interesting stories, helped me to learn more about supportive instruction for English language learners. Based on my learning from my work with Collin, I will share some recommendations for Reading Recovery teachers in early lessons with children who have very limited control of English.

**Read aloud complex and interesting stories.** The act of my reading fairytales aloud, of much greater complexity than Collin’s own speech, exposed Collin to the language of storybooks. These complex stories were a catalyst for talking about and retelling stories. Key to Reading Recovery lessons is work with whole stories so the child is engaging with real reading and writing tasks. Clay reminds us:  

> *Stories read to children introduce them to new language forms … Reading to children from books*
beyond their reading level is helpful and two reasons for this are because it contributes to incidental learning of new vocabulary (Elley, 1989) and increases exposure to literary language.” (Clay, 2015c, p. 95)

Reading books at levels well beyond Collin’s reading capabilities became an important part of the first 15 lessons. Rereading the same story over three consecutive days provided extended opportunities for practice using vocabulary and literary language.

Fairytales have a clear, strong structure that is evident in stories from many cultures around the world. Listening to, having conversations about, and retelling stories, made more complex language comprehensible (Krashen, 1983) and supported the acquisition of language. Clay (2014) describes such read aloud experiences as opportunities to expose the child to “language beyond their own control. Reading aloud to children of any age will sketch for them a landscape of features into which their own language usage may expand. Hearing a stretch of new language in rereading or a different context will give access to new features of text language. Repeating it in a drama or a refrain might sow seeds that lead to an alternative rule emerging in a child’s grammar” (p. 137). Collin was able to use his strengths as a teller of stories to employ his current understanding of English structures and vocabulary.

**Use phrasing and expression as a support to meaning and structure.** My use of expressive and phrased language in reading aloud to Collin was a powerful tool that likely supported his ability to hear, notice, process, and practice language. Collin’s retellings included meaningful and expressive phrases. In describing Kuhn and Stahl’s (2003) research related to reading fluency, Clay states, “there was more involved than automatic word recognition, and points to ‘the prosodic features of language’ like rhythm, expression, and perceptions of the boundaries of phrases in speech and texts” (Clay, 2005b, p. 152). Supporting the development of the prosodic features in Collin’s speech would become a strength to support phrased and fluent reading and the ability to access the structure of language when reading.

Given repeated opportunities to practice retelling stories, Collin’s use of English language became more understandable and he would try out and use more-complex language structures. Clay recommends, “the child’s encounter with text may be brought to a new level of understanding if he follows the reading with some kind of expressive output” (Clay, 2015a, p. 335). Retelling and acting out the story provided opportunities for Collin to try out the prosodic features of language that he had heard in listening to stories.

**Provide more time for the ELL to talk.** In Reading Recovery lessons, the highest value is set on independent problem solving. “Children should gain some measure of independence” on tasks from the start (Clay, 2016, p. 41). An important start for Collin’s development of independence was gaining some facility with the English language. Clay

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**Recommendations for Supporting Students with Limited Control of English Language**

1. Read aloud complex and interesting stories.
2. Use phrasing and expression as a support to meaning and structure.
3. Provide more time for the ELL to talk.
4. Observe language: Make it visible.
5. Interweave talking, reading, and writing.
also reminds us that the teacher “sets up fail-safe situations in which the child can initiate successful activity!” (Clay, 2005a, p. 61). Talk about stories was an emphasis throughout the 30-minute lesson and a means of setting up a fail-safe situation where Collin could engage in talk. Reading aloud, discussing, and retelling higher level storybooks, connecting books to personal experiences, and acting out stories with props allowed Collin opportunities to practice using the language of stories. As a teacher, I was highly aware of the need to talk less, listen more, and smile as encouragement to continue.

Observe language: Make it visible. There is much to learn when we become more observant and reflective with respect to what the learner can do. “As a general rule children will use simple structures correctly, then attempt a more complex construction, then get close to correct use of the new syntax, before they get control over it. Observers must expect to see these cycles of change” (Clay et al., 2015, p. 14). The act of recording and transcribing Collin’s use of language helped me to “see” language that is difficult to capture through the ear alone. As Clay describes, one can then see change in the use of language.

Clay reminds us that “Consultation among a group of colleagues is very helpful” (Clay et al., 2015, p. 37). If you are wondering about a child’s learning of English, record and transcribe the child’s utterances? Consider your contributions to the child’s learning as well. Are you using language strengths to choose and introduce new books for reading? Are you being intentional with your use of language structures in conversation? Meet and talk with a colleague about what you have noticed and then notice more together.

Interweave talking, reading, and writing. The ways in which talking, reading, and writing come together are key to accelerated language learning. Clay reminds us, “Teachers who work to prevent literacy learning difficulties know implicitly that there can be a big practical payoff in talking, writing, and reading if we understand how to strengthen children’s control over the structures of the language they use” (Clay, 2014, p. 122). Through making the invisible oral language more visible, I became more aware of the opportunities to make links between the language used in speaking, reading, and writing tasks:

If the teacher knows what the learner controls, but wants the child to attend to unfamiliar usage, she has three possible ways to introduce the new learning: in talking, in writing, or in reading. Using the new turn of phrase in more than one of the three activities — that is, discovering it somewhere else — can be very helpful. (Clay, 2014, p. 131)

Conclusion
In just 15 lessons, Collin was learning to use English to understand and be understood. Clay suggests to us, “It is powerful to harness the established power of children’s oral language to literacy learning from the beginning, so that new literacy knowledge and new oral language powers are linked and patterned from the start” (Clay, 2015c, p. 95). Reading aloud stories, talking about stories, and inviting Collin to retell the stories were the means to harnessing the power of oral language. Collin’s Reading Recovery lessons were discontinued when he was successfully working within the average range of his classroom peers. Clay reminds us, “[However] After a series of Reading Recovery lessons the child then has three complementary routes to (sic) that further language learning via oral language, writing, and reading” (2005b, p. 183).

Collin did indeed have three ways of furthering his learning of the English language and most importantly, he could communicate, understand, and be understood. As an English language learner, Collin would continue to need opportunities to increase his proficiency in the use of conversational English as well as academic language.

Epilogue
Collin continued to progress in the regular classroom setting without additional language supports. At the end of third grade he was an active classroom participant, reading, writing, and talking. He knew how to ask for clarification with language that was new and unfamiliar. He had particular interests in math and science which gave him motivation to read and understand increasingly difficult academic content in English.

References


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**About the Author**

Jennifer Flight is a Reading Recovery trainer at the Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery, Western Region, in Winnipeg, Canada. She has experience as an early years classroom teacher, and as a Reading Recovery teacher and teacher leader. Recent research interests have explored how to better support English language learners in Reading Recovery lessons.

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**Children’s Books Cited**


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**About the Cover**

Tavio Hollins loved to listen to his teachers reading stories at Marion-Sterling Elementary School in Cleveland, Ohio. At the beginning of first grade, he lacked the confidence to believe that he could read those stories for himself. With the help of Reading Recovery teacher, Cheryl Franchino, Tavio’s confidence as a reader blossomed and he soon began reading his favorite books to others. He loves reading humorous stories; his favorite book to read is *Smarty Pants*, a story about a comical circus clown. When he’s not reading books, Tavio loves to watch Superhero movies, especially his favorite character, Spiderman.
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Where Are They Now?

Helping New Generations Learn to Read

by Seth Charna

“I am Seth. I like to read. I like boating. The end.”

I actually started writing this article with these words as a joke to show my progress. When the laughter ended, I thought it was appropriate to include as a reminder of the first sentences I struggled with as an early reader and writer.

Many years ago, I had the privilege of being one of the first students enrolled in what was then a ground-breaking reading program newly introduced in Central Ohio. As a first grader, I was among a small group of students selected for this program, but I always thought everyone in the class was given the same opportunity. I was always excited when my Reading Recovery specialist, Mrs. Addy, called out my name to join her for my special one-to-one lessons. These sessions were always fun and I felt success daily while participating in the various literacy activities. My achievements influenced my mother to enroll in Reading Recovery teacher training at The Ohio State University, and she loved many years teaching students through this program until her recent retirement.

Fast forwarding to today, I feel extremely accomplished. My reading and writing competence has lead to a very successful career in technical sales as a mechanical engineer with a Fortune 500 company. I am so grateful to have had such a great support network in my early elementary years and have funneled my energy towards giving back to the community. My wife (Ania), Standard Poodle (Saba), and I enjoy teaching children how to read at a local elementary school through the pet therapy program called R.E.A.D. Many of the Reading Recovery techniques are used in this program and it is encouraging to see student growth as a direct result of our involvement.

Among the first students in the U.S. to receive Reading Recovery lessons, Seth credits the support network for his success. Seth and his wife, Ania, are paying it forward in Texas by helping other students learn to read with the help of their dog, Saba.
Debbie Charna shares her thanks

I thought I was a pretty successful reading teacher. However, it was not until my first child, Seth, showed incredible progress in his emerging reading and writing skills that I realized I needed to learn more about the new intervention program called Reading Recovery.

Seth participated as a second-round student during the second semester of his first-grade year in the Bexley City Schools. After seeing Seth’s success, I decided to sign up through The Ohio State University and begin my training during the 1993–1994 school year. I can honestly say that after retiring with 36 years of teaching experience—with most of those years as a Reading Recovery teacher and literacy specialist in the Worthington City Schools and Columbus School for Girls—that I could give my students the best reading and writing instruction possible. All my students demonstrated incredible growth which they sustained throughout their school years and beyond. I stay in touch with many of my Reading Recovery “families” and feel very grateful that I could learn the Reading Recovery techniques and gain this valuable expertise.

"These writers challenge us to implement differentiated teaching in classrooms to meet the instructional needs of individuals, and they have provided a rich source of information to help us do it.”

—From the Foreword by Gay Su Pinnell, The Ohio State University

“The combination of Marie Clay’s research and theory with the authors’ understanding of these principles in today’s classroom is what sets this book apart.”

—Lisa Lenhart, The University of Akron

“This resource will help classroom teachers support the continued learning of all their students.”

—Robert M. Schwartz, Oakland University

“An excellent professional development resource for classroom teachers, Reading Recovery teachers, literacy coaches/specialists, and site administrators.”

—Kathleen Brown, Reading Recovery teacher leader, CA

This resource gives K–2 teachers specific suggestions for using Marie Clay’s groundbreaking Reading Recovery® principles to ensure that all children meet new and rigorous standards in all facets of literacy learning.
Retirement offers an opportunity to reflect on one’s profession and to consider contributions made, missed opportunities, and lessons learned. As a director of special programs and chief academic officer at the time of my retirement, my career included many aspects, but one aspect in particular—my role as site coordinator for Reading Recovery/Descubriendo la Lectura in a large, suburban district—is an area I have often revisited.

I am a staunch advocate for this reading intervention and a big fan! My pride in being part of a team that adopted and implemented Reading Recovery for over 20 years is substantial. However, it is tempered somewhat by a realization that I was in a key position that allows me now to see what we might have done differently, especially given the fact that 3 years after my retirement, my former district discontinued Reading Recovery.

Upon reflection, there are places where we got our implementation right and times when ‘more’ or ‘different’ was needed. Our implementation ran both long and deep—over time, full implementation in over 40 elementary schools in the district—and in that regard there is much to ponder. While we successfully served thousands of children, the outcomes we achieved did not always come easily. And in some ways, as the years progressed, the work became more daunting in terms of keeping our large-scale, long-term implementation going. But let me go back to the beginning and then elaborate on our story in a way that hopefully will provide some meaningful lessons learned that can inform the work of others.

