Reading Recovery: the teacher's perspective

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READING RECOVERY: The Teacher's Perspective presents a report of research that looks at Reading Recovery, an early intervention reading program for low-performing students, with the primary focus on the role the teacher plays. Data used was compiled from journal articles and personal interviews with three teachers randomly chosen from a Midwest school district. The basic questions were directed toward the teacher training, lack of professional input from the teachers in training, and the extensive paperwork required of the Reading Recovery teachers.

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Reading Recovery:
The Teacher’s Perspective

A Graduate Project
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ABSTRACT

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PRESENTS A report of research that looks at Reading Recovery, an early intervention reading program for low-performing students, with the primary focus on the role the teacher plays. Data used was compiled from journal articles and personal interviews with three teachers randomly chosen from a Midwest school district. The basic questions were directed toward the teacher training, lack of professional input from the teachers in training, and the extensive paperwork required of the Reading Recovery teachers.

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READING RECOVERY: The Teacher’s Perspective

Introduction

For several decades, teachers have been encouraged to adapt their instructional methods for at-risk reading students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 reinforced this with allocated funds to allow for supplemental instruction for low-income students. A search began for the most effective program for teaching children to read with low-performing students as the focus. In 1985 Reading Recovery, an early intervention reading program originating in New Zealand, was introduced in the United States and proceeded to spread rapidly across the country. Ohio State University was the initial training site for Reading Recovery in North America, and since that time, thousands of teachers have participated in the training. Reading Recovery became so popular that it was trademarked in 1989 to ensure accuracy of program implementation. (Hiebert, 1994) In an article written by Bonnie Barnes (1997), and in a response to that article by Bennetta McLaughlin, et al. (1997), questions were raised regarding how Reading Recovery teachers accepted or rejected the Reading Recovery program training and implementation. The questions more specifically dealt with the very focused training, lack of acceptance of professional input from teachers in training, and extensive paperwork required of the Reading Recovery teachers. From this information, questions can be raised regarding the role that the teacher plays in the child’s success in the program and the success of the program itself. The goal of this study is to look at how Reading Recovery teachers feel about these issues.
A Description of the Reading Recovery Program

Reading Recovery began in New Zealand where curriculum follows a whole language philosophy. In some cases, low-performing students showed gains from traditional programs, but they seldom caught up to their peers or showed evidence of long-term effects. Marie Clay, a psychologist and educator in New Zealand, developed the Reading Recovery program to provide early intervention for struggling readers before they felt like failures. It was her belief that intervention should be done during the early years of literacy development. (Pinnell, 1985) The goal of the program was that children would develop independent, self-generating systems to become successful readers. Follow up studies showed that most students did continue to make progress after they had successfully completed the program. (Pinnell, 1989) In a comparison of traditional remedial programs and Reading Recovery, Spiegel described the program in the following way. “Reading Recovery emphasizes that ‘the larger the chunks of printed language [children] can work with, the richer the network of information they can use, and the quicker they learn. Teaching should dwell on detail only long enough for the children to discover its existence and then encourage the use of it in isolation only when absolutely necessary.’” (Speigel, 1995)

In a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in 1992 by Patricia L. Scharer and Nancy C. Zajano, the Reading Recovery program was presented as being an appropriate balance between a “top-down direction and bottom-up discretion”, or in other words, bottom up instruction. The basis of this was that the Reading Recovery program provided overall structure and goals, but teacher decisions were required daily in interactions with the students. The teacher’s
capacity to develop decision-making skills was provided through focused professional
development sessions. In these sessions the teachers were provided with direction
through prescribed procedures, but they were also required to make decisions before,
during, and after each lesson. Within the lesson framework the teacher was trained to
respond to the specific and individual nature of each child and his/her learning. Teacher
decisions had to be firmly established on a knowledge base that constantly increased
through his/her observations of each child’s strengths and weaknesses. (Sharer, Zajano,
1992)

