

KEY READING RECOVERY STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT CLASSROOM GUIDED READING INSTRUCTION

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Primary classroom teachers can incorporate key Reading Recovery strategies—normally used in a one-on-one setting—into their everyday small-group guided reading lessons.

It's 9:15 a.m., and I (Jamie, first author) am ready to start guided reading, the most important hour of the day, with my students. I've created my groups, chosen appropriate books, and made sure that everyone understands the expectations for the morning. "All right, first-grade friends, I need to see Marvin, Sadie, Kylie, and Rashid [all names are pseudonyms] back at the reading table. Grab your reading bags and head on over!" I tell them. I've got roughly 15–20 minutes with this group of students, and it's time to make the most of these precious moments!

Effective teachers are continually seeking opportunities to improve their craft. Fortunately, there is no shortage of literature aimed at improving teaching methods and strategies. Perhaps you have considered trying to *Teach Like a Champion* (Lemov, 2010).

Maybe you've even attempted to "Teach Like a Pirate" (Burgess, 2012): Arrr! Primary (K–3) teachers undoubtedly place a high priority on the importance of being effective teachers of literacy. Creating students who can read and write well is no easy task, and providing instruction that ensures this is crucial. In regards to effective literacy instruction, Reading Recovery teachers come to the table armed with

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a great understanding of theory and research and training on which they rely for effective, strategic decision making. With that in mind: Have you ever considered trying to teach like a Reading Recovery teacher?

Reading Recovery is a short-term intervention that provides one-on-one tutoring to first-grade students who are struggling in reading and writing (What Works Clearinghouse, 2013). Developed in New Zealand by educator and researcher Marie M. Clay, Reading Recovery has more than 30 years of extensive, positive data to support its effectiveness. Teachers trained in Reading Recovery teach four students in a one-to-one setting while they participate in a full year of graduate coursework, followed by ongoing training and professional development to be

able to sufficiently support the learning of their students. During the 12–20 weeks of intervention with individual students, Reading Recovery teachers continually practice carefully observing their students and reflecting on their specific needs in order to accelerate their learning. Reading Recovery teachers carefully create and examine running records to determine next steps in teaching and understand the importance of supporting their students in developing strategic processing systems for reading and writing.

Reading Recovery continues to show positive outcomes for students. Despite the strict screening measures involved, the What Works Clearinghouse (2013) reports that Reading Recovery has positive effects on general reading achievement and potentially has positive effects on alphabets, reading fluency, and comprehension for beginning readers. Further, research has shown that 75% of students who receive a complete Reading Recovery intervention reach grade-level proficiency in reading and writing (D'Agostino & Harmey, 2015). These successes are due, no doubt, to both the nature of the intervention and the knowledge of the teachers using them.

How can we integrate into the classroom setting some of the key techniques of these highly trained Reading Recovery teachers? Teaching reading one-on-one is likely not possible in general education classrooms with a large number of students; nor do all students need this intensive level of instruction. However, guided reading groups, developed by Fountas and Pinnell and largely based on the roots and theory of Clay's research, are one area of instruction where classroom teachers can significantly lower the number of students they are instructing at one time.

Guided reading offers small-group support and explicit teaching to help students take on more challenging texts (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). Within these guided reading groups, even more differentiated reading instruction can occur because of the intentional teaching of skilled teachers. It is one thing to understand and implement the framework of a guided reading lesson, but it is another to use guided reading to bring readers from where they are to as far as the teaching can take them in a given school year (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Fountas and Pinnell (2012) state, "The teaching decisions within guided reading become the next horizon" (p. 5). It is beneficial to explore the ways in which key Reading Recovery strategies can be used to support teaching decisions in classroom guided reading lessons.

