



Professional Development in Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery®
Council of North America

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“...As schools systematize and create more opportunities for serious staff development, the thoroughness of the Reading Recovery model seems to be well worth emulating.”

— R. Herman and S. Stringfield

Administrators and policy-makers understand the vital connection between highly qualified teachers and student achievement. A hallmark of Reading Recovery is the intensive, ongoing professional development for school-based teachers, site-based teacher leaders, and university-based trainers. Reading Recovery is an investment in the teachers who work with children having the greatest difficulty learning to read and write.



For all Reading Recovery professionals, a full academic year of initial professional development is followed in subsequent years by ongoing development sessions. The comprehensive staff development model ensures the quality of teaching and implementation in schools and systems. Integral to Reading Recovery professional development is the use of a one-way glass, with class members observing lessons and talking about a child's behaviors and a teacher's teaching decisions.

No packaged program can substitute for an informed teacher's design and delivery of individual lessons for each child. In Reading Recovery, the teacher analyzes students' strengths and needs, selects procedures and makes teaching decisions on the run, and assesses the results to inform her next teaching moves. This process takes skill and ongoing study, collaboration, and support.

Quality Assurance

The Standards and Guidelines of Reading Recovery in the United States and The Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery Standards and Guidelines provide detailed information about professional development at all levels of Reading Recovery. Ongoing professional development, coupled with strict adherence to standards, assures the quality of Reading Recovery.

Reading Recovery Professional Development for Teachers

A highly qualified teacher makes a difference in student outcomes, especially for children having difficulties. Reading Recovery's professional development is widely acclaimed as an investment in the professional skills of teachers and a model worth emulating (Herman & Stringfield, 1996). It is a yearlong period of change as teachers learn to make decisions based on a child's responses during individual teaching sessions.

Initial year of professional development

School districts select Reading Recovery teacher candidates who must be certified teachers with a record of successful teaching experience with young children. These teachers engage in a full academic year of professional development with graduate credit under the guidance of a registered Reading Recovery teacher leader.

Following an intensive week of assessment training to learn to administer, score, and interpret *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2002, 2006), the teachers actively participate in weekly classes (biweekly in Canada) while applying their learning by teaching four children individually on a daily basis. Reading Recovery teachers work only part of the school day in one-to-one Reading Recovery lessons. Their professional development also benefits their work in other settings (e.g., classrooms, small groups, work with special populations of children, literacy coaches).

The teacher leader makes at least four visits (five in Canada) during the school year to each teacher-in-training to observe lessons and to consult about children and implementation in the school. Detailed information about teacher selection and professional development requirements for teachers is found in the Standards and Guidelines for the United States and for Canada.

Integrating theory and practice

Reading Recovery teacher training is comprehensive, complex, and intensive because each teacher must learn to design and deliver individual daily lessons. No prescriptive manual or packaged set of materials can meet each child's individual needs.

Teachers must learn to

- systematically and regularly assess each child's current understandings.
- closely observe and record behaviors for evidence of progress.
- use teaching procedures competently and appropriately.
- put their observations and analyses into words and articulate their questions and challenges.
- self-analyze teaching decisions to determine the effect on each child's learning.
- tailor interactions to extend each child's understandings.
- communicate about Reading Recovery within the school.
- communicate regularly with the classroom teacher about each child's progress in both settings.

Professional development in Reading Recovery consistently integrates theory and practice. All teachers teach lessons behind a one-way mirror, enabling their colleagues to observe, discuss, and reflect on the teaching and learning. In addition to putting what they see into words, they articulate conflicts with their previous assumptions. They learn to analyze and discuss effective teaching and to apply new understandings to their own teaching.

Built-in professional development

After their initial year of professional development, Reading Recovery teachers participate in a minimum of six sessions (eight in Canada) each year with their colleagues and teacher leader(s). At least four sessions (five in Canada) involve observing lessons through a one-way mirror while talking about child behaviors and teaching moves. This ongoing professional development system ensures continuous inquiry and teacher learning to support student outcomes.

A Striking Match with Research Findings on Professional Development

Reading Recovery professional development for teachers closely mirrors current research findings (see Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

1. Useful professional development emphasizes active teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection.
2. Effective professional development enables teachers to acquire new knowledge, apply it to practice, and reflect on the results with colleagues.
3. Professional development that focuses on student learning and helps teachers develop the necessary pedagogical skills has strong positive effects on practice.
4. Research supports professional development that is intensive, sustained over time, collaborative, and collegial.

Professional Development for Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders

Reading Recovery teacher leaders are key people with a complex role requiring a wide range of skills obtained in a full academic year of professional development. They are leaders in their local districts where they teach children, train Reading Recovery teachers for local schools, maintain contact with past trainees, analyze and report student outcomes, educate the local educators, advocate for what cannot be compromised, and communicate with the public.

