The Journal of
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Improvement Science at Work: Strengthening Teaching Decisions With the Record of Literacy Processing

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Taking Words A-part, Ap-art, Apar-t While Reading

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Patricia L. Scharer, Editor-in-Chief

Rich Resources for Professional Development

As I worked through the final edits of this issue, I was struck by the amazing resources readers will find.

The "Where Are They Now?" piece will make you smile. The Distinguished Scholar article by Rasinski and Valerio is based on Rasinski's keynote at LitCon last year. It will make you want to run copies for every legislator and administrator! Kaye's revised article about taking words a-part, ap-art, and apar-t while reading will have you rethinking your teaching decisions as you support students' developing literacy processing.

Let's think about planning a professional development session with Reading Recovery teachers or classroom teachers. How about starting with the poem Corban's Reading Recovery teacher wrote followed by his "Rockin Reader" award in third grade? The articles by Rasinski/Valerio and Kaye would prompt deep discussions about teaching and learning about words during Reading Recovery lessons as well as classroom instruction.

Another professional development opportunity could be designed with the Hub's work on the Record of Literacy Processing and a new tool to "SCALE" up your students' writing. Have participants bring samples of their students' reading and writing over time to analyze, as both these tools support deeper analyses. You can count on new insights into both teaching and learning.

I'm hoping that readers will use the 2-page Intervention Essentials to share important ideas with teachers and administrators as they make decisions about young readers. Sharing an article on the front and back of a single piece of paper will certainly encourage reading more than handing over a lengthy article! (By the way, we all need to thank Mary Anne Doyle for her dedication to selecting topics and writers for this important feature.)

Some parts of this issue you'll want to read, enjoy, and learn from on your own. For others, you'll want to discuss with colleagues to ensure a deep understanding. I know that this issue will inspire lots of learning!

Happy reading!

Literacy Council
of North America

Vision

We ensure the competencies necessary for a literate and productive future for children learning to read and write.

Mission

We construct collaborative partnerships to change the trajectory of literacy achievement by:

- *implementing Reading Recovery® in English, Spanish, or French as an essential, research-based early literacy intervention within a comprehensive literacy system*
- *expanding the application of literacy processing theory through Literacy Lessons® with special education students and English learners*
- *delivering expert teaching that is equitable and responsive to children's strengths and needs*
- *providing sustained, specialized professional development focused on continuous improvement and literacy leadership*
- *advancing the development of knowledge and practice based on research, data, and the theoretical framework that has underpinned Reading Recovery® since its founding.*

How to Submit Articles

Write for *The Journal of Reading Recovery*

Every Reading Recovery teacher, teacher leader, administrator, site coordinator, and parent has a good story to tell. Please consider sharing your Reading Recovery experiences, ideas, and surprises by writing for *The Journal of Reading Recovery* (JRR). We need to hear from you because readers have told us they want to hear more about people like themselves — especially those on the front lines working with children.

Blind Peer Review Process

The Journal of Reading Recovery is a peer-reviewed and refereed publication issued twice annually to members of the Literacy Council of North America. All submitted manuscripts will be read by the editors to determine suitability for publication. Authors will receive an acknowledgment when the submission is received and will be notified via email of the editors' decisions.

JRR uses a blind review process allowing only editors and editorial staff to know the names of the authors. The article will be sent to the appropriate section editor who will monitor a peer review process by a team of reviewers. Editors will send authors feedback from reviewers and, if necessary, specific suggestions for revision.

Guidelines for Authors

- Select a topic of interest to our Reading Recovery audience.
- Write clearly, concisely, and use an active voice.
- Be sure the message is clear and has a consistent focus throughout.
- Include dialogue or samples of children's work when possible.
- Articles will be edited to fit space and style requirements; published length ranges from short anecdotes to longer, more technical articles.
- LCNA publications follow the style designated by the most-recent edition of the Publications Manual of the American Psychological Association.

Submitting Articles for Publication

All manuscripts, feature items, photos, and original artwork must be submitted electronically (see website for photo and artwork requirements) via email to vfox@readingrecovery.org. For original manuscripts, please follow the most-recent APA style guidelines. Manuscripts must be double-spaced and should be no more than 30 pages (excluding reference list, tables, and figures). No identification of the author(s) and affiliations should appear anywhere in the manuscript, including running headers and footers. **A cover page identifying corresponding and contributing authors, affiliations, and email contacts should accompany the manuscript, as well as an abstract of not more than 250 words.**

For questions about or help with the submission process, email vfox@readingrecovery.org.

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Taking Words A-part, Ap-art, Apar-t While Reading

Elizabeth L. Kaye, Texas Woman's University

Author's note:

This is an update to my article with the same title in *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, Fall 2008. I have updated all of the references to Clay's work so the reader can locate the information in current editions of her books. In addition, I made some minor revisions to improve clarity, particularly related to the student examples. All names are pseudonymns.

> "*Perfect*," Chase mused as he stared at the word he had just figured out, "it has *er* in it. And *perfect* sounds like *purse*."

Children learn to analyze words while engaged in authentic reading and writing of continuous text, as illustrated by Chase's comment in the preceding example. The goal of word analysis is to enable readers to take words apart rapidly and efficiently, as needed, during reading and writing (Clay, 2016). These may include unfamiliar words, partially learned words, or familiar words encountered in unexpected contexts. Although children begin developing their understanding of printed words through early interactions with books and initial writing experiences, confusions and misconceptions can arise which hinder progress. Knowing how and when to support children's efficient word analysis during Reading Recovery® lessons can be challenging, particularly given the breadth of learning involved.

In this article, I share my path of study related to how children work at taking words apart while reading and writing. This exploration began with my study of reading behaviors exhibited by proficient second-grade readers (Kaye, 2002). I marveled at the variety of ways they worked out complex words and at their efficiency in doing so while maintaining the fluent pace of their reading. My analysis and reflection continued as I worked with children in Reading Recovery and studied *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (Clay, 2005a, 2005b, 2016). I began to make connections between the reading behaviors of proficient second graders and those of my first graders in Reading Recovery, and I was astonished to see some similarities emerge. As I refined my understanding of Reading Recovery procedures and the rationales behind them, my teaching decisions became more helpful. By sharing this exploration, I hope to support teachers as they design reading and writing instruction that strengthens students' decoding through observation, data analysis, study, and reflective practice.

Learning From Proficient Readers

Competent readers break words in many different ways, and that should be our aim for children in Reading Recovery as well (Clay, 2016). Because we are preparing children to work as independently and successfully as their classroom peers, it is important to clearly understand our endeavor. Clay's reference to the variety of ways proficient second graders break words comes from a study in which I followed a group of children across an academic year, taking running records monthly to gain

insight about their strategic reading activities (Kaye, 2002, 2006). In the process, I learned a great deal about the ways they worked on new or unusual words. Four key features of the second graders' word solving stand out as critical to this discussion. (See Kaye, 2002, 2006 for more detail.)

1. Variety — Skillful second-grade readers exhibited 63 distinct ways to take words apart while reading. Every child demonstrated several different ways of breaking words, yet many methods were unique to particular children at a particular point in time. The following example illustrates five children's attempts to work out the word *industries* in a passage about Peter the Great from *Qualitative Reading Inventory-3* (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001).

Text—Peter tried to establish modern *industries*...

Sara: in-dus-tr, industries

Caleb: in-, in-dustries

Greta: intri-, industries

Jasmine: indu-, industries

Steven: in-, industries

Clearly there was not one "best" way to approach a difficult word, and children were flexible in their attempts.

2. Efficient units — Second-grade proficient readers used large, efficient units when taking words apart. They never tried to solve words phoneme-by-phoneme or letter-by-letter. They were adept at quickly accessing a variety of useful segments to help them solve words on the run. (See Table 1 for the most common units used in solving words.)

3. Left-to-right analysis — Every time these competent readers broke words apart, they worked left to right. Across hundreds of examples, the children never began by articulating segments toward the middle of words or at the end of words. They always started on the left and worked sequentially across the word. Occasionally they returned to the beginning for a second attempt. For example, children read

- *dr-ied* for *dried*;
- *es-tablish* for *establish*;
- *in-dus-tr-*, *industries* for *industries*; and
- *pair-, pairlem-, parliement* for *parliament*.

It seems this sequential movement pattern across words, using useful clusters, had been firmly established by second grade.

4. Independence — Proficient second-grade readers always attempted the complex words they encountered. They never stopped and waited for a "told," nor did they appeal to the teacher for help without trying the word. In addition, they never skipped a difficult word and read on to the end of the sentence. They always made attempts, and sometimes multiple attempts, at point of difficulty. These readers had a range of problem-solving actions that they initiated to work at challenges.

Each of the four observed patterns occurred on instructional-level texts which children usually read in a fluent, phrased manner. The vast majority of substitutions reflected the integrated use of meaning, language structure (syntax), and visual information from print (letter-sound relationships). Although children's substitutions were excellent approximations, they were frequently able to self-correct those errors as well.

Table 1. Efficient Units for Second Graders' Word Solving

Units	Examples	
	Child's Attempt	Word in Text
Multisyllable segments	inter-ested	interested
	elec-, electricity	electricity
	Saca-jawea	Sacajawea
Syllables	voy-age	voyage
	skir-mish	skirmish
	purch-, purchased	purchased
Root word + ending(s)	sight-ing	sighting
	strength-ened	strengthened
	long-, longer	longer
Halves of compound words	news-paper	newspaper
	ship-yard	shipyard
	earth-worm	earthworm
Onset-rime	fl-ip	flip
	th-eory	theory
	n-, notes	notes

The importance of children using what they know to problem solve became strikingly clear during my work with proficient second-grade readers. In one of the tasks I administered, I asked two different children how they had solved the word *puncturing* in a text they had just read. Marcus said that he figured out *puncturing* because it was like the word *punching*, except for the middle part, which he explained was like *turn*. However, Rita told me she had figured out *puncturing* because it looked a lot like *punctuation*, except for the last part (-ing). Both children had made unique and sophisticated analogies based on words in their own repertoires to solve this novel word *puncturing*, and both were successful in their attempts. These second graders helped me understand the importance of rapidly accessing what one knows well and using it to problem solve. Understanding the complexity of the children's solving raised my expectations about young learners' capacity to tackle complex challenges and elevated my teaching practice.

As I reflected on the efficient and sophisticated problem solving I had observed in proficient second-grade readers, I realized the tremendous responsibility we have with the first graders we tutor in Reading Recovery. We need to prepare these children to develop an equally complex range of problem-solving behaviors as they move through second grade. As a Reading Recovery teacher, I need to be sure my students take initiative to problem solve early in their lesson series. I want to ensure that they can quickly access useful parts of words while moving sequentially across print. Habituating appropriate directional movement is paramount. Students must also be able to efficiently integrate meaning, language structure, and visual information from print while reading. Finally, I need to help students learn to work flexibly, trying different ways to problem solve as they maintain the fluent flow of their reading. My job in helping them construct the beginnings of a self-extending system is critical to their future success. These thoughts weighed on my mind as I reread *Literacy Lessons* and began to examine my teaching and my lesson data with renewed intensity.

Exploring Literacy Lessons

Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals (Clay, 2016) guides our work with children in Reading Recovery. Although we can find helpful information for thinking about word analysis in many places, my exploration centers upon four areas of Clay's text:

- How children's behaviours change during a series of individual lessons (Clay, 2016, pp. 44–47),
- Taking words apart while reading (Clay, 2016, pp. 146–155),
- Learning to Look at Print (Clay, 2016, Chapter 3), and
- Writing Continuous Texts, Stories, and Messages (Clay, 2016, Chapter 4)

I find that the more I keep my focus on problem solving within continuous text, the fewer detours I need to make toward isolated word work. Therefore, "Attending to words in isolation" (Clay, 2016, pp. 155–164) is beyond the scope of this article.

Change over time

Clay provides guidance to help us think about shifts in our teaching as children's literacy behaviors change across their series of lessons. This section, entitled "Changes teachers might observe during lessons" (Clay, 2016), is intended to serve only as a rough guide to progressions in learning for our students, yet I think it is important to deliberately examine the learning trajectory we are supporting. While looking across that section, I am struck by the number of supportive opportunities there are for learning to take words apart within the different lesson components and across the lesson series.

Within each lesson component presented on these pages, the early phases of learning (labeled with Roman Numeral *I*) address the initial challenges of directional movement, letter order and orientation, spatial concepts, and breaking apart known words. In early lessons, children learn the arbitrary but nonnegotiable rules about direction and sequence in written language and the relationship of print to spoken language. Learning "how" to look at print is critically important. In fact, "Learning to look at print," Chapter 3 of *Literacy Lessons* (Clay, 2016), specifically addresses these concepts and lays the foundation for the later, more-sophisticated work children will engage in to take words apart.

The middle phase (labeled *II*) emphasizes the use of several

strategic activities and multiple information sources. Breaking words is supported by fast recognition of letter forms and fast links to sounds. Children work in sequence and are able to break words in different ways and make connections between words containing similar components. Growing expertise with phonological elements and some orthographic features also characterize the middle phase of a lesson series.

Later learning (indicated by *III*) involves more independence and fluency. Flexible word and word-part processing happens rapidly—on the run—in reading and writing, even with multisyllabic words. In addition, children gain expertise with phonological and orthographic analysis and use of analogy. Perhaps not surprisingly, this latter description captures the complex problem solving I observed in proficient second-grade readers, although they were reading more sophisticated texts than the first graders in Reading Recovery.

Overall, the progressions outlined in sections *I*, *II*, and *III* draw attention to the qualitative shifts in students' processing that we are working toward across the lesson series. Periodically rereading these pages helps me maintain high expectations for students' growth and ensure they are developing the flexibility and independence needed for success when they leave the intervention.

Taking words apart while reading—A closer study

Taking words apart while reading involves any word work done from continuous text in reading or writing. Several areas of *Literacy Lessons* provide clarification about when we might take words apart, most of which are closely linked to continuous text:

- after familiar reading (but only if necessary)
- when the child is breaking up words at the magnetic board
- when the child is taking words apart in isolation or in writing
- during preparatory work on the new book
- and after the reading of the new book. (Clay, 2005, p. 125)

Teachers should be sensitive to these opportunities across the lesson but beware of taking words apart unnecessarily, which could distract children from the meaning of the story.

Children's known vocabulary provides strong support for word analysis in text (Clay 2016). In fact, it is easier to learn how words work by examining those that are quite familiar. If we help children work with the knowledge that they are secure in, they will be able to link new experiences to their existing body of knowledge (Clay, 2016). These opportunities support our aim for the child to "bring what he knows to bear on his attempts to read books" (Clay, 2016, p. 148). We glimpsed this phenomenon of linking what is known to that which is new in Chase's comments at the opening of this article as well as in the examples provided by second graders working out the word *puncturing.*

Early accomplishments that support students' subsequent efforts to take words apart include breaking known words into letters as part of learning spatial concepts (Clay, 2016, pp. 58, 71–72) and learning how letters make up words by breaking familiar words into letters and letter clusters (Clay, 2016, pp. 72–75). By taking apart known words in different ways, children learn how to look efficiently at letters or letter clusters within words, consistently moving left to right. They also begin to sort out the concepts of *letter* and *word*. These procedures detailed in "Breaking words into letters and letter clusters" are not used for learning new words, and they are not intended to help children link sounds with letters, as they learn to do in the writing portion of the Reading Recovery lesson. Rather, they ensure that children learn to consistently look left to right in helpful ways.

At first, we help children break words letter-by-letter, and we ensure they perfect this way of looking. Before long, we introduce different breaks: inflectional endings and onset-rime. Within each of these activities, children must respect the directional sequence for our written language. At this point in children's learning, we are not expecting them to use this breaking for word solving, but in time, the types of breaks we have used will become familiar to them. Children may break the word anywhere, but we must ensure that their eyes are moving left to right across the words (Clay, 2016). Although Clay provides some initial examples of words to use in these activities (e.g., *looking, went*), we are encouraged to find examples elsewhere in the lesson that provide opportunities for this type of work as well.

The behaviors we aim to establish with these procedures mirror two fundamental actions of competent second-grade readers. First, by engaging in these procedures with our children in Reading Recovery, we can help establish a consistent way of looking (left to right). The accomplished Grade 2 readers always worked left to right; that movement pattern was rapid and invariable. Second, we are demonstrating useful ways to break words (at the inflectional ending and between the onset and rime). Second graders in the study were flexible in their approach to taking apart words. Although there was no best way to break a word, students frequently employed onset-rime breaks and breaks at inflectional endings. They solved words in varied ways and consistently used efficient word parts — hallmarks of their effective word solving.

Children who are very familiar with breaking words apart in different ways may begin to take words apart in reading, but Clay contends that studying words in isolation and making analogies are later accomplishments (2016). Because we are focused on accelerative progress, teachers need to be judicious about their teaching decisions, considering the individual child's competencies and the appropriateness of the word segments being attended to. The list provided at the bottom of page 147 of *Literacy Lessons* (Clay, 2016) provides a general guide for thinking about what is "easy to see" or "easy to hear" and what elements are more challenging, such as hard-to-hear consonants and particular vowel patterns. The observant teacher, armed with detailed knowledge of the child, will carefully select opportunities for taking words apart that help extend the child's problem-solving repertoire.

Exploring Teaching Interactions

Teaching children in Reading Recovery has provided numerous opportunities to observe children's developing literacy expertise, sharpen my analysis, and hone my teaching. By reviewing carefully taken records, I can trace my teaching decisions and my students' paths of progress. In this section, I share teaching interactions during reading and writing that capture children's development as taking words apart and constructing words evolve from simple beginnings to more complex learning.

Early learning

Early in Amber's lesson series I realized that I needed to help her increase her meager knowledge of letters (six at entry) and words (two at entry) and help her become strategic with the few she already knew. She demonstrated early accomplishments in directional movement, one-to-one matching, and locating words. Because initial letters are easy to see, they would provide a useful starting point for her word analysis. I knew that it would be easiest for Amber to use letter-sound knowledge if I helped her use her personal associations with those letters. Data from the writing segment of her daily lessons, her alphabet book, and her reading vocabulary provided the exemplars I used as links in the following interactions from one of her early lessons.

During familiar reading, Amber was having difficulty recalling the name of the animal depicted in the story (a lizard). Amber paused and pointed to the picture.

Text—I see a lizard.

Amber: I see a—What's it called? (pointing to the illustration)

Teacher: (placing the magnetic letter *l* on the table in front of Amber) It's *lizard*. It starts like *like* (clearly stressing the /l/ sound of her known word *like*).

Amber: I see a *lizard*.

From Amber's behavior, I hypothesized that she was searching her memory for the name of the animal, but to no avail. I placed the magnetic letter *l* in front of her to clearly draw attention to the first letter, which I wanted her to notice. After telling her the word *lizard*, I explained that she knew something that was like this unfamiliar word, making a link to the first letter of a known word and saying, "It starts like *like*." I was establishing the idea that she can use something she knows to help her get to something new.

Later in the same lesson, Amber hesitated after correctly reading *supermarket*.

Amber: /s/, supermarket. Right? (asking for confirmation)

Teacher: (turning responsibility back to Amber) What would you expect to see at the beginning of *supermarket* (slightly elongating the first sound when saying *supermarket)*?

Amber: S.

Teacher: Okay, now see if it makes sense too.

