The Shared-Classroom Model of Reading Recovery Implementation: Critical Aspects and Positive Outcomes

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The intent of this article is to share our district's implementation of Reading Recovery following the shared-classroom model. By definition, the shared-classroom model is used when two trained Reading Recovery teachers share a first-grade classroom. Each teacher is responsible for a half-day Reading Recovery assignment of teaching four students, and working in the classroom for the other half of the day.

Center Point-Urbana School District serves 1,200 students from two communities. On average, 16% of the students qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch. The school has a Title I program in Grades K–6 and four trained Reading Recover teachers. District data show that 25–30% of our first graders require a Reading Recovery intervention; another 5–7% receive Title I small-group instruction. Center Point-Urbana's reading intervention program is fully implemented, meaning all first graders who need Reading Recovery are served by the program.

We shared a classroom from the 1992–1993 academic year through 1998–1999. Because our job assignments have changed, we do not currently share a classroom. However, the district continues to follow this model whenever possible. Currently, we have two other teachers sharing a first-grade classroom and providing Reading Recovery service.

Sharing a classroom of real, live, learning, wiggling children is not an easy task. It is simplified when both teachers possess a high level of professionalism and share a commitment to making the assignment work. Teachers need to be committed to continuing their professional development and dedicated to sharing information, their expertise and talents, a sense of mutual respect, and time with one another.

Each of us came to the experience with confidence in her own ability to teach. Mickey had 5 years of classroom experience, working with fourth through eighth graders. Upon completion of her master's degree in reading, she had served as Title I teacher for 5 years in the district. Ann had taught first grade for 2 years after teaching fifth grade for 2 years. Ann was trained in Reading Recovery in 1992–1993, and Mickey was trained the following year in 1993–1994.

We share a commitment to learning. We recognize that we are evolving as teachers and can teach as well as learn from one another as we support our students' learning and growth.

With that in mind, we began our trek. During our 6 years together, we discovered that certain aspects of implementing the shared-classroom model are critical to its success. Here, we share the lessons we learned by addressing the following critical

Certain aspects of implementing the shared-classroom model are critical to its success, including communication between teachers. Here, authors (from left) Ann Wooldridge and Mickey Dunn take a few minutes to share information. When they are unable to have one-on-one meetings with each other, they often use sticky notes left on their desk.

aspects of implementing this model: planning, communication, record keeping and reporting, and sharing curricular duties. We conclude our discussion by talking about the positive outcomes of the model in terms of professional growth to teachers and learning benefits to students.

Critical Aspects of the Model

Planning

The effectiveness of this arrangement for us hinged upon planning. Finding the time to do so was a continual challenge. There was little time available during the school day, so during

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the first year we set weekly meeting times outside the school day to organize our units and craft our plans to ensure that all the bases were covered regarding district curricular requirements. During these times we also discussed individual students and any classroom management plans we might need to address. Because we shared a room for Reading Recovery instruction, we generally met every day at the end of the day as we planned our next day's Reading Recovery lessons.

After the first couple of years we were able to relax a bit from this daily meeting and planning. We continued to use teacher workdays for mutual planning and made a special point to meet formally when we needed to plan our transitions from one classroom thematic unit to another.

Planning together continued to be critical for coordinating our joint teaching effectiveness. However, because we invested ourselves fully during those first 2 years, we had worked through our differences in philosophy and teaching style. This allowed us to concentrate more fully on the nuts and bolts of day-to-day instruction.

Communication

"Presenting a united front" became our motto. It didn't take long for one of our students to try an end run around one or the other of us in order to get their own way. If the morning teacher let a student slide on some behavior rule, the afternoon teacher was faced with it soon enough.

Stealing a few minutes at the end of the morning—or the beginning of the afternoon to conference with the student in question or with the whole class—sent a clear message that each of us was aware of what was happening in the room during our absence. It also sent the message that we respected our partner enough to keep her in the loop and on the same page.