Teaching materials for Reading Recovery do not consist of a commercially
prepared set of texts and workbooks. The teacher makes selections from books that are
systematically arranged by levels of difficulty. There is no teacher’s manual to aid in this
selection process, but there are criteria provided in the teacher training to give guidance
in making the appropriate selections. The guidebook that all Reading Recovery teachers
use extensively is Reading Recovery: A Guidebook for Teachers in Training by Marie M.
Clay. However, during the lesson when the selection needs to be made, the teacher must
rely on personal observation, her knowledge of the reading process, and how the new
book will support and challenge the child. (Sharer, Zajano, 1992)

Professional development in Reading Recovery is a graduate level program that is
completed over an entire school year with weekly classes held after school hours. The
sessions focus on learning how to use the observational tools, such as more assessment,
reflection and planning, implementing, and an assessment cycle, that Clay recommends
to learn what children know about print. The preparation for Reading Recovery teachers
requires a significant amount of time and commitment, with teachers often spending
many hours after school involved in attending classes in Reading Recovery and in preparation for those classes. (Sharer and Zajano, 1992)

At the beginning of their training it is necessary for teachers to dissociate themselves from an instructional viewpoint that defends teaching a sequence of skills to one that evokes responding to what the child does. By observation the teacher learns what the child uses in his/her attempts to become literate. The teacher’s duties center on being responsive. During the first two weeks a child is in the Reading Recovery program, the teachers use an activity called “roaming around the known.” (Lyons, 1993) In essence, this gives them a chance to see what the child already knows and to work with different opportunities for the child to use their own knowledge. This also helps the teacher to follow the child’s lead and continue to follow it throughout the program. At the beginning of the training, the teachers’ understanding of how to prompt and ask questions that lead the child to use of meaning, structural or visual clues is not very broad, but through daily practice and their weekly training sessions they look at their teaching with more breadth. Knowing when, why, how, and under what conditions to ask questions is developed in a peer discussion setting in the weekly training sessions. Discussing the use and misuse of questions within an actual observed teaching context greatly increases a teacher’s understanding of the theories of learning and teaching. Beginning Reading Recovery teachers may very likely experience an evolution regarding their concepts of how to teach reading. (Lyons, 1993)

While the appropriate reading methods have long been debated in the United States, in New Zealand there is less concern with polarized arguments that relate to phonics and meaning-centered approaches. While the child may use details such as
sound-letter relationships or visual features of the print, they focus on communication and construction of meaning as the fundamental goal of their reading instruction. In order to do this, the New Zealand teachers balance holistic activities with attention to detail. To design good reading programs for both individuals and groups, they look at the following things: the degree to which literacy experiences must be contextualized, direct or indirect instruction, the extent to which instruction comes from the child or is planned by the teacher, and issues that deal with implementation of these broad theoretical ideas. (Pinnell, 1989) Reading Recovery may be viewed as a teacher-child collaboration. The new strategies that teachers introduce aim toward a flexible collection of strategies that the child possesses and can select from to be a successful reader. This is, in fact, the goal of Reading Recovery. It is the child's responsibility to learn and choose the appropriate strategies in specific situations. Specific examples of teacher talk that would help the reader in his/her choices include: “Does that make sense? What did you do to try to figure out that word? Did that work? What else might you have tried?” or “Check to see if what you read looks right and sounds right.” The child is more likely to stay on task without a lot of prompting because the teacher has carefully selected tasks at which the child can succeed. (Spiegel, 1995)

The format of the lesson within the Reading Recovery program is actually quite simple. The thirty-minute lesson consists of reading known stories, reading the book that was introduced in the lesson from the day before, writing a story, working with a cut-up sentence, and reading a new book. The child may use strategies to help his/her understanding, and the teacher supports these actions. While the child independently reads the story introduced the day before, the teacher records behaviors that the child is
displaying as they read. The observations that the teacher makes and records serve as a basis for instructional decisions and selection of future teaching points. The teacher helps with some problem solving but encourages as much independence as possible. (Forbes, 1997) Pinnell points out that program design is different for each child. The teachers may change any program position with the provision that they have “observed children sensitively, articulated the theoretical base for making a change, and tested it by asking a group of well-trained peers to try it with children, documenting the results.” (Pinnell, 1989)

