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Reading Recovery in United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland: 2012–13



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Foreword

Reading Recovery is a daily one-to-one literacy programme for the lowest achieving children aged five or six that enables them to reach age-expected levels within 20 weeks. In 2012–13 more than five in every six children in Reading Recovery caught up with their class mates. Reading Recovery teachers offer additional support within a school by mapping, providing and monitoring a range of other literacy interventions across the primary age range.

This report presents an overview of Reading Recovery; the scale of implementation across the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, outcomes and on-going progress. In particular, it highlights the impact of the intervention on the attainment of children identified as disadvantaged, and on closing the gender gap in achievement. It calls upon the latest research and findings highlighting the importance of early intervention. The voices of children, teachers and schools managers are heard.

Ongoing professional development is a crucial component of being a Reading Recovery teacher. A section of the report this year explores the power of continual adult learning and the impact for children. Reading Recovery teachers never consider themselves to be ‘finished’ – there is always more we can learn from working with our children.

Introduction

What is Reading Recovery?

Reading Recovery is an accredited school-based literacy programme for the lowest achieving children that enables them to reach age-expected levels within 20 weeks. It involves a short series of one-to-one lessons every day with a specially trained teacher.

The programme is different for every child, starting from what the child knows and

what he/she needs to learn next. 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 for children to develop effective reading and writing strategies in order to work within an average range of classroom performance.

Why choose Reading Recovery?

Reading Recovery is the affordable way to deliver the best results for children who need to catch up in literacy.

Reading Recovery is the only programme for six year olds who are significantly behind in reading and writing.

Research shows that no other approach achieves such good results so swiftly and so long lasting.

“At a time when education appears to be in a constant state of flux, Reading Recovery remains untouched, unscathed and impenetrable in terms of political interference.

“It is the fulcrum in the jigsaw of school provision and is held in the highest regard by staff, governors and parents. Why? It opens doors for the most vulnerable and deserving of our young people, to a world of communication, meaning and enjoyment.

“To empower a child with the ability to read, to problem solve and process information is truly the core purpose of our existence as educators. Reading Recovery has proven, over time, in many contexts and across the globe, that it works.

“As a school it has helped us challenge our thinking and professional practice to the point where we view ourselves as learners. Barriers to learning are being broken on a daily basis across the school – a direct result of the influence of the principles of Reading Recovery.”

Stephen Fallon, head teacher at St Stephen’s Roman Catholic Primary School, North Tyneside.



Highlights from annual Reading Recovery monitoring

Almost **12,500** five and six year olds received Reading Recovery in 2012–13 because they were the lowest attaining in their class. More than **five in every six** children who completed Reading Recovery were lifted to age-appropriate levels of literacy.

A further **8,208** children received a 'lighter touch' intervention, supported by the Reading Recovery teacher, meaning that the programme benefitted more than **20,000** children in all.

In total, over **1,500** schools implemented the programme, through more than **1,600** Reading Recovery teachers.

Special Educational Needs

Following Reading Recovery **1,558** children could be removed from the SEN register, whilst **84** children could be identified early as requiring formal assessment (allocated resource hours in Ireland).

Key Stage 1 National Assessments in England

Almost **nine in 10** of those children who had made accelerated progress in Reading Recovery, went on to attain Level 2 or above in reading, and **three out of four** in writing.

Key Stage 2 National Assessments in England

The children identified for Reading Recovery at age six are the most likely to fail to reach Level 3 at age 11.



Don't be afraid to read because it's going to be easy!

Of the **1,218** former Reading Recovery pupils, **94%** attained Level 3 or above in reading, and **74%** attained Level 4 or above.

In writing, **95%** achieved Level 3 or above and **65%** achieved Level 4 or above. This includes all children who completed Reading Recovery, even those who had not achieved the goals of the programme previously.

Closing the attainment gap

Economically disadvantaged children made up **48%** of the Reading Recovery cohort, compared with **21%** nationally.

Of these children, **83%** reached age-related expectations for literacy, alongside **85%** of their more advantaged peers, narrowing the attainment gap considerably.

