

Changing the Educational Landscape: A Short History of Reading Recovery in North America

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The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.—*Marcel Proust*

These words of wisdom belong to French philosopher Marcel Proust. I have always considered them to be a description of my journey into Reading Recovery, in which I learned to look at children's literacy development in a completely new way, different from my previous learning and experiences—with new eyes, so to speak. Reading Recovery as an instructional literacy intervention has made a difference for more than a



Marie Clay's observational research in the mid-1970s led to the development of Reading Recovery. Marie Clay wrote of this time in 1997, "By the end of 1977 we had a well-documented miracle full of surprises." Here, Reading Recovery students from Kansas met Marie Clay in 2004.

million children in the United States and countless thousands more across three continents, and all of this is because a New Zealand professor interested in children's literacy wondered if things could be different for struggling learners if we looked at them with new eyes, as learners on individual paths of literacy learning with unique strengths and weaknesses. At that time, Professor Marie Clay could not have imagined that her work would inspire teachers across the world for decades to come.

As we celebrate 20 years of Reading Recovery in North America, teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers can be proud of their individual contributions to an immense network of educators where everyone works collaboratively to achieve the common purpose of literacy success for every child. To commemorate this milestone here, I share Reading Recovery's remarkable history, which of necessity includes a perspective beyond the United States and Canada, and I explain some of the dimensions of international leadership that serve to ensure its solid future in North America and the world. Although this commemorative issue of *The Journal of Reading Recovery* is celebrating 20 years of Reading Recovery in North America, its rich historical and international contexts contribute to its quality as a force in literacy learning and instruction across the world. Thus it is also a story of successful partnerships forged across international boundaries and academic settings by collaborators—researchers and practitioners—who share the same mission (Doyle, 2000).

The Development of Reading Recovery in New Zealand

The history of Reading Recovery is an account of a modest beginning consisting of focused research observations of one teacher "in a lean-to behind an old house in Wynyard Street" (Clay, 1997, p. 658), to extensive growth, compelling research, and unprecedented success as both an early literacy intervention for children and a professional development model for teachers that reaches across the world. Its story involves the dedication of countless individuals whose vision, dedication, and laudable efforts have effected systemic change in schools and districts, demonstrating that an early literacy intervention can foster literacy success for children who initially struggle with literacy learning (Doyle, 2000).

Marie Clay's interest in early literacy began when she was a lecturer and doctoral student at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. She asked the question, "Can we see the process of learning to read going off-course close to the onset of instruction?" Her doctoral dissertation, "Emergent Reading Behaviours," examined how all children were learning to read and write in their first year of instruction. Because she studied and recorded the entire span of change for children at all levels of progress, she began to understand the teaching necessary for lower-achieving children.

In the mid-1970s, after becoming the first female professor and head of the Department of Education at the University of Auckland, Dr. Clay embarked on observational research

Reading Recovery on Three Continents



Although Reading Recovery began in New Zealand in the 1970s, by 1990 Reading Recovery had emigrated to Australia, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

that led to the development of Reading Recovery. For a full year, she observed and recorded how one teacher worked individually with harder-to-teach children. In the second year, she recruited a team of other teachers, supervising teachers, reading advisers, and senior university students, all of whom taught children individually and worked to identify appropriate instructional strategies for specific situations. As they observed lessons, the team discussed teacher-child interactions; after each lesson, observers asked the teacher to explain why a particular technique or book was selected. During these discussions, the teacher's implicit assumptions had to be explained and justified verbally

rather than remaining simply intuitive hunches. Clay explained, "A large number of techniques were piloted, observed, discussed, argued over, related to theory, analyzed, written up, modified and tried out in various ways, and most important, many were discarded" (Clay, 1993, p. 61).

This work with 6-year-old high-risk children revealed that they had diverse problems with print, but they also had unique strengths and skills. Building on these strengths, teachers discovered they could design individual instruction to enable accelerated learning that would change the paths of progress for these children. Dr. Clay (1997) wrote of this time, "By the end

of 1977 we had a well documented miracle full of surprises" (p. 658).

