

## DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR SERIES

# Why Reading Recovery Is The Way It Is

*Dr. Marie M. Clay*

## About this article

This article is an historical text discovered recently. It is an unpublished talk presented by Marie Clay during a conference sponsored by the Ohio State



Department of Education and held in Columbus on April 10, 1986. At that time, Reading Recovery educators were preparing initial, statewide implementations of Reading Recovery in Ohio, an unprecedented step.

In her comments, Marie Clay offers guidance for this new venture by specifying her requirements for initiating and sustaining Reading Recovery, and she clarifies why the design of Reading Recovery is the way it is. To illustrate processes proven successful in disseminating Reading Recovery widely, she describes procedures conducted in New Zealand. When doing so, she uses New Zealand terms, such as tutors for teacher leaders. In this talk, she provides the initial blueprint for expanding Reading Recovery in the U.S. successfully, a venture continuing 36 years later. Our editors hope you will find it interesting and reinforcing



of your current efforts to expand and sustain Reading Recovery.

## Introduction

Educational programs are designed for particular settings, historical times, and cultures, and we do not expect them to be transplanted readily to other educational systems. Reading Recovery® has had this opportunity, which makes it particularly interesting.

An ideal implementation of the program would result in a high proportion of children with very, very low achievement in reading and writing after 1 year at school becoming able to cope with class programs at average levels of performance. This is achieved in a second chance program with daily, 30-minute, individual lessons supplementing regular classroom instruction for only 12–20 weeks. Educators have been surprised at the accelerative learning that can be achieved. As soon as the pupils have skills to manage their classroom program with a fair degree of independence, their Reading Recovery programs are discontinued, and other children take their places in the program. This continues throughout the year.

The program is designed to be an intervention at the early level of an educational system. It has the potential to be cost-effective because

at least two-thirds of poorest performers who entered the program have been returned to average levels of performance in three countries where it has been tried — New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. Another 25% of the children in the program can succeed in a well-resourced, high drive, highly efficient program. Having cleared 90% of the poorest performers from the classrooms, the system is then freed to devote special attention to the very small numbers of children who will need to continue with specialist help — less than 1% of the age group.

Reading Recovery involves four dimensions of change:

- Behavior change on the part of teachers,
- Behavior change in children who learn to read and write,
- Organizational change in the education system achieved by teachers and administrators, and
- Socio-political changes in funding and support by the community.

It is the rationale behind these necessary changes that determine why Reading Recovery is the way it is.

## A Systemic View

My academic discipline is developmental psychology and I am interested in research which explores how children change over time in response to all the influences that act upon them. I have two professional trainings, as a teacher and as a developmental psychologist. My interest in the prevention of problems for children brings my two interests in normal and clinical child psychology together. Because of this background, many aspects of the Reading Recovery innovation were planned on suppositions about how one gets teachers and children to change their behavior. One useful concept is that the individual and the system are in a process of learning to operate and understand the innovation. Within that framework one can conceptualize forces which facilitate, block, or modify the innovation and direct it back to old practices and procedures, or leave it prey to the whim of current advocacy.

Organized systems, whether they are children's responses or the functioning of a large education system, maintain their integrity through a strategic balance of vital processes. They are not free to learn, adapt, or change in any way. They can only be modified in ways that are consistent with their current, essential functions and the balance of these operations. Thus, while it may seem difficult to achieve a policy change, it is much harder to achieve and sustain a change in the operating system itself. I have approached both child learning and education system learning in this way. So, Reading Recovery takes account of the complex interdependence among parts of the system. The origins of progress would lie with the

child and teacher, but the success of the program would also depend on many other variables.

## The Timing — Early Identification

The original question I had to ask in the 1960s was, "Can we see the process of learning to read going wrong close to the onset of instruction?" At that time it was a silly question, and probably looked as if it was impossible to answer. A whole set of problems working against early identification came from the field of psychological measurement. Reliable instruments would predict who the failing readers were after 2 years of instruction, but screening tests and comprehensive clinical appraisal make too many mistakes when conducted before children learn to read. They select too many children as likely failures who subsequently learn easily. Also, they miss too many others who are predicted to succeed but, in fact, have difficulties.

A second set of problems hindering early identification has been educational philosophies which suggest that natural child development should be the basis of learning, that children should be allowed to develop in their own time, that intelligence will surface in due course, that children will accelerate when they are motivated, and that pressure from teachers will create failures. There are three important arguments against that position. Firstly, children who get further and further out of step with the system lose their opportunity to learn from it, primarily because a system providing for numbers of children cannot be infinitely variable to suit individuals. Secondly, a long

delay in reaching success in reading carries high risks to emotional development and to self-concept. Thirdly, I watched particular children in my early research habituate inappropriate responding under the not-noticing eyes of otherwise good teachers. The consequences of waiting should concern us.