**Our Beginning**

I was a member of the team back in 1994 that was actively involved in making the decision to implement Reading Recovery in our school district. It is noteworthy that our team did not make this decision impulsively. Rather, we deeply researched our options in providing a proven, effective literacy program for our struggling early learners, and we made a very thoughtful, fully considered decision based upon our findings.

At that point in my career, I was not a ‘newbie’ in education. I fully understood the capricious nature of school district decision making, having been involved in several well-intentioned, fly-by-night implementations that were abandoned early on in favor of yet another promising practice. This pattern of constantly changing school improvement agendas obviously did not produce desired results and served to foster an attitude among skeptical teachers “that this too shall pass.” I would characterize these efforts as examples of ‘implementation light’ with minimal results.

When we researched Reading Recovery over 20 years ago, our team was dedicated to changing this implementation pattern. Our goal was to find a proven innovation that fit our needs, to implement this innovation with high quality, and to sustain it over time. And in this manner and attitude, we began our Reading Recovery implementation. Based upon its track record, it was a best bet in terms of tackling one of our thorniest issues — ensuring that our students were successful readers and writers by Grade 3. This was a challenging goal, given the diversity of our student population in terms of countries of origin and economic status, but one that we were fervent about addressing. Our task was to implement this very promising intervention with the attention and quality needed for it to succeed in our district over the long term.

**The Implementation Plan**

From the start, our plan was to put into place “anchors” to sustain the intervention over time and to implement it with integrity and high quality to achieve maximum results across the diverse populations we served. These anchors consisted of both structures and attitudes that we believed would help us achieve excel-
ence and overcome the tendency to step through that trapdoor of revolving, serial implementations. A discussion of what I considered to be a few of our key anchors follows.

“*We*” attitude
A cornerstone of our plan was to embrace the ‘*we*’ attitude upon which Reading Recovery is founded. Looking at the structure of its implementation, our team was struck by the multilayered system of university trainers, site coordinators, teacher leaders, and teachers working in tandem to achieve positive outcomes for students. We were impressed by this network of oversight and support. Ultimately, we expanded upon this collaborative, layered approach to further anchor our own implementation within the district. Our ‘*we*’ included me as the site coordinator, teacher leaders, and Reading Recovery teachers, as well as principals, other campus-level teachers and staff members, central office personnel, board members, and community members.

Though the teacher leader/Reading Recovery teacher interface is a critical one, we also recognized the need to build a strong, active partnership between the teacher leaders and myself as site coordinator. The respective roles of each position are critical, but different, in achieving a highly effective implementation. And from the start, we adopted an attitude that regular communication and collaboration were keys to functioning as an effective team. Consequently, the teacher leaders and I conducted monthly meetings and came together in a summer retreat. Within our meeting structure we saw ourselves as problem finders and problem solvers, keeping a very watchful eye on our implementation and proactively addressing issues that detracted from our mission.

Our site coordinator/teacher leader team expanded to include principals. Interestingly, the recent Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) report on the i3 scale-up of Reading Recovery (May, Sirinides, Gray, & Goldsworthy, 2016) notes the critical importance of the principal’s buy-in and prioritization of the program in maximizing results. We certainly found this to be true in our implementation, and we cultivated this partnership from the start by putting a number of structures in place — including our application process for becoming a Reading Recovery campus, the teacher interview process, the requirement of school literacy teams, and principals’ in-services for effective literacy instruction. An essential component of each was the active involvement of the principal and a commitment to implement each of these with integrity. Principals not only committed to attend four required meetings each year in order to grow their literacy leadership and Reading Recovery oversight, but they also agreed to implement school literacy teams at their campuses in order to monitor results and to enhance literacy outcomes throughout the school. They also were expected to regularly review their teachers’ Reading Recovery data and to monitor student progress.

The teacher leaders and principals also worked as a team to interview prospective Reading Recovery teachers and make agreed-upon selections. As the i3 evaluation report underscored, teacher selection is a high-stakes matter (May et al., 2016, p. 146). Our team interview process helped ensure that our pool of teachers was top-notch and their skills and dispositions were well matched to this challenging yet very rewarding position. In the few instances where Reading Recovery was not a good match for a selected teacher, the principal, teacher leaders, and I worked as a team to counsel the teacher out of the program and place him or her back into a better-matched instructional setting.

The collaborative efforts of our central Reading Recovery team along with campus-level principals were essential, as were such efforts at the district level. The ‘*we*’ factor within our central office played an important role in our longevity and success. Reading Recovery was not housed within the district’s curriculum department, but rather within special programs, creating a scenario where we may have been working at competing purposes. Therefore, throughout our implementation, building a strong collaboration with our curriculum folks was a focus. One way we created teamwork was through the structure of a districtwide early literacy planning team whose function was to align early literacy instructional efforts throughout the system, with Reading Recovery being an essential component of a comprehensive plan to ensure all students were effective readers and writers by Grade 3.

Our ‘*we*’ also extended beyond the campus level to include a district-level advisory team whose purpose was to support and advocate for the long-term implementation of Reading Recovery. The teacher leaders and I were responsible for recruiting members and developing the meeting agendas. Our membership was diverse and included representatives...
of the school board, central office staff, principals, Reading Recovery and general education classroom teachers, parents of Reading Recovery students, and community members. At each meeting we shared positive results of our implementation, but we also solicited input on issues such as Reading Recovery teacher recruitment and retention and funding. At our annual new teacher graduation, our members were prominent and often had a part in the program. They also visited lessons and training sessions to further give teachers the lift of their positive presence.

It is important to note that while a ‘we’ attitude was critical to our success, alone it was not enough in our minds to achieve our overall goals. Other components of our plan, such as our focus on data, were equally important.

Focus on data
Among the many positives of Reading Recovery is the focus on data. The depth and breadth of its data collection that is coordinated by the International Data Evaluation Center (IDEC) at The Ohio State University are gifts to any school district implementation. Of course, that statement only applies if something is done with the data. From the start, our team’s attitude was that data is important and we agreed that we would regularly collect and use data in a meaningful way to inform our work. Therefore, it was important that we have structures in place to ensure that the data analysis process occurred and appropriate actions were taken based upon our findings. A few examples follow.

Although the teacher leaders and I met monthly and regularly reviewed data, our annual retreat was especially important in framing our implementation goals for the coming year. We pored over the IDEC results and additional data not captured through the Reading Recovery evaluative process. The teacher leaders were quite effective in sorting and sifting teacher- and campus-level data within the umbrella of our overall district data to give us a clear picture of our strengths, weaknesses, and needs. Our discussions led to our plan for the coming year in terms of teacher leadership development topics, development of training dates to maximize results, campus selection for improvement and teacher leader oversight. These same strengths, weaknesses, and needs became our talking points and areas for monitoring at each of our monthly meetings as well.

At one point, our district became deeply involved in the Data Team Process developed by Doug Reeves (Besser, Anderson-Davis, & Peery, 2006). This process requires regular data analysis resulting in specific action plans. Although primarily designed for teacher-led data teams, this process was also utilized at the district level. The teacher leaders and I formed a team with our chief academic officer. We identified our lower-performing teachers and developed specific plans based on the data to enhance their results within their Reading Recovery lessons.

Our teacher leaders also exhibited great interest in data analysis in order to closely monitor teacher outcomes on student performance. Weekly book graphs that indicated each child’s progress up the set of leveled books are one example. The graphs were regularly submitted by the teachers and became indicators that signaled teacher leader intervention, teacher reminders, or celebrations of children’s progress. Principals were also trained to review the book graphs as an opportunity to ensure daily lessons and as conversation starters with teachers.

School literacy teams were also a structure for data analysis and monitoring. Topics for the meetings held every 6–8 weeks focused on data and problem solving within the teacher teams. These teams were critical in terms of monitoring student progress and discussing ways to lift the literacy learning across grade levels.

Principal meetings always included agenda items focused on data, and the principals were given numerous opportunities to utilize data to inform their campus implementations of Reading Recovery. We shared data in advisory board meetings and utilized our data to enhance the work of our district-level literacy planning
team. Uses of our data were multiple and powerful in strengthening our implementation. As well, our results were used widely to support a critical third piece of our plan — marketing for sustainability.

**Marketing for sustainability**

As mentioned earlier in this article, we were well aware of the capricious nature of school districts in terms of implementing innovations over time. Given that knowledge, we knew it was of critical importance to market Reading Recovery. This is not, of course, an activity that comes naturally to most school folks who have such a heart for their work that they cannot imagine that everyone does not immediately feel likewise about a certain intervention.

In our work together, the teacher leaders and I problem solved often and deeply about how to market our Reading Recovery implementation for long-term sustainability. As alluded to earlier, our ‘we’ attitude was in part a marketing endeavor. In our mind, the more people knowledgeable and involved in our work, either directly or tangentially, the more people we would have on our team. We wanted to grow advocates throughout the system and endeavored to do so on a regular basis. As an example, we initiated the idea to form a districtwide team to develop the previously discussed literacy plan. This resulted in a plan into which Reading Recovery was embedded and also helped promote classroom instruction that welcomed and built upon the strengths of our Reading Recovery students. It also grew our advocate pool among the ranks in the central office and on campuses.

Marketing efforts also included presentations and written materials targeted to cabinet-level administrators and school board members. Although we were not successful in our requests to conduct annual presentations to the board regarding our results, we did have that opportunity on a couple of occasions. One unique idea was volunteering to have a small number of current and former Reading Recovery students present a thank you gift to our board members during Board Appreciation Month. We also had schools invite board members to view lessons and congratulate our students. In addition to these and other face-to-face marketing efforts, we created numerous evaluation reports and highlights of our implementation for broad distribution.

Marketing was a main function of our district advisory board, and we encouraged this group to promote our work throughout the district and community. Additionally, we asked for input from our members on how to ensure our sustainability over time. It is interesting to note that when the question of dropping Reading Recovery came before the school board, several of our former advisory board members either wrote letters supporting its continued implementation or spoke directly to school board members via phone or at that meeting.

A few years ago, with the assistance of the Reading Recovery Council of North America (RRCNA), we conducted a Friend Raiser for Reading Recovery and invited influential community members to learn about this intervention. Again, one of our main purposes was to grow advocates.

Our marketing efforts did not remain solely in-district, however. We were actively involved within the RRCNA network and took every opportunity to present at regional and national conferences utilizing principals, teachers, and even board members as our speakers. This resulted in positive press coverage and enhanced the favorability of Reading Recovery at the district level.

And last, but certainly not least, a main recipient of our marketing campaign was always the current superintendent. We endeavored to keep our leader regularly informed about our positive results through evaluation reports, parent testimonials, and principal reports of campus implementations. We also invited him or her to be a part of our implementation by speaking at teacher training class graduations. Invitations were also extended for the superintendent to attend training sessions and student lessons. Talking up Reading Recovery in various committee meetings with the superintendent also served us well. This part of our plan was important, and we thought creatively and deeply about different ways to keep the positives of Reading Recovery in their view. We also thought of ways to promote the superintendent through Reading Recovery, such as through a nomination to the RRCNA Superintendent’s Advisory Board and as a recipient of an Advocate for Literacy Award presented annually at the Texas Woman’s University conference for Reading Recovery professionals and educators in the field of early literacy.