At age 11, the attainment gap between economically disadvantaged children and their peers remained small, with a difference of just **4%** at Level 4 in both reading and writing.

Almost **two in every three** of the lowest attaining children in Reading Recovery were boys, but the gap between the genders was also closed by Reading Recovery, with just **2%** at both age seven and again at age 11.

For further details

Please see the Reading Recovery™ annual technical report for the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland: 2012-13 available at: <http://readingrecovery.ioe.ac.uk/reports/37.html>

Reading

The children offered Reading Recovery are the lowest attaining in literacy in their class, effectively non-readers (figure 1), even after three terms at school.

On entry to the programme, three out of four children (**77%**) were Reading Recovery Book Level 2 or below.

After **18 weeks**, or an average of **36 hours** of one-to-one lessons with a specially trained teacher, **84%** of children had caught up with their classmates.

Progress

Children had progressed from a reading age of **five years and one month**, Book Level 1 (image 1), to a reading age of **six years and 10 months**, Book Level 17 (image 3).

In National Curriculum terms, they moved from working towards **Level 1 to Level 1a**, on track for achieving **Level 2b** at the end of Key Stage 1, in line with national benchmarks.

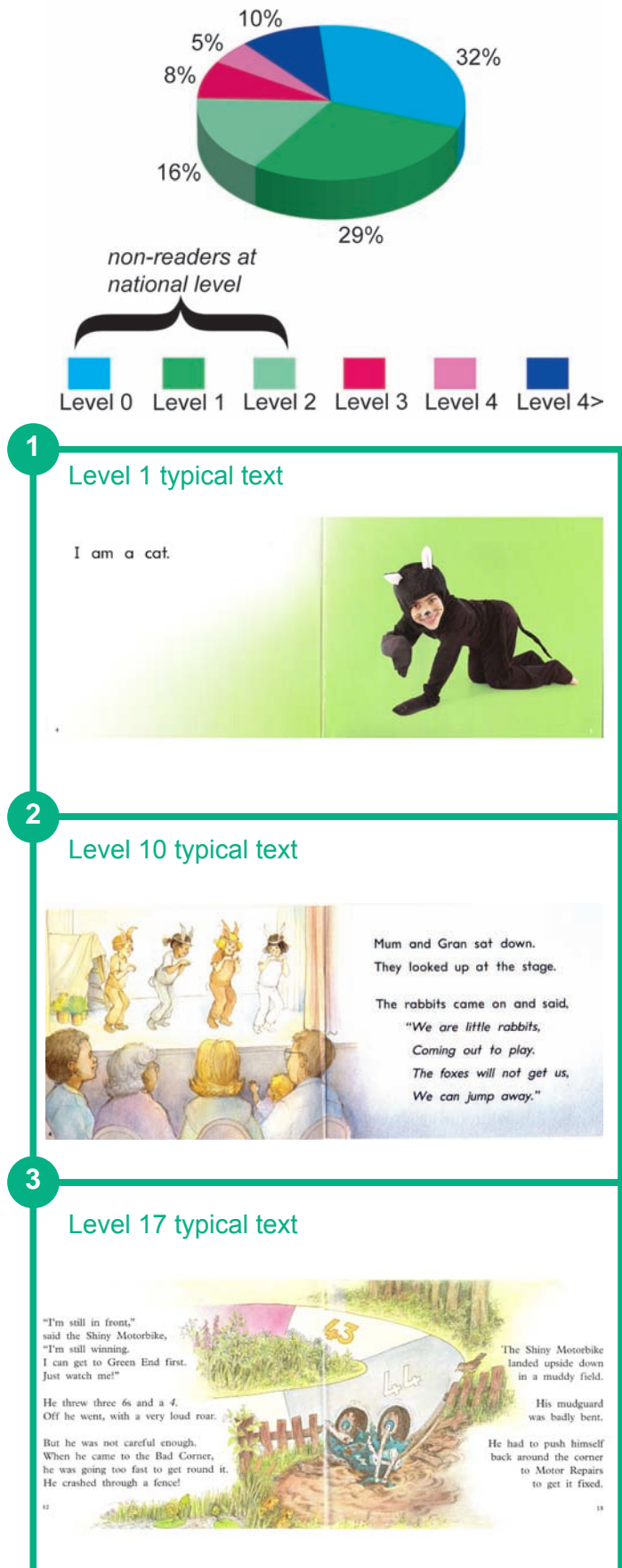
They made, on average, a reading age gain of **21 months** in four-to-five months, around **five times** the normal rate of progress.

