



Reading Recovery Implementation Brief

The Educational Change Process

Educational Change

Implementing Reading Recovery involves an educational system in the process of educational change. Educational change of any significance involves changes in organizational structures, communications, resource allocation, and beliefs and attitudes. Change is difficult and often unsuccessful. If the process is to be successful, administrators and teachers will need to understand the process of change described on this page and be committed to the success of the implementation within their system. Successful change appears to pass through at least three phases: **adoption**, **implementation**, and **institutionalization**.

Adoption

What happens during the adoption phase of change can have marked effects on the quality of implementation and the chances of a change becoming institutionalized.

- **Impetus for change.** Imposed change is often unsuccessful because it does not address underlying structures or attitudes and beliefs. Grassroots change may last only as long as the tenure of the individual developers unless there is strong administrative buy-in. Changes planned and agreed upon both by administrators and by teachers have the best chances for success.
- **Perceived need.** The more broadly that a need for the proposed change is perceived within an organization, the greater its chances not only for adoption, but also for quality implementation and institutionalization.
- **Reasons for change.** Change as a response to external or political pressure is least likely to succeed. Change as an outgrowth of internal problem solving has the best chance of success.
- **Clarity.** The change and the purposes of the change need to be clear and communicated widely.
- **Decision making.** Formation of an advisory team to guide the adoption process is recommended. The advisory team should be representative of all stakeholders within and affected by the organization. Members of the team need to remain in close communication with people throughout the organization, both to receive information about needs problems and concerns and to share information about the proposed change and how it will affect others.

Implementation

The quality of the implementation will have a dramatic effect on the success or failure of the change as well as the chances that the change will become institutionalized.

- **Standards.** Any standards listed by the authors of the change should be followed carefully. *Standards and Guidelines of Reading Recovery in the United States*, published by Reading Recovery Council of North America, provides the standards for implementation.

- **Processes.** Administrators should plan carefully to establish processes for each important area of decision making. This allows for defensible justification of decisions and for equal opportunity. For example, the process of selecting teachers for a new educational program needs to be planned with input from teachers, the personnel department, administrators, and authors of the change.
- **Timing.** Slow and thorough is faster in the long run. Plan only as much change within a single year as can be completed thoroughly. Clear timelines for change should be developed, with regular review and revision based upon the results of process evaluation. In the case of Reading Recovery it is better to fully implement a few schools the first year, even though some schools may need to wait to train teachers. The results that the fully implemented schools experience will demonstrate the wisdom of this decision.
- **Flexibility.** In addition to careful planning, those guiding the change need to remain flexible and ready to make alterations if serious need for alteration becomes apparent. Although educators are encouraged to remain flexible in making alterations in the change process, they must adhere to the standards and guidelines of Reading Recovery in the United States. The teacher leader can provide guidance in understanding which parts of the implementation cannot be altered.
- **Communication.** Decision makers need to maintain open communication lines with those responsible at every level for implementing the change as well with as the clients of the change. Teachers, principals, school staff members, students, and parents will have differing perceptions of the change that may signal the need for alterations or increased effort or resources. Always engage the teacher leader in these communications. The teacher leader has been specially trained to understand and communicate the rationale for principles and procedures of Reading Recovery. The teacher leader may also choose to consult with a trainer at the affiliated university training center.
- **Evaluation.** Evaluation needs to be done for every aspect of the change process. The quality of planning and communication needs to be evaluated just as much as results and outcomes. Individuals responsible for evaluation need to be involved at every step of the process of change, and written records need to be prepared, organized, and available for review. The teacher leader has expertise in analyzing and interpreting the data gathered on the students and teachers involved in Reading Recovery and can provide insight into the effectiveness of plans and communications.
- **Focus.** Change is difficult and takes time. If the change is known to be needed and valuable, early disappointing results should provoke questions about the process of change and what else needs to change within the system before abandoning the change as unworkable. Systems that have successfully implemented Reading Recovery find that results of the implementation improve over the first few years.

Institutionalization

Institutionalization is reached when the change has become part of the routine planning and allocation of resources and when any threat to the change is met with strong, broad-based resistance.

- **Ownership.** Ownership of the change is broad-based within the system. Most all members feel the change is desirable and necessary.
- **Community.** Parents and community members know about and have positive perceptions of the change.
- **Economy.** The cost of the change becomes less expensive over time as it achieves goals and solves problems that were costing the system money in other ways.
- **Reorganization.** The system has reorganized its roles, responsibilities, and resources to make the change an integral part of its operating system.

For Further Information:

There are many excellent publications that address the change process and, specifically, change that occurs as Reading Recovery is implemented in an educational system. The references below are suggested as resources for administrators and teachers within the educational system.

Clay, M. M. (1994). Reading Recovery: The wider implications of an educational innovation. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 1(12), 122–141.

Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. Bristol, PA: Falmer Press.

Fullan, M. (1999). *Change forces: The sequel*. Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M. (2003). *Change forces with a vengeance*. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Wilson, K. G., & Daviss, B. (1994). *Redesigning education*. New York: Teachers College Press.