Our implementation plan was ambitious and evolved as we moved along our implementation pathway. It was a plan that required nurturing and constant oversight and one which resulted in many positive outcomes.
Our Outcomes
Certainly it is important to note that we sustained our implementation over more than 20 years. This was no small feat given the fact that during that time period, we had several different superintendents who embraced its continuing implementation in the district. Thousands of students, representing the wide-ranging diversity of our population, were served. On our 20th anniversary we had successfully served 12,077 students. Our discontinuing rate mirrored that of the averages in the United States, and in several of our schools a 100% discontinuing rate was common and continuous. We also had evidence of sustained gains such as when we tracked the Grade 3 state reading assessment scores for our former Reading Recovery students. Their performance notably increased our districtwide passing rate percentage so as to move our district’s rating on this reading indicator up one level to the highest ranking.

Hundreds of teachers received the outstanding professional development that Reading Recovery provides. Their expertise had an impact on students in the Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura programs as well as on the students they served the other part of their day. Many of our teachers were also general education classroom teachers, serving approximately 21 students daily within that setting, and those students also gained benefit from their instructional expertise.

There were other, less-obvious effects as well:

• A cadre of principals made early literacy a priority in their schools and utilized their acquired training through Reading Recovery to improve literacy instruction in the early grades at their campuses.
• Leadership of our Reading Recovery team in collaboration with the central office curriculum team resulted in the development of a comprehensive K–3 literacy plan which served to improve literacy instruction in the district as a whole.
• The influence of Reading Recovery directly impacted the district’s utilization of more-effective tools for monitoring student acquisition of early literacy skills.
• Reading Recovery was a key, critical component of the district’s response to intervention (RTI) plan. The number of students referred for special education was significantly reduced.
• Reading Recovery teachers trained hundreds of general education classroom teachers in effective literacy instruction.
• Data analysis became more routinized through the implementation of school literacy teams and data discussions at principal meetings.
• Over time, Reading Recovery-trained professionals were placed in a variety of key, decision-making positions and were influential in supporting the longevity of our implementation.
• A team of school board members became Reading Recovery advocates and spread the word about its excellence at conferences outside the district. Two former members wrote an article in a statewide publication for other board members about the important questions to ask when districts propose innovations, using Reading Recovery as the example.

While proud of these accomplishments and the positive influence Reading Recovery had on instruction throughout our district over time, as well as the contributions we made beyond our local level, we were not by any means perfect in our implementation. Looking back, there were other proactive actions we could have taken to support our success and longevity.

Reflections for Improvement
Given the fact that Reading Recovery has been discontinued in the district, I am prompted to reflect on why this occurred. And while answers to the reasons for its removal may not guarantee longevity, I believe we could have strengthened our position and made it more difficult for this intervention to be upended.

Energizing and re-energizing our advocacy efforts
What first comes to mind is that despite our ‘we’ attitude and marketing efforts, we did not sustain or grow enough committed advocates throughout our system over time. Early in our implementation, we
We should have stayed more focused on our implementation plan. With time, some of the structures and attitudes we so clearly valued at the onset lost their punch. We let other priorities interfere and did not fight hard enough or energize ourselves enough to keep those structures vibrant and meaningful.

were quite energetic about making our implementation a team effort and emphasizing the ‘we.’ However, our district, like many others, had significant turnover in its leadership ranks at both the district and campus levels. Keeping that energy and focus alive takes a lot of ongoing work. We attempted to grow the commitment and understandings of each new principal, but we often found that a different mindset occurs when a leader inherits rather than applies for a program. We needed to make a greater effort in bringing these new administrators to the Reading Recovery table and communicate clearly and concisely the value of this innovation to their overall instructional program at each of their specific campuses.

Another obstacle to building the advocacy and commitment of principals was that assistant superintendents were not always in alignment with our efforts. And while we worked to keep these cabinet-level professionals a part of our team by inviting them to join our advisory board and informing them in other ways, our efforts were not always supported. This most often occurred with turnover, as some new assistants had other priorities. In those cases, we needed a stronger plan to cultivate their interest and support. Also, at some point this group of assistant superintendents determined that principals should not be taken off their campuses for meetings unless approved, and our Reading Recovery principal meetings were cancelled. Our marketing efforts failed us in this regard, and we did not garner enough active principal support to continue the meetings. A question for us to ask ourselves at that point was whether our principal training plan was as compelling and meaningful as possible.

In the CPRE report referenced earlier, it is clear that principal leadership is a key, critical piece of an effective, long-term implementation of Reading Recovery. I would absolutely agree and wish I could have another go at cultivating their role as leader of literacy in the school.

Creating and maintaining a positive, collegial atmosphere
I think we sometimes inadvertently cultivated a culture that made us look “better than thou.” Perhaps we would have reflected a more collegial attitude had we paired Reading Recovery and classroom teachers as trainers in early literacy instruction. Or maybe we needed to give more recognition to the many hats a principal wears, and come to them with a “How can we help?” attitude. At times, we probably sent out a message that “Reading Recovery knows best” and failed to factor in how our listeners might be hearing that as arrogance.

Proactively planning for longevity
We should have developed a succession plan. Prior to my retirement, I was promoted to a cabinet-level instructional position. And while I was a key decision maker in who replaced me, I held onto my role as Reading Recovery site coordinator. Had I thought more long-term, I would have seen the value of cultivating a strong site coordinator who would embrace the role with great energy and enthusiasm. Instead, I
hurriedly crafted a plan soon before my leave-taking, which left little time to cultivate the necessary mindset for an incoming site coordinator. And while I had placed someone in a top curriculum leadership role that was an advocate for Reading Recovery and recommended placement of the program within the curriculum department, my effort fell short of what was needed.

Related to a lack of a succession plan was the lack of a plan to respond quickly to any effort to discontinue Reading Recovery at any level within the district. Essentially, we were so focused on supporting sustainability that we failed to consider what would be needed if the continuation of the program was imminently threatened. Rather than responding to such a threat with flat-footed surprise, we should have had a plan we could immediately and forcefully put into action. The time to respond most effectively and powerfully is NOT when a final decision is being made by a school board.

Final Analysis and Considerations
It can be concluded that we had a wonderful run in our implementation of Reading Recovery. But given its eventual outcome, there remain pertinent questions we needed to ask ourselves along the way to strengthen our positives and reduce our risks. For me, those questions include these:

• Are we valuing the structures and attitudes we have in place that strengthen and sustain our implementation and doing so in a manner that keeps them viable, visible, and vibrant?

• Are we adapting to changes and proactively placing ourselves in a position to be a meaningful part of those changes?

• Are we continuously maintaining and building our pool of advocates throughout the system?

• Are we continuously building the commitment of principals and supporting the very important role they play in the success of Reading Recovery?

• Are we viewed as integral, positive partners within a comprehensive literacy plan? If not, why not, and how do we improve our relationships to achieve increased success for students?

• Do we have in place a strong succession plan?

• Do we have a ready-for-immediate-action preparedness plan in case our implementation is threatened?

And if there was one thing I wish I had done that I didn’t, it would be to make sure the following occurred: When a new superintendent search was being contemplated, I wish I had made sure that Reading Recovery had a strong presence in brainstorming sessions as to what kind of superintendent the district wanted. I would have made sure board members included, as one criteria, that the newly hired superintendent would strongly support the continuation and sustainability of Reading Recovery as a key, necessary initiative in the district.

In summary, I was most fortunate to be a part of the implementation of Reading Recovery in our district. That work was a highlight of my career. At various times I was resolved, renewed, reflective, repentant, and reinspired—one student, one teacher, one teacher leader at a time—over and over again. And now? I am hopeful at some point Reading Recovery can be resurrected in the district! For the students who need its services, that time needs to come sooner rather than later.

References

Dr. Mary Jackson is retired chief academic officer of a suburban school district in the Houston area. In that role, and in her earlier role as director of special programs in the school district, she was also the Reading Recovery site coordinator. An avid supporter, Mary has been actively involved in the work of RRCNA and has, among other contributions, served as both president and treasurer of the Council’s Board of Directors.

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Student Outcomes Among Strongest in 32-Year History

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

The 2015–2016 school year is the first year following the end of the successful i3 scale-up intervention grant. One outcome of the i3 grant is an increase in the number of Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura teachers in the United States, who are also serving more diverse populations, including urban, rural, and English language learners. As this report indicates, Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura have continued to maintain strong outcomes, both in terms of progress across the length of the intervention, and as contrasted against comparison groups.

Summary of Reading Recovery Outcomes

Characteristics of participants
In 2015–2016, Reading Recovery was implemented by 18 university training centers responsible for overseeing the intervention in schools located in 43 states (see Table 1). More than 42,000 children were selected to participate in the one-to-one intervention. There were 5,361 teachers trained in Reading Recovery who delivered the intervention, with support from 295 teacher leaders at 233 training sites serving over 1,100 school districts. There were a total of 3,447 schools where Reading Recovery was delivered.

The Observation Survey was administered to Reading Recovery students, a random sample of comparison students, and tested-not-instructed (TNI) students in fall, mid-year, and spring. As shown in Table 1, a total of 3,181 random sample students and 6,448 TNI students were tested.

Consider the following student demographics among the Reading Recovery participants from 2015–2016: 56% were boys and 69% were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Children represented different racial and ethnic backgrounds, including 55% White, 19% Hispanic, 18% African American, 2% Asian American, 1% Native American, and 5% representing either multiple races or other ethnic backgrounds.

For the Reading Recovery students:
- 17% ($n = 7,170$) were still in lessons at year-end without enough time in the school year to complete the intervention.
- 4% ($n = 1,666$) moved during the school year while they were enrolled in lessons.

Of the remaining students who completed the intervention ($n = 32,434$):
- 73% ($n = 23,677$) reached at least average levels of reading and writing such that their lessons were successfully discontinued.
- 27% ($n = 8,757$) 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 5,741 who were recommended for small-group literacy instruction or intervention other than special education, and 1,989 who were recommended for special education services.

| Table 1. Participation in Reading Recovery in the United States 2015–2016 |
| Entity | n |
| University Training Centers | 18 |
| Teacher Training Sites | 233 |
| States | 43 |
| School Systems | 1,109 |
| School Buildings | 3,447 |
| Teacher Leaders | 295 |
| Teachers | 5,361 |
| Reading Recovery Students | 42,442 |
| Random Sample for RR | 3,181 |
| Tested-Not-Instructed for RR | 6,448 |

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 20.2 years of teaching experience.
- Mean 8.4 years of Reading Recovery and/or Descubriendo la Lectura teaching experience.
- Taught from 1 to 9 children on a daily basis (mode = 4), while teaching a mean of 7.6 children across the school year.

Results
There were two comparison groups, 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 (Observation Survey being one metric for literacy achievement level). A second critical 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 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 spring 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 spring Observation Survey scores were chosen from each group, respectively, to represent a 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 (e.g., scale construction, reliability, and validity evidence) on the Observation Survey Total Score scale are described in D’Agostino (2012).

Figure 1 illustrates the mean Total Scores for successfully discontinued Reading Recovery students who were served first (fall entry) during the school year, Reading Recovery students served second (spring entry), random sample students, and TNI students. Only students with valid scores at all three test 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.