After this development phase, Reading Recovery was field-tested in five diverse Auckland schools in 1978, where teachers used the teaching procedures with children who were falling behind their classmates in their second year of instruction. Teachers learned to observe children's strengths and to design individual lessons to optimize instruction and expand their abilities rapidly. By the end of the year, the majority of low-performing students accelerated into the average band of their class. An in-service course in 1979 trained new teachers from 48 Auckland schools in these

early Reading Recovery procedures. Results for the second year of implementation in school settings revealed the same rate of success in enabling low-performing students to catch up to the average band of their class. Follow-up studies in 1981 of the children taught in 1978 confirmed that those students had continued to make good progress relative to their classmates (Clay, 1993).

As a result of strong success in Auckland schools, the intervention continued to expand. Reading Recovery was implemented nationally in 1983 with the support of the Ministry of Education. In 1984, Dr. Clay also established a national data collection and monitoring procedure for the ministry.

To support the teacher training program, a government-funded tutor training and coordination program was established in 1983 (now part of the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland). Approximately 7,000 Reading Recovery teachers have been trained by Reading Recovery tutors since teacher training began in 1979, with 133 tutors (known as teacher leaders in the United States and Canada) and 25 trainers trained for New Zealand and many overseas education systems.

International Expansion

Although the intervention started in New Zealand, by 1990 Reading Recovery had emigrated to Australia, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Each international implementation has its own history of how Reading Recovery was introduced and disseminated.

Australia: The First Replication In *Handbook of Research on Teaching*

Literacy Through the Communicative and Visual Arts (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 1997), Dr. Clay describes the early quest to consider whether Reading Recovery could be replicated in another country in "International Perspectives on the Reading Recovery Program":

Education is usually not considered to be exportable as education systems are organized and managed differently with different political agendas and a superior result from a program on home ground did not justify the optimism about replication in another education system (Clay, 1997, p. 659).

So one uncertainty was, Can Reading Recovery be faithfully replicated in other educational systems?

Dr. Clay gave a presentation on Reading Recovery to the Darwin Reading Conference of the Australian Reading Association; that introduction spurred implementations in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory. She felt it was important for the program to be implemented without her presence to document its replicability across systems. The new scheme of intervention known as Reading Recovery was studied in terms of its acceptance by teachers, school staff, and parents in a study by Geekie (1992) with Brian Cambourne. The first trainer for Australia was trained in Auckland and returned to Bendigo in 1984. Three tutor training programs were then initiated in Victoria at the Bendigo College of Advanced Education, at the La Trobe University, and at Melbourne University.

Since 1984, the program has spread to all but one of the Australian states and territories. Dr. Clay notes that much

was learned from the replication of Reading Recovery in Australia with respect to such issues as age at entry to school, expectations for emphasis during the first year of school, variations of curriculum and materials, and assessment procedures. The apparent answer to whether Reading Recovery was exportable was "yes," because the Australian implementation remains strong to this day.

Not long after the start in Australia, the United States was expressing interest in Reading Recovery.

Reading Recovery Comes to the United States

In 1984, Gay Su Pinnell, Charlotte Huck, and Martha L. King from The Ohio State University (OSU) spent time in Auckland observing and speaking with teachers and researchers regarding aspects of teaching and implementation; from this visit, they became determined to replicate Reading Recovery with integrity in the city schools of Columbus, Ohio. Marie Clay and Barbara Watson arrived in Columbus in the fall of 1984 to begin training one university trainer, three teacher leaders, and 13 teachers at OSU. In January 1985, the first Columbus children began Reading Recovery lessons; books were leveled for the first time, and the first U.S. book list was created. In a short time Reading Recovery spread beyond the city borders of Columbus to the state of Ohio (1985) and then to other states (1986) as educators recognized its extraordinary success with struggling learners.

