The Reading Recovery training has been like no other training I have had during my teaching career. Even after teaching for 22 years and receiving National Board Certification, I am learning ways of teaching reading that are new and that work.

Shelly Doughrity
Durfee Elementary-Middle School

Reading Recovery has made a huge impact on my teaching because it has made me a better teacher in every way. I love the ‘aha’ moments and my parents love that their children can read… One of my parents can’t thank me enough for helping her daughter learn how to read. I’ve learned so much from the training class and look forward to class every week.

Renee Chown
Clark Elementary School

At the end of the 2010–2011 school year, Reading Recovery® in the Detroit Public Schools (DPS)—one of the nation’s most economically challenged urban school districts—had reached a low of one teacher leader and only three teachers. However, with the support of DPS administrators and literacy leaders, action was taken to bolster literacy intervention services and implement Reading Recovery in the district’s highest-priority schools beginning in fall of 2011. Budget allocations from the district’s Office of School Turnaround and funds from Oakland University’s $4 million share of the i3 federal grant to scale-up Reading Recovery spurred the expansion efforts. In only 5 years, DPS and its Reading Recovery team—led by new teacher leaders Richelle Barkley, Jacqueline Mitchell, and Jan DeRossett, and Dr. Deborah Winston, the district’s deputy executive director of literacy and Reading Recovery site coordinator—has extended the reach of Reading Recovery to 64 teachers providing the one-to-one daily intervention to children in 24 priority schools.

Adding to the momentum achieved by the i3 grant funding in Detroit is the Reading Recovery Expansion Grant awarded to the Reading Recovery Center of Michigan at Oakland University in the summer of 2015. The goal of the grant, valued at approximately $42,450 in support of the DPS implementation alone, is to assist in covering the costs of initial training of new Reading Recovery teachers that expand the implementation in one or more school districts that the university training center oversees.

Numerous testimonials from DPS administrators, teachers, Reading Recovery children and their parents, explained the power and impact of Reading Recovery in Detroit. Among these is the acknowledgment of the investment in teachers afforded by the Reading Recovery teacher training. As stated by Dr. Winston:

Since the scale-up of Reading Recovery in Detroit, many of our teachers have had the opportunity to receive unparalleled training with a firm theoretical base. Our newly trained teachers and teachers-in-training work collaboratively with their colleagues and administrators as the literacy experts in their schools. Last year alone, our 45 teachers impacted almost 500 Reading Recovery students and supported hundreds of additional students in small-group literacy intervention during the rest of their day. This year their impact will be even greater, given that there are 18 additional teachers-in-training.

Likewise, each of the teacher leaders expressed gratitude for their recent training and the funding provided by the i3 grant. “It has been a great honor and privilege to be able to train as a Reading Recovery teacher leader...
Implementation

under the i3 grant,” states Jacqueline Mitchell who trained in 2014–2015. “The training provided an amazing opportunity for growth as a teacher of children and teacher of teachers. Through the intense training, I have gained a deeper theoretical understanding of the literacy processing system. This training has also enabled me to become a stronger supporter of and spokesperson for Reading Recovery throughout the Detroit Public Schools. Also, because of the i3 grant, Reading Recovery has expanded rapidly, and we continue to train new Reading Recovery teachers for the district each year. Seeing the lives of young children changed forever because of Reading Recovery has been an especially rewarding experience.”

Richelle Barkley, who also trained as a teacher leader in 2014–2015, echoes Mitchell’s statements and adds, “This has had a tremendous effect on me in terms of my growth as a literacy professional. The training as a teacher leader last year has expanded my theoretical knowledge about literacy teaching and learning and has allowed me to become an effective advocate for Reading Recovery. As a teacher leader for my site, I meet and collaborate with district leaders and stakeholders. I am now better equipped to impact district decisions for the benefit of early readers and first-grade teachers. Without the i3 grant, my role in this dynamic reading and writing intervention, professional development program for teachers, and my continued impact within my district would not be possible.”

Their colleague Jan DeRossett, who trained in 2013–2014, shares similar remarks. “My Reading Recovery teacher leader training was by far the most-challenging experience in my 18 years in education. Not only did the training provide me the opportunity to develop as a stronger Reading Recovery teacher, it prepared me to help teachers lift their own competencies well beyond their work with children in Reading Recovery.” DeRossett also praises the district’s teachers stating, “I am very fortunate to support such dedicated Reading Recovery teachers in the Detroit Public Schools. Together we are changing lives!”

DPS Reading Recovery teachers also explained the impact of Reading Recovery on their professional lives. For example, Cari Chagnon from Fisher Magnet Lower Academy reflected on her training in Reading Recovery in 2014–2015 under the i3 grant. “… This has been a challenging and rewarding year … I will always be grateful for the enjoyment of being professionally and intellectually challenged and the sheer delight in watching children as they became more-capable readers and writers.”

