Over One Million Served... and Counting: National Data Update 2002–2003

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By 2002–2003 Reading Recovery had been implemented in the United States for 19 years. In contrast to 1983–1984, when 110 students were served, Reading Recovery served almost 140,000 children in 2002–2003.

These children were served by a network that included nearly 17,000 teachers working in about 3,100 school districts in 49 states, the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, and Department of Defense Domestic and Overseas schools. The Reading Recovery national network included 45 university faculty serving as Reading Recovery trainers affiliated with 23 different universities. The 45 trainers provided ongoing professional development to 706 teacher leaders working in 532 teacher training sites. These 706 teacher leaders in turn provided training and professional development to 16,839 Reading Recovery teachers (see Table 1).

Data obtained through the federal National Center for Education Statistics indicate that Reading Recovery served a wide variety of schools during 2002–2003. One-third of schools with Reading Recovery were located in large cities, one-third were located in suburbs or large towns, and one-third in rural areas. Most Reading Recovery schools received some Title I assistance; about one-fourth received no Title I assistance, 40% received Title I assistance for individual students, and an additional 37% were high-poverty schools receiving schoolwide Title I funds (see Table 2).

End-of-program status was available for all but 165 of the 139,814 children served. Of all children served nationally in Reading Recovery, even if for only one lesson, 59% were discontinued successfully. The following list shows the percentages of children in different groups who had the opportunity to receive a full series of lessons and who successfully completed their programs (or discontinued):

- 77% of all children served
- 75% of African-American children
- 75% of Hispanic/Latino children
- 73% of children who received free school lunches
- 77% of children who received partially subsidized school lunches
- 65% of English language learners who spoke only isolated phrases in fall of first grade
- 72% of English language learners who spoke complete but grammatically incorrect sentences in fall of first grade
- 68% of hearing-impaired students
- 63% of students with emotional disturbance disabilities
- 72% of children with visual impairments
- 79% of urban children
- 76% of students in high-poverty schools

These powerful numbers demonstrate that Reading Recovery serves well those children who are considered at risk because of various socio-demographic or personal factors and are also the lowest readers within these groups. In other words, when we say that 76% of Reading Recovery children in high-poverty schools discontinued successfully, we are really saying that 76% of the lowest readers in these high-poverty schools that had an opportunity to receive the full Reading Recovery intervention had successful outcomes.

In 2002–2003, a new procedure was used to collect random sample data. Reading Recovery’s random sample
Table 2. School Locale, Minority Enrollment, and Title I Funding of Reading Recovery Schools 2002–2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Locale</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>333</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban City</td>
<td>2,755</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban/Large Town</td>
<td>3,434</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Town/Rural</td>
<td>3,376</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Title I Funding</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>899</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Title I</td>
<td>2,106</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Title I</td>
<td>3,554</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide Title I</td>
<td>3,339</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Minority Enrollment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>384</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–5%</td>
<td>2,333</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–20%</td>
<td>2,342</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–50%</td>
<td>2,010</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–100%</td>
<td>2,829</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Data are now representative of the entire first-grade population of all Reading Recovery schools in the United States. (The previous method sampled only students not served by Reading Recovery.) Data for the Reading Recovery random sample now provide a comparison of where Reading Recovery students are in the fall of first grade relative to their peers and where they stand again in spring after having benefited from the intervention.

Figure 1 shows Text Reading Level mean scores for

- children whose Reading Recovery interventions started in fall of first grade (first round) and who discontinued successfully at mid-year,
- children whose interventions started at mid-year and discontinued successfully at year-end (second round), and
- children in a random sample who were tested in fall, at the same mid-year point, and at year-end.¹

In fall, the group with the lowest average score was comprised of children whose Reading Recovery interventions started in fall; this is because Reading Recovery always serves the lowest readers first. They averaged a text level of 0. Next lowest were the children whose interventions would start at mid-year. They averaged a text level of 1. The random sample, representing the general population of first-grade students, averaged a text level of 4.

At mid-year, the random sample averaged a text level of 12. In other words, the average first-grade U.S. child progressed 8 text levels between fall and mid-year. Children served by Reading Recovery progressed 13 text levels in

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¹ Not all first-round students discontinue precisely at mid-year and not all second-round students end their interventions at year-end. Figure 1 includes data only for children tested within the same time frame in fall, mid-year, and at year-end.
the same time period: They had caught up with their peers in the random sample. Children who were low readers in fall and had to wait for Reading Recovery service averaged a text level of 4. These students not initially served by Reading Recovery progressed very little from fall to mid-year with classroom instruction alone. From Level 1 in fall, they reached Level 4 at mid-year, a gain of 3 text levels in 18 weeks. Clearly, this group of children was not benefiting from classroom instruction; they were now 8 text levels behind the random sample (which represents a population average).