Amber: (accurately rereads the sentence and nods in confirmation)

I was aware that Amber already associated S with the sound /s/, and I wanted her to use this emerging letter-sound knowledge together with her strong sense of meaning to check on herself. Therefore, when she asked for confirmation, "Supermarket. Right?" I shifted the responsibility back on Amber to use what she knew to check that the word looked right at the beginning and made sense in the story. Determining which sources of information a child can access is essential before expecting her to check one kind of information against another or integrate them independently.

Later in familiar reading, Amber read a story containing several animal characters. After reading one of the pages correctly, Amber stopped to share a link she made.

Amber: (pointing under the *p* in *pig*) See? It's like *Palmer*. (her last name)
Teacher: Yes, it starts like a word you know—*Palmer*!

Impressed with this link to her last name, I replied in confirmation. This brief interaction contains several features that are generative to continued learning:

- Amber is drawing on her unique store of personal knowledge as she reads. She made this particular link because *Palmer*, her last name, was familiar to her.
- First letters are often easy to see and hear. Amber's comment is evidence that she is looking left to right, an essential movement pattern for our written code.
- Children will begin to attend to the things that we attend to if our instruction is clear and well-suited to the individual learner.

In the three interactions shared from this early lesson, I was careful to help Amber use her existing knowledge as a link, or bridge, to new learning. In addition, I was intentional in ensuring that the meaning of the story did not get lost as I drew attention to visual information. At this point in Amber's lesson series, I was also using the earliest procedures for breaking words into letters and letter clusters, beginning on page 72 of *Literacy Lessons* (Clay, 2016), to help her habituate efficient left-to-right looking across known words.

The writing portion of the Reading Recovery lesson provides additional meaningful opportunities to support word analysis, whether building an ever-expanding writing vocabulary, hearing and recording sounds in words, or getting to a new word through analogy. When children can write a word correctly, letter-by-letter, teachers are advised to give them opportunities to do it again and again more quickly. In doing so, children are learning to pay close attention to scanning all the details of the word in order and recognizing those details as a pattern (Clay, 2016).

The earliest lessons provided opportunities for Amber to extend her writing vocabulary and produce known words more fluently. In Lesson 13, Amber composed the story, "I saw a monkey at the zoo." She wrote *I* and *a* fluently and had the opportunity to learn *at* (see procedures in Clay, 2016, p. 105). Although the word *at* seems fairly simple, it is composed of letters she knew, it appears frequently in books, it would help her learn how to learn words, and it has great utility for getting to new words. Moreover, constructing words in writing fosters the later visual analysis of words in text. These writing experiences would help her tackle future challenges in both reading and writing.

In Lesson 13, Amber also was learning to hear sounds in words, although she had not yet learned the lesson procedure of slowly articulating a word she wants to write and recording the sounds in boxes. I supported her learning by making links to the few sounds and words she knew, as in this example with the word *monkey*.

Amber's story—I saw a monkey at the zoo.

Teacher: Mmmonkey (stressing the first sound).

Amber: (no response)

Teacher: (with emphasis on initial /m/ sounds) Mmmonkey starts like Mmmom.

Amber: M! (records *M* in her story)

By deliberately emphasizing the initial sound and linking it to a word she knew, *Mom*, I gave Amber the opportunity to use a known word in a strategic way to help solve a new word in writing. As Clay notes, combining existing knowledge with effective strategies

enables students to "go beyond the information that is already stored" and tackle new challenges successfully (Clay, 2015, p. 331).

Final letters, inflections, and syllable breaks

Final letters and inflections are often useful places to draw children's attention. Step two of "Breaking words into letters and letter clusters" introduces children to breaks at inflectional endings (see Clay, 2016, pp. 73–74). Before long, children may be noticing these endings in words they encounter, as Jackson did while reading *Monkey on the Roof* (Clough, 2000) and *Just Like Daddy* (Asch, 1981).

Text—"Come down to me, Monkey," said Emma. "Here he comes," said Matthew.

Jackson: "Come down to me, Monkey," said Emma. "Here he comes," said Matthew. Hey, look! *Come* and *comes*. This one (pointing to comes) has an *s*!

Text—All day we fished and fished, and I caught a big fish...

Jackson: All day we fished and fished, and I caught a big fish. I get it! *Fish* and *fished*! (coordinating his comment with the covering and uncovering of the *ed* ending of *fished*)

Not only had Jackson noticed the use of inflectional endings -s and -ed while reading; he seemed excited about his discovery.

Literacy Lessons details some ways teachers can support children's attention to visual features through questions which prompt learners to look for familiar visual features of words and search for what they know (see Clay, 2016, pages 138 and 152–153). A "scale of help while reading" (p. 152) helps us think about how to adjust the level of support we give. Records of my interactions with Amber during the first reading of *One Cold Wet Night* (Cowley & Melser, 1980) reveal how I was supporting her visual analysis of inflectional endings and helping her use syllable-level breaks, which are easy to hear.

Text—I'm going to be warm tonight.

Amber: I'm— (stops at *going*)

Teacher: Do you know a word that looks like that?

Amber: Go...*going*! I'm going to be warm (stops, then rereads) I'm going to be warm (stops)

Teacher: What can you see that might help? (After a pause, teacher divides *tonight* with her finger, briefly showing the segment *to*, then moves her finger away.)

Amber: to-n, tonight. I'm going to be warm tonight.

Teacher: Did that make sense?

Amber: (nods)

In these examples, I used two questions: "Do you know a word that looks like that?" and "What can you see that might help?" These prompts called her to look at the word in text and search her own repertoire for something similar. Amber found *go* and then was able to read the word *going*. The second interaction required a bit more support. I asked, "What can you see that might help?" Amber did not respond, so I quickly used my finger to divide the word to expose *to*. That quick move supported her looking at the unfamiliar word, and she was able to solve it.

After finishing the book, I turned back to a page with the word *tonight*. I wanted to be more explicit about how she might find help within a word, and in this case I highlighted the syllable breaks. (See Clay, 2016, p. 149 for other natural breaks in spoken language.)

Teacher: Clap *tonight*.

Amber: (clapping once per syllable) to-night

Teacher: Show me *to*.

Amber: (divides the word with her finger so *to* is visible)

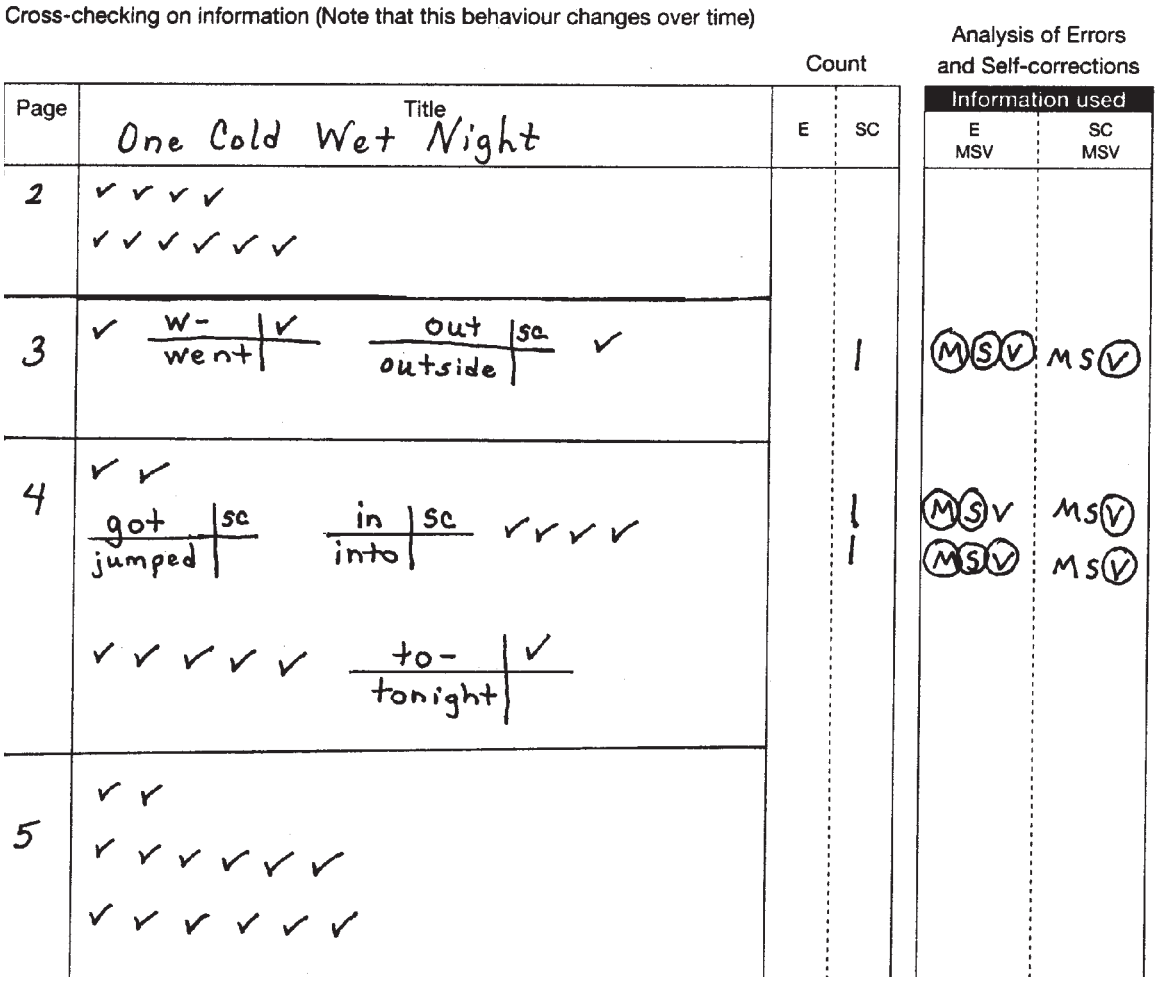
Teacher: Show me *night*.

Amber: (divides the word with finger so *night* is visible)

By deliberately articulating part of the word, I was calling her to hear a useful part, which she then located. This brief interaction, then, reinforced both hearing and seeing useful parts of words.

Amber's running record of this Level 6 text on the next day demonstrated that she was beginning to use some of these useful breaks (see Figure 1). I was astonished to see that many of her reading behaviors were similar to those that proficient second-grade readers showed on much more sophisticated passages. Amber read in a phrased manner, particularly after working out some initial challenges on pages 3 and 4. Her

Figure 1. Excerpt from Amber's Running Record



approximations and substitutions were quite efficient too. In Table 2, I share my analysis of Amber's problem solving on a portion of the story and explain how it relates to my observations of skillful second-grade readers.

Given the similarity of Amber's reading behaviors in *One Cold Wet Night* and the reading behaviors of capable second-grade readers, it seems that signs of efficient word-level solving can be seen fairly early in children's lesson series. With careful observation and skillful support, teachers can help their Reading Recovery students extend their competencies on increasingly complex texts.

The writing portion of Amber's lesson during this timeframe provided additional opportunities for word analysis.

Amber's story—Me and my sister got chocolate milk at the mall. I spilled.

Amber wrote the high-frequency words in her story unaided (*Me, and, my, got, at, the, I*). In this lesson, I introduced the procedures for using letter boxes so that Amber would now have to attend to spelling in addition to the sounds of words (see Clay, 2016, pp. 100–101). To help Amber think about the letters she would expect to see in *sister*, I drew a box for each letter. In her attempt, Amber seemed to be working with a large cluster when she wrote *sis* as a unit. She then recorded the *t* and paused. My verbal support helped her use a word she knew to finish writing *sister*:

Teacher: It takes two letters for *er*, like in *Amber* (stressing the *er* sound of her name).

Table 2. Analysis of Amber's Problem Solving and Relationship to Proficient Second-Grade Readers

Page 3 Text: **He went outside. Then**
Amber: **He /w/ went out. outside. Then**

My Analysis	Similiarity to Proficient Grade 2 Readers
/w/ went As Amber read, she quickly articulated the onset (first sound) of went, then solved the word in its entirety. This is efficient solving.	The onset-rime break was one of the most- frequently observed ways proficient second-grade readers took words apart. In every case, it was a rapid action.
out. outside. (self-correction) Amber said *out* with a drop in pitch that seemed to indicate she had ended the sentence. When she made this substitution for *outside*, she seemed to have searched for and used a combination of meaning, language structure, and visual information. In fact, she used the entire first syllable of the compound word *outside* in her attempt. Despite the good fit with all these sources of information, Amber made a second attempt that resulted in a self-correction.	The vast majority of substitutions made by proficient second-grade readers were meaningful, syntactically appropriate, and visually similar to the word in text. Even though they made "good" substitutions, they frequently corrected their initial attempts. In addition, breaks between two halves of a compound word were common.

Page 4 Text: **The horse jumped into bed and said, "I'm going to be warm tonight."**
Amber: **The horse got, jumped in, into bed and said, "I'm going to be warm to-tonight."**

My Analysis	Similiarity to Proficient Grade 2 Readers
got, jumped (self-correction) Amber made a meaningful substitution that was structurally appropriate, then she probably noticed that *got* did not look right. Incorporating some visual information, her second attempt resulted in a self-correction right at the point of error.	Proficient second-grade readers consistently integrated meaning with visual and structural (syntactic) information as they read. Self-corrections often occurred immediately following the error.
in, into (self-correction) When taking the running record, Amber's pitch change and pausing led me to believe that *into* was a self-correction; however, it is possible she was taking the word apart. Again, Amber's initial substitution seems to indicate that she was integrating meaning, syntax, and visual information in print. More careful attention to visual detail probably led her to self-correct. *Into* is a compound word composed of two smaller words in Amber's reading and writing vocabularies.	When accomplished second-grade readers took apart multisyllabic words, they often paused briefly at the syllable break. In this case, the syllables also correspond to the two halves of a compound word. This type of breaking seemed to be efficient and successful for them.
to-tonight This attempt is just a bit different than her attempts with *outside* and *into*. Rather than stopping after saying the first part of the word, she elongated the vowel sound of *to* then said the entire word. The way she drew out the sound led me to hypothesize that she was in the process of solving the word, so I did not consider it a self-correction. (For clarification, see Clay, 2019, p. 61) Once again, Amber used an efficient breaking point to take the word apart. She worked at the syllable level for this compound word that begins with the known word *to*.	Breaking at the syllable level or between two parts of a compound word happened frequently with proficient readers in Grade 2. Sometimes readers paused briefly at the break, and at other times they elongated the first half of the word as shown here. This breaking seemed to be efficient and effective for them.

Amber: E-R! (She fills in the last two boxes.)

Teacher: Does that look right?

Amber: Yep.

In the word *milk*, Amber easily recorded the first two letters, then I supported her with the hard-to-hear *l*. Amber showed her flexibility as she worked on the final sound and considered her options:

Amber: (hesitating at the last box) C or K?

Teacher: What would look right?

Amber: K. (fills in the letter *k*)

This brief interaction indicates that Amber knew there were two possible ways to represent the sound at the end of *milk* and that she could search her personal store of knowledge to decide which looked right. She had probably seen the word *milk* before, and she may have had an idea that *c* rarely appears at the end of an English word.

To write the word *mall*, I asked Amber to search her personal repertoire and find a word that might help her:

Teacher: Do you know a word that sounds like *mall*?

Amber: Ball! (She proceeded to write *mall*, needing no further help.)

Amber easily made the analogy from the word *ball*, which she knew well. The word *spilled* was a bit more complex. Rather than drawing boxes to support her attempt, I chose to help her use another word she knew:

Teacher: If you know *will*, then you can write *spill*.

Amber: (writes *will* on the working page, then writes *spill*)

Teacher: What ending will turn *spill* into *spilled*?

Amber: E-D (records the inflectional ending *-ed*)

In the writing portion of this lesson, Amber had the opportunity to quickly produce known words, use known words to get to new words through analogy, learn more about orthography, and construct new words by analyzing sounds and thinking about what would look right. Her shift toward working with clusters is a notable sign of progress related to taking words apart efficiently. Moreover, her facility with tackling a new word by relating it to a known word was a new accomplishment that would support her problem solving in both reading and writing.

Compound words, analogies, and surprises

Carefully observing children and capturing their comments as they read or write offers valuable insight into what they are noticing about words. We do not have to teach children everything they need to know; they learn from daily interactions with text, as Aiden taught me as he read *Blackberries* (Randell, 1996).

Text—Mother Bear's blackberries went into this basket.

Aiden: (reading correctly) Mother Bear's blackberries went into—Hey, *into* is *in* and *to*!

Aiden had discovered a compound word! His attention to how the word was constructed gave me insight into his visual analysis, and this curiosity about how words are constructed bodes well for his future learning.

Aiden was also noticing that some words sounded alike, as in this example from *The Three Little Pigs* (Van Lille, 1995).

Aiden: *Sticks* is like *bricks*.

Teacher: What do you mean (wondering if he was referring to the letters in the word or the sounds of the words)?

Aiden: It rhymes.

Teacher: Yes, they do rhyme!

At the end of that book, I wrote *sticks* and *bricks* on a small white board so Aiden could see that they also look similar; they share the same rime. I helped him make a link between what he could hear and what he could see in these words. These connections would be generative to both taking words apart in reading and constructing words in writing.

On another day, while reading a story in which a lost bear climbs up a tree (Randell, 1996), Aiden asked an insightful question that opened another window into his thinking.

Text —I'm lost, but I'm good at climbing.

Aiden: I'm lost, but I'm good at climbing. It's *climbing*, right? It has a *b*?

Teacher: That's surprising. We can't hear the *b*. Does climbing make sense, though?

Aiden: Yes. (He continues reading the story.)

That was not Aiden's first experience with silent letters, but it may have been the first time he realized that a *b* could be silent. Aiden was uncovering some of the irregularities of our language, and it happened on-the-run as he was engaged with stories.

Growing independence

As children become more proficient readers, they develop additional approaches to problem solving and become quicker at accessing the information they need. These progressions are evident in Griffin's records from the middle and latter parts of his Reading Recovery lesson series.

Griffin had recently become adept at working with inflectional endings. His quick self-correction of *paint* for *painted* and the way he broke *lifted* into two parts (*lift-ed*) indicated that inflectional endings were fairly easy to work with. I supported Griffin when he stopped at the word *began* with a call to search for information he knows:

Griffin: (stops at the word *began*)

Teacher: Look for something that will help you.

Griffin: *be*, *began* (and he continues reading)

The prompt—"Look for something that will help you"—directed Griffin to examine the word, search his personal store of knowledge, and make his own link. Although I did not specifically direct his attention to a particular part of the word, he found *be* then said *began*. Later in the same book I heard him solve *beside* on-the-run in the same manner, with just a slight pause after the first syllable (*be-side*). My records indicated that he was learning from his own efforts, and my support for taking words apart was primarily verbal at this point in his lesson series.

Griffin also worked efficiently with useful word parts while writing. Several of his comments while writing the following brief story indicate that he was working in segments as he wrote, finding useful clusters and making his own links.

Griffin's story—My mom put red sparklings on the stockings.

Griffin: (silently writes *My mom put red*, then announces the next word) Sparklings—I know it starts like Spiderman!