Screening programs administered prior to entry to school cannot provide services for all children who do not learn to read. Included are those children who could pass the test but who are sick after they enter school, are absent often, or who remain nonengaged with the initial instructional program throughout the first year of school. Screening tests also fail to detect some children who later find it difficult to learn to read. Identification during, or at the end of the first year of instruction, catches all such children and leaves out those who succeeded despite initial low scores on screening tests. It covers for both types of screening errors. My logical analysis of the position was, then, that we should try to get as many children underway in the first year of school and systematically test the lowest ones at a selected point of time and offer a supplementary and second chance opportunity to them.

## Organizational Issues

Most children will learn to read in a good program that is rich and varied and caters to children who have very different learning needs and personal schedules for learning. What I am talking about today is not intended to alter the way in which reading instruction is managed for most children. Reading Recovery is not a program for teaching beginning reading to 80–90% of school children. The

solution to reading problems will not be found in changing the methods of teaching our classes, because under every method that I know about, reading failures occur. I believe that this occurs because we have to deliver small-group instruction to individuals who differ; most times we succeed and sometimes we do not.

The Reading Recovery program assumes that an education system should provide for a child likely to have difficulty learning to read:

- opportunities to learn in a good first program that is rich, varied, and informed by the latest knowledge of the reading processes;
- checks on each student's literacy progress conducted systemwide for at least the lowest 50% of the age group at a specified point in time;
- early and effective intervention; and
- specialist help for those whose problems persist after the intervention.

Evaluation of the lowest 50% of children at the end of the first year at school in Australian and New Zealand projects, or in Ohio when children are progressing slowly for whatever reason, is required. Systemwide evaluations could not be carried out by only a few specialists; coverage would necessitate that classroom teachers also engage in carrying out these functions. Half an ungraded class could be given individual assessments by the classroom teacher who could refer the very lowest scorers to a trained Reading Recovery teacher. The cost-effectiveness of this program depends upon

most children reaching average levels of performance. Effort and money expended on this will undercut some of the reading difficulty problems and the costs of remediation in the upper elementary school. Some of the achievements that can be predicted are these:

- no nonreaders at the end of the second year at school
- a narrowing of the spread of reading achievement
- a markedly lower demand for help for older remedial readers
- early identification of the few children needing long-term specialist help after a trial period in Reading Recovery

Why does the program focus on average levels of performance? Why not aim for minimum competency? It is organizationally inappropriate to merely raise children to a level of minimum competency—if the alternative is to set them independently on their feet at average levels—because the minimally competent would be more likely to fail in subsequent years. Studies in three countries show that average levels for the class are quite realistic goals. It is also clinically unrealistic to promise to take into the program any child with low reading abilities and then to aim to get all to minimum competency levels. There will be a population, however small, who will have extreme difficulty learning to read. Any attempt to diagnose that small percentage of children with extreme difficulties could only be made by an army of expensively trained specialists. I argue that we take in all children with low achieve-

ment and aim to move them as far as possible, and most to average levels for class. The minimum competency question no longer is relevant.

Two overriding principles in the design of the intervention were that the system would have to be able to incorporate it easily, and that growth and expansion of the program should proceed in an organic way; spreading outwards from a base training scheme. Teacher leaders trained in a major city are then located in smaller town centres where they train local teachers. The teacher leaders are key personnel for the expansion of the project and for maintaining a quality control on the program in each district. They teach children, train teachers, educate local educators, negotiate the implementation of the program, and act as advocates for what cannot be altered without compromising the program's results. They talk to administrators, the public, and the media to clear up misconceptions. It is possible for cities to be served by several teacher leaders and for others to travel to smaller urban areas to carry out training for groups of 12 schools in an outlying area.

Expansion of the program occurs following the establishment of an informed system with trained personnel. Experience suggests three minimum requirements for adoption of a program of this kind:

1. An education system should make a firm decision to trial or run the program.
2. At least two experienced school teachers with appropriate academic training should attend an established training course for teacher leaders.

3. A senior administrator should visit a program in operation because there is a need for such an officer to be familiar with the goals and operation of the program and to be able to argue for the necessary resources and organizational changes.

This informed team of trained personnel will be needed to meet each new challenge during implementation — a question not previously answered, a projection into the future for that education system, a criticism not previously anticipated, or a two-page executive summary to be on someone's desk by Monday to convince some high official of the program's worth.