Truthfully, there needed to be another way to take care of some questions and issues. The school day is too short and the time we had available to teach our Reading Recovery students was too precious to squander. So we came up with a supplemental method—which we can chalk up to the beauty and versatility of Post-It© (sticky) notes.

Whenever one of us had a situation arise where there was any question regarding classroom protocol (e.g., "Is Michael allowed to lie down on the carpet, since his pants are so tight that he cannot be comfortable sitting on his bottom like the rest of the class?") or instruction (e.g., "Short vowel sounds seems to throw a good part of the group!"), a small sticky note carrying the question was placed on the classroom desk we shared. At the next opportunity, we responded on our own sticky note or visited about it.

With an eye toward efficient use of time, we began to use our classroom routines in ways that served to sup-

port our efforts in communication. We recognized that our communications to the children were every bit as important as those between ourselves.

One classroom routine we used, for example, was the Morning Letter which was on display in the room as children arrived for the day. It was written by one of us and Mickey read it with the class early in the day. It generally included the lunch menu and noted the day's itinerary such as special events and information about any ongoing project. It didn't take us long to recognize this was a way to alert the group to any policy changes or, as we used to call them, executive decisions. Academic aspects of our work in the classroom could also be addressed in this manner.

So, for instance, in response to the rash of children who followed Michael's lead in ignoring the sit-on-your-bottom rule, the next morning's letter included a statement that addressed this issue: "As you sit on the carpet today, please do your best to keep your eyes on Mrs. Dunn, and your body in your own space." This took care of the real problem, which was some students' inability to lie down as Michael did and still attend to the lesson.

At the end of the morning, the children composed a letter with Mickey using language-experience techniques. It was addressed to Mrs. Wooldridge and allowed the students to process what had been learned that morning. It was also an authentic way to share how any new rules had worked out during the morning (e.g., "We did a lovely job of watching the speaker when we were on the carpet this morning"), to set the tone for the afternoon ("We are really looking forward to learning our new center this

afternoon"), and to share new concepts or skills acquired ("A lot of us practiced using commas in our Writer's Workshop projects by including a list or a series in our story").

Sticky notes were an integral element in our communication about individual children as well. As special behavioral successes ("Drew shared willingly during Show and Tell for the first time!") and concerns arose ("Michael appeared to be very surly this morning but I couldn't get anything from him to explain why"), the sticky note became an instant communication. Academic observations for individual children were shared as well ("Abby doesn't seem to be able to hear some sounds as she writes. Is this showing up in her reading?"; "Ryan consulted the Word Wall during Writer's Workshop!"). Each of us felt free to use the information during our stint with the child to congratulate or to demonstrate concern where and when appropriate.

The result was electric. The children felt very connected to each of us and, we suspect, may have even thought we could communicate telepathically. None of them doubted our genuine concern for their well-being—emotionally, socially, and academically. By including the students in our paradigm of communication—through class meetings and Morning Letters—we created an environment in which our students felt secure in their understanding of rules, regulations, and procedures. They also had a voice in how concerns in the classroom were addressed.

Record Keeping and Reporting
The sticky notes also became part of our permanent record keeping and supported us as we wrote narrative

reports to parents quarterly. As the desk began to take on a cluttered look from all of the sticky notes, one of us (usually Ann) retired the yellow slips to the three-ring binder marked Anecdotals. Once a month, one of us took on the task of making an entry about each child on each page. The sticky notes were left there so that comments could be made regarding follow-up observations and any changes that had been noted since the note was written. We specifically worked to make notes about progress in the areas of reading, writing, and math in order to simplify completing report cards when that time came.

Sharing Curricular Duties
Sharing duties of teaching the curriculum was a key consideration as we implemented this model. It could be handled in many ways. Ann had just been trained in guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) and wanted to implement that. Mickey loved to experiment with writing. It seemed to be an easy split. Since Ann had been trained in a special developmental math program, math fell into her domain.

When it came time to report to parents, we split the class list in half. Each of us wrote about work habits and study skills that included deportment and social issues for our half of the group. Ann wrote a blurb for math and reading for all the students and shared those with Mickey, who incorporated them into her narrative reports. The same was done for writing.

