

Special Note to the Reader:

The principles described in this publication are applicable to the literacy acquisition process of bilingual students whose initial literacy instruction is delivered in Spanish. Research documents that children who achieve literacy success in Spanish during the first three years of literacy instruction in Spanish are likely to achieve literacy success when they transition to literacy instruction in English. Descubriendo La Lectura (Reading Recovery in Spanish) provides early intervention for children whose early literacy instruction is in Spanish. References to Reading Recovery throughout this publication include Descubriendo La Lectura.

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Executive Summary

National attention is focused on early literacy, as several panels investigate and debate new directions in teaching children to read and write. The National Research Council Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children has analyzed research on effective programs for students who are having difficulty learning to read and write. This research meets the criteria established by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) for reliable, replicable research. Based on a survey of research that met the NICHD criteria, including the research presented in *The Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998), ten principles provide guidance for designing early intervention programs.

Research has demonstrated that young readers having difficulty are mostly of average intelligence, and they have problems resulting from multiple and differing causes. With appropriate intervention, almost all can learn to read, provided instruction is intensive and begins early. It is therefore important that reading interventions be multi-dimensional to meet the diverse needs of learners.

The Reading Recovery Lesson

- Reading familiar stories
- Reading a story that was read for the first time the day before
- Working with letters and/or words using magnetic letters
- Writing a story
- Assembling a cut-up story
- Introducing and reading a new book

The following discussion illustrates how Reading Recovery epitomizes the ten principles in literacy programs that work. These principles operate throughout a Reading Recovery lesson and apply differently for each child who is learning to read and write. The power of Reading Recovery lies in the integration of the ten research-based components and the careful, sensitive application of these components during a Reading Recovery lesson.

Principle 1: Phonological Awareness: Teach students to hear the sounds in words.

Developing the ability to hear the sounds in words is explicitly recognized in Reading Recovery. When children are evaluated for selection for Reading Recovery, a measure of ability to hear and record sounds in words is used. Performance on this measure of phonological awareness provides data that teachers use daily as they work individually with young children. Children selected for Reading Recovery are the lowest achievers in their first grade classes. Most, although not all, need instruction to develop phonological awareness.

Principle 2: Visual Perception of Letters: Teach students to perceive and identify letters of the alphabet.

Students are assessed for letter recognition as part of the battery of tests used for selection. Most children who enter Reading Recovery need to learn more about letters, have very limited knowledge, and need to learn how to look at print.

Because Reading Recovery teachers work one-to-one every day and keep daily records, it is possible to identify with precision what the child knows or is confused about. Teachers begin with the known set of letters and work for expansion. For children

with very low letter knowledge, teachers use movement and, if necessary, verbal and visual approaches to help the child remember the letter. Children write letters, construct their own alphabet book recording their knowledge to date, and work extensively with magnetic letters.

Program evaluation reports indicate that with very few exceptions, children who participate in the program can identify the 54 characters (upper and lower case letters of the alphabet and the print version of *a* and *g*) by the end of the 12- to 20-week program.

Principle 3: Word Recognition: Teach students to recognize words.

First-grade children who are having extreme difficulty in learning to read and write generally know very few if any words. These children are just learning to look at print and to identify a few letters and sounds. It is helpful to build a small but expanding repertoire of words that the child knows in detail and can recognize quickly. With that goal in mind, early in the program, the teacher works to extend knowledge of words by having children make words using magnetic letters, trace words, and write words. Word cards may also be used. The words that the teacher selects to teach to children are

- words with high utility;
- words which occur most often in the language;
- words needed often in writing; and,
- words the child almost knows that a little more practice will bring to overlearning.

Principle 4: Phonics/Decoding Skills: Teach students to use simple and complex letter-sound relationships to solve words in reading and writing.

In Reading Recovery lessons, children learn letter-sound relationships in several different ways, and they are taught to apply that knowledge in reading and writing. Word-solving skills are assessed on a word reading test, a test of hearing and recording sounds in words, and a test of text reading. Analysis of students' errors while they read texts reveals their current skills, and the teacher works from there. Through explicit instruction based on the individual's needs, students are taught to analyze words while reading text. Strategies include left-to-right letter or letter cluster sound analysis as well as noticing word parts. Several different components of the lesson foster the use of sounds and letter correspondence. All instruction is directed toward helping children learn how words work and the automatic, rapid recognition of words while reading for meaning.