#### *The Need for Full Implementation*

To operate as a prevention scheme undercutting the remedial reading problem, Reading Recovery will need to be implemented across the education system, funded continuously, and safeguarded by quality control measures. There will be a time lag before the effects of the program are noted because older children in the schools will not have had this opportunity. It is not possible to undercut reading problems significantly with partial implementation. Children will get help and will improve, but the prevention program will not be operating until Reading Recovery is fully implemented. It is inevitable that teachers implementing the program during their initial year of training will, because they are novice teachers of this program, be delivering a partial implementation; they are learning their trade.

Full implementation is the goal of the program because in the long term it

does not merely provide for children with special needs, but it reduces their numbers.

Reading Recovery as a second chance program is part of the organization of the school, and it requires allocations of sufficient staff and resources to meet the needs of the type and size of a school's population.

of children. Naturally, we are thrilled with the results. The benefit does not stop there. Expertise was gained by the two teachers in their training, the daily analysing of children's reading behavior and progress, and assisting other teachers with selection of suitable reading materials. As a result chil-

---

To operate as a prevention scheme undercutting the remedial reading problem, Reading Recovery will need to be implemented across the education system, funded continuously, and safeguarded by quality control measures.

---

Full implementation means that children in need of individual instruction get a full program continuing until they are able to cope with the classroom reading and writing program. Full implementation means that the program is not curtailed because there are not enough trained teachers, enough teaching hours allocated, or some other reason for too few lessons given. Reading Recovery teaching-time should be allocated according to school size and should take into account the problems in individual children's lives in that school area such as mobility, sickness, absenteeism, and other such life events.

One principal wrote to us about the program in her school. She had two trained teachers working 2 hours a day each recovering children. She wrote:

Ten children have been tutored each day and 24 have been discontinued over the course of the year — nearly a whole class

of children from our school have made a shift upwards of 6–12 months in reading level and on the whole the children are 6 months younger. I enclose class lists showing these shifts.

#### *The Participation of Schools*

In New Zealand, the suggested requirements for a school considering adopting this program were the following:

- full support of the principal
- allocation of a 2-hour minimum time for daily individual teaching for full implementation for that school
- attendance of the Reading Recovery teacher at inservice sessions held weekly for 1 academic year
- no other use of the Reading Recovery teacher's time in the school for any other purpose



- provision of a suitable area for individual instruction to occur
- arrangement for the few but necessary materials, mostly storybooks for the children's program

Two models of Reading Recovery have been tried, a full-time model and a part-time model. Each has its strengths and its difficulties. Teachers working part-time had only 2 or 3 hours for individual instruction each day and taught a class the rest of the time. The full-time teachers did not have the problems of switching from one job to another. They did, however, miss the reinforcement of teaching a class of children who were progressing normally and they found the concentrated individual teaching very demanding.

More than one Reading Recovery teacher is required in a big school or in a district where children are ill-equipped for reading when they enter school.

### *Introducing Schools to the Program*

The introduction of Reading Recovery to schools in New Zealand was guided by several assumptions related to the delivery of a quality program. We were convinced that the Reading Recovery teacher would not work well in isolation but should be part of a team aiming to raise the number of children reaching achievement in that school. So, an initial meeting was held at the beginning of the school year for all principals, teachers in charge of the junior classes and the designated Reading Recovery teacher, who had yet to be trained. The local administrator in charge refused to let schools participate unless they sent this school team

along to the briefing. Information was passed to the teams in an afternoon of talk and discussion. After that, schools confirmed their wish to opt into the program.

A second assumption was that the school populations would be very different and the program must allow for different solutions in different settings.

### *In Summary*

Organizationally, this is a prevention program aimed at cutting back the incidence of reading failure in the senior school. It is a second chance strategy needed in every school. As schools, teachers, and populations of

---

**Three key features of the Reading Recovery program are early identification, instruction for accelerative learning, and acceptance of lowest functioning children for instruction.**

---

children are very different, plans must allow for this. Different solutions are needed in different settings. These must be thought through in terms of the aims of the program. For effective operation in a school, a team including the principal must plan, evaluate, and make decisions in consultation, providing backing to the endeavors of the Reading Recovery teacher. Most schools need one teacher; some with language, mobility, or social problems will need two; a small school may need a teacher less than full time.

## **The Tutoring Program for the Children**

Three key features of the Reading Recovery program are early identification, instruction for accelerative learning, and acceptance of lowest functioning children for instruction. It is a daily and individual, supplementary program given in addition to the class program.

