

Reading Recovery® Program Background

The work and analysis of Reading Recovery in the state are described in the following report, which provides information about its operation and the results of the Reading Recovery research project at the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development.

Reading Recovery was designed to serve the bottom 20%-25% of the second-year primary population. Reading Recovery is based on the assumption that intensive, high-quality help during the early years of schooling is the most productive investment of resources. The early years, which set the stage for later learning, are particularly critical for children who are at risk of failure. Reading Recovery, which was developed and initiated by New Zealand educator and psychologist Dr. Marie M. Clay, provides a second chance in reading for young children who are at risk of failure in their first year of reading instruction.

To implement Reading Recovery, teachers need specialized training over a period of a year while simultaneously teaching children. Through clinical and peer critiquing experiences facilitated by a teacher leader, teachers learn to use the observational and teaching procedures for conducting the lessons. Accompanied by the use of a one-way mirror for the training sessions, teachers become more adept at observing children's reading and writing behaviors thus becoming better-informed decision makers when making moment-to-moment teaching decisions.

Currently, Reading Recovery, through the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development, is providing training for Reading Recovery teachers serving children in 88 elementary schools. These elementary schools are from 34 school districts clustered within three areas of the state (see Table 2). In 1988, Reading Recovery was piloted in Jefferson County Public Schools. By 1993-94, Reading Recovery had grown to include two sites: Jefferson County Public Schools and Central Kentucky Education Cooperative. By 1998, Reading Recovery had added an additional site, the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative. At that time, the University of Kentucky assumed responsibility for the Reading Recovery site previously administered through the Central Kentucky Education Cooperative. The teacher leaders at these sites continue with yearly training classes, thus ensuring the growth of Reading Recovery. At the conclusion of the 1999-2000 school year, these three teacher leaders will have trained a total of 126 teachers. Currently, 122 of these teachers are still serving children (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Growth of Reading Recovery in Kentucky

| School Year | Teacher Leaders | Trained Teachers | Children Served | Children Served per Provider |
|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 1993/4-1997* | 2 | 56 | 1,022 | 7.0 |
| 1998/9-1999/00** | 3 | 70 | 2,166 | 8.8 |
| Total | 5 | 126 | 3,188 | 7.6 |

*University of Kentucky (UK) / Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) sites

**UK / JCPS / Kentucky Valley Education Cooperative (KVEC) sites

During the 1998-99 school year, 956 at-risk, second-year primary students received one-on-one Reading Recovery tutoring services for half an hour daily for approximately 12-20 weeks. Prior to their Reading Recovery experience, these children were the lowest performing children in their classes in both reading and writing, and they closely matched the diverse population of the total site. Across the served schools, each of the 122 trained teachers provided service to approximately 9 children.

Research Documentation

Research documentation is based on *An Observation Survey* designed by Marie Clay. It consists of six tasks dealing with the reading and writing processes. Reading Recovery students are asked to complete these six tasks at both time of entry and time of discontinuation (when children are able to function independently within the average range of their class). Further research data is collected on a random-sample population of second-year primary students not receiving the services of Reading Recovery in order to provide an “average” base across the site. Any child receiving just one Reading Recovery lesson would not be considered in the random sample. If a random-sample child is taken into Reading Recovery at any point during the school year, that child’s data is removed from the random sample. This indicates, then, that the performance of the Reading Recovery students is measured against much higher levels of academic achievement.

Often, Reading Recovery children find it difficult to read a one-episode story containing just three words. They find it challenging to write words; frequently, a Reading Recovery child can write only his or her first name. In contrast, children representing the random sample population are able to read stories with multiple lines of text on a page, with more than one episode, and containing about 80 words. They are able to write their first and last names as well as many concept words (i.e., cat, dog, red, no, etc).

Analysis of Project Data

Rate of Discontinuing. Of the 956 students served in Reading Recovery during the 1998-1999 school year (see Table 3), 688 students (72%) were discontinued, meaning that they were able to return to their classrooms as successful readers and writers not needing further intervention services. Of the 268 remaining students, some benefited from the program but were unable to do so at an accelerated rate, thus making it difficult for them

to attain average status within their classes. Some children received incomplete programs for reasons such as moving to schools that did not house Reading Recovery or being served in Reading Recovery but not having enough time in the school year to receive a complete program. Some children were withdrawn from Reading Recovery because of placement in special education. Table 4 charts the progress of the served Reading Recovery students by reporting sites within the state.

