Communication between classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers: a study of teacher perceptions

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Additional issues examined included classroom teacher and RR teacher perceptions of student performance at the beginning, middle, and end of the scheduled RR program. This paper also describes recommendations for further research on teacher communication between classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers.
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Abstract

Communication is an important variable in collaboration when seeking to raise achievement of struggling readers participating in multiple learning environments. This research project investigates teacher communication between first grade teachers and Reading Recovery teachers who are jointly responsible for providing literacy education to students. This study compared the effects of regularly scheduled meetings between Reading Recovery (RR) teachers and classroom teachers coupled with documentation of conversation topics on perceptions held by the Reading Recovery and classroom teacher relative to achievement. Additional issues examined included the relations between classroom teacher and RR teacher perception of student performance at the beginning, middle, and end of the scheduled RR program and student success. Outcomes suggest regularly scheduled meetings did not make a measurable difference in the perceptions classroom and Reading Recovery teachers hold about their students. On questionnaire items teachers agreed regarding class rankings, instructional reading levels, and probability of program success, all without having a set time to meet on a weekly basis. This paper also describes implications that may have affected the results and recommendations for further research on teacher communication between classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers.
Introduction

At lunchtime, two teachers sit huddled around tables designed for young students. Binders and journals, Diet Cokes and frozen entrees line the table. “Which student should we discuss first?” one teacher asks. “Let’s discuss MD first,” says the Reading Recovery (RR) teacher, “We just moved into level 12 books yesterday and I have been working hard with her on chunking or finding parts of words she knows.” The classroom teacher responds, “I have been seeing some of that this week in her reading group, in fact I used her as an example with the group. Our new book in reading group today was a level 10, and she handled it quite well. How is her spacing between words in her Reading Recovery journal? I know I have had to remind her a few times when she writes in class to check her spacing.” The RR teacher flips open the journal and the teachers discuss MD’s journal entries from the past week. Then the writing vocabulary graph is laid out on the table, “I wanted to tell you that MD has mastered 5 new words this week and it is only Wednesday. Look at what a difference this is from the first few weeks of program.” She gestures to the graph and the spike representative of MD’s recent progress.

“I am glad you are seeing that too, when I tested her on her bedrock words (Dolch word lists) she had jumped from 14 words at the beginning of the year to 150 words now!” the classroom teacher shares. The teachers share a smile, “I wasn’t sure she could do it,” the classroom teacher says, “but now I think we can take her off the red flag list (for students considered for further interventions).” The teachers high five each other and glance at the clock. “We’ll cover one more student today and the others can wait till planning time tomorrow,” they decide.
This interaction could have taken place in any school, in any state or town. Beyond the report of a student’s well-earned progress, the collaboration and communication occurring between teachers of the same struggling reader may represent an important, perhaps essential, variable in raising the achievement of struggling readers participating in multiple learning environments. When more than one teacher is responsible for the education of a student it may be critical that these teachers communicate on a regularly scheduled basis to ensure program goals and expectations are consistent and consistently targeted by instruction.

Today teachers are pulled in many directions. Not only do they often deal with the day-to-day demands of teaching twenty-five plus students in the classroom, they must also coordinate their work with many other staff members serving those children. In a Reading Specialist’s world, the days of a remedial reading student being considered “yours” or “mine” have diminished. Every student who walks through the school entryway each morning is “ours”. Mackey and White (2004) argue, “Literacy learning is no longer the exclusive domain of the classroom teacher. All stakeholders (principals, teachers, school library media specialists, and support staff) have a vested interest in enhancing the literacy achievement of all students housed in their schools” (p.31).

Mackey and White also believe that school-wide literacy programs such as Read A Million Minutes, Drop Everything and Read, and Silent Sustained Reading lead to collaboration across the staff, building and district. Consequently, communication is a vital key to helping students achieve. Picard (2005) argued that discussion about reading strategies made teachers “better at identifying students’ needs and more curious about the reading process” (p.462). What kind of communication is crucial to increasing the
consistency of perceptions between the RR and classroom teacher? If meetings are scheduled on a regular basis and conversation topics documented, will RR students have a higher incidence of success in their RR program?