For Reading Recovery to spread beyond Ohio, other universities had to assume the same leadership role within a region as OSU had done for the Columbus area. So OSU professors worked with university faculty of

various universities who expressed interest in establishing university training centers for the dissemination of Reading Recovery training; university training centers continue to form the regional infrastructure of support for Reading Recovery in the United States.

A key event in the dissemination of Reading Recovery throughout the United States was its selection in 1987 by the National Diffusion Network (USDE) as a demonstration project, thereby providing funds to make the program available outside of Ohio. Another important contribution was the awarding of a \$750,000 grant to OSU from the John D. and Katherine T. McArthur Foundation; this grant provided funding for a large-scale study that established empirically the effectiveness of Reading Recovery over other teaching strategies and group configurations. This seminal study on Reading Recovery (Pinnell, Lyons, DeFord, Bryk, & Seltzer, 1994) was designed and monitored by a panel of nationally known experts selected by the foundation to support the integrity of the outcomes. The panel included such esteemed researchers as Rebecca Barr, Isabel Beck, Gerald Bracey, Shirley Brice-Heath, Robert Slavin, Dorothy Strickland, and Richard Venezky; Jeanne Chall and Jana Mason served as consultants. The study continues to serve as scientific evidence that Reading Recovery is an effective and research-based approach to early literacy intervention.

Along with expansion to multiple states, Reading Recovery was also adopted for implementation by Department of Defense Schools (DoDDS). The U.S. Department of Defense operates a preschool–12 school system that educates children of American military and civilian per-



Reading Recovery lessons in Department of Defense Schools look much like lessons across the world. Here, Reading Recovery teacher Deborah Lowder works with Jonathan Mills at Ramstein Elementary School in Ramstein, Germany.

sonnel assigned overseas by the U.S. government. In the late 1980s, the director of DoDDS in Arlington, Virginia asked Jim Eckel, systemwide reading coordinator, to investigate Reading Recovery for the overseas schools. After careful review of the program, Jim convinced DoDDS officials of the program's value and the importance of establishing ongoing collaboration with OSU faculty. In Europe today, five teacher leaders work in seven different countries supporting Reading Recovery teachers. DoDDS-Europe is geographically the largest Reading Recovery site in the world, reaching from Iceland in the north to Sicily in the south. For several years in the Pacific, one teacher leader supported 10 schools located in Japan, Korea, and Guam from the training site in Okinawa.

In the United States, 1.4 million children have participated in Reading Recovery since the beginning year in Columbus, Ohio, and more than 20,000 teachers have been enriched beyond their imaginations by learning how to meet the needs of children in

ways they thought were not possible (National Data Evaluation Center, 2004; see page 66, this issue, for evaluation highlights of Reading Recovery in the United States).

The Development of Reading Recovery in Spanish: Descubriendo la Lectura

The development of Descubriendo la Lectura began during the 1988–1989 academic year when teachers who were in Reading Recovery training in Tucson, Arizona became interested in exploring how the teaching could be adapted for Spanish-speaking children whose initial literacy instruction was being delivered in Spanish. In 1989 the Collaborative for Reading Recovery in Spanish was formally established, and Descubriendo la Lectura educators began the work of reconstructing the literacy tasks found in *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2002). Validity and reliability were established in 1991 with Spanish-speaking children from Arizona, Illinois, and Texas (Escamilla, 1992).



Yvonne Rodríguez, Texas Woman's University, and Tina Lozano, National-Louis University, are university trainers of Descubriendo la Lectura teacher leaders.

With Marie Clay's guidance, Descubriendo la Lectura educators not only produced the bilingual text *Instrumento de Observación de los Logros de la Lecto-Escritura Inicial* (Escamilla, Andrade, Basurto, Ruiz, & Clay, 1996), which is the reconstruction of *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2002) in Spanish, but also produced applicable sections of the Reading Recovery *Guidebook*. Research has confirmed that Descubriendo la Lectura produces results similar to those of Reading Recovery in English (Escamilla, 1992; Gómez-Bellengé & Rodgers, 2004).