Teacher: (draws a box for each letter in *sparklings*)

Griffin: (silently writes *sp*, then begins to say the word aloud) sp-ar, A-R (records *ar*), /k/ /l/ *ings*. (He correctly records the final six letters in the boxes while articulating, *k- l- ings*.)

I was excited to hear him say and record the word *sparklings* in clusters as he worked. This behavior will serve him well with other complex words he has to write, and it parallels the kind of solving he may need to do when encountering an unusual word in reading.

Griffin continued writing *on the* and then came to *stockings*.

Griffin: *Stockings* sounds a lot like *sparklings*.

He had made an interesting observation about the words sounding alike, probably referring to the final syllables of *stockings* and *sparklings*, and possibly to the initial sound /s/ or medial /k/ as well. He needed support to hear the *t* in the *st* blend in *stockings*, but he recorded it easily after I articulated the word with emphasis. He quickly recorded the *o*, then filled in *ck* as a unit, and finished by fluently writing the cluster *ings*. Over time, Griffin had learned to search independently and make his own links. I think about the language I had often used when prompting him to use his current knowledge for solving:

- Do you know a word that sounds like that?
- Do you know a word that looks like that? or
- Look for something that might help you.

Griffin's comments "it starts like…" and "it sounds a lot like…" suggested he had internalized this language and was asking himself these questions to support his independent solving!

Toward the end of his lessons Griffin wrote stories that were several sentences in length, often working without boxes. He occasionally tried out a word on his work page, and if it did not look right, he produced an alternative spelling and judged whether that version looked better. Supported by an extensive reading and writing vocabulary, he was flexible in his approach. He read in a fluent, phrased manner and

worked quickly at the syllable level to solve words: *be-side, be-tween*, and *happ-ens*. He solved *kernels* on his own by breaking it into three useful segments: *k-er-nels*. At this point, my support was no longer needed to remind him to find something he knew or to show him how those words worked. He rarely used his finger to break words, instead relying on his eyes, just as proficient second-grade readers do.

Putting It All Together

After focusing so intently on taking words apart, it is important to keep the bigger picture in mind. There is much more to reading and writing than noticing letter clusters. Successful readers are able to deliberately direct their attention to any of several levels when reading continuous text: "a letter feature, letter, letter cluster or letter sequence, a word, phrase, sentence, or to the gist of the story" (Clay, 2016, p.146).

It is critical that our students can move fluidly among these levels—pulling together the information they need—to understand and enjoy the message as they read and write. Children who have frequent, successful opportunities to with continuous texts will be working effectively across all of these levels.

Early attention to directional movement is critical to children's later success in taking words apart, as is the establishment of early concepts about words and letters, and the ability to break words letter by letter or in clusters. As teachers, we also need to recognize and build upon each student's strengths in reading and writing. Our carefully planned demonstrations and support around continuous text will allow children to take on new learning, becoming more independent and efficient at looking at print and taking words apart. Teaching and learning work in concert, so we challenge ourselves to make excellent teaching decisions that will foster students' accelerative progress. If we keep our aim in mind, knowing what proficient readers do, we can support our students' continued learning. Studying *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (Clay, 2016), making careful observations, and reflecting on our teaching with our records and with colleagues will support our continued learning as well.

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Intervention Essentials

A Shared Vision: Collaborating for Success

Debra Semm Rich, Saint Mary's College of California

Why is it important to plan for a child's success collaboratively from the start?

The goal of Reading Recovery® is to help the most tangled children learn to read and write at average levels of their first-grade peers in the shortest time possible, usually within 12–20 weeks. This impressive rate of growth is called *accelerated progress.* To give most students the best chance to reach this goal, school personnel take steps to prepare for a student's transition to classroom-only instruction early, from the start of lessons. Being proactive maximizes a child's opportunities for success!

Why begin with the end in mind?

In *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals,* Clay (2016) emphasizes the importance of beginning with the end in mind. Therefore, after administering and summarizing *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2019) and before beginning lessons, the Reading Recovery teacher considers what the child needs to know in reading and writing when lessons end. Clay also urges the teacher to promote independence in the child from the earliest lessons. By maintaining a focus on these end goals, the Reading Recovery teacher ensures that all instructional decisions are powerfully targeted.

The Reading Recovery teacher also collaborates with the classroom teacher before beginning the child's instruction to discuss the expectations of the classroom setting in support of the child's learning and success. To support this partnership, the North American Trainers Group (NATG) 2020 document, *U.S. Exit Status Categories for Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura Students,* offers a roadmap to create a shared vision and develop a mutual plan to maximize student success.

How does the partnership enhance learner success?

The Reading Recovery teacher and classroom teacher begin collaborating by reviewing the expected outcomes of the classroom setting for the child achieving *accelerated progress* (see NATG, 2020, pp. 5–7). The classroom teacher is encouraged to monitor the child's progress, as shared by the Reading Recovery teacher, and adjust the classroom instruction to reflect the learner's ongoing growth in reading and writing.

As lessons proceed, the Reading Recovery teacher communicates regularly with the classroom teacher highlighting the child's strengths, noting effective literacy behaviors and new skills now within his control, including new words added to his ever-expanding reading and writing vocabularies. She also shares ways the child accesses multiple sources of language knowledge as he reads and writes more-complex texts.

What student behaviors make a difference?

A child achieving accelerated progress demonstrates growth in literacy and independence in both the intervention and classroom settings. He is observed

- taking initiative, making links, and solving problems;
- reading longer and increasingly complex texts;
- composing longer and increasingly complex messages;
- expanding his reading and writing vocabulary; and
- knowing when and where to seek help when needed.

The classroom teacher observes the child demonstrating these strengths during classroom instruction, encourages him as he takes initiative, and holds him accountable as he transfers his new learning to independent situations. This collaborative partnership ensures that both teachers use congruent instructional practices to create a seamless learning environment for the child.

Note: This discussion about the Reading Recovery intervention for first-grade students also pertains to Descubriendo la Lectura (Reading Recovery in Spanish), Intervention préventive en lecture-écriture (Reading Recovery in French), and Literacy Lessons® — an intervention based on Reading Recovery theory and instruction for children reading in upper grades who have yet to reach an end of first-grade literacy proficiency.

Also in this article, consistent with Clay's writings, "he" refers to the student and "she" refers to the teacher.

What about consulting with the school team?

The school team also plays a crucial role in a child's success. Just as they are involved in the student's selection, they are consulted whenever the child needs additional support. When the child exits Reading Recovery, the school team is vital.

What are important collaborations as lessons end?

As the child's series of lessons ends, the Reading Recovery teacher and classroom teacher confer to review the progress made by the child. Data confirm that all Reading Recovery learners, irrespective of exit status, make progress (Mauck et al., 2025). All learner strengths are acknowledged as the best recommendations for ongoing literacy instruction are discussed. An exit status category is determined, and the Reading Recovery teacher prepares a *Summary of Progress at the End of Lesson Series and Recommendations* (NATG, 2024).

This report is shared with the school team which reviews the recommendations and arranges any necessary follow-up support. Essential aspects of this process are to consider how well the child will fare in classroom following Reading Recovery by maintaining literacy gains and demonstrating independence, and the importance of ongoing monitoring of all Reading Recovery students. Thus, the critical, ongoing partnership between Reading Recovery and classroom teachers for learners in each exit status category continues. The following guidelines (NATG, 2020) provide recommendations for supporting students as they transition from the intervention to their classrooms.

Accelerated Progress: Achieved Intervention Goal

These children have caught up with their classmates and demonstrate proficient literacy processing. They continue to make progress through classroom instruction only. The intervention teacher checks in with the classroom teacher periodically and occasionally monitors the child's progress by listening to him read and observing his writing. She may need to remind him of what he knows how to do, but she acts as a coach and cheerleader.

Progressed: Monitoring and Support are Essential

These learners have made impressive gains but have not met the rigorous standards for accelerated progress after completing a full, 20-week series of lessons. They require close monitoring and support from the classroom teacher. Some children require additional help, such as small-group tutoring, to maintain ongoing progress. The intervention teacher may assist with evaluating progress and confirming instructional needs.

Recommended: Additional Evaluation and Ongoing Intervention are Essential for Ongoing Literacy Progress

This small number of children have not made sufficient progress to succeed in the classroom after 20 weeks of instruction without ongoing specialist support. They are recommended for immediate consideration by the school team, classroom teachers, and specialists who guide instructional decisions based on additional evaluations of literacy behaviors. Intervention teachers offer diagnostic information based on their records and may assist with ongoing assessments of literacy processing.

Summary

Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers collaborate from the start in the best interest of their students. Their shared planning, monitoring, and ongoing partnership together with the school team create a collaboration that provides each learner the greatest potential for becoming a successful reader and writer.

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Intervention Essentials

The Complex Role of Reading Recovery Teacher Leader

Mary Ann Poparad, National Louis University

School systems implementing Reading Recovery® embrace an obligation to significantly improve literacy education for all children—especially for the most academically challenged first graders—by prioritizing highly effective professional training and support for Reading Recovery teachers. Successful Reading Recovery interventions significantly reduce costly retentions in the primary grades and reduce the need for long-term interventions and special education services that are both financially and emotionally costly. Such a serious commitment begins with supporting a teacher leader dedicated to protecting, enhancing, and extending an effective implementation of Reading Recovery.

The role of a Reading Recovery teacher leader is uniquely complex and challenging. It includes demonstrated professionalism with key responsibilities, including leading, communicating, and problem solving. Through their daily work mentoring and guiding Reading Recovery teachers, teacher leaders influence academic gains for large numbers of students having the most difficulty acquiring early literacy.

Reading Recovery teacher leader responsibilities fall under categories of teaching children, training and coaching teachers, conducting and reporting site-based research, managing a valid implementation of Reading Recovery, and continuing to extend their own professional growth. Key responsibilities and particular challenges of this role are reviewed briefly below.

What are the key responsibilities of the teacher leader?

Tutoring students. Teacher leaders tutor at least two Reading Recovery children individually, daily, and this allows them to hone their instructional expertise. Their ongoing instruction of learners struggling to acquire beginning literacy inform and improve their work guiding teachers.

Teacher training: Developing professional capacity. Because Reading Recovery lessons are customized for each learner's idiosyncratic strengths and needs, the Reading Recovery teacher cannot be limited to scripted lessons. Under the guidance of teacher leaders, teachers engage in extensive preparation and continued learning year after year as they practice child-centered, responsive, reflective practices that best support each child's unique path to literacy.

Prior to the start of the school year for teachers in training, teacher leaders plan and deliver instruction in how to administer, score and analyze *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2019). This is followed by graduate courses taught by the teacher leader in sessions across one school year. For teachers beyond their first year of training, teacher leaders conduct a minimum of 18 hours of continuing professional development sessions each year and visit teachers to provide individual coaching.

Teacher leaders extend Reading Recovery teachers' skills by discussing live lessons conducted by a rotation of colleagues behind a soundproof, one-way mirror during sessions for both in-training and trained teachers. While observing these lessons, teacher leaders engage teachers in high level, collegial conversations through astute guiding and questioning to link literacy learning theory to teaching practices. Thus, teacher leaders foster teachers' dispositions about learning, teaching, and beginning reading instruction. This unique model of professional learning empowers teachers to internalize and transform psychological processes in learning how to learn into their own instructional repertoires (Lyons et al., 1993).

Monitoring implementation. A key role of the teacher leader is monitoring that Reading Recovery is implemented with integrity

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and efficiency, thus ensuring cost effectiveness. Teacher leaders guide the student selection process and monitor progress of individual children. They review weekly reports of student data and quickly communicate with teachers when a student's performance does not meet expectations.

Through collaborative problem solving with Reading Recovery teachers, classroom teachers, and administrators, teacher leaders recommend instructional adjustments as needed to enhance student success. Teacher leaders also prepare annual reports illustrating student outcome statistics for school administrators and community stakeholders.

Continued professional growth. Each year, teacher leaders actively participate in local, state, and national networks with other Reading Recovery teacher leaders, university faculty, and school administrators. These networks support ongoing learning through study of current educational research, practices, and standards.

Advocacy. Teacher leaders advocate for children, teachers, and families. They advocate for policies and practices designed to lift teacher expertise and thus enhance teachers' abilities to help children most in need of early intervention. They communicate the value, goals, cost effectiveness, and systemwide impact of Reading Recovery, and its capacity to reduce the need for long-term, costly interventions.

Addressing challenges. A variety of challenges may arise within each of the key responsibilities. Teacher leaders successfully address challenges by engaging in collaborative problem solving with administrators, Reading Recovery teachers, classroom teachers, and specialists, as warranted, to resolve issues and maintain a successful implementation.

Additional, ongoing challenges include maintaining organized work schedules to ensure time for teaching children, teacher training sessions, teacher coaching visits, traveling between schools, and consulting.

What are key considerations for teacher leader selection and training?

Choosing Reading Recovery is an investment in teacher expertise that over time returns valuable results for teachers, children, and educational systems (Kaye, 2023). Carefully selecting individuals best suited to the rigors of the teacher leader role protects and extends this investment. Although a track record of successful classroom teaching is highly recommended, it is also important to consider leadership potential, problem-solving abilities, and communication skills. These characteristics are key to success with the broad challenges of the teacher leader role.

Teacher leader candidates engage in rigorous university, graduate-level coursework over a full academic year while they tutor Reading Recovery children in their home districts. University-based Reading Recovery faculty mentor teacher leader candidates as they study and teach children. This in-depth study deepens knowledge and specialization in early literacy theory and research; educational leadership; cultural responsiveness; mentoring and coaching adult learners; working with families, administrators, and school teams; teaching struggling first-grade children; assessment; and curriculum development.

Successfully integrating Reading Recovery within a particular educational system calls for a teacher leader who deeply understands that system's literacy curriculum, improvement goals, resources, and expectations. Teacher leaders remain loyal to their employing school system while negotiating necessary flexibilities to meet quality control standards for implementation under the Reading Recovery trademark. (See *Standards and Guidelines of Reading Recovery in the United States*, 2018.)

Summary

The power of Reading Recovery rests in the expertise of Reading Recovery professionals who deliver this intervention with integrity. Teacher leaders—who have a vital, complex role—are essential to achieving success.

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Intervention Essentials

Professional Development: A Hallmark of Reading Recovery

Allyson Matczuk, Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery

The success of the Reading Recovery® intervention, observed in the early literacy achievement of first-grade children in multiple languages, is rooted in the knowledge and expertise of Reading Recovery professionals who have participated in superbly designed training. High-quality professional development is a crucial factor impacting teacher expertise (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Rowe, 2003). Importantly, it is critical for educators who teach children struggling with beginning literacy to ensure accelerated progress. Children have literacy difficulties for many different reasons, and teachers must be prepared to design and teach a high-quality series of lessons suited to each child, taking them from their current understandings to a robust literacy processing system.

The characteristics of this effective literacy teacher training reflect both the components and the effects of high-quality professional learning identified in numerous studies. These components, familiar to Reading Recovery professionals, include reflection (Bos & Anders, 1994), conversation among colleagues (Combs, 1994), monitoring, support, and sustained coaching (Neufeld & Roper, 2003).

Beyond the initial training, a key component for sustaining new learning and enhancing instructional expertise is ongoing professional development. In-depth, relevant, and ongoing professional learning opportunities accompanied by mentoring and collaborative activities has been associated with positive student outcomes in multiple curricular areas (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Gorman, 2005) and in Reading Recovery (Mauck et al., 2025).

What is the Reading Recovery training model?

The professional development model provided Reading Recovery teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers meets the highest standards recommended for teacher development. To become a Reading Recovery professional, one must complete training with an instructor affiliated with a trademarked Reading Recovery center or site. Each candidate must meet the requirements of training to secure course credits and qualify to serve in their respective roles. Teacher leaders in training enroll in graduate courses that are taught by university-affiliated Reading Recovery trainers. Teachers in training complete graduate courses, or equivalent training, taught by Reading Recovery teacher leaders. For the initial training to be effective, trainers and teacher leaders strive to ensure that the quality of instruction and experiences, in both academic coursework and field-based teaching assignments, is of the highest standard.

What does the initial training and ongoing professional development involve?

Reading Recovery teacher leaders initial training. School districts invest in the training of a teacher leader to provide teacher training and to monitor the implementation of Reading Recovery in the district (see Poparad, p. 19 in this issue). Teacher leaders participate in an intensive course of study at the post-master's level over 1 academic year offered at a university training center. They also receive individual coaching in their respective school settings.

Teacher leaders-in-training engage in an extensive study of theory; teach four Reading Recovery students in individual, daily lessons; and observe teacher training experiences. They learn how to work with Reading Recovery teacher training groups and apprentice into the role with experienced teacher leaders. They also learn the history, theory, implementation, and research of Reading Recovery to deepen their understandings of the intervention.

Ongoing professional development for teacher leaders. Following their initial training, they receive ongoing professional development sessions scheduled by their trainers at intervals over a school year. They

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participate in these meetings during each year they serve as a teacher leader. Trainers also make site visits to their teacher leaders to support them with their responsibilities, e.g., teaching children, training and supporting teachers, and addressing implementation issues.

One of the important foci for ongoing attention involves studying new, relevant research and determining how new findings may impact Reading Recovery. Teacher leaders read and discuss many articles and prepare to share new information with their teachers and administrators, as needed. Teacher leaders also participate in projects designed to study Reading Recovery and provide their local sites with the guidance to ensure new research is conducted successfully.

Reading Recovery teachers initial training. The professional development for Reading Recovery teachers occurs at Reading Recovery sites within school districts. The training, which involves weekly, in-service sessions conducted during the school year, is taught by a qualified teacher leader. All teachers in training teach Reading Recovery students as soon as their training begins, and each teacher receives multiple visits from the teacher leader who provides individual coaching and support.

Initially, teachers receive training in *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2019), an assessment of early literacy skills. Assessment and identification of a learner's literacy strengths and needs, based on the standardized test, is followed by study of instructional procedures. The key text offering procedures effective in the instruction and acceleration of struggling learners' literacy is *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals* (Clay, 2016).

A valued component of the training sessions is live lessons of two Reading Recovery children taught by two participating teachers. As the teachers observe the live lessons, the teacher leader guides their observations and poses questions to motivate close observations and careful thinking. This provides teachers opportunities to observe many learners; to discuss ways a learner has responded to instruction; and to consider alternative teaching moves. Teachers help each other problem solve as they strive to link theory to instruction and deepen their knowledge.

Ongoing professional development for trained teachers. Trained teachers engage in professional development sessions and coaching visits with their teacher leader each year they instruct Reading Recovery students. This is considered paramount to sustaining a successful intervention. By participating in ongoing sessions, usually six scheduled over the year, Reading Recovery teachers continue to refine and extend the theories of literacy and learners that guide their instructional decisions. They continue observing live lessons, engage in collaborative problem solving with peers, and share insights based on relevant theories. The goals of this requirement are to continue to support and extend each teacher's expertise and to avoid any loss of effectiveness in their skills observing and instructing students who require intensive invention.

Summary

Reading Recovery's professional development model, a hallmark of Reading Recovery, is an investment in teacher expertise — the key to the intervention's success. Its effectiveness rests in powerful components and experiences verified by research.