Teachers at our school who are currently operating within this shared-classroom framework have divided their workload as follows: One is responsible for writing skills and math; the other handles curriculum

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concerns (thematic units). They have chosen to alternate the instruction of reading groups. Following the guided-reading model, their six reading groups are flexible. Every 2–3 weeks, group make-up is reworked. If, at that time, a group (or a student) is not making a shift into more complex text with one teacher, her partner takes over. The morning teacher teaches her three reading groups just before lunch. Those children who are not in her groups have center time. When the afternoon begins, the children who have already had centers receive their reading instruction, and the rest of the children have centers.

Positive Outcomes
This experience could be counted as positive in so many ways! We enjoyed a closeness that few colleagues can. We recognize that our administration deserves much of the credit for the success of this model. The superintendent and principal demonstrated great foresight by choosing to initiate the Reading Recovery program in our building. They displayed phenomenal insight in their choice of participating teachers. They implemented the findings from research regarding early intervention approaches which found

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"expert, individual tutoring produces on-level reading achievement with many struggling readers" (Allington, 2004, p. 22).

The superintendent and principal's level of commitment could not be questioned as they strove to provide us with all the necessary materials to make our Reading Recovery program work. They also allowed us latitude with the arrangement: how the schedules would work, how we balanced classroom time with Reading Recovery time, which teacher was responsible for what instruction, and how report cards were handled.

Our principal checked in with us often and was always open for brainstorming and problem solving. She subtly attended to any signs of discontent or bickering between the two of us. She encouraged us in our efforts to provide the highest level of instructional quality and in holding our standards high for student performance as well. This basic support continues to be essential to the positive outcomes of this implementation model at our school. Because of the administrative commitment we received, we profited in two essential ways.

Professional Growth of Cooperating Teachers

Enough emphasis cannot be placed upon the personal impact this implementation model has had on us. Through the process involved in creating a unified approach to instruction and behavior management, we grew professionally in many ways.

Working with a colleague in a classroom of 18–22 students on a daily basis can provide incredible opportunities for real-life professional conversations about immediate problems, issues, and questions. Like much-touted study groups, which have been found to raise educators' levels of concern and the quality of their reflective thinking and teaching (Lefever-Davis et al., 2003), sharing a classroom provides a powerful impetus for professional development. In a call for reform in the area of professional development, Lefever-Davis and her colleagues assert that "t(eacher) s(tudy) g(roup)s…build a positive interdependence among teachers through face-to-face interactions. They strengthen leadership skills and provide new experiences for teachers in decision making, communicating, and conflict resolution" (p. 784). Sharing the responsibilities inherent in managing a classroom of first graders is truly a test of all these aspects of professionalism.

Like teacher study groups, the classroom-sharing model of Reading Recovery implementation required us to examine our philosophy of teaching, understanding of teaching practices, and theories about children and how they learn. Each of us engaged in the highest level of reflective teaching. Added to that was the demand for sharing those ideas with one another. Addressing conflicts in attitudes and

approaches forced us to fully examine and explain our thinking. By committing to the concept of presenting consistent instruction, these conflicts resulted in growth—both in the area of refining chosen practices as well as tolerating and appreciating alternatives to them.

Inherent in the sharing of the classroom is subjecting oneself to continuous peer review. The trust factor cannot be discounted as one contemplates pursuing this teaching model. We recognized that conversations regarding teaching practices needed to focus on children's needs. Discussions were pursued in a helpful manner and were situated in terms of goals for children and alternative routes by which those goals could be met. Each of us was confident in her own capacity to teach. We also recognized that there is no one way to achieve learning. So these discussions were frank, supportive, and productive.

Professional Growth of First-Grade Teachers

In addition, this model of implementation was a highly visible example of professional sharing in the most intimate of circumstances. Other first-grade teachers were routinely exposed to our discussions as we problem-solved and planned our instruction. During weekly grade-level meetings, our colleagues were well aware of our system for sharing our teaching assignment. We struggled with the same issues; we were one of them.