Teachers making the shift from one language to another work under the tutelage of a teacher leader or trainer with expertise in both Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura for a sustained period of time. Therefore, teachers trained in Reading Recovery or in Descubriendo la Lectura participate in an additional year of training to implement the pro-

gram in the other language. The university training course known as *bridging* prepares teachers who have been initially trained in Reading Recovery to teach in Descubriendo la Lectura (and vice versa).

Descubriendo la Lectura has served students in Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington. In 1999, the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic-Americans recognized Descubriendo la Lectura as a program that is effective for Latino youth.

Canada Extends the North American Implementation

In 1988 school administrators from the Scarborough Board of Education in Ontario attended the National Reading Recovery Conference in Columbus, Ohio. They became very interested in implementing Reading Recovery. As a result, they hired a teacher leader who was trained at

OSU, and the first class of teachers was trained in Scarborough, Ontario in 1988–1989. The implementation of Reading Recovery began in Nova Scotia the following year (1989–1990).

By 1992, the expansion of Reading Recovery across Canada required the training of teacher leaders locally. In 1992, a partnership between the Scarborough Board of Education and the Faculty of Education/University of Toronto resulted in the establishment of the Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery (CIRR). CIRR is a nonprofit organization which received the authorization of Dr. Clay to register the term Reading Recovery as a trademark in Canada. CIRR is operated by a volunteer board, and its purpose is to support the work of the Reading Recovery professionals in Canada.

Prior to the establishment of CIRR, training for teacher leaders was conducted at either the National Reading Recovery Centre in Auckland, New Zealand or OSU in Columbus, Ohio because a Canadian trainer of teacher leaders had not been trained. The institute made it possible to send individuals to New Zealand to prepare for training teacher leaders within Canada's borders. In 1993–1994, the first course for teacher leaders began at CIRR. To facilitate the training of teacher leaders in other regions of Canada, the Western Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery opened in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1995, and most recently an institute opened at Mount St. Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Over the past decade, eight Reading Recovery university trainers of teacher leaders have been certified for service in Canada.

Reading Recovery is now implemented in nine provinces and the Yukon

Territory. Provincial funding is provided in Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and the Yukon Territory.

The Development of Reading Recovery in French: Intervention Préventive en Lecture-Écriture

In 1995, a plan for the redevelopment of Reading Recovery in French was conceived in collaboration with Dr. Clay. The first phase was the adaptation of *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* into French; this resulted in *Le sondage d'observation en lecture-écriture* (Clay, 2003). The Nova Scotia Department of Education conducted the first translation. However, additional adaptations needed to be undertaken in order to reflect the differences between English and French. With the initial adaptation completed, developers of the French reconstruction conducted validation and norming research. These studies were carried out in 2000–2001 under the auspices of the Canadian Institute of

Reading Recovery/Institut Canadien d'Intervention Préventive en Lecture-Écriture.

The first implementation of Reading Recovery in French was conducted in Canada because that nation has two official languages, English and French. Although the majority of the French population in Canada is located in Québec, French communities are present in every Canadian province.

Expansion to the United Kingdom and Beyond: Reading Recovery Travels to a New Continent

Reading Recovery was first introduced to teachers in England in 1990 by a Surrey headteacher who had trained as a teacher leader in New Zealand. In 1991, the Institute of Education at the University of London, in close association with Dr. Clay and with support from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, initiated tutor (teacher leader) and trainer of tutors training courses. The program is now widespread in England and has also estab-

lished training bases in Jersey, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, where it is an integral part of the Northern Ireland Literacy Strategy. A national network advisory group, consisting of teacher leaders representing every geographical area of the United Kingdom and Ireland and the national coordination team of trainers from the United Kingdom and Ireland, exists to support communication among tutors and between tutors and trainers. This group provides a forum for discussion of issues arising within Reading Recovery and the various education authorities and education library boards across the United Kingdom and Ireland. In 1993, a system of annual national monitoring and reporting was established, which has informed the implementation and raised awareness of the potential of Reading Recovery to achieve change both locally and nationally.

