

The Journey to Integrated Implementation: Sarasota Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons Site

Lea M. McGee, *Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons Training Site, Sarasota, Florida*

Lisa A. Fisher, *Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons Training Site, Sarasota, Florida*

The purpose of this article is to describe the 6-year journey implementing Reading Recovery® at our site and the changes which occurred for students, teachers, administrators, and schools. We then argue that the Sarasota Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons™ site in Florida is currently at the “integrated” level of implementation according to *Reading Recovery: An Evaluation of the Four-Year i3 Scale-Up Report* (May et al., 2016). We have not only implemented Reading Recovery that serves the needs of our low-performing children, but we also have impacted our school system through the value we add in improved teacher knowledge and student learning in classrooms.

Our Journey

We will argue that our district implementation, while differing from school to school and teacher to teacher, is considered “ideal” and has added value to our district through the leadership provided by our Reading Recovery teachers in their schools. However, when our site began in 2015–2016, we did not know that was the direction we were headed or even that we should be heading this way. In this section of the article we discuss our journey and the conditions that propelled us to move toward our current stance

of not only deliberately planning to train teachers as Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons teachers, but also as literacy leaders.

Gearing up Reading Recovery and uncovering two issues with unexpected payoff

The Sarasota site began with the efforts of Veronica Brady working with Keith D. Monda, one of the private funders needed for The Ohio State University Investing in Innovation (i3) grant (2010–2015). Monda was influenced by the strong results of Reading Recovery’s impact on the learning of the most at-risk children and wondered how this could be implemented in the Sarasota County School District where he resided. In May 2015, he requested a meeting with Director of Elementary Education Dr. Laura Kingsley and requested that his colleague, Veronica Brady from the Gulf Coast Community Foundation, locate someone who knew about Reading Recovery to attend the meeting. Lea McGee, trainer emeritus from The Ohio State University, had just retired to Sarasota and was available to attend that meeting.

Following that meeting, Monda, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, and the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, along with other private

donors, provided funds for the startup of a Reading Recovery site to begin August 2015. Three principals volunteered to pilot the intervention in their schools, and two teachers were selected from each school to be trained as Reading Recovery teachers. Lisa Fisher was selected as teacher leader to be trained at The Ohio State University during 2015–2016, and Lea McGee taught the first training class of six teachers. In many ways our first year was like all sites implementing a brand-new Reading Recovery site. There was a scramble to get the behind-the-glass room constructed and financial procedures had to be ironed out. Getting schedules established for the teachers was of utmost importance to protect half of their day for Reading Recovery. These necessary measures required much communication on many levels within a school and throughout the district.

The first year was a blur of activity with much enthusiasm and hard work. Just as we were ready to celebrate the outcomes for our first round of children, we encountered our first challenge — an issue we faced which turned out to have long-term positive outcomes. Sarasota, like all school districts in Florida, had mandated multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) policies and procedures

for Children At Risk in Education (CARE) which involves school-based MTSS/CARE teams. MTSS is a term used to describe a model of schooling that uses data-based problem solving to guide academic and behavioral instruction and intervention. Children receive instruction and intervention in varying intensities (Tier 1, 2, and 3) based on student need. Typically, children who are not achieving with regular classroom instruction (Tier 1) are recommended for more intense Tier 2 instruction. When children do not respond to instruction in Tier 2, they are recommended for Tier 3 instruction. The school CARE team carefully reviews the cases of children in tier instruction and makes recommendations for additional testing or services for children who make minimal learning gains in Tier 3. A CARE team is comprised of teachers, administrators, support staff, and others from multiple community agencies. The team works together to address challenges facing the at-risk student population and their families.

The first of our challenges was to integrate Reading Recovery within Sarasota's MTSS/ CARE process. Fisher recognized that working across three different schools with three different teams emphasized the need for a system-wide approach. She approached our site coordinator (elementary school director) to schedule a meeting with the student services program specialist who supervises all elementary school MTSS/CARE processes for the district. During this meeting many issues were identified; however, the program director agreed to watch a behind-the-glass lesson. He suggested that the program director for speech and language services would be a valuable addition to the working group.

After watching the behind-the-glass lesson, both program specialists agreed that Reading Recovery was a model intervention with strong progress monitoring results. They were especially impressed with the content and pedagogical approaches used in instruction and saw the text level progression graph and writing vocabulary progression graph as powerful documentation for the required MTSS/CARE progress monitoring. Thus, the concept of knowing a

performance levels required to be promoted). As we were working through how to address this issue, we examined the pupil progression guidelines for all three schools and discovered many inconsistencies but only one commonality — none of the guidelines indicated that text level reading should be a factor in considering first-grade retention because of low reading achievement. Instead, all schools required children to know phonics and sight words,

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student's text level and being able to track progress in increasing text levels for all low-achieving children was introduced to district and school personnel. Of course, at the time, almost none of the teachers and other staff members of the MTSS/CARE teams at the three schools knew what this meant, but the idea that knowing the level of text that students could read was critical for teaching and evaluation had been planted.

The second challenge emerged amid end-of-year testing and making decisions about second-round children. Teachers at all three schools had children in second round that had been identified as possible retention candidates at the time they entered Reading Recovery. As the year ended, two children in one school who had discontinued reading at or above level 18 were still being considered for retention according to that school's pupil progression guidelines (i.e.,

but the number of items expected to be known varied considerably from school to school.

Again, the site coordinator, because of her work through the year with Reading Recovery, recognized the shortfall in the progression guidelines (both their inconsistencies across the district and their lack of attention to text level reading). As director of elementary schools, she mandated that a district-wide committee be formed the following year to prepare pupil progression guidelines for K–5. This was yet another way in which the idea that it is essential to know a student's text reading level began to percolate through the system.

This essential concept, that instruction is most effective when it is delivered at a student's instructional level, was not necessarily a shared belief held in all the schools when Reading Recovery began. During

our first year delivering Reading Recovery, very few classroom teachers assessed children's text reading levels, and even fewer used their knowledge of children's text reading levels to plan instruction. Instead, teachers were mandated to use the core reading program with fidelity. Therefore, most teachers read the core passages in the literature anthology with children in whole groups and sometimes provided differentiated small-group experiences by reading what the core program called paired reading texts. These texts were designed to be read in small groups with children reading below grade level, at grade level, and above grade level. The below-level paired text was the same text as the on-grade level text except that the text had fewer words. The above-level paired text was the same text as the on-grade level text except that the text had more words. The sight words and the words using the phonics patterns that were targeted for instruction for that week in the paired reading texts were the same across all small-group texts and in the literature anthology. Thus, teachers could enact the reading curriculum using the core materials without regard to a students' actual text reading level. For the most part, during those early years, teachers taught the same skills to all groups of learners at the same point in the curriculum.

Expanding Reading Recovery into all Title I schools

In 2016–2017, Reading Recovery expanded from 3 schools to all 10 Title I schools in the district and 14 new teachers were trained. While we were busy with this new training class, we were also working with the district on a common MTSS/CARE procedure and with the committee

developing new pupil progression guidelines. During this year, new issues emerged. At a meeting with our incoming superintendent, Lori White, the outgoing and long-time superintendent praised our promising results. However, she challenged us: "If Reading Recovery is not just to survive, but to thrive, classroom teachers must see Reading Recovery as essential." This challenge is one faced by all Reading Recovery sites as they struggle to avoid becoming isolated, having little interaction with the larger literacy picture in a school or district.

On a similar note, several times during our Reading Recovery monthly meetings the site coordinator would ask how the teachers were doing sharing their knowledge with their classroom colleagues. Indeed, many of the Reading Recovery teachers reported to us they were bursting with new understandings and teaching strategies and were eager and willing to share their insights. We knew this was happening in an informal manner. However, we considered what it would take to have teachers share knowledge with classroom teachers in a way that could maximize impact on student learning. Because of the encouragement from the site coordinator for our Reading Recovery teachers to share their "expert knowledge," we decided that the way we would meet our challenge of not just surviving, but thriving, was to use our Reading Recovery teachers to provide high-quality professional development at the school level. To make this happen, we knew we had to develop a consistent approach and content for the professional development. We also realized that Reading Recovery training alone was not sufficient for the

Reading Recovery teachers to develop the skills needed to engage classroom teachers in collaborative learning during professional development. So, we knew we had to provide additional training for the Reading Recovery teachers on the attributes of effective professional development. We also had to revise how we recruited and selected incoming Reading Recovery teachers to be more deliberate about requiring candidates to have a desire for and ability to take on leadership in engaging teachers in professional development.

We began writing what we call Reading Recovery Professional Development Modules around seven topics including book introductions, monitoring, using sound boxes, teaching with rhyme (analogies), working with multisyllable words, and using cumulative decoding. Each module included directions for presenters (Reading Recovery teachers), a teachers' guide (for classroom teachers), and hands-on activities to engage teachers in the content. Most modules included videos, PowerPoints, and other materials. The modules were in two parts: a short introduction to the topic which could be delivered in a professional learning community (PLC) meeting and a longer, in-depth exploration of the topic which could be provided during a district professional development day or an after-school meeting. As we finished the modules, we began providing additional trainings (beyond the ongoing professional development required for Reading Recovery) on how to deliver the professional development modules to the first two cohorts of Reading Recovery teachers.

Professional development for the modules met many of the criteria established for effective professional

development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). It focused on helping Reading Recovery teachers actively engage classroom teachers in hands-on activities which would demonstrate the concepts under study. Videos or demonstrations were used to provide examples of effective practice. Classroom teachers were encouraged to participate in a follow-up application activity following the introduction to the topic, and the Reading Recovery teachers always took the first 10 minutes of the next PLC meeting to engage teachers in sharing their experiences with these application activities. This cycle of learn, do, and reflect was designed to foster greater collaboration and group problem solving among the teachers and the Reading Recovery teacher.

Expanding Reading Recovery into all schools

During the 2017–2018 school year we expanded to all 23 elementary schools in the district. Fourteen new

teachers were carefully selected and trained bringing us to a total of 34 Reading Recovery teachers. After their training year, we established the expectation that all Reading Recovery teachers would provide some professional development to K–2 teachers through their PLCs. We suggested selecting the Reading Recovery Professional Development Modules which would be most relevant for their schools. A teacher at one of our schools, after providing professional development using the book introductions module, posted a video on YouTube showcasing how her colleagues were able and willing to successfully use their new strategies immediately in their classrooms (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lUtFmAVlnI>).

During that same school year, the new pupil progression guidelines for the district were revealed. Each grade level had a band of text reading levels that was expected to be reached by the end of the year. An example of

the pupil progression guidelines for kindergarten is found in Figure 1. This figure shows that all kindergarten teachers were expected to administer running records to their low-performing students to determine each child's text reading level. The guidelines for first grade and beyond also included a band of expected text level achievement and all teachers were expected to use running records to provide these data. Because of these new guidelines, principals began purchasing benchmark assessment systems to measure text reading levels, and some Reading Recovery teachers began writing grants or securing PTO funding to purchase sets of leveled books which they loaned to classroom teachers. These new materials brought the need for further professional development which principals encouraged the Reading Recovery teachers to provide.

The site coordinator—who was now assistant superintendent/chief academic officer—mandated that all

Figure 1. Grade Level Progression Chart Example

Sarasota County School District GRADE LEVEL PROGRESSION CHART (No single data column should be used solely as a set of criteria in determining a student's progression towards end of year grade level expectations) Kindergarten								
SCHOOL: _____			TEACHER: _____			DATE: _____		
Student Name: _____			DOB: _____			Age: _____		
Subject	Letter Recognition (Upper & Lower 52)	Letter Sounds (31)	Concepts of Print (13)	Blending Phonemes (10)	Segmenting Phonemes (10)	Running Record (instructional level) Guided Reading/DRA	i-Ready Reading	i-Ready Math
Meeting grade level expectations	50-52 # _____	26-31 # _____	13 # _____	9-10 # _____	9-10 # _____	D (6)	402 50 th percentile # _____	379 50 th percentile # _____
Progressing to grade level expectations	41-49 # _____	18-25 # _____	12 # _____	6-8 # _____	6-8 # _____	C (4)	398-401 21 st –49 th percentile # _____	358-378 21 st –49 th percentile # _____
Below grade level expectations	40 or below # _____	0-17 # _____	11 or below # _____	5 or below # _____	5 or below # _____	A/B (1-3)	Below 368 Below 21 st percentile # _____	Below 358 Below 21 st percentile # _____



Sarasota County Reading Recovery teachers attend an additional ongoing professional development session for Analyzing Running Records Module 2 training to be implemented with classroom teachers.

K–2 teachers in the district receive professional development on how to administer and score running records so that the teachers would be prepared to implement the new pupil progression guidelines. The goal was for teachers to not just use running records to obtain text reading levels, but to also use them to drive ongoing instruction. All Reading Recovery teachers were required to provide this professional development during the planning week of school start up in 2018–2019, and the schedule of trainings was placed on the district menu of required school opening trainings.

Each of the Reading Recovery teachers led the professional development on administering and scoring running records for their first- and second-grade classroom teacher colleagues as school began in 2018. Additional running records trainings were provided later in the fall on how to analyze running records and use the results to focus instruction. This

was a clear demonstration from the district leadership that Reading Recovery teachers had critical and valuable information that all classroom teachers should know. We received much positive feedback from this activity from classroom teachers, principals, and assistant principals. Following this intensive delivery of professional development, our Reading Recovery teachers reported that teachers began requesting additional professional development. Several Reading Recovery teachers initiated “push in” small-group instruction in regular classrooms after teacher requests.

Introducing Literacy Lessons

We have continued to grow. In 2019–2020, 2020–2021, and in 2021–2022 again with the support of donors and our Teacher Leader Rachel Chappell, we were able to provide Literacy Lessons training to cohorts of teachers of English language learners (ELLs) and exceptional student education (ESE)

along with replacement Reading Recovery teachers. This expansion of Literacy Lessons allowed us to provide the literacy instruction that our ELL and ESE teachers desperately needed to close the achievement gap. We continue to provide professional development for delivering our modules to all Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons teachers. We also trained a new teacher leader, Laurel Hinds. Our site now includes 58 Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons teachers and 3.5 teacher leaders.

Current Status of the Sarasota Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons Site

The Sarasota Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons Site is housed in Sarasota County, Florida. The county has 61 schools and over 43,400 students. There are four preschools, 30 elementary schools (including six charter and two magnet schools), 18

middle schools, and 9 high schools. Forty percent of the students are minorities and 47% of the students are economically challenged. Two sets of data further describe our site: achievement data from International Data Evaluation Center (IDEC) and data from an interview with Reading Recovery teachers taken prior to last year's school ending.

Strong results 2020–2021 despite the pandemic

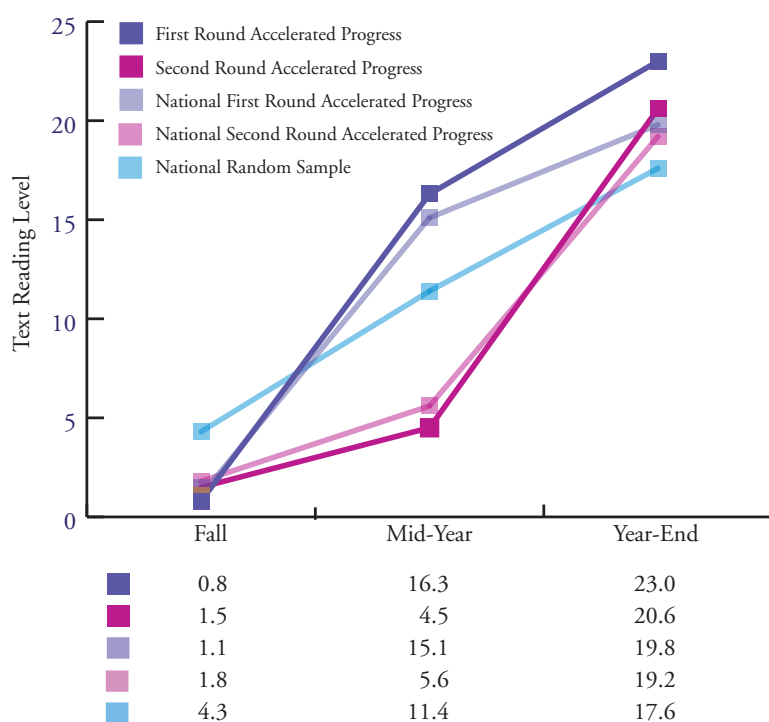
Figure 2 presents data from IDEC regarding the text reading level growth comparison of children who made accelerated progress at the Sarasota site compared to the national pool of all Reading Recovery children making accelerated progress in

2020–2021 and the national random sample. Our first-round children started at a slightly lower text level in the fall than the national pool of all Reading Recovery children and much lower than the random sample children. Upon exit, children in Sarasota had higher text levels than both the national pool of all Reading Recovery children and the national random sample. Thus, while starting as low as all Reading Recovery children in the United States who made accelerated progress, children in Sarasota who made accelerated progress made greater text level gains and continued making those gains after leaving Reading Recovery. The data displayed in Figure 2 are very similar to the data from all our

previous years showing high levels of text reading achievement reached at the exit of the series of lessons and end of year.

Unfortunately, the pandemic did have an impact on our success, as it did all across the country. In 2018–2019, the year before the pandemic began, a total of 264 children were served by 32 Reading Recovery teachers. Of all the children who received a full series of lessons, 80% made accelerated progress and lessons were discontinued, and 20% were recommended. During 2020–2021, 298 children were served by 36 Reading Recovery teachers. Of all children who received a full series of lessons, 70% made accelerated progress, 18% made progress, and 13% were recommended. This dip in results was disappointing, but not unexpected.

Figure 2. Comparison of Text Level Reading for Reading Recovery Students in Sarasota to the National Total Number of Children Who Accelerated and National Random Sample, 2020–21



Behind the scenes support from the district

Like other sites across the country, we continue to face challenges and difficulties. However, our site has survived (with the support of two new superintendents) and thrived (growing in 6 years from six teachers at three schools to 59 teachers at 25 schools including one charter school and one K–8 school with more growth this current year). The story of our journey has provided insight into the role played by Dr. Laura Kingsley, our site coordinator and assistant superintendent/chief academic officer. Her willingness to step in to make things happen for Reading Recovery and her insistence that Reading Recovery teachers are experts who must share their knowledge beyond their classrooms played a critical role in shaping our journey. She is the “make it happen” person on our team.

Another district administrator has been a key player. Christopher Renouf became the director of elementary education and joined the Reading Recovery team when Dr. Kingsley was promoted to assistant superintendent at the end of the second year of our implementation. During his first year as director of elementary education, he took time to meet with Lisa Fisher to find out more about the intervention and to visit a behind-the-glass lesson. As he stated in a recent interview, “I knew Reading Recovery had a great reputation, but it has turned out to be even greater than what I could have ever conceived.”

In his director role, he spoke with principals weekly about Reading Recovery, and many of his communications with principals were through individual, one-on-one conversations. He claimed that the most frequently discussed topic with principals was the potential value which the Reading Recovery or Literacy Lessons teacher would bring to the school. He advocated for principals to collaborate with the Reading Recovery leadership team in order to select the best possible candidate for new positions. He also shared with principals that their new Reading Recovery or Literacy Lessons teachers were expert at listening, observing, and learning — skills which they would bring to the collaborative work in professional learning communities. He reported to us that each new Reading Recovery or Literacy Lessons position in a school brought additional opportunities for those teachers to contribute to what he called “hardwiring” best practices (Studer, 2003, 2014). Hardwiring in schools is when a behavior or belief becomes the standard, accepted

“I knew Reading Recovery had a great reputation, but it has turned out to be even greater than what I could have ever conceived.”

— Christopher Renouf, director of elementary education

practice by all. One indication of our hardwiring best practice is that our Reading Recovery teachers report that running records are now part of the evidence used to discuss students of concern.

Insights From Our Journey

May and colleagues (2016) argued that “A . . . lesson that emerges from the case studies (of Reading Recovery implementation) is that *if* it is the goal that Reading Recovery influences literacy instruction school-wide, certain supports must be in place,” (p. 146). We would contend that there were six key factors which influenced our journey to integrated implementation and allowed us to influence literacy instruction district wide. The first key element was making the decision to deliberately and strategically leverage Reading Recovery teachers as literacy leaders in their schools through providing professional development. Other sites might position their Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons teachers as leaders by playing roles such as coach (Baker & Brown, 2019; Fountas & Pinnell, 2009) or providing mini-professional development sessions around topics selected by teachers (see Lipp, 2018, for a discussion of other leadership roles Reading Recovery teachers might take).

The second key to our success emerged from having the right administrators in the right positions and having frequent communication with them about implementation. Our teacher leader met with the site coordinator (executive director of elementary schools) bi-monthly during the first year of the project, then met monthly with both our executive director and K–12 assistant superintendent during subsequent years. At the end of the second year of implementation, the Reading Recovery leadership team expanded to include the elementary school executive director. Our site coordinator had tremendous influence in the district and was able to broker collaboration across different departments as needed, and the elementary school executive director was key in communicating with all principals. While individual schools may reach integrated levels of implementation, it is not likely that entire sites can reach this level without at least one powerful district-level administrator working hand in hand with the Reading Recovery team.

The third key element in our success was the frequent communication the elementary school director had with principals about Reading Recovery. He emphasized the principal’s role in maximizing the potential leadership of the Reading Recovery or Literacy

Lessons teacher. He encouraged principals to take an active role in how the Reading Recovery Professional Development Modules were implemented in their schools. While our teacher leaders did communicate frequently with principals, we believe that to reach a high level of principal buy in, at least one administrator at the district level must have knowledge and passion for Reading Recovery and the willingness to communicate with principals frequently.

Selecting the right Reading Recovery teachers was a fourth key to our success. To select teachers with the right attributes, the principals and the Reading Recovery team decided that, starting in Year 3, all candidates for a Reading Recovery position would be interviewed by an administrator and at least one teacher leader. We found that it is critical for our teachers to display open-mindedness and willingness to listen to all sides of an issue, ability to engage others in collaborative communication, and confidence in their abilities and knowledge. We also found it critical that teachers were eager to take on not only training in Reading Recovery or Literacy Lessons but also leadership roles.

Having principals who were willing and able to support their Reading Recovery teachers as they enacted leadership roles within the school's professional learning communities was the fifth key to our success. Schools that have demonstrated the greatest shifts in the way their K–2 teachers deliver literacy instruction have principals who not only support their Reading Recovery teachers as they provide professional development, but also make time in their schedules for systematic follow-up coaching and school-wide professional development.

Our sixth and final key to success was providing Reading Recovery teachers with the tools and resources they needed to deliver high-quality professional development with confidence and skill. The professional development modules and the training that the teachers received to deliver these modules helped build confidence and allowed for consistent, high-quality professional development across the district.

The Value Added to the District by Reading Recovery

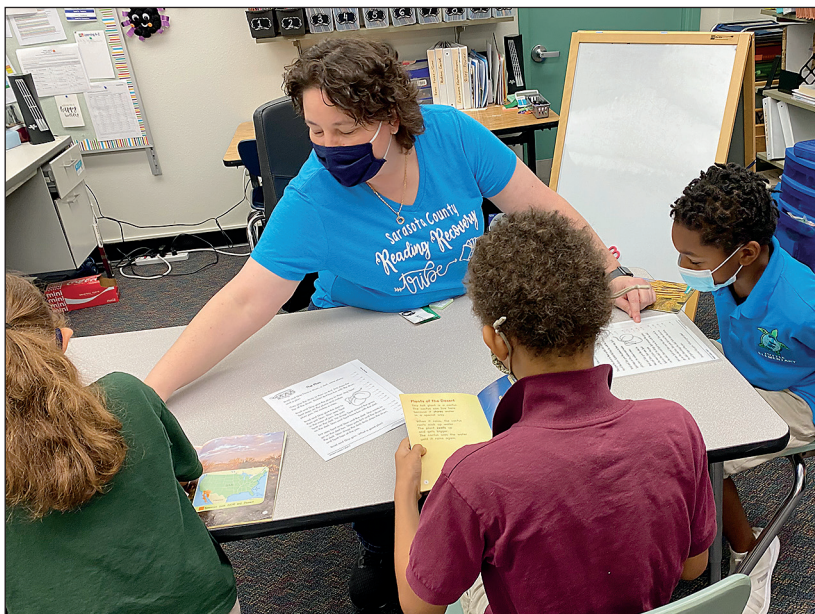
In the midst of the pandemic, there were many ways we showed our administration and funders the value of Reading Recovery above and beyond outcomes for children served. First, we reviewed the presentation we made at LitCon 2021 titled, “Empowering Reading Recovery Teachers as Change Agents in Your Schools and for Your District.” This presentation began with a statement made by Dr. Kingsley, our site coordinator and assistant superintendent/ chief academic officer:

Sarasota County's Reading Recovery teachers and teacher leaders have transformed every one of our primary classrooms into literacy-focused, strength-based environments where children learn to LOVE to read! These incredible educators are the literacy experts our district desperately needed! All of us, from classroom teacher to administrator to superintendent, have come to depend on these educators to influence all important ELA decisions. Almost everything we have to brag about regarding literacy in our district

can be traced back to our Reading Recovery teachers and teacher leaders!

As we searched for a way to support this statement with data as compelling as our IDEC data, we recalled insights from the 2016 i3 scale-up report related to the idea of Reading Recovery having added value beyond individual lessons. The authors of this report concluded, “In order to be well-supported, Reading Recovery must gain value somehow; and it is not always true that student data can make the case for the program alone,” (May et al., 2016, p. 146). The value added explored in this report was clearly demonstrated in case studies of schools at the integration level of implementation. May and his colleagues argued that Reading Recovery schools are at different levels of implementation — from isolation and obstruction at the lower end to endorsement and integration at the upper end. Schools that exhibited an integration level of implementation were “considered ideal implementations” (May et al., 2016, p. 131).

One of the critical characteristics of schools with integrated implementation as described in the i-3 scale up report was that they use Reading Recovery to build capacity in the school. In the report, for example, principals and classroom teachers made comments about the value of Reading Recovery teachers collaborating to build new understandings about literacy acquisition for all children but especially for children who struggle. According to May et al. (2016), principals argued that they played an active role not only in supporting Reading Recovery but also in brokering communication and knowledge sharing among Reading



A Sarasota Reading Recovery teacher models small-group instruction for an intermediate classroom teacher during push-in coaching lessons.

Recovery and classroom teachers. They claimed they were vocal about the value of Reading Recovery in a variety of settings.

There were two important and intertwined characteristics of schools with integrated levels of Reading Recovery implementation. First, Reading Recovery teachers enacted the role of what May and his colleagues called *literacy leaders*. Second, the principal played an active role in supporting teachers as they enacted that leadership role. May et al.'s (2016) selection of the term literacy "leader" rather than literacy "expert" or "specialist" is notable and connects to a related concept — "teacher leader." In the field of school reform, leadership, in general, and teacher leadership, specifically, has gained importance in the last decade (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Teacher leaders or teachers who provide leadership (not to be confused with Reading Recovery's teacher leaders) are described in many different ways, but two elements

are critical. Teachers as leaders are engaged in K–12 teaching as their official duty in the school; however, they also play leadership roles outside of their classrooms (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Mangin and Stoelinga (2008) argued that teachers can play pivotal roles in school change efforts that build capacity in a particular setting because they are so immersed in the complexities of teaching in that setting. They are uniquely positioned to address local needs by increasing teacher collaboration around best practices in particular content area (Curtis, 2013; Muijs & Harris, 2003, 2006). Thus, the role of literacy leader, akin to the role of teacher as leader, is particularly relevant to our setting.

We wanted to demonstrate that our site meets the two intertwined criteria of integrated implementation: Reading Recovery teachers serving as literacy leaders and principals providing active support to Reading Recovery teachers in that role. Further, we

wanted to demonstrate the value that the Reading Recovery teachers add to our district. In order to support our assertions that our Reading Recovery teachers were enacting a leadership role, we developed a 15-minute interview protocol for our Reading Recovery teachers. As part of the interview, teachers were asked to describe their role in their grade-level PLC meetings. In our site, all Reading Recovery teachers are required to be a member of one grade-level PLC team which meets weekly. The members of the PLC team include grade-level teachers, and may include ESE and ELL support staff, speech and language pathologists, behavior specialists, and Reading Recovery teachers. These teams are expected to provide forums for professional learning and collaboration around the instructional needs of children; thus, it is likely that Reading Recovery teachers might provide leadership at these meetings.

During the interview, as teachers described their role in the PLC teams, they were asked to provide concrete examples. If teachers described their role as providing professional development, they were asked to describe what they had presented and why they chose that particular content. Next, they were asked to rate their principal's support for playing this role and to provide concrete examples of their principal's actions or words.

Interview results

We interviewed 26 of the 32 teachers from 21 schools who had been in Reading Recovery for 2 or more years. (Other Reading Recovery teachers and Literacy Lessons teachers at our site were not interviewed as they had only recently been trained.) Teachers who were not interviewed were on leave or retiring. All teachers

who were interviewed reported that they were always on the PLC agenda or could ask for an agenda slot at any time. Teachers described roles they played in the PLC that could be considered supporting the professional learning of classroom teachers:

- Provide support and resources for small group differentiated instruction.
- Provide input in discussions about students of concern.
- Review and interpret progress monitoring data, especially running records.
- Provide suggestions for Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction.
- Answer teachers' questions (most Reading Recovery teachers reported an increase in the number of teachers who regularly ask them questions).
- Provide professional development using Sarasota's Reading Recovery Professional Development Modules.
- Provide professional development for new small group reading texts and intervention materials recently purchased.

Some of the teachers offered suggestions which implied they take a collaborative role with their colleagues:

- Plan for coaching in a teacher's classroom.
- Be a good listener; help teachers tease out issues and problems.
- Guide discussions around ideas for solving issues or roadblocks (being careful not to tell teachers what to do but getting them to delve into the problem and focus on desired outcomes).

- Ask questions (probe general statements for more careful detail).
- Help focus discussions that encourage teachers to articulate what they know about best practices.
- Collaborate with teachers on interpreting data and aligning instruction with not only best practices, but what the data is showing about needs.
- Offer follow-up support. (How can I help you with ____ that we talked about today?)

After describing their roles in the PLC during the interview, interviewers discussed with the teachers how their activities allowed us to identify them as what the professional literature (Wenner & Campbell, 2017) calls "teacher as leader" and explained how that role was defined (a K–12 teacher who takes on unofficial leadership role outside her classroom). Then the Reading Recovery teachers were asked to rate how well their principals supported them in playing that role. They were asked to rate their principals on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most supportive principal imaginable, and 1 being an obstructionist who actively worked against them taking this role. The score of 5 would indicate their principal was neutral — neither supportive nor obstructionist.

Nineteen of the 26 Reading Recovery teachers rated their principals with a 6 or higher indicating they believed their principals were supportive of their enacting a leadership role within their school. Fourteen teachers rated their principal at a level of 9 or 10, indicating a very high level of support. Seven teachers rated their principals as being neither supportive

nor obstructionist. Regardless of whether the principal was perceived as being supportive, all Reading Recovery teachers reported that their principal was willing to listen to their concerns and needs and tried to find ways to solve problems and provide new materials. Importantly, most Reading Recovery teachers who rated their principals as supportive mentioned at least one way their principal had positioned them as a valued team player in their school. For example, a few teachers mentioned that at staff meetings their principals had remarked on the success of Reading Recovery or how the Reading Recovery teacher had obtained new materials and would be offering training on their use. Other Reading Recovery teachers reported that their principal frequently referred other teachers to them to help problem solve issues. Two teachers remarked that, during retention meetings, principals frequently asked them for input. Many of the Reading Recovery teachers reported that their principals had placed them on the school's adoption committee for the new core literacy program. Two teachers commented that after providing a professional development training to classroom teachers, principals asked them what aspects of instruction they should be looking for in walk-throughs. One teacher reported that when the new superintendent visited her school, the principal took him to the Reading Recovery room to watch part of a lesson and to discuss how she had received external donor funding for new classroom small-group reading instruction.

Integrated implementation of Reading Recovery: Value added through Reading Recovery

The results of this interview with our current Reading Recovery teachers

reinforced that all teachers at the Sarasota site are enacting the literacy leader role by contributing to the professional learning of their classroom colleagues. All have been involved in informal learning experiences through group discussions and all have provided planned professional development sessions during the PLC meetings. Many have provided longer, follow-up professional development to the short sessions presented in PLC meetings. Thus, our site is meeting the first criteria of integration implementation — using Reading Recovery teachers to build capacity within the literacy program by knowledge sharing. They have become literacy leaders in their schools. Some of our Reading Recovery teachers discuss their roles in ways that suggest they play a more collaborative role with their colleagues likely contributing to collective efficacy (Donohoo et al., 2018). Their comments suggest

that they believe they are members of a team whose combined ability and problem solving can influence student outcomes.

We have also met the second criteria of having principals who support their Reading Recovery teachers as literacy leaders. With very few exceptions, our Reading Recovery teachers report that their principals are highly supportive of them in the role of literacy leaders. They stated that many principals provide positive and public support for them. They provided examples of actions that principals took which demonstrated that they regard the role of the Reading Recovery teacher to be vital in the literacy program of their school.