By year-end, however, these children served in the second round of Reading Recovery had progressed 14 levels in 18 weeks and finished the year only 2 levels behind both the random sample and children served in the first round. Children who had Reading Recovery in the first half of the year increased their average reading by 7 text levels within the context of classroom instruction and without one-to-one tutoring.

Other tasks of the Observation Survey indicate similar progress for Reading Recovery students who discontinued after a full series of lessons. The Word Test is an inventory of words a child can read by sight. In fall, the children who later discontinued successfully read less than two words on average, compared to 6.5 for the random sample. At year-end, both groups read nearly 19 of the 20 words.

The Writing Vocabulary test is an inventory of those words that a child can write independently. In fall, the discontinued children could write eight correctly spelled words in 10 minutes, compared with 16 for the random sample. By spring, these children wrote an average of 55 words in 10 minutes, one word more than the average score for random sample students.

Data are also collected in order to see how classroom teachers perceive the improving competencies of Reading Recovery students. In fall, 89% of all children who later discontinued successfully were seen as low readers by their classroom teachers. By spring, only 8% were still seen as low readers, and 56% were seen as above average (see Figure 2).

At the end of an average 12- to-16-week period of Reading Recovery intervention, the teacher must determine whether the child now is no longer in need of supplemental assistance for literacy learning. The teacher makes this complex clinical decision based on a variety of factors, including the results of the administration of the six tasks of the Observation Survey, to determine if the child's status should be classified as discontinued. In the 1993 edition of The Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement, Clay suggests a number of questions for the teacher to ask: Is there an appropriate classroom group at the child's level towards the middle of the class? Does the child read increasingly difficult material always at 90 percent accuracy or above? Is there evidence that the child has a system of strategies which work in such a way that the child learns from his own attempts to read? Is the child able to self-monitor, cross-check, use multiple cue sources, and self-correct? Has the child acquired sufficient item knowledge? Has the child, in short, learned to learn to read?

If the answer is yes, the teacher is predicting future successful literacy outcomes for the student. Clearly, a subsequent placement in reading-related
special education would not be a successful literacy outcome. In 2002–2003, about 81,000 students were discontinued. Only 146 of those were subsequently placed in a learning disability program during first grade because of reading difficulties. This extremely small number suggests that the large majority of decisions to discontinue individual children’s lessons were sound.

Similarly, a child who is accurately determined to have discontinued from Reading Recovery as a successful reader should not then be retained in grade for reading difficulties. The national data show that only 249 Reading Recovery children who discontinued successfully were retained in grade.

The evidence that

• students’ literacy achievement gains are sustained at least through the end of Grade 1,
• classroom teachers change their perception of the improving competencies of these initially low reading students, and
• discontinued Reading Recovery students are extremely unlikely to be placed in special education or retained because of reading difficulties

are all powerful indicators of the effectiveness of the Reading Recovery intervention on a national scale, across all of the local implementations.

Descubriendo la Lectura

In 2002–2003, Descubriendo la Lectura served 2,760 children. More than 1,000 schools in over 300 school districts had Descubriendo la Lectura. These children came overwhelmingly from high poverty (79%) and urban schools (70%). Only 2% of Descubriendo la Lectura students paid full price for school lunches.

Of the 2,753 Descubriendo la Lectura children for whom outcome status data are available and who received even just one lesson, 53% discontinued successfully. Of those Descubriendo la Lectura students who received a full series of lessons, 76% were discontinued. Although a very limited number of responses were available for Descubriendo la Lectura students with a disability, 65% of students with a speech and language impairment discontinued successfully. For students classified as migrant, the discontinuing rate was 77%.

As with Reading Recovery, the outcomes for Descubriendo la Lectura students did not vary greatly when comparing the characteristics of the schools. Most Descubriendo la Lectura students were in schools with 50% or greater non-White student enrollment. In those schools, 76% of students (n=1,396) discontinued, compared to 75% (n=59) in schools with 25–50% non-White enrollment.

In fall, those Descubriendo la Lectura students who later discontinued successfully had an average text reading level of 1, compared to 4 for the Descubriendo la Lectura random sample. In spring, this same group of discontinued students had an average text reading level of 20, equal to that of the random sample. Descubriendo la Lectura students scored slightly higher than the random sample at year-end on all six tasks of the Instrumento de Observación.

The data for Descubriendo la Lectura students exhibited the same patterns as discussed above for Reading Recovery students for classroom teacher perception of improving competency, referral rates to special education, and retention rates for reading related reasons.

Conclusion

An important measure of the effectiveness of an intervention is whether results can be replicated through time and across space. Scaling up any intervention is challenging. The standards and guidelines of Reading Recovery provide a rigorous framework for doing so with fidelity; that is, with consistently even quality and equally high standards for all served. Data have shown with remarkable consistency through 19 years and across 49 states that with a proper framework and determined persistence, this one-to-one intervention has made a difference in the lives of nearly 1.3 million children. No other educational intervention in American education can make such a claim.