Table 3.
End-of-Year Status of Children Served in 1998-1999

| Year | Discontinued | | Non-Discontinued | |
|-----------|--------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| | N | Percent Served | N | Percent Served |
| 1998-1999 | 688 | 72% | 268 | 28% |

Table 4.
End-of-Year Status of Children Served in 1998-1999 (By Site)

| Site | Number of Teachers | Children Served | Discontinued Children | Percent of Served Children Discontinued |
|------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|
| KVEC | 17 | 124 | 86 | 69% |
| UK | 72 | 553 | 420 | 76% |
| JCPS | 33 | 279 | 198 | 71% |

Levels of Service. According to Marie Clay, a child’s experience in the Reading Recovery Program “ranges from 12-20 weeks, with 12 weeks or less viewed as a ‘bargain’ and about 16-18 weeks being more typical.” (Clay, 1999) The effectiveness of the program is affected by the fact that the first cohort of students is moved quickly through the program so that services can be provided for the second and possibly third cohort of students. Across the Kentucky reporting sites, programs for the discontinued students were completed within an average of 16.5 weeks (see Table 5). It is important to note that in 1999, Reading Recovery children attended only approximately 3.5 lessons per week and were absent from about 16 lessons during their programs. These absences represent three weeks of instruction. It would be interesting to speculate how many more students could have benefited from Reading Recovery or what children with incomplete programs would have accomplished given three additional weeks of instruction.

Table 5.
Levels of Service

| End-of-Year Status | Number | Weeks (Mean) | Lessons (Mean) | Absences (Mean) |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Discontinued | 688 | 16.5 | 55 | 16 |
| Incomplete | 211 | 10.5 | 33 | 16 |

Progress of Served Reading Recovery Children. Marie Clay stated that there is no fixed set of strategies, required level of reading, nor test score that must be attained to warrant discontinuing a student from the program. Rather, it is essential that children have a

system of strategies which works in such a way that they learn from their own attempts at reading.

End-of-year scores on the six tasks of the *Observation Survey* for all children served in Reading Recovery were compared to those for each site's average band. The average band was determined by calculating the mean for each of the tasks for a group of randomly selected, second-year primary students. It is important to remember that the Reading Recovery children were the lowest performing children in their second year of primary instruction. The task of reading stories of multiple episodes with multiple lines of text on a page and numerous words was quite challenging. See Tables 6a-6f (Appendix D-4) for a representation of the gain these children made over the course of the school year as compared to the gain of the random-sample population.

On each task of the *Observation Survey* (with the exception of Concepts About Print), the discontinued Reading Recovery students made higher gains than did those of the random-sample group. In text reading, which most demonstrates a child's control over all aspects of the reading process, discontinued students attained an 18.9 mean gain compared to the random-sample students' mean gain of 10.5 (see Appendix D-4, Table 6a). With this knowledge of the reading process, the discontinued Reading Recovery children's ability to read both fiction and nonfiction text containing many episodes, numerous lines of text with various layouts, and approximately 250 words easily matched the reading ability of the random-sample population. A discontinued Reading Recovery child has acquired an individual system for learning with which he or she can function within the average of the class in reading and writing without need of further intervention.

The sub-test, Concepts About Print, gave the observer a way of checking on what children had learned about the way we print language. These concepts are learned gradually as children use their eyes to locate, recognize, and use the print information. For children who find the reading and writing process a challenge, it is imperative that confusions about the arbitrary way we print language get sorted out early. It is impressive to note that 86% of the discontinued Reading Recovery children scored either within or above the average band, compared to only 78% of the random sample population (see Appendix D-4, Table 6b). Control over this task will allow the reader to effectively deal with multitudes of print type and text layout.

Even though it is a well-proven fact that reading is much more than just sorting out letters and sounds, efficient readers and writers must have a system for using letter/sound relationships to figure out unknown words. Reading Recovery children are taught to use this system, known as phonics, to develop knowledge of letter/sound relationships within a meaning driven context. 98% of the Reading Recovery children scored either within or above the average band compared to 85% of the random sample children (see Appendix D-4, Table 6f).

Continued Progress of Discontinued Reading Recovery Children. Students who discontinue from Reading Recovery are said to have a self-extending system, meaning that they are expected to continue to improve their reading achievement after the tutoring

sessions have ended. To support this statement, students discontinued prior to April 1 (often as early as mid-December) are again administered the battery of tasks in the *Observation Survey* in May. Table 7 charts student progress from the point of discontinuing to the end of the school year. This growth is an indicator of both a self-extending system and supportive classroom teaching.