If the child has low letter knowledge, the teacher will work intensively with letters; but when the child knows about 20 letters, the teacher will also begin to do some work with words in isolation. This procedure is called *making and breaking*. Using magnetic letters, the teacher works with the child each day, moving from making words that the child knows to using predictable (regular) letter-sound sequences, to simple analogies, and to less predictable letter-sound sequences. The process is systematic in that the teacher has a precise record of the sound-letter sequences that the child already knows and can use; the expansion of knowledge moves from that place to more complex associations. The emphasis is on flexibility and on helping children learn principles to apply in solving many words.

Principle 5: Phonics/Structural Analysis: Teach students to use structural analysis of words and learn spelling patterns.

In Reading Recovery, word analysis is integral to the reading and writing of continuous texts, and there is also explicit instruction in structural analysis of words. Words are considered in isolation to illustrate principles that help children gain control of the principles that underlie English spelling. There is a strong link to reading and writing, with the goal of helping children quickly use knowledge of word structure to take words apart and to spell words.

Principle 6: Fluency/Automaticity: Develop speed and fluency in reading and writing.

In Reading Recovery, there is a strong emphasis on teaching for fluency and phrasing in oral reading. In the 30-minute Reading Recovery lesson, the majority of time is devoted to students' reading of continuous text. While it is important for children to read and use problem-solving skills on a new, challenging text every day, Reading Recovery teachers also make extensive use of rereading texts. Teachers select texts carefully to encourage fluency.

Principle 7: Comprehension: Teach students to construct meaning from print.

Reading Recovery students are taught that what they read must make sense. Instruction helps students develop a variety of strategies directed toward helping children search for meaning as they read. In fact, the Reading Recovery teacher assures that children never lose meaning by careful text selection, careful introduction, and conversation about the story. These strategies (called a self-extending system) include helping children

- monitor their own reading and writing;
- search for cues in word sequences, in meaning, and in letter sequences;
- discover new things for themselves;
- repeat as if to confirm the reading or writing so far;
- self-correct, taking the initiative for making cues match or getting words right; and,
- solve new words by using all the above strategies.

Principle 8: Balanced, Structured Approach: Provide a balanced approach so that literacy develops along a broad front and students can apply skills in reading and writing.

Reading Recovery consists of an interrelated set of learning experiences. Teachers intentionally work to be sure that students make connections across components of the lesson framework. A key concept in Reading Recovery is that “every new thing learned should be revisited in several other activities.” A lesson consists of a variety of activities including reading and comprehending both familiar and new texts, writing a message of importance to the child, phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, basic sight words, fluency, and teaching for strategic processing. It is this balance of activities, providing the opportunity to use skills in many ways, that allows for acceleration.

Principle 9: Early Intervention: Intervene early to undercut reading failure.

Reading Recovery is a short-term (12 to 20 weeks) safety net intervention. Children are entered into Reading Recovery at a critical time in their school careers (age 6 or during first grade). Reading Recovery helps children make accelerated progress and catch up with their first-grade peers. The program also helps

students continue to progress with good, ongoing classroom teaching. It is a supplementary opportunity and is not intended to replace classroom instruction.

Principle 10: Individual Tutoring: Provide one-on-one assistance for the students who are having the most difficulty.

Reading Recovery is defined as one-to-one tutoring. It is not a classroom program; it is not a small group program. Quite simply, if the instruction is not one-to-one, it is not Reading Recovery.

**Reading Recovery:
An Analysis of a Research-Based Reading Intervention¹**

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Literacy is in the forefront of national attention. According to Reid Lyon of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, “reading failure is not only an education problem, but a significant public health problem as well.” National goals and national standards are directed toward raising the general reading competencies of America’s school children; but there is special concern for the children who lag behind. It is in the national interest to provide high quality, intensive intervention for children who are having difficulty in learning to read during the early years of school. And, it is essential for the intervention to catch students before they fail and before they fall so far behind their peers that they can not profit from classroom instruction (Foorman, Francis, S. Shaywitz, B. Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1997; Torgeson, Wager, & Rashotte, 1997a).