Teacher leaders are selected by a school district or consortium of districts that has made a commitment to implement Reading Recovery. For more details about requirements for teacher leader selection and professional development see the Standards and Guidelines for the United States and for Canada. Teacher leaders in the U.S. must have a master's degree. Candidates in both countries must have teaching credentials, effective teaching experience, and leadership potential.

Initial year of professional development

The teacher leader candidate attends a registered university training center in the United States or a regional institute in Canada for an academic year of full-time professional development. Their complex role requires them to

- become Reading Recovery teachers.
- develop an academic understanding of the theoretical concepts upon which Reading Recovery is based and a flexibility to consider new concepts and practices.
- test practice against theoretical concepts.

- critically appraise Reading Recovery’s strengths and problem spots as well as competing explanations for its success.
- observe and work through the experiences of a teacher trainee group across an academic year with the support of experienced teacher leaders in the field.
- help teachers develop competency in individualized assessment-based instruction to improve student achievement.
- become skilled at working with adult learners in order to effect significant change in teachers’ practice.
- develop a thorough knowledge of the whole operation of Reading Recovery in an education system including organizing and administering the teacher training course and evaluating and reporting student outcomes,.
- become skilled at working with local administrators (e.g., site coordinator, principals).
- develop interactive system-level leadership skills.

In order to accomplish these goals during the initial year of professional learning, teacher leader candidates teach four Reading Recovery students daily; participate in graduate-level classes that include teaching sessions; engage in course work to explore theoretical concepts in reading, writing, language, literacy difficulties, and adult learning theory; participate in leadership seminars and practica that include field work at established sites; and prepare their home districts for Reading Recovery implementation.

Continuing to learn

After the initial year, teacher leaders return to full-time positions in their districts/sites and ongoing professional development. They continue to learn during this field year with the guidance and support of their university trainer(s). They teach children daily in Reading Recovery, train Reading Recovery teachers, and provide leadership for site implementation with the support of the site coordinator (the administrator responsible for overseeing and managing the implementation of Reading Recovery). Teacher leaders oversee data collection on all Reading Recovery children and use evaluation data to work with school leadership teams to improve student performance and implementation factors.

As long as they are in the role, teacher leaders participate in regularly scheduled professional development sessions conducted by university trainers. They also attend a national or regional conference each year and participate in an annual required national Teacher Leader Institute to ensure current knowledge about all aspects of their roles.

Long-Term Impact of Teacher Leader Training

Training a teacher leader is an investment that pays dividends over time. One teacher leader can train as many as 12 teachers a year, with each teacher serving at least eight students per year. Under ideal conditions as many as 400 students could be reached over 3 years through the commitment to professional development for a single teacher leader.

Professional Development for Reading Recovery Trainers

Reading Recovery trainers are faculty members within an established university training center (UTC) or Regional Canadian Institute who are responsible for initial and ongoing professional development for teacher leaders, supporting a network of affiliated Reading Recovery teacher training sites, expanding and strengthening sites within the network, and ensuring the integrity of Reading Recovery within the region. More than 20 Reading Recovery UTCs currently provide the organizing structure for states or regions of the United States, and 3 Canadian institutes provide regional structures for that country.

Initial year of professional development

Becoming a Reading Recovery university trainer requires a year-long residency program (at the post-doctoral level in the United States). The initial year of professional development for trainers is offered at four international centers: The Ohio State University, Texas Woman's University, the University of Auckland, and the University of London. For more detailed information about becoming a Reading Recovery trainer and about professional development requirements for trainers see the Standards and Guidelines for the United States and for Canada.

During the year of study, candidates learn to

- teach Reading Recovery children.
- support the development of Reading Recovery teachers across an academic year.
- bring diverse areas of theory and practice into working relationships and educate other professionals to do this.
- work with teacher leaders across their initial year of professional development and in subsequent years to ensure cycles of change.
- establish and maintain high-quality Reading Recovery teacher training sites.
- coordinate Reading Recovery in their network of sites, advising administrators about sustaining the quality of implementation.
- advise others about the range of research related to Reading Recovery.
- monitor student outcomes to analyze implementation issues.
- conduct and report research and program evaluation.
- manage a university training center.
- communicate about and advocate for Reading Recovery.

Continuing professional development

University trainers meet for at least two extended sessions annually and work collaboratively within the North American Trainers Group (NATG). Committee structures within NATG create opportunities for ongoing inquiry and study: teaching and professional development, implementation, and research. Trainers communicate on a continual basis about current theoretical, research, and pedagogical perspectives and conduct research to seek answers to questions about the many complex aspects of the intervention.