It has been suggested that the accelerated rates obtained through the Reading Recovery program can be attributed to the fact that “the teacher never wastes valuable learning time on teaching something the child doesn’t need to learn.” (Spiegel, 1995) The teacher must interact within each of the lesson components. During the first few roaming-around-the-known sessions, the child and teacher build a positive relationship and discover what knowledge the child has going into the program. As the child reads a familiar book, the teacher interacts by talking with the child about the story and giving support to any actions the child has effectively used. The purpose of using a book from the previous lesson is so that the teacher can take a running record to recognize and analyze strategies that the child is using to get meaning from the text. The teacher is a neutral observer at this point as the child works independently. To get a closer look at the details of written language, the teacher and child write a sentence that reflects the child’s language. The teacher writes it on a strip and cuts it up so the child can reconstruct it. Again, teacher observation is important as the child uses visual information. The introduction to a new book allows the teacher to help the child scaffold meaning prior to
reading by creating understanding as they talk about the book and the pictures. The Reading Recovery teacher must apply instructional techniques that will help to develop and promote strategy use, and at the same time, be able to follow each individual child and respond to his/her needs for acceleration and strategy development. (Slavin, 1993)

One of the training activities that the teachers participate in, is an exercise that is referred to as teaching-behind-the-glass. During this activity, the trainees take turns individually demonstrating a lesson with one of their own students while the other teachers are observing the lesson through a one-way glass. The teacher leader asks questions and guides discussions to prompt responses toward description, providing evidence, drawing inferences, offering challenges, and predicting and rehearsing skills that might be used during actual teaching settings. The spontaneous live demonstration provides good practice at analytical and decision-making skills. When the teacher who has been demonstrating finishes, she joins the rest of the group and further reflection is done. The language the teachers use needs to show sensitivity yet provoke a powerful response from the student. It is important that the teacher provide strong support in a setting that is as natural as possible. (Pinnell, 1989)

There are no step-by-step directions or prescriptions for Reading Recovery teachers to follow. It is through their yearlong training that they learn how children develop good reading strategies. The demonstrations that they observe provide practice for making moment-to-moment decisions from keen observation and analysis of their observation. The progress of the student depends on a teacher who has learned some special ways of teaching using a developed skill and knowledge base with multiple levels of understanding. (Pinnell, 1993)
The Teacher's role in Reading Recovery

Change for teachers who enter Reading Recovery does not come without pain. Drastic changes in learning will require drastic changes in teaching. Reading Recovery brings about change that is often drastic for both the teacher and the student. Both will require guidance and support as both internal and external disciplines interact in the change process. Internal forces as pointed out by DeFord include personal history of literacy learning, personal experience as a learner, personal experiences as a teacher, ongoing observations of students reading, thinking, and talking. External forces include systemic expectations and mandates, colleagues' expectations, preservice and in-service training, and community expectations and pressures. To some, it is a paradigm shift and is difficult to accomplish. The Reading Recovery training helps teachers to learn about the roles and responsibilities of being a teacher within the program and supports them in their efforts. (DeFord, 1993)

Review of the Literature

"Any article that promises new insights into the ways we can best teach children to read is usually met with anticipation and excitement." (Chall, 1989) Articles regarding Reading Recovery generally fall into this category; however, there are a few that point out negative aspects. While some of the negativity refers to the cost of the program, the purpose of the following article summaries is to take a look at information that refers to the teacher commitment. The first article summary will look at the training received by Reading Recovery teachers versus those in other early intervention programs. Next, opinions of teachers within the program itself will be reviewed. These will be followed by personal interviews with active Reading Recovery teachers.
Rasinski (1995) brought to light differences among teachers of Reading Recovery and other intervention programs, such as Reading Success. To begin with, Reading Recovery teachers tend to be full-time teachers with several years of teaching experience. Other programs often use part-time or even substitute teachers. The full-time teachers have a higher degree of commitment to their school and to the program, not to mention ongoing support. They have the advantage of experience and familiarity of the schools and students, which enables them to have more effective interaction, quality of management, and enthusiasm for what they are doing. Rasinski also noted the intensive long-term training involved in Reading Recovery and cited it as a critical element to the success of the program. Teachers in other programs such as Reading Success, often receive no more than a two-week intensive workshop, which does not provide the opportunity for interactive staff development to support theoretical understanding. Reading Recovery teachers are given the opportunity to actually practice instructional techniques within their training. The ongoing, daily experience that the Reading Recovery teachers have in their classrooms versus the sporadic or less consistent opportunities provided to other teachers is another element that helps to provide positive student achievement in reading. Rasinski concludes by stating that he believes that Reading Recovery is “one of the most promising approaches to corrective instruction available” and that the dedication to thorough and ongoing teacher training and support is what makes this possible. (Rasinski, 1995)