First, consider the fall entry Reading Recovery students. By mid-year, these students had a greater mean gain than spring entry students, TNI,
Once they begin their intervention in the second half of the year, spring entry Reading Recovery students had the largest growth rate. In addition, the fall entry, spring entry, and random sample means were approximately the same at spring testing, indicating that the Reading Recovery students had caught up to their random sample peers.

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 spring, 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.

Next, consider 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 Reading Recovery students had the largest growth rate. In addition, the fall entry, spring entry, and random sample means were approximately the same at spring testing, indicating that the Reading Recovery students had caught up to their random sample peers.

Figure 2 displays the results for the same four groups across the three time points for Text Reading level. The general trend as shown in Figure 2 is quite similar to those for the Observation Survey Total Score. Note, however, that the Reading Recovery discontinued students (both fall and spring entry) at spring testing had not totally caught up to the random sample students.

The means and magnitude of mean differences (effect sizes) in fall and spring 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 right 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 value). 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.

Figure 2. Mean Text Level Score for Successfully Discontinued Reading Recovery (fall and spring entry), Random Sample, and Tested-Not-Instructed Students in the United States, 2015–2016
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 -.36 to -1.48. By spring testing, there were relatively small effect sizes in favor of the Reading Recovery students (ranging from .04 to .24), except for Text Reading Level (-.24). Thus, the Reading Recovery sample began in the fall substantially below the random sample and by spring had surpassed them for all but Text Reading Level. More specifically, the effect size changes from fall to spring were as follows: Total Score (1.25), Text Reading Level (1.24), Writing Vocabulary (1.05), Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (0.84), Letter Identification (0.43), Ohio Word Test (1.57), and Concepts About Print (0.93). Thus, the Reading Recovery students had surpassed the TNI students on all measures, with effect sizes ranging from .14 (small) to .58 (medium). Thus, the Reading Recovery sample began in the fall substantially below the TNI sample and by spring had surpassed them for all measures. More specifically, the effect size changes from fall to spring were as follows: Total Score (1.07), Text Reading Level (1.12), Writing Vocabulary (0.84), Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (0.78), Letter Identification (0.37), Ohio Word Test (1.03), and Concepts About Print (0.23).

### Table 2. Mean Fall and Spring Total Scores with Effect Sizes for Successfully Discontinued Reading Recovery and Random Sample Students 2015–2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation Survey Task</th>
<th>Discontinued Fall</th>
<th>Discontinued Spring</th>
<th>Random Sample Fall</th>
<th>Random Sample Spring</th>
<th>Effect Size (d) Fall</th>
<th>Effect Size (d) Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>395.4</td>
<td>554.2</td>
<td>441.1</td>
<td>553.0</td>
<td>-1.21</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Reading Level</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>-1.48</td>
<td>-.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Vocabulary</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>-.98</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>-.67</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Identification</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>-.36</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Word Test</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>-1.36</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts About Print</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>-.70</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 -.36 to -1.48. By spring testing, there were relatively small effect sizes in favor of the Reading Recovery students (ranging from .04 to .23), except for Text Reading Level (-.24). Thus, the Reading Recovery sample began in the fall substantially below the random sample and by spring had surpassed them for all but Text Reading Level. More specifically, the effect size changes from fall to spring were as follows: Total Score (1.25), Text Reading Level (1.24), Writing Vocabulary (1.05), Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (0.84), Letter Identification (0.43), Ohio Word Test (1.57), and Concepts About Print (0.93). Thus, the Reading Recovery students had surpassed the TNI students on all measures, with effect sizes ranging from .14 (small) to .58 (medium). Thus, the Reading Recovery sample began in the fall substantially below the TNI sample and by spring had surpassed them for all measures. More specifically, the effect size changes from fall to spring were as follows: Total Score (1.07), Text Reading Level (1.12), Writing Vocabulary (0.84), Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (0.78), Letter Identification (0.37), Ohio Word Test (1.03), and Concepts About Print (0.23).

### Table 3. Mean Fall and Spring Total Scores with Effect Sizes for Successfully Discontinued Reading Recovery and Tested-Not-Instructed Students 2015–2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation Survey Task</th>
<th>Discontinued Fall</th>
<th>Discontinued Spring</th>
<th>Tested-Not-Instructed Fall</th>
<th>Tested-Not-Instructed Spring</th>
<th>Effect Size (d) Fall</th>
<th>Effect Size (d) Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>395.4</td>
<td>554.2</td>
<td>415.9</td>
<td>538.6</td>
<td>-.57</td>
<td>0.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Text Reading Level</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>-.68</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Vocabulary</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>0.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>-.38</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Identification</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Word Test</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>-.60</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts About Print</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About Print (0.87). Thus, the Reading Recovery sample, as compared to the TNI sample, increased by nearly one standard deviation unit from fall to spring averaged across the measures (an average effect size change of 0.87).

**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 information about participation in Descubriendo la Lectura in the United States. For the 2015–2016 school year, a total of 677 Descubriendo la Lectura children were instructed by 101 teachers (both indicating small gains over the previous school year). These Descubriendo la Lectura students attended 95 schools in 30 school districts located in six states. These teachers were supported by 27 teacher leaders. Fifty-five percent of Descubriendo la Lectura students were boys, 98% were Hispanic, and 96% qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Of the students served in Descubriendo la Lectura, 49% reached the average reading levels of their peers and thus were discontinued successfully. Another 27% were recommended for further evaluation, 3% moved, and 20% received incomplete interventions. For the students who completed the intervention (both discontinued and referred students), 64% were discontinued. Of the referred students, of note were 118 recommended for small-group literacy instruction or intervention other than special education services. The trained teachers had a mean of 17.3 years of teaching experience, 7.2 years of Reading Recovery and/or Descubriendo la Lectura teaching experience, and taught from 2 to 9 children on a daily basis (mode = 4), while teaching a mean of 6.2 children across the school year.

*Results*

Two students per participating Descubriendo la Lectura school were administered the Instrumento de Observación in fall, mid-year, and at the end of year 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 combined, 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 in the Total Score occurred for the fall entry Descubriendo la Lectura students (see Figure 3). From mid-year to spring, the largest growth was for the spring entry Descubriendo la Lectura 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 spring, the spring entry Descubriendo la Lectura students outgained the random sample, as expected during the time of the intervention.

| Table 4. Participation in Descubriendo la Lectura in the United States 2015–2016 |
| Entity                        | n        |
| University Training Centers   | 4        |
| Teacher Training Sites        | 24       |
| States                        | 6        |
| School Systems                | 30       |
| School Buildings              | 95       |
| Teacher Leaders               | 27       |
| Teachers                      | 101      |
| DLL Students                  | 677      |
| Random Sample for DLL         | 332      |
| Tested-Not-Instructed for DLL | 0        |

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.
expected during the time of the intervention. The trend for Text Reading Level (see Figure 4) was quite similar to that of the Total Score trend. By spring 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.

Table 5 shows the mean scores and effect sizes (Cohen’s $d$) for fall and spring entry Descubriendo la Lectura discontinued students combined, as well as random sample students, at fall and end of year testing. In fall testing, the Descubriendo la Lectura sample Total Score mean and individual score means were all lower than the comparison random sample group, with effect sizes ranging from -.40 (medium) to -.85 (large). By spring testing, the Descubriendo la Lectura students had surpassed the random students on all measures, with effect sizes ranging from .18 (small) to .50 (medium). In other words, the Descubriendo la Lectura sample began in the fall substantially below the random sample and by spring had surpassed them for all measures.

More specifically, the effect size changes from fall to spring were as follows: Total Score (.90), Text Reading Level (Análisis Actual del Texto, 1.10), Writing Vocabulary (Escritura de Vocabulario, .87), Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (Oir y Anotar los Sonidos en las Palabras, 0.86), Letter Identification (Identificación de Letras, 0.69), Ohio Word
Test (Prueba de Palabras, 1.25), and Concepts About Print (Conceptos del Texto Impreso, 0.94). Thus, the Descubriendo la Lectura sample, as compared to the random sample, increased by nearly one standard deviation unit from fall to spring averaged across the measures (an average effect size change of 0.94).

**Conclusion**

Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura continue to be amongst a rather small list of educational interventions that have had strong effects on student learning and program longevity in the United States. In its 32nd year of implementation in 2015–2016, students in the intervention posted amongst the strongest outcomes shown thus far. On the 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.

Such large effects 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. Their efforts continue to deliver greater student literacy success than other similar interventions.

**References**


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**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.

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**Table 5. Mean Fall and Spring Total Scores with Effect Sizes for Successfully Discontinued Descubriendo la Lectura and Random Sample Students 2015–2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumento de Observación Task</th>
<th>Discontinued Fall</th>
<th>Discontinued Spring</th>
<th>Random Sample Fall</th>
<th>Random Sample Spring</th>
<th>Effect Size ($d$) Fall</th>
<th>Effect Size ($d$) Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>462.8</td>
<td>575.7</td>
<td>477.9</td>
<td>562.7</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Análisis Actual del Texto</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>-.77</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escritura de Vocabulario</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>-.69</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oir y Anotar los Sonidos en las Palabras</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>-.60</td>
<td>0.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identificación de Letras</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prueba de Palabras</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>-.85</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptos del Texto Impreso</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>-.71</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Neuroscience Meets Reading Recovery

Bridie Raban, University of Melbourne, Australia

Editor’s note: This article is based on the author’s presentation at the 2016 International Reading Recovery Institute in Vancouver.

Introduction

In a previous article (Raban, 2014), it was reported that developmental scientists argue that “knowledge from brain research does not lead to any specific or particular outcomes for education at this time” (p. 46). As Bruer (1997) points out, neuroscience is still in its infancy and while the bridge between education and cognitive psychology has a long tradition, the bridge between education and neuroscience is a more recent endeavor and less well developed. This discussion reviews current understandings of interesting implications of neuroscience for teachers of literacy and links these understandings to instructional suggestions offered by Marie Clay in the 2016 second edition of Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals. (Unless otherwise noted, all Clay citations refer to this 2016 publication.)

Overview and Perspective

At the University of Chile in March 2007, 145 developmental scientists met to discuss recent issues of neuroscience. The outcome of this meeting, referred to as The Santiago Declaration, was signed by all participants and states: “Neuroscientific research, at this stage in its development, does not offer scientific guidelines for policy, practice, or parenting. Current brain research offers a promissory note, however, for the future.”

During the years that have followed, there have been many continuing misconceptions concerning the links between neuroscience and education (Alferink & Farmer-Dougan, 2010). These misconceptions are typically referred to as neuromyths by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (2002, p. 71; 2007.) (Also see Center for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) website; Howard-Jones, 2014; Geake, 2008). In addition, Howard-Jones (2008, 2014) and Dekker and colleagues (2012) identify the extent to which teachers hold misunderstandings about the brain and how it can affect teaching and learning.

One such misunderstanding is that the first 3 years of life are critical and decisive for later development and success in life, a view challenged by Barinaga (2000). More recently, words like decisive and critical periods have given way to understandings about sensitive periods (Bruer, 1999a, 2006; Bailey, Bruer, Symonds, & Lichtman, 2001). This change in vocabulary choice places less emphasis on when and more emphasis on how experiences impact the early years.

