



STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

AN INTRODUCTION

For the Implementation
of Reading Recovery
in Europe



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CONTENTS

Contents	2
Standards & Guidelines for the Implementation of Reading Recovery in Europe.....	3
An Introduction to Reading Recovery	4
Key Features of Reading Recovery	5
Structure of Reading Recovery in Europe	5
A Brief History of Reading Recovery in Europe	6
Register of Reading Recovery Professionals in Europe	7
Reading Recovery Network Group	7
Coordination Across Europe	8

STANDARDS & GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF READING RECOVERY IN EUROPE

Standards & Guidelines are intended to inform and support those who are responsible for the establishment and maintenance of Reading Recovery implementation in an authority, board, or district.

Standards are essential for assuring that children receive quality services for children that are based upon research into the most effective practices. It is the role of Reading Recovery National Leaders to monitor implementations and administer the trademark.

Guidelines draw upon underlying rationales, which are understood and applied by Reading Recovery teachers, Teacher Leaders, and National Leaders. Adherence to these guidelines will support those implementing Reading Recovery in achieving the goals of this early literacy programme.

The **Standards** are a **minimum requirement** for an effective implementation. Many sites often exceed these requirements.

We recognise that no set of standards and guidelines will ever address the range of issues that may arise in an education system. However, Reading Recovery is protected by trademark both within the United Kingdom and internationally, as variations in one site may impact upon Reading Recovery elsewhere. Any proposal to vary from standards set here must be negotiated in advance with the Reading Recovery National Leaders.

“The art in the change process is that changes should not distort or diminish its payoff and any changes made should be explicitly referred to theories of what is occurring. Compromise or unthinking adaptations can readily change the impact of the innovation and reduce its capacity to deliver effective results.” Marie Clay¹

¹ Watson, B. and Askew B.J. (2009) *‘Boundless Horizons: Marie Clay’s Search for the Possible in Children’s Literacy’*, pp 228-229. Pearson Education: Auckland, NZ.

AN INTRODUCTION TO READING RECOVERY

There is strong evidence that failure to learn literacy begins early and often leads to low self-esteem, lack of confidence, truancy, and other social and emotional problems.¹ This can be successfully tackled through strategies dedicated to the early prevention of reading failure. Reading Recovery has a long history of success in this endeavour. Although the programme originated in New Zealand, it has been designed to recover children from potential failure in literacy “in any education system with whatever instructional programme is being used, and the goal is to have them succeed back in the programme running in their own school”².

Data on over one million children worldwide now provides evidence of the programme’s successful contribution to the prevention of literacy failure. Reading Recovery is a school-based, short-term literacy programme designed for pupils aged five or six, and who are the lowest literary achievers after their first year of school. The time of entry to school and age of entry to the programme are factors that have had to be adjusted to the local education system since implementation and “unlikely to duplicate the New Zealand system of school entry, where children begin formal schooling on their fifth birthday”³. In principle, pupils should be identified for Reading Recovery lessons at around the age of six. These are usually Year 1 and Year 2 pupils in England and Wales, Jersey and Guernsey, Senior Infants and First Class pupils in Ireland, Year 2 pupils in Malta, and P1 and P2 pupils in Scotland.

Reading Recovery involves intensive one-to one lessons for 30 minutes a day with a specially trained Reading Recovery teacher. All pupils selected for lessons are identified as the lowest attaining in reading and writing in the age group. On entry to the series of lessons, pupils are often not yet able to read simple one-line texts or write their name.

The focus of each lesson is to comprehend messages in reading and construct messages in writing; learning how to attend to detail without losing focus on meaning. The goal is to support pupils to develop into effective readers and writers, able to work within the average band of their class at age-appropriate levels of literacy.

¹ See McLaughlin, Speirs & Shenassa (2014); Ricketts, Sperring & Nation (2014).