In 1997 Bonnie Barnes, a first year Reading Recovery teacher, discussed some uneasy feelings and concerns she had about the program in an article published in The Reading Teacher. Included in the concerns were: the tremendous responsibility that falls
upon the teachers in regard to the child’s success in the program, the overwhelming amount of paperwork required, the pressure of the thirty-minute time frame of the lessons, and that she felt the instruction itself did not always respond to the student. In regard to her training, she found it to be difficult and unpleasant, as it was conducted in a community in which she felt the learners were not respected or trusted to learn and be responsible. She felt her personal beliefs and knowledge seemed to be of no value as the teachers learned and practiced only skills that were relevant to the Reading Recovery program. As in all Reading Recovery training, all decisions had to be justified from Reading Recovery: A Guidebook for Teachers in Training by Marie Clay. She did, however, feel that the training helped her to refine and extend her knowledge of how to help children with reading difficulties and give her some specific ways to observe children in their process of dealing with text. She said she also “learned a whole new set of comments and questions to encourage strategic reading,” and made reference to some of the paperwork and its analytical purposes. She commented on the knowledge she gained about learning to scaffold instruction so that the children stay in control of tasks with her role being to give support to what they are doing. (Barnes, 1997) This article would definitely give someone who was thinking about entering the Reading Recovery training something to think about.

McLaughlin, McNamara, and Williams (1997) wrote a response to the Barnes’ article that represented the viewpoints of five Reading Recovery teachers from three different states. While these teachers did not directly speak to the degree of responsibility they felt toward student success they did address the need for student ownership within the program. They took an interesting stance regarding the paperwork.
Their belief was that most teachers are expected to do some preparation and recordkeeping. One teacher commented that she would not eliminate one piece of the documentation, as it gave her a clear picture of the child’s progress. They felt that part of their learning process was devoted to analytical and reflective skills development that was of value to them when making decisions regarding their students’ needs. Another said that as she learned to take better notes of her observations, it helped her to plan more successful lessons with a clear teaching focus. This group admitted that it wasn’t easy to include all the lesson components within the thirty-minutes but looked at it as valuable time in which the teacher was forced to work efficiently toward a clear focus of the lesson and eliminate any irrelevant items. One of the teachers admitted that this was hard to do but saw that her students did learn faster when she was able to do this. Another said she felt that every aspect of the lesson allowed her to make decisions that responded to the child’s needs.

The attitude toward the training that this group of teachers received was very different from Barnes. They went into the new territory ready to be open to taking a fresh look at things and being willing to adjust, not discard, their knowledge accordingly. They did not feel they had to give anything up, but merely changed their emphasis. The training was complex and challenging to them, but they felt a “renewed sense of the meaning of teaching ‘strategically’ and planning for effective teaching.” The colleagues that they interacted with all developed a sense of trust and felt rewarded by the rapid progress their students were making. They truly felt they had learned a great deal both personally and professionally about the process of reading and had changed their lives as
a result. (McLaughlin, McNamara, Williams, 1997) The authors of this article offered a very positive outlook towards Reading Recovery training.

**Teacher Interviews**

In order to look further into issues that involve the teachers of Reading Recovery, personal interviews were conducted with three teachers who were chosen randomly from a list of the Reading Recovery personnel in a Midwest school district. The following paragraphs reflect the questions and responses from these teachers who will be referred to as Teacher #1, Teacher #2, and Teacher #3. Teachers #1 and #2 have taught four years of Reading Recovery with twenty-two and twenty-five years of total teaching experience, and Teacher #3 has taught two years of Reading Recovery with eight years of total teaching experience.