In further considering how experiences impact learning, Zull (2011) argues that the transformation of experience into knowledge is a process—not a single step—and that reflection (through appropriate feedback) is a search for connections between experiences and understandings. Marie Clay makes this apparent in terms of literacy learning as she describes theory and instruction addressing how the young learner’s brain constructs neural networks and how strategic activity is developed, leading to increasingly sophisticated, successful literacy processing over time. Throughout her book, Clay elaborates how:

The goal of teaching is to assist the child to construct effective networks in his brain for linking up all the strategic activity that will be needed to work on texts, not merely to accumulate items of knowledge. (p. 41)

By this means he is extending his own literacy learning and is building his own neural networks to support continuing progress. (p. 44)

Although there are many who suggest that we need to be cautious concerning the links between neuroscience...
and knowledge about the brain with teaching and learning, there are some things we are becoming clearer about (Carew & Magsamen, 2010; Anderson & Oliver, 2012). For this discussion, 10 of these clearer pieces of information are presented. They focus, in particular, on the ways in which what we now know about the brain are observed in Clay’s Reading Recovery instructional practices. These 10 concepts are discussed individually with direct references to Reading Recovery instructional procedures.

**Linking Understandings of Neuroscience to Reading Recovery**

1. **More information doesn’t mean more learning.**

The brain is equipped to tackle large amounts of information and sensory input, but there is a point at which the brain becomes overwhelmed, an effect scientists call **cognitive overload** (Torcasio & Sweller, 2010; Sweller, 2016). The discovery of this cognitive phenomenon has major implications for our work as teachers. In order to reduce mental noise, we have to approach the presentation of ideas and activities using techniques like focusing on past experiences and making links with what the child already knows, rather than ignoring what they bring with them into our school settings.

Clay points out that the initial lessons, referred to as *Roaming Around the Known*, provide a critical time for Reading Recovery teachers to discover these aspects of each child they work with. The teachers then plan instruction with each learner’s unique history, level of language development, stores of knowledge, and cultural understandings in mind. (See *Roaming around the known*, pp. 29–34.)

Teachers tend to provide much information through talk; however, Clay cautions that teachers often “underestimate how complex children find . . . the things that teachers say” (p. 162). Resultantly, children are confused by teachers’ talk and learning is diminished. To avoid this, she recommends teachers demonstrate in place of complex verbal explanations, and thus, Reading Recovery teachers model actions for the child often and they avoid talking about their actions. A few examples found in Clay’s procedures include instruction addressing learning about directional movement (p. 52), acquiring appropriate matching behaviors (p. 56), forming letters (p. 65), breaking letters out of words (p. 73), using Elkonin boxes in writing (p. 97), and reassembling a cup-up sentence (p. 107), among others.

Even in the context of reading continuous text, Clay argues that Reading Recovery teachers should not waste words. They should, of course, “[c]ommend the child for good work on processing print, praise to boost morale . . . BUT eliminate all unnecessary talk” (p. 119). (See pp. 67 and 199 for more detail.)

2. **The brain is a highly dynamic organism.**

Until the past few decades, people believed that the connections between the neurons in the brain were fixed by the time children left high school, and perhaps even earlier. One of the biggest breakthroughs in understanding the science of learning happened when scientists began to realize that this just wasn’t the case (Kolb, Gibb, & Robinson, 2003). In fact, the brain’s wiring can change at any age and it can grow new neurons and adapt to new situations, though the rate at which this happens will slow with age (Doidge, 2007; Park & Reuter-Lorenz, 2009). This **plasticity** does not increase the brain’s underlying capacity; it simply means the brain has the capability for change (Kolb & Whishaw, 1998) and for the expansion of knowledge and learning until late old age (Burke & Barnes, 2006), yet this is a common misinterpretation.

Clay draws our attention to the work of Larry Squire, quoting: “We know now that the brain goes on developing and that its formation is impacted by learning and remembering” (p. 231). Clay reminds us that there are different sources of information in print to learn about and new connections in the brain have to be made, linking information through...
the eyes to information from the ears to what we already know about language and how the world works.

The learner’s active brain is rapidly crossrelating all this information and making decisions about what works by mapping past experiences with the new experience and making it make sense. It is the nature of the brain to move with urgency from early slow processing to fast processing on things the brain can recognize, which leaves space and time for slower processing on the things the learner does not yet fully know. It seems likely that if the learner develops faster responses racing around the neural circuits in his brain, this will make reading more effective.

On texts of an appropriate level of difficulty, during a Reading Recovery lesson the child can

- monitor his own reading and writing;
- search for information in word and letter sequences, and in meanings;
- discover new things for himself;
- cross-check one source of information with another;
- repeat as if to confirm his reading or writing so far; and
- self-correct to solve problems.

(p. 43)

In *Becoming Literate*, Clay (1991, 2015) refers to this process as “building a network of strategic activities” (p. 362) resulting from appropriate literacy learning experiences and leading to the building of more-complex strategies. In effect, “[a]s children work on simple texts they solve complex problems and become able to read slightly more difficult texts” (Clay, 2016, p. 127).

3. **Emotion influences the capability to learn.**

The ability to learn, retain, and use information isn’t just based on our raw IQs. Over the past few decades it has become increasingly clear that how we feel and our overall emotional state can have a major impact on how well we can learn new things (Clore & Huntsinger, 2007; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Hinton, Miyamoto, & Della-Chiesa, 2008). Educational (and family) situations where children feel stressed, shamed, or just uncomfortable can actually make it more difficult for them to learn, increase negative emotions, and spark a vicious cycle that may leave some reluctant to even attend school.

When under stress or anxiety, the brain blocks access to higher processing and stops forming new connections, making it difficult or impossible to learn. This is discussed quite vividly by Tough (2013) who explores the impact of stressful lives, both physiologically and psychologically, on children’s ability to learn in school. Likewise, Greenspan’s research (cited by Lyons) “shows that when an infant is confused, senses disapproval, or feels anxiety or stress, there is a psychological and physiological reaction in the brain that inhibits processing” (Lyons, 2003, p. 60). It may seem like common sense that classrooms should be welcoming, non-stressful environments, but different children have different triggers for negative emotional states, making

Emotions are the brain’s primary architect, and teachers can read emotions. Emotions are at the heart of learning and remembering. Because of this, learning is not solely a cognitive process. Emotions are essential to thinking and are an inseparable part of the learning process.
the emotional or affective reaction to the experience, both of which will be coded together in the brain” (Lyons, 2003, p. 61).

Children who have positive experiences while being taught to read and write are more likely to confidently try different ways to solve the problems they encounter. Thus, Clay reminds Reading Recovery teachers that reading “several familiar books provides an enjoyable start to the lesson and encourages confidence and a feeling of being in control” (p. 111). (See Familiar reading, pp. 111–112.)

Children who continually experience failure are more likely to wait for the teacher to tell them what to do and ‘silence to an unknown word’ is a common response. Clay invites Reading Recovery teachers to give the child liberal praise for any attempts that move his behavior closer to what is required, bolster his confidence and while it is alright to be negative about unwanted responses, she asks teachers to be “charmingly negative” (p. 183).

4. Mistakes are an essential part of learning.
Failure is a negative word in most aspects of modern society, but when it comes to the science of learning, research shows that failure when experimenting is essential. A recent study (Autin & Croizet, 2012) found that children performed better and felt more confident when they were told that failure was a normal part of learning, and their study results are bolstered by a growing body of research pointing to similar findings. Much like it takes multiple tries to get the hang of riding a bike or completing an acrobatic feat, it can also take multiple tries to master learning tasks like reading and writing.

Neuroscience research suggests that the best way to learn something new isn’t to focus on mistakes but instead to concentrate on how to do a task correctly, what to do to get it right, and this may well be different for different learners.

Whenever a mistake reveals the reappearance of an inappropriate behavior, Clay stresses the need for the teacher to intervene “to prevent the occurrence of an old unwanted response” (p. 61) not giving “an old bad habit any chance to recur when you are trying to eliminate it” (p. 61).

Sort out confusions, of course, but Clay asks Reading Recovery teachers not to become trapped by the detail of an error, but to focus on successful processing. (See Teaching after the second reading, p. 121).

There are additional cautions to consider. Paying attention to a mistake or error only reinforces the existing incorrect neural pathway and will increase the chance that the mistake will be made again. (See When strong skills block learning,
A new pathway has to be built, which means abandoning the old one as a different approach is developed for solving problems. For instance, show children: “You do it like this,” thereby focusing on potentially successful strategic action.

When Clay states that Reading Recovery “sets the highest value on independent responding” (p. 41), she acknowledges that this involves the risk of error. “Any theoretical position that includes self-monitoring and self-correcting as significant behaviours in reading or in writing implies the existence of near misses, approximations, uncorrected responses and sometimes corrected responses” (p. 41). “The important thing about self-corrections is that the child initiates them because he sees that something is wrong and calls up his own resources for working on a solution” (p. 139). A teacher who allows only for correct responding would not be supporting the child to explore the strengthening potential of self-correcting behaviors.

5. The brain needs novelty.
It turns out that boredom really can undermine productivity and will lessen your will to pay attention and to learn (Bench & Lench, 2013; Willis, 2014). Repetition may have some place in learning, but what the brain really craves is novelty. Researchers have found that novelty causes the dopamine system in the brain to become activated, sending the chemical throughout the structure (Kyeong, Kim, Park, & Hwang, 2014).

While we often regard dopamine as the “feel good” chemical, scientists have shown that it actually plays a much bigger role, encouraging feelings of motivation and prompting the brain to learn about these new and novel stimuli (Balci, 2014). This breakthrough has led to some major changes in how we think about learning and has motivated many schools to embrace learning methods that cater to our brains’ need for new and different experiences.

Parts of the brain—referred to as the limbic system—can either facilitate or shut down the processing system if it fails to find some kind of challenge. Evidently, detecting novelty and seeking reward are two primary sources that determine where we focus our attention. Children who have positive

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experiences while reading and writing are more likely to try different and more-challenging ways to solve a problem.

Reading Recovery teachers offer their students multiple opportunities for novelty in the context of their lessons by the instructional decisions they make and the learning experiences they create. Each day the introduced new book and the child’s written composition offer novelty. In regard to instruction focused on letters and words, teachers maintain novelty by selecting from a wide menu of alternatives. For example, there are numerous procedures for extending letter knowledge (see pp. 60–61) and teaching or reinforcing a new word for reading or writing (see pp. 71 and 91). Teachers may use different responses to support early learning and these include singing, shouting (see pp. 58 and 182), or role-playing. Novelty is also maintained by using different materials, including chalk, felt-tip pens, paint, cards, sand trays, and white boards. The fast pace of a Reading Recovery lesson adds excitement and novelty for the child. In summary, Reading Recovery teachers engage learners in multiple and varied ways of learning and reviewing, and these procedures introduce or maintain novelty for the learner.

6. There are no learning styles.

What kind of learner are you? Chances are that at some point during your educational career someone labeled you as a particular type of learner — either visual, auditory, or kineasthetic. This idea that there are distinct types of learners who learn best with a certain assortment of stimuli has been showing up in education and brain science for decades; but, recent studies have shown that this idea really doesn’t hold up to scrutiny.

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in education and brain science for decades (Corballis, 2012; Coffield, 2013); but, studies have shown that this idea really doesn’t hold up to scrutiny (Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2009). Children may have preferences for how they learn but when put to the test, children were found to have equivalent levels of learning regardless of how information is presented to them (Hattie, 2012, p. 79).

