# The Reading Recovery Intervention

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***Abstract***

*Early years students enter the educational system with varying degrees of reading and writing knowledge. Designed by Marie Clay, Reading Recovery is an intervention program that targets struggling literacy learners in grade one. Reading Recovery teachers conduct assessments to identify the neediest literacy learners. Then they design and deliver one-on-one lessons that will accelerate these struggling learners. The lesson segments target reading fluency, reading strategies, letter and word work, and writing skills. Reading Recovery aims to accelerate struggling literacy learners in order to close the gaps among peers at an early age.*

When early years students struggle with reading and writing skills, Reading Recovery intervention can offer support by building the foundational skills that those children lack. Marie Clay designed the Reading Recovery program to provide intensive assistance to struggling learners, in order to develop their skills to meet those of their average classmates (Education & Training, 2015). Many strategic processes must occur simultaneously in the brain in order to read and write proficiently (O'Connor, Briggs, & Forbes, 2013), and often early years children need assistance to coordinate these processes in order to become successful literacy learners. Reading Recovery responds to a child's literacy struggles by intervening with a series of lessons that are tailored to the child's strengths and weaknesses. The format of the Reading Recovery program and the expertise of the teacher combine to create an intervention that assists young students. Struggling literacy learners can benefit from the support of Reading Recovery.

Many school teams are now using a response to intervention (RTI) model in order to group students according to their literacy needs. RTI is a tiered system that classifies students through assessments (Dunn, 2010). Based on assessment data, the school team arranges the necessary interventions to fill students' learning deficits. The Reading Recovery program is a second-tier intervention in the RTI model (O'Connor et al., 2013). The students in this tier do not respond to classroom literacy instruction and therefore require a more intensive approach in order to develop their skills to the level of their peers. Reading Recovery teachers are trained to respond with a one-on-one program that targets these struggling learners. RTI is implemented by educators to assist children who have weak reading and writing skills.

Reading is more than phonics and decoding. It is an intricate process that involves strategic activity, self-monitoring, and self-correcting (Clay, 2006). Readers mentally integrate the information drawn from the letter sounds, the language structure, and the context of the story. Reading Recovery teachers simplify this complicated process by designing individual lessons that accommodate the child's existing letter and print knowledge. Some students struggle to read because of deficits in language structure and articulation (Sices, Taylor, Freebain, Hansen, & Lewis, 2007), while others may struggle because of a lack of exposure to books and print concepts (*Profile 4*, 2005). Reading Recovery teachers are trained to analyze students' running records of reading and to teach students to use and to cross-check sources of information in order to read more challenging levels of text. The reading process extends beyond phonemic awareness.

School staff members collaborate to identify struggling readers, and the Reading Recovery teacher becomes involved. Reading Recovery is an intervention specifically designed for grade one students whose literacy skills are in the bottom 20% of their class (Clay, 2006a). Through consultation among the grade one classroom teacher, resource teacher, and Reading Recovery teacher, students who struggle with reading and writing skills are identified. The Reading Recovery teacher assesses these students and then identifies the most struggling learners to receive the intervention (Education & Training, 2015). The Reading Recovery teacher then

prepares and delivers daily one-on-one lessons that are designed to build on the students' strengths (Clay, 2006a). By working with the school team, the Reading Recovery teacher can respond efficiently to the needs of struggling literacy learners in the early years.

Once a Reading Recovery student is identified, his/her 20-week lesson series begins with 10 lessons in which the teacher familiarizes him/herself with the student. During these "roaming around the known" lessons (Clay, 2006a), the Reading Recovery teacher offers many opportunities for the child to converse, read, and write. The Reading Recovery teacher also uses his/her assessment notes to pinpoint the student's strengths and to reveal what the child already knows about print concepts. During these initial lessons, the student practises reading techniques and the writing of familiar words, in order to solidify this knowledge. An example of practising known material might be writing specific sight words quickly or locating words that the student can read in the text. The Reading Recovery teacher models new reading behaviours, such as solving words by sounding them out, but these reading strategies are not formally taught at this time (Clay, 2010b). The teacher continues to make notes during these lessons, paying particular attention to how the child independently solves problems in text. These introductory lessons enable the teacher to become acquainted with the child and to identify the student's strengths and needs, so that the rest of the lesson series scaffolds to new learning.