**Item 1.** Most Reading Recovery teachers have prior teaching experience and, therefore, have developed practices and beliefs as to how they feel children should be taught to read. The teachers were asked how they feel their prior experience fits into the framework of the Reading Recovery program.

Teacher #1 said, "Reading Recovery has revolutionized my way of thinking about teaching reading." Her early teaching experiences were with traditional basal methods where some children were struggling and not keeping up with the rest of the class. She moved from there into a Title I position where she focused her entire day on reading and had some freedom to get into the whole language area that was becoming very popular. She jumped at the opportunity to do Reading Recovery because she thought it would get early and emergent readers on the right track. It focused on looking at what the individual student could do, where they needed to be, and then designed a program that
was just right for that student. "That pretty much revolutionized my thinking about reading, but I still look at Reading Recovery as one aspect of reading. I don't think that it can be everything, and it isn't the answer for every student." Her prior experience allowed her to look at things she had done, and, since some weren't as successful as she would have hoped, know that it was okay to look for something else. That something else needed to zero in on individual needs of a student rather than hit the middle of the road and not challenge those above or lose those at the bottom, and she felt Reading Recovery met those needs.

Teacher #2 said, "I agree one hundred percent with the philosophy of Reading Recovery. I appreciate that everything is authentic for the child, how the lesson has to be their language, and that they write their own stories." She has seen an evolution of change through the years from being tied to basals rather than real literature and "thinks that the things they do in Reading Recovery are just very, very good. But, while it is a good practical approach that is based on taking the child from where they are and going forward, it does not work for every child." She admitted that learning to take the cues from the child was not an easy change and that she missed taking advantage of a teachable moment and saying, "Oh, really? Tell me about that."

Teacher #3 said, "I feel that my philosophy follows that of Reading Recovery very closely. I feel I have always been, and still am, a very flexible, go-with-the-moment type teacher and that is hard for me to do in the Reading Recovery program. But, the program does follow my beliefs as to what teaching reading should involve. By bringing all of your experiences with you into Reading Recovery you are not so tunneled or focused. I feel that you need to know other ways such as whole class, whole language,
and natural literacy because if the only thing that you knew was Reading Recovery you
could become very stagnant.”

**Item 2.** It has been indicated that due to the nature of the Reading Recovery
lesson format and the time constraint that teacher talk must be very direct. These
teachers were asked if they felt that this tended to produce teacher talk that was more
prompting in nature rather than praise-giving.

Teacher #2 definitely felt that the teacher talk is more prompting in nature. “It
gives praise but at a little higher level. It’s easy to get into the habit of giving praise
without being specific and a child doesn’t really know what he/she did that was good.
The teacher talk that is generated through Reading Recovery is all for a real purpose. It is
very specific toward fostering independence. It may be to reinforce what has been done
or to get their wheels turning on the right track so that they can go on to the problem-
solving on their own, whereas, with praise giving you just kind of slide it in and it doesn’t
go anywhere.” She said that it felt good for the child to know he had done a good job
but that he didn’t always know why. Saying “Nice job” doesn’t tell the child, “Oh, this is
what I need to continue to do as a good reader.”

Teacher #2 felt that the praise-giving was there because when you noticed a child
doing something that was going to help him/her and the teacher response was so specific,
it meant more to the child. “When the teacher helps the child to justify what he/she did
and why, prompts really do help the child to feel the praise. The teacher is positively
reinforcing if you analyze where you are going, and the child then takes the steps where
they feel success, and it becomes intrinsic.”
Teacher #3 responded that throughout her entire teaching career she found that if she caught herself saying, "Oh, good job" that in the back of her mind she had a foot kicking her saying, "Well, now wait a minute. Don't just say good job and leave it at that." She felt that it was obvious that every once in a while a child wanted to hear just that he/she did a good job, but she felt she did that on a very minimal basis now. "I can never just say that and leave it at that. I feel that if a child understands why he/she did a good job it will then allow the student to use those prompts successfully the next time that he/she reads."