Children who did not catch up with their classmates (known as 'referred') still made progress, on average at **twice the normal rate**, and they moved from being non-readers to accessing reading and writing in their class, but still needing some support.

These children had learned how to use their knowledge of letters and sounds to decode text, and to understand and enjoy stories.

They had progressed to a reading age of **six years and one month**, Book Level 10 (image 2), a gain of 12 months reading age after a slightly longer lesson series, an average of **19 weeks**.

Figure 1: Book Level on entry, for children with completed programme outcomes, 2012-13



Writing

Writing is an essential element of Reading Recovery. What a child learns in reading supports and complements their writing and vice versa.

Children are taught how to compose sentences to write down their own ideas. They are taught explicitly how to use their phonic knowledge to spell regular words.

As children progress they are taught more complex or irregular spelling patterns, and they build a vocabulary of words they can write automatically in order to become fluent writers. They compose and write longer, more complex messages independently.



" Writing is good because I can make up my own stories. " Reading Recovery child

4

At entry to Reading Recovery

W
M M e h o b o r t r o s e p f t
dress party
M M e h o b o r t r o + m
great time
W e

5

At exit from Reading Recovery

Once upon a time there was
three little pig one day they
decided to build house of straw
then the wolf came along
and the big bad wolf said little pig
little pig let me cum in

6

Almost a year after completing Reading Recovery

Oh long long time ago
there was a little light blue boy
playing on his wiff. Then his mum called
the boy "little light blue grammar" because
to see you as her son, so they "mum
called "ok" called little light blue so
little light blue got changed and soon
he took off to see his grammar. So he
walked and walked in the woods until
he meet a fox. The fox asked "where
are you going?" "I'm in the woods" the little light
blue ran away to his grammar house
but the fox got there before little light
blue did. Then he knocked and grammar
opened the door "hello little
light blue" "I'm here" grammar said and then
the fox grabbed grammar all up. Then
little light blue came and
screamed "grammar I meet a fox
he scared me wait are you in there?"
then he saw grammar "grammar wait
you look different" "quest ind little
light blue" "It is a new plan I'm
trying out the fox grabbed wow
What big teeth you have" "I'm
little light blue."

Children like Leon¹ (writing examples, below left) had learned very little about writing before being identified for Reading Recovery. They were typically unable to write the letters and sounds they knew, or to use phonics to help their spelling (image 4). Many could not write their own name.

Progress

At the end of their Reading Recovery lessons, after an average of **18 weeks**, children had made substantial progress in writing and were now **on track** for the appropriate National Curriculum level for their age, **Level 2**. Leon was able to use his knowledge of phonics to spell new words and complete simple pieces of writing (image 5).

Leon is now working at the expected phonic phase (**phase five** of 'Letters and Sounds'). Children in Reading Recovery have learned how to use their new understanding of letters and sounds to compose and write messages and stories.

Children who complete their lessons series afterwards, as Leon's independent class work (image 6) demonstrates. As well as being able to control more complex spellings post-programme, children are also able to express more interesting and challenging ideas and to sustain a lengthy composition.

¹ Leon is a pseudonym

Closing the gap

Children in poverty

“Birchen Coppice Primary School [in Worcestershire] is super, but it faces many challenges. Free school meals are at 70%+. As a staff we work tirelessly to support pupils and their families so they can engage and flourish in education and celebrate success. Reading Recovery children gained between 21-30 months in reading age from entry to exit. This is fantastic”.

