

Implementing Literacy Lessons in the United States: Revised Standards and Guidelines

Mary Ann Poparad, National Louis University

In June 2023, the North American Trainers Group (NATG) approved revisions to the *Standards and Guidelines of Literacy Lessons in the United States*. This article provides contextual background information and highlights particular changes appearing in the current edition.

Historical Background

Clay (2005) provided the rationale to support implementations of Literacy Lessons® in addition to Reading Recovery®:

A Reading Recovery training for teachers of special education children has been approved and supervised from time to time. The new title for this book acknowledges that these things have occurred and implies that further exploration of working with some special education children is appropriate. (p. ii)

By 2006, explorations with Literacy Lessons began in the United States as an extension of Reading Recovery to serve two special groups of students beyond first grade—English language learners and children identified for special education services—who were experiencing difficulty with early reading and writing.

In 2013, NATG prepared and approved the first edition of the implementation standards for Literacy Lessons in the United States in order to support an application for the trademark currently held by The Ohio State University (Figure 1). That U.S. trademark legally guards against counterfeiting, fraud, and misuse.

Further clarification of Clay's earlier guidance appeared in the second edition of *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (2016).

It is because these procedures are designed for adapting instruction to the learning needs of individual children that they can be applied to special education students who are experiencing difficulty with early literacy acquisition and to English language learners, including seven- to nine-year-old children who need foundational instruction in English literacy.

The training in Reading Recovery teaching procedures needed by teachers of special education students and English language learners has been developed and implemented with the trademarked

Figure 1. Trademarked Literacy Lessons Logo



title *Literacy Lessons*. . .within the existing infrastructure for training and dissemination established by the holder of a national trademark. (p. 3)

An operational standards document provides implementation consistency, protects the trademark, and ensures the quality and integrity of Literacy Lessons implementations across multiple locations. The Implementation Committee within NATG carries responsibility for monitoring and recommending revisions to the implementation standards based upon trends found across national research reports and current practices reported by teacher leaders through their university training centers.

The *Standards and Guidelines* document delineates expectations regarding eligible students, teacher qualifications, initial teacher training and continuing professional development, the role of teacher leaders and trainers, ongoing data collection,

and research. Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons teacher training sites receive an annual authorization to use the trademark “Literacy Lessons” based upon agreement with these operational standards. Each approved teacher training site employs at least one actively registered and credentialed Reading Recovery/*Descubriendo la Lectura* and Literacy Lessons teacher leader.

As Reading Recovery teacher training sites and university training centers began and sustained implementations of Literacy Lessons over the past 10 years, we have learned more about effective operations and essential practices. With the exception of the pandemic years, the national number of schools, teachers, and students participating in Literacy Lessons has increased over time as shown in Figure 2.

Why Standards and Guidelines?

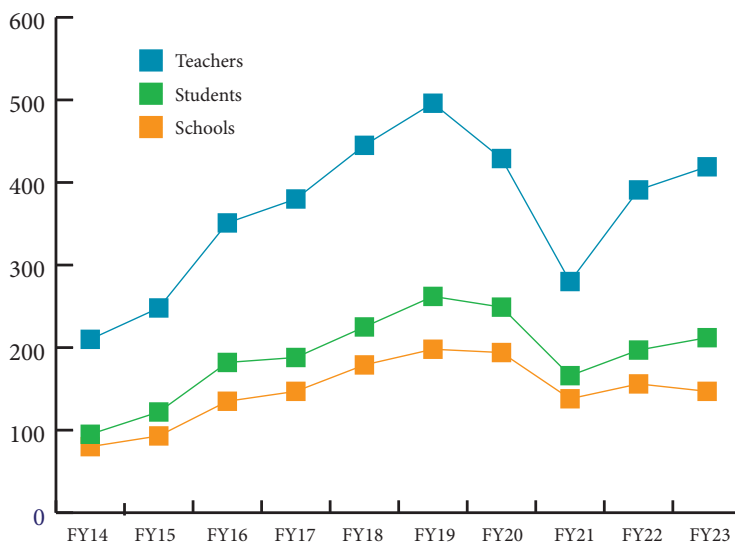
Written standards provide an implementation infrastructure and assurances that the national data collected and published in research reports reflects standardized implementations. While standards are developed and periodically revised to ensure the consistency and quality of implementations, Reading Recovery trainers carry the primary responsibility to interpret and guide site-based decisions that will most likely ensure quality implementations, practical consistency, and effectiveness across a wide variety of educational systems. Standards assure consumers that annual national, regional, and local research reports reflect the most-essential characteristics for authenticity.