If we do not significantly reduce failure in the early years of schooling, it becomes more and more detrimental to the individual and expensive to the system. We take the risk of having a

¹This document was prepared by Gay Su Pinnell for the use of certified Reading Recovery professionals. Pat Kelly, Adria Klein, Maribeth Schmitt, Noel Jones, and Barbara Schubert assisted in the preparation. This material closely represents material already published under copyright. Permission is needed to quote extensively from Marie Clay’s publications. Marie M. Clay has consented to Gay Su Pinnell’s right to represent in this form, protected by the said author’s right to copyright and by the trademark of Reading Recovery.

large number of young adults who have very low literacy skills and negative attitudes toward literacy, and, as a result, toward schooling. Reading Recovery^{®2} is precisely designed to significantly reduce failure in reading.

It makes sense to design our interventions in a way that is consistent with what we know from research about “what works” for young, at risk children. Well designed and delivered interventions that are consistent with the findings of research are worth the investment of resources. In this article, I focus on Reading Recovery as a research-based intervention that incorporates elements supported by research; further, Reading Recovery selectively and uniquely applies these research-based elements in a masterful mix of instruction, with the guiding principle of working from the individual child’s strengths and needs.

The goal of all reading instruction is to teach the child to read with understanding. Reading Recovery is a balanced approach within which powerful instructional components work together to enable young, initially struggling readers to strategically process written texts. There is attention to needed details, for example, letters, sounds, and word parts; there is attention to the use of decoding strategies while reading and writing texts. And, there is attention to the language aspects of reading such as monitoring for comprehension and using phrasing and fluency. There is direct instruction and there is supported practice. This paper reports an analysis of the components of Reading Recovery; it is impossible to do so without taking lessons apart to examine each teaching action. The results in terms of student achievement, though, are related to the combination and integration of these components rather than to a single element.

²Reading Recovery[®] is a program trademarked by The Ohio State University, with permission granted by Marie M. Clay. The trademark was established to protect the integrity and quality of the program; sites meeting standards for Reading Recovery implementation are granted a *royalty free* use of the trademark name yearly. In the interest of readability, the symbol ® is used here but not throughout this document.

As a basis for this component analysis, I examined a selected body of empirical research that is currently receiving national attention. Reid Lyon (1998), Chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) has defined this body of research as the following:

First, the NICHD reading research program is rooted in scientific tradition and the scientific method. The program rests on systematic, longitudinal, field-based investigations, cross-sectional studies, and laboratory-based experiments that are publicly verifiable and replicable. Second, the research integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to increase the richness, impact, and ecological validity of the data. However, using qualitative research methods requires the same scientific rigor employed in quantitative studies. Third, the NICHD reading research program is only one of the many programs dedicated to understanding reading development and difficulties. (p. 15)

While much information may be gained from well-designed longitudinal case studies and from program evaluation, the purpose of this document is to focus only on the research identified by NICHD as “systematic and replicable.” A review of this selected research reveals both instructional and organizational principles that are characteristic of programs that “work” for students who are having difficulty in learning to read and write. Reading Recovery will be analyzed in relation to ten guiding principles, for which supportive empirical research will be cited. A high quality reading intervention must:

- Teach students to hear the sounds in words [phonological awareness].

- Teach students to perceive and identify letters [visual perception/orthographic awareness].
- Teach students to recognize words [word recognition].
- Teach students to link sound sequence with letter sequence in reading and writing words [phonics/decoding skills].
- Teach students to make connections between words and notice and use spelling patterns [phonics/decoding skills using analogy].
- Develop speed and fluency in reading and writing [fluency and automaticity].
- Teach students to construct meaning from print [comprehension].
- Provide a balanced approach so that literacy develops along a broad front and students can apply skills in reading and writing [balanced approach].
- Intervene early to undercut reading failure [early intervention].
- Provide one-on-one assistance for the students who are having the most difficulty [individual tutoring].