### *The Instruction*

In an interaction-packed 30 minutes the child reads two to three easy books, rereads yesterday's new book, practices some letters and words working for fluency, writes a sentence or two, analyses the words for that writing which are new, completes a remake of this sentence as a cut-up story, helps the teacher introduce a new book, and reads the new book, a first reading. Every task is tuned in two ways to the individual children's needs — it is selected to provide a high proportion of success achieved independently, but also, to provide challenge in attempting something new as the difficulty level of task is lifted. There is a bias towards using text for most of the work.

For 2 years in the development phase, we made records of one-to-one lessons, as good teachers tried to teach children with reading difficulties. Procedures were articulated with theory and with research descriptions of how good readers read; some were retained, others were discarded. Only the most facilitating and accelerative were retained, and that resulted in many activities favored by teachers and by some theorists being discarded.

Instead of the usual tests and measurements type of diagnosis by a specialist, the Reading Recovery

teachers analyze children's achievement on entry to the program. From this analysis the teacher moves directly to the design of the lessons, paying special attention to what individual children can do. Children begin the lesson by reading easy books, ones they have read a few times before, out of their own box of books. In this activity they put together a smoothly operating sequence of choices matched to the text. A new book is introduced every day, selected to suit the children's level of achieving. Sometimes the text was too hard, but teachers improved in making appropriate selections of texts. A new book meant a book not previously worked on; it did not necessarily mean a step up in difficulty level. Keeping the need for acceleration in mind, teachers aimed to move the children as quickly as possible through the various levels of text difficulty, checking their accuracy levels and their understanding of the stories. Allowing the quantities of easy reading and the use of many different story books places demands on resources.

Sentence writing is a required section of the daily lesson. In writing their story down, children have an opportunity to learn several things about written language — formulating the ideas, putting them into words, choosing a form of expression, controlling the difficulty in terms of what they know they can do, and trying to write words they have not yet learned. The exercise is creative and open-ended and the output is different for all children. The frequently occurring words of the language are used often, become familiar, and need less attention. This is a form of drill on common words that is achieved in the context of writing

simple messages. Gradually the stories lengthen as the children become more venturesome. Writing complements the reading and provides the analysis of letters and words that is needed to sharpen visual perception learning.

When trying to write words they do not know, the children are taught to analyze the sound sequence of the word and to find a way of writing down that sound sequence. As the children give attention to this, what has gone before fades from memory. So, the children go back to the beginning, rereading the text, checking the ideas in their head with the text they have written, and monitoring their own work. This situation is rich in opportunities for the children to search for information, check on their work, monitor their own behavior with the teacher doing nothing for them that they can do for themselves.

Note the stress on independent problem solving. These children must be able to survive on their own, back in their classroom.

After the children have written, read, and reread their messages for the day, the teacher, having written them out on a card, will ceremonially cut up the sentences into phrases or words. Sometimes the teacher clips off the odd plural 's' or a word ending, and the children will assemble the story and read it again. It is a personal message so the model should be more or less accessible. Teachers introduce over time a series of challenges in this task.

All of the Reading Recovery children need a new book every day, and to read a minimum of two others each lesson from the 20 or so recent books kept in their box. The book resource is very important. The lack of availability of such easy material in

Australia and USA has been a problem to overcome. A magnetic board and several sets of letters—mostly lowercase—a small chalkboard, and blank books for writing with some felt pens completes the teachers' requirements for materials.

### *Learning Their Way Out of It*

Features of the area of remedial reading have been (a) the academic debate over the concepts, terms and theories, (b) the simplistic analysis of the psychological components of the task to be accomplished, (c) the reductionist teaching which moves readers away from, rather than towards, the complex orchestration of responding that they need to learn, and (d) the complacency over the delivery of services, late and often by nonspecialists in reading or even with untrained teachers. A major conceptual shift to specific learning disorders in the last 2 decades did not alter these adverse features. Commonly, educators and the public search in two places for remedial improvement; a change in the child due to things like drugs, a transition age, interest, motivation, or maturation, or a switch to a miracle teaching method.

Reading Recovery results do not come from either of these sources. Children learn their way out of their problems and teachers teach them how to draw on their own resources no matter how limited. By problem solving they work their way into new opportunities to learn. Reading Recovery is not a miracle method; all children have a different set of lessons created by the teacher to meet their learning needs.

Whatever the origins of reading difficulties, the behaviors or responses that teachers have to work with have

a large, learned component. Whatever the limitations, children have to learn in spite of them. This position is overlooked in many diagnostic frameworks which seek etiological causes rather than behavioral responses. Whatever the origins of children's current state, they have to learn how

to move onwards from what they can presently do. What children can do at the moment of referral will differ, and Reading Recovery teachers are trained to observe and to create individual programs for all children to ensure the most accelerative progress. To do this effectively, teachers need a clear description of the patterns of progress of successful children in the program. The successful children demonstrate what the failing children have not learned to do and what they need to be taught to do. In New Zealand we had such studies. These were helpful in both Australia and Ohio.