North American trainers are also active members of the International Reading Recovery Trainers Organization (IRRTO). The international group is committed to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Reading Recovery and to supporting change and growth in Reading Recovery through international collaboration, research, and resource development. Sharing and learning from international colleagues further enhances the ongoing professional development of Reading Recovery trainers.

Ongoing Professional Development

If an innovation is to remain vital and dynamic, it must have a system in place to ensure continued professional learning. The ongoing professional development of teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers is at the heart of Reading Recovery's success and specified in the Standards and Guidelines for the United States and for Canada. This continued learning keeps professionals up-to-date on recent changes in Reading Recovery and ensures that professionals at all levels deepen their knowledge about implementation and teaching.

for Reading Recovery teachers

Reading Recovery teachers design and deliver daily lessons tailored to the specific needs of each individual child. They make moment-to-moment teaching decisions based on the evidence of each child's responses during the individual teaching sessions. Ongoing professional development enables teachers to design optimal learning opportunities for children with diverse needs and ensures that the hardest-to-teach children have the most-skilled teachers. Without ongoing learning and interaction with other professionals, the effectiveness of the intervention is likely to be compromised.

The ongoing learning of Reading Recovery teachers is supported in several ways. Trained teachers

- continue to teach a minimum of four Reading Recovery children and learn from the students' idiosyncratic routes to literacy learning.
- participate in a minimum of six professional learning sessions each year with a teacher leader and colleagues. At least four of the sessions provide opportunities to observe and discuss live teaching sessions (eight sessions with a minimum of six teaching sessions in Canada).
- learn from teacher leader and colleague visits that involve lesson observations and collaborative discussion of teaching decisions.
- attend conferences and institutes.
- interact and collaborate with colleagues, administrators, and school teams in their own schools.

for Reading Recovery teacher leaders

Reading Recovery teacher leaders teach children, train Reading Recovery teachers, and provide oversight for Reading Recovery implementation within the schools. To fulfill this complex role, teacher leaders engage in extended learning opportunities after the initial year of professional development. Ongoing professional development for teacher leaders is designed to ensure that they are knowledgeable about Reading Recovery teaching practice and theory and are able to facilitate teachers' growth and development. In addition, teacher leaders must be able to evaluate and communicate the effectiveness of the teaching, advocate for the intervention, explore related research, and provide guidance for implementation decisions in and across schools.

The ongoing learning of Reading Recovery teacher leaders is supported in several ways. Teacher leaders

- continue to learn from the children they teach and from their work with Reading Recovery teachers.
- participate in professional development days provided by regional university/institute trainers. Emphases include refining their knowledge of teaching children, working with teachers, and implementing Reading Recovery locally. Teacher leaders also learn about new research and educational factors that may have an impact on early literacy intervention.
- receive on-site visits from a university trainer.

- participate in a national Teacher Leader Institute (Teacher Leader Forum in Canada) annually to ensure current knowledge about all aspects of their roles.
- attend a regional conference or national conference or institute each year.
- continue to learn about teamwork and collaboration so they can effectively integrate Reading Recovery into their schools' comprehensive plan for literacy learning.

for Reading Recovery trainers

Reading Recovery trainers provide the organizing structures for Reading Recovery in the United States and Canada. They provide the initial and ongoing professional development for teacher leaders, support the implementations of Reading Recovery within their network of affiliated sites, develop new implementations, monitor and interpret student outcome data, review and conduct research, maintain the integrity of Reading Recovery within their network of sites, and advocate for Reading Recovery within their state or region.

In order to fulfill their complex responsibilities for the oversight of Reading Recovery, trainers are engaged in numerous professional development venues. Reading Recovery trainers

- continue to learn from the children they teach and from their work with Reading Recovery teacher leaders and teachers.
- meet with their colleagues in the North American Trainers Group for extended professional development at least twice each year.
- work within committee structures to study and share new learning about teaching, professional development, implementation, and research.
- engage in collaborative learning with their international colleagues through the International Reading Recovery Trainers Organization.
- work with academics and educational leaders outside Reading Recovery to maintain an up-to-date perspective of research and practice across the disciplines and across the educational enterprise.

Support from RRCNA

RRCNA supports the development of professional learning opportunities for Reading Recovery teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers. As a membership association, the Council works closely with trainers and teacher leaders to supplement and extend the existing system of professional development offerings through conferences and institutes, web-based learning, journals, and products and publications.

For more information, visit the Professional Development Section at www.readingrecovery.org.

References

- Clay, M. M. (2002, 2006). *An observation survey of early literacy achievement* (2nd ed., rev. 2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
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- Herman, R. & Stringfield, S. (1997). *Ten promising programs for educating all children: Evidence of impact*. Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.