The Needs of Beginning Readers Who Have Difficulty Learning to Read

Some beginning readers struggle to understand the relationships between oral and written language. Meanwhile, they find the other students racing away from them as they become readers and writers. First, it is important to note that young readers who have difficulty are mostly of average intelligence and they may have problems resulting from multiple and differing causes. They require one-on-one instruction from a teacher who is able to use a balanced range of approaches in an intensive and individualized way. With appropriate intervention, almost all can learn to read, provided instruction is intensive and begins early (Vellutino, Scanlon, Sipay, Small, Pratt, Chen, & Denckla, 1996). It is therefore important that reading interventions be multi-dimensional in nature in order to meet the needs of these diverse learners.

The report of the National Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children³ states that “there is abundant empirical and observational evidence that the children who are particularly likely to have difficulty with learning to read in the primary grades are those who begin school with less prior knowledge and skill in certain domains, most notably, general verbal abilities, phonological sensitivity, familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading, and letter knowledge.” (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1999, p. 117). It is also important that reading interventions provide a strong foundation for these young learners, including the development of phoneme awareness, orthographic awareness, familiarity with words, and important concepts about print.

The Reading Recovery Lesson: Word Work, Reading and Writing

The Reading Recovery lesson, designed by Clay (*Reading Recovery: A Guidebook for Teachers in Training*, 1993b), provides a masterful combination of components that are consistent with the recommended research. According to Adams (1990),

The Reading Recovery program has been methodically designed to establish and secure that whole complex of lower-order skills on which reading so integrally depends. Its goal extends much further. The program is intended to help the children learn to monitor their own reading; to develop the habit of rereading a word, phrase, or passage when unclear; to know not only that they can discover new words and meanings but also that they can cross-check their discoveries, confirming or correcting them on their own; and to develop a

³The committee reviewed a defined body of research that met the criteria established by the National Institute of Child Health and Development. The findings of the committee are reported in Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., and Griffin, S. (Eds.). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. Washington, DC: Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council.

strong sense of how to search deliberately and methodically for information in letter sequences, word sequences, or meaning when needed. (p. 421)

Instruction provides for learning in the areas of phonological awareness, letter identification, concepts about print, and word learning. Lesson components discussed in this paper are presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Components of the Reading Recovery Lesson

Context	Specific Teaching/ Learning Activity	Base of Instruction
Reading	Rereading familiar texts.	Reading continuous <i>text</i> .
Reading	Rereading yesterday's new book (teacher assessment).	Reading continuous <i>text</i> .
Letters/Words	Letter identification <i>and/or</i> making and breaking words using magnetic letters.	Working with letters, sounds, and words using plastic letters on a magnetic board.
Writing/Sounds	Composing and writing a story (including hearing and recording sounds in words). Writing words for automatic word learning and fluency.	Writing continuous text, with attention to letter-sound relationships and the structure of words.
Constructing and Reading Text	Cut-up story to be rearranged.	Constructing, sequencing, reading task (involves visual searching and confirmation).
Reading	Introducing a new book. Reading a new book.	Thinking about continuous text - story or informational. Reading continuous <i>text</i> .

Some lesson components focus the child's attention at the letter or word level in order to develop phonological abilities and visual perception abilities as well as to help them learn words and learn the structural properties of words, that is, how words "work." Letters, sounds, and words are essential information for readers and Reading Recovery teachers assure that children learn them. Other lesson components provide instruction as children are reading or writing continuous text. Children learn strategies for *using* their understanding of letters, sounds, and words within the processes of reading and writing.

It is obvious from the framework described above that Reading Recovery is a text-based program in which students have many opportunities to read and reread texts selected by the teacher for appropriate level of difficulty and for learning opportunities. Students also have the opportunity to compose and write a message every day, spelling words and using various word solving strategies as they write. But it is also obvious that Reading Recovery teachers spend time with children working on words, letters, and sounds so that they focus their attention on the internal structure of words. Letter-sound relationships, as well as the analysis of words, are taught explicitly. Analyses done at the letter and word level are continually incorporated into meta-operations for the successful reading and writing of texts. This balance of word work, reading and writing - tailored to the precise needs of the individual learner - makes the Reading Recovery lesson accelerative for these initially struggling readers.

Ten Principles for Designing Reading Intervention Programs

Elements of the Reading Recovery lesson will be described and linked to each of the first eight instructional principles drawn from research. The final two principles refer to organizational

arrangements against which Reading Recovery will also be assessed.

Principle 1: Phonological Awareness: Teach students to hear the sounds in words.