While not required for standard implementations, guidelines offer additional recommendations

known to support highly successful implementations (Briggs & Lomax, 2017; Harmon & Williams, 2017; Poparad, 2021, 2022). The most essential, standard, and nonnegotiable requirements for implementing Literacy Lessons under the U.S. trademark are these:

- Individually designed and delivered instruction for students from special populations who are having great difficulty in developing an early literacy processing system
- A recognized initial course of study for qualified teachers with annual ongoing professional development
- Data collection, research, and evaluation
- Establishment of an infrastructure with standards to sustain and ensure quality

Figure 2. Number of Participating Teachers, Students, and Schools in Literacy Lessons in the United States, FY14–FY23



SOURCE: International Data Evaluation Center, 2023.

Upon NATG approval, the Reading Recovery Council of North America (RRCNA) publishes and houses the most current *Standards and Guidelines* documents for Literacy Lessons and for Reading Recovery/*Descubriendo la Lectura* in the United States.

Additions, Revisions, and Clarifications

The intent in this section is to draw attention to particular differences including additions, revisions, and clarifications that may support the implementation and growth of Literacy Lessons sites within the United States. Not every difference between the 2013 and 2023 document is detailed within this article.

Additions

Instruction in Spanish. Literacy Lessons may be provided in Spanish under appropriate conditions and when an individual educational plan (IEP) for special education services requires Spanish to be the language of instruction. Literacy Lessons may be offered in Spanish under these conditions:

1. *Instrumento de observación de los logros de la lecto-escritura inicial* (Escamilla et al., 1996) is an appropriate assessment.
2. The IEP designates Spanish as the language of supplemental instruction.
3. The teacher of Literacy Lessons holds a multilingual credential.

4. A credentialed and active Descubriendo la Lectura teacher leader provides the teacher training, coaching, and continuing professional development.

Transitioning of teachers. The 2013 document did not include a standard method for transitioning the teacher of Literacy Lessons credential to a Reading Recovery credential. To address the need for such cases, Section 6: Standards for Transitioning Teachers Credentialed in Literacy Lessons, was added in the 2023 document. This section was approved at the Spring 2019 NATG meeting.

The transition may be completed through professional development requirements specified by the university training cen-

ter in collaboration with the teacher leader. Teachers making a transition will complete specified requirements to earn additional status as a Reading Recovery teacher per the current edition of the *Standards and Guidelines of Reading Recovery in the United States*. (2023, p. 11)

Definitions. The 2023 document also includes an expanded 2-page Introduction and overview of rationale; trademark information; clarification; and specific definitions of terms, roles, and responsibilities.

Revisions

Table 1 summarizes significant revisions and additions since 2013. Terminology adjustments value individuals over a service

Table 1. Summary of Changes to *Standards and Guidelines of Literacy Lessons in the United States*

2013 Edition (Updated 2014, 2015)	2023 Edition
Introduction	Expanded Introduction and Overview section
Teachers	
Literacy Lessons intervention specialists	Literacy Lessons teachers Teachers training (trained) in Literacy Lessons Teachers of Literacy Lessons
Eligible Teachers of Literacy Lessons	
School has an implementation of Reading Recovery	School or district affiliates with a Reading Recovery site
Students Eligible for Literacy Lessons	
Bilingual	Multilingual
English language learners	Students who are multilingual
Special education students	Students who are identified for special education services
References	Updated references
No Appendix	Appendix A: Code of Ethics for United States: Professionals and Administrators Implementing Literacy Lessons Appendix B: Request for Exemption from Standard

category or job title. For example, throughout the document, “teachers trained in Literacy Lessons” has replaced “Literacy Lessons teachers.” “Students identified for special education” has replaced “special education students.” “Students who are multilingual” has replaced “English language learners” to align with the *WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework* (2020). The term ‘multilingual learners’ refers to “all children and

School administrators choose to implement Literacy Lessons and agree to operate under the current standard expectations. They agree to maintain an annual affiliation with a Reading Recovery teacher training site and collaborate with teacher leaders who assist and advise administrators in selecting students and qualified teachers to enter the training courses. Teachers complete initial training courses during the first year of implementation and

The updated 2023 standards document allows for the implementation of Literacy Lessons in the absence of Reading Recovery in a school building by offering alternative practicum experiences during the teacher’s initial training year:

When the teacher is in training and working in a Reading Recovery school, Literacy Lessons students will be selected from the pool of students eligible for Reading Recovery after the lowest-achieving students have been selected for first round Reading Recovery. The next-lowest first-grade students will be assigned to teachers training in Literacy Lessons.