---

**Reading Recovery teachers are trained to observe and to create individual programs for all children to ensure the most accelerative progress. . . . I know of no examples of programs for children of this kind that have tried to bring their performance back to average levels of performance.**

---

to move onwards from what they can presently do. What children can do at the moment of referral will differ, and Reading Recovery teachers are trained to observe and to create individual programs for all children to ensure the most accelerative progress. To do this effectively, teachers need a clear description of the patterns of progress of successful children in the program. The successful children demonstrate what the failing children have not learned to do and what they need to be taught to do. In New Zealand we had such studies. These were helpful in both Australia and Ohio.

#### *The Program as a Diagnostic Tool*

After the New Zealand trials, we were very surprised, but fairly confident, that the recovery period was rather short — a period of 12–20 weeks. Placing children in a highly favorable teaching opportunity for a short period of time ensured opti-

mal learning conditions. If after a fair trial of one-to-one teaching a change in children's learning did not occur, we discovered those children who would need highly specialized teaching. We had established this by teaching and no doubt it could be confirmed by testing. It would still

#### *Who Gets Into the Program?*

Reading Recovery is for children who, after 1 year at school, have the lowest level of achievement for their class level or age group. Their personal background, ethnic origin, previous development, or school history are not factors taken into consideration. They are children who have not 'joined the school program' after a specified period at school, about 1 year. This allows children time to adjust to the demands of schooling, to make up for lost opportunities in their preschool years. It allows the timid children time to move into school on their own terms and the boisterous, block-building active children (who hate books and

sedentary activities like writing) a period to be won over to the power of books and written messages.

Reading Recovery does not exclude any children for any reason — intelligence, ethnic membership, language achievements, school history, physical handicaps or learning disabilities. It, therefore, deals with the social inequalities problem. Specialists are not needed for selecting the children for the program. The Reading Recovery teachers, trained to do systematic observations of reading and writing behaviors, choose potential Reading Recovery pupils in consultation with other school staff. The children are simply the poorest performers in their particular schools.

Children selected for individual teaching are not chosen by setting a particular attainment level. Whatever the level of achievement in their schools, they will be the ones at the bottom of the grade, mark, or achievement list. Their progress and their images of themselves as scholars will be threatened by those discrepancies. Within the population of their school, they are at risk of failing.

#### *Acceleration*

I know of no examples of programs for children of this kind that have tried to bring their performance back to average levels of performance. Yet, simply, that is what was needed. Classmates would be making normal progress while the Reading Recovery children were in the program, so they would have to learn at an accelerated rate to catch up. This presents a silly question which has two forms. "Can we take failing readers and expect them to learn to read at accelerated rates, and if so, how is this to be

done?” Alternatively, we could ask “Can we take children from the tail end of the achievement distribution of reading achievement and move them into the middle of the distribution?”

If children do not catch up to their average classmates, they will be locked into special supplementary provisions. Yet, it is contradictory to expect accelerated progress from children who are making the slowest progress in their age group. Major questions for the projects were

1. Could children who were nonreaders reach average levels of performance? If so, how many?
2. What proportion could sustain such levels 1 or 3 years later?

We got answers to our silly questions and to these consequential ones. Children could progress at accelerated rates. A large percentage could be brought to average levels of performance as a result of a good program delivered early in schooling. This has been demonstrated in New Zealand; in Victoria, Australia; and in Ohio. That children can retain these gains, 1 and 3 years later has been shown in New Zealand. Children could be taught to discover things about reading and writing for themselves. They were trained to be independent and were able to survive as learners back in their classrooms.

In each country there have been minority groups, different from each other, but each in their varied ways is benefiting from the program.

These results do challenge my prior notions of typical development, slow learners, deprived backgrounds, and

their effects. They make me feel uncomfortable about a great many of the concepts upon which I have operated and taught my students in the last few decades. Nevertheless, the results are there, brought about by hundreds of teachers for thousands of children.

There are a group of children we were not able to help. They are the children who were not at school to be taught often enough to get a pattern of accelerated growth underway. They were sick, absent, or changed schools too often. Reading Recovery teachers made extreme efforts to find these children, get them to school regularly and give them make-up help, but they continued to present a problem.

After 4 months in Reading Recovery, children who are not responding to the program should be transferred to a reading specialist, providing a third wave of assistance for children with extremely difficult reading problems. Reading Recovery teachers are not trained to work with that level of severity.

