Introduction

Reading Recovery® is a short-term early literacy intervention designed for first grade children having extreme difficulty learning to read and write. Children meet individually with a highly skilled certified teacher for 30 minutes daily. The intensive instruction ranges from 12-20 weeks. Most children served by Reading Recovery make accelerated progress and meet grade level expectations in reading and writing. They develop effective reading and writing strategies that enable them to continue learning independently in the classroom. Reading Recovery can also serve as a pre-referral program for a small number of children who may need specialized longer-term help.

Reading Recovery

• Reading Recovery is based on scientific reading research. Reading Recovery is built on a strong research base across several decades. Evaluation data are collected annually on every child. Reading Recovery incorporates the essential components of effective reading instruction identified by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency.

• Reading Recovery is not a commercial program. The not-for-profit collaborative effort among schools, districts, and universities, trains expert teachers to work with the lowest-achieving first graders.

• Reading Recovery selects the lowest children for service first. Teachers administer tasks published in An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 2002) to select the lowest children for service first; they use this assessment information and daily observation to plan individual lessons that capitalize on a child’s strengths to overcome deficiencies.

• Reading Recovery teachers are trained in a yearlong program and receive ongoing professional development. Reading Recovery teachers participate in a year of training for which they receive university credit. During the training year, no service is lost to children because teachers begin to work with children and put their new knowledge into actions continuously. The professional development and continuing education that are hallmarks of Reading Recovery assure the quality of the program and provide the basis for continuous quality improvement as outlined in federal legislation.

• Reading Recovery teachers work with the lowest performing readers and serve in a variety of instructional roles. Reading Recovery teachers provide 4 thirty-minute lessons per day and can serve 8 to 12 at-risk students per year in this half-time role. During the other half of their teaching day they apply their expertise while working with as many as 25 to 40 additional students in their other teaching roles as classroom teacher, literacy specialist, ELL teacher, or special educator.

A Brief History

Developed in New Zealand by Dr. Marie Clay, Reading Recovery began in the United States in 1984 at The Ohio State University. Reading Recovery is now established in 50 states, Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, and Department of Defense schools. Last year, Reading Recovery served 115,717 U.S. students in 2,614 school districts and 8,139 schools. Since 1984, more than one million U.S. children have been served.

Oakland University is one of only 21 universities in the United States to serve as a Reading Recovery University Training Center. Oakland University trainers provide training, professional development, implementation support to sites, and annual evaluations of program data. Since 1991, Reading Recovery has served over 73,200 Michigan first graders.

Reading Recovery in Michigan 2004-2005

Description — During the 2004-05 school year, Michigan Reading Recovery professionals served 5,714 of the lowest-achieving first graders in the state. This was achieved through the support of 24 teacher training sites and 33 teacher leaders serving 140 school districts and 480 schools. Of the 650 teachers working in Reading Recovery, 54 were in their training year.

Demographics — Reading Recovery children in Michigan represented a diverse population: 77% were White, 14% African-American, 5% Hispanic/Latino, 1% Asian, 1% Native American, and 2% multi ethnic. Eighty-nine percent were native speakers of English with 3% native Spanish speakers and 8% speakers of a language other than English. Among Reading Recovery children for whom we have lunch data, 33% received a free lunch and 7% received a reduced lunch.

Results — Reading Recovery reports the progress of all children served, even those who received incomplete interventions. Sixty-two percent of all children served by Reading Recovery successfully completed the program, having met grade level expectations in reading and in writing and 17% were referred for further support after receiving a full program of 20 weeks. The remaining children did not receive a full intervention, usually because their intervention began late in the school year, or they moved during the intervention. Among the 4,559 children who received a full series of lessons, 78% were discontinued and reached grade level reading proficiency, and 22% were recommended for a longer-term intervention (see Figure 1). The average length of an instructional program was 15 weeks for students that achieved grade level expectations.

Figure 1
End-of-Program status of Full-Program Reading Recovery Children. N = 4,559

Discontinued - 78%
Recommended - 22%
Changing Futures: Bringing At-Risk Students to Average Achievement Levels

Research by Juel (1988) shows that low achieving students in grade one are very likely to be low achieving in grade four. Conversely, first graders performing at average levels are likely to be average or above in fourth grade. Policy makers need to know which programs are successful in meeting the needs of these low achievers in measurable ways.