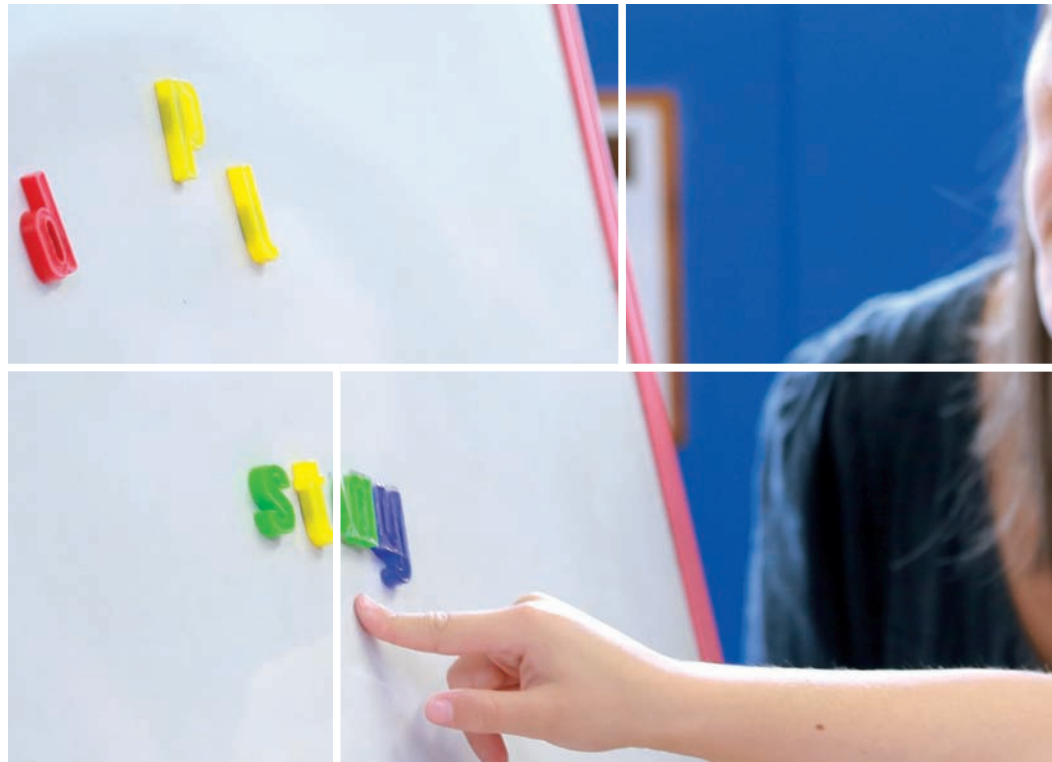
Too many children fail before they’ve even started in life (Save the Children, 2013).

Reducing school failure and improving outcomes for disadvantaged children is high on government agendas both in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

The attainment gap between children in poverty and their more advantaged peers widens throughout a child’s schooling, and so has a direct bearing on access to higher education and the best jobs (DfE, 2013a).

Save the Children (2013) found that if children from poor families were already behind with their reading at the age of seven, they had just over a **one in five** chance of going on to achieve a grade C in English at GCSE.

Nearly half of the children (**48%**) in Reading Recovery in 2012–13 came from economically disadvantaged homes.



This is a very high proportion compared with the distribution of such children in the general population (**21%**).

Poor children were more than **twice** as likely to be the lowest attaining in their age group and thus identified for Reading Recovery.

In Ireland, the Department for Education and Science (DES) has implemented an action plan for educational inclusion entitled DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) (DES, 2011).

Under DEIS, schools and school clusters or communities are allocated supplementary resources and support in line with their concentration of disadvantage.

Reading Recovery is offered as part of this support structure, along with other lighter-touch interventions led by a Reading Recovery teacher or teacher leader.

In 2012–13, **more than half (52%)** of the Reading Recovery schools in Ireland were located in designated areas of disadvantage.

The Government in England considers tackling disadvantaged pupils’ underperformance during school years as critical to improving young people’s life chances (DfE, 2013a).

Pupil Premium is allocated to individual children, using entitlement to free school meals as an indicator of poverty. Schools in England can decide how they apply the Pupil Premium.



School inspections focus in particular on the attainment of those pupils who attract the premium (DfE, 2013b).

Schools are therefore able to choose to use this funding to support Reading Recovery.

Reading Recovery brought about a remarkable change to the fortunes of children in poverty in 2012–13.