Attention to the individual talents, preferences, and abilities of children, which helps create novelty and caters to their emotional and social needs improving their ability to learn, is more important than styles — of which there have been over 70 different models during the past few decades (Coffield, Moseley, Hall, & Ecclestone, 2004). According to Susan Greenfield (2000), the practice of separating out students on the basis of their learning style is “nonsense” from a neuroscientific point of view. Greenfield shows how humans have evolved to build a picture of the world through the senses working in unison, exploiting the immense interconnectivity that exists in the brain.

Indeed, Reading Recovery teachers “[c]reate varied learning opportunities that involve looking, hearing, saying, manipulating, moving, changing colour, changing pens and pencils, changing textures, changing surfaces (horizontal and vertical) and changing books” (Clay, p. 176). This is clearly depicted in the procedures addressing instruction for the learner who finds it hard to remember. (See, When it’s hard to remember, p. 176.) Clay argues that the more senses the teacher engages when addressing a hard-to-remember problem, the more likely this will catch the brain’s attention. Similarly, teachers may more appropriately consider using conceptions of learning to build novelty, variety, and interest into the presentation of their lessons (Bowles, 2008; Bowles & Hattie, 2016).

7. Brains operate on the “use it or lose it” principle.

There’s a reason that you forget how to speak a foreign language or work out a trigonometry problem if you don’t use those skills on a regular basis. Information in the brain that isn’t used is often lost, as neural pathways are weakened over time (Bruer, 1999b; Verghese et al., 2003). Research has found that the brain generates more cells than it needs, with those that receive both chemical and electrical stimuli surviving and the rest dying off (Lehman & Skoe, 2015).
Clay’s theory is that learning to read and write is complex and at any one time on any one day each learner’s challenge will be idiosyncratic. Therefore daily, individual lessons with each child are essential to respond effectively to a learner’s current responses and hypothesized needs.

The brain has to receive regular stimulation through a given pathway to sustain those cells, which is why Reading Recovery lessons occur daily and indeed why lifelong learning is so important to brain health. There is a great deal of variability among all learners at all ages and levels of learning. As such, for a child having difficulty with literacy learning, the lesson series will be ideally tailored to the unique needs of the particular child. (See Intervening early to reduce literacy difficulties, p. 14.)

Clay’s theory is that learning to read and write is complex and at any one time on any one day each learner’s challenge will be idiosyncratic. Therefore daily, individual lessons with each child are essential to respond effectively to a learner’s current responses and hypothesized needs. Idiosyncratic pathways presented by Reading Recovery children need this individual attention by a teacher who can address confusions and create opportunities for appropriate strategic actions to be learned or used and inappropriate actions to be unlearned or discarded. Clay points out how each day, the Reading Recovery teacher observes each learner completing tasks of increasing difficulty. She slows the child down momentarily, asking him to look and think again, then prompts him to fine-tune his decision making. (See Prompts and prompting, p. 36.)

8. **Learning is social.**

The majority of people need a social environment to maximize their learning (Blakemore, 2010; Frith & Frith, 2010). Research has found that from infancy on, people learn better through social cues, much more easily recalling and emulating the actions or words of another human being (Meltzoff, Kuhn, Movellan, & Sejnowski, 2009). Aside from social cues, socialization has been shown to have other learning benefits. Peer collaboration offers children access to a diverse array of experiences (Fawcett & Garton, 2005) and requires the use of nearly all the body’s senses, which in turn creates greater activation throughout the brain and enhances long-term memory.

Small-group work, especially when it capitalizes on the strengths of its members, may be more beneficial than many realize, both for teachers and the children they work with. Lyons (2003) reminds us that social relationships and interactions with others profoundly influence learning. If social interactions are traumatic or indifferent, then resultant learning is diminished.

Purposeful, contextualized conversations with young children impact their emotional, cognitive and physical development (Siraj, Kingston, & Melhuish, 2015). Children learn their language through interaction with others from birth. And through language children learn to make sense of and interact with their world. Language is intimately related to learning.

To help children control their attention, Reading Recovery teachers engage them in conversation that is genuine and tied to the specific activity or task at hand. In addition, drawing on each child’s experiences, interests, and ideas focuses and sustains the learner’s attention. When interactions are positive, emotional connectedness occurs and learning is enhanced. Indeed, it is through such positive social interactions with caring adults that children learn how to learn. This reflects Vygotsky’s (1962) theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) that underscores the notion that from interpersonal engagement, new learning becomes intrapersonal and then automatized, requiring little or no attention. “Recursion through prior phases of the ZPD,” (Lyons, 2003, p. 55) from intrapersonal to interpersonal, allows the learner to revise or add new learning, knowledge or skills.

9. **Learning is best when patterns are capitalized on.**

All of us, from the time we are born, possess innate abilities to see and hear patterns, something that psychologists doubted was true for decades but that we now know to be the case (Bob & Louchakova, 2015). Indeed,
Marie Clay’s first book, published in 1972, was entitled *Reading: The Patterning of Complex Behaviour*. Research suggests that reinforcing those innate capabilities by teaching patterns early on may actually help children learn more and sharpen their brains (Sullivan, Gervasori, & Phillipson, 2017).

Aside from being able to see and hear patterns, the human brain has a number of innate abilities (the ability to learn a language, for instance) that when capitalized on in the right way, can help make learning any concept, even one that is abstract, much easier (Tymms, 2016). Combining these innate abilities with opportunities to practice frequently, indeed daily, in meaningful contexts—as in Reading Recovery lessons—can help make new ideas and concepts stick and make more sense. (See Finding and using the information in print: developing the brain’s activity on text, p. 127.)

Due to the nature of language and how the brain uses language, if you help the child move easily around his secure knowledge, he will become able to venture beyond his known repertoire by linking novel experiences to the body of knowledge that he owns. It is this knowledge that he owns that is accessed by Reading Recovery teachers in order to inform their teaching decisions. (See Building the foundation of a self-extending processing system, p. 44.)

**10. Learning Changes the Structure of the Brain.**

Brain structure and function are intertwined, and one cannot be improved without taking the other into consideration. Yet, in years past, most ideas about learning ignored ways that the brain’s structure itself could be modified, instead focusing on brain function or the brain’s output. The reality is that brain function can only be changed through changing brain structure, which is actually less complicated than it sounds (Zull, 2002).

For example, brain cells fired up during both perception and action overlap, and lessons that engage both enable children to more easily identify with their teachers and to learn concepts more quickly as their brain cells are getting twice the attention and workout. In fact any new information, if used enough, can modify the structure of the brain, which is actually less complicated than it sounds (Zull, 2002).

Reading Recovery teachers alter their instructional support as children’s competencies grow and develop.

**In Conclusion**

Recent research in neuroscience provides concrete evidence that learning is much more than just a cognitive process. Lyons (2003) reminds us that “[l]earning involves perceptual, emotional, cognitive and social functions that are not a hierarchy, that are not acquired in sequence. Nor is one function more important than the others but rather, all functions are a synergy, a combined and correlated force of united action” (p. 66).

Greenfield (2000) tells us that learning occurs when neurons set up networks that fire together, and the more you use these synchronizing networks by acting successfully, the more developed those networks become, until they become automatic. She continues by saying that neurons go to where the action is and they are ruthlessly practical, designed to survive and adapt to the needs of today — the here and now. This description of the brain’s activity links well with Clay’s suggestions for Reading Recovery teaching. Daily lessons focused on communicating
meaning in reading and writing engage the learner in “building a network or processing system for working on print that becomes smart enough to extend itself” (Clay, 2016, p. 127), and this is the self-extending system for literacy.

In Educational Neuroscience, a new open access journal, editors Brown and Daly (2016, p. 1), provide the opportunity to better link the potential that lies within multiple interconnected fields like education, psychology, child development, neuroscience, and medicine, to fundamentally transform how we think about and create educational neuroscience. This positive and farsighted view is also echoed by Morris and Sah (2016). It is worth noting that Reading Recovery teachers, trainers, and leaders will have much to offer this new discourse.

References

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About the Author

Bridie Raban is a former senior research fellow at the Australian Council for Education Research and from 2007–2013, was a professorial research fellow at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, having resigned from the position of professor of early childhood studies at the University of Melbourne 1995–2007. Prior to coming to Australia, Bridie was professor of primary education (early years) at Warwick University in England. She is a former president of the United Kingdom Reading Association.
If you attended the National Conference in January (and if you didn’t attend you missed one of the best professional learning opportunities in the country), you may have heard Abigail Gray, a senior researcher for the Consortium for Policy Research in Education. Abby was a coprincipal investigator of the $55 million, 5-year i3 scale-up of Reading Recovery that involved all of our university training centers across the country. Findings in one of the most ambitious and well-documented expansions of an instructional program in U.S. history reveal the impact of Reading Recovery on early literacy learning.

Regardless of what happens with the Trump administration, one thing is certain – there will be change. Educators will need to rely on proven strategies to improve student outcomes. And evidence-based strategies have never been more important as ESSA, the Every Student Succeeds Act, turns control back to the states for testing, standards, school accountability, and more. As you know, ESSA largely restores control to states for accountability and policymaking decisions and allows them to set their own performance standards. It requires states to put into place locally designed evidence-based strategies and develop strong systems for school improvement to meet the unique needs of their students.

An Education Week analysis reveals half of the nation’s state legislatures have at least one new education committee chairperson this year, and a quarter of state schools chiefs are less than a year into the job.

Advocacy at the local and state levels becomes even more critical, as control moves out of the hands of the federal government and back into the hands of state lawmakers and district decision makers — many with little or no background in education. According to an Education Week analysis, half of the nation’s state legislatures have at least one new education committee chairperson this year; some having experience with K-12 and others who are veteran lawmakers with no specific education background. In addition, a quarter of state schools chiefs are less than a year into the job.

Everyone involved in Reading Recovery knows that all things begin with a child. So it was a few weeks ago when I was invited to attend a behind-the-glass session in a nearby training site. The teachers and teacher leader had been working before I arrived to get a legislator in to see a lesson. This type of outreach is a continual focus in Kentucky and takes place throughout the year and across all sites. As legislators are changing so often, it allows us to constantly educate and update our state government representatives about the great work we are doing for Kentucky’s children and the long-term impacts this can have for our state.

The legislator took part in the circle discussion as the teachers talked about their children and answered questions that arose. He watched the behind-the-glass lesson with excitement and awe. The child had been serviced in a small literacy group since the beginning of the year and had gained only two text levels. In February, he was picked up for Reading Recovery and had already gained 5 text levels in only 15 lessons. The teachers explained that many children can be reached through small-group instruction but many—our most tangled readers—require that one-to-one attention that only Reading Recovery can provide.

When the lesson was finished, he thanked us for the opportunity to see such a wonderful example of a professional learning community focused on direct services to children. He continued by sharing his own personal story about why he viewed
learning to read as so crucial for all children, and indeed, for our state. He had a family member who had never learned to read. From that one meeting came an invitation for a follow-up meeting and a request to help draft legislation for reading grants to support our work.

Every year, the university training center in Kentucky spends an entire day at the State Capitol with teacher leaders as one of our professional development days. The teacher leaders begin early in the school year requesting letters, notes, pictures, and cards from parents, teachers, and children to share with their site’s local legislators in February. I am always in awe of the fresh ideas that our teachers come up with to impress upon our legislators how their youngest constituents appreciate their support in helping all of Kentucky’s children learn to read. The photo at left is an example of one such fresh idea from this year’s visit.

