

Remembering Moments Shared With Marie Clay



Marie, the Visionary

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I can't imagine my professional life without the knowledge and experience I have gained based on Marie Clay's work. Her work changed the way I viewed teaching and learning and I will forever be grateful for the enlightenment. I know there are many other reading professionals that feel this way also. The body of research and writing she left us will continue to be a major contribution to the field of literacy and teaching.

Marie Clay was a unique individual, well-honored, and well-loved. As I reflected on her work and how she lived her life I recognized dichotomies that contributed to her uniqueness that also might provide lessons from which we all can benefit.

Marie Clay had a huge vision — the vision that all children can become literate if teachers learned how to teach them. Her big idea was that it might be possible to change the trajectory of literacy failure for most children by changing the way teachers teach. And that this could be done by observing and valuing partly correct responses rather than deficits.

But she developed this vision based upon looking through a fine lens at the idiosyncrasies of individual learners.

The life lesson might be that you should have a big vision, but it is the little things that contribute to your success.

Marie Clay was respected and honored around the world as a literacy leader. She held various honorary degrees, accepted many prestigious awards, and received much recognition during her professional career. Yet, she was humble, always focused on what was important—the teaching and learning—what was good for the children.

I think many a Reading Recovery teacher has been surprised to know that Marie Clay was in the room, sitting in the back listening to the conversations about teaching. In later years she was reluctant to do keynotes and conference presentations, but told trainers she would accept invitations to spend time with them and their teacher leaders.

The life lesson might be that no matter how successful you become, don't let it go to your head. Our work in Reading Recovery at every level should be in the service of others.

Even though Marie Clay's name is recognized as the sole developer of Reading Recovery, she embraced collaboration and invited many people to be partners in her work.

Over the last 30 years, thousands of reading professionals and administrators in five countries around the world became her Reading Recovery partners. And in doing so she helped us to create our own

self-extending system as we learned from each other and supported each other's work. I know that Marie was proud of that accomplishment.

She realized that collaborative organizational structures had to be in place for her work to continue into the future, and she arranged for that to happen before she died. Marie Clay placed her trust along with the challenge and responsibility in all of us to ensure that her vision will be realized.

She established IRRTO to monitor the implementation and future development of Reading Recovery internationally and set policy related to the monitoring and upholding the trademarks; future expansion of Reading Recovery throughout the world; and the reconstruction of Reading Recovery procedures, practices, and materials in other languages.

Marie helped to secure trademarks for Reading Recovery and provided guidance and direction for trademarking *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* in every country.

In each of the five countries that implement Reading Recovery there is a network of trainers who are responsible for generating and monitoring the Standards and Guidelines that assure standardization, high quality and integrity. In the United States, the North American Trainers Group is responsible for generating and overseeing policy and procedures related to research, implementation, teaching, and professional development. NATG works in partnership with RRCNA to provide support for Reading Recovery professionals in North America.

It is good that we remember the examples that Marie Clay set for us:

- Keep our vision big, but don't overlook the important things.
- Don't get too self-important, individually or collectively.
- Keep the focus on what is important — the children and the teaching.
- And most importantly, all of us. . . teachers, teacher leaders, trainers, administrators, site coordinators, and other stakeholders need to work together collaboratively to ensure that Reading Recovery continues be a high-quality early intervention for children who find literacy learning difficult.

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