From being more than **twice** as likely to be amongst the lowest attaining children, **five out of six (83%)** of those children deemed to be economically disadvantaged reached age-related expectations for literacy alongside **85%** of their more advantaged peers.

Children in England are independently assessed at the age of seven (Key Stage 1).

Of children who had completed Reading Recovery, **76%** of those entitled to free school meals achieved Level 2 or above in the reading assessment, with **63%** achieving the same for writing.

Moreover, for the children who achieved accelerated progress in Reading Recovery, the difference between outcomes was negligible; **88%** of children deemed disadvantaged reached Level 2 in reading alongside **90%** of their peers, and **74%** achieved the same in writing, alongside **76%** of their more advantaged peers.

Neither was there seen to be a widening gap as children progressed through school.

Children who had completed Reading Recovery at around the age of six were tracked through to the end of Key Stage 2.

The gap at Level 4 was within **eight percentage points** for reading and **seven percentage points** for writing.

For those children who had achieved accelerated progress when they were six, the gap between children in poverty and their more advantaged peers was even smaller at just **4%** difference at Level 4 in both aspects.

At Level 3, the attainment gap between children in poverty and their peers had all but disappeared, with just **1%** separating them in both writing and reading.

Given that Reading Recovery seeks specifically to address the difficulties of the children who fail to reach Level 3 at the end of Key Stage 2, this is a remarkable success.

“We should be ambitious for all children’s ability – even those who are falling behind the most – to master literacy early in primary school, with all the benefits that this will bring for them in the future” (Save the Children, 2013).

Boys & underachievement

In 2012, the National Literacy Trust in England published the findings of the All Party Parliamentary Group's (APPG) Boys' Reading Commission.

The report revealed that **three out of four (76%)** UK schools were concerned about boys' underachievement in reading, with research consistently evidencing the attainment of boys in reading lagging behind that of girls'.

The commission noted how the reading gender gap was widening in the population.

Moreover, the gap grew bigger between boys and girls as cohorts progressed through their school years.

The persistence of the attainment gap between girls and boys remains with little change over time (Ofsted, 2012).

Boys are significantly more likely than girls to leave school early and to demonstrate low levels of attainment in education (DES, 2007).

Gavin Barwell MP, in his foreword to the APPG Boys' Reading Commission, recognised that the gender gap presented complex issues for which there was no one-size-fits-all solution.



The overriding belief of the Commission was that "boys' underachievement in literacy is not inevitable" (National Literacy Trust, 2012).

Findings for children taught in Reading Recovery provide irrefutable evidence to substantiate that belief.

Of the children identified as the lowest attaining at around the age of six and therefore eligible for Reading Recovery, boys outnumbered girls by approximately **three to two**, with boys representing **60%** of the intake.

The fact that this figure has remained consistent over time accords with the findings of Ofsted and the Boys' Reading Commission.

Now Reading Recovery outcomes for children at the end of their lesson series can demonstrate a closing of the gap between the genders.

In 2012–13, boys attained within **two percentage points** of girls, with **83%** and **85%** respectively lifted to national expectations for literacy.

"In Key Stage 1, the number of boys making expected progress rose from **69%** to **82%**."

"The school has forecast a similar level of attainment this year. Many of our children enter school working well below age related expectations in reading."

I seeu happy when I read. Books make me



The effects of Reading Recovery are seen to maintain for both gender groups over time.

The long-term effects of low literacy have been shown to have a huge influence on future life chances (KPMG, 2009).

Tacit acceptance of the gender gap in attainment serves to reinforce the expectation that boys will not be good or keen readers.