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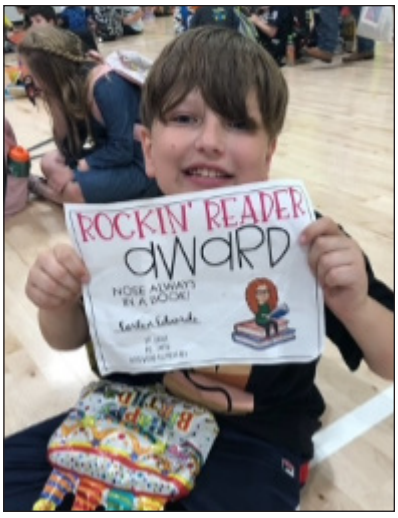
Where Are They Now?

Celebrating the Literacy Journey

Heather Cherry, Highland Park Elementary, Broken Arrow, Oklahoma

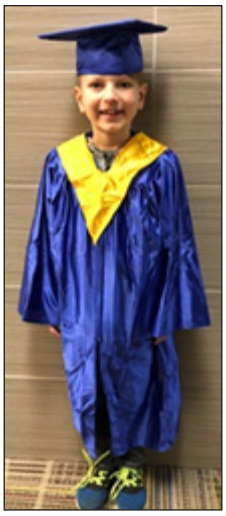
As teacher leader, I had the opportunity to train five new Reading Recovery® teachers last school year. To honor the completion of their training, I was inspired to write a poem that expressed the power Reading Recovery can have on each student's literacy journey. I drew inspiration from my own experiences and one student in particular who helped shape my understanding of the unique opportunity Reading Recovery provides.

Corban was a first-round student during my training year. I fondly recall that he had a difficult time sitting and often climbed around on his chair as he read. Although wiggly and wild at times, Corban was reading and he made great gains, completing the program with accelerated progress. A few years later, I crossed paths with Corban as he waited for the bus ride home on his last day of third grade. When I saw him, he was proudly holding up a certificate he had received in class. It was a "Rockin' Reader" award that read, "Nose always in a book." My heart melted when I saw it because I couldn't imagine a better outcome for a student who initially struggled with reading. The certificate didn't signify outstanding achievement in reading (although he may very well have been a high achiever). It was an award to recognize what he was most known for in his class — being a lover of reading!



Students often get referred for reading intervention with descriptors that highlight their limitations, creating a sort of identity around their learning challenges. I love that Reading Recovery removes those limitations and allows students to develop new identities, ones as readers and writers. It can even become what they are known for!

What He's Known For



Too bouncy
Too loud
His head's in a cloud.
It's kind of what he's known for.
Too quiet
Too shy
Too hesitant to try.
It's often what he's known for.
Too slow
Too stubborn
Too much to still learn.
It's sort of what he's known for.
That was
Until he met his Reading Recovery teacher
Now he's so curious
So comfortable
So ready to show he's capable
Could it be what he's known for?
He's so eager
So engaged
So enthralled with every page
It might become what he's known for.
He's confident
He's proud
He's so excited to read aloud.
It's becoming what he's known for.
Now he's every bit a reader and writing up a storm.
His nose always in a book
has become the norm.
No, he's not just a reader.
He's a lover of reading!
It has become what he's known for.

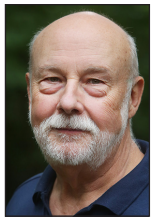
The power each Reading Recovery teacher can have on each student's literacy journey is reflected in Corban's success. From a first grader with his head in the clouds (above) to a third grader with his nose always in a book (left), Corban became known as a lover of reading!

DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR SERIES

The Art and Science of Teaching Reading: Embracing Evidence-Based Practice and Teacher Expertise

Timothy Rasinski, Kent State University
Meghan Valerio, Canfield Local School District, Ohio

About the Authors



Dr. Timothy Rasinski is a professor emeritus of literacy education at Kent State University where he directed its award-winning reading clinic for over 25 years. Tim has written over 200 articles and has authored, co-authored, or edited over 50 books or curriculum programs on reading education. His research on reading has been cited by the National Reading Panel and published in journals such as *Reading Research Quarterly*, *The Reading Teacher,* and the *Journal of Educational Research*. Prior to coming to Kent State, Tim was an elementary and middle school classroom and reading intervention teacher in Omaha, NE.

Dr. Meghan Valerio is a K–12 district literacy coach in Canfield, OH. Her research has been featured in *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Journal of Literacy Research and Instruction*, and *Voices from the Middle*. She previously was an elementary classroom teacher and reading specialist in Baltimore, MD, and has taught graduate and undergraduate literacy courses at several universities. She is the incoming secretary for NCTE's Children's Literature Assembly.

Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit.
— John Steinbeck

Introduction

We know that children need to learn how to decode words and that there is scientific evidence that when children learn to become better decoders, they become stronger readers and writers. While we may know the skills that children need to learn to be proficient and efficient readers, the way to teach these skills is lacking (Shanahan, 2020). As schools nationwide adopt premade curricular programs that are science of reading (SOR) informed, the "how to teach" in a way that reaches and engages all learners and builds knowledge can be narrow-minded and limiting. We argue that it's essential for there to be an existence and acknowledgement of both a science of reading melded with artful ways of teaching reading and writing.

Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.
— Aristotle

How is art defined? Rasinski (2009) and Young et al. (2022) have explained that art in teaching reading involves the creative, authentic, and aesthetic application of SOR. Art is taking what is known, combining it with new knowledge and understandings, and creating a new product. In classrooms, both the teacher and students can take on the role of artist.

Effective teaching requires intentional decision making, where instruction is continuously adjusted to meet students' needs and foster engagement and deeper understandings.

In a previous article we wrote on this topic, we described the teacher as the only artist in the room and the student the audience (Paige et al., 2012). However, we have evolved this understanding to say that the student is also an artist as well, not just a passive recipient of learning. The student—through collaboration with the teacher, peers, and the content itself—makes meaning and creates new understandings as an artist would. Sometimes, this can be seen in an actual product whether writing, digital production, or a speech (among others). Other

Effective teaching requires intentional decision making, where instruction is continuously adjusted to meet students' needs and foster engagement and deeper understandings.

times, this can be a new thought or idea that lies quietly within the child who walks away from the lesson with new understandings.

Benjamin Riley (2020) explained that SOR concepts inform instruction, but there should be enough room for the instruction adjustment and adaptation to meet the needs of and be responsive to students. Often missing from explanations of SOR are considerations of motivation, authenticity, how the brain works when learning, and teacher agency and creativity. Paugh and MacPhee (2023) summarized The National Research Council (2000) report, *How People Learn,* and reported that teacher-directed instruction can lead to surface-level understandings of content and skills. Instead, "studies across cognitive neuroscience and developmental psychology indicate that past and present experience and social collaboration are necessary factors for long-term concept development" (Paugh & MacPhee, 2023, p. 7). When considering how to teach literacy then, there must be much emphasis on not just the "what works," but also on how to center the learner so that they are seen as active agents of constructing their knowledge. This is where the art of teaching comes in.

In this piece, we highlight ways to teach SOR concepts in artful ways. In each of these explanations, the teacher and student take on role of artist but may move within and beyond as they negotiate meaning.

The Challenge With a Science-Only Approach

It is established that orthographic-mapping and word structure knowledge can support reading. Curriculum programs have responded to such needs by including an overabundant amount of time on scripted instruction on decoding real and nonsense words in isolation. When in real-life do children and adults decode nonsense words or words in isolation (Young et al., 2022)?

As states nationwide adopt an SOR instructional approach, universal screeners and diagnostic assessments are included to understand students' needs further. One way to measure such needs is with standardized fluency assessments, often measured by counting the number of words read correctly within 1 minute. While this assessment gives information on decoding skills and reading speed, it misses the full definition of what reading fluency is. It also sends the wrong message that reading as fast as possible is the reading focus.

So, as we consider scientific-informed instruction, we must also consider authentic connections to the real world and the ways reading is constructed and employed.

It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.
— Albert Einstein

Why An Artful Approach

There are skills children need to know to read. We know this. Phonemic awareness, word decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are non-negotiable scientifically informed skills. We also agree with Albert Einstein, that to truly "awaken joy" and inspire "creative expression and knowledge" is through artful teaching. We argue that an artful approach to reading instruction is essential for making connections to real life and creating lifelong, motivated readers. There is a difference between knowing SOR and how to teach SOR.

Below, we have included some suggestions of artful approaches to teaching the essential science-based components of reading. Often, teachers have expressed issues with time to create and think of ways to create artful approaches. As we provide suggestions below, we also include the real-life connections that we were inspired by. Sometimes, the planning for artful approaches isn't happening during the 50-minute instructional planning, but rather the museum we visit or the beach vacation we just took. Art is all around us, and our job is to think of how to connect it back to literacy instruction.

Examples of Artful Approaches to Reading

Developing phonological/ phonemic awareness artfully

Phonological and phonemic awareness—the ability to hear and manipulate discrete language sounds—has been found to be an essential foundational competency for proficient reading. Children who

lack adequate phonemic awareness are likely to struggle with phonics; and, of course, if word decoding is not mastered early, children are more likely to face obstacles in all aspects of reading.

How might we develop phonemic awareness in young children at home and in the preK, kindergarten, and first-grade classrooms? One does not need to search online deeply to find many highly structured curricular programs designed to nurture phonemic awareness.

Rather than investing in such programs that, in many cases, do not pass scientific muster and are costly, why not consider an old fashioned and artful approach to phonemic awareness development — nursery rhymes! Nursery rhymes, as well as many songs for young children, play with the sounds of language with rhyme and alliteration. When a child reads "Dickery dickery dare" or "Diddle diddle dumpling" they are developing an awareness of the /d/ phoneme; "Betty Botter bought some butter" leads to greater awareness of the /b/ sound. We can't help but think that these joyous rhymes and songs were purposely developed decades ago to help young children conquer the sounds of language. And, the science does point to the fact that nursery rhyme knowledge is associated with the development of phonemic awareness and literacy development (Bryant et al., 1989; Harper, 2011).

Yet, despite the evidence in support to developing phonemic awareness through artful nursery rhymes, we find that parents and schools are less likely to expose children to rhymes (Parenta, 2019). Perhaps curriculum developers of more costly programs have been able to sway schools and parents away from the tried, true, effective, and cost-efficient approach. Let's bring nursery rhymes back to parents and early childhood teachers!

Promoting word decoding (and encoding) artfully through games

There is no question that learning to decode words (phonics) and its corollary, word encoding (spelling), are non-negotiable parts of a scientific reading (and writing) curriculum. Curriculum developers have provided a plethora of systematic and scientific approaches to phonics and spelling. The rigidity and limited meaningfulness of such approaches often leaves students with confusion about the nature of reading itself — is it sounding words or is it communicating meaning?

In the course of our own family lives, we have discovered that games, and specially word games such as Boggle, Scrabble, Wordle, Words with Friends, and more have become an integral part of our family time — they're fun. In both our families we play such games regularly. If we, as adults love to play word games, why wouldn't children? One other observation: If you play a game regularly you get better at it. We have a special name for getting better at something — it's called learning!

The point to all this is that gaming offers some creative opportunities for providing students with word learning experiences. Word ladders (or word chains) are one particular game-like activity that is based on science and that students have found engaging and fun. In a word ladder, students begin with one word (written or as letter tiles) and then are guided by the teacher to make a series of new words by adding, subtracting, changing, or rearranging the letters in the previous word. The teacher can provide clues such as which letters/sounds to change the meaning of the new word or simply pronounce the new word itself. Here's an example:

1. Science	Teaching reading is a science.
2. Since	Take away one letter to make another word for "because."
3. Sink	Replace two letters with one to make a basin for washing.
4. Sin	Take away one letter to make a religious term for a bad deed.
5. Tin	Change one letter to make a silvery-white metal often used to make cans.
6. Tan	Change the vowel to make brown by exposure to the sun.
7. Tar	Change one letter to make a dark, heavy, sticky substance used to cover roads.
8. Tart	Add one letter to make a small baked pastry shell with a fruit or other filling.
9. Art	Take away one letter to finish this sentence: "Effective reading instruction is both science and an ___."

As students are guided through the word ladder, they are working on phonics, spelling, and developing

their vocabularies. Making the first and last word in the ladder connect in some way adds to the game-like feel of the activity.

In implementing an activity of this sort on a regular basis with struggling primary-grade readers, McCandliss et al. (2003) found that students made greater gains in phonological awareness, word decoding, and comprehension than a control group of students in a more traditional approach to phonics instruction. Creative teachers can find ways to make word games an integral and engaging part of their phonics and spelling instruction.

Vocabulary development through art

What good is it to be able to decode words accurately if the readers does not know what the words mean? Essentially, these are nonsense words. Instruction in vocabulary, or word meaning, must be an essential part of a scientific and artful reading curriculum.

In the National Art Museum and Portrait Gallery located in Washington, DC, you'll find the work of artist Mel Bochner. This piece shown here, entitled "Money," is a collection of words and phrases that refer to money.

The colorful arrangement of words is eye grabbing and a conversation starter about how each word relates to money, yet has its own meaning. This had us thinking of similar artworks that could be created by students to build word meaning.

Understanding word meaning and vocabulary is a well-established, research-proven component of comprehending text (Anderson & Freebody, 1981; Biemiller, 2010; Hock et al., 2009; Paige et al., 2012; Seifert & Espin, 2012; Stahl, 1990). Schmitt et al. (2011) examined hundreds of students in eight different countries and found that in order for students to comprehend at least 60 percent of the text, they need to understand 98 percent of the words.

Teaching vocabulary by using context clues has been proven in some research studies to be helpful for students. However, other research studies have proven that context clues are not always present in the text to understand the word meaning (Beck et al., 2002; Schatz & Baldwin, 1986; Stahl, 1990), especially in studies where highly controlled vocabulary sentences are used (Young et al., 2022). It is therefore essential to understand that vocabulary learning does require explicit and direct instruction.

Teachers often ask how to really engage students with vocabulary instruction so that it is truly meaningful. After all, directly explaining what a word means,

"Money" by artist Mel Bochner is a collection of words and phrases that refer to money.

while in the moment helpful, does not necessarily mean it will "stick" with the learner. An artful teacher understands the importance of schema and building background knowledge through word meaning to understand the text (Young et al., 2022).

Returning to Bochner's display piece, we see this as an instructional process and product that students and the teacher could create together to make a word "stick." Consider an overarching concept such as "cold" or "friend." The teacher could display Bochner's art piece and discuss how the artist brought to life multiple meanings of the word. Using this as a model, students can work together to brainstorm other words and phrases that have similar meanings through conversations and diving into a thesaurus. They could then draw, paint, or post their collection of words similar to Brochner. Students' own works of art could be displayed within the classroom and around the school to expand vocabulary. We encourage conversations to discuss how the words shared are similar yet convey very specific meaning. Consider the different meanings of colleague, acquaintance, peer, and confidant — yet all are umbrellaed under the term "friend."

Building reading fluency through singing

Student reading fluency proficiency is often measured through reading rate, as measured by assessments like STAR Reading and DIBELs. But these 1-minute timed reading assessments limit reading fluency to rate and accuracy, leaving out the significant role automaticity and

prosody play into essential reading that lead to reading comprehension.

Strong readers read often. Allington and McGill-Franzen (2021) reported that the more children read, the more words they recognize and the stronger their comprehension grows. But what artful ways can we incorporate to encourage more reading, especially for the unmotivated or reluctant readers? Here's one answer: Singing!

Why sing? Well, first, it's fun. Psychologist Kate F. Hays (2014) reported that singing physically supports diaphragmatic breathing, which produces good sound and also gives the mind an oxygen boost and clears out carbon dioxide. These lead to a sense of relaxation and mental clarity. The act of choral and partner singing in the classroom also builds a sense of belonging and shared purpose. In this process, children are also developing prosody (expression) and automaticity of new vocabulary words!

Consider the lyrics to this traditional song, *You Are My Sunshine:*

You are my sunshine
My only sunshine
You make me happy
When skies are grey
You'll never know, dear
How much I love you
Please don't take my sunshine away

I'll always love you
And be there for you
I'll protect you from harm's way
'Cause I adore you
You're my dream come true
You're my beautiful sunshine

You are my sunshine
My only sunshine
You make me happy
When skies are grey
You'll never know dear
How much I love you
Please don't take my sunshine away

In a classroom, the teacher would model singing the song first to the children while following along to the words. Then, using repeated reading, the children would join in singing the song. The teacher might even consider playing a different version of the text and talking with children about how the different singing performances change the meaning or the way the reader feels.

Allington (1977) reported an alarming number of struggling readers in his study were only found to read on average 43 words in context per day. If a teacher and children read and sang the words in *You Are My Sunshine* twice, they would easily read 176 words — all while having fun!

Research has shown that singing improves both reading fluency and comprehension (Biggs et al., 2008; Iwaski et al., 2013). Biggs et al. (2008) reported that students in Grades 7 and 8 when singing for 20 minutes or more a day, demonstrated increased reading gains of 7 months.

Comprehension development through project-based learning

As many school districts across the country implement SOR-informed curricular programs, we have found that comprehension is often measured and determined by whether a child can answer questions correctly about the text read. From an artful and authentic approach to literacy instruction, this is not considered very engaging nor telling of a child's true text understanding.

Comprehension is the goal of all reading experiences (Young et al., 2022). Purposes for reading include insight, knowledge, inspiration, and enjoyment (Pearson, 2021; Young et al., 2022). No one has ever excitedly expressed that they read a text to answer multiple choice questions correctly.

As we consider artful approaches to reading, we think of ways to move beyond reducing comprehension to just skills and strategies and instead to think of project-based learning (PBL) tasks. PBL was established by John Dewey as a way to explore curiosity of the world around us. A child would consider a topic they are interested in understanding more deeply and, with guidance from the teacher, set out to explore this topic in literacy-rich ways from reading, writing, talking, and creating. In a recent study by Duke et al. (2021), second-grade achievement using PBL was compared to traditional social studies instruction. The results reported that the second graders who engaged in PBL learning showed more growth than the traditional instruction group in social studies and information text.

What would a PBL look like in action? We suggest starting with Tableau — an artful approach to building comprehension while text reading. The teacher would have the students read the text, and then working in small groups, each group would be assigned a scene to "paint" using just their bodies, demonstrating a "still life" or "living scene." Picture this in

action. Students meet with their small group to plan out their "living scene." They have to discuss their understanding of the scene. Ideas are negotiating, misconceptions are shared, and deeper understandings are built through this conversation process. When they finally decide on the scene, they present this to their other classmates. The other classmates then engage in dialogue about their interpretation of it while the members in the tableau remain frozen. Once a class consensus is reached, the members unfreeze and explain their own thinking and decision making.

Using Tableau as an artful approach to comprehension, we then consider comprehension as a process and not just the final product (Young et al., 2022). Students are asked to create meaning by orchestrating a scene. The other classmates are invited in on the meaning-making process by sharing their ideas and thoughts on the created scene. This kind of socializing and thought sharing is exactly the kind of artful approach that will motivate and engage students in comprehending texts.

Other PBL tasks might include creating a brochure, engaging in a poetry slam in readers theatre, or creating and delivering a speech to advocate for a specific need based on the text. In all instances, we encourage teachers not to limit comprehension to answering questions, but to find opportunities where students put ideas to authentic use that build on and contribute to their text understanding.