This year’s teachers also expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to train in Reading Recovery and commented on what the training has meant to them. Kimberly Joyce Morrison of J. E. Clark Preparatory Academy states, “Reading Recovery and the theory and philosophy of Marie Clay has affected me as an educator in a very positive way and has shifted my view of how children learn and use the strategies that will impact their lives and the future of literacy in our country.” Crystal Coburn, teacher at Dossin Elementary-Middle School, observes, “The training classes along with the demonstration lessons and the discussions following the lessons are extremely powerful. The sessions make me look deeper into my teaching decisions and what I could have done differently. The entire thought-provoking process constantly informs my views of what good literacy instruction looks like.”

Similar comments from the teachers-in-training this year add to these sentiments. “Reading Recovery has renewed my perspective of the reading process and how children look at
“As a teacher of over 20 years and being a part of the Reading Recovery training program, I now see the teaching of reading through a different lens and would hope that all teachers of primary grades children would have the opportunity to do the same. For [struggling first graders], Reading Recovery is the springboard to literacy.” Kathleen Vitale, a veteran teacher at Burton International Academy, adds, “The Reading Recovery training has greatly impacted my teaching career. … After 27 years of teaching, I have seen many students struggle to learn to read. … it is both heartbreaking and discouraging. I am proud to be part of the DPS Reading Recovery program.”

Many of the teachers commented on the affective changes observed in children who receive the intervention. “Hearing one of my students say things like, ‘I can read!’ and ‘I am a good reader!’ warms my heart,” says Quintaunia Charles, a teacher-in-training at Sampson Elementary School. “[He] had such a low self-esteem in regards to reading before Reading Recovery, but then he became much more confident. Even his mother and classroom teacher noticed a difference in how his reading improved. His mother has told me on several occasions how grateful she is for her son to be a part of Reading Recovery.”

Lakiesha Conley of J. E. Clark Preparatory Academy also expresses the emotional satisfaction brought about by seeing her Reading Recovery students progress and hearing about the changes noticed by their teachers and parents. “The joys of the training come when I hear how well my students are doing in their regular classrooms. For example, Ava’s first-grade teacher shared ‘I am very impressed with Ava’s reading and writing skills. She has come a long way from the beginning of the school year.’ And, Ava’s parents proudly add, “We cannot get Ava to stop reading. She wants to read anything she can get her hands on. We are so proud of her.”

Classroom teachers and the students themselves add to the statements about Reading Recovery in Detroit. DaJuan, a Reading Recovery student sharing his thoughts on becoming a skilled reader and on working with his teacher, Shelly White, at Burton International Academy remarks, “I love reading now! Do you remember when I couldn’t read, Mrs. White? Thanks, I’m going to miss reading with you. I’ll remember what you taught me, I won’t forget.” His classroom teacher adds, “DaJuan is a great example for the Reading Recovery program. In September, he was a slow, low reader at the bottom of the class. Now he is a fluent reader in the top 10% of his class. He loves to read and write. He is a leader who enjoys helping struggling
students read.” DaJuan’s mother expressed her gratitude as well. “My son is so excited about reading now. I am forever grateful to her for helping my son read. I was so worried that he wouldn’t be on grade level when he entered first grade, but after being in Reading Recovery, he is now one of the top students.”

Positive responses to Reading Recovery resonate from many DPS parents, including those of George Shade, whose son received Reading Recovery this year at Gompers Elementary-Middle School. Shade, who recently observed his son’s lesson at one of the teacher training classes, shared this. “Jacob has accomplished a lot with Reading Recovery. It has helped him to not be afraid to pick up a book even when he doesn’t know some of the words. Our family loves what she [Nichola Johnson] has done for our son and now he is reading well above average. If I were to tell another parent about Reading Recovery, I would say, ‘Please sign your child up. This will help motivate your child and give them hope’.”

Responses like the ones conveyed in this article are very familiar to those of us who work in Reading Recovery. Each day, educators, administrators, parents, and children express the extraordinary difference Reading Recovery has made to the lives of so many. Clearly, funding from the i3 federal grant and the expansion grant has enabled DPS to fully implement Reading Recovery in its priority schools and impacted children’s lives as described in the previous testimonials from district administrators, teacher leaders, teachers, and parents. Perhaps the joy and feelings of accomplishment experienced by so many Detroit children are best captured by one initially shy first-grade student, Jaden, who proudly proclaimed to his Reading Recovery teacher in the midst of one of his recent lessons: “My reading is amazing!”

Editor’s Note:
The Reading Recovery Expansion Grant awarded to Oakland University provided funding for training of 18 Michigan Reading Recovery teachers, including 15 teachers from the Detroit Public Schools. Funds from the grant covered a portion of the tuition costs at $1,000 per teacher. Each teacher also received supplies and a starter set of books for children’s instruction. The grant was part of a $127,000 initiative by associate members of the Reading Recovery Council of North America. Pioneer Valley Books, Kaeden Books, and SongLake Books provided grant funding and materials, with additional teaching materials and resources provided by Blueberry Hill Books, MaryRuth Books, Reading Reading Books, Resources for Reading, and Richard C. Owen Publishers, Inc. In addition to Oakland, grants were awarded to Georgia State University, National Louis University, and The Ohio State University.

An associate professor and director of the Reading Recovery Center of Michigan, Mary K. Lose was the principal investigator for both the expansion grant and for the i3 federal grant to Oakland University.