by Graham Bowling

When I was in kindergarten and first grade, I was aware that I could not read. I remember being called to the front of the classroom by my kindergarten teacher to lead my peers in reading a simple sentence on the board. I failed miserably and was quite embarrassed. Later, in the first grade, I recognized the distinction between the reading levels. My best friend was in the accelerated group and I was in the lowest level. My parents read with and to me each evening. We tried Hooked on Phonics. We owned a trove of wonderful children’s books. Despite my parent's involvement and our resources, reading simply did not come easily. My teachers were convinced I had a learning disability.

I was enrolled in Reading Recovery with Mrs. Becky Koval at Carlisle Elementary in Delaware, OH. I distinctly remember one of my first lessons. I was frustrated and looking up at the ceiling. Mrs. Koval gently reminded me that the words were not on the ceiling but rather in the book on the desk. Looking back, I believe that was the turning point in my reading struggles. I realized it would be a lot of work to master reading, but I wanted it badly so I practiced and made a conscious effort even as a child. I progressed rather quickly and was invited to participate in a behind-the-glass session in Marion, OH. My Reading Recovery training continued and in the second grade, I was reading and comprehending the Harry Potter series. When the results of my standardized tests came out, my second-grade teacher was ecstatic because I received advanced scores in reading! What a fantastic transformation from one year earlier! I was thriving in school because of my new reading ability. Today, I count reading as one of my greatest joys.

I am grateful to Reading Recovery for giving me the tools for success. In high school, I was privileged to graduate as the class valedictorian with an entire year of college credit. Currently, I am finishing my senior year at Miami University in Oxford, OH. I will graduate with a business management and entrepreneurship degree. I am a national finalist for a Fulbright U.S. Student Program grant to teach the English language in Taiwan next year. In the future, I hope to pursue a graduate program, own a personal business, and run for public office. Reading Recovery is a phenomenal program that changed the trajectory of my life, and it is my hope that it will continue for many years in the future.

Graham Bowling was a Reading Recovery student at Delaware City Schools in 1999–2000. His Reading Recovery teacher, Becky Koval, now lives in New Orleans. Graham received a standing ovation after sharing his story at the 30th Anniversary Reception.
Bradley Chandler, 1992–93

Bradley Chandler is a nurse in the surgical intensive care unit at Riverside Hospital in Columbus, OH. He received his RN with an associate’s degree from Central Ohio Technical College and has continued his education while working nights in the hospital. This summer he will complete a bachelor’s degree at Ohio University and hopes to begin master’s degree coursework this winter. Brad and his wife, Katie, have two boys, ages 6 and 2 with a third child expected this summer.

It’s hard to imagine that this successful, dedicated man struggled with early reading and writing, but both Brad and his twin brother were Reading Recovery students at Fairbanks Local School District in Milford, OH. His now retired teacher, Nancy Bowman, taught both Brad and his brother and says they had “totally different learning styles.” She also recalls that Brad worked hard and had supportive family to help him.

Asked about Reading Recovery, Brad says he doesn’t remember much, but does recall being behind in first grade and feeling disheartened. He says he learned that “it’s okay to go back if you don’t understand,” and his Reading Recovery lessons got him on track. Specifically, he remembers reading through many little books that helped give him confidence.

In a small-world coincidence, Brad’s supportive father, Dwain Chandler, now is the systems manager at the International Data Evaluation Center at The Ohio State University, annually reporting evaluation research data for thousands of students like his son.

Brad Chandler knows the importance of a supportive family. Joining him at the 30th Anniversary Reception in Columbus were his wife, Katie, and his mom and dad. When he was in first grade, (top) both he and his twin brother were Reading Recovery students.
Ethan McKay came into Reading Recovery as a quiet, shy boy in Grade 1 at Wellington School in Winnipeg. It wasn’t long before his eyes began to twinkle and his quirky sense of humor began to surface as oral stories were shared in reading and writing.