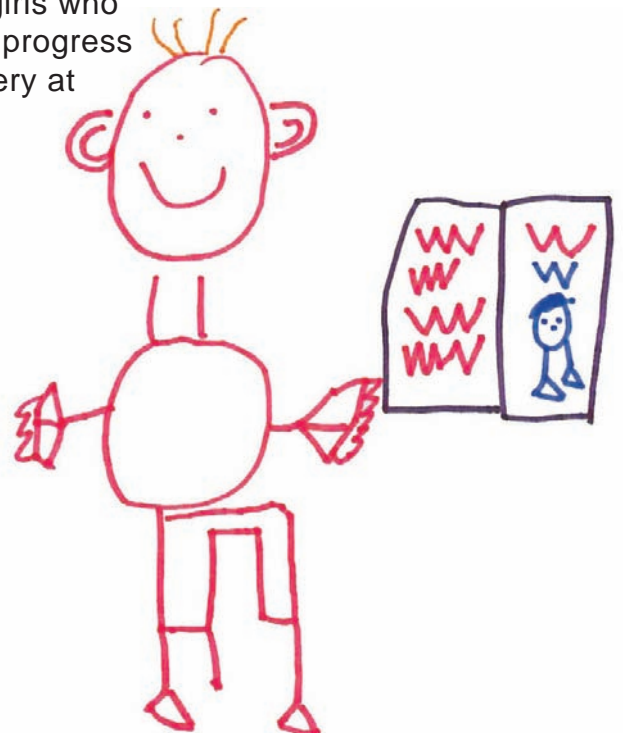
Reading Recovery in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland clearly challenges that expectation and proves that boys can and do become excellent readers, equipped with the literacy skills needed for them to take their place in a literate society.

“Now the progress pupils make in Key Stage 1 is rapid and sustained,” Millbrook Combined School in Buckinghamshire.

Independently assessed levels of attainment for children in England at age seven and again at age 11 demonstrate the gender gap continuing to close.

It needs to be reiterated that these children were the lowest attaining in their year group at age six, yet by the age of 11, the gap between the genders was only 3% for reading and 4% for writing at Level 4 or above for all children who had completed Reading Recovery, including those who were referred for further support.

For children who achieved the programme aims (that is reaching the average attainment for their age group at the end of their lesson series), the gender gap in reading almost completely closed; 81% of boys and 83% of girls who made accelerated progress in Reading Recovery at age six, achieved Level 4 reading at age 11.



Laugh. I can write a letter to my Dad.

Teacher professional development

Ask a group of Primary School teachers what they know about what Reading Recovery teachers actually do and you'll get some interesting answers, ranging from "Teaching one child at a time – it sounds a breeze!", "There's no way they'd get me teaching behind a one way mirror!" and "Don't they have to recite a script?"

To which the short responses are no it isn't, yes they would and you've got to be joking! The real story is, as always a lot more complicated.

Professional learning

Yes, Reading Recovery does involve teaching the very lowest attaining children individually every day and no, that is not as easy as it sounds.

The challenge for Reading Recovery teachers is to take those children who, for whatever reason, have made almost no progress in learning to read and write in their first year at school, and to get them learning at four times the rate of progress of children without reading difficulties so that they don't just catch up with their peers, but continue to learn at normal rates, as if they have never had reading problems. Put like that, it's not such a cushy number.

So you can imagine that the professional learning that enables teachers to achieve that more than eight times out of 10, is no ordinary training.



Christine Elford from Northumberland trained in Reading Recovery. "I qualified as a teacher in 1996, and I have learned more this year than in any other. I have always been eager to take part in Continuing Professional Development, and have previously qualified as a Specific Learning Difficulties teacher, being recognised as an approved teacher by the BDA.

"Having been trained in Reading Recovery has at last made me confident in my response to a child who is struggling with reading.

"Simple procedures with small steps have allowed children, who at five had already developed a negative attitude to reading and books, to blossom in a way and a time-scale that I never thought possible."

Real children, real lessons

That's where the one way mirror comes in - the opportunity to watch at very close quarters as a colleague teaches a child, and to analyse in fine detail the interaction between teacher and learner, grounds professional learning in reality.

One teacher wrote: "As I observed lessons behind the screen and engaged in conversations which analysed the learning we were seeing, I became much more astute in knowing what to look for.

"I began to think more theoretically and learned to problem-solve more effectively, making stronger, more powerful teaching decisions."



This reflective practice, directly linking observation, analysis and theory, can help us see things in a new light: “I mean things like visual perception. I’d never even considered it and yet you read [that chapter] and you think ‘gosh, why have I never thought of this before? And all those little bits start to fall into place and you realise how difficult literacy is for these children”.

