

READING RECOVERY: AN OVERVIEW

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Reading Recovery is an early intervention program designed by Marie M. Clay (1979, 1985) to assist children in first grade who are having difficulty learning to read and write. Children eligible for the program are identified by their classroom teachers as the lowest in their class in reading acquisition. Children who are not taking on reading and writing through regular instruction receive a short-term, individually designed program of instruction that allows them to succeed before they enter a cycle of failure. Reading Recovery is designed to move children in a short time from the bottom of their class to the average, where they can profit from regular classroom instruction. The goal of Reading Recovery is accelerated learning. Children are expected to make faster than average progress so that they can catch up with other children in their class.

Reading Recovery provides one-to-one tutoring, five days per week, 30 minutes a day, by a specially trained teacher. The daily lessons during these 30 minute sessions consist of a variety of reading and writing experiences that are designed to help children develop their own effective strategies for literacy acquisition. Instruction continues until children can read at or above the class average and can continue to learn without later remedial help. Reading Recovery is supplemental to classroom instruction and lasts an average of 12-20 weeks, at the end of which children have developed a self-extending system that uses a variety of strategies to read increasingly difficult text and to independently write their own messages.

The Reading Recovery Lesson

Reading Recovery uses supportive conversations between teacher and child as the primary basis of instruction. This teacher-child talk has been found to be an effective method for experts (teachers) to help beginners (students) take on complex tasks (such as reading) (Cazden, 1988; Kelly, Klein, & Pinnell, 1994) and is a particular need of children having difficulty in school (Clay & Cazden, 1990). The Reading Recovery lesson follows a routine framework of activities that are individually designed based on a daily analysis of student progress by the teacher. Each lesson has seven distinct parts:

1. Child rereads several familiar books. These stories come from a variety of publishers and represent a wide range of narrative and expository texts of varying difficulty levels.
2. Child rereads a book introduced the lesson prior while teacher observes and records the child's reading behaviors.
3. Child does some letter identification and learning how words work.
4. Child writes a story with teacher providing opportunities for the child to hear and record sounds in words.
5. Child rearranges his or her story from a cut-up sentence strip provided by the teacher.
6. Teacher introduces a new book carefully selected for its learning opportunities.
7. Child reads the new book orchestrating his or her current problem-solving strategies.

Teacher Training

Reading Recovery uses a trainer of trainers model. University professors (trainers of teacher leaders) prepare district or county level teacher leaders (experienced staff developers) who in turn train teachers in the Reading Recovery teaching techniques. This model ensures that Reading Recovery will have the support at the school district and site levels necessary for successful program implementation. It also sets the stage for systemic reform of how we teach reading and writing and how we provide access to good first teaching for all children.

Experienced teachers are provided professional development in a yearlong curriculum that integrates theory and practice and is characterized by intensive interaction with colleagues. Teachers-in-training conduct lessons behind a one-way glass and are observed and given feedback by their colleagues. In addition, Reading Recovery teacher leaders visit teachers at their sites and help them reflect on and improve their teaching and observing of children. There are three main elements in the Reading Recovery professional development program:

1. Teachers and teacher leaders participate in an extensive training program that combines child development and early literacy theory with practice in the observation and discussion of Reading Recovery lessons that are taught behind a one-way glass.
2. Teachers and teacher leaders work with four children in Reading Recovery each day during their training year and in subsequent years. Teachers are observed and coached by teacher leaders during school visits.
3. Teachers and teacher leaders participate in ongoing professional development as long as they continue to teach in Reading Recovery. Teachers are visited and coached, and they participate in inservice training sessions where demonstrations are observed and critiqued using the one-way glass.

Terminology

Much of the research on Reading Recovery uses various terms that need further clarification and definition:

Observation Survey (Clay, 1979, 1985) contains six measures of a child's attempts on reading and writing tasks and provides information about what the child knows and can control in his or her learning. The components of the survey are:

1. *Letter Identification* - a list of 54 different characters including upper and lower case letters and the printed forms of *a* and *g*.
2. *Word Test* - a list of 20 words most frequently used in early reading materials.
3. *Concepts about Print* - a variety of tasks related to book reading and familiarity with books.
4. *Writing Vocabulary* - children are given an opportunity to write all of the words they know in ten minutes.
5. *Dictation Test* - a sentence is read to the child who writes the words using sound analysis.
6. *Text Reading Level* - a determination of reading level based on actual books organized by a gradient of difficulty.

Roaming around the known refers to the first two weeks of a child's program in which the teacher explores the child's known set of information and helps establish a working relationship, boost the child's confidence, and share some reading and writing opportunities.

Running records are a systematic notation system of the teacher's observations of the child's processing of new text.

Discontinued refers to the decision by the teacher to exit a child from the program based on the readministered Observation Survey scores and observations of the strategies used by the child during reading and writing, as well as reaching at least the average of the classroom performance in first grade.

Program children are those who received sixty or more lessons or who were successfully discontinued from the program prior to having received sixty lessons.