This paper will explore communication between Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers and how regularly scheduled collaboration times can lead to increased transfer of skills and strategies between remedial programs and the classroom curriculum. The goal of this study was to document conversations between RR teachers and classroom teachers (CT), and how those meetings affected the CT’s perceptions of the RR student. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in some cases there are productive exchanges, planned and unplanned, taking place between these teachers, but in other instances there is little to no formal or informal communication taking place at crucial moments in many students’ literacy development. In fact, the presence or absence of planned, purposeful discourse between a student’s primary teachers, when responsible for students literacy development is shared, may be a significant variable in literacy learning for these students. If conversations between responsible teachers are pertinent, then what outcomes or element of those conversations most benefit the student? There is some evidence (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, Hamilton, 2006) that teacher perceptions of a student’s literacy performance impacts student achievement. There is evidence (Jasmine, 2005) that purposeful, academic conversations between teachers can solidify student perceptions when focused on achievement gains. This study examines these variables within the context of collaboration between Reading Recovery teachers (see description of Reading Recovery below) and regular classroom teachers who share responsibility for selected students literacy achievement.
**The Research Questions**

- Are the perceptions of the Reading Recovery (RR) students similar between the classroom teacher and the RR teacher at the beginning, middle, and end of the RR program?
- Do holding regular scheduled meetings and documenting the conversation topics increase the consistency of perceptions held by the RR and classroom teacher?
- Do the students whose classroom teacher and RR teacher have similar perceptions have a higher incidence of successfully completing their RR program?

**What is Reading Recovery?**

Reading Recovery is a popular reading intervention implemented in elementary schools across the United States. Developed by the New Zealand researcher Dr. Marie Clay in the mid 1970’s, the program was designed to decrease the amount of reading difficulties children experience during their first few years of formal schooling (Clay, 2005). Reading Recovery does not employ a set sequence of activities, but rather a series of individually designed lessons determined by the literacy strengths of the student and what they need to learn next.

Before these individually designed lessons begin, candidates for Reading Recovery are administered the “Observation Survey”. The Observation Survey test includes six components: letter identification, reading words in isolation, concepts about print, written vocabulary, hearing and recording sounds, and leveled text reading with miscue analysis using a “running record” procedure (Clay, 2006). The testing has dual purposes: to determine which children are the most in need for this intervention and what stage of literacy development the child is actively working in.
Jones, Johnson, Schwartz, and Zalud (2005) describe the Reading Recovery program as an early intervention designed for struggling readers who have received one year of formal schooling. This type of intervention is referred to as second level prevention, meaning the program identifies those in need of more support than the usual interventions all children receive. Second level prevention precedes the next level, which is considered "highly specialized long-term learning support". The students usually selected for second level prevention perform within the lower 10-20% range of their peers. Clay (1998) states the goal of RR is to dramatically reduce the number of learners who have extreme difficulty with literacy learning and reduce the cost of these learners to the educational system.

The daily Reading Recovery lessons last thirty minutes and teach reading behaviors or strategies that have not yet come under the student's control. The structure of the lesson typically contains these components: reading familiar and new books, composing and recording student's message or story, working with words within the context of continuous text, and practicing reading strategies in an unfamiliar book. The components involve students working mostly within the confines of intact text messages rather than words and letters in isolation (Clay, 1993).

Reading Recovery is intended to be a short-term intervention, lasting between 12 and 20 weeks. At the point when the student has developed a self-extending system and is able to survive and succeed in the regular education classroom, lessons are discontinued. A self extending system occurs when a reader is using a set of strategies that allow them to monitor their reading and check sources of information against each other in order to continue reading more difficult texts (Clay, 1991). If a child is unable to
reach the level of their peers during this short-term intervention, a long-term intervention, such as testing for special education services is recommended.

