Wishing for Funding for Children “Hoping to Be Picked”

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I am a second-year Reading Recovery teacher at Sunnyside Elementary in Indianapolis, Indiana. Having taught for 25 years and taken graduate work in learning disabilities, I was one of those teachers who thought perhaps there was nothing new anyone could be taught for helping struggling readers. I, like many others, found myself wondering why anyone who had 30 minutes a day with a child, working one-to-one, couldn’t help that child learn to read. I am amazed at what I have learned and even more impressed by the brilliant simplicity of Reading Recovery. Probably the most important thing to me is that it is a program based on what we know about the way the brain works in the early stages of cognitive development.

During my first year of training, as I was about to pick up my second round of students, I looked at the data and thought carefully about the needs in our building. We had seven first-grade classes and four teachers in Reading Recovery training. I spoke with one of my students and told him that I was going to work with him in our special room and help him to become a better reader like I had done for...and I named a child or two. He looked at me with hope and trust in his little eyes and said, “Oh boy, I was hoping you would pick me!”

With such motivation and personal incentive, that young man discontinued successfully in a matter of about 12 weeks. How I wish the funding were there for more of us to be able to implement Reading Recovery full-time for our most struggling readers. I wonder how many, like my student, are sitting in classrooms hoping that they will be “picked!”

Influencing High School Literacy Teaching

Mary Clayton, Chapel Hill-Carrboro, North Carolina

At the time of my Reading Recovery teacher and teacher leader training, I never imagined that Reading Recovery could have a positive influence on high school students—unless of course they had been served in the Reading Recovery program in first grade! But it turns out that Reading Recovery training (what I refer to as the single most important professional experience I have ever had) provided me with the courage and understanding to convince secondary teachers to change some ineffective practices.

When I became English/language arts coordinator for Grades K–12, I was shocked to find out that round-robin reading was alive and well in middle school and secondary classrooms. Student engagement was low as they listened to other students struggling to pronounce words or watching the person next in line panic as they practiced the next passage to be read. I suggested that teachers read aloud to their students as they follow along in their texts and take opportunities as they arise to teach about that text or other texts, and how to model meaning-getting and problem solving by thinking aloud. After reading to the students just one time, teachers were amazed at the positive responses and spread the word to others. They thank me often and say that their students are more motivated to read complex text and that they love class on the days they read to them. So I guess you might say that at least some of our high school students have Reading Recovery training to thank for turning an often embarrassing (or boring) experience into an enjoyable one!