Focus on Fluency

Throughout the guided reading lesson, it is important that students have multiple opportunities to read texts at their instructional level and read them well—and in these opportunities, slow, staccato reading cannot be the norm. If reading is phrased and fluent and responding is fast, this likely indicates that the reader has grouped together the words that the author had meant to go together to support meaning (Clay, 2005b). There are multiple ways to facilitate and encourage fluent reading within the lesson. Gather your students at your guided reading table and let's begin!

Allow Opportunities for Familiar Reading

All right, boys and girls, thanks for being ready for reading group so quickly. We are going to take out our familiar reading books that you took home last night. Go ahead and pull those out of your reading bag now and choose one to whisper read to yourselves to warm up. I'm going to

Pause and Ponder

- What do current running records reveal about the strengths and needs of your students?
- In what ways are you using information from analyzed running records and observations to support your teaching decisions?
- What prompts could you use to best support your guided reading group based on the analysis of a set of the students' running records?

be listening for reading that sounds like talking, and I'll jump in to help you if you need me.

Reading Recovery teachers begin every lesson by having their students read yesterday's new book as a familiar read. For primary classroom guided reading lessons, allow students to warm up by reading a familiar text at the beginning of the lesson. This text should be at the student's independent or instructional level and should be one that the student has read at least once before. This could be the text to which the guided reading group was introduced during the previous lesson.

Listen closely as each student reads quietly to him- or herself. While the students are reading, ensure they are practicing good fluency, and if not, intervene to model and practice how it should sound. For example, ask students to reread and make it sound like talking. Read the text aloud and ask the students to match your voice. To keep the focus on fluency, familiar texts should be easy for the students, ensuring that they are not exerting too much effort on decoding issues and word solving. Clay (2005b) asserts, "Easy books are easy because you do not have to put so much effort into solving the words and the messages" (p. 150).

Make Sure Every Student Has an Anchor Text

Marvin and Sadie, why don't you pull out your anchor text from your reading bag? I noticed your reading today sounded a little choppy. I'm going to keep reading a little with the others, but I want both of you to read a few pages of your anchor text to remind you how your reading should sound. Think about how your reading sounds when you read your anchor text, *Baby Bear Goes Fishing* for you, Marvin, and *The Red Rose* for you, Sadie. Try to make your new book, *The Hungry Giant*, sound just like that.

In this case, an anchor text would be one that the student can read fluently,

and it will serve as a model and reminder of what fluent reading sounds like. An anchor text, while familiar, is more specific to each student. It is a direct representation of a text that each student reads as an example of the way fluent and phrased reading should sound. Also, an anchor text is one that the student has read repeatedly and that is more familiar than most other texts; familiar texts are usually those read the day before or read a few times in the past.

An anchor text may be a quick poem, passage, or text, and it can be kept in the student's reading bag or classroom cubby—anywhere that is quickly and easily accessible during reading group. For example, allowing the student to read the specific anchor text and then reminding him or her how the reading sounded can be very effective. When engaging in new texts, it is helpful to remind the student of the way the reading sounds when he or she reads the anchor text and to encourage him or her to mimic this fluent reading even in the new text.

Model Fluent Reading During the Lesson

Rashid, you did a great job reading for us. I love what is happening in this story! Let's read the next page together. Keep up with me and match my voice.... Excellent. I want you to read the next three pages quietly to yourselves. I'm going to be listening... Kylie, are you listening to yourself? Keep reading... Now put them all together so that it sounds smooth. Nice job! That sounds like talking!

Let us hope the days of round-robin reading are quickly ending. Rather than having students take turns reading a page of a story, use these reading opportunities to model and practice fluent reading with your students. Read aloud to them. Have them whisper read to themselves or read to a



partner. Give them opportunities to choral read.