Reading Recovery teachers are required to complete a full academic year of training to become qualified to teach the program and are registered in the RR national database. The initial training year is followed by regular professional development in subsequent years. Fundamental to the model of teaching and learning is the use of a one-way glass mirror, where RR teachers conduct a lesson with colleagues observing the child and discussing the teaching decisions (Reading Recovery Council of North America, n.d.). Reading Recovery students are pulled from their regular education classroom to receive their lesson each day. This situation places the RR teacher in the position of a co-teacher of literacy, making communication with the classroom teacher an important element of intervention.

**A Review of the Literature**

To ensure that accelerated progress occurs in the Reading Recovery program there must be a partnership between the Reading Recovery teacher and the classroom teacher. That relationship must have the following components:

- Communication
- Consistency
- Collaboration
- Comparable perceptions

This literature review will explore how these four C’s have an effect on the progress a RR student makes and the perceptions that the classroom teacher holds about the RR student (Askew & Frasier, 1994; Clay, 1991; Jasmine, 2005; Scull & Johnson, 2000).
Johnston, Allington, and Afflerback (1985) suggest that most remedial reading students receive a "fragmented program" that consists of two disconnected curriculums, which operate in relative isolation. They explain that teachers share little about one another's program, objectives, or philosophies with each other. This type of disjointed program can lead to confusion for early readers as they sort out the reading process in two separate programs. Many times RR teachers will hear that a student loses much of the information taught during his RR lessons as he walks down the hall to his regular education classroom. It is reasonable to suspect that the RR student is not aware that the reading and writing strategies learned in RR lessons can be used in the classroom as well. This is something that a strong communicative relationship between teachers can help facilitate. A strong communication plan could contribute to a higher success rate of students exiting Reading Recovery.

Communication

Often teacher-to-teacher communication occurs conversationally in the teacher's lounge, in the parking lot, and sometimes a test score shared in the hall. Does this informal style of communication work as effectively as structured sit-down meetings with observational notes and agendas? Does this form of communication achieve the goal of updating teachers on their students' progress and improvements? Does this type of communication help both partnering teachers view the student alike in regards to performance level?

Rhodes-Kline (1996) reports in her qualitative study that a majority of classroom teachers (94%) believed Reading Recovery had a large, or very large, impact on the progress of students in their classroom. Eighty two percent of the teachers in the study
thought RR teachers at their school did a good job of keeping them updated on the progress of the RR students in their room. One teacher commented that the RR teacher updated them on assessment data and the strategies focused on during the child’s RR lessons. This communication led the classroom teacher to also hold the student accountable for those strategies in the classroom also. Another teacher involved in the study remarked that RR impacted the way literacy was taught throughout the whole school. Rhodes-Kline states “Some schools adopt RR in conjunction with a school wide focus on early literacy. They design programs that familiarize teachers with the theories of literacy acquisition which RR is based on”.

How do Reading Recovery teachers decide what is most important to share with partnering classroom teachers? Throughout the RR program teachers are observing students’ literacy development each day from a perspective not available to the classroom teachers. RR teachers are able to focus on students’ strengths and needs to design each day’s individualized lessons. Accordingly this provides opportunities to make careful observations of reading skills and strategies that can be hard to note in a large group of students. These observations from RR lessons need to be effectively conveyed to the classroom teacher, in order to best scaffold and support participating students in the classroom. The information shared must be relevant, accurate, informative, and useful. Clay (2005) states “the human mind works often by analogies and will relate something new to something already known and familiar.” When talking with teachers it is best to relate RR strategies and theory to what the classroom teacher is already familiar with.

Communication between teachers is crucial at this stage of a student’s literacy learning because of the considerable literacy development that typically takes place
during first grade. Wasik and Slavin (1993) argue when observing how much progress takes place with an average reader, during their first grade year, “it is easy to see how students who fail to learn how to read during first grade are far behind their peers and will have difficulty catching up” (p.179). If poor teacher interaction limits progress then regular communication between teachers is crucial to ensuring early readers have all the support possible.