That new light can shine in unexpected places: “... possibly as a class teacher you look at the surface level of what children are doing, you might be looking at the behaviours, but you don’t necessarily have a theory about what those behaviours might mean about that child.

“Before I came into Reading Recovery I didn’t ... try to look at why the child was doing something. I looked at what they were doing and then I decided what they should be doing next or what they should be doing instead but... it just didn’t enter my head to think about why the child was doing something”.

That can be quite challenging, especially when we have grown accustomed to being told what and how to teach, as one teacher told us: “I have previously delivered a prescribed literacy curriculum, following schemes, school policies or national guidelines without fundamentally questioning these.

People often comment that using a mirror seems very old fashioned in the age of hi tech, but we’ve tried video lessons and they are just not the same. This is not about giving perfect models of lessons to be imitated, it is about analysing the learning of real children, in real time, and trying to understand their thinking.

It’s about exploring with the teacher after the lesson, what helped that child to learn and what might be getting in the way, and then working together to find a way forward.

And, because the teacher is a colleague with whom we will continue to work with over the coming months, it is about following that child’s progress and knowing how our advice worked out in practice. It is a challenging but exhilarating way of learning.

Interweaving theory and practice

Deep professional learning doesn’t come from observation in isolation, but from the interplay of theory and practice, through opportunities to examine our understanding of how children learn to read and write, to articulate our thinking and hold it up to scrutiny against the evidence of how we see children respond.

Another Reading Recovery teacher wrote: “I have gradually moved towards being a more reflective literacy learner and teacher, interweaving theory with practice, assimilating a different theory of learning, examining assumptions and revising them, this is transformative learning!”

“I expected a scheme of work to deliver Reading Recovery and was frustrated when this was not forthcoming.

“Instead, my perceptions of how children learn have altered, as I questioned my teaching, moving from a scheme-driven, item based model to one developing independent learning, developing strategic processing, integrating letter and word work and reading and writing as reciprocal processes”.

Another said: “When I embarked on the Teacher Leader Professional Development year, I thought I was going to learn how to ‘teach teachers how to teach Reading Recovery.

“In reality I have learned how to be a learner. For the first time in my career I have been given an opportunity to think, reflect, consider and make informed decisions rather than rolling out the next initiative with little theory or understanding.”

That transformation is not just in their teaching, but in teachers’ view of themselves as a professional. Mandy King from Devon wrote: “For me it has fulfilled the wish to specialise in something. I love the fact I can focus on one subject and learn about it in depth ...

“I have learnt so much in one year about reading and how to teach it but I know I have much more to learn. It has, so far, been a great journey.

“Yesterday I was chatting with some lady in town and we got onto talking about children and the importance of their development and I heard myself saying ‘reading was my field’! I was very proud to catch myself saying that along with the realisation that it was actually true!!”

Reading Recovery is hard work, ask any Reading Recovery teacher, but it is empowering. The real motivation for all of these teachers is the sense of changing children’s lives.

Mandy again, wrote: “The rewards are amazing as you watch and guide these children into becoming successful readers.

“They seem to go from the child who wants the ground to swallow them up rather than ask/answer a question, to the child who is focussed, confident and having dialogue with the adults and children around them in a way that has never happened before”.

And Cathy told us: “Being a Reading Recovery teacher has been career changing for me and life changing for the children who have learnt to read and write through this programme.

“One little boy started Year 1, crying every day. His mother was despairing and the teacher could not get him to do any work.

“He started Reading Recovery at the end of September. Within a couple of weeks he came to school happy, and attempted work in class.

“He is now working slightly above the average of the class, and his attainment in other subjects has improved dramatically, resulting in him being placed on the gifted and talented register for Art, and he was invited to Chatsworth House to see his work on display there”.

Jane O’Brien, a Reading Recovery teacher in Wandsworth, sums it up: “The skills and strategies [the children] now have are important tools to help them in the rest of school life (and in future learning).

“But it is how they are clearly feeling inside that is the greatest measure of success of this intervention. These children keep their chins up, love showing off what they know, run into the room to get their file out and smile - a lot. It should be called Self-esteem Recovery.”

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