Closing Thoughts

We are educating people out of their creative capacities… I believe this passionately that if we do not grow into creativity, we grow out of it. Or rather, we get educated out of it.
— Sir Ken Robinson, educationalist

There are research-proven components to reading instruction that support the reading process. Some components are classified under SOR. But we fear that an SOR-only approach to reading will cause a decrease in creativity and critical thinking. Children in the United States, especially those in kindergarten through third grade, are becoming less creative (Kim, 2011).

We know that children need support in literacy development. We caution that SOR-informed instruction must not evolve into overly rigid schedules, scripted curricula, and test taking and test prep only. Rather, we want to consider educating the whole child to be a lifelong reader and critical thinker. To do this, we root instruction in the aesthetic, authentic, and creative approaches (Young et al., 2022). Following the science is important, but equally important are teachers with the autonomy to blend artful approaches to literacy instruction.

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About the Cover

Seven-year-old Aria's favorite book is *Quack's Red Boots* because Quack really likes his boots. For fun, Aria likes to go to the park and play with her friends. Aria plans to be a daycare teacher when she grows up. We can't wait to see what you do next, Aria!

Early Literacy Without Exclusion: Making the Case for Multilingual Students in Reading Recovery

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Addressing Common Questions and Clarifying Misconceptions About Reading Recovery for Multilingual Learners

Reading Recovery® is an early literacy intervention designed to support and accelerate the progress of first-grade students who are having difficulty learning to read. In this one-to-one program, a specially trained literacy teacher develops an individualized instructional plan based on a detailed analysis of early literacy assessment data. This individualized instructional plan is adjusted day by day, as the student progresses through a series of 30-minute daily lessons that can last 12 to 20 weeks. Each lesson includes reading and writing of continuous text and targeted phonics instruction using words in isolation. The goal of this intervention is to scaffold the student's progress in order to support the development of an effective self-extending processing system for reading that places the student back in the average reading group of their peers, so they can benefit from classroom instruction. Reading Recovery is a viable reading intervention for multilingual learners.

Supporting students who are multilingual

Educators sometimes wonder if Reading Recovery is suitable for students who are multilingual and at different stages of language development. The answer to this question is, "yes." *Multilingual children who come to school speaking any home language will have a preparation for literacy learning that is to be valued, whatever the prior language might be because it provides a strong foundation for literacy learning* (Clay, 2016).

Decades of research confirm that students who are multilingual benefit from Reading Recovery (Ashdown & Simic, 2000; Neal & Kelly, 1999; Gentile, 1997, Borman et al., 2020). In addition, it is important to consider that Reading Recovery should be available to first graders who are reading at the bottom 20 percent in order to benefit from the systemic effect of a comprehensive approach to early literacy intervention, regardless of language background. An additional component of a comprehensive literacy intervention system may also be Literacy Lessons,® a related intervention designed to address the needs of students who are still acquiring literacy in higher grades or who are multilingual learners. (See sidebar.)

Reading Recovery provides authentic interactions which "expand knowledge about any language process at every opportunity" (Clay, 2015a, p. 34). Those interactions include reading, writing, and speaking. Therefore, there are great advantages that stem from the one-to-one instructional setting that allow teachers to support language development. Reading Recovery is also available in Spanish through Descubriendo la Lectura (DLL) and in French through Intervention Préventive en lecture-écriture (IPLÉ). Students who are multilingual have benefited from these interventions in all three languages

Literacy Lessons is an intervention based on Reading Recovery theory and instruction for children reading in upper grades who have yet to reach an end of first-grade literacy proficiency and have been identified for special education services or who are multilingual. The daily, individualized lessons are taught by teachers who have completed graduate-level courses to be recognized as a teacher of Literacy Lessons. For further information visit https://myliteracycouncil.org/literacy-lessons-overview/

(Elzy et al., 2019). While not all students will return to the average reading group of their peers in 20 weeks, they make progress in reading and writing in the language of instruction.

The framework of a Reading Recovery lesson, coupled with individually designed instruction by a highly trained teacher, provides ample opportunities for students to expand all aspects of language — reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Research by Elzy et al. (2019) found that "Reading Recovery is an exceptional intervention for English learners, accelerating early literacy progress in ways comparable to native speakers across all domains" (p. 45).

What should be considered when selecting students who are multilingual for Reading Recovery?

Questions have once again arisen regarding whether students who are multilingual should be selected for Reading Recovery and, if so, when. Dr. Salli Forbes addressed this in her 2001 article, "Selecting English Language Learners for Reading Recovery," affirming that multilingual students are indeed appropriate candidates. If a student is able to understand the teacher's directions for *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Observation Survey; Clay, 2019), they are eligible for Reading Recovery (Clay, 2016). According to Clay, "as long as the child knows enough language to be able to engage with the tasks it can be predicted that [their] literacy achievement will be helped by Reading Recovery's approach in spite of low or zero entry scores" (Clay, 2015b, p. 279). While Observation Survey scores are used for the selection process (Clay 2019), they are not reliable predictors of whether there will be acceleration during the child's lesson series (Clay & Tuck, 1991).

Can the Observation Survey be used with learners who are multilingual?

Yes. The Observation Survey can be used with learners who are multilingual as long as they can follow the instructions and attempt at least some of the tasks, even if the responses are not yet correct (Clay, 2016). The survey's norming sample included students who are multilingual, supporting its validity and reliability for this population. Furthermore, learners who are multilingual and still growing in their language proficiency can benefit from Reading Recovery, DLL, or IPLÉ (Clay, 2016). While only responses in the language of the assessment are counted as correct, the in-depth analysis of the student's responses provides important information that is helpful in designing instruction.

The Observation Survey is available in English (Clay, 2019), Spanish (Instrumento de observación de los logros de la lecto-escritura inicial; Escamilla et al., 1996), and French (Sondage d'observation en lecture-écriture; Clay 2013), in North America. The directions for the assessment tasks match the language of the assessment. For example, the directions the teacher provides to the student when administering the Instrumento de observacion are given in Spanish. It is important to note that the assessments are not direct translations but have been reconstructed to account for the particular differences of each language. Students who are multilingual may be assessed in more than one language in order to provide a holistic picture of their early literacy knowledge. If Reading Recovery, DLL, or IPLÉ are available, school teams can decide the most appropriate intervention for the child. However, the language of intervention must match the language of literacy instruction in the classroom (Torres Elías, 2017). While teachers are encouraged to utilize information from other assessments (e.g., WIDA levels, 2020) to plan instruction, that data should not be used to exclude students from participating in the intervention.

How does the intervention align with classroom instruction?

Dorn et al. (2021) emphasize that "classroom instruction and interventions are viewed as reciprocal and generative processes involving collaboration among teachers. This collaboration ensures that students have opportunities to transfer their knowledge across multiple settings" (p. 56). For this reason, when a child receives classroom literacy instruction in English, it is important that the intervention also be delivered in English. The alignment of the instructional language provides consistency and massive opportunities to effectively transfer learning. In addition, this enables teachers to use common language and techniques, enhancing both classroom and intervention experiences.

Conclusion

Reading Recovery, DLL, and IPLÉ are powerful, research-based interventions that support students who are multilingual in accelerating

their literacy development. Through initial training and ongoing professional learning, educators develop expertise in early literacy teaching and learning, which allows them "to design a superbly sequenced series of lessons determined by the particular child's competencies, and make highly skilled decisions moment by moment" (Clay, 2016, p. 20). Regardless of their language background, Reading Recovery helps students grow into confident, independent readers and writers.

About the Authors

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Improvement Science at Work: Strengthening Teaching Decisions With the Record of Literacy Processing

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If there's one principle all members of the Reading Recovery® community adhere to, it is the importance of being tentative and flexible in our learning. Improvement science, an approach to systems change, has been an integral part of Reading Recovery's commitment to continuously learn and grow (Forbes et al., 2019). In 2017, a group of trainers read *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better* (Bryk et al., 2017). In subsequent years, members of the Reading Recovery community engaged in deep learning around improvement science, to examine issues within Reading Recovery and to help address two areas: 1. "The variation in student outcomes (and related variation including fidelity to standards, instructional strength, and implementation)," and 2. Growing and sustaining our work (Forbes et al., 2019, pp. 40–41).

For more information, read Forbes et al. (2019) and Lochmiller & Karnopp (2020) in previous issues of JRR.

In 2019, representatives of various roles within the Reading Recovery community convened at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to learn how improvement science might support Reading Recovery. Soon after, a leadership team was created to guide the work of improvement science. This group is known as the Hub and is made up of Reading Recovery community members, trainers, and teacher leaders. The Improvement Science Hub has engaged in numerous projects guided by our driver diagrams, theory of improvement, and these three questions stemming from Byrk et al. (2017):

1. What is the specific problem I am trying to solve?
2. What change might I introduce and why?
3. How will I know whether the change is actually an improvement? (p. 9)

It was determined that one of the problems to solve was how to minimize the variation in students' results. Using a causal system analysis process (Byrk et al., 2017, pp. 65–68), stakeholders contributed individual perspectives on problems for variation in results. These perspectives were organized to create a *"fishbone" diagram*, a visual representation of the cause and effects of an issue. From this, the Hub members created a *driver diagram* outlining a theory of improvement (Byrk et al., 2017, pp. 68–69). Our theory of improvement suggested that by focusing on change ideas in teacher decision making and literacy processing theory, we could minimize variability in results.

Through the driver diagram, we explored the second question: What change might I introduce and why? In improvement science, change ideas are trialed in PDSAs, or Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles. This process involves studying or planning for a change that will be implemented. The small change is first trialed on a small scale, and the results are studied. If the results are promising, further adjustments may be made, and the process begins again. The change idea may also be trialed with a larger group.

For Hub members to learn about the PDSA cycle as an improvement science tool, the team started with a simple change idea, modifying a standard work process. With professional learning as our typical way of working with teachers, it was important to try a new approach.

The first PDSA involved changing elements on the running record form. We wondered, could teacher expertise be improved by changing a form (i.e., without professional development)? Could this small change have a big impact?

The running record form is a tool to support instructional decision making. It documents a teacher's observations of a child's reading behaviors and the interpretation of those behaviors. Hub members predicted that improvements to the form would focus and support teachers in noticing patterns in the child's strategic behavior and lead to instructional priorities focused on strengthening a child's literacy processing.

From this segment of the driver diagram, our theory suggested that modifying the running record to focus on analysis and the teacher's response to a child's literacy processing would strengthen this instructional tool and lead to a bolstered instructional design (see Figure 1).

Trialing the Form

The Record of Literacy Processing went through six iterative trials. Each iteration provided positive data, which led to new questions and adjustments to the form. Table 1 offers an overview of timeframes, participants, data collected, and tools used for analysis. There was a slight interruption due to COVID-19. The table also captures how the use of the Record of Literacy Processing tool expanded across participants and locations.

Table 2 (see pages 38–40) includes the questions that directed the iteration's focus and the decisions that were made regarding the form based on studying the data. The highlights indicate the changes that were made.

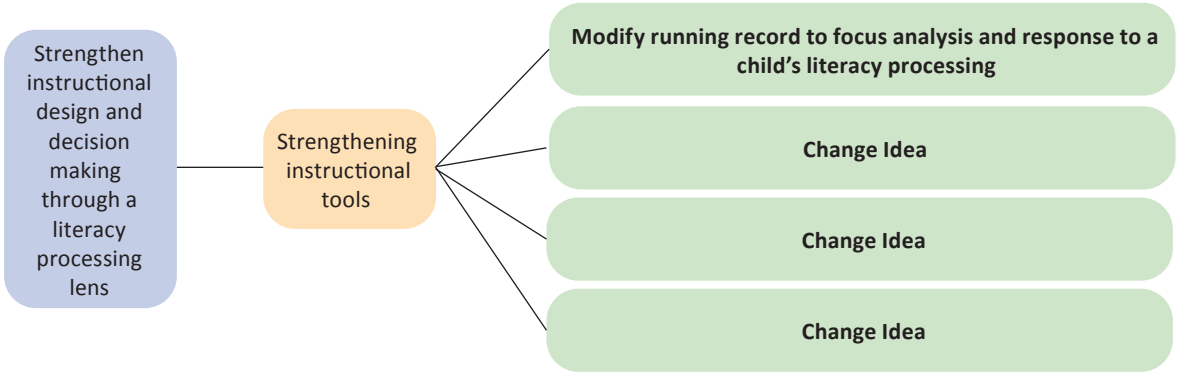
Methodology of the Final Iteration

Two-hundred-forty Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura teachers used the Record of Literacy Processing in its final form. To understand the effects of the form, the Hub created a survey for teacher leaders and teachers to complete within 2 weeks of initial use in the 2023–2024 school year.

The survey consisted of the following questions:

- In what state or province are you located?
- How long have you been a Descubriendo la Lectura, Literacy Lessons, or Reading Recovery teacher?
- When was the Record of Literacy Processing form introduced to you?
- Rate the form's usefulness to your teaching.
- Explain your rating.
- What is something the form helped you to attend to as compared to the typical running record form?
- Is the form helping?
- Is the form helping you better understand and/or focus on literacy processing theory? If so, in what ways?
- Tell us about your experience using the form.
- What suggestions or feedback do you have about the form?
- Is there anything else you want to tell us about the form?

Figure 1. Driver Diagram Segment to Test Theory of Improvements to Running Record Form



Fourteen teacher leaders and 153 teachers responded to the survey. To analyze the survey, we used the qualitative method of thematic analysis (Glesne, 2006) in which the data are searched for patterns, then classified and synthesized (p. 147) to create codes that allow for further analysis. Initially, Hub members analyzed the data separately to search for patterns. These patterns were discussed and refined before becoming codes:

1. Used literacy processing language or discussed analysis
2. Addressed planning for the next lesson/instruction
3. Ease of use and formatting
4. Commented on fluency

Each Hub member was assigned a code and returned to the data to find each instance in the data related to that code. We met again to discuss our findings; classifications were refined through discussion

Table 1. Overview of Timeframes, Participants, Data Collected, and Tools Used for Analysis in PDSA Iterations

PDSA Iteration	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5
Date/Time Frame	Nov/Dec 2019	Jan/Feb 2020	Oct/Nov 2020 & Spring 2021	January 2022	Sept-Dec 2022	Sept-May 2024
Participants	8 trained RR teachers, 4 UTCs/RIs, records of 1 student	Group 1: Same 8 trained RR teachers, 5 UTCs/RIs, records of 2 students each Group 2: 5 trained TLs, records of 1 or 2 students	Group 1: 8 trained TLs Group 2: Each TL selected 2 trained RR teachers, 7 UTCs/RIs.	40 teachers, 7 UTCs/RIs	2031 teachers (RR, DLL, and LL), 9 UTCs/RIs	The form was made available to all who wanted to use it during lessons with trainer support, per approval by NATG.
Data Collection	Conversation protocol, 1 record per teacher each week (24 records total)	Conversation protocol, 3 consecutive records for each student (48 records total) Process measures: accuracy rate, SC rate, text level	Conversation protocol, last 3 records collected and analyzed, Change Over Time in Text Level graph	Records for 2 students at 5, 10, and 15 weeks were collected and analyzed.	1 record submitted for each student at 5, 10, and 15 weeks Participating TLs scored the records with the checklist.	Survey sent to TLs and trainers regarding the use of the form
Data Analysis	3-point rubric, 2 reviewers for each record	Checklist for scoring each record	Simplified checklist for scoring records	Checklist	Collated and analyzed data based on checklist information	Responses were coded, and trends were identified.

KEY:
UTC = University Training Center
TL = Teacher Leader
RI = Regional Institute (Canada)
NATG = North American Trainers Group
RR = Reading Recovery
DLL = Descubriendo la Lectura
LL = Literacy Lessons

Table 2. Record of Questions and Changes for PDSA Iterations

PDSA 1.0

Question:
Will the reorganization of the running record form to highlight literacy processing behaviors increase the connection of the summary statement to the evidence of the child's literacy processing?

Changes to the form:

- Added — Literacy Processing Summary statement (e.g., based on evidence that the student monitors, searches, cross-checks, discovers, repeats, confirms, rereads, corrects, solves, makes multiple attempts, integrates sources of information)
- Added — Based on your analysis of this running record, what will you be teaching for tomorrow?
- Added — At the bottom of page 2: How did the reading sound? (pace, phrasing, intonation)
- Moved — To the bottom of the back page: Running Words, Accuracy Rate, and Self-Correction Ratio
- Removed — Easy, instructional, hard

Front of form:

Name:	Date:	Lesson #:

Literacy Processing Summary[1]**:** (e.g. based on evidence that the student monitors, searches, cross-checks, discovers, repeats, confirms, rereads, corrects, solves, makes multiple attempts, integrates sources of information)
Based on your analysis of this running record, what will you be teaching for tomorrow?

Back of form:

How did the reading sound? (pace, phrasing, intonation[2])		
Running Words	Accuracy Rate %	Self-correction Ratio 1:

continues ►

Table 2. Record of Questions and Changes for PDSA Iterations CONTINUED

PDSA 1.1

Question:
Will changing the language in the Summary box help coalesce teachers' observations into patterns of useful and problematic strategic activity?

Changes to the form:

- Moved — To bottom of side 1 and remains for additional iterations: Data (Running Words, Accuracy Rate, Self-Correction Ratio)

Name:	Date:	Lesson #:
How did the reading sound? (pace, phrasing, intonation[1]) Moved to the front of the form.		
Literacy Processing Summary: Summarize patterns of useful and problem strategic activity (e.g. monitors, searches, cross-checks, discovers, repeats, confirms, rereads, corrects, solves[2], makes multiple attempts, integrates sources of information) Added highlighted language.		
What will you be teaching for tomorrow? Shortened question.		

Running Words:	Accuracy Rate: % Moved to the front of the form.	Self-correction Ratio: 1:

PDSA 1.2

Question:
Will the teaching priorities align with the pattern of behavior?

Changes to the form:
None

PDSA 1.3

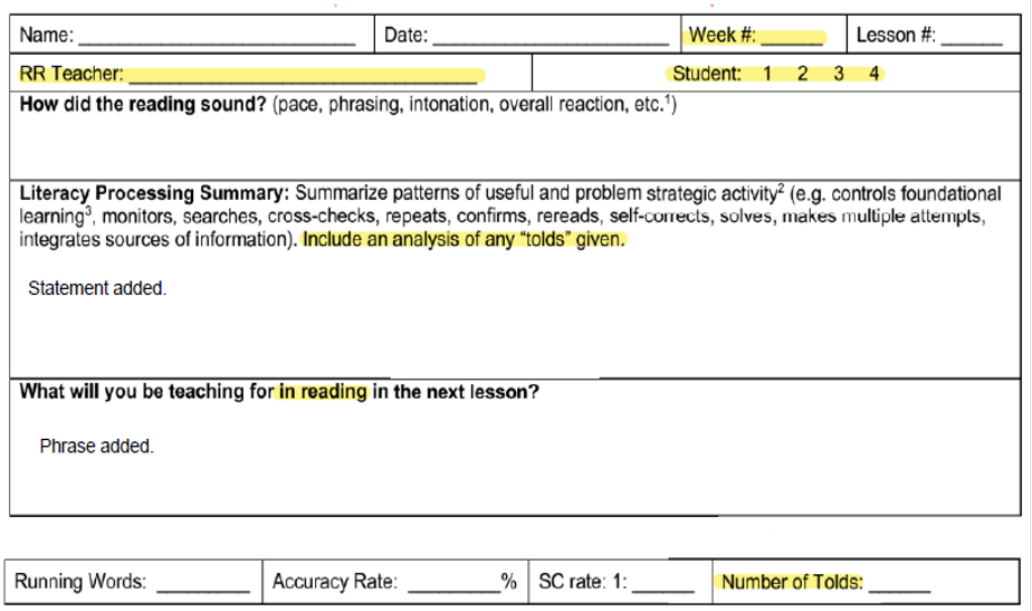
Questions:
Would adding prompts to the teaching statement support teachers in identifying a teaching priority based on processing? What PD might be needed for TLs and teachers?