If a student begins to read in a choppy manner, quickly place your voice over his or hers to encourage them to match your pace. Demonstrate how to briefly slow the pace to solve an unknown word, then immediately return to the fluent, phrased reading that is expected. Model this behavior. Ensure that students are mastering word recognition in order to free up mental resources for comprehension and prosody. When asking students to read independently, do not accept slow, staccato reading. Clay (2005b) suggests prompts such as these:

- Put them all together so that it sounds like talking.
- Are you listening to yourself?
- Reread. Did it sound smooth? (p. 205)

Encourage Flexible Use of Finger Pointing

Oftentimes when I work with students, I see them using finger pointing when it is unnecessary. Perhaps this is something their parents or previous teachers have instructed them to do with the best intentions in mind. However, extended use of finger pointing can be problematic.

Emergent readers often use finger pointing long after it is needed. Once early behaviors such as one-to-one matching, return sweep, and locating

known words are firmly established, it is important to ask students to read with their eyes only. Encourage students to use their finger flexibly, inserting their finger when needed, and removing it again quickly when it is no longer needed. This prevents the habituation of choppy reading, as the finger can often cause students' eyes to unnecessarily slow down.

Marvin, you don't need your finger anymore. It is slowing down your eyes. Read this page with just your eyes, and if you get stuck, put your finger in quickly to help you, then get it right back out...Yes, just like that! I'll write a note to mom and dad and let them know that you know how to use your finger when you need it, and you can read with just your eyes from now on.

Provide a Supportive Book Introduction

Once students are all warmed up and ready to go, it is time for the new book introduction! Reading Recovery teachers are specifically trained to understand the importance between oral language and reading instruction. The new book introduction in a Reading Recovery lesson is a conversation between student and teacher and provides the student with much more than a picture walk, where a basic overview of the text and a glance through the pictures remain the focus (Briggs & Forbes, 2009).

Remember, if we are truly instructing at the students' instructional levels, the new book should not be considered a test of their abilities; rather, it should be an opportunity for teaching interactions and feedback to advance students' reading abilities. Solid, supportive book introductions engage conversation, developing oral language and meaning around the text, setting the reader up for a successful read. In order to teach for a successful first read, consider

the recommendations in the next two sections.

Excitement Is Contagious

The new book is like the dessert at the end of the lesson. It is the treat. I often refer to the new book throughout the lesson to keep my students moving.

Let's finish our writing so we can get to the new book...I am so thrilled that you are reading well enough that you are ready to read this book. I have been waiting so long to share it with you. It is one of my favorites!

Your students will want to read the book you are introducing if they feel like it will be worth their time and energy. Helping them to see how the story is connected to their interests, or how it can provide them with a story or information they would want to know, will help them engage in the task of reading in a less threatening way. You might say, for example,

I am so excited to read this new book with you today because I know how much you loved the *Hungry Giant* story. There is another story with the giant in it called *The Hungry Giant's Soup*. Let's see how the people take care of the mean giant this time!

While this is likely to catch their attention, it is merely a summary statement and *not* your book introduction.

A Picture Walk Is Not a Book Introduction

Take the "bugs" out of the new book (Clay, 2005b). Talk about the story with your students so they have a thorough understanding of what they will be reading. Oftentimes, pictures can be misleading and may not support the actual events in the story. Be prepared to engage students in conversation about the text they are about to read. Even beginning books can and should have a story line that needs to be discussed.



We must make students familiar with the story, the plot, unfamiliar phrases, unusual names, new words, and old words used in an unusual way (Clay, 2005b). For example, the phrase "Into the tub went some tomatoes" (Cowley, 1993) may be structurally unfamiliar to readers and will need to be practiced before the first reading. Reading Recovery teachers often ask questions that allow students to think beyond the text, making predictions and creating suspense by not revealing up front the ending of the text. The following book introduction, used with a group of first graders, shows examples of the teacher familiarizing students with the text, practicing unknown words and phrases, confirming and rejecting attempts at words, identifying the problem of the story, and leaving the reader in some suspense.

Boys and girls, take a look at this first page of *The Hungry Giant's Soup*. It is the same problem as the last time. The giant is hungry, and he is demanding that the people get him the things he wants. This time, he wants some soup.