Ethan’s mother, Colleen, recalls that at first she had felt a little let down and sad about Ethan needing additional support in learning to read and write. As an elementary school teacher, she talks about how she and Ethan’s father were actively involved in the school parent council, the Mother Goose and home reading programs, as well as being a family involved in many literacy activities around the oral stories and traditional ways of their aboriginal culture.

However, she says with a smile, “It wasn’t until the Reading Recovery teacher and the classroom teacher were able to identify the missing piece that Ethan needed … that one-to-one support by the Reading Recovery teacher. It made me so thankful that Ethan got this additional support which has really helped him for the long run.”

Colleen was so interested in the Reading Recovery intervention that had been successful for her son that she went on to take the Reading Recovery training. Now she is using those new understandings about literacy processing to guide her teaching in a Grade 1 classroom.

Ethan reflects on the good start that individualized lessons gave him. He recalls feeling more confident and successful back in the classroom knowing that he had learned strategies to use when reading and writing. He also recalls with a smile the goldfish crackers shared at the end of each Reading Recovery lesson. It is this good start that his mother feels gave Ethan the feeling that anything is possible for his future.

Ethan is now in Grade 11 at Daniel McIntyre Collegiate Institute and is an emerging youth leader in the aboriginal community. Recently, he was selected as part of an aboriginal youth exchange program between Northern Quebec and Manitoba bringing students together to experience the traditional Inuit ways. Always constant in his life is a love of reading, and on breaks during this part-time job at the Norway House Cree Nation Medical Treatment Access Program, he can be found engrossed in a good book.

The “good start” he received in the Reading Recovery intervention, along with thinking that “anything is possible,” leads Ethan to anticipate with eagerness the goal of going to university after high school graduation. He wants to be a social worker and work in inner city Winnipeg with aboriginal and at-risk youth to make a difference in his community.

— Holly Cumming, teacher leader
Sir William Osler School
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
Where Are They Now?
Fifth-Grade Author Receives Rave Reviews on Amazon

Kautilya Jammalamadaka, a Missouri fifth grader, has written an 88-page adventure story. Published by Amazon in June 2014, The Warriors of Wridor: The Doomed Quest, is now available online and receiving rave reader reviews: “This is a fast-paced book written by a 9-year-old kid. It is epic!” and “One can visualize the characters and setting through the excruciating details. The reader experiences intensity and curiosity in every scene until the last page of the book.”

No one could have predicted this success when Kautilya began first grade as a struggling reader and writer. Kautilya was selected for first-round individual lessons with Reading Recovery teacher, Kank Schwarz, in Parkway School District, Missouri. Schwarz remembers the qualities that led Kautilya to his recent success — love of writing, and a wild imagination!

“Kautilya loved to write, and he would get upset when I had to stop him so we could get to the new book for the day,” she said. “He had a wild imagination and was always writing stories about dragons and other make-believe characters. He was so passionate about his stories and his writing, it is not surprising that he has a published piece at such a young age.”

And what does Kautilya remember about Reading Recovery lessons?

“Well, I do remember reading a book, then writing words down on the board. To make it competitive, we raced each other writing the word. We also cut out tiny pieces of paper and wrote words on them. At home I had to create the sentence. Then I went home and reviewed the new book with my mom. It was kind of fun. But then one day at the library, I saw a book that seemed really interesting, but looked really hard. I read it anyway, and then suddenly I was eating up books.”

Kautilya says ideas come randomly, often when he’s bored. He says he often updates stories as he writes to incorporate a new character or event he has imagined. He has ideas for other books, but wants to finish this series first.

“My motivation is thinking of the epic battle twists that will happen throughout the series,” Kautilya said. “If I write, then I’ll get to that part. If I don’t write, I won’t get to the exciting parts I want to write.”

— Melinda McDill, teacher leader and Kank Schwarz, teacher
Parkway School District
Creve Couer, MO

Kautilya autographs copies of his book for his Shenandoah Valley fifth-grade classmates. Photographer Michael DeFilippo captured the moment for a recent issue of the school newsletter.