



# Reading Recovery — *a safe shore*

*Clemson's Reading Recovery® Training Center has helped two decades of South Carolina first-graders overcome problems in learning to read.*



**By Sandra Parker**

If you've been around a South Carolina elementary school in the past 20 years, you've probably heard of the two R's that are sacred to all first-grade teachers — Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery is an instructional intervention for first-time first-graders who have difficulty learning to read.

## **When reading just doesn't come easy**

First-graders are as individual as their little handprints, with different skills, talents and learning styles. At the beginning of each school year, incoming first-graders are tested on a variety of skills.

Reading Recovery-trained teachers test 20 to 30 percent of each first-grade class as recommended by teachers. Those recommendations are based on factors such as previous test scores, kindergarten performance and an alternate rank determined by the teacher.

Reading problems vary greatly and need individual attention. This is where Reading Recovery comes in.

## **How Reading Recovery works**

"The hallmark of Reading Recovery is the one-on-one instruction children receive tailored to meet their individual needs," says C.C. Bates, Clemson reading education assistant professor and Reading Recovery trainer.

Each child receives reading and writing instruction individually with a trained Reading Recovery teacher for 30 minutes every day for 12 to 20 weeks. The time frame varies based on the child's progress.

- Perhaps oversimplifying, the basic lesson includes
- rereading books to gain new understanding about the text;
  - reading the previous day's new book while the teacher records the student's responses;
  - working with letters, letter sounds and words;
  - writing a story to improve ability to hear sounds in words and pay attention to visual aspects of print;
  - applying strategies to reading a new book.

### When 'discontinue' is a beautiful word

"Discontinuing' is the term used to describe successfully completing the program," Bates says. "Eight out of 10 children in the state who receive a complete series of lessons start the program and complete it in an average of 15 weeks."

**In the past 20 plus years, more than 50,000 South Carolina first-graders' Reading Recovery lessons were discontinued because they had learned to read and write on grade level.**

Parents see the results. For example, one mom says, "My son's entire life was turned around. His self-esteem rose immediately. He has become an advanced reader."

Another writes about the lasting effects of the program, which both her children experienced as first-graders, attributing their success in high school to their time in Reading Recovery. And teachers appreciate the importance of this specialized work.

"I have been a Reading Recovery teacher for more than 20 years. The students who enter Reading Recovery are only in first grade, but they are already behind their peers in literacy and are in a downward spiral," says

Susan Turner, Reading Recovery teacher leader for Oconee County.

**"As a Reading Recovery teacher, I have been trained to build on the child's strengths, and through intense one-on-one daily lessons, I am able to lift a child out of that academic hole. There are no words to describe the feeling I get when a child learns to read. I feel that I have thrown that child a lifeline and brought him to a safe shore. Teaching a child to read is absolutely about saving a life!"**

### Clemson makes the reading difference

Clemson's Eugene T. Moore School of Education is home to the state's training center for Reading Recovery. Clemson's center, one of 21 across the U.S., started in 1989, making it the second oldest in the country.

It coordinates training and professional development for all S.C. Reading Recovery teachers and leaders. The center also collaborates with the

S.C. Department of Education to continue effective statewide implementation of the program.

**Consider these numbers: Last year the center served 32 school systems, 2,758 students in one-on-one sessions and 9,406 students in small-group instruction. Currently, there are 208 teachers, 16 teacher leaders, 34 teachers in training at different sites around the state and three teacher leaders in training at Clemson.**

"We train the teacher leaders," says Bates. "They receive 18 graduate credit hours from Clemson. They are teachers with their master's degrees and have usually been trained as Reading Recovery teachers. They study the theoretical underpinnings of literacy processing and how to go back and implement, maintain and sustain Reading Recovery in a school district. They also serve as adjuncts because their primary responsibility is to train Reading Recovery teachers in their district."

Some of the training is online so that teachers still have some blocks of time in their districts in which they can continue teaching the Reading Recovery children.

The National Guard provides technical and operational support for some virtual training classes. Maryann McBride, Clemson's training center teacher leader-in-residence, conducts five at Clemson, and the class is simultaneously broadcast to approximately seven National Guard locations all over the state, reaching from 160 to 200 teachers at once.

### Managing the costs and delivering good news

Recent budget cuts demand creative ways to maintain the training levels required for the program. Clemson's center had received most of its funding from a state grant, but funding levels have decreased over the years and last year took a 45 percent cut.

Last fall, Clemson's training center became an official partner with 15 other higher education institutions and lead applicant Ohio State University in the Investing in Innovation Fund grant, Reading Recovery: Scaling Up What Works.

The total grant is more than \$54 million, which includes approximately \$45 million from the U.S. Department of Education and a \$9 million match of private funds. Clemson's sub-award amount is \$2,177,964. As an official partner, Clemson will train 50 new Reading Recovery teachers each year for the next five years and continue expanding the use of technology to support teachers in the field.

But no matter the method of delivery or funding source, Reading Recovery remains a vital part of the state's educational opportunities. As various educational reforms have come and gone over the years, Reading Recovery has stood the test of time. And thousands of the state's children can prove it. 🌐

For more information on the Clemson University Reading Recovery Training Center, go to [clemson.edu/readingrecovery](http://clemson.edu/readingrecovery).