Read what he says to the people on page 3. That's right: 'I'll hit you with my bommy-knocker!' There's that phrase again, 'bommy-knocker.' *Bommy* rhymes with *mommy*, remember?

Keep going. To cook the soup, the people say they need a soup pot. Point to where it says that. *Soup pot*... Good. But the soup won't fit in the soup pot. What will they need to put it in? Could be a tub, could be a bathtub. Slide your finger under that word and figure out which one it is.

Now the giant is getting angry. He says something a little different here. He says, "Hurry! Hurry!" the giant yelled. "Or you'll all get my bommy-knocker!" Say that again with me... Good, now find where he says that in the story and read it. They are hurrying! The people are going to put some tomatoes, onions, and spices into the tub.

Look at pages 10 and 11. What's the problem? Yes, the soup's stopped cooking because they need more wood for the fire. The children will find some wood. Turn back to the beginning and we will read to see what the children find to keep the fire going. Pay close attention, this is funny!

Prompting Is Important

The texts you are introducing in your guided reading lessons should be at the edge of students' instructional level; not too easy but not too hard (Vygotsky, 1978). This is the teacher's opportunity to support and provide careful instruction and feedback to promote strategic processing systems. The ways in which we prompt students become some of the most important teaching decisions throughout the guided reading lessons. Clay (2005b) suggests, "Give thoughtful attention to the level of help the child



"Our prompting, if not balanced, can inadvertently create readers who attend to one source of information over the others at difficulty."

needs and decide when you are prompting for processing or when you should be supplying information that the learner does not have (teaching)" (p. 94).

After the new book is introduced, students should be given the opportunity to read the text in various formats, as previously discussed. Listen closely to your students and consider the suggestions in the next two sections to provide instruction and teacher feedback throughout the lesson using flexible and effective prompting.

Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say

Most teachers, by nature, are very verbal. Reading Recovery teachers are trained to know how to say enough without saying too much. Clay (2005b) encourages, "Do not waste words. Say whatever is necessary to keep the story flowing, but eliminate all unnecessary talk" (p. 95). Too much teacher talk can impede learning.

Interrupting a student who is reading must not be a lengthy process that breaks the flow of the story. Be explicit when teaching students so they know exactly what will help them. Instead of saying, "Don't do..." direct students' attention to what will help them in the particular situation. When a student is showing signs of difficulty by pausing during reading longer than necessary, Clay (2005b) suggests prompts such as these:

- Do this.
- What did you notice?
- Why did you stop?
- Think about what you know that might help. (pp. 202–203)

Rashid is reading *The Hungry Giant's Soup* and stops at the word *children*.

Rashid, reread and think about who is looking for the wood. Try a word and finish the sentence. Were you right? That's right, they could be children or they could be kids. Slide your finger under that word and check which one it is. Yes, children! Reread and put it all together.

Know What Prompts to Use When

Reading Recovery teachers become experts at pulling the appropriate prompt out of their mental toolboxes at just the right times to support learning. As classroom teachers, knowing which prompts are best in which situations can assist your teaching in being more direct, explicit, and differentiated to your specific group of learners. We must remain flexible with our prompting to ensure we are creating readers who skillfully integrate meaning, structure, and visual information to interpret texts. Our prompting, if not balanced, can inadvertently create readers who attend to one source of information over the others at difficulty. Clay (2005b) provides multiple examples of prompts and how to best use them to support learning; based on our work with classroom teachers, we have provided examples of which prompts may work for various situations.

The prompts to locate are especially helpful in book introduction scenarios, where you want to support students so that the first read is a successful experience.

OK, friends, now the people have a problem. The soup has stopped cooking. Think about that word *stopped*. What do you expect to see at the beginning? Yes, the word *stop*. And at the end? Yes, an *-ed* ending. Now, find the word *stopped* and slide your finger under to check if you have it.