**Item 3.** It has been determined that the more opportunities a student has to problem solve independently, the greater their outcomes will be. A question was posed in respect to how these teachers felt the thirty-minute time restraint affected this.

Teacher #1 felt this was actually a two-part question. In response to the opportunities to problem solve independently she said there is no question that "they are very focused and a lot of times you feel driven by the time that's ticking away right in front of you. You don't get into responding to the text as you do in the classroom." She looked at Reading Recovery as having to be very focused for the thirty-minutes of intensive one-on-one intervention. While the student does not have the opportunity to do these other things in his thirty-minute lesson, he should be getting those opportunities in the classroom. "My goal is that I am working with that student so they can read and understand, and be able to then have the ability to go on and do these other things. I feel a real strength of the Reading Recovery lesson is that they have so many opportunities for independent problem solving. That is the focus of the lesson."
Teacher #2 responded, "I do think especially if you have a child who processes slowly it takes more thinking time. You're watching that timer tick away, and you are trying to speed them up. I am sure that on occasion we have speeded a child too much, but the child has to start processing a little quicker, or they will be lost in the classroom with a whole group." She does not think they are deprived of additional opportunities. "With a new book being introduced each day you don't have a chance to extend the book a whole lot but you still do. You encourage them with their cutup sentence to write about the story they have read, or when they come back the next day after taking it home, you ask what did you and Mom talk about the story. So you are extending a little bit but not within the lesson itself."

Teacher #3 looked at the thirty-minute time restraint as a means to help her focus. "It is very focused and very structured, but it also makes allowance for when the children are reading their familiar books, you can pretty much stay out of it unless they need assistance. When you give assistance, it's not just giving the word; in fact, rarely do you just give the word. A simple prompt or simple cue can get them over the hump and get them going again. Obviously, the teacher is setting the format, but the child is doing the work and learning how to do the work so that in later lessons you can step out of it, and the child is doing the problem solving. The child learns that you are there just as an assistant. A lot of times I will say, 'This is your job. This is what you need to be doing.' And, the kids understand that. Obviously, if they are not ready for that much independence, then the teacher would jump in and give assistance as needed. Yes, I feel it is difficult in thirty minutes, but you really have to prioritize where the most important
parts of the lesson are and where the child is at that time. If the child is at that point where they are learning to problem solve, then that needs to be the focus right there.”

**Item 4.** Both the Barnes (1997) and McLaughlin et al. (1997) articles mentioned that the record keeping involved in Reading Recovery is very time consuming. These three local teachers were asked how they felt about this and if they felt any improvements or deletions could be made.

Teacher #1 agreed that there was no question that it was very time consuming. “I feel torn between feeling ‘It’s time to write the summary’ because I know it’s going to take me hours, and thinking ‘Oh, I really don’t think that this is necessary’ until I force myself to sit down and do it. Then, it all becomes so clear in my mind that it really is important.” She relayed that some of it did get to be a little too much, such as monitoring records of progress that are kept on graduates through the fourth grade. She said, “I think we’ve carried this thing too far, and I don’t think anybody’s paying attention. It’s just sort of like somebody somewhere says we have to do this, and so we’re going to have to keep on doing it.” She felt that the day-to-day records on the individual student were very time consuming, but vital. “We would not have anywhere near the results, and be as effective as we are, if we didn’t do that part of the record keeping.” She really didn’t feel that any part of it could be left out. The only improvement she could offer was real time built into the day’s schedule. “We have time built in on paper in our building, but in reality, it’s not there.”