Changes to the form:

Name: _____	Date: _____	Lesson #: _____	___ remote lesson ___ in school w/social distance ___ in school (per usual)

continues ►

Table 2. Record of Questions and Changes for PDSA Iterations CONTINUED

PDSA 1.4	Questions: Will the revised running record with specific language and scaffolding help teachers (either trained or in-training), from more locations, use the literacy processing theory language when describing patterns and establishing teaching priorities that reflect these patterns? Will teachers improve their use of LP language, their discernment of and articulation about student reseponse patterns, and their instructional response to patterns when using the revised running record? Changes made to the form:  Name: _____ Date: _____ Week #: _____ Lesson #: _____ RR Teacher: _____ Student: 1 2 3 4 **How did the reading sound?** (pace, phrasing, intonation, overall reaction, etc.[1]) **Literacy Processing Summary:** Summarize patterns of useful and problem strategic activity[2] (e.g. controls foundational learning[3], monitors, searches, cross-checks, repeats, confirms, rereads, self-corrects, solves, makes multiple attempts, integrates sources of information). Include an analysis of any "tolds" given. Statement added. **What will you be teaching for in reading in the next lesson?** Phrase added. Running Words: _____ Accuracy Rate: _____% SC rate: 1: _____ Number of Tolds: _____
PDSA 1.5	No changes made.

until we reached agreement. Next, each instance was further analyzed as to whether it was positive, negative, or neutral in terms of the Record of Literacy Processing form, and each code was quantified.

Discussion and Results

Table 3 displays the quantitative results of the codes, indicating the number of instances for each code, as well as the percentage of instances that were interpreted as positive, neutral, or negative comments. The first column lists the number of instances or the number of times the code was observed, represented by n = . For instance, n = 160 indicates there were 160 instances of the code, "Used Literacy processing language or discussed analysis."

As was stated, one goal in modifying the running record form was to support teachers in noticing students' patterns of literacy processing. As this table indicates, "Used literacy processing language or discussed analysis" was the most widely used code, with 160 instances, 90% of them positive. This means 144 comments from teachers indicated this form was helpful in focusing attention on literacy processing. One teacher wrote, "The suggestions given [in the form] remind me of specific strategic processing that I might not have considered when analyzing the first time." Another wrote, "It encourages me to think about foundational learning, confirming, making multiple attempts, and analyzing Tolds [when the teacher gives the child the word]." Finally, another teacher commented, "I like that it includes space for 'Tolds,' and it gives us a chance to dig deeper into the students' literacy processing. It gives teachers almost like a reminder to observe if the students are monitoring and how they

are monitoring." Each comment indicated nuanced thinking that moved beyond accuracy or a simple analysis of meaning, structural, and visual information, into analyzing a child's monitoring, searching, and making multiple attempts to problem solve.

Additionally, under the theme of literacy processing language or discussed analysis, there were 60 instances in which teachers commented that the new form supported them in thinking carefully about their "Tolds." For instance, one teacher wrote, "This form helped me attend to the types of "Tolds" I was giving this child." This kind of analysis is helpful because a Told can indicate an area where children lack strategies for problem solving. Through analyzing Tolds, a teacher can assist their student in developing ways of searching for information and developing flexible strategies to problem solve on their own (Fried, 2013).

A second stated goal of modifying the running record was to support teachers in planning, with students' literacy processing at the forefront. This goal was parsed into two codes — one to analyze when teachers discussed literacy processing, and one to analyze when they discussed planning. Hub members coded 59 comments as "Addressed planning for the next lesson/instruction," and found 98% of them to be positive and 2% of them to be neutral. For example, one teacher wrote, "[The Record of Literacy Processing] sets me up more effectively for my lesson planning and gets me thinking more about the specific information I gathered during the running record." Another teacher explicitly connected planning with thinking in complex ways about literacy processing. She wrote, "[The form] prompts me to assess a wider range of literacy skills. It allows me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' literacy abilities and areas needing improvement… This helps me tailor instruction more effectively to address individual needs." A third teacher wrote, "I have analyzed the running record much closer each day. I write the focus for the next day on my lesson plan sheet. This has helped me focus on what I need to teach next more efficiently." Each of these teachers identified the new form as a useful tool to connect analysis of students' literacy processing to planning for effective instruction. This indicated the form may support teachers in planning for targeted and explicit instruction, building on an individual child's literacy processing strengths and needs.

> The data from this study strongly suggest that the Record of Literacy Processing supports teachers in noticing patterns in a child's strategic behavior and leads to instructional priorities aimed at strengthening a child's literacy processing.

A code for "Ease of use and formatting" also emerged. These comments included any discussion from teachers about how easy or difficult they found the Record of Literacy Processing to use, if they liked or disliked the format, and suggestions for improvement. This code had 156 comments; 81% of the comments were positive, 17% were neutral, and 2% were negative. This was the second most widely used code. Examples of positive comments from teachers were, "It is clear and easy to use," and "Simple but useful." Some neutral comments cited logistical drawbacks, such as time limits. For instance, this teacher indicated the form was useful as a reflection tool but not realistic for daily use: "It was challenging to fully implement the form in my school and district's system. Intervention caseloads are too high, and prep time is minimal. So, while the form is very useful and helps promote deep reflection,

Table 3. Coding Categories

Category	*n* =	% Positive	% Neutral	% Negative
Used literacy processing language or discussed analysis	160	90	0	10
Addressed planning for the next lesson/instruction	59	98	2	0
Evaluated ease of use/formatting	156	81	17	2
Commented on fluency	50	96	2	2

it is not always possible to fill it out completely due to time constraints…" Other neutral comments were suggestions for formatting. For instance, "I wish there was a space to write if the level is easy, instructional, or hard." Finally, negative comments for this code indicated they did not like the formatting. For instance, "I did not like the running words, accuracy, and self-correct ratio being at the bottom of the page; I find it more convenient when they are listed closer to the top."

Finally, Hub members coded for comments that discussed fluency. There were 50 instances of the fluency code, with 96% of comments positive, 2% neutral, and 2% negative. In one example of a positive comment, a teacher wrote, "It is helpful to have all the areas of fluency on the form as a reminder as to the different components of fluency." The different components of fluency this person referenced from the form are "pace, phrasing, intonation, and overall reaction." In this instance, the teacher was commenting on a change in format (fluency and its components now listed on the form) as helpful in thinking holistically about fluency. Another teacher liked the addition of fluency on the new form, noting its connection to comprehension. She wrote, [I like that] "The new form has a place for fluency, which is important for readers as it is an aspect of comprehension that needs to be in place." Her claim that fluency is an aspect of comprehension is likely derived from research such as Rasinksi et al. (2020), who state that fluency allows a reader to shift from focusing their cognitive efforts from word recognition to comprehension, allowing meaning to become the focus of reading. Rasinksi et al. emphasize that readers have limited cognitive resources; by increasing fluency, those resources can be focused on comprehension. Because comprehension is the goal of reading, by supporting fluency, the form also supports comprehension.

Next Steps

The Hub entered this process wondering if it was possible to improve teacher expertise by making changes to a form. Could this small change have a big impact? After six iterations (over 6 years) of the Record of Literacy Processing, the Hub felt that the data demonstrated that the new form supported teachers in strengthening their focus on literacy processing. These data were shared with NATG and at the Teacher Leader Institute in 2024. Using the Hub Spread Plan document as guidance, the Hub worked with the NATG Executive Committee to determine the best route for disseminating the form so that it could be widespread across the Reading Recovery community. Trainers were asked to share the form and encourage teachers to use the Record of Literacy Processing during all lessons and assessments.

In the summer of 2025, the Hub created a press release to share the Record of Literacy Processing in English, Spanish, and French. The widespread distribution of this document demonstrates the vast potential of this work on the literacy community, as the Record of Literacy Processing can be used by any professional listening to a child's reading of text. We believe there are great possibilities when teachers use this form for daily instruction and assessment.

The Hub is encouraged by the support for the Record of Literacy Processing. As more and more educators use the form, the Hub will continue to welcome feedback from the community. One of the common phrases used in improvement science is that any endeavor is "possibly wrong, definitely incomplete." This spirit of continuous improvement aligns well with the concept of tentativeness and life-long learning embedded in Reading Recovery (Askew, as cited in Watson & Askew, 2009). The data from this study strongly suggest that the Record of Literacy Processing supports teachers in noticing patterns in a child's strategic behavior and leads to instructional priorities aimed at strengthening a child's literacy processing.

Finally, the Hub would like to thank the many Reading Recovery, Descubriendo la Lectura, and Intervention préventive en lecture-écriture teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers who worked on this project over the years, with special recognition going to former members of the Hub who were invaluable in this work.

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SCALE Up Your Students' Writing

Donita Shaw, Oklahoma State University

Have you ever wondered what exactly is meant by the term writing complexity and how you should measure it? During spring 2024, I, along with a team of doctoral students enrolled in the Reading Recovery® doctoral theory course, spent time attempting to answer that question. Our result was the creation of a measurable rating scale that we used to evaluate students' writing complexity for sentences, vocabulary, and student independence. Our manuscript published in *The Journal of Reading Recovery* (Shaw et al., 2024) details our research process and the tool we created, which we called Syntactic Composition and Authentic Language Evaluator (SCALE).

SCALE (see Appendix) uses a 1–6 rating, with 1 as low and 6 as high for each component (sentence structure and vocabulary). When scoring, a child may receive the same or different 1–6 score for each component. For sentence structure, many Reading Recovery children begin writing a simple declarative sentence with a subject, verb, and direct object that includes an adjective (score of 2). Throughout lessons they will use adverbial and prepositional phrases to provide more details (score of 3), and they will write compound sentences (score of 5 or 6). Hopefully, the first graders also learn various sentence types (imperative, interrogative, exclamatory). Likewise, their early attempts at writing vocabulary often include simple words that may include names of family and friends (score of 2 or 3). With scaffolding, their vocabulary complexity grows to include more book language (score of 4), topic-specific words (score of 5), as well as varied and emotive language (score of 6).

In this article, I present SCALE data voluntarily given by three Reading Recovery teachers plus their teacher leader on their second-round Reading Recovery students between March and May 2025. They used two (sentences, vocabulary) of the original three SCALE aspects to measure their students' growth once a month. In addition to the SCALE assessment data, teachers also reflected. My research question was, "How does teacher use of the SCALE writing assessment support student writing growth and their teaching reflection of writing?" In this manuscript, my goal is to analyze SCALE as an assessment of Reading Recovery student writing, but also as a potentially useful tool for teacher reflection that hopefully influences their teaching. I glean and share theoretical foundations, provide an overview of the research methodology, present the findings, then draw conclusions and implications for Reading Recovery teachers and future research.

Theoretical Foundations

I begin with seminal quotes from Marie Clay and the questions we asked at the start of our research project. Perhaps you've found yourself relating to some of these inquiries. In *Change Over Time*, Clay (2015b) wrote, "By the time children complete their early intervention lessons they need to have fluent control of writing sentences and be well-prepared to produce stories of greater length and quality back to their classrooms" (p. 26). In *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*, Clay (2016) wrote, "A Reading Recovery teacher needs to become a good judge of increasing complexity in the daily writing. It is not easy to capture what increasing the complexity of construction means" (p. 79). Clay provided an example of one student's change from simple to complex sentences between lessons 1 and 65, stressed the importance of teacher interaction to support the child's initiations towards complexity, and then referenced a model (Jack's profile) of successful progress in writing (2016, p. 201). At the conclusion of Jack's profile, Clay said, "It is a very complex task to track the changes, and the interchanges, that occur during writing!" (2016, p. 211).

Clay's quotes challenged our discussions about Reading Recovery students' writing. In our collaborative work we asked questions such as these:

- What is writing quality?
- Is quality comparable to complexity? (a term Clay used more often)
- Am I a good judge of writing complexity?
- What does writing complexity look like?

- Is complexity simply the difference between simple and compound sentences or is there more?
- What role does sentence type play in complexity?
- What about conjunctions, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions?
- Is complexity based on the child's independence in writing?
- What about the child's use of written vocabulary?
- How can we quantify differences in vocabulary?
- What role do known words play in complexity?

We also discussed Clay's (2016) phrase, "track the changes and interchanges" (p. 211), what that meant for us as educators, and how that tracking should look on our daily lesson records and documented over the 12–20 weeks of intervention. We also spent a lot of time discussing the relationship between reading and writing and its influence on complexity.

Clay (2016) described reading and writing reciprocity using analogies "having two hands" and "common ground." Much like each hand can work independently, there is also unity and strength when using two hands. Oftentimes we have a dominant hand, but both hands can complete many similar tasks. Likewise, the ground (or the basis) of reading and writing has commonalities in strategic activity. In *Literacy Lessons*, Clay (2016) mentioned reciprocity in six different sections. In *Change Over Time,* Clay (2015b) embedded reading and writing reciprocity throughout the book, outlined a possible progression of literacy processing for both reading and writing (Table 1, pp. 84–85) and often used descriptive terms for reciprocity like "extra power" (p. 9) and "two for one bargain" (p. 11). Educators who understand the connections between reading and writing can maximize the child's strategic efficiency by "linking invisible patterns of oral language with visible symbols" (2016, p. 5) and "lift" the child's processing. Having stated the importance of reciprocity, we now turn our minds to a child's processing of mental networks, followed by message composition and vocabulary because they shape how ideas are generated, structured, and expressed.

Networks

Learning is not an isolated task, and the brain works most efficiently when internal networks are linked. Initially, the brain networks may seem to work slowly in tasks such as forming letters, putting letters together to form words, learning directionality, and so forth. Even though students can't describe what is happening in their brain, Clay (2015a) said that "the constructive nature of the task in writing is probably more obvious to the young child" (p. 109). This quote implies the value of daily writing time. As the unseen internal networks strengthen, the brain speeds up and integrates new learning. For example, forming individual letters takes less attention, and more effort is put towards writing unknown words. Through active processing students use various sources of information. They reread and check their written message and correct their errors without prompting. They become more independent at controlling the task by keeping the message in memory, applying sound analysis when needed, quickly writing known words, and using what is known to write a new word. Their written text becomes increasingly complex and difficult over time.

Messages

The daily written message should be the child's ideas and words; however, "the message construction is a literacy task completed jointly with quality teaching interactions" (Clay, 2015b, p. 23). The teacher open-endedly invites the child to form a message through conversation. Oral language should be linked with writing (Clay, 2015b) and children's development in vocabulary and sentence patterns grow rapidly (Clay, 2015a). The teacher may guide the child's message to be expanded (Clay, 2016) and support the child to hold the message in his working memory. During the composition process, the child will parse the sentence, word-by-word, and use cognitive processing to assemble the message through strategies such as monitoring, rereading, and checking (Clay, 2016).

Vocabulary

Children rely on oral communication until they reach formal schooling. It is imperative that adults talk with a child and provide the child "many opportunities to hold a real conversation with a competent and flexible speaker of English" (Clay, 2015c, p. 31). Through conversation, children grow in their vocabulary knowledge. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) classified vocabulary in three tiers: general vocabulary,

specialized vocabulary, and technical vocabulary. Tier 1, general vocabulary, are everyday words, such as "mom," "play," "run," and "look." Tier 2, specialized vocabulary, are useful in multiple settings and may have varied meanings. Examples include "bat" (sports equipment/animal), "howled," "pretend," and "characters." Tier 3 is technical vocabulary connected to a specific discipline, such as "photosynthesis."

As children gain control over oral language they attempt to apply their spoken vocabulary to their writing. Robinson (1973; as cited in Clay, 2015b) found that a student's writing vocabulary—which is the number of words the student can write in a given time limit—was "the main predictor of early reading progress" (p. 65). Thus, a teacher's time spent building writing vocabulary is worthwhile. Students have words they know and can automatically write, words that are coming under control, and words they have never attempted to write before. A wise teacher will judiciously make choices on what words should be taken to sound or spelling boxes, which words should be mastered quickly, which words have generative aspects (Clay, 2015b), and which words the teacher should simply write for the child at a specific point in time.

In sum, Reading Recovery teachers should be a good judge of students' writing complexity. Theoretically, there is a connection between reading, writing, and oral language that influences the child's structure and vocabulary produced in their oral message and written message. Strategic processing occurs in the brain when students engage in reading and writing tasks.

Methodology

I have chosen a collective case study methodology for this research. "The case is a specific, complex, functioning thing" (Stake, 1995, p. 2). Features of a case study include being (a) particularistic, which is good for designing practical problems; (b) descriptive, which uses literary techniques to present the data; and (c) heuristic, which focuses on new insights and interpretation in a real-life context (Merriam, 1998). Since I am interested in understanding the "process" of teachers using the SCALE assessment to measure student growth and support their decision making, the case study methodology is particularly suitable (Merriam, 1998). Collective case study implies that several cases are presented, providing richer data interpretation than an individual case.

Participants

In this manuscript, there are a total of eight cases; each case is bound by one teacher and one Reading Recovery student with data from three lessons. Three Reading Recovery teachers and one Reading Recovery teacher leader (hereafter mentioned as the four teachers) at a midwestern school district each taught and submitted data for two first graders who received Reading Recovery second-round intervention spring 2025.

All four teachers were veteran teachers with 18, 25+, 35, and 36 years of experience. Specifically in Reading Recovery, one was in her training year while the other three teachers had 6, 13, and 15 years of experience teaching Reading Recovery. Three of the teachers held master's degrees.

A total of eight first graders participated in this study as they daily met their Reading Recovery teacher. One first grader was a girl and the remaining seven were boys. Since this was volunteer participation and I did not want to overwhelm the teachers, I asked the teachers to choose two of their four students to participate. There were no discriminating features for which students were included in this study. The teachers offered their student selection rationale by stating they were curious about some aspect. For example, perhaps the child was slow to accelerate, showed signs of dyslexia, showed greater strength as a reader than a writer, a child said writing was his favorite part of the lesson, and so forth.

Data sources

Teachers submitted three data sources: the child's writing samples, the SCALE assessment score [see Appendix], and reflections to a short questionnaire:

1. What did you learn about your student's writing from using SCALE?
2. How will that knowledge impact your teaching?
3. Feel free to share any additional thoughts, questions, or concerns.

The student writing samples, SCALE writing assessments, and teacher questionnaires for all eight students were scanned and uploaded

Table 1. Organization of Spreadsheet to Analyze Data

Teacher Name	Student Name	Month of Data Collection	Child's Composed Sentence	Sentence Structure Score	Vocabulary Score	What the Teacher Learned	What the Teacher Planned Next in Teaching	Other Notes or Thoughts from the Teacher

to a shared folder at the end of the school year. These three data sources (one of each) are called a data set and were collected at three points (March, April, May) during Round 2.