Observe and Analyze Carefully

Observing students is a complicated task. Reading Recovery teachers have the luxury of only having one student at a time on which to focus their attention, allowing them to know these students and their reading behaviors in a very complex way. Clay (2005a) offers an extensive explanation of what it truly means to observe our students:

To prevent reading failure teachers must take time to observe what children are able to do....Observation involves more than hearing children read every day. It involves being a teacher who interacts with the child, who notices the child's responses to the story, its language and meanings, and who takes the time to gather evidence of how the child is working on print. The teacher must be reflective and responsive to the negotiations of the child. (p. 11)

Classroom teachers can gain knowledge about their students through guided reading instruction by observing specific skills and reading behaviors, then documenting them on a running record. Likewise, careful analysis of running records (formal or informal) helps teachers to further understand how students respond to difficult text. Each action (or lack of

action) students take reveals insight into the ways in which they are problem solving and processing information. For more information about running records, see the Web links in the More to Explore sidebar at the end of this article.

Although running records are often used to assess text difficulty for a student, they can also be taken at different time intervals to capture progress (Fried, 2013). Information revealed in running records should shape future teaching interactions. Be mindful of the following:

How Does the Reading Sound?

Think back to our discussions on fluency. Are your students putting words and phrases together so the reading flows, indicating that they are making meaning out of what is read? Are they spending too much time on word solving, making the reading disjointed and slow? Do they slow down at difficulty but speed back up immediately afterward?

What Do Students Control? Building off a reader's strengths is a foundational piece of the Reading Recovery lesson. Make note of what your students control when they are reading and writing, and use these strengths to support further learning. Do they read for meaning? Do they read in longer phrases? Do your students make multiple attempts at unknown words? Do they reread to confirm their attempts? Students need to feel successful; showing them what they do well through teacher

feedback, and reminding them of these skills often, can help to accelerate their learning.

What Do Your Students Do at Difficulty? Do your students make haphazard attempts at high-frequency words? This could indicate that more work is needed to firm up their core of high-frequency words to ensure automaticity. Practice with quickly locating these words in texts or writing these words from memory could support this learning. Do your students reread at difficulty, at times self-correcting? This indicates that they are using strategies to support self-monitoring. Build on those strengths and praise this strategic action!

What Does a "Told" Tell? When analyzing a running record, note when a student appeals and a told (word) is given, then ask yourself, What did the student not control that prevented them from solving the word on their own? Although you want students to move away from the teacher supplying the word at difficulty, the told can reveal specific processing actions. A told suggests the student (a) noticed something that made them stop and (b) could not find any strategy to solve the word themselves. Make note of every told, and explicitly teach students the strategy that could have best supported them in that particular situation. Look for tolds on formal running records to plan for instruction and use information gained from tolds to make effective teaching points after an informal running record is taken.

Table 1 Prompts to Support Students at Difficulty

General	To Locate	To Look	To Attend to Meaning	Prompting to Check
Try that again and think about what would sound right and look right.	What do you expect to see at the beginning? At the end? In the middle?	Do you know a word that looks like that?	You said _____. Does that make sense? Something didn't make sense. Reread.	What would make sense, sound right, and look like that?



While students are warming up by reading their familiar reads, I ask one student to read the book introduced from the previous guided reading lesson. I only need to hear about 100 words, and I do a quick, informal running record of that reading. Glancing over the running record, I can see that Kylie stopped and waited for a told on the word *cooked*. The text said, “Soon the soup was cooked.” So, I will revisit this with Kylie explicitly. “Kylie, you read, ‘Soon the soup was...’ and then you stopped. What did you notice?” Kylie responds that she thought the text should say, “Soon the soup was ready,” but she knew it didn’t match. I reply,

Excellent, you noticed something! “Soon the soup was ready” does make sense, but it doesn’t look right. If you notice it doesn’t look right, reread and try something that would work. Let me show you: “Soon the soup was cooked” [saying the word slowly and running my finger under it as I do]. See, that’s a match! Next time, try multiple attempts to help yourself.