## The Training of Reading Recovery Teachers

Reading Recovery teachers are classroom teachers or reading teachers who work for at least 2 hours each day in this program. They receive their training in an inservice program once every week or 2 weeks over a period of a year, while they are also teaching the children.

The teachers selected should be permanent teachers, in junior school teaching, committing themselves to the program beyond the training year, working with the classroom teachers of the children selected,

demonstrating good relations with staff members, and teaching behind the one-way screen for other members of the inservice course.

It is essential that teachers have the experience of teaching successful readers. They know the behaviors to be developed and can make accurate predictions about when children are ready to leave the program. This ensures that children will be able to continue to gain in skill as a result of being in the normal classroom program.

Teachers are first trained to be sensitive observers and appraisers of children's reading and writing behaviors. They learn to take records of text reading behavior, recording exactly how children are reading their books. They do a very careful and detailed analysis of exactly what the children can do.

Teachers keep detailed records in lesson plans, daily samples of text reading behavior, graphs of progress through book levels, and accumulation charts of new writing vocabulary. On the basis of this knowledge, they select new books very carefully to use all of the strategies children have mastered and to provide the next biggest challenge they think the children might be able to take. Giant leaps must be taken whenever possible because acceleration of progress must be achieved. It is unacceptable getting children bogged down in things they already know, or with detail and repetitive practice. Detailed preplanning of lessons is not possible because teachers must respond to what the children are doing today and to make decisions about where to take time now and possibly reinforce something tomorrow.



Initially in New Zealand, teachers were invited to teach for each other and were expected to gradually change over the period of the year in response to what they saw other teachers and children doing. By the end of the year, they had acquired new theories about how they and their pupils performed. They were then able to question, challenge, discuss, work out course of action, and explain their decisions in ways they all could all understand because these new theories were shared and explicit.

Every 1 or 2 weeks throughout the year demonstrations of teaching and group discussions were arranged. These were critical aspects of the teacher training course. We assumed that teachers would gradually understand the full implications of programming individually for children with difficulties who needed to learn at accelerated rates. The use of the one-way window meant that children were being taught on one side of the screen, while the teaching demonstration was being discussed by the teacher's peers in training on the other side of the screen. The one-way viewing facility is an essential part of the inservice training, allowing for discussion of what children were doing and why teachers responded as they did, and whether that was the most supportive or accelerative way to go. Delayed discussion would not have been as effective and videotaped replays lost the excitement of the on-task questioning and commentary.

Under such close scrutiny, strong pressure was on the teachers to make sound judgments which had massive payoffs in terms of learning gains for the children. Teachers were to waste no time on unnecessary instruction.

Shortcuts were fine; detours away from reading text were suspect and needed to be defended with sound rationales. The teachers' peers were quick to criticize any indulgent wandering into unnecessary activities once they appreciated the importance of acceleration.

All inservice sessions aimed to enrich the teachers' understanding of children and to sharpen their use of special teaching procedures in order to maximize their effectiveness. They were becoming decision makers able to generate finely tailored curriculum tasks for troubled readers.

#### *In Summary*

Reading Recovery lessons can be developed by good junior school teachers supported by inservice sessions which include demonstration and discussion, over the period of a year, during which not only what the teachers say, but also what they do, change in appropriate ways to meet the special needs of their pupils. These teachers observe, diagnose, and interpret the children's behaviors and design the programs from this. Teachers create a context for learning out of what children can already do and into this they insert the next biggest challenge they think the children can take. The teachers monitor progress daily and the program is so adaptive that they cannot even preplan a lesson in detail. Each lesson must be responsive to new strengths or confusions that the children demonstrate.

### **The Training of Tutors/ Teacher Leaders**

The key people in the smooth running of this whole program within an education system are the tutors. They

need a sensitive awareness of the organizational, professional, and child development issues associated with the program, and extensive practical experience of the everyday workings of the infant school (primary school).

They need to be flexible in considering new concepts and practices, and to be able to work in inservice settings with teachers whose work they observe, criticize, and discuss. They must be skillful in helping others to grow, develop, and be good organizers. In addition, they have to gain an academic and theoretical knowledge of what they are doing to be able to weigh new developments, revisions, and proposed changes to the program. These are the components of the year-long course for tutors.

Tutors train as Reading Recovery teachers and throughout the year work through the experiences of a trainee group as a group member. Thus, they become aware of the shifts in teachers' understanding, their questioning, and their inservice needs as their skills increase. By mid-way through the year, the training emphasis shifts to observing how the tutors are learning from working with teachers. They get opportunities to try out the role of guiding the lesson observations, developing questioning skills, leading teachers to articulate in words what the children are doing, and why they thought the teachers did what they did. They become more skillful in helping teachers to grow and to develop their decision making. Trainee tutors also visit teachers in their schools and learn from their tutor how to help teachers in their own school settings.