*Consistency*

Miles, Stegle, Hubbs, Henk, and Mallette (2004) state consistency between supplementary and classroom reading instruction as one of the essential principles of program success. They state inconsistent instruction within reading programs leads to student confusion when learning to read. Consistency in this manner is defined as all reading teachers adhering to the same philosophies while teaching reading. Wasik-Slavin (1993) argue “Lack of consistency in how reading is presented in the classroom and how it is presented in tutoring may present a mismatch in how reading is taught and result in confusion for the children” (p.196).

Through improved communication we are hoping to find increased consistency between curriculum in the classroom and the Reading Recovery lesson. One element this researcher considers crucial is consistency of perception of student performance and consistent evidence of this matched perception in teacher-to-teacher communication as it may be an important factor in student achievement. Jasmine (2005) supports this conclusion about the veracity of shared teacher perceptions, “when the two teachers share similar perspectives of the student’s ability, instructional consistency for the Reading Recovery student is likely to increase”(p.53). Perceptions also effect teacher expectations
and higher teacher expectations can lead to increased student achievement. For example, if the RR teacher believes a child can be successful with grade level reading after their series of lessons is completed, but the classroom teacher still perceives this child to be considerably behind his peers, we can anticipate lessened progress for the student in the regular classroom. That teacher may provide instruction at lower levels commensurate with diminished expectations thereby stalling the student’s progress. Jasmine argues “if two teachers perceive a student differently and fail to communicate, strong student progress will be extremely difficult to accomplish”(p.47).

Hill and Hale (1991) reported that most teachers are “sold” on the Reading Recovery program in their schools, but have questions and concerns about integrating the program’s concepts and theories with their classroom reading programs. Although classroom guided reading programs are based on the principles of RR, guiding students’ strategic reading and problem solving by teacher prompting to using multiple sources of information in the text (Hicks & Vallaume, 2000). The teachers Hill and Hale reported on were using a direct instruction reading model and had questions about comprehension and phonics instruction through the RR program. Some of these questions would be answered, Hill and Hale suggest, if the RR teacher and classroom teacher met often to communicate program goals and how to align these with the classroom curriculum and goals. It is beneficial for the RR teacher to obtain input into the child’s reading behaviors in the classroom from the classroom teacher, as returning the child to the classroom at the average performing level of his peers is the program’s goal. Hill and Hale (1991) and Clay (2005) agree that one way to gain insight into a student’s literacy progress is to observe the student during their RR lesson. The specially designed lesson and unique
learning environment can help a classroom teacher gain insight in addition to language and specific strategies to use in the classroom.

Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (2000) and Miles et al. (2004) agree, inconsistency in programs and program compatibility are common problems in schools. These authors concur that schools with integrated reading programs, between the classroom and the remedial reading program, are deemed more effective schools. These programs implement a collaborative “push-in model”, where the remedial or Title I teachers are conducting reading instruction inside the classroom rather than in separate rooms.

Miles et al. (2004) discovered in their literacy delivery model named “The Anna Plan” that consistency between supplementary reading instruction and classroom reading instruction was an essential principle of any program to remediate reading problems. The founders of the Anna plan also discovered that most at-risk students received isolated instruction, inconsistent with classroom curriculum through their remedial (Title I) reading programs: This contributed to student confusion when learning to become successful readers. The Anna Plan specifically incorporated a five-day rotation in which the fifth day was devoted to planning and collaboration between teachers and reading specialists. This common planning time helped ensure consistency and that all participants had a clear understanding of the literacy goals they were trying to achieve.

Collaboration and Reading Recovery

Marie Clay (1991), the founder of Reading Recovery states the classroom teacher and the Reading Recovery teacher both hold a shared responsibility to communicate effectively to educate their participating students. Expectations for the Reading Recovery
teacher are to share beginning of program and end of program data with students’
classroom teacher and arrange weekly meetings to report progress as the child moves
through this fast-paced program. Through collaboration, teachers can ensure that reading
programs coincide and their student perceptions and expectations are consistent in both
settings.

