

## Reading Recovery Levels and Decodable Phonics

The Reading Recovery Levels developed in New Zealand by Dr Marie Clay were developed for a specific pedagogy to help young children who were regarded as being 'at risk' in their reading development during junior primary school. Marie Clay's levels are a complex system of very gradual increases in text complexity. At the early levels they relied on a high degree of repetition in sentence structure and word usage, among other criteria. There were three reading strategies (cues) that were an important part of Reading Recovery pedagogy – meaning (semantic), structure (syntactic), and grapho-phonological (sound-letter) cues for children to predict and decode text.

Decodable Phonics is a very different pedagogy from this. At the early levels, it relies on phonemic awareness and a carefully staged introduction to individual letters and their commonly associated sounds. The letters are introduced in staged sets and are taught before the student reads a text using those letters and sounds only. Texts are ruled by the use of certain sets of letters only in very simple levels of word complexity (CVC, CVCC and CCVC words), and carefully staged use of some high-frequency words and simple sentences. A high degree of repetition of sentence structure and the use of semantic and syntactic cues is not the focus of decodable phonics. The focus is on strong knowledge of letters and their sounds, and the use of this to decode words by using these sound-letter correspondences.

The two pedagogies are quite different in their focus. As a result, texts created for decodable phonics instruction do not and cannot conform to the system of Reading Recovery Levels.

Decodable phonics texts can be used in guided reading groups, but the grouping of students is based on the stage students are at in the sequence of letter sets being learned. They are not based on Reading Recovery levels.

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