The organization and administration of the inservice course from the introductory talk through the year's

operation are studied in detail. In New Zealand these tutors meet for an annual refresher course to maintain contact with the operation of the program in their area and to discuss any developments that need attention.

Tutor training is an essential first step toward implementing this educational take. Once there are some trained tutors available, the program has a “redirecting system,” as Goodlad (1984) calls it, able to guide, inform, monitor, and maintain quality control over the development of the new program.

### *Creative Substitutes*

Substitute procedures tend to arise with time in any new program, and there may be several reasons for this. If attention to detail, explanation, and training have been inadequate then shifts will occur. Substitutes arise when the program is successful because the teaching looks too easy and is copied superficially. Substitutes also arise from adaptations of the program to settings that vary in practical aspects or for political and economic reasons that set constraints on operation or on funding. Substitutes will arise from extensions to the theory behind the program, from alternative and equally reasonable conceptualizations, or from challenging and oppositional theoretical positions.

Our ways of controlling for creative substitutes that might reduce the effectiveness of the program have been the following:

- The teachers receive a year-long training to develop both the practice and the understanding of good procedures.
- Local programs are overseen by highly trained tutors who talk to teachers and adminis-

trators about changes, teach them the theory of the program, and demonstrate the implications for children to prevent failure.

When would a change in the procedure of the program be sanctioned? A change might be sanctioned if it did not threaten the acceleration in learning that is achieved in the program, the range of improvement in reading and writing skills, or the emphasis on independent learning that is related to continued progress after the program ends. The effectiveness of the change would need to be demonstrated for the designated population of children and not just for the general population of school children.

Most of the substitutes offered have either been welcome adaptations for the size of school, available personnel, age of entry, and other organizational factors, or they have been a clearly unacceptable break with the principle that all children have different programs and take a different course. Training teachers to deliver individual instruction follows from that principle. I tire of having to explain that there is no program package, that I cannot supply program materials, that it is not possible to implement the program without training, and most recently, that it is not likely to be sold as a software disc.

A cautious response to challenges to change the program is this. The program as a package has been shown in research to work with this population of children. That in itself is surprising. The results have been demonstrated in day-to-day progress as well as in research and test variables. A major change in any component of the program should not be made without similar research

documentation of its enhancing effects plus any losses incurred on the same unrestricted special population of children.

## **Answering the Critics and the Skeptics**

In New Zealand, the results were too good to be believed and the hunt was on to find the flaws in the project. Among many criticisms, charges have been that

- it is a middle-class program,
- it needs too many specialists (yet it uses classroom practitioners),
- the children were hand-picked (yet we had taken the poorest),
- instruction started too early for ESL children, and
- certain ethnic minority children learn in different ways and would not be served by this program.

The individual tutoring has been criticized as uneconomic and inefficient, although the results suggest that you can get struggling learners to do surprisingly well if you are prepared to work with what they have to offer. There has been recurrent opposition to daily instruction, with a myriad of alternatives suggested.

We were told that children would spontaneously improve if we just left them to grow older; but I had not observed spontaneous remission in a single struggling reader throughout a long career.

We were told that if teachers only did their job properly, then Reading Recovery would be unnecessary. The ‘do the job properly’ advice ignores two important facts that are appar-

ent to any observer of new entrants to school. At entry, children are dramatically different in what they have already learned, and secondly, reading acquisition is a very complex orchestration of activities which is accomplished by children, not by the teachers. Children have to get their act together and pull out all the right stops at the right time. The teachers are their assistants in this. Many things go right, but some go wrong. The confusions and tangles need close and individual help to straighten them out.

There were issues arising from unpopular aspects of special education which were directed to Reading Recovery. The arguments ran like this:

- Special education calls attention to deviance and perpetuates the concept of disability. (Reading Recovery reduces differences markedly.)
- Special education rationalizes an asocial withdrawal of the children from the class. (Reading Recovery uses short-time, short-term withdrawal from class to accelerate children back to full-time in the classroom.)
- In special education packaged programs replace the teachers' program. (In Reading Recovery, teacher-designed individual lessons replace basal packages or class group programs.)
- Special education narrows life options. (Reading Recovery works to return the children to normal routines in less than half a year.)