Reading Recovery has spread beyond the United Kingdom to neighbors in the Republic of Ireland and Denmark, where considerable expansion is anticipated within different educational systems. Currently the intervention is being developed for implementation in Denmark; in addition, *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* is being redeveloped as a research instrument in Irish, Spanish, and Slovak for future use by teachers in Ireland, Spain, and Slovakia.

Reading Recovery Leadership Groups: Sustaining an Innovation Across Time and Place

Although not referring to the history of Reading Recovery, these comments by Dr. Clay regarding the central tenets of Reading Recovery may very well reflect the reason for its growth and endurance across time and place:



The French reconstruction of the Observation Survey began in 1995. The published version, Intervention Préventive en Lecture-Écriture, is shown here. In 2002–2003 it was offered in two school boards in Ontario, and in 2004 it was implemented in a third province, New Brunswick.

Roots and Branches

Central tenets of Reading Recovery have been tentativeness, flexibility, and problem-solving. These qualities have surfaced in the ways in which the teaching addresses individual patterns of strengths and weakness in children, and in how the teachers are training to design lesson series for individual children, and again in the solutions people have found for implementing Reading Recovery. Somehow Reading Recovery professionals have learned how to hold fast to principles, practices and rationales while at the same time allowing for variability in the educational practices and beliefs, and change over time in society (Clay, 2001, p. 298).

Leadership structures are critical to sustaining quality implementations of innovative initiatives such as Reading Recovery. Several such structures have been created to direct Reading Recovery professionals and stakeholders throughout the world. They include the International Reading Recovery Trainers Organization, the Australia and New Zealand Trainer Team, the European Trainer Group, and the North American Trainers Group, all of which are described in the following sections.

Global Leadership: The International Reading Recovery Trainers Organization

To assure that Reading Recovery would continue well into the future with the same high quality and integrity of the early years, as well as to support continued development in response to research, an international leadership structure was created in 1998. This leadership group is the

International Reading Recovery Trainers Organization (IRRTO). Membership consists of every Reading Recovery trainer in the world; this organization provides a system for international decision making through a committee structure for issues regarding research and development, training of trainers, funding, communications, and systems design. The IRRTO Executive Board was created to direct the operations of IRRTO and Reading Recovery internationally. The IRRTO Executive Board is comprised of five elected members, with representation from each country plus a nonvoting chair. The IRRTO Executive Board is responsible for monitoring the implementation and future development of Reading Recovery internationally and for setting policy related to the monitoring and upholding of the Reading Recovery trademarks; future expan-

sion of Reading Recovery throughout the world; and the translation of Reading Recovery procedures, practices, and materials in other languages. The IRRTO Executive Board meets once a year; the total membership of IRRTO meets every 18 months.

In the early stages of establishing this decision-making worldwide organization, the international university trainers together with Dr. Clay generated the rationale for such a global network, including important factors as:

- Reading Recovery provides a model for educational innovation across international boundaries.
- Dynamic growth and change in Reading Recovery draws on international theory, research, and practice broadly and within Reading Recovery.



International exchange of early literacy research and information keeps Reading Recovery scholars current. Here, Blair Koefoed, New Zealand trainer from Auckland College of Education, talks with Sue Duncan, now at Georgia State University, during the 13th Ohio Reading Recovery Conference held in Columbus, Ohio in 1998.

- Reading Recovery is equally effective in varying national contexts.
- Sharing ideas among international partners helps clarify practices and broadens theory.

The vision of IRRTO is “to maximize the availability of Reading Recovery for any children who need early literacy intervention in any country.” IRRTO is committed to maintaining the quality, upholding the integrity, improving the efficiency and effectiveness, and supporting the change and growth of Reading Recovery through international collaboration, research, and resource development.

IRRTO coordinates an International Reading Recovery Institute every 3 years in different countries; institutes have been held in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. These institutes have included internationally renowned researchers and scholars whose work can inform teaching, implementation, and research in Reading Recovery. Early work of the organization indicates it is functioning as a strong leadership structure to assure Reading Recovery will continue as a powerful, dynamic, and developing educational entity in literacy instruction around the world.

