

Reading Intervention for High-Risk First-Graders

First-grade students at highest risk receive daily, intensive, one-on-one reading lessons. After 30 to 40 hours of instruction, they never need remediation again.



Children who do not learn to read by the end of first grade will fail to achieve in almost all other areas of the school curriculum. Reading failure causes children an immense loss of self-esteem during school years, and their need for additional schooling and remedial service makes them expensive educational liabilities. Moreover, an individual who leaves school as a nonreader continues to be a social liability, lacking the basic skills needed for self-support and for making an economic contribution to society. The Ohio Department of Education has begun a collaborative program with local school districts and teacher-training institutions to support reading instruction for first-grade students at highest risk of becoming nonreaders. Ohio is the first in the United States to implement statewide the New Zealand Reading Recovery program developed by Marie Clay, an educational psychologist at the University of Auckland.

The Reading Recovery Approach

Early in the first grade, Reading Recovery identifies pupils at risk of failing and uses intensive instruction to catch them up to the average or above-average level of their class-

In Reading Recovery, the child can choose what familiar books to read, what to write about, and which strategy to employ on unfamiliar words.



During the second segment of the Reading Recovery lesson, the child reads yesterday's new book while the teacher creates a running record.

mates. The early intervention program stresses the need to intervene before children's poor habits become difficult to change and block future learning.

Capitalizing on the specific techniques that good readers use naturally, Reading Recovery teachers provide intensive one-on-one instruction for 30 minutes daily. Children practice reading and rereading many easy books with interesting stories in natural language. They also write sentences and stories, learning to hear sounds in words and gradually to spell them correctly. Most important, children develop independent reading strategies that enable them to learn at an average level in their regular classroom.

Longitudinal research using this method with thousands of children

has demonstrated startling results unduplicated in the typical school remedial reading program (Clay 1985). After an average of 15 to 20 weeks, or 30 to 40 hours of instruction, 90 percent of the children whose pretest scores were in the lowest 20 percent of their class catch up to the average of their class or above and *never need remediation again*. In the pilot research conducted in the Columbus School District during the 1984-85 school year, Reading Recovery children not only made greater gains than the other high-risk children who received no help, but they also made greater gains than the children who needed no help (Huck and Pinnell 1985). The expanded program, which included children from 18 different urban, suburban, and rural geographic

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regions of the state during the 1985-86 school year, obtained similar results. A follow-up study of the children in the original Columbus group confirmed that they maintained their gains (Pinnell 1986).

Implementation at the Building Level

Reading Recovery teachers must complete a one-year training course equivalent to nine quarter hours of graduate credit with an especially trained Teacher Leader, who thereafter acts as a liaison between the training site and the participating school district. The Teacher Leader visits Reading Recovery teachers and provides information and inservice sessions about the approach at the building or district level. All Teacher Leaders, including university professors or district supervisors, continue to work



A Reading Recovery teacher asks the child to find way in his book and asks if it looks the same as the word on the letter board. After the child reads the sentence with way in his book, the teacher asks, "Does it make sense?"

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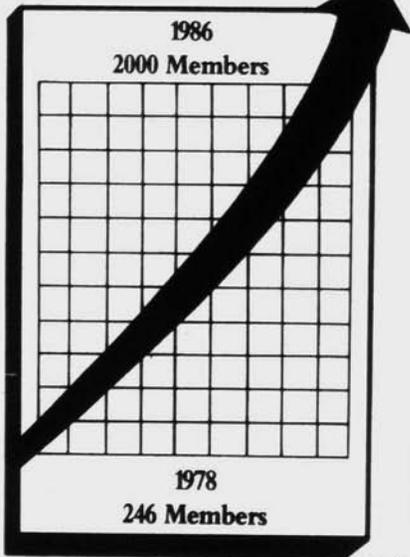
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with children to expand their understanding of the model through direct experience.

Districts release teachers from classroom duties for two hours daily to work individually with Reading Recovery children. The districts pay the cost of the permanent substitute or team teacher, and state funds cover the cost of training and materials. Districts have involved staff in the project in four ways. A district may:

1. assign two full-time teachers to one first-grade classroom; one or both become Reading Recovery teachers for two hours a day;

2. train a Chapter 1 teacher as the Reading Recovery teacher; the teacher uses two hours of Chapter 1 time for Reading Recovery;

3. create a Reading Recovery team of a Chapter 1 teacher and a first-grade teacher; or

4. employ a part-time teacher or full-time floating teacher to substitute for the first-grade teacher during the Reading Recovery period.

The permanent substitute or team-teacher approach ensures continuity for the first-grade children and alleviates the concern some principals felt about the classroom teacher being away for part of each day.

Talking About Reading

The Reading Recovery teacher listens as the child begins by rereading easy books. The teacher suggests, "Read it with your finger."

"Now it came out right," the child replies, "I had enough words for each time I pointed."

The teacher offers no assistance as the child rereads the book they worked on together during the previous lesson. They continue with the lesson until the child, puzzled, stops.

"That didn't make any sense," the child observes, repeating the beginning of the sentence, taking another look. Then, after a moment, the child reflects aloud, "Oh, it's away. That makes sense."

A little later, the child shakes her head and seems uncertain. The teacher asks, "Why did you stop?"

"I don't remember that word."

"What word would make sense there?"

"Bike. But this word is longer. It's got to be bike. Oh! It's bicycle!"

By asking questions, the teacher helps the child correct her own errors. The teacher does not ask the child to "sound out the word" as this interrupts meaning processing. The teacher does not tell the word to the child, a procedure that tends to keep the child dependent upon the adult.

Thus for visual and meaning cues, the teacher asks, "Does it make sense?" For visual cues: "Does that look right?" For letter or sound cues: "What would you expect to see or hear?" And for structure or grammar cues: "Can we say it that way?"