Table 7.
Progress of Children Discontinued Prior to April 1

| Measure | Fall | Entry | Exit | End-of-Year |
|---|------|-------|------|-------------|
| Text Reading Level (Grade 1 = 14-16) | 1 | 1 | 11 | 19 |
| Concepts About Print (Maximum: 24) | 11 | 11 | 20 | 21 |
| Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words/Dictation (Maximum: 37) | 10 | 12 | 35 | 36 |
| Writing Vocabulary (10 minutes) | 7 | 10 | 53 | 61 |
| Ohio Word Test (Maximum: 20) | 1 | 2 | 17 | 19 |
| Letter Identification (Maximum: 54) | 46 | 47 | 53 | 53 |

Note. Data represents UK and KVEC sites.

Summary and Conclusions. The goal of Reading Recovery is to have the lowest 20-25% (in some special instances an even higher percentage) of the first-grade population of a school system independently reading and writing with the average of their peers within a 12-18 week period of time. This annual report has addressed the level of implementation as well as the success of the program during the 1998-1999 school year. There were a total of 956 “at-risk,” second-year primary students. Of the 956 served students, 72% were discontinued because they had achieved reading levels near the average of their peers. This rate of discontinuing is well within the national average. It is imperative that Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders, Reading Recovery teachers, and other school personnel use this data as a problem-solving tool so that more students in need of the services will have the opportunity to receive them and to receive them effectively.

Many program students who did not discontinue from Reading Recovery showed significant gains in all areas of the *Observation Survey* (in some cases falling within the average band but not exhibiting a self-extending system), but were unable to achieve independent reading and writing success matching that of the average group. Other non-discontinued children did not make significant gains, often because of short or incomplete programs. There were 211 children who had incomplete programs. It is a continuing challenge for teachers to analyze struggling readers’ difficulties and to adjust teaching methods based on that analysis. Frequently, if a teacher is a keen observer of the student’s strengths during the early portions of the program, accelerated learning and early discontinuation can be achieved.

Reading Recovery students participated in programs that were, on average, 15.6 weeks long. A continuing challenge is to effectively teach children within a 12-16/18 week period, thereby maximizing the number of students served by a Reading Recovery teacher and lowering the number of children not receiving a complete program. In tandem with this is the challenge of serving children daily.

Discontinued students were given, on average, 3.5 lessons per week while non-discontinued students were absent from approximately 16 lessons from their programs. Marie Clay stated,

“Reading Recovery lessons are given daily. The power of the programme to effect change is diminished when the child is not attending regularly... [and] when the teacher is not available to teach.... When the daily, intensive programming is not achieved, the quality of the teaching and the outcomes of the programme are seriously affected.” (Heinemann, 1996, p. 9)

During the 1998-1999 school year, Reading Recovery children tended to miss their lessons because either they were not available (absences, assembly programs, etc.) or their Reading Recovery teachers were not available (substituting, activity monitoring, etc.) It is imperative that Reading Recovery teachers, classroom teachers, and parents all become advocates for daily service.

The findings reported here are impressive in that a group of students who were expected to experience failure in learning to read and write are now expected to succeed. Reading Recovery in Kentucky has provided the necessary second chance for these students.

Reading Recovery continues to grow in the state. The Collaborative Center for Literacy

“Reading is fundamental to educational progress and with improved teaching of reading in early grades, the foundation for moving from ‘learning to read’ to ‘reading to learn’ will be established.”

—Reading Recovery Teacher

Development has sent its teacher leader to Texas Woman’s University for Trainer training, thus creating more opportunities for growth. Upon returning as a Trainer, Dr. Judy Embry will train Teacher Leaders from sites across the state who will then train Reading Recovery teachers for their local school districts. Dr. Clay designed Reading Recovery as a system intervention. Therefore, there is a challenge to make Reading Recovery grow not only within schools but also within districts. The growth chart on page 15 (Table 2) is indicative of state growth. However, there are many areas within the state that do not have a level of coverage sufficient to provide a safety net for these needy children. Levels of implementation do affect levels of discontinuing. Two reporting sites, schools which have recorded a 75%-100% implementation rate, discontinued approximately 78% of the served children compared to a 65% discontinuing rate in systems serving less than 50% of the neediest children.

Members of the Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence stated that the “goal of Kentucky is to break the cycle of illiteracy and ignorance over the next generation” (1999, p.1). They added that they strongly believe in this goal and feel that “headway is being made.” Reading is fundamental to educational progress and with improved teaching of reading in early grades, the foundation for moving from *learning to read* to *reading to learn* will be established. Reading Recovery is an intervention model of instruction that will establish that foundation for the neediest population of children.