In Scull and Johnson’s (2000) study of professional development they discovered
time was the key issue in developing professional working relationships. Collaborative
relationships need time, trust and respect to grow. When teachers see a new program or
innovation enhance the learning outcomes of students in their class, then a significant
change in their beliefs and attitudes is more likely to occur. This supports the contention
that RR teachers need to share results from the RR program with classroom teachers.
Lyons and Pinnell (2001) cite time constraints as the one of the main causes for
unsuccessful teamwork and communication. Although adding more hours to the school
day is not usually an option, there are a few creative ways collaboration can take place
between the RR teacher and the classroom teacher. Routman (2002) suggests some
possibilities for creating time for weekly professional meetings:

- “Establish before-school support groups
- Start school late or dismiss early one day a week
- Devote faculty meeting to issues of the profession
- Create common planning times
- Hire roving substitutes
- Add paid days to the school calendar
- Add more time to the school day” (p. 35).
Taylor et al. (2000) reports that one of the characteristics of an effective school is collaboration within grade levels and staff working together to help all students, in reading. One teacher from an identified "effective" school in the Taylor study stated, "Teaming with other staff is important. You can't do it by yourself. Teaming also builds a sense of community. The children get to see other teachers and get to know them. That builds a caring community." Another teacher reported that collaboration also led to a school wide buy-in to their reading model and curriculum and this was a key factor in program success.

Today students are coming and going throughout the day to receive support from other educators. Students are working outside the classroom with talented and gifted teachers, English language learner teachers, remedial reading teachers and special education resource teachers. In the school district where this study took place, 6% of the students received talented and gifted instruction, 7% English as a second language support, 16% special education services, and 33% of the population received Title I services (Waterloo Community Schools, 2006). With so many adults taking part in students' education it is crucial that teachers communicate with one another to discuss student progress and expectations. Routman (2002) states, "making a commitment to weekly professional meetings is not easy, but it is one of the best ways to develop thoughtful practice school wide and to improve teaching and learning" (p.35).

Picard (2005) offered insights from teachers who participated in "collaborative and sustained conversations" with their colleagues. She discovered teachers had greater confidence when making difficult teaching decisions having spent time collaborating and being supported by their colleagues. She quotes Arnold's (2000) research about teacher
participation in study groups, “When teachers are given time to work together, they concentrate on helping one another solve instructional dilemmas, and improve their teaching skills. Teachers who participate in such collaboration, gain confidence, feel better prepared, and become more proficient” (p.461).

Another reason collaboration is so important for struggling readers is to ensure they use effective reading strategies in all reading settings. Clay (1991) explains that in the early stages of reading a child who practices unproductive reading strategies regularly can end up habituating this inefficient problem solving. Clay suggests that all partial correct behaviors be encouraged rather than dismissed as wrong. But she does admit this takes a well-trained person who knows “a great deal about possible routes to success to be able to support partial responding in reading.” The importance lies in RR students returning to an environment where their teachers are knowledgeable about the reading strategies they have just come under control and are therefore able to support them. Clay (1993) suggests that schools monitor former RR students closely and provide further help if needed because “although RR children may perform well in their classes they remain at-risk children for two or more years after completion of their program.” With effective collaboration, RR teachers are able to share with classroom teachers the partial correctness students demonstrate and discuss a plan both teachers can implement in order to allow a participating child to continue constructing a system of effective reading strategies.

Teacher Perceptions

Askew and Frasier (1994) conducted a study of teachers’ perceptions of second graders who had been in Reading Recovery the previous year. They found that teachers
perceived most of the discontinued children as having “average reading ability and positive attitudes about reading, chose books when time allowed, worked diligently on school tasks, and responded well to discussion” (p.93). When these teachers were asked to predict how those children would do in reading the next year, they believed 80% would make steady or excellent progress.