This entire process, from Kylie reading her familiar text to my brief modeling of the appropriate strategy, should take about three minutes.

Who Is Doing the Work? Reading Recovery teachers are taught to balance strategic teaching with high

expectations of accountability for students. Reading, to most students, can appear like a puzzle in need of careful solving. Helping students to understand and gain control of the skills and strategies to do their own puzzle solving will decrease their dependence on you as the teacher for constant support.

Ask students, “Were you right?” (Clay, 2005b) when they are right and when they are wrong; then, ask them how they know. Show students how to use meaning, structure, and visual information simultaneously to confirm or reject their attempts. For example, try showing two words on a dry erase board (i.e., *house* and *home*) to a student and say, “One of these words is *house*, and one of these words is *home*. Which one is which? Were you right? How did you know?” Model how students should slide their finger under each word from left to right and say each word slowly, not letter by letter, checking visual information with what their mouth is saying.

Make sure that you are not jumping in right away to rescue students each time they pause or falter. Allow students some time to process the text on their own, then come in when needed with specific prompts that teach rather than tell. When words are pulled out of a text for students to work on in isolation, it is always important to take students back to the continuous text to read the word in context:

I’m going to write two words on the dry erase board. One of these words is *hey*, and one of these words is *hurry*. Which one is which? How do you know? Now, which one of those is in your story right here? Slide your finger and check. Yes, you are right, it is *hurry*. Now you know how to check yourself. You don’t need me to tell you! Do that when you make an attempt at a word and you aren’t

“Reading, to most students, can appear like a puzzle in need of careful solving.”

sure you are right. Sadie, when you read this sentence, you said, “Hurry, hurry!” Were you right? How do you know? Yes, you were right! Nice job checking yourself!

Final Thoughts

With the amount of ongoing professional development opportunities provided to Reading Recovery teachers, it is no surprise that these teachers are well versed in all of the areas noted in this article. However, classroom teachers can take on this learning by weaving these suggestions into their daily guided reading routines. Classroom teachers must become efficient at helping students become strategic problem solvers. Remember the major goal(s) in your guided reading lessons.

Clay (2005a) encourages teachers to “keep in mind that the teacher at all times must decide the next most powerful strategic activity that could help this particular child to increase his processing of information in text” (p. 43). Further, Lyons, Pinnell, and DeFord (1993) comment that “the hardest shift for teachers to make is to think about teaching as assisting the student’s problem solving” (p. 62). Through increased attention to fluency, supportive book introductions, flexible, specific prompting, and careful observations, classroom teachers can provide powerful teaching within guided reading lessons. So, return to your classrooms and gather your students at your table for guided reading instruction. Waving your pirate flag is optional, but ultimately, if you

TAKE ACTION!

1. Select a focus guided reading group with which you will begin working.
2. Carefully analyze these students' most recent running records to plan for instruction.
3. Begin your lessons with familiar reading while focusing on fluency throughout.
4. Plan for supportive book introductions that help to ensure a successful first reading. Think about the group and the support needed in terms of meaning, language structure, and new or difficult words to support students' reading of the new book at an instructional level.
5. Make note of the ways in which you are prompting students. Use these notes to help you decide how your prompting can be more effective.
6. Observe carefully throughout the lesson and be mindful of strategic teaching decisions and feedback that accelerate learning.
7. Ask yourself at the end of the lesson, What did students learn today that will help them be better readers tomorrow?

teach like a Reading Recovery teacher, a champion of literacy you will be!

Oh, my goodness! Everyone did so much hard work today. Gather your familiar

books into your reading bag, and you can head on back to your literacy station. All right, friends, I love the way you are all working quietly. I need John, Arianna, Trevor, and Cruz to head on back to my reading table.

Here we go again!

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