Teacher #2 said that she just didn’t get all of it done for each child every day, and that it was one of her shortcomings. “I’m writing the lesson plan format all the time while the child is here…but I don’t have the time to go back and really go over it.” One
of the important things that she felt she didn’t have time to do was to analyze the running
record from the day before to determine the nature of the child’s errors. She expressed
that she really would like to be able to do that. “It tends to be one of those things that if I
have a child that is not accelerating, not making progress, then I will sit back and analyze
for that particular child. I honestly believe that if I had the time to do the record keeping
the way it is supposed to be done that all of my children would accelerate faster. In our
building we put in a ten-minute block between each lesson… but we often go to the
classroom to pick the children up so that takes part of that time…so we aren’t able to
fully utilize it.” She thought the ten minutes might be adequate if she actually could use
the time right. She said she stayed after school to write the lesson plans for the next day.

Teacher #3 didn’t feel that she had as much of a problem with the record keeping
that a lot of her colleagues did. “I don’t know why, but I’m able to get a lot of my record
keeping done during the lesson. I am able to listen to the child read, keep one eye on the
book, and one eye on my notebook.” But, she did agree that unless your building and
your principal were aware of the time required to keep good records, it was extremely
difficult for teachers who had back-to- back lessons scheduled. “We are able to build in
five minutes between each Reading Recovery child to do records. Obviously, it takes
more than five minutes just to get down what’s up in your head as far as your thoughts
about the child. I often take my work home.” She felt that all of it was extremely
important and that it kept you honest. She went on to explain, “Not honest versus
dishonest, but honest in honest to your students so that you are not thinking something
that’s not really happening. But, I also think a little bit of slack could be given to the fact
that we are trained teachers.”
**Item 5.** There has been a great deal of research done regarding the Reading Recovery program as to how it is implemented, the success of the child, and comparisons to other intervention programs. With this in mind, the question was raised about how the program regards professional teachers and their input to decision-making and overall direction of the program.

Teacher #1 said she felt that she had a tremendous amount of power in the decision making regarding the direction of the program. She couldn’t think of an instance where she felt that someone else came in and told her the way it was going to be run. “I would love to not have the thirty minutes there but I understand the research behind it to support it and I don’t think the program would be as effective, so I look at it as I don’t like it, but it’s necessary.” She has not felt any disrespect to her professional opinions. Through continuing contact classes she has had wonderful opportunities to talk and learn from others, and to bring up concerns and issues to work through. In regard to the decision-making and the direction of the program she “feels that there is so much research and field practice behind Reading Recovery that what constraints there are are there for a purpose, and while I may grumble about it, I know that they are necessary. Being open-minded and flexible is necessary.”

Teacher #2 said, “I really do feel teachers in general…more and more of our decision making as teachers has been taken away, and I think Reading Recovery has probably contributed to that. It’s such a sequential, programmed thing that other than the fact of the daily lessons the decision making is not ‘I don’t have to do that.’” In regard to her professionalism as a teacher she said, “It’s maybe not questioned, but it’s not valued. It’s just give the test, turn in the scores, and they’re not asking teachers what do
you think – they’ve taken away their professional judgment. If you’re having a problem with a child, you can bring in other Reading Recovery teachers or the teacher leader to observe, and you as a teacher are given ideas of what to do. I think because all of us that are in it know that it is a trademarked program we just accept those things. You know when you go in this is the way it is.”

Teacher #3 felt that in her building a lot more weight was being placed on the Reading Recovery program as they were seeing the successes year by year. She thought that other professionals really understood the intensity of the amount of record keeping and the amount of work. “They understand that the Reading Recovery teacher really gets to know the child and their learning styles. Obviously, we are always included in any staff meetings and referrals for any child we’ve worked with, so I think that our reading Recovery program is more respected and valued as an identification tool as well as an intervention program. “I think that a lot of the things that were set up in the program were put in place for a reason, so I do agree with a lot of the Marie Clay Bible and there is a reason for it.”

**Item 6.** In programs such as Special Education that have high levels of intensity, repetition, record keeping, etc., teachers often tend to experience burnout and leave the program after a number of years. The question in reference to this was if they felt that Reading Recovery could be affected by these factors in another five to seven years.