Torgeson (Torgeson, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1977a, 1977b) has argued the importance of assessing children's phonological awareness as a critical aspect of learning to read (see also, Juel, 1991). The phonological system refers to the sounds of the language; when children develop phonological awareness, they become sensitive to the sounds. They recognize that spoken words consist of a sequence of sounds (Ball & Blachman, 1991). They can hold up language and its sounds to conscious observation and analysis. They can tell when words start like or end like other words. Phonological awareness may involve several different ways of breaking up and analyzing words, including a phoneme-by-phoneme analysis, syllable analysis, or onset-rime analysis.

Listeners automatically process speech signals; indeed, human beings are uniquely programmed to do so. In speech, the consonant and vowels are completely coarticulated so that they do not stand out as separate entities. This coarticulation is not a problem for listening but it does make it hard for children to discover that a word has an internal structure. They need to learn to "hear the sounds within words," for example for the word *bat*, rather than as separate sounds, consonants followed by an "uh" as in *buh, a, tuh* for *bat*).

Phonemic awareness (that spoken words consist of a sequence of sounds) is an important understanding that is basic to grasping the alphabetic principle (Ball & Blachman, 1991). The alphabetic principle is the basis for the English writing system.

Grasping the alphabetic principle means understanding that written words are made up of letters and these letters are approximately matched to the sounds of language; that is, the graphic units of the alphabet are related to the phonological structure of words (I. Liberman, D. Shankweiler, & A. Liberman, 1985).

Young children demonstrate awareness of syllables, but awareness of the sounds in words, or “phoneme segments,” is more difficult for young children to achieve (Liberman, I., Y., Shankweiler, D., Fischer, & Carter, 1974). Phoneme awareness comes later and many children need some help or instruction in developing it. This strong predictor of reading achievement (Lomax & McGee, 1987) involves children’s ability to recognize that words can be broken into phonemes and syllables and being able to manipulate these elements.

A large body of research documents that phoneme awareness is related to early development of the ability to read and spell words (Blachman, 1984; Bradley & Bryant, 1983; Fox & Routh, 1984; Hohn & Ehri, 1983; Lundberg, Frost, & Petersen, 1988; Perfetti, Beck, Bell, & Hughes, 1987; Treiman & Baron, 1981; and Vellutino & Scanlon, 1987). Researchers have found that performance on reading tests was predicted by performance on phonological awareness measures as well as ability to recite nursery rhymes (Bryant, Bradley, Camlean, & Crossland, 1989; Bryant, MacLean, Bradley, & Crossland, 1990). Early training in phonemic awareness has been shown to be related to word recognition and spelling (Ball & Blachman, 1991).

Deficiency in phonemic awareness has been identified as a major cause of difficulty in word identification (Vellutino & Denckla, 1991). According to Griffith & Olson (1992), phonemic awareness is foundational to using letter-sound correspon-

dences for solving words in reading. It may also be related to whole-word learning (Tunmer, Herriman, & Nesdale, 1988).

Phonological Awareness in Reading Recovery Lessons

Developing the ability to hear the sounds in words is explicitly recognized in the Reading Recovery program (Adams, 1990). When children are evaluated for selection for Reading Recovery, a measure⁴ of ability to hear and record sounds in words is used (Clay, 1993a). The measure, Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words, involves dictating a sentence to the child, who is expected to write it, one word at a time as prompted by the assessor. The measure is not a spelling test; it is scored to determine the number of phonemes (maximum = 37) that the child has represented accurately. Several sentences have been constructed to provide for retesting. The test assesses children's ability to represent 37 phonemes. Performance on this measure of phonological awareness provides data that teachers use daily as they work individually with young children.

In Reading Recovery lessons, children are explicitly taught how to use letter-sound relationships to construct words in writing and to analyze words while reading. In order to accomplish these complex analyses, specific instruction is employed to help children think about the order of sounds in spoken words and to analyze the word into the sequence of sounds. From the story that a child writes, the teacher selects two or three words that will be illustrative of the process. At first, the teacher chooses words in which it is easy to hear the sounds, which the child will need to use often, and which have simple letter-sound relationships.

