Where Are They Now?

The True Meaning of ‘Full Circle’

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What does “full circle” mean? For me, it means being able to provide my students what Reading Recovery® provided me many years ago. Opportunity. Experience. Success. Hope.

As a young student I was a painfully shy, slow worker who rarely completed my schoolwork. I remember wanting everything to be perfect at school. My first-grade teacher, Mrs. Sullivan, wrote, “She is very easily distracted during her independent work. Often I think she’s trying so hard she needs to take a break from work.”

I received reading intervention, speech therapy, and was still struggling to learn to read and write. I qualified for Reading Recovery in the 1989–90 school year. Mrs. Vogtsberger was my Reading Recovery teacher, and it was Benton-Carrol-Salem’s first year implementing Reading Recovery. I still remember having books to take home that I could read and that I could write with my Reading Recovery teacher’s guidance! I made significant growth during that school year.

In the following couple years, school remained somewhat challenging for me. I continued to be monitored and received some reading intervention as needed. Each year, I was growing at a rate faster than my classmates and by fifth grade had not only exited all monitoring and reading intervention, but I was helping in the reading resource room! Amazingly, in the sixth grade, I earned straight As in my first year of junior high and helped start and manage a peer-tutoring-peers support program. I was a strong and confident reader, and I believe that my time spent in Reading Recovery was the true catalyst for the shifts I made that year and in the years following.

I knew in first grade that I wanted to be a teacher when I grew up. Reading Recovery gave me the opportunity to make that dream come true by supporting my journey of becoming a successful reader and writer. I graduated from Bowling Green State University summa cum laude with a bachelor’s degree in education and from Xavier University with a master’s degree in reading education.

After several years of classroom teaching, I knew my calling was in supporting students who were struggling to learn to read and write like I was in first grade. After pleading my case and expressing my desire to support emerging readers and writers, I joined the Title I team at my school. A few years later, when I heard my district was implementing Reading Recovery, I shared my passion and desire once again — detailing why I should be part of the first training class for Reading Recovery in Hamilton City Schools in Ohio.

My life has yet again been changed for the better by the Reading Recovery experience. My amazing teacher leader, Carla Castator, and my Reading Recovery training have taught me lessons that not only changed and improved my teaching, but also my life. From the shy first grader who desperately wanted to be a skilled reader and writer, to the passionate Reading Recovery teacher shaping lives each day, I am a true example of the phrase “full-circle” and I am prouder today than ever to support my students on their individual literacy journeys.

Michelle has learned many lessons from Reading Recovery — both as a first-grade student and as a teacher now supporting her own students.