Achievement groups for the Text Reading Level measure were obtained from national norms. Students were divided equally into fifths, each comprising a quintile or ‘achievement group,’ illustrated in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80th-99th national percentile</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60th-79th national percentile</td>
<td>High Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40th-59th national percentile</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th-39th national percentile</td>
<td>Low-Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st-19th national percentile</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About 20 per cent of the population falls within each achievement group in both fall and spring. It is important to note that these achievement groups are not used as criteria for identification of students needing Reading Recovery services. Achievement groups represent a national standard against which Reading Recovery students’ performance can be compared.

Text Reading Level

Table 2 below lists the raw scores and corresponding achievement groups for the national random sample for the Text Reading Level measure. For example, the Low quintile in fall of first grade corresponds to a text level of 0 and the Average quintile in spring to a text level range between 18 and 22.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Low-Avg.</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>High-Avg.</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Year</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>8-10</td>
<td>12-16</td>
<td>18-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year-End</td>
<td>0-12</td>
<td>14-16</td>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>24-26</td>
<td>28-30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children that begin first grade in the low category are very likely to end the year in this category, but with a larger gap between their performance and their average peers. Reading Recovery services change the odds! For children whose series of lessons were successfully discontinued, 46% were in the Low group in fall compared to only 3% in spring, a remarkable shift. For the treatment group students, which includes all students who receive a full series of lessons regardless of outcome, 51% were in the low achievement group1 in fall but in spring, only 24% were still in that group (see Figure 2). These data are remarkable because they illustrate that Reading Recovery spoils the predictions of failure for these at-risk students.

1 Without a floor effect, most students in the treatment group would have been in the low achievement group.

Support for Michigan and National Initiatives

Reading Recovery plays an important role in state and national initiatives designed to “Leave No Child Behind.” Outcomes show that Reading Recovery dramatically reduces the number of children with reading difficulties and the costs related to educating those children.

In December 2004, President Bush signed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) into law. A reauthorization of the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the IDEIA 2004 focuses on the education of children with disabilities. Key features of the law are a provision for early intervening services (EIS), also defined as “response to intervention” or RTI without requiring labeling of children as LD (learning disabled). A second provision of the IDEIA is the discretion it gives to school districts to spend up to 15% of their federal special education funds on professional development for teachers and on qualifying EIS. In this context, Reading Recovery provides an ideal response to the federal provision for EIS by targeting children in the lowest performance levels in the fall and helping them reach average performance levels (Lose, 2005). For the very few children who remain low performers after this intensive intervention, Reading Recovery serves as reliable and valid RTI method to identify those children needing continued specialist support for literacy learning (McEneaney, Lose, & Schwartz, in press).

Implementation Factors

Site-based decision-making is an integral part of Reading Recovery. All outcomes should be considered within the context of the implementation decisions made by districts. Known to contribute to positive outcomes are the level of coverage within a school and within a district, protection of time for teaching sessions, quality of teacher training, knowledge of administrators and classroom teachers, and ownership of the intervention by all stakeholders.

Reading Recovery has a strong track record of preventing literacy failure for many first graders. Results support the investment of resources in this prevention effort. Yet, Michigan is still far from providing Reading Recovery to all children who need it. Many of the participating schools experience the impact of low coverage. Four out of five students in Michigan who need Reading Recovery do not have access to the intervention. Ideally 20% of our state’s first graders should have access. Policy makers and all who are concerned about leaving no child behind could achieve greater equity by providing the intervention to the 24,933 first graders that could benefit from Reading Recovery.

Results of a large-scale study indicated that money spent on improving teacher performance netted greater student achievement gains than did any other use of school resources (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Last year, Reading Recovery teachers served 5,714 of the lowest performing first graders in Michigan. Those same teachers applied their expertise while working with 20,540 additional students in their other teaching roles as classroom teacher, Title I/reading teacher, or special educator. A small percentage of Reading Recovery professionals also influenced the literacy learning of several thousand additional Michigan students by serving as literacy coaches and staff developers.

References


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