—Mary Boehnlein

Children are selected on the basis of Diagnostic Survey test results and conferences with classroom teachers (Clay 1979). From the lowest 20 percent of the first-grade classes, the Reading Recovery teacher selects four children. The rest wait until places become

available when original students move or no longer need individual help. Reading Recovery does not replace the children's classroom reading instruction, and they do not receive additional reading support services.

Reading Recovery Lessons

The first ten lessons—called Roaming In the Known—allow the teacher to observe the child's reading and writing skills. Teachers present no new material during these sessions although children may learn spontaneously. The teacher models fluent and expressive reading to and with the children, and the children read many easy books to develop fluency. Children also write their own "books" using natural language; they write down known sounds, and the teacher fills in the unknown symbols. This process helps children apply problem-solving strategies and to practice with books they have written themselves. They begin to adopt strategies of fluent readers: using sentence structure to predict meaning, using picture clues, and relating symbols to sounds to recall a forgotten word.

As children reread enjoyable but easy material, they gain confidence. After three lessons, one child said, "I told my teacher I could read!" These early sessions also build rapport between



Child and teacher write words and listen carefully to their sounds.

teacher and child, creating bonds that enable the child to "risk" problem solving with more difficult material. Now the Reading Recovery program can begin.

Reading Recovery lessons follow a specific sequence and have one clear goal: *to accelerate the child's learning at a faster rate than the learning in the classroom.* Without accelerated learning the child would never catch up to or exceed classmates. Therefore, daily lessons are one-on-one, 30 minutes of intense work for both teacher and pupil. To become independent, however, the pupil must do the real work of reading.

The teacher's role is to help the child organize the details about letters, print, and words, eliminating confusions that stand in the way of getting meaning from print. No manual or printed sequence of lessons gives the teacher a plan to follow. The teacher builds each child's program individually, observing each child's daily performance and making on-the-spot decisions about the lesson content.

Lessons follow a specific sequence designed to help children become independent readers. Children:

- reread several small books for fluency and to reinforce new skills;
- reread yesterday's new book, while the teacher records the child's oral reading;
- identify letters, using movable plastic letters on a magnetic board;
- write a self-composed sentence or story in a composition book and learn to hear and write the sounds in words;
- cut up a duplicate of the sentence or story, rearrange it, and self-correct it using the composition book model;
- encounter a new book, focusing on the text and meaning while the teacher encourages the use of prediction and other strategies; and
- attempt to read the new book independently.

Children transfer out of Reading Recovery when they can continue learning in the classroom, monitor their own reading, and correct self-detected errors. Their release is based on a group decision by the Reading Recovery teacher, the classroom teacher, and the Teacher Leader. Another trained Reading Recovery teacher or Teacher Leader administers post-tests to assure an objective evaluation.

Techniques of Good Readers

Reading Recovery teachers provide intensive one-on-one instruction for 30 minutes daily. They help children acquire specific strategies that research shows good readers use.

Thus children learn to:

- control directional movement, left to right and top to bottom;
- use book language and develop memory for text;
- get meaning from structure;
- self-correct nonsensical errors; and
- cross-check confusions or errors using meaning and visual and auditory cues.

—Mary Boehlein

Teacher Training

An intensive inservice program prepares Reading Recovery teachers to understand reading theory and current instructional methods, to be sensitive observers of reading and writing, and to accommodate individual learners' needs. During the one-year training period, teachers begin working with children. Several times during the year, teachers instruct a child behind one-way glass while the rest of the group analyzes the

child's reading behavior and the teacher's responses. This clinical coaching experience, guided by the especially trained Teacher Leader, enables teachers to master diagnostic techniques and teaching strategies that will improve their instruction. The program encourages parents, the school administrator, and classroom teachers to observe the program, as enlightened supporters close to the child can help ensure the child's success.

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The Ohio Model

The dissemination of Reading Recovery in Ohio results from a collaboration between the state department of education, public schools, and selected teacher training institutions, including Ashland College, Cleveland State University, Miami University, and Wright State University. The Ohio State University trains the Teacher Leaders who, in turn, train Reading Recovery teachers at the district level. Assisted by Marie Clay, originator of the program, the 1984-85 pilot program trained 21 teachers, seven of whom went on to receive Teacher Leader's training. Teachers training teachers is a principle at the heart of this program.

Funding from the Ohio State Legislature enabled the program to expand statewide in 1985-86, and to train 18 additional Teacher Leaders. The department of education's long-range goal is to make Reading Recovery training available to all first-grade teachers and to serve 15 percent of the state's first-graders. The state-funded program will continue for two years with renewal of state funding likely for two more years.

Action Against Illiteracy

As a result of Reading Recovery, teachers have grown in ability to describe and diagnose children's reading behavior (Pinell 1986). During the second year of the project, about 90 percent of Reading Recovery children have moved from low to average reading levels for their classrooms. Results have been remarkable. Prior to the program, teachers doubted many of these children would pass to the second grade. Comparison children, on the other hand, scored well below the mean scores of the class.

While the program needs additional evaluation, it is obvious that intervention is more cost-effective than remediation. This statewide collaboration of institutions and teachers promises to deliver a workable model to other education agencies looking for effective ways to combat illiteracy. □

Note: For more information about Ohio's Reading Recovery Program contact: Gay S. Pinnell, Reading Recovery Office, 200 Ramseyer Hall, 29 W. Woodruff Ave., Columbus, OH 43210-1177, or Nancy Eberhart, Director of Inservice Education, The Ohio Department of Education, 60 S. Front St., Columbus, OH 43215. The preparation of this paper was supported, in

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