If there are no students eligible for Reading Recovery or other first-grade students needing early literacy intervention, teachers training in Literacy Lessons with guidance from the teacher leader may select (in this order) from

- Retained first-grade students who did not have an opportunity for Reading Recovery lessons
- The lowest second-grade students
- Second semester kindergarten students (p. 6)

Any school implementing Literacy Lessons will affiliate with an active Reading Recovery teacher training site in order to access a qualified teacher leader. Reading Recovery or *Descubriendo la Lectura* remains the expected primary preventative, short-term instructional supplement for eligible first-grade students.

Any school implementing Literacy Lessons will affiliate with an active Reading Recovery teacher training site in order to access a qualified teacher leader. Reading Recovery or *Descubriendo la Lectura* remains the expected primary preventative, short-term instructional supplement for eligible first-grade students.

youth who are, or have been, consistently exposed to multiple languages (WIDA, 2020, p. 11).

Clarifications

Constant is the overarching aim of Literacy Lessons to accelerate the learning of each student in both reading and writing. An implementation of Literacy Lessons primarily complements rather than replaces Reading Recovery. While it is not possible to address all potential scenarios within a universal standards document, the 2023 document aims to clarify expectations while acknowledging that unique circumstances and challenges may arise. University trainers consult and advise school leaders when temporary allowances may be appropriate.

agree to participate in continuing professional development sessions each year thereafter to sustain an authentic implementation of Literacy Lessons.

Students selected for Literacy Lessons have not yet developed an early literacy processing system (after completing Grade 1), have been recommended or identified for intensive early literacy instruction, and are not eligible for Reading Recovery or *Descubriendo la Lectura*. When Reading Recovery is not available or possible in a school, Literacy Lessons may be implemented through regular consultation with the university trainer and teacher leader.

Reading Recovery aims to reduce the number of children needing long-term intervention services beyond first grade. While a series of short-term and diagnostic Reading Recovery lessons are limited to a period of 12–20 weeks, individualized Literacy Lessons may continue until a student has (a) established an early literacy processing system commensurate with end of Grade 1 proficiency and (b) has acquired the capacity to participate in and profit from less-intensive group instruction.

Continuing Role of NATG and RRCNA

NATG remains the final authority for monitoring, developing, revising, and approving the implementation *Standards and Guidelines* documents for both Reading Recovery/ Descubriendo la Lectura and for Literacy Lessons in the U.S. Published revisions result from ongoing analysis of trends found in national student outcome data, from school-based practices, and challenges reported by teachers, teacher leaders, and school administrators. The Canadian Institute for Reading Recovery develops similar standards for Canadian implementations under trademarks for Reading Recovery, Intervention préventive en lecture-écriture (IPLÉ), and Literacy Lessons in Canada.

Collectively, we acknowledge the uniqueness and various complexities of instructing students who are multilingual learners and students

recommended or identified for special education services. Trainers are prepared to offer continued guidance and oversight in collaboration with teacher leaders, teachers, and site coordinators in making local decisions to ensure the quality and integrity of implementations.

References

- Briggs, C., & Lomax, R. (2017). Literacy Lessons: An innovation in progress. *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 17(1), 41–48.
- Clay, M. M. (2005). *Literacy lessons designed for individuals part one: Why? when? and how?* Heinemann.
- Clay, M. M. (2016). *Literacy lessons designed for individuals* (2nd ed.). Heinemann.
- Escamilla, K., Andrade, A. M., Basurto, A. G., Ruiz, O. A., & Clay, M. M. (1996). *Instrumento de observación de los logros de la lecto-escritura inicial*. Heinemann.
- Harmon, L., & Williams, J. (2017). Enhancing the lives of learners and teachers: Literacy Lessons implementation in Kentucky and Ohio. *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 17(1), 32–39.
- Pinkerton, L. (2023). Trademarks: Protecting Clay’s literacy interventions. *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 22(2), 43–44.
- Poparad, M. A. (2021). Teachers and children learning with and from each other: What is possible with Literacy Lessons. *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 20(2), 41–52.
- Poparad, M. A. (2022). Literacy Lessons implementation: Reaching school improvement goals. *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 22(1), 39–40.

About the Author



Dr. Mary Ann Poparad is an associate professor emerita and trainer of Reading Recovery teacher leaders at National Louis University (Chicago/Tampa). She has served in many leadership roles for the North American Trainers Group, most recently as chair of the Implementation Committee.

Standards and guidelines of Literacy Lessons in the United States (2nd ed.). (2023). Reading Recovery Council of North America. <https://readingrecovery.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/LL-SG-June23-FINAL.pdf>

WIDA. (2020). *English language development standards framework, 2020 edition: Kindergarten–grade 12*. Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. <https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf>