

Intervention Essentials

Empowered Teachers: Key to Reading Recovery

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What is the investment schools make?

For decades, Reading Recovery® teachers have been successfully teaching first-grade children who have had difficulty in their classroom literacy programs to read and write within a period of only 12 to 20 weeks. The key to Reading Recovery's success is not found in a box of purchased materials, a strictly sequenced curriculum, or a set of scripted lessons. To the contrary, the key to Reading Recovery's success is a knowledgeable, effective teacher. Thus, when schools select Reading Recovery, their investment is in developing teacher expertise. Participating teachers are provided professional development that empowers them to design and deliver high-quality, individual lessons for young learners in need of specialized support to acquire early literacy. The quality of this teacher training is an important guarantee of the Reading Recovery trademark, detailed in *Standards and Guidelines of Reading Recovery in the United States* (2017).

In this discussion, the term Reading Recovery refers to all implementations of this early literacy intervention and teacher training in the languages of instruction used in North America. These include English, Spanish (*Descubriendo la Lectura*), and French (*Intervention préventive en lecture-écriture*). Professional development activities

of all teachers affiliated with these implementations are identical, and thus the term Reading Recovery, used in the following discussion, encompasses all.

What makes Reading Recovery teacher training unique?

Reading Recovery teachers participate in year-long, graduate level coursework taught by highly knowledgeable teacher leaders in their district or region. Following an initial week of assessment training in which they learn to administer and interpret *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2019), teachers actively participate in weekly, or biweekly, classes that consistently integrate theory and practice. Importantly, teachers apply new understandings and skills immediately as they instruct two consecutive cohorts of four Reading Recovery students daily during their training year. Thus, while they gain expertise in assessing and teaching early literacy with the guidance of their teacher leaders, they also provide valued benefits of Reading Recovery to their schools without delay.

During their initial year of professional learning, Reading Recovery teachers are engaged in learning experiences that transform their understanding about literacy teaching and learning. Teachers learn to observe closely and articulate

individual children's literacy behaviors, analyze children's responses to instructional interactions, and adjust their teaching to ensure students learn at an accelerated pace.

As part of teachers' professional learning, they teach individual lessons to children behind a one-way mirror, and this provides powerful learning opportunities for their colleagues to watch, discuss, and reflect upon teaching and learning in real time. This unique experience allows teachers to become astute observers, converse about student learning and effective teaching, evaluate their own instructional decisions, and apply new understandings to their own teaching. Because an accelerated pace of learning is essential for children, teachers must learn to select specific, well-researched teaching procedures that will ensure students continue their individual learning trajectories. Their learning opportunities with colleagues foster a community of collaborative problem solving while teachers deepen their knowledge of Clay's literacy processing theory and refine their teaching.

Reading Recovery teachers also receive multiple coaching visits from teacher leaders during their initial year of professional learning. Teacher leaders watch lessons and act as thinking partners to give personalized consultation about the students and their teaching. They may demonstrate explicit teaching

procedures, review records, or help the teacher gather more data about the student to support accelerated progress.

Across teachers' first year in Reading Recovery, learning opportunities with colleagues and coaching visits with teacher leaders create shifts in teachers' understanding about early literacy learning. Reading Recovery's unique model affords teachers many opportunities to "acquire a disposition about learning, teaching, and beginning reading instruction that is different from the one they had prior to the training. This model of learning enables teachers to internalize and transform psychological processes in learning how to learn into their own instructional repertoires" (Lyons et al., 1993, p. 165). Therefore, the year of graduate coursework that provides teachers the necessary experiences to achieve this deep learning is a critical element of Reading Recovery's design.

How is school collaboration involved?

With the support of their teacher leaders and administrators, Reading Recovery teachers also learn how to strengthen implementation in their schools. They collaborate with classroom teachers, principals, and specialist teachers to ensure children most in need are selected to receive the intervention first and that they are available for daily lessons. The classroom teacher is an essential partner who has firsthand knowledge of the child's literacy performance, so teachers collaborate to monitor students' progress, problem solve challenges, and communicate students' progress to their families.

Does professional learning continue?

Following the year of initial training, high-quality, ongoing professional development occurs on a regular schedule each academic year for as long as Reading Recovery teachers remain in their positions. This professional development includes both sessions with teaching at the one-way mirror and coaching visits to provide individual support and problem solve any challenges to the accelerated progress of each student. With every student they teach, Reading Recovery teachers gain more experience designing individual series of lessons for a variety of diverse learners. Thus, teachers become valuable resources for each other's learning and freely request their colleagues' input and support. These collaborative learning experiences ensure teachers are continually refining their expertise.

What are the additional benefits of Reading Recovery teacher training?

A highly qualified teacher makes an important difference in student outcomes, especially for children having difficulties. Reading Recovery's professional development is widely acclaimed as an investment in the professional skills of teachers and a model worth emulating (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Herman & Stringfield, 1997). Additionally, Reading Recovery teachers are a rich resource of research-based understandings of early literacy. As such, they contribute a wealth of expertise to school literacy teams charged with identifying students who need support, monitoring student progress, and collaborating to ensure students get high-quality

literacy instruction. The Reading Recovery teacher's professional knowledge provides key benefits for other teachers and administrators, potentially creating systemwide changes.

The decision to provide Reading Recovery for children in need of specialized support is an investment in teacher expertise, and this investment provides both measurable and immeasurable results for children, teachers, and schools.

References

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