⁴Test-retest reliability coefficients reported for this measure ranged from 0.73 to 0.89 (Clay, 1985) on a New Zealand population. This research reported corrected split-half coefficients ranging from 0.84 to 0.88. Validity was determined by correlating the dictation test results with scores on a test of word reading with 100 children at age 6.0. Correlation coefficients were determined to be 0.79 (Clay, 1966). In a study of kindergarten and first-grade children (Pinnell, McCarrier, & Button, 1990), results of the dictation scores provided a source of data to determine reliability on an American sample. A Cronbach alpha procedure indicated a reliability coefficient of .96 on the first-grade sentences.

According to Clay (1993b), "...some children find it extraordinarily difficult to hear the sounds that go to make up words. For example, some children consistently focus on the final sound of the word and for them this completely masks the initial sounds. For children who cannot hear the order of sounds in words the teacher can act as analyser of the words. She articulates the words slowly, but naturally, and gradually develops the same skill in her pupils" (p. 32).

Most children selected for Reading Recovery need instruction to develop phonological awareness. If this is the case, in the first lessons, the child is encouraged to articulate and hear the word in the absence of letters; he uses counters, which are pushed into boxes while the word is articulated (Elkonin, 1963, 1973). This "hearing sounds in words" exercise is used daily in Reading Recovery, moving from sound boxes in the absence of letters to boxes in which letters are recorded for each sound, and finally, to working out words with a box for each letter (Clay, 1993). In this way, children are explicitly shown how to analyze sounds in words and to connect phonemes and the grapheme patterns that represent them. The learning in this part of the lesson is applied in several other parts as children become more competent in hearing sounds in words (Clay, 1993b).

Principle 2: Visual Perception of Letters: Teach students to perceive and identify letters of the alphabet.

The alphabet is the basic tool of the reader and writer; all words in our system are based on this limited set of graphic signs. To identify letters, a basic foundational skill, the child must learn to notice the features (very small differences) that distinguish one letter from another. In students' early experiences with print, it is important for them to notice letters and to learn how to differentiate one from another. They also need to learn the

names of letters (Pressley, 1998; Venezky, 1975; Walsh, Price, & Gillingham, 1988). Letter identification is traditionally evaluated in preschool and kindergarten children. Adams (1990) has said that "...knowledge of letter names is the single best predictor of success in first-grade reading." (p. 21). Snow, *et. al.* (1998) reports that "the strongest predictor on its own is letter identification."

A large number of longitudinal studies indicate that "how many letters a kindergartner is able to name when shown letters in a random order appears to be nearly as successful at predicting future reading, as is an entire readiness test." (p. 113). Furthermore, recognizing the letters of the alphabet is a necessary, although not sufficient, factor in mastering the alphabetic principle (I. Liberman, D. Shankweiler, & A. Liberman, 1985). Some research indicates that even children who have very little difficulty visually identifying letters may yet be making little progress in learning to read and will need special help in other areas of learning (Stanovich, 1982; Vellutino, 1979). Snow, Burns, & Griffin (1998) caution that letter identification alone is not sufficient as a single measure to identify children for early intervention; nevertheless, letter knowledge is an important factor.

The National Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) specifies kindergarten accomplishments to include recognizing and naming all uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet. Research provides ample evidence that low letter knowledge is a roadblock in learning to read; letter-level cues are the primary means for recognizing words (Adams, 1990; Pressley, 1998).

Letter Identification in Reading Recovery

Students are selected for Reading Recovery during their first grade year. They are assessed for letter recognition as part of the battery of tests that are used for selection. Most children who enter Reading Recovery need to learn more about letters, and some have very limited knowledge (for example, in one large city the average entry score was 2, and for many children that involved the same letter, upper and lower case versions). On the assessment, letters are presented randomly so that the child is required to recognize each letter rather than “saying the alphabet.” The initial assessment provides good information for the beginning of instruction. There is ongoing observation and careful recording as the child not only learns more letters but gains strategies for looking at them and using them in flexible ways. The child is assisted to build a system for learning letters — knowing what to look for to distinguish one from another.