In addition to the three data sources, during the summer the teachers were asked to give their overall feedback via email. The teachers were asked to write a healthy paragraph about how they viewed the writing assessment, time spent using SCALE; feedback specific to the SCALE assessment for improvement; and any other pertinent information they wished to share.

Data collection

Second-round Reading Recovery lessons continued as expected. The teacher leader sent an email to all 32 district Reading Recovery teachers. Three teachers volunteered to participate in the research study. The teacher leader provided SCALE assessment training. The teachers were asked to collect data sets during each of these three time periods: March 3–7, April 7–11, and May 12–16. They could choose the day during the designated weeks that best suited their schedule to collect a writing sample from their two first graders. Immediately after collecting the writing sample, they were asked to complete the other two data sources: analyze the sample using the SCALE (see Appendix) and complete the short questionnaire. After the final May data were collected, the teachers were asked to upload to the shared folder each student's writing sample, scored SCALE assessment, and teacher questionnaire.

In July, the teachers were sent an email requesting their reflection about the use of the SCALE writing assessment.

Data analysis

Summer 2025, I took all the uploaded data and entered it into a spreadsheet for easy comparison in one document. Table 1 shows how the spreadsheet was organized.

Each student had three rows of data (one row per month of data collection). Because I was interested in each case, I printed and analyzed each child's three rows of data including the composed sentence, ratings in sentence structure and writing vocabulary, what the teacher learned and planned for next steps in teaching. This holistic analysis enabled me to create a picture of each case. After creating the picture summary of each case I looked across all eight cases to see if I could find some lasting lessons about student growth and the teachers' reflection of the SCALE.

Even though the summer teacher email I sent to obtain their "after the research study" perspective does not directly answer the research question, their responses provided valuable information. Therefore, at the end of the case study findings I include a summary paragraph from the teachers. I individually collected the emails and combined them into a Word document. I looked through the responses for themes to incorporate into the final section of the findings.

Findings

To answer my question, "How does teacher use of the SCALE writing assessment support student writing growth and their teaching reflection of writing?" I begin presenting each case with students' numerical SCALE data, selected writing samples, and teacher reflection from the questionnaire. In all cases, the teachers and Reading Recovery students are given pseudonyms. Please note that each child received a numerical score 1–6 rating on sentence structure and vocabulary. The sentence structure and vocabulary scores may be similar or different at each point in data collection. For example, a child may write a simple sentence with an adjective (sentence structure score of 2), but include an inflected ending (vocabulary score of 3). (See Appendix for the complete SCALE.)

See Table 2 for a brief review of scores 2–5 for sentence structure and vocabulary. Scores 2–5 were most common in the findings. See Appendix for complete descriptions of scores 1–6. Also, please note that both the sentence structure and vocabulary are listed under the same numerical score, but the child did not have to have both the same sentence structure (SS) and vocabulary (V) score.

Figure 1. Molly's Numerical Scores for Case #1

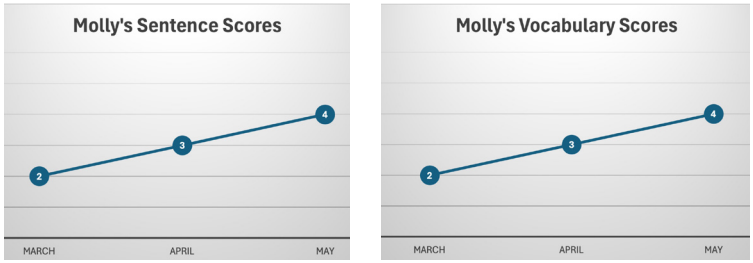
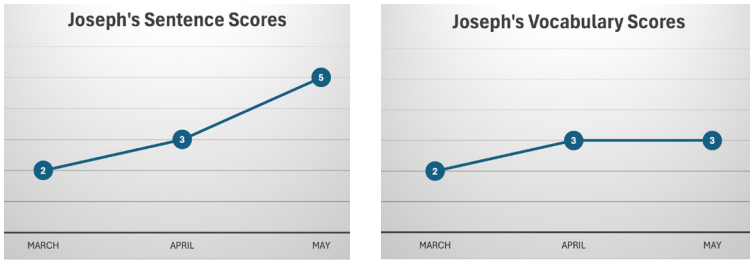


Figure 2. Joseph's Numerical Scores for Case #2



Case #1: Amy (Reading Recovery teacher) and Molly (first grader)

(See Figure 1.) Amy learned that Molly initially wrote simple sentences with familiar word choice (March), her sentence structure and vocabulary matched in score (April), and she grew consistently (May). Molly's first sentence was simple and then she wrote compound sentences for April and May. Her April example is, "My momma is the best because she is getting me a hover board." Amy attributed growth in complexity because she encouraged Molly, on most days, to use her reading text as a writing topic.

Case #2: Amy (Reading Recovery teacher) and Joseph (first grader)

(See Figure 2.) Regarding Joseph's initial sentence, "I like to work with my dad," Amy said that Joseph knew what a sentence is, and she would "love to see him add a few more details." Between March and April, Amy asked Joseph to write about a familiar text. Amy noted, "He is growing and learning how to construct better sentences. I want to encourage him to continue making sentences that are rich in vocabulary and meaning." By May, Joseph wrote a more meaningful sentence with a compound sentence structure: "Danny is a spy and he has funny eyebrows."

Table 2. Summary of Scores 2–5 for Sentence Structure and Vocabulary

Score of 2	
SS	Simple sentence with an adjective
V	Familiar, common words and simple high-frequency words
Score of 3	
SS	Simple sentence with adverbial and/or prepositional phrases
V	Vocabulary that includes inflected endings, words in a child's context
Score of 4	
SS	Simple sentence with exclamation or dialogue or question
V	Book proper nouns and book language
Score of 5	
SS	Compound sentence with adjectives, adverbial, or prepositional phrases
V	More topic-specific and descriptive words

Case #3: Naomi (Reading Recovery teacher) and Greg (first grader)

(See Figure 3.) In March, Greg wrote, "My fish has pretty scales." Naomi offered, "He is off to a good start. He wrote a good basic sentence. I will encourage him to add when or where info." To clarify her general terms of good/basic, Naomi said she learned Greg knew noun/verb agreement and used an adjective. In both April and May, Naomi said next teaching steps

Figure 3. Greg's Numerical Scores for Case #3

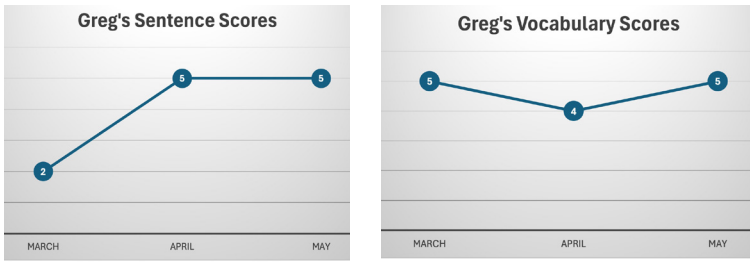


Figure 4. Kevin's Numerical Scores for Case #4

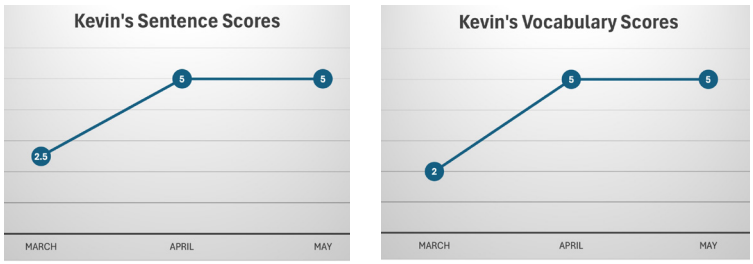
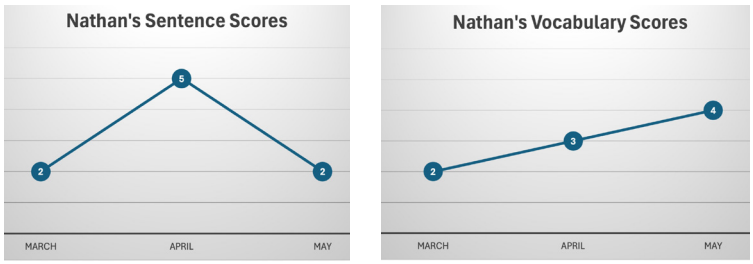


Figure 5. Nathan's Numerical Scores for Case #5



should "continue to discuss his ideas in depth before determining what to write." Naomi realized the power of the conversation and its impact on writing complexity. Greg's May writing sample showed that complexity with a compound sentence and topic-specific words; "There are over 1000 kinds of snakes and they lived before the dinosaurs."

Case #4: Naomi (Reading Recovery teacher) and Kevin (first grader)

(See Figure 4.) Naomi recognized that Kevin's oral language strength influenced his writing complexity. After analysis of his March sample, Naomi said she needed to encourage Kevin to generate sentences that do not start with "I." Even though Kevin's April writing began with "I," it was personalized and expressive because Kevin was motivated to write about video games: "I need to get rid of the End Crystals to defeat the Ender Dragon." Naomi's next step in teaching was to encourage Kevin to add information in his writing such as who, what, when, and where. By his final writing sample, Kevin included who, what, and where and he independently used a contraction.

Case #5: Julia (Reading Recovery teacher) and Nathan (first grader)

(See Figure 5.) Julia commented that Nathan's initial writing didn't match his oral language. She inferred Nathan resorted to a safe sentence because he saw the writing portion of the lesson as "hard work." Julia's next teaching goal was to "listen more closely to his conversation and attempt to 'capture' a sentence with more structure and vocabulary." By this Julia meant that the oral conversation before composition was rich with interesting details, yet Nathan only wanted to write simply. Her goal was for Nathan to include more interesting Tier 2 vocabulary words as well as elaborate to a more-complex sentence structure. By April, Nathan wrote, "My mom pretended to move and it blow my mind." Julia was celebrating Nathan's ability to connect two ideas and write a compound sentence, which happened because Julia encouraged more complexity during oral rehearsal. Nathan used the word "blow" both in oral and written language. At the end of lessons, Julia was disappointed: "Just as Nathan did during the reading portion of his lessons — he regressed to recording short, safe sentences and he became aware of my attempts to add more details to his writing and refused to do more than he felt like doing. He was happy with just doing enough to get by."

Case #6: Julia (Reading Recovery teacher) and Jackson (first grader)

(See Figure 6.) Jackson made steady progress for both sentence structure and vocabulary. In his initial sentence, "They drilled something into me." Julia said Jackson used the correct verb tense both in oral rehearsal and recording. In April, Julia again noted verb tense: "I realized that Jackson was using appropriated past tense when he easily produced "ran" instead of saying "runned" as he had been saying earlier in RAK and early lessons." Her next step in teaching was to reteach a word work lesson demonstrating the three sounds of the suffix -ed. Julia used magnetic letters -ed to have Jackson build past tense "look," "play," "pat." Then she gave Jackson the word "run." Julia explained some words don't need -ed, such as "runned." She followed up with the word "eat/eated." Julia reemphasized the role that -ed makes past tense, but we have to use our ear to know if -ed makes the word sound right. By May, Julia saw Jackson's writing reflect his reading as he included where/why details and recorded complete thoughts with a conjunction: "We pulled weeds from Jason's garden so we can make my mom happy."

Figure 6. Jackson's Numerical Scores for Case #6

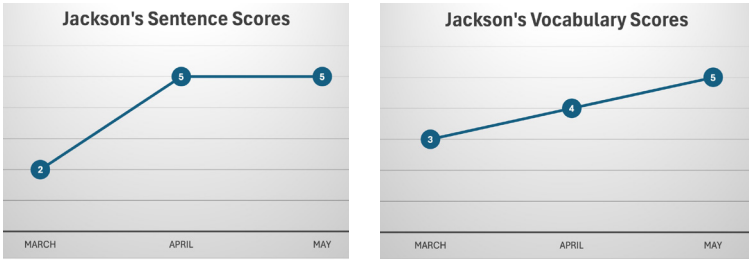


Figure 7. Caleb's Numerical Scores for Case #7

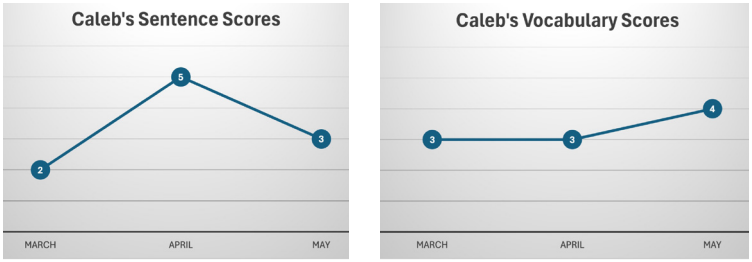
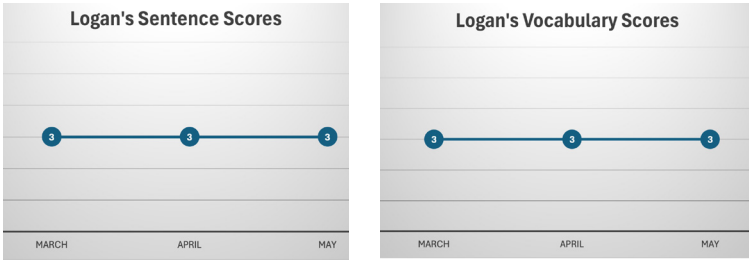


Figure 8. Logan's Numerical Scores for Case #8



Case #7: Helen (Reading Recovery teacher) and Caleb (first grader)

(See Figure 7.) In March, Helen learned that Caleb used text character names in simple sentences. For next teaching, Helen wrote, "I am interested to see how his messages change if I adjust my prompts to ask for more info like, 'And then what?'" By April Caleb wrote a message that included adverbial/prepositional phrases: "The puppy chewed on the pages in the book." Helen questioned, "I wonder if his vocabulary will increase in complexity with more opportunities to write about the books he is reading, including nonfiction texts." By May, Helen realized Caleb used more complex vocabulary (e.g. "a big mess with paint)" and she needed to give him opportunities to try different sentence types.

Case #8: Helen (Reading Recovery teacher) and Logan (first grader)

(See Figure 8.) Logan's writing, by numerical indication, remained very similar over time. After his March writing (Gus got stuck outside), Helen planned ways to prompt him for details and stated, "getting him to talk more may help." By April, Helen wrote, "[Using the SCALE] let me know that I really need to work on getting him to say more because this sample is very similar to the first one." Logan's final sentence, "I

When Clay said a wise teacher would be able to discern writing complexity, she didn't give us more specific language (such as including parts of speech or varying sentence structures and types). The SCALE is to support Reading Recovery teachers to be a good judge of writing complexity (Clay, 2016).

went hiking with my cousin when I was camping," showed more complexity and detail. Helen noted she wanted to score the writing higher, but his sentence didn't fit the next category of compound sentences. Helen's final goal was to have him read nonfiction books to practice more challenging vocabulary.

Summary Across Cases

I have chosen collective case study, and, in this section, I draw together some major findings across the individual cases. "How does teacher use of the SCALE writing assessment support student writing growth and their teaching reflection of writing?" Using the research question, I present findings based on the two parts: student writing growth and teacher reflection.

Student growth

First, let's look at numerical data for sentence structure. Most first graders initially scored a 2 (simple sentence structure with an adjective) and grew to a 5 (compound sentence with adjective or adverbial/prepositional phrase) at some point, even if they regressed to a lower score in May. Writing complexity varies for several reasons, including personal student or teacher factors, as well as factors such as time/day. So, it is expected to see a range of scores and fluctuations, especially when we only took three samples. Further, end-of-lessons/end-of-school-year attitudes may have influenced first graders' May writing complexity. We can conclude, with teacher support, the first graders grew in their ability to be more descriptive through adjectives, adverbial and/or prepositional phrases, and the children were able to compose and record compound sentences. That said, all 24 writing samples were declarative sentences, and additional variety in sentence type (imperative, interrogative, and exclamatory) was missing from the samples.

Now let's look at student vocabulary growth as evidenced with numerical data. Except for Logan, first graders showed improvements from initially relying on familiar common words (rating of 2), using common words with a proper noun (rating of 3) to recording more book language (rating of 4) or topic-specific words (rating of 5). It seemed vocabulary ratings varied more than sentence structure, which could be because sentence structure has predictability (simple versus compound, and the inclusion of descriptors and phrases) and with teacher prompting, a child's simple sentence idea can be expanded. In comparison, vocabulary may be more subjective and dependent on the child's oral language. Naomi noted both of her students had "excellent oral vocabulary" and this strength showed in their writing. Julia mentioned the importance of having the child "converse and rehearse" before writing. Also, she commented that Nathan wrote the way he talks. Helen stated Logan's simple sentences "seem to match his oral language so getting him to talk more may help." As evidenced, teachers put forth reflective effort to grow their students' vocabulary.

Reflections on teaching

As I read through their notes, I saw a pattern for each teacher. Amy encouraged students to write their story based on their reading and to grow complexity with sentence details and rich vocabulary. Naomi's reflection always included terminology directly from SCALE. Naomi's two teaching foci supported students adding details (where/when/who/what/why) and the importance of a deep conversation before writing. Similarly, Julia paralleled Naomi's idea but differentiated between two connected ideas: "listen more closely to his conversation and attempt to capture a sentence with more structure and vocabulary" and ensure oral rehearsal before recording ideas. Julia was the only teacher who specifically connected the word work portion of the lesson to the child's writing. Helen had three foci, and they differed from the others. First, she spoke about her prompting, specifically one prompt (And then what?) to expand the child's writing. Like Amy who mentioned including story books as a writing topic, Helen differed in her focus on nonfiction text. Finally, Helen also realized her students'

writing was comprised of declarative sentences, and she needed to give opportunities for additional sentence types.

In summary, student writing complexity growth was expected and documented through a visual score. Teachers judged growth by sentence structure (simple, compound), sentence type (declarative, etc.), descriptors (adjectives, adverbial and/or prepositional phrases) and written vocabulary (e.g. book language and topic specific words). Also, four themes arose from teachers' reflections. First, teachers need to focus on oral conversation in various ways: listening to students, supporting students' idea generation, increasing students' oral vocabulary, orally rehearsing students' composition, and prompting students. Second, teachers should have students write about their reading text (including nonfiction) to expand their writing complexity. Third, teachers should consider connecting the child's word work to writing (repeating a word work lesson is okay). Finally, teachers should look over their students' writing samples for sentence types. If only one sentence type (e.g. declarative) is consistently used, teachers can intentionally teach children to write a variety of sentence types.

Email teacher perspective

I would like to share some additional comments the teachers gave at the end of the research project. All four teachers said that SCALE was an easy assessment to use. It took them initially about 10–15 minutes to evaluate each student's writing sample as they had to study the SCALE indicators. However, they said, by May, they were able to move through the SCALE indicators more efficiently. Julia offered some great formatting suggestions for the SCALE that will make it more teacher friendly. (See discussion.)

They also said the time evaluating writing was worthwhile because it helped them think more about their teaching of writing in relation to reading. Amy, who was in her Reading Recovery training year, said that she really liked using the writing assessment because it gave her new valuable information to consider that she had never contemplated. For example, she had previously thought about structure, spacing, capitals, and punctuation use, but she never thought about vocabulary. Julia said she found evaluating student writing with the SCALE "to be a valuable way to slow down my thinking and look for opportunities to accelerate my student's writing growth and attempt to make it match their reading growth."