At lesson 11 in the program, the Reading Recovery teacher begins to teach new reading strategies. The teacher follows a regimented sequence of activities that considers the student's strengths and needs, as carefully noted from the first 10 lessons (Clay, 2006a). A typical Reading Recovery lesson is divided into three 10-minute segments: reading familiar text, doing letter work and writing, and reading new text. The Reading Recovery teacher works beside the child to enable easy observation as the child reads and writes (Clay, 2010b). Throughout the remainder of the lessons, the teacher encourages the student's attempts to read and to write, noting any new reading and writing behaviours that he or she exhibits. The student's text level is regularly graphed in order to make the Reading Recovery teacher accountable for the student's progress during the lesson series. The Reading Recovery teacher refers to his/her notes in order to plan an individualized teaching path for the child. Reading strategies are formally introduced in the 11$^{th}$ lesson.

A typical lesson at this point in the series begins with the child reading familiar text, and then the teacher completes a running record of the child's reading. During the first part of the lesson, the teaching focuses on fluency and phrasing in reading. After each book that the child reads, the teacher gives specific praise for a positive reading behaviour that was exhibited and then teaches a strategy that the student did not demonstrate. The teaching point is delivered by a carefully worded "prompt" (Clay, 2006a) that builds on a reading behaviour that the child has already demonstrated. An example might be: "When you read this part, you sounded smooth. Now put these words together so it sounds like smooth talking here, too." The child then rereads the piece of text, trying to hear his/her own fluency. If necessary, the teacher models the fluency, and the child repeats after the teacher. Reading fluency is taught and practised at the beginning of the lesson.

The Reading Recovery teacher then completes a running record as the child reads the text that was introduced in the previous day's lesson. The teacher analyzes the running record, noting the strategies that the child used to solve problems in text. Again, the teacher offers positive feedback for good problem solving in text and then offers a prompt to improve the child's problem solving at difficulty. A Reading Recovery teacher might say, "I like how you noticed when you got here that it did not look like the word *river*, and you reread and fixed it up. Now reread this part, and think about what would sound right and look like that word." These specific prompts reinforce the use of reading strategies. The first 10 minutes of the lesson focus on fluency, phrasing, and reading strategies.

The next 10-minute segment begins with letter identification and word work. The child goes to the magnetic board in the room and quickly sorts a set of letters in order to exercise visual discrimination skills. This letter sorting is followed by "breaking words apart" (Clay, 2006b) at the

board, where the teacher has carefully chosen a set of words from a previous lesson for the child to examine and to manipulate as magnetic letters. The teaching at this point attends to features and patterns in words. Visual discrimination and phonemic awareness skills are supported by having students manipulate letters and words during this part of the lesson.

Writing, the next part of the lesson, supports the child's reading achievement. This lesson component begins with a brief conversation about something of interest to the child or about a story that was read earlier. The teacher then assists the child to compose a sentence based on that conversation. The child writes this sentence in a special notebook, receiving assistance as necessary from the teacher. For difficult words, the teacher might draw Elkonin boxes, with each box representing a sound in the word (Clay, 2006b). The child is taught to push a counter into each box as he or she says the word slowly. This process teaches students to articulate words slowly as they write. This practice also demonstrates that the sounds heard in words can be visually represented in print. As students progress in their phonetic spelling skills, they are encouraged to use word analogies to write new words (Clay, 2006a). Students also practise writing sight word vocabulary during the writing segment. The Reading Recovery teacher then reprints the student's composed sentence onto a sentence strip and cuts it into words. The student is asked to rebuild the sentence, which not only reinforces self-monitoring and self-correcting of text, but also enables reading fluency because the child needs to phrase the sentence as presented on the table by the teacher. In Reading Recovery, the writing component of the lesson complements the reading component.