Because we taught first graders from their classrooms in Reading Recovery lessons, we talked with their teachers about individual students' progress and how we could work together to further our students' literacy development. These discussions involved con-

versations about text difficulty, book levels, emerging early reading strategies, literacy development, writing behaviors, and the occurrence of at-home reading. At times, we shared information gleaned from our continuing contact sessions. In turn, colleagues began to consider different, more flexible ways to group children as skills improved. A desire to establish more consistency between the classroom and the Reading Recovery program bloomed.

Out of this collegial sharing emerged a plan for teachers to be trained in guided reading. In pursuit of our common goal, which was to become as skilled as possible at implementing the guided-reading model, the first-grade team established its own study group. Its focus was the reading and discussion of Taberski's *On Solid Ground* (2000).

Professional Growth of Other Teachers
Enthusiasm for the guided-reading approach spread to the second- and third-grade levels in the district within the first 3 years. With administrative backing, teachers received training in guided-reading instruction. At about the same time, our district began work to establish standards and benchmarks for reading. Because of the training they had received, teachers were eager to develop a packet of benchmark passages. These are used as beginning-of-the-year assessments and serve to verify individual student progress and achievement throughout the year.

Benefits for Students
As we know, when teachers are good at what they do, children reap the rewards. Marcia Nye Boody at the Central Maine Reading Recovery Training Site reports that her program

enjoyed improved results by adopting a shared-classroom model. She attributes this to the fact that the model allows the classroom teacher to "gain newer understandings of the reading and writing processes through Reading Recovery training and…use that knowledge and skill to enhance the teaching of Grade 1 students who are most at risk" (2003, p. 29). Our experience confirmed this thinking. There were several ways this could be observed.

Consistency of Instruction
The shared-classroom model appeared to greatly benefit low achievers as they proceeded through their respective Reading Recovery programs. Each of us watched these students for evidence of growth throughout the day in reading and writing. Also, because we used language employed in the Reading Recovery program (i.e., prompting for strategic action in reading and writing), children were less confused in their attempts at literacy activities.

Less Intrusive Intervention
We looked for evidence of self-extending systems in all of our students as they engaged in daily literacy activities. Having this primary goal in mind for every first grader—not just those enrolled in Reading Recovery—allowed for a more accelerated and higher level of achievement for each student in the room.

No Child Left Behind (2000) mandates that highly trained teachers be employed to teach reading. We believe unequivocally that, because of our Reading Recovery training, children who did not require service in Reading Recovery benefited from our more focused instruction. For example, Elkonin sound boxes were part of the writing instruction delivered in

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our classroom. Reading lessons were laced with prompts from *Reading Recovery: A Guidebook for Teachers in Training* (Clay, 1993) to encourage monitoring, cross-checking, and searching.

Children who possessed a wide range of abilities and skills entered our classroom each of those 6 years. Not all who were functioning below grade level qualified for the first round in the district's Reading Recovery program. It is our contention that over the 6 years that we shared a classroom, 25–30 students who might have otherwise qualified for Reading Recovery intervention were able to reach the average of the class without walking through the doors of a Reading Recovery classroom because of our having been trained in Reading Recovery.

We recognize the accuracy of Clay's statements in *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (2002) in her discussion of the variety of reasons for reading failure among early learn-

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ers. She identifies lack of identification (of readers who might experience difficulty), entrenched error behavior (in contrast to effective strategic reading and writing behaviors), and lack of confidence (self-efficacy) as being factors that inhibit literacy development (p. 27). Further, Clay cites attributes of classroom teachers who are best able to address these issues and provide appropriate instruction that supports low achievers. Chief among these is the capacity to individualize instruction (p. 25). Because of our commitment to the Reading Recovery philosophy of following the child and our heightened concern regarding communication, our students received highly specialized and individual instructional experiences. This can best be illustrated by looking to the children themselves.