Discussion

This study has attempted to show how a writing scale can illustrate student writing growth and support teacher reflection that hopefully influences teaching. I have three take-aways for Reading Recovery teachers and teacher leaders:

- Have a system for writing.
- The SCALE is an in-progress tool.
- Connect writing to reading.

First, if you have a system for analyzing student writing that is working well, please continue to use that system. However, if you are not systematically analyzing your students' writing and find the SCALE indicators of sentence structure and vocabulary helpful, then consider using the tool to periodically measure growth numerically and/or reflectively. When Clay said a wise teacher would be able to discern writing complexity, she didn't give us more specific language (such as including parts of speech or varying sentence structures and types). The SCALE is to support Reading Recovery teachers to be a good judge of writing complexity (Clay, 2016). As teacher data showed, the specific sentence and vocabulary descriptors indicate the SCALE may be a helpful tool for teacher reflection. Further, across a district the SCALE provides specific terminology for all the teachers to commonly use as they discuss student writing.

Second, please know the SCALE is a working document. The purpose of this research study allowed teachers to try the SCALE and use it reflectively. In my analysis of the student

> The teacher leader can provide initial training, have the teachers use the tool and come back together to reevaluate their specific ratings on a writing sample. Also, the teacher leader can provide support for how the teachers can reflectively use the collected SCALE data to inform their teaching.

numerical data scoring their writing samples, I would have changed a few of the teachers' ratings for either sentences or vocabulary. This brings two thoughts to mind. First, the numerical rating is much less important than teaching and teacher reflection. Like most tools, there can be variation over a "rating." Also, there should be ongoing SCALE teacher training. The teacher leader can provide initial training, have the teachers use the tool and come back together to reevaluate their specific ratings on a writing sample. Also, the teacher leader can provide support for how the teachers can reflectively use the collected SCALE data to inform their teaching.

The SCALE, as a working document, can be adapted and changed for your district as needed. For example, Helen's comment that Logan's message should be scored higher but didn't fit the next category is one indication that adjustments can and will need to be made. When we created the SCALE, we used a 6-point rating, but perhaps there should be more ratings (such as an 8 or 9 rating scale) with more specificity in the indicators to represent growing complexity. Based on the data gathered spring 2025, I now suggest adding another rating row for simple sentences that show greater nuances, rather than jumping into a compound sentence for a rating of 5. Also, since the 24 samples only included declarative sentences, the ratings could be reworked to differentiate sentence types. Perhaps the column "sentence structure" should focus solely on simple and compound sentences with adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions. Then a different column can focus on "sentence type" (declarative, imperative, interrogative, and exclamatory). Julia suggested adding a rating column on the right side of vocabulary (currently the rating is only on the left side by sentence structure). Julia further recommended a box at the top or bottom to record both sentence structure (SS) and vocabulary (V) scores so the teacher can quickly look back and compare scores over time. A key take-away is that the SCALE is a working document, trialed on a very small scale, and has potential to be revised by your Reading Recovery teachers. Much like the purpose and use of a daily running record, there is value in having a consistent writing tool for teacher reflection. The SCALE can show specifically how students' writing changes over time in greater length and complexity (Clay, 2015b).

Third, the teaching of reading and writing should be connected throughout lessons and a writing assessment tool can facilitate that connection. The idea of linking reading and writing is not new. However, more teaching awareness about writing complexity can strengthen that relationship and make the connection more intentional and explicit to our students. Since its inception, the running record has afforded insights into students' strategic processing during reading. It has also provided evidence of reading growth. Across the districts I know, writing assessment has primarily been recorded as the number of known vocabulary words each week. Now, the SCALE offers one more possibility for an intentional evaluation of writing that relates to and supports reading. SCALE does not take long to use; teachers become more efficient at analyzing their student writing over time. Teachers also really liked the two reflection questions (What did you learn about your student's writing from using SCALE? How will that knowledge impact your teaching?). These helped them think about the importance of oral conversation, using reading text as a writing topic, and integration across the lesson. Julia summed up the reading-writing connection:

> Understanding the importance of the reciprocity between reading and writing makes daily student analysis imperative! The running record provides the teacher with a daily tool while using the SCALE and [two] follow-up questions provides a process for taking a deeper dive into writing over a period of time since writing development tends to progress at a slower rate than reading growth.

As with all research, this study has its limitations. I did not focus on teacher interviews, which would get more in-depth into their thinking. Also, I did not collect teachers' daily lesson plans and the students' working pages in their writing books, which would have enabled rich data. An additional limitation is the fact that only a select number of teachers and students participated so the findings are not generalizable. In sum, with limitations in data for both the number of participants and data sources, there are possible avenues for future research. These

include an analysis of how Reading Recovery districts currently score their students' writing to see what is currently being used to measure complexity. Increasing the sample size of participants and extending the timeline, such as first-round students, also are some ways to further writing complexity research. Additionally, there are great opportunities for analyzing teacher's lesson plan/notetaking as well as in-the-moment observation of teacher and student interchanges during the writing portion of the lesson as Clay (2016) emphasized the need for capturing quality teaching interactions and interchanges during writing.

Conclusion

The goal of this research study has been to show how the SCALE writing assessment can support student growth in sentence structure and vocabulary. It also provided evidence that teacher reflection prompts instructional next steps. With recommendations for future SCALE tool revision and research, the study shows potential for a writing tool to assist Reading Recovery teachers and teacher leaders to consistently and systematically analyze their students' writing changes over time and purposefully inform instruction.

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About the Author

Donita Shaw is a professor of literacy education at Oklahoma State University and was trained in Reading Recovery 2022–2023. She has over 30 years experience as a reading specialist and enjoys teaching children to become proficient in literacy as well as to love reading and writing.

Author's Note:

The original SCALE assessment includes three aspects to measure student growth: Sentence Structure, Vocabulary, and Independence. For reader convenience, the full assessment is included in the Appendix on the following pages. Only the first two aspects—Sentence Structure and Vocabulary—are the focus for this article. For more information on the SCALE assessment, email donita.shaw@okstate.edu

Appendix: Syntactic Composition and Authentic Language Evaluator (SCALE)

Scale	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Independence
1	Shows an awareness of sentence parts including noun/verb agreement. Example: I like pizza.	Records words of personal significance, such as their own name or those of family members. Example: My mom is Ann.	The student learns to compose his own message. The student needs intensive scaffolding from the teacher (e.g., filling in the word, sound boxes, using familiar text, analogies.). Student is learning to form letters and/or hears some phonemes (in any position) in the word.
2	Simple sentence(s) that are imperative or declarative. The sentence includes adjectives. Example: Jasper loves tuna fish.	Uses familiar, common words (e.g., like, play, went and 1-, 2-, and 3-letter high-frequency words (e.g., I, my, to, the, a, see, me). Use of Tier 1 vocabulary and may include a story character. Example: I will buy a horse.	The student composes his message. The student independently writes common simple high-frequency words (e.g.., it, the, like, go, my, go, play, etc.). For unknown words, the student writes most consonants in sequential order. The teacher scaffolds (e.g., sound boxes, analogies) many words in the message.
3	Sentence(s) use simple declarative or imperative that includes adverbial phrases and/or prepositional phrases. Example: Louna chewed my charger to my hoverboard.	Use of words particular to the child's cultural context/background knowledge, may include proper nouns. May include Tier 1 vocabulary altered with inflectional endings, such as playing, plays, looking, looks, etc. Example: Danny was looking for Abby but Abby was looking for Danny.	The student independently composes a message. The student independently writes high-frequency known words (e.g., come, have, went) and other known-to-student words; may also include words of personal importance to the student. Student understands how to use phonological analysis with some independence. Attempts some regular orthographic patterns such as CBC or CVCe. The teacher scaffolds (e.g., filling in the word, sound/letter boxes, using a familiar text, using analogies) for the unknown.

Appendix continues

Appendix: Syntactic Composition and Authentic Language Evaluator (SCALE) — CONTINUED

Scale	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Independence
4	Uses simple sentence(s) that is interrogative and/or exclamatory. OR Declarative sentences include dialogue and/or quotations. Example: Do you like cheese pizza?	Use of Tier 2 vocabulary with "book language" (e.g., howled, ignore) and "book proper nouns." May use past tense such as swam for swim (more than just adding an -ed). Example: Bella ate dad's pizza and she got in big, big trouble.	The student independently composes a varied message (not the same structure as previous day). The student demonstrates increased use of regular orthographic patterns. Words may have digraphs and blends or familiar vowel teams (ai, ee, oy, etc.). Attempts use of inflectional endings (ed, ing, s). If incorrect, plausible alternatives using phonological analysis and breaking word into chunks are attempted. The teacher scaffolds (e.g., filling in the word, sound/letter boxes, using a familiar text, using analogies) for unknown parts or unfamiliar words.
5	Compound sentence(s) that is imperative and/or declarative with appropriate conjunctions (e.g., and, but, then, because). Uses adjectives and/or adverbial and/or prepositional phrases. Example: My dad broke his motorcycle because a lady crashed into him on purpose.	Uses more descriptive Tier 2 vocabulary, may include topic-specific words (e.g., story about going to the zoo might include animal names, descriptors, behaviors). Example: Liz howled every single time she wanted her way.	Student composes longer, more complex message. Independently uses phonological analysis, breaks words into chunks, and takes part of known to solve unknown. Uses common orthographic patterns. Uses inflectional endings Attempts spelling of more complex common words (their/there, where/there, light, etc.) Limited teacher scaffolds (e.g., filling in the word, letter boxes, using a familiar text, using analogies) for the unknown, irregular spelling patterns, and proper nouns.
6	Compound sentence that is interrogative and/or exclamatory with a appropriate conjunction (e.g., and but, then). OR Declarative sentence may include dialogue and/or quotations. OR Writes more than one sentence that includes a variety of sentence structures: simple, compound, or complex. Example: I went skating at wheels and thrills in Owasso and it was so much fun!	Demonstrates a variety of Tier 2 vocabulary choices. Includes emotive language. Example: My sister stumbles across an arachnid on the sidewalk and let out a terrified screech!	Student independently composes message with length, complexity, and variety (across days). Independent use of multisyllable words (e.g., birthday, breakfast). Uses known to solve unknown. Independent use of some irregular spelling patterns (light, cough, brought). Attempts to use more difficult spelling rules (hope/hoping, skip/skipping, fly/flies, etc.). Teacher provides minimal, if any, scaffolding.

President's Message

Shaping a More Literate Future

LCNA President Stephanie Smyka

It's an honor to serve as the first president of the Literacy Council of North America — and what an exciting moment to begin this journey together! As we move forward under our new name and shared vision, I'm filled with optimism about the future of literacy education and the incredible work we'll do as a community.

Our new name, the Literacy Council of North America, reflects both where we've come from and where we're headed. It honors our strong foundation while embracing a broader mission — one that continues to support educators and children across all literacy contexts. Leading LCNA through this next chapter is a privilege I take to heart.

Throughout this transition and the year ahead, I look forward to collaborating with our members — each of you who makes literacy learning possible every day. Your expertise, creativity, and commitment to meeting each child's needs are what define this organization. Together, we'll continue to elevate teacher knowledge, celebrate student success, and advocate for responsive literacy instruction that changes lives.

As we move forward under our new name and shared vision, I'm filled with optimism about the future of literacy education and the incredible work we'll do as a community.

And of course, I can't wait for LitCon '26! More than a conference, LitCon feels like a homecoming — a place where literacy leaders, educators, and advocates reconnect, recharge, and reignite their passion for teaching. This year's fully virtual format makes it easier than ever to join the experience: a full month of high-quality professional development, accessible from anywhere — no travel costs, no sub plans, no stress. Just time to learn, reflect, and grow alongside peers who share your dedication to literacy.

Thank you for being part of this community and for the important work you do every single day. Together, we're shaping a brighter, more literate future for all learners, and I'm thrilled to be on this journey with you.

Executive Director's Message

A Bold New Chapter for Literacy

How your professional association is embracing a shared vision for the future

LCNA Executive Director Billy Molasso

If you've been part of our community for a while, you know how deeply the Reading Recovery Council of North America believes in the power of literacy to change lives. For more than four decades, we've stood shoulder to shoulder with educators who do whatever it takes to help children become confident readers and writers.

I'm thrilled to share something that feels both exciting and deeply right: We have a new name, **Literacy Council of North America (LCNA)**, and a bold new vision for the future.

This change is so much more than a new logo or letterhead. It's a reflection of who we've become — a community that's grown beyond a single program. Our members now include not just Reading Recovery, Literacy Lessons, DLL, and IPLÉ teachers, but also classroom teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators, all united by a shared belief in the power of literacy to open doors for every child.

> This change is more than a new name — it's a reflection of who we are, who we serve, and what we believe about literacy for every child.

Why Now?

Over the past few years, I've heard from countless educators who share the same message: Literacy is complex, it's evolving, and it takes all of us. That's the truth that guided this change.

We wanted a name that reflects the strength of our collective work — a name that honors our history while embracing the future of literacy in every form it takes.

What This Moment Represents For Us

Collective strength
Literacy success doesn't happen in isolation. It's built through collaboration — across classrooms, across grade levels, across roles.

A broader view of literacy
Children today are reading, writing, and communicating in more ways than ever before — digitally, visually, orally, and on paper. Our understanding must reflect that reality.

Growth with gratitude
We're carrying forward the pioneering spirit of Dr. Marie Clay, who reminded us, *"If a child is not learning the way you are teaching, then you must teach in the way the child learns."* That philosophy continues to guide every decision we make.

Looking Ahead

As the Literacy Council of North America, our mission remains beautifully simple: to empower educators, celebrate learners, and ensure that every child has access to the life-changing power of literacy.

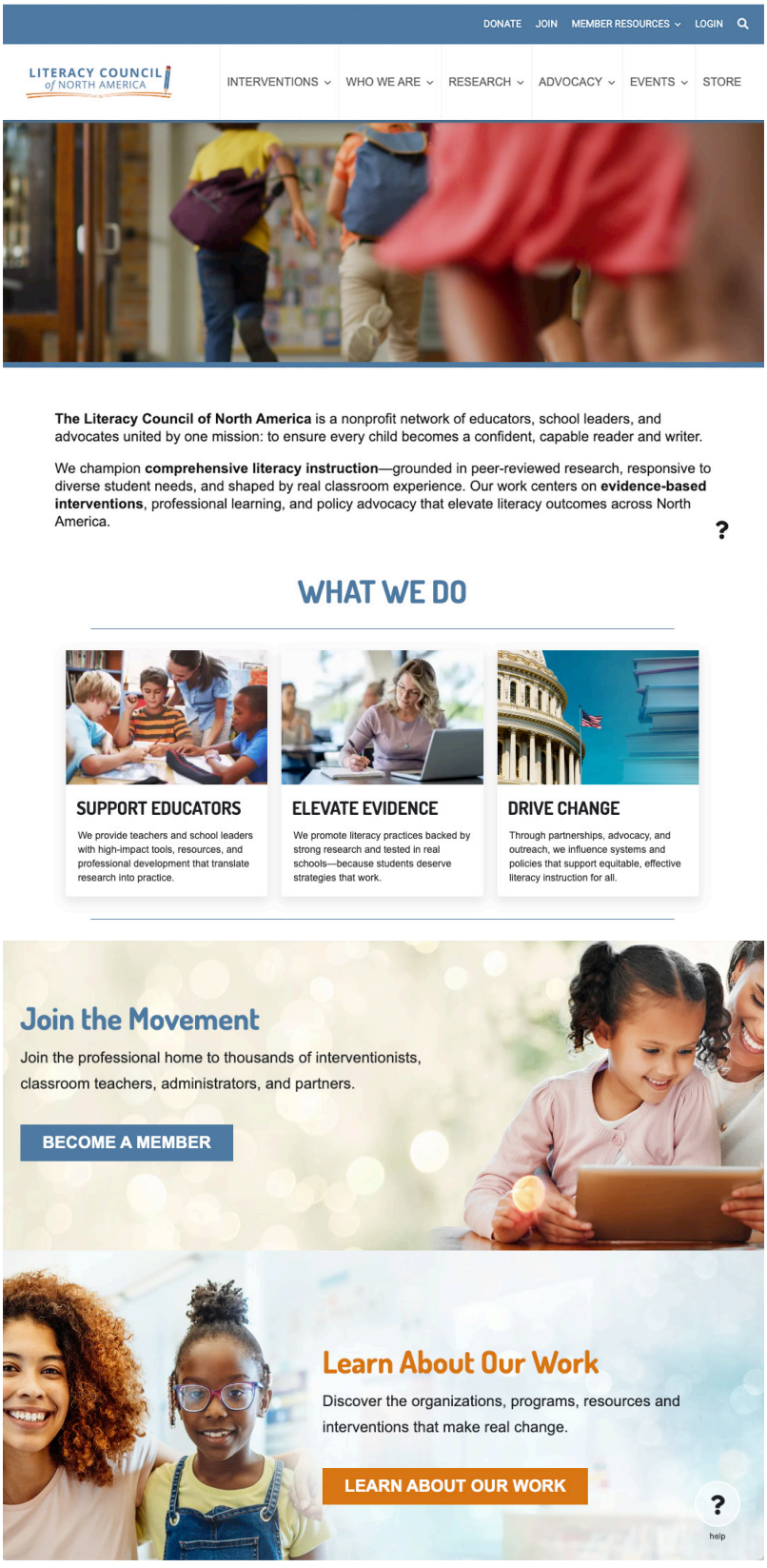
Yes, our new name comes with many changes, from a new logo, to social media, to the brand new myliteracycouncil.org. But the heart of our work—the community of passionate, reflective educators who never stop learning—that remains unchanged.

We'll continue to

- offer **professional learning grounded in research and responsive practice**,
- **advocate** for equitable literacy instruction for all students,
- build a **diverse, supportive network** of educators committed to doing what's right for kids, and
- **shine a light** on stories of literacy growth and resilience happening every day in classrooms and intervention rooms across North America.

This moment feels like both a celebration and a promise — a promise to keep growing, learning, and leading together. I couldn't be more proud of how far we've come, or more inspired by where we're headed, the members we serve, and the students we impact.

The new myliteracycouncil.org website reflects our commitment to honor our history while embracing the future of literacy.



The Last Word

Our readers say The Last Word column in *The Journal of Reading Recovery* is one of their favorite things to read. **We need more of your great Reading Recovery stories**. Please share in an email to vfox@readingrecovery.org.

Jane Montgomery, retired New York City teacher leader, shares an end-of-year gift received she received from one of her students

Devon made accelerated gains and completed his Reading Recovery lessons some time ago. I had been checking in on him but in recent weeks, due to scheduling, we had not seen one another. Last week after lunch, I heard a knock on the office door. I opened the door, and there was Devon.

Devon: Hello Ms. Montgomery, I came to say "Hi."

Me: Hi Devon, how nice to see you. How are you?

Devon: Good. (pause) Ms. Montgomery, I have a good idea ...

Me: What's that Devon? (pause as I wait)

Devon: (looks me squarely in the eyes and says with command) Let's read some books.

And then we did — several!

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