² Clay, M. (1992) ‘A Second Chance to Learn Literacy: by different routes to common outcomes’ (The Reading Recovery Programme). In Cline, T. (Ed.) *The Assessment of Special Educational Needs: International perspectives*. London: Routledge

³ Clay, M.M. (1994) *Reading Recovery: The Wider Implications of an Educational Innovation Literacy Teaching and Learning* 1 (1) p 129

Reading Recovery is not an isolated phenomenon in schools but has a carefully designed plan for implementation and integration into existing systems. The success of any intervention programme is influenced by the quality of the decisions made about implementation. These are guided by a quality assurance infrastructure, of which these Standards and Guidelines are a fundamental part. Annual reports document the progress of all pupils served in Reading Recovery, whatever the outcome. Consistent outcomes have been shown across the United Kingdom and the Channel Islands, the Republic of Ireland and Malta, with on average eight out of 10 completed programmes successful in reaching age-appropriate levels of literacy performance.

KEY FEATURES OF READING RECOVERY

- Pupils receiving Reading Recovery are those who have the most difficulty in reading and writing after one year at school, the lowest achieving pupils in mainstream class, without exception.
- A Reading Recovery programme is different for every child. The starting point is the pupil's strengths, and teaching builds upon what s/he can do, building confidence and motivation to participate in reading and writing activity.
- Each pupil has an intensive programme of daily 30-minute lessons which are individually designed and individually delivered. This is supplementary to classroom instruction.
- The focus of each lesson is on comprehending messages in reading and constructing messages in writing. In every lesson, pupils read several books and write their own stories, learning how to attend to detail without losing focus on meaning.
- A key feature of the successful implementation of Reading Recovery lies in the model of professional development for teachers, Teacher Leaders, and National Leaders.

STRUCTURE OF READING RECOVERY IN EUROPE

Research evidence⁴ has established that one of the challenges for any instructional approach is ensuring that its implementation has fidelity to the researched model.

When a system programme such as Reading Recovery is introduced into a new setting, there is the additional challenge of ensuring that necessary adaptations work

⁴ Wasik, B.A. & Slavin, R.E. (1993) 'Preventing early reading failure with one-to-one tutoring: A review of five programs'. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 28 (2), 179-200.

within the new context. In Reading Recovery, we ensure that the quality and effectiveness of teaching and training is maintained through a network of Reading Recovery professionals, which is made up of three levels of professional staff.

Reading Recovery Europe Network

- Reading Recovery teachers – working locally/school-based
- Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders – working locally/district regionally-based
- Reading Recovery National Leaders – working nationally and internationally, supported by a university holding the trademark for training and implementation

School-based Reading Recovery teachers work with the hardest-to-teach children.

They become sensitive observers of reading and writing behaviours and develop skills in making moment-by-moment analyses that inform teaching decisions.

Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders working at local/district/regional level are responsible for training and supporting Reading Recovery teachers, ensuring that at school level the programme operates as designed.

National Leaders are responsible for maintaining the quality of the implementation in the United Kingdom, Jersey and Guernsey, the Republic of Ireland and Malta. They provide support, information, and professional development to enhance the quality and integrity of implementations, accredit Teacher Leaders and teacher training courses, and support those involved at every level.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF READING RECOVERY IN EUROPE

Reading Recovery was first introduced to teachers in England in 1989. In 1991, the Institute of Education, University College London established courses for Teacher Leaders and for trainers of Teacher Leaders, recognised internationally as a university-based training site. Reading Recovery became widespread in England during 2005-2011 as an essential element of the Every Child a Reader strategy, and has established professional development bases in England, Jersey, Guernsey, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, and Malta.

In July 2025, University College London stepped back from holding the trademark for Reading Recovery and ceased its role as the only Reading Recovery university training site in Europe. Reading Recovery Europe continues to be managed in Europe as a trademarked programme with support from Lesley University, Massachusetts.

REGISTER OF READING RECOVERY PROFESSIONALS IN EUROPE

The register is a database compiled and maintained by Reading Recovery Europe. The register holds a record of all teachers, Teacher Leaders and National Leaders who have completed the requirements of a recognised Reading Recovery training course at an accredited site in the United Kingdom, Jersey, Guernsey, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, and Malta.