Take, for example, Abby. She loved to draw, and each morning her journal page would be quickly filled with colorful images and a wonderful (oral) story to go with them. She knew some letters but they did not correspond to the dialogue she linked to the picture. We encouraged her to continue to create strong stories through her drawing. We also engaged her in shared writing experiences as often as possible—generally once or twice a week.

Abby soon became confident in her capacity as a student. She began to take more risks, even doing her own writing when no one was available for shared writing. Her efforts moved her beyond the random letter stage and she soon began to accurately record sounds in sequence. It wasn't long before Abby realized that she could use the word wall for her writing and invent the rest. Each step forward was celebrated, and Abby never required extra reading support.

Now visualize Jeffrey, who could not compose a picture. His control was so limited that the marks he made on the paper with his pencil were too faint to see. The letters he knew were drawn or formed—but certainly not written. His timidity was pervasive, asserting itself even in his oral communication. He talked in two- and three-word spurts that were difficult to hear. This was complicated by his reluctance to repeat himself.

Curiously, his performance on the Observation Survey did not designate him as a first-round Reading Recovery candidate, but from his scores and performance in the classroom, we anticipated that he would qualify for Reading Recovery in the second round. The focus of our classroom instruction for him centered on teaching him to portray his ideas through pictures and engaging him in lots and lots of talk. Once he began to fully engage in oral sharing of his work, we discovered his interest in bugs. We brought in a critter cage full of grasshoppers, and he shared what he knew—which was a lot! This was his first risk. Then Ann chose books for his guided-reading group that started with words Jeffrey knew. He began to keep track of the number of books he could read.

As Jeffrey's confidence increased, his control improved, and Jeffrey began to bloom. When Jeffrey wrote about our study of Native Americans, Mickey used his journal as a model for her mini-lesson. She encouraged others to follow his lead and use what we learned at school as a topic for their journal entries. When it came time to test students for second-round Reading Recovery candidates, Jeffrey tested high enough to match the average of the class and did not require our supplemental services.

Early Diagnosis

Our training helped us to identify any children whose progress could be seen as slipping behind as the year progressed. These students were then selected for second- or third-round Reading Recovery instruction. As we have pointed out, our specialized training allowed us to meet the needs of many of these children within the classroom. This meant that only a very few children slipped through the cracks of regular (but strong) classroom instruction.

Transition

One of the most difficult obstacles in discontinuing a student from Reading Recovery can be the transition back to the classroom. It is difficult for some teachers to see the progress the very lowest performers in the room make as they progress through Reading Recovery. We recognized the changes they had made and reinforced the risks taken by our Reading Recovery students. This confirmed for them that the expectations were the same and would continue even after their one-to-one instruction was completed. We expected them to become very independent, and we were able to scaffold for these children in ways the typical classroom teacher may not be equipped to do.

Conclusion

Our experience with the Reading Recovery shared-classroom model was very positive because key factors were addressed ahead of time, and problems were solved quickly when issues arose. Those key factors included full administrative support and careful selection of the participants. Also the teachers who shared the classroom were flexible, committed, and had time to plan and communicate.

We feel the most positive benefit came about in the form of student achievement, both for those served in the Reading Recovery program and for those in our classroom. This model enhanced our teaching in Reading Recovery. When we taught our students in Reading Recovery, we benefited from knowing how children had to be able to perform in the classroom to be successful. We knew how good first-grade readers performed because we taught some of them, too, every day. That knowledge allowed us to be more efficient and to make decisions in our Reading Recovery teaching which led the children to be successful, independent learners in the classroom. Many children who began the year as low achievers benefited from our classroom instruction and made sufficient progress so they did not need Reading Recovery instruction. We used Reading Recovery procedural language during the day when students were reading and writing. Each child in our classroom progressed and became independent readers and writers because of our honed observation skills and our philosophy of starting from strengths to assess and teach.

If either of us were given the opportunity to participate in this model again, we would jump at the chance. We recommend this sort of implementation in every Reading Recovery school. While its establishment takes forethought, planning, and solid commitment on the part of administrators and teachers, its benefits are well worth the investment. We are investing, after all, in the welfare of children, and children are our business!

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