Because of their supportive roles, our principals could be described as providing distributed or collective leadership (Bolden, 2011). Collective or distributed leadership occurs in a

group when there is a planful or strategic alignment of resources (power, political influence) with a specific person equipped with particular skills and knowledge (Leithwood et al., 2006; MacBeath et al., 2004). The change that arises from the group's actions is a result of the unofficial leadership created by the strategic alignment of resources with a particular member of the group. This contrasts with the view that leadership can arise only from attributes and behaviors of individuals with official leadership roles. Overall, the principals in our site distribute leadership power to Reading Recovery teachers through their public and private acknowledgment of the value of their role in supporting improved student learning.

We can also point to one important outcome of having Reading Recovery teachers who are empowered to play the role of literacy leader in their schools. There has been a significant reduction in kindergarten, first-, and second-grade retentions from the first year of implementation in 2015 to 2019. (2020 results not provided due to pandemic.) In spring of 2015, from all 23 elementary schools a total of 420 children kindergarten through second grade were retained; 250 children were from the 10 Title I schools. In the spring of 2019, only 250 children were retained overall, with 119 children retained in the Title I schools. This reduction in retention rates is due to many factors; but having Reading Recovery teachers collaborate with their classroom teacher peers to develop stronger strategies for instructing low-performing children was certainly a significant factor. These reductions in retentions have led to a cost avoidance of hundreds of thousands of dollars yearly to our district.



A homeroom primary teacher implements the letter tracing procedure from the alphabet module after receiving literacy kits and being trained by her school's Reading Recovery teachers.



Sarasota County K–2 classroom teachers learn how to administer running records. Reading Recovery teachers provide this and other training during pre-planning week each year.

Another outcome of having Reading Recovery and Literacy Lessons teachers play leadership roles is reflected in the shift of focus of classroom teachers' conversations during PLC meetings and in their classroom practices. Before, Reading Recovery teachers reported that most conversations during the PLC meetings were about "how to teach this or that skill." Now they talk about "how to teach this child." In addition, all our Reading Recovery teachers reported that they have had frequent discussions with classroom teachers regarding the analysis of running records and how to use them to modify instruction.

The Reading Recovery teachers also reported other shifts in classroom literacy teaching. One teacher noted that when she began teaching Reading Recovery only 20–40% of the teachers in her school taught small groups daily. Now she estimates that

90% of the teachers do this daily and everyone does it several times a week. Another teacher reported that this year, all the first-grade teachers in her school had checked out many sets of different leveled texts to use in small-group instruction, a practice that was not in place when she first began as the Reading Recovery teacher a few years ago.

All our kindergarten and first-grade teachers have shifted their teaching in another way because of new materials they received through the efforts of one Reading Recovery teacher. In the spring of 2018, one of our Reading Recovery teachers approached a donor during our annual donor appreciation luncheon to share with her the contents of a teaching literacy kit she had developed for the kindergarten and first-grade teachers in her building. She also shared testimonials from the classroom teachers about how

the materials made their teaching so much more powerful. The donor was impressed by the teacher's initiative and the testimonials and was willing to provide funds for the teaching materials for all classroom teachers in our district. In the fall of 2018, every kindergarten and first-grade teacher in the district (300+ teachers in all) received a kit of multisensory materials for teaching the alphabet and phonemic awareness. All the Reading Recovery teachers provided professional development to the teachers in their buildings on effective uses of these materials.

In Closing

Our journey has implications for other sites who wish to strengthen their impact on the literacy learning of all children in a district. We suggest that Reading Recovery leaders consider what value could be added

to the districts in which they work. We conclude by emphasizing what May and his colleagues (2016) suggested about the ability to reach integrated levels of implementation:

...[The] positioning of the program and Reading Recovery teachers in a building should be a conscious part of initial program adoption, as well as ongoing implementation—something that would require particular attention by administrators, teacher leaders, site coordinators, and even UTC directors. (p. 146)

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About the Authors

Dr. Lea McGee is emeritus professor and Reading Recovery trainer at The Ohio State University where she was the Marie Clay Chair of Reading Recovery and Early Literacy. She is author and co-author of several books. She has published many book chapters and articles and presented numerous sessions at conferences. Dr. McGee currently is serving as a teacher leader at the Sarasota Reading Recovery/Literacy Lessons site.



As of 2015, Lisa Fisher was the first Reading Recovery teacher leader trained in Florida in over 10 years. She currently is one of four Sarasota County teacher leaders serving under the leadership of National Louis University's Reading Recovery Center for Literacy training site. She is also one of Sarasota County's ELA district program specialists. Lisa has 24 years of experience as an elementary teacher, reading specialist, reading resource teacher, CARE and MTSS facilitator, professional development coordinator, and Reading Recovery teacher leader. She is a former Sarasota County Teacher of the Year and has since presented at several national conferences. Lisa can be reached via email at lisa.fisher@sarasotacountyschools.net or twitter @lisafisher95.