Letters, sounds, and words. Working with letters is an integral part of the Reading Recovery lesson until the child is competent in this area. Teachers work to ensure that very early in the program, children learn how to look at letters, distinguish one from another, learn their names and associated sounds, learn to notice letters within words, and produce all of these responses with speed. According to Clay (1993b), “The child must learn to attend to the details in print, respecting the rules of direction, the order or sequences of letters, and the order of words. Some children, finding this difficult or tedious, coast along on their language skills and pay as little attention to the detail of print as they can get away with.” (p. 23). Several components of the Reading Recovery lesson work against this kind of behavior.

Because teachers are working one-on-one every day and keeping daily records, it is possible to identify with precision what

the child knows and/or is confused about and to individualize the letter learning program for maximum effectiveness.

Teachers begin with the known set of letters and work for expansion. Early in the program, the teacher is working to help the child “gain footholds” in print by learning letters and some simple words.

For children with very low letter knowledge, teachers use a movement, verbal, visual approach to help the child remember the letter. Children write letters, use their personalized alphabet books, construct their own alphabet book with their own letter knowledge recorded to date, and work extensively with magnetic letters, which, because they are three-dimensional, lend themselves to feeling shapes and sorting letters in various ways.

After taking a running record on yesterday's new book, teachers always work with magnetic letters. “This is a short segment of a lesson in which children learn to identify all the letter forms, but the letters must be overlearned because as well as identifying the letter, the children need to learn fast and accurate visual responses which require only minimal attention” (Clay, 1993b, p. 24). Other segments of the lesson move the child into reading and writing, so performance in those areas is not delayed until the child knows every letter. Alphabet learning is completed before the end of the program, however, as documented by exit scores on the letter identification task. The personalized alphabet book is useful in helping the child “tidy up” knowledge of these small items of print. Program evaluation reports indicate that almost all children who participate in the program can identify the 54 characters (upper and lower case and the print version of *a* and *g*) by the end of their individualized twelve- to twenty-week program. This work with isolated letters is combined with noticing letters within words and within continuous text.

Writing. As the child learns more, high value is placed on noticing and using letters within writing. As the teacher and child work together to compose and then write a message, there is opportunity for the teacher to call the child's attention to visual features of letters, to orientation, and to movement as the child writes them. Often, verbal descriptions are used to help instill the movements necessary to produce letters, for example, "*make k down, and in and out*" (Clay, 1993b, p. 26). In a writing book, turned sideways, the child's story is written on the bottom page. The top page, or "practice page," is a place where the child can write letters (early in the program for children with low letter knowledge) and words.

Reading. When children have very low letter knowledge and are just starting to read, the teacher's task is to find a readable text. That will be one with just one or two lines of print and possibly repeating language patterns. The idea is *not* for the child to memorize text. As Clay (1993b) states:

It has been erroneously reported that in Reading Recovery children are expected to memorise the texts of their first books in order to match what they have learned by heart with what they see on the page (Ehri & Sweet, 1991). Such a memorising strategy would be antagonistic to what the reader has to do: the on-going problem-solving of the reader on continuous text has nothing in common with memorising the text first. Memorising is NOT a place to begin because it gives the novice reader an incorrect impression of what the task is. (p. 39)

Principle 3: Word Recognition: Teach students to recognize words.

In the earliest stages of learning to read, students do not have in place the skills needed for phonological decoding systems; so, they must often read words by sight (Ehri, 1991). These early sight words are very helpful to students as they learn more about word identification strategies. Children who know how to recognize letters and have a small body of words they can read, move more easily to the application of letter-sound relationships to reading words (Ehri, L.C., & Wilce, L.S., 1985). Also, as Vellutino & Denckla (1991) found, some words in English require sight recognition because of inconsistent letter-sound generalizations (for example, of, some, who, the). Noting the order in words also seems to support word recognition (Vellutino & Denckla, 1991).

Moreover, it appears that the more words an individual knows and recognizes, the easier it is to learn more. In a longitudinal study, Juel (1988) found that first graders who had good word recognition read twice as many words in books as did those who had low competence in this area. Having a body of sight words allows children to read more rapidly and to read more. Juel, Griffith, & Gough (1986) also found high correlations between word recognition and text comprehension. Stanovich (1985) offers:

While it is possible for adequate word recognition skills to be accompanied by poor comprehension abilities, the converse virtually never occurs. It has never been empirically demonstrated, nor is it theoretically expected, that some instructional innovation could result in good reading comprehension without the presence of at least adequate word recognition. (p. 418)