

Reading Recovery Teacher Training

A guide to working with small groups

Reading Recovery teacher training was designed for an optimal group size of 10–12 teachers — providing many opportunities to observe each other teach, talk about the teaching as it occurs, and engage in detailed and thoughtful discussion with colleagues after the lessons. The teachers are learning together in a supportive environment in which observation of live teaching sessions provides a critical opportunity to relate theory and practice and to develop an in-depth understanding of the Reading Recovery teaching procedures.

This model of Reading Recovery teacher training is encapsulated in the *Standards and Guidelines of Reading Recovery in the United States* (RRCNA, 2011, p. 19). The standards require teacher leaders to establish training classes of 8–12 teachers, and to ensure that 80% of classes across the year (or a minimum of 18 sessions) include two behind-the-glass lessons.

In recent years, reduced numbers of teachers training for Reading Recovery, along with constraints on teacher travel and the challenges of transporting children outside their own school district, have made it difficult to meet the required minimum of 8 teachers per class in some sites. In these situations, teacher leaders can request a waiver from their university training center and initiate a problem-solving process with Reading Recovery trainers. The aim is to provide high-quality professional training for Reading Recovery teachers that replicates the research-established protocols of the Reading Recovery design and to minimize the impact of reduced class size.

Step 1: Identifying the challenges

The challenges of replicating high-quality training with small groups of teachers need to be clearly acknowledged and addressed. Small class size can mean that

- it is difficult to provide sufficient opportunities for the group to observe and discuss lessons behind the glass;
- it places a great strain on teachers to transport children and teach behind the glass more than four or five times a year;
- teachers might see a limited range of children, teaching, and lessons;
- it is tricky to maintain a high level of critical observation and ‘talk’ during lessons when the observer group numbers are small; and

Step 2: Problem solving

The first priority must be to increase group size in order to optimize the learning experience for teachers. When all efforts to increase group size have been exhausted, a waiver may be granted — provided teacher leaders engage in active creative thinking centered on how to ameliorate a less-than-optimal situation. It is desirable to consider a wide range of options and adopt a multipronged approach, as no single ‘solution’ will be sufficient on its own.

Following are some suggestions for maximizing opportunities for the teacher-in-training group to observe and discuss Reading Recovery lessons and to use these as a spring board to delve deeply into teaching practice and rationales:

- Plan to link up smaller groups in contiguous sites at regular intervals throughout the year. Meetings can be held in the district where the children are being taught. (4–6 lessons)
- Opportunities to observe lessons taught by experienced teachers are very valuable at the beginning of the year and from time to time throughout the year. (4 lessons)
- Ask a teacher leader colleague to teach for the group. This will provide a potent demonstration of a Reading Recovery lesson early in the year and may be used to focus on a particular topic later in the year. (1–2 lessons, different teacher leaders if possible). It should be made clear to the teachers that there are no perfect lessons.
- Videotaped lessons by experienced teachers are a poor substitute for live lessons, but if the video player is placed behind the one-way screen and the recorded lesson used as if it were a live lesson, interactive talk during the lesson is facilitated. This is more productive than watching a video in the seminar room with teachers sitting in a circle. (2–4 lessons)
- Later in the year it may work to have one teacher bring a video of the previous day's lesson with the child she has brought to teach at the session. The group observes the previous lesson and engages in joint planning for the next lesson, which is then taught behind the glass. This model has been used with trained teachers. **NOTE that the video is used to extend the experience and not as a substitute for the teacher bringing a child to teach. It is very important not to establish a precedent for teachers to bring video lessons instead of teaching live lessons for their colleagues.**
- Also later in the year, cluster visits can be used to extend the opportunities to observe live teaching. This is not a good substitute for lessons taught behind the glass because the teacher leader cannot guide the observation and talk during the lesson. Cluster visits will be most productive if they are carefully planned with a clear focus for the observation and discussion after the lesson.
- Again later in the year, the training class might join a professional development session for trained teachers; staying on afterwards for some further discussion of the lessons and teaching procedures. (2 lessons)
- Sometimes trained teachers have been invited to join the training class to increase the group size for discussion. The social dynamics of this need to be thought through very carefully.