

Marie Clay Talks About Reading Recovery's Challenges



"...teachers plan for all children to have the same amount of exposure to each activity when individual learners need differential exposure ... I would like all educators to understand that literacy learning difficulty is a product of the ways we delivered instruction. That the world could be otherwise — that should be Reading Recovery's contribution to education."

*Marie Clay
from a December 1999
interview with Carol Lyons*

In honor of the 15th Anniversary of Reading Recovery in North America, Carol Lyons spoke with Marie Clay about her past and present work with Reading Recovery. The following excerpt is from a longer interview.



Lyons: What challenges have you encountered in your Reading Recovery work?

Clay: Most people want to give children time to come to literacy learning, and they resist the call for early intervention. Reading Recovery's opposite view is that once teachers are helping competent children to race ahead with reading and writing, schools have an immediate responsibility to give extra learning opportunities to children who are showing clearly that they cannot make sense of what is going on in the classroom.

There is a strong bias toward an 'even playing field.' People would rather spend educational resources evenly on all groups, despite vast differences in prior opportunities to learn. Consequently, teachers plan for all children to have the same amount of exposure to each activity, though actually individual learners need differential exposure. What happens to the lowest-achieving children is rarely a priority. There is an absence of belief that things can be different and a lack of will to make things different.

Another challenge is that the majority of teachers have assumed that reading and writing are separate and different, rather than recognizing that the two contribute to each other in the literacy process.

Reading Recovery has to take active steps to resolve these challenges. A sound program delivered by well-trained teachers in good schools is not enough to support a prevention program. It must be supported by the structures and policies at a district, state, provincial, or country level, helped in cities, and sustained over time. Weak implementation of an early intervention program is a potential problem being vigorously addressed by Reading Recovery in the USA.

Finally, there is too little educational effort directed by theoretical researchers to design their research so that practical questions can be answered. Theorists, administrators, and teachers must relate their proposals to changes in *how* children learn. At present they attend mainly to *how much* children learn.