

## Reading Recovery: The Power of One

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**Course:** Educational Leadership and Policy Studies EDLP 225 :: Advanced Seminar: Ethical Decision Making

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**Term:** Fall 2000

Reading Recovery is a one-to-one early literacy intervention for first graders performing in the lowest quartile. The Reading Recovery teacher participates in a rigorous year of training with numerous observations and multiple lesson presentations behind one-way glass. Students' reading improves in a short amount of time. Marie Clay (1991; 1993a; 1993b) is the author of this New Zealand originated program and author of three texts whose research based approaches and techniques are constantly referred to and used as a guide to instruction. This paper identifies four positive aspects of this reading program.

Reading Recovery teachers quickly learn the value of this one-to-one approach to teaching. Five day weeks, thirty minutes per lesson for twenty weeks follow a six part observation survey of the child's present literacy knowledge. The first two weeks are devoted to "roaming around the known", where the teacher spends time reinforcing known letters, sounds, and concepts of print. "Roaming around the known" provides time for teacher and student to develop trust and to cultivate an attitude of risk taking initiative without the fear of failure hindering their attempts. Instruction commences after a full 10 days of roaming. Every lesson involves readings of familiar text, a "running record", magnetic letter work, "making and breaking", journal writing, and an introduction to a new book. Running records provide the teacher insight into the strategies that the child has adopted in decoding. Three categories are scrutinized when reviewing a running record: Meaning, Syntax (Structure) and Visual. These areas provide insight into the thought processes of the reader and are translated into specific teaching points for later lessons. The last running record of each week is recorded and graphed for projected progress.

Many criticisms of Reading Recovery center around the high cost. In response to that criticism Swartz argues that Reading Recovery is "cost effective" because of its short duration and after receiving Reading Recovery students perform at or above the average range of their class without additional support beyond the classroom (Swartz, 2000). There is a one-time fee per teacher for training. Teachers share the cost of paying for training. Most schools have shouldered the costs equated with Reading Recovery through former literature adoptions. Dyer (1992) substantiates Swartz findings by stating cost is reduced "through (1) not having to retain low-achieving students in the first grade; (2) not having to place students in special education or Chapter 1 programs; and (3) not mislabeling a child as 'learning disabled' when in fact the child needed only brief, supplementary intervention provided by Reading Recovery".

Reading Recovery changes a teacher's view of teaching reading by holding him/her responsible for moving students forward in a very measured and noticeable way. During this intensive 20 weeks the children make progress. However, after children leave the instruction there is potential for backsliding. Reading Recovery is not a "fix all", but rather a jump-start for children lacking literacy enhancing life experiences. It is a tool for early prevention of literacy failure. The Reading Recovery teacher is one reason for the success or failure of a student, never only the parents, school or homeroom teacher. It also is a program that is dependent on further interventions for its long-term success. Literacy groups need to be in place and grades following need to have teachers who understand the concept of moving children from where they are. Reading Recovery also reduces future referral to special education and programs for at-risk children

Research shows that three-fourths of students who have completed Reading Recovery instruction demonstrate improved test scores on the Stanford Achievement Test-9 (SAT9) and Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS). The research also found that students continued to score in the average or above average range in grades two through five (Brown, Denton, Kelly, & Neal, 1999). This clearly indicates the long term advantage of early intervention using Reading Recovery.

Based on the review of literature, we recommend the adoption of Reading Recovery in first grade for the following reasons:

One-to-one instruction

Cost effective long term

Gives lasting results

Improved standardized test scores

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