Continuing contact refers to inservice training provided after the initial training year.

Research on Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery has a rigorous research design that continuously monitors program results and provides support to participating teachers and institutions. Data are collected on all students who participate in the program. Findings of these studies include:

1. Approximately 75-85 percent of the lowest 20 percent of children served by Reading Recovery achieved reading and writing scores in the average range of their class and received no additional supplemental instruction (Pinnell, DeFord, & Lyons, 1988; National Diffusion Network, 1993; Swartz, Shook, & Hoffman, 1993).

2. The progress in reading and writing made by children in Reading Recovery is sustained and their performance in the average band has been measured up to three years after the children were discontinued from the program (Pinnell, 1989; Smith-Burke, Jaggar, & Ashdown, 1993).

3. Studies have shown Reading Recovery to be more effective in achieving short-term and sustained progress in reading and writing than other intervention programs, both one-to-one tutorial and small group methods (Pinnell, Lyons, DeFord, Bryk, & Seltzer, 1994; Gregory, Earl, & O'Donoghue, 1993).

4. Reading Recovery has been found to be cost-effective when compared to remedial reading programs, special education placement, and primary grade retention (Dyer, 1992; Swartz, 1992).

Personal Reflection

Reading Recovery has a number of key elements that we believe make the program an important opportunity to reform how we teach young children to read and write. They are provided in summary form.

1. Reading Recovery is an early intervention program that supports early literacy. Reading Recovery focuses on early intervention, the benefits of which have been paid lip service for years. Spending the money early before problems begin rather than on later remedial programs or even on incarcerating criminals has been talked about but not seen in public schools. Reading Recovery is designed to concentrate resources on first graders as they begin to read.

Reading Recovery also supports accelerated learning. Most of our remedial programs consider themselves successful even when some progress is made. Unfortunately, children making only some progress will always be behind their class. Only acceleration can help a child catch up to the average of his peers and allow participation in the regular class program.

2. Reading Recovery serves the lowest achieving children. The lowest achieving children in first grade, without exception, are selected to receive the program. None of the historic reasons used to explain non-achievement (e. g., likely referral to special education, lack of parental support) are used to exclude children from the program.

3. Reading Recovery is effective with diverse populations. Data collected on program success from different geographical regions (throughout the United States, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand) and from various groups of children (those with ethnic, language, or economic differences) are comparable. Preliminary data from the more recently developed Descubriendo La Lectura/Reading Recovery in Spanish are also similar to children receiving the English program.

4. Children develop a self-extending system of learning to read and write. Children learn the skills to be independent learners who will just need the support of regular classroom instruction rather than remedial programs.

5. Student outcomes are sustained over time. Research on students after program completion has demonstrated continued growth in reading and writing without continued Reading Recovery support or other specific interventions.

6. Reading Recovery teachers serve children as part of their training. Teachers in the program learn by doing and use the Reading Recovery lesson framework throughout their training year. Students served by these teachers-in-training show comparable progress to those served by more experienced teachers.

7. Reading Recovery provides continuous professional support for teachers. The continuing contact for trained teachers is provided as long as the teacher participates in Reading Recovery. Unlike other teacher education programs which have little contact with students after the training period, Reading Recovery has ongoing inservice opportunities designed to maintain teaching effectiveness.

8. All Reading Recovery teachers, staff developers, and university professors work with children daily. This ongoing teaching of children by personnel at all levels is the practice that is generally credited with maintaining the effectiveness of the training. Professors can relate instruction in the university classroom to a recent event rather than something from the distant past. This novel aspect of Reading Recovery deserves serious examination by other teacher trainers.

9. Program success is directly tied to student performance. And by implication, success as a Reading Recovery teacher is related to student outcomes. Teachers are accountable for the amount of progress in reading and writing made by children in the program.

10. Reading Recovery is cost-effective. Though Reading Recovery is a supplemental program it remains cost-effective because of its short-term nature. Comparable programs (e. g., Chapter 1, special education) are much more expensive because they are typically long-term. Reading Recovery has been found to be both less expensive and more effective. Public school administrators still express concern about the expense of Reading Recovery. The best response is that the problem is a hard one and the solution will be just as hard. Educators have been searching in vain for cheap and easy answers for many years. A less expensive program that serves more children but has limited outcomes (or does not even attempt to measure outcomes) is no bargain.

11. Reading Recovery is a nonprofit program. Unlike a host of other programs offered to the public schools, Reading Recovery has no royalties, sells no materials, and makes no profits. The Reading Recovery name is trademarked only to protect the integrity of the program. This nonprofit status allows us to promote the program with impunity.

Those of us involved with Reading Recovery do so because its success with children has been continually demonstrated. Reading Recovery is a children-first-and-foremost view of the educational system. As such, the strength of its results with children, both short-term and long range, and its teacher professional development component provide avenues of much needed reform. To those truly interested in genuine school reform that provides access to good first teaching for all children, your careful review and consideration of Reading Recovery is recommended.

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