Teacher #1 responded, “I think this is a real concern. I’m sure that it does happen already and will continue to. If I was by myself I would be very prone to it, I think, because you lose the perspective of seeing what average good students are capable of doing, and you’re always working with the really needy children. Just when you feel
really good about a success and run to the classroom teacher, it’s ‘Oh, well, everybody else is doing that, too.’ So that can get you down at times.’ She said of the teachers she talked to who have left Title I or Reading Recovery, those were the comments she heard. One thing that really helped her when she started to get bogged down was a Reading Recovery conference. They seemed to come around at just the right time. ‘We do have the opportunity to attend a Reading Recovery conference every year, and that is so motivating and so uplifting that it’s like I’m a different person when I come back. The constant rejuvenation is very important.’

Teacher #2 replied that she really hadn’t thought about that, but that the program was extremely stressful. ‘I often feel a lot of tension in my shoulders, and I feel a lot of pressure if the child isn’t accelerating quickly enough. I’m not sure that personally I could do this for too many years. If the child is not making the progress, then the teacher is doing or not doing something that the child needs, and that, I think, is probably the biggest stress.’

Teacher #3 expressed that ‘I think that on a personal note, teacherwise, it is extremely stressful, extremely intensive, extremely exhausting, the record keeping is horrendous, and the continuing contact is exhausting. There is a lot that has to be done with the Reading Recovery program, and it is its own separate entity, but it’s far removed from all of your Title I responsibilities…and, also your schoolwide things that you have to do. There’s a lot of different things on your plate. I guess that success that you see makes it worthwhile. If every one of my students, or more of my students, were not being successful in the program, I think that I would be completely discouraged. You go back and check on them in second grade, and the teachers tell you they can’t believe that
child was in Reading Recovery or ever had reading problems. And, you have parents coming and saying ‘Thank you so much. You completely changed my child’s life.’ Or, a child coming in and saying, ‘I got this new chapter book I’d like to read to you.’ It’s great! That’s what makes it worth it. I’ve only been in it two years but I don’t feel any type of burnout. I can see if you didn’t put stock into the program and really believe in it, if it was hard to conform to the record keeping, and you didn’t get a lot of support from your classroom teachers and your principal, that you could suffer horrible burnout very quickly. Attitude is definitely a big factor.”

Summary and Conclusions

From this research some conclusions can be drawn. It appears that most teachers who are actively involved in the Reading Recovery program feel very strongly about its success. While they do not necessarily personally prefer to do the lessons as the program mandates, they realize that there is a great deal of research behind the program and its success. To achieve consistency from all that use it, there must be some type of control, and the trademark helps to assure this. However, this may be why some teachers may feel that their own professional opinions in regard to how reading should be taught aren’t taken to be as valuable as they would like. The record keeping seems to be a very common point of contention among Reading Recovery teachers, but suggestions for change or deletion are difficult to come up with. All of the teachers interviewed see a definite purpose for the records in order to accurately target their students and their growth. It is important for them to be able to establish a proper starting point and be able to go on from there with individual goals. It appears that the Reading Recovery training is modeled after the format the teachers are expected to follow in their own classrooms.
The structure is very focused and stays very much on task. They get right to a point and move quickly on to the next one. The language or teacher talk that is stressed during the training is effective preparation toward guiding the child to recognize strategies they are successfully using in their reading process. The teachers recognize the importance of a child knowing what they have done successfully and being encouraged to repeat that act. A burnout factor is a concern that doesn’t seem to be something current teachers have thought much about. This may be due to the fact that they themselves have not been in the program any more than four years, but they readily acknowledged factors that could make burnout a real possibility.

This paper has described the Reading Recovery program and examined some of the issues that have been raised regarding the teacher’s role in that program. The teachers I interviewed indicated that while these issues do exist to one degree or another, the program is very beneficial for children and, on the whole, has raised their own level of professionalism. In conclusion, I would like to offer three quotes from teachers in the district’s Reading Recovery site report.

“Reading Recovery has given me a window into the mind of a struggling reader.”

“I relate strongly to the saying, ‘the more we know, the more we know we don’t know’.”

“Everytime I learn a new way to do things, I start thinking how I could do things better,”

Reading Recovery does compel reading teachers to find a window into their students’ minds and constantly look for a better way to do things, often with their personal roles serving as the path to the child’s success.
References