It is an essential part of quality control for this trademarked programme and only those who have successfully completed the initial professional development programme for their role are registered on this database and entitled to describe themselves as Reading Recovery trained or as accredited to teach Reading Recovery.

The register gives information about when and where a person was trained; it holds no qualitative or evaluative record and so would not be suitable for compiling references. It does, however, enable schools and education authorities to confirm whether an individual is a qualified and currently accredited Reading Recovery teacher, Teacher Leader, or National Leader.

READING RECOVERY NETWORK GROUP

The Network Group exists to:

- Enhance channels of communication between Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders, and between Teacher Leaders and Reading Recovery National Leaders
- Advise upon the successful development of Reading Recovery
- Provide a forum for discussion and problem solving within Reading Recovery across different sites
- Collaborate in planning the professional development to meet the needs of Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders and the organisation of conferences for teachers
- Engage in practical activities to support the work of Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders and teachers

The Network Group is comprised of Reading Recovery National Leader(s) and Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders, representing regional clusters. There are considerable benefits, both to Teacher Leader representatives and to their areas, as they receive opportunities to gain a broader perspective of the programme, of what is possible and what is problematic, that goes beyond the bounds of their immediate situation. All Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders have an opportunity to serve on the Network Group and representation is shared across individual clusters.

COORDINATION ACROSS EUROPE

Coordination from Reading Recovery Europe provides a unique service to areas implementing Reading Recovery, enabling local implementations to derive benefits of scale, breadth, perspective, and integrity for their site.

Benefits of scale

Many factors which underpin the effectiveness of Reading Recovery are made considerably more cost effective through economies of scale, enabling individual sites to derive a significantly higher value for money. Examples include the initial professional development and continuing professional development of Teacher Leaders, or systematic monitoring and reporting, the benefits of which, at individual site level would be prohibitive.

Economies of scale can allow greater purchasing power, which enables Reading Recovery National Leaders to negotiate advantageous costs that can then be passed on to individual sites, e.g., publication of resources, purchasing books for Reading Recovery professional development centres, etc. The combined scale of the Europe-wide Network enables individual sites to draw upon a much greater resource than would otherwise be available. In one example of these advantages of scale, the Network was able to collect new and very powerful information about special cohorts of pupils, such as the children of travellers, which at a local level would be too small for meaningful analysis. Similarly, the collection of information about the challenge offered by individual texts, on a national level, enables the publication of invaluable teacher aids such as the Guide to Book Selection and resources for the banding of texts for guided reading. The combined power of a coordinated European Network also enables smaller sites to reap the benefits of lobbying and pressure groups, thereby empowering parents, schools, and districts.

Benefits of breadth

Reading Recovery is embedded in education authorities, centres, and schools in a wide variety of settings, each of which is independent of the others. European coordination on the one hand provides a unifying role, but also enables individual sites to benefit from a breadth of experience of problem-solving in different ways, in a variety of contexts, over a long period of time, including international perspectives through the International Reading Recovery Trainers Organization (IRRTTO). This broad perspective enables individual sites swift access to developments, refinements, and improvements in Reading Recovery. It also provides a broad range of research, including highly relevant local research carried out by Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders as part of their professional training.

Benefits of perspective

Change and responsiveness are imperative if Reading Recovery is to continue to improve the life chances of children through literacy, in the most challenging settings. If change is to be effective, sites may need to be ready for assumptions to be challenged at every level. European coordination provides a 'critical friend' service. This brings a fresh perspective to local challenges and enables individual sites to access objective, informed and supportive thinking, grounded in experience and evidence.

Benefits of integrity

As any innovation develops, is refined, and moves into new contexts, a tension develops between adjusting to fit the new context and maintaining the integrity of the original. Research has shown that in any large-scale innovation there is, over time, a tendency for it to drift away from the core principles, which can undermine effectiveness. Solving the varying needs of the most challenging children is complex and requires exceptional skill. Outcomes are likely to be poor if the standards are compromised. European coordination of Reading Recovery provides in-built systems for quality assurance, including central standards for training and accreditation, and an infrastructure to manage change based on a sound evidence base.