Leadership in North America: The North American Trainers Group

From its inauguration in 1984, a growing leadership group for Reading Recovery evolved in North America consisting of individuals trained to train teacher leaders for universities as those institutions became Reading Recovery university training centers. In 1996, trainers of teacher leaders from all Reading Recovery university training centers in the United States and Canada developed their association into a formal organizational

structure. The North American Trainers Group (NATG) was created to serve a variety of purposes but primarily to guide and oversee all training aspects of Reading Recovery and to generate and monitor standards and guidelines to assure the operation of Reading Recovery with high quality and integrity. The members of the organization uphold the integrity of Reading Recovery by providing leadership and high-quality continuous learning for the educators who comprise the network of professionals involved in the mission of dramatically increasing the numbers of children who learn to read and write. They engage in strategic planning for continued success in meeting the needs of children and teachers, and they plan and conduct research to inform the profession.

The NATG governing structure includes an executive committee comprised of president, past president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and two at-large members. There are three major working committees: Teaching and Training, Implementation, and Research. NATG oversees Reading Recovery in all matters related to these three areas but works in concert with RRCNA, CIRR, and the National Data Evaluation Center at OSU in specific matters. NATG is not connected to any particular university but is supported by RRCNA in carrying out its many tasks and functions.

Leadership in North America: The Reading Recovery Council of North America

In 1993, a small group of leaders in the United States gathered to discuss how Reading Recovery might be expanded and strengthened. Several people at that meeting wrote personal

checks to found the organization that became the Reading Recovery Council of North America. From a small group of founders, the Council has grown to today’s organization of more than 9,000 members. It carries out advocacy, development, membership, conferences, and communications activities. (See photo highlights, pages 43–45.)

Leadership Groups in Other Nations

Reading Recovery leadership structures include an Australia and New Zealand Trainer Team (ANZTT) and a European Trainer Group (ETG). In 1996 Reading Recovery trainers in Australia and New Zealand formed a professional leadership network. The network provides a forum to discuss issues of mutual interest and a vehicle for continuing professional development aimed at supporting and strengthening the implementation of Reading Recovery in the region. The group comprises trainers from New Zealand and the three Australian states with statewide Reading Recovery implementations: Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria. Annual meetings are held to discuss recent publications and research, observe and discuss teaching, update each other on regional and national events, and discuss issues of common concern related to all aspects of training.

In Europe, trainer leadership for Reading Recovery comprises two levels. First is ETG, which serves as an overarching support group for all trainers in Europe. Second, both the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland National coordination team and the Danish trainer and national coordinator are located within the structure of ETG. The European Centre for Education in Reading

Recovery is located at the University of London Institute of Education.

The national coordination team trainers undertake quality assurance, research activity, and provide oversight of Reading Recovery for the whole of the United Kingdom. The UK implementation extended into the Republic of Ireland in 1999. In 2001, the centre was recognized as the European Centre for the Training of Trainers, and ETG expanded to include the Reading Recovery trainer of tutors for Denmark in 2002.

Just the Beginning of Our Voyage?

The history documented here was compiled for an upcoming book entitled *Changing Futures: The Influence of Reading Recovery in the United States* (Schmitt, Askew, Fountas, Lyons, & Pinnell, in press). The history reflects the facts of Reading Recovery's remarkable growth both in North America and the world. The 20-year celebratory commemoration prompts me to refer again to seeing things with new eyes. Marie Clay's Proustian voyage of discovery into how struggling learners get off track has inspired educators throughout the world to see the educational landscape differently. Her influence has developed in an exponential fashion resulting in the remarkable growth of an international network of collaborators who have made their mark on literacy learning and teaching across the world. Because of their commitment, many children have gone down a path that would have been inaccessible without Reading Recovery and the dedication of the professionals who created it and helped it prosper.

I wonder what possibilities she will consider next...

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