When those teachers made that invitation to watch a behind-the-glass lesson or when those teachers tracked down their past students to create the painting above, they had no idea how legislators would be touched by what they witnessed, or where it would take us, or how it might impact even their own future in Reading Recovery. They did it anyway. They did it because they are passionate about teaching children to read and because they know that in times of budget cuts to education—as money gets tight at the district and school levels—Reading Recovery can often be the first to go.

So my message today is this; the federal education budget is facing cuts, many state education budgets will in turn be forced to cut, and so on down to the district and school level budgets. There is no better time for those of us who are passionate about teaching our most-vulnerable students to take action than now. Focus your attention on the state and local levels. Remember, everything in Reading Recovery begins with a child. Invite your legislators, superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, and community leaders in to see a lesson. Explain to them what we do and why it is so important to the children we teach and the communities in which we all live.

Kentucky teacher leaders created this canvas of thumbprint, first name, and school year of all the children served in Reading Recovery in a single elementary school over the past few years.
Executive Director’s Message

Reaching Out to Principals

RRCNA Executive Director Jady Johnson

As a new political agenda shifts the direction of national education policy, outreach continues to be one of RRCNA’s key activities. Throughout 2017, we are partnering with the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), giving us new opportunities to reach critical decision makers. NAESP has endorsed Reading Recovery and is enabling RRCNA to share information on early literacy and intervention in a variety of forums.

We have a year-long calendar of articles, advertorials, webcasts, and Twitter chats geared for principals. RRCNA was an education partner at the NAESP Leaders Conference in March and we will present a concurrent session and exhibit at the National Principals Conference in Philadelphia this July. We’ll post our resources and webcasts in the Member Resources Center on the website.

Principal Magazine

- March/April issue advertorial on early literacy learning
- May/June issue article on systems change for success
- May/June issue 4-page promotional insert on Reading Recovery
- September/October issue article on English learners
- November/December issue advertorial

On-Demand Webcasts

We are producing two on-demand webcasts to expand on the articles published in the May/June and September/October magazine, with the first focusing on professional learning communities. Written by Billie Askew and narrated by Nayal Maktari, the webcast features video and audio of Reading Recovery principals and schools teams, with cameos by Gay Su Pinnell and Peter Johnston.

Twitter Chats

We are hosting two chats geared to principals. The successful March 19 chat focused on effectively using job-embedded PD and featured Gerry Brooks and Karen Scott. An October chat will focus on English learners.

Many thanks to the following individuals who are serving as the steering committee for this effort: Lindy Harmon, Craig Dougherty, Janice Van Dyke, Bob Schwartz, Jeff Williams, Mary-ann McBride, Karen Scott, Gerry Brooks, and Nayal Maktari.

This partnership is also a great chance for teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers to reach out to principals to reinforce the effort, so please share the news! Thanks for your help in supporting this national initiative!
Fund Challenge Exceeds Goal

Laughter and lattes helped the Reading Recovery Fund Challenge climb even higher than goal at this year’s National Conference. Attendees grew the total to $16,584, and the M. Trika Smith-Burke Fund once again provided a match, bringing the total contribution to $33,168.

Kentucky Reading Recovery Principal (and renowned Internet sensation) Gerry Brooks and RRCNA Development Chair Cathy Duvall challenged the crowd to support Reading Recovery and purchase one less $8 coffee during their time in Columbus. The Reading Recovery-trained principal also visited the general session crowd for updates via video.

The Reading Recovery Fund allows RRCNA to continue its work supporting education policy, adequate school funding, meaningful professional development, ongoing research, and outreach to school decision makers.

We thank all our generous donors for supporting Reading Recovery as we near the end of our “Growing Readers One by One” campaign.

RRCNA Development Chair Cathy Duvall and Kentucky Principal Gerry Brooks challenged attendees with humor.
New Toolkits offer more resources for professional learning and literacy teams

RRCNA’s Professional Learning Toolkits organize videos, journal articles, audio files, and other resources by literacy topic areas.

Each interactive toolkit suggests ways to involve teaching staff and administrators in enhancing the comprehensive literacy system and can be adapted to meet the particular needs and interests in your school.

- **Introduction** describes the resources and guides leaders on how to use them
- **Toolkit #1** — Assessing and Monitoring Children’s Literacy Behavior
- **Toolkit #2** — Literacy Teaching and Learning
- **Toolkit #3** — Text Reading and Comprehension

**NEW TOOLKITS**

- **Toolkit #4** — Writing
- **Toolkit #5** — Oral Language

The toolkits are designed as an extension of *Promising Literacy for Every Child: Reading Recovery and a Comprehensive Literacy System*. The guide connects self-evaluation tools with current strengths and the essential components of a comprehensive literacy approach to promote high-quality literacy instruction for all children.

- **Self assessment and planning forms** to guide literacy teams or school staff in-service training (interactive forms also online)
- **Promises in Practice case studies** and insights from successful implementations across the U.S.

Get the Free Interactive Toolkits and Guide Information Online

https://readingrecovery.org/professional-learning/professional-learning-toolkits
Scholarship and Grant Recipients Attend National Conference

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 $30,000 to fund two teacher leader scholarships. The recipients are (left) Susanne Elvington, Marion County School District, Marion, SC, training at Clemson University, and (right) Elva Maldonado-Gonzales, Deer Park ISD, Deer Park, TX, training at Texas Woman’s University, pictured with donor Ray Yuen.

Kaleidoscope Series Donations Top $50,000

Over the last 6 years, Hameray Publishing Group and the authors of its Kaleidoscope Collection have donated sales revenue and royalties totaling $54,250 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 generous check to RRCNA Executive Director Jady Johnson. Many thanks are extended to all of the authors and the Yuens!

2017–2018 Teacher Leader Scholarship Applications Accepted Until May 31

There’s still time to apply for one of three $15,000 teacher leader training scholarships for the 2017–2018 training year. Funds are provided by the Hameray Publishing Group/Yuen Family Foundation, MaryRuth Books, and Pioneer Valley Books — all generous supporters and associate members of RRCNA.

The scholarship provides support for the initial training of teacher leaders, which consists of a full time, one-year postgraduate course conducted by one of the Reading Recovery university training centers. School districts located in the U.S. and Canada are eligible to apply. Candidates must be members of RRCNA.

Download the application and get details on the Scholarships & Grants webpage.
Tenyo Family Foundation offered 10 National Conference 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 (left to right) Julie Sardo, Sarasota County Schools, North Port, FL; Debbie Baker, Woodford County School District, Versailles, KY; Jenny Leroux, Rosemont-Apple Valley-Eagan ISD 196, Apple Valley, MN; Karen Barbour, Evanston/Skokie School District #65, Evanston, IL; (seated) Molly Hollister, Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, KY; Kelly Vangel, Lapeer Community Schools, Lapeer, MI; Laura Hutchinson, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Madison, TN; Regina Sudderth, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Nashville, TN; and Pamela Stone, Johnson County Schools, Paintsville, KY. Not pictured, Lauren Johnson, Beaufort County Schools, Chocowinicity, NC.

Kaeden Books provides quality reading materials for schools, teachers, and parents to use with children in the first years of their reading experience. With roots in the early years of Reading Recovery, Kaeden has grown with educators’ needs and now provides classroom libraries and bookrooms as well as leveled books. Kaeden Books provided one $15,000 teacher leader scholarship. The recipient is Leigh Turmel, Spartanburg District 7, Spartanburg, SC, training at Clemson University, pictured with donor Craig Urmston.

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. The recipient is (left) Melissa Wilde, York Region District School Board, Newmarket, Ontario, Canada, training at the Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery Central Division, pictured with donor Mia Coulston.
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 Tiffany Garner, Prince George’s County, Capitol Heights, MD.

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, or other literacy efforts. The recipients include Molly Larkin, Cook County School District 130, Blue Island, IL; Joanne LeBlanc, Genesee ISD, Flint, MI; Christine Miller (pictured), Walled Lake CSD, Walled Lake, MI; and Melissa Wood and Holly Karram, Genesee School District, Genesee, MI.

Minnesota Professional Development Grant was established in memory of Reading Recovery teacher leader, Diane Holm. This award honors her commitment and passion for literacy and learning. The recipient is Lizabeth Kyser, Roseville Area Schools ISD 623, Maplewood, MN, pictured with donor representative Teresa Douglas.

Reading Reading 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. The recipient is Terri Lawlis, Deer Park ISD, Deer Park, TX, 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. The recipient is Elizabeth Scully, Niagara Wheatfield School District, Sanborn, NY, pictured with donor Sarah English.
Dr. Julie Olson Literacy Professional Development Grant was established in honor of Dr. Julie Olson, retired director of Independent School District 196 elementary education and Reading Recovery site coordinator, to honor her commitment and passion for Reading Recovery, literacy, and learning. The grant supports Reading Recovery professionals from ISD 196 in Minnesota to attend the National Conference. Two $1,000 grants were awarded to (left) Michelle Fiedler, Eagan, MN, and (right) Anne Reed, Rosemount, MN, pictured with donor representative Teresa Douglas.

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 pre-kindergarten through Grade 2 and are developed to help children learn effective reading strategies. KEEP BOOKS provided two $1,000 grants for National Conference expenses. The recipients are (left) Jaime Dawson, Spartanburg School District Three, Spartanburg, SC, and (right) Lisa Silva, Beaufort County Schools, Chocowinity, NC, pictured with donor representative Marsha Levering.

Remembering Marie...

Ten years ago, educators from around the globe shared their memories of and admiration for Marie M. Clay upon her death in April. This year, RRCNA celebrated her life with a special social media invitation during the week of April 13. Colleagues were invited to remember Marie and her impact on not only their lives and teaching, but on the lives of the millions of children who have benefitted from her research. Donations were made in her memory to the Marie M. Clay Memorial Fund, which is dedicated to continuing her legacy by supporting work that reflects her research and efforts to enhance Reading Recovery. The tributes, like the one here, voiced admiration of Marie, who continues to be an inspiration to us all.

“I have a hero. Her writings informed my teaching, stretched my thinking, and changed the conversation about what was possible. Dame Marie Clay left us ten years ago, but she will forever be a part of this educator’s head and heart.”

— Cathy Duvall
Twitter Chat Popularity Taking Off

RRCNA is in the social media mix with shares, likes, and followers on Twitter and Facebook continuing to increase daily. In November, RRCNA hosted its first ever Twitter Chat — a great opportunity for networking and professional learning. The now-monthly chats are hosted by Hollyanna Bates, teacher leader from Colorado, with support from the Membership and Communications committees and staff.

Participation in #rrchat continues to grow with each featured topic — more than doubled since our first Sunday chat in November when 38 Twitter users engaged in the Q&A platform discussion with special guest Maryann McBride. The chat on “Selecting and Sequencing Texts” is archived in a Storify and posted at a Twitter Chat link in the Member Resource Center, where new links are added monthly.

Even if you’re new to Twitter, it’s easy to participate in the chats (see graphic below). If you have questions, just call or email Communications Manager Carissa Hershey. And send us your ideas for future chat topics!