New text is introduced during the final 10 minutes of the lesson. The Reading Recovery teacher carefully selects a new book that enables the child to apply "what is known to new text" (Clay, 2006a, p. 51), yet also presents some challenge for new learning. Prior to the child attempting this text independently, the teacher provides an orientation to the story in order to support the child's reading. This book introduction might include a discussion of theme, a review of language structures, or a visual search in the text for new vocabulary. As the child reads the text, the Reading Recovery teacher coaches strategic reading behaviours that the child does not yet efficiently demonstrate. The child will reread this new text independently in the following day's lesson.

The Reading Recovery program directly benefits schools by reducing stress for classroom teachers, by accelerating struggling readers, and by saving money in the long term. Struggling learners usually require more time and assistance from the classroom teacher. Reading Recovery teachers support classroom teachers by engaging their neediest literacy learners in a daily one-on-one lesson, while the classroom teachers work with the rest of their class (Grehan et al., 2007). Because the Reading Recovery child receives an individual lesson, he or she does not need to spend time practising anything that is already known to him/her (Clay, 2006a). Consequently, the child's reading and writing skills accelerate more quickly. Children receiving the Reading Recovery intervention are less likely to require special education services and resource support later in their school life (Holliman & Hurry, 2013). Thus, Reading Recovery can prevent additional financial burdens for schools. The support provided by the Reading Recovery intervention is invaluable to classroom teachers, students, and the educational system.

Despite the comprehensive advantages of the Reading Recovery intervention, the program poses a financial issue for schools. Throughout the school year, teachers training in the program must participate in monthly professional development sessions. Because the program is a one-on-one intervention, it directly affects only a small percentage of the students in the school. Both the training model and the one-on-one component of the program translate into extra financial costs for school divisions to absorb (Serry, Rose, & Liamputtong, 2014). Schools committing to the Reading Recovery program invest a substantial amount of human and financial resources in the program.

Although Reading Recovery teachers are highly trained in the process of learning to read and write, they are not trained to diagnose reading disabilities. Reading Recovery teachers are obligated by the program to select only the lowest achieving literacy learners in the grade one

classroom (Clay, 2006a). Despite participating regularly in a full series of lessons with a devoted Reading Recovery teacher, Reading Recovery students do not always attain the required reading level to be "discontinued" (Clay, 2006a, p. 52) from the program. These students are then referred for additional support from the school's resource and special education services. Students who do not successfully complete the program are often later diagnosed with clinical problems such as developmental delay, autism, dyslexia, or lowered intellect (Serry et al., 2014). Reading Recovery teachers observe and analyze the literacy behaviours of struggling readers in order to facilitate their progress; however, they are not qualified to identify specific reading or learning difficulties.

Reading Recovery supports students who enter school with substandard literacy backgrounds and skills. A child's literacy skill development is influenced by his/her life experiences (Clay, 2010c). Some children are frequently exposed to reading and writing by having their own writing tools and books and by seeing adults in their lives engage in reading and writing activities. When parents support literacy development at home by exposing their children to print concepts and by encouraging the children's attempts to write (Clay, 2010a), they set the foundation for their child's literacy success. Classroom teachers are responsible for offering reading and writing opportunities to any children who have been deprived of this pre-school literacy exposure (Clay, 2010c). Reading Recovery teachers can intervene and provide the necessary foundational skills for these children. Early years experiences affect reading and writing development, and the Reading Recovery program is a means to enable all early years students access to an equitable start to literacy learning.

Reading Recovery aims to accelerate needy literacy learners in order to decrease the disparity of skills in a classroom. If an intense intervention is provided for struggling students during their early years in education, then academic and behavioural problems can be prevented for those students later in their school lives (Harn, Linan-Thompson, & Roberts, 2008). By responding quickly and early, teachers can work toward filling learning deficits, rather than having the skill gaps widen further among peers. Investing money in the Reading Recovery program can save time, money, and stress for schools and families in the long run (Harley, 2012). With the early and intense intervention of Reading Recovery, struggling readers can perform as successfully as their peers.

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