Thus, Reading Recovery places a short time limit on allocation to this special program; it is planned and carried out by the staff of the school; it is designed by teachers who train to make quality decisions; it has the end goal of exiting children from the program fully able to cope alone with the program of their particular

---

**Reading acquisition is a very complex orchestration of activities which is accomplished by children, not by the teachers.**

---

classroom; and it is not aided by any deliverable packages. It was not explicitly designed to avoid the four problems of special education outlined, but it does.

The other questions raised by hesitant administrators are, "What is in the wake of this program? Is it a thing in tune with the moment only and will it need to be drastically changed next year?" These are not questions a researcher can answer, but if the program is monitored effectively by research studies, and information is kept current and accessible, policymakers will be able to make more informed guesses about these questions and others like them.

There are three key factors in Reading Recovery which stress informed leadership.

1. A university level training program to train tutors and staff who will act as consultants to

the educational systems and who can explain the implications of compromises and modifications for the expected outcomes.

2. Persons at the highest level of administrative decision making who understand the instructional features of the program. Expansion should only proceed after such an administrator has been appropriately briefed onsite with a fully operational program.
3. Tutors with an important leadership role in their own districts where they train teachers for local schools, maintain contact with past trainees now operating independently in their schools, and deal with the public and professional educators about the program at district level

In the Reading Recovery program, child learning, teacher learning, system learning, and community learning make up effective maintenance systems, with a tutor as the agent of redirection supported by educational administrators who fully understood why Reading Recovery is the way it is. It is a system intervention, tuned to the needs of the children in that system.

In our context, control over public statements about the program was attempted in several ways. Every means was taken to ensure that the messages that became public were clear, giving the true strengths and limitations of the program. They were written on several levels for different audiences, coming from a widespread of professional involvement, and public forms of display

of the progress of the children. A complex program was able to proceed down a clear path picking off each challenge or counter argument on the way until acceptance of the program was achieved. In two countries support has been demonstrated by a vote of funds in a budget.

If you have a creative solution to a traditional problem, it clashes with people's expectations. This means you have to educate everyone and establish new expectations. Before long you have a new cohort of parents, journalists, doctors, specialists, and politicians; and so, the education has to begin all over again. In March of 1979, I was amazed to find myself faced with the Department of Education hierarchy in New Zealand in the persons of seven top directors who asked me to explain the implications of the program for the education system. Until then I had just been a developmental psychologist. Since then, I have thought a great deal about the implications of a system intervention, its challenges, and its problems. Here, this morning, it is a little like 1979 in Auckland. Ohio is close to beginning a statewide implementation. The Department of Education has sponsored this conference and you have been wondering whether this program, that raises silly questions and gets unexpected answers, will work in Ohio.

I visited all the training programs here in Columbus in January, and I was very impressed with the vigor

and the integrity the new teachers and tutors were carrying out their work. The children did not surprise me. I just expect to see them change now. As the program moves out to other sites beyond Columbus next year and the year after, I feel confident that you will achieve what some of my American colleagues have said was impossible — making an educational program work here that was dreamed up in the South Pacific. I am confident of the results.

Let me finish by offering you a challenge. I will first quote from page 124 of an excellent publication called *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. (Anderson et al., 1985). In an afterward Professor Jeanne Chall writes the following:

Let us take one of these special groups as an example — those with severe reading and learning disabilities, often referred to as dyslexia. There is general agreement among researchers that from 10 to 15% of the population is so handicapped. Their reading achievement lags significantly behind their mental abilities and language comprehension. Although improved instruction makes it easier for them to learn to read, their difficulties often persist and take different forms as they progress. They learn and they do best when they receive proper diagnosis and remediation. And the earlier they get this the better.

Thus, it would seem that in order to affect significant improvement in reading for children and adults with reading/learning disability, we will need to plan for more care, more funds, and more professional help both to prevent and treat their difficulties.

That is a new statement about an old model — an expensive model to run. It costs money and it costs in human failure. Reading Recovery is a thoughtful and carefully researched and deliberate break with that model. The best demonstration, which would provide evidence that Dr. Chall and many others are wrong about that 10–15% having learning disability, is to get Reading Recovery up and running statewide in Ohio, and to get your percentage of children who fail in Reading Recovery and are referred for continuing specialist help down to the current figures for New Zealand. For the last 2 years they have been running well under 1% of the age cohort. There is a challenge here, and I leave it in your capable hands.

### References

- Chall, J. (1985). Afterward. In R. C. Anderson; E. H. Hiebert; J. A. Scott; & I. A. G. Wilkinson. *Becoming a nation of readers: The report of the Commission on Reading* (pp. 124–125). Center for the Study of Reading.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1984). *A place called school: Prospects for the future*. McGraw Hill.