In the archive…
Jan Burkins and Kim Yaris — “Creating Independence”
Jan Richardson — “Differentiation in Small Group Reading”
Gerry Brooks and Karen Scott — “Effectively Using Job-Embedded PD”
Jen Serravallo — “Teaching Writing Helps Readers: Exploring Hows and Whys”

On the calendar…
May 21 — Allison Briceño and Adria Klein on oral language development
June 25 — Professional books for summer reading
July 16 — Janet Bufalino on teaching reading and writing vocabulary
August 20 — Betsy Kaye on Roaming Around the Known
September 17 — Nancy Anderson
October 15 — NAESP co-sponsored chat for principals on English learners

Joining the Twitter Chat
Participating in the Chat
New Series Focuses on Teacher Language

Created and narrated by Lori Taylor, Reading Recovery trainer from Bangor, ME, this four-part professional development series features four interactive modules that feature video clips and photos. Each module includes a downloadable facilitator script with notes to help teachers learn together through discussion and observation. The modules can also be helpful for individual learning.

Just log in and link from the Members Only Resource Center webpage.

Module 1 — Fostering a Dynamic Mindset Teachers can engage learners and motivate active problem solving by teaching with intention.

Module 2 — Contingent Teaching Teachers can foster independence, self-regulation and transfer by carefully observing and responding.

Module 3 — Supporting Independence Through Teacher Language Teacher instructional language impacts student learning.

Module 4 — Supporting Learners with Intentional Action Teacher non-verbal actions can support or hinder learning outcomes.

A special thank you to Lori Taylor and to Billie Askew, Pam Grayson, and RRCNA’s Membership Committee for their assistance in developing this new member resource.

Online Book List Grows by 185 Titles


A special thank you to Book List Chairperson Dr. Janet Bufalino, NATG’s Teaching and Professional Development Committee, and the dozens of teacher leaders across the U.S. who field-tested books last year. The process starts up again this summer as publishers will be invited to submit titles for the next round of leveling. If you have a favorite new publisher you would like to see represented on the Book List, please call or email Membership Director Julie Reeves.
More Perks of Membership

Door prizes
What could be better after a long day of learning than food, fun, and freebies! Thanks to all who attended this year’s annual Membership Meeting in Columbus.


*MRCNA Associate Members

Mailing labels
Other National Conference perks for Council members include discounts and first notice for hotel and session registrations, and free personalized mailing labels provided by RRCNA and available for pickup during the conference (photo).

Registration drawing
All new and renewing members in attendance are also entered into a drawing to receive a free conference registration and lodging for the following year. Congratulations to this year’s winner was Cruz Herrera, a Reading Recovery teacher from Tucson, Arizona.

Barbara Schubert (standing left) and Maryann McBride provided entertainment during the door prize drawing — the highlight of the annual meeting that offers members a chance to meet the RRCNA staff and hear updates on the work of each standing committee.
Teacher Leader Award Honors Gwinnett Schools Superintendent

J. Alvin Wilbanks, chief executive officer and superintendent of Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) in Georgia, is the recipient of the inaugural Excellence in Literacy Leadership Award Presented by the Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders.

The award is given to individuals not trained in Reading Recovery who have displayed a strong commitment to expand and maintain its high standards, and who have made significant contributions to implementation beyond the local level.

Gwinnett County Public Schools and its 139 schools and other educational facilities serve more than 178,000 students in metro Atlanta. More than 12,000 students have received Reading Recovery Lessons since the program was introduced in Gwinnett in 1994. Today, Reading Recovery is implemented in all 80 elementary schools. The district has trained more than 300 Reading Recovery teachers, many of whom have gone on to serve in state, county, and local school leadership roles. Besides their Reading Recovery students, trained teachers also work as literacy coaches and Title I small-group teachers. A significant number of Reading Recovery students are English language learners; 46% spoke a language other than English in 2015–2016 and more than 20 native languages are represented.

A longtime educator whose career has bridged from K-12 to postsecondary, Mr. Wilbanks was named to his current position in 1996. He is the longest serving school superintendent in a large, urban district in the United States, and under his leadership the Gwinnett district has earned a reputation as one of the most successful in the country. The Broad Foundation selected GCPS as a finalist for the prestigious Broad Prize for Urban Education three times—in 2009, 2010, and 2014—and awarded Gwinnett the Broad Prize in 2010 and 2014.

As superintendent, Mr. Wilbanks has been selected by three Georgia governors and two United States secretaries of education to help craft significant education-reform legislation at the state and federal levels. He has won numerous honors for his professional accomplishments and civic contributions, including being named “2005 Georgia Superintendent of the Year” and one of four finalists for the national title, and Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce “2005 Citizen of the Year.” He is the recipient of the Boy Scouts of America’s 2008 “Distinguished Citizen Award;” Gwinnett Clean & Beautiful’s 2012 “Environmental Legacy Award;” and the University of Georgia College of Education’s “Lifetime Achievement Award” in 2016. Most recently he was chosen by the Professional Association of Georgia Educators as its honoree for the annual “A PAGE Turning Event” that recognizes outstanding business and civic leaders for their contributions to public education in Georgia. Mr. Wilbanks earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education from the University of Georgia, and his education specialist degree from Georgia State University.

Unlike some literacy programs that do not live up to their advance billing, Reading Recovery delivers the promised results. The research-based strategies have proven to be effective not only in teaching struggling youngsters to read, but in equipping them with reading skills that last over the years. That means the dollars invested for Reading Recovery are a beneficial investment of our instructional resources.

— Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks
Deep learning, collaboration, and laughter combined to make this year’s conference a tremendous success! More than 2,300 Reading Recovery professionals and other educators from 45 states and 5 countries gathered to learn together and improve literacy learning for their students.

The evaluations are in and show the impact on attendees —

- 99.86% say the ideas and information they learned have value for their work
- 99.36% will integrate the ideas they learned into their teaching

Above left – RRCNA President and 2017 National Conference Chair Lindy Harmon, Executive Director Jady Johnson, Keynote Speaker Peter Johnston, and Special Guest Abigail Gray were part of the opening session. Dr. Johnston’s keynote challenged us to view the way we think about our students and their behaviors as it changes how we interact with them. Dr. Gray discussed key findings from the i3 evaluation and insights on strong Reading Recovery instruction.

Above right – Jan Richardson’s keynote session focused on progressive steps for teaching comprehension to strengthen each reader’s ability to construct meaning during targeted guided reading lessons.

Left – In the final keynote, author Mike Artell energetically shared his passion for children’s learning using his own unique humor.
More than 160 speakers and 100 professional development sessions offered the rich experience the National Conference is known for in the education community. Sessions provided research-based literacy instruction that balanced theory with practice.

What they’re saying…

“This year the district allowed us to bring a team of eight educators and the conversations since the conference have been outstanding! It’s the excellent combination of keynote speakers and sessions that makes it such an appealing event.”

“It’s great to hear from the actual authors, researchers, leaders, but this conference is also rich in a range of highly applicable topic sessions facilitated by people doing the work in their schools.”

“This was professional development on a grand scale.”

“Having so many of the greatest minds in literacy research in one place is invaluable to teachers!”

“I love that there’s a common theme threaded through the topics. It really connects the dots and increases the learning!”

The first Leadership Institute, led by Anthony Muhammad, was attended by 86 school administrators and explored the connection between personal and institutional mindsets and academic achievement gaps.
No Animals Harmed

I had asked Brody to make a prediction as to what would happen to the squirrel when two hungry birds fought over it in Red Squirrel’s Adventure. At the end of the story I commended him for making an accurate prediction. He said, “Of course, I’m right. They wouldn’t kill an animal in a children’s book!”

Denice VanCleave
Reading Recovery Teacher
Rincon, Georgia

Translation, Please

My little 5-year-old student brought me something she had written in her classroom to show me. It read, “I like to do crod.” I asked her what crod was.

She replied, “Karate, of course!” I gave her lots of positive reinforcement for being able to hear sounds in words in sequence so well!

Sandy Poole
Reading Recovery Teacher Leader
Canby, Oregon

Author, Author

Today Heidi was reading The Hungry Giant’s Birthday Cake by Joy Cowley. On page 11 she read, “I am going to eat it all by myself.” She did not notice that she’d added in the word by.

When she finished the page, I brought this to her attention. She read it correctly, but then said, “That doesn’t sound right.”

“Well, you and I would say ‘all by myself,’ but that’s not what’s here, so we have to read it this way,” I replied.

She responded, “We have to read what the author put. Maybe the author didn’t know how to write ‘all by myself’.”

Angela Surber
Reading Recovery Teacher Leader
Gwinnett, Georgia
Lift students’ learning beyond the walls of the classroom with texts and a blueprint for teaching that create authentic experiences in reading, thinking, talking, writing, and reflecting to realize what it means to live a literate life.

My wish for you
Is that you continue
Continue
To be who and how you are
To astonish a mean world
With your acts of kindness
Continue
To allow humor to lighten the burden
Of your tender heart
Continue
To put the mantle of your protection
Around the bodies of
The young and defenseless
Continue
To ignore no vision
Which comes to enlarge your range
And increase your spirit
Continue
To dare to love deeply
And risk everything
For the good thing
Continue
And by doing so
You and our work
Will be able to continue
Eternally

Remembering Marie
RRCNA is proud to play a role in supporting the professionals who carry out Marie Clay’s work. As we reflect on her legacy, we offer this tribute published at the time of her death in 2007. Extracted from a longer poem entitled “Continue” by Maya Angelou, the words suggest how we might honor Dr. Clay through our daily efforts and ongoing commitment to children and teaching.
National Reading Recovery & K-6 Literacy Conference
February 17-20, 2018 in Columbus, Ohio

3 Keynotes • 6 Featured Speakers • 4 Preconference Institutes

Mary Fried
Mary Fried is a Reading Recovery trainer at The Ohio State University. She was trained by Marie Clay and Barbara Watson as part of the original pilot study of Reading Recovery in the United States in 1984–85. She has served as editor of the Running Record, Network News, and KEEP BOOKS. Her work as an elected representative to both the national and international trainer organizations has had an extensive impact. She is a respected author, presenter, and teacher of children, teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers. Her research on Reading Recovery continues to enrich professional development.

Ellin Keene
Ellin Keene is the author of Mosaic of Thought: The Power of Comprehension Strategy Instruction 2nd edition, Talk About Understanding: Rethinking Classroom Talk to Enhance Understanding, To Understand: New Horizons in Reading Comprehension, and co-author of Comprehension Going Forward, as well as numerous chapters for professional books and journals on the teaching of reading. She has been a classroom teacher, staff developer, nonprofit director and adjunct professor of reading and writing and currently works with schools and districts throughout the country and abroad. For 16 years, she directed staff development initiatives at the Denver-based Public Education & Business Coalition. She served as deputy director and director of literacy and staff development for the Cornerstone Project at the University of Pennsylvania for 4 years.

Pat Cummings
Pat Cummings is the creator of over 30 books for children, including titles that have won the Coretta Scott King Award, the Horn Book-Boston Globe Award, and the Orbis Pictus Award for nonfiction. As one of the illustrators for Our Children Can Soar, she received the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work: Children. Some of her many books include the Harvey Moon series, My Mama Needs Me, Carousel, and My Aunt Came Back. Ms. Cummings sits on the boards of The Authors Guild Foundation, the Authors League Fund, the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators and the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art. She is a member of the Writer’s Guild and teaches children’s book illustration at Pratt and Parsons, the New School for Design, where her goal is to prepare students for a career in children’s books.

Preregister and save! Visit the website for details!