In the Askew and Frasier study, most perceptions of students in the RR program were in the average range, while perceptions of a random sampling of students in the Askew and Frasier study were in a higher range. The students in the random group were drawn from a non Reading Recovery student population chosen from the class list from which the RR students were also drawn. The study also found teachers’ predictions for the reading tasks to be administered did not correlate with the student’s performance on the tasks. Overall, the literacy perceptions of the teacher did not match the child’s literacy performance. They quote Wood (1988) “When teachers are asked to evaluate a child’s likely potential in a particular subject or discipline, their answer is likely to relate to a specific feature of the child’s classroom behavior... those children who spend most time on task are most likely to be judged as doing well....if we monitor the children’s progress we will find that teachers predictions are, more often than not, borne out” (p.55-56). Askew and Frasier acknowledge that teachers occasionally rate children according to other factors related to classroom behavior, for example: time on task, willingness to concentrate, and effort exerted.

Askew and Frasier (1994) argue that statistics like this occur when the bottom of the class is removed and brought up to grade level, which is the aim of the Reading Recovery program. Since these teachers were required to rank the students on a
numerical scale, children can be defined as low because they are being compared to their classmates. They suggest, “Persistence of old concepts may be keeping teachers from realizing how close to average these children are actually operating” (p.105). Askew and Frasier (1994) also state that programs like RR can push the learning curve so the lower group is eliminated and the majority of students fall into the mainstream group. This would require the concept of average to be re-defined.

Quay, Steele, Johnson, and Hortman (2001) report a study where classroom teachers rated former RR students as making higher progress in the areas of oral communication, written expression and reading throughout first grade when compared to a norm group. Not only did the RR students perform well on assessments, the study showed they made great progress in the classroom. Classroom teachers in this study ranked the RR student higher in areas such as following directions, self-confidence, social interactions, and work habits, in control to the norm/control group. These results demonstrate the Reading Recovery program can effect other development in children besides just learning to read. In summary, Quay’s study shows classroom teachers perceive RR students as making good academic progress along with social and personal development. But Quay does admit a limitation with this study was bias, as the classroom teachers knew who was receiving RR support and may have expected the students to make progress for that reason alone.

Teacher Perceptions and Text Difficulty

Jasmine (2005) states that if “teachers perceive a student’s potential ability in a certain way it influences how they perceive [using Vygotsky’s expression] the zone of proximal development for that student” (p.47). This affects the level of difficulty in the
material presented to the student. As important as similar perceptions are between the RR
teacher and the classroom teacher, of equal importance is the level of difficulty of the
texts presented to the child. Clay (1991) states:

The reader needs the kind of text on which his reading behavior system works
well...at the heart of the learning process there must be the opportunity for the
child to use a gradient of difficulty in texts by which he can pull himself up by his
bootstraps: texts which allow him to practice and develop the full range of
strategies which he does control and by problem-solving new challenges, reach
out beyond that present control (p. 215).

For a reader to continue to grow they must be working at their instructional level.
Similar to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, a student’s instructional level text
is a text they can read at 90% accuracy or greater, as measured via a running record test.
Jasmine (2005) declares that RR teacher and the classroom teacher “must accurately
locate and teach within the student’s zone of proximal development if teaching moves are
to be maximized” (p. 47). With two separate reading programs supporting students
teachers must communicate regarding the texts the student reads successfully. Clay
(1991) argues, “The essence of successful teaching is to know where the frontier of
learning is for any one pupil on a particular task” (p. 65). Clay refers to this as the
“cutting edge of learning”, and considers it a vital part of Reading Recovery lessons and
any type of learning.

Unfortunately this does not always happen, and in some cases Clay (1991) states
most classroom observations of reading instruction show movement through texts for the
following reasons:
• “Because a particular reading program says that a gradient of difficulty is not important
• Or because, alternatively, rigid attention is given to the sequential steps in a reading program
• Or merely to interest the child without having regards to his achievements
• Or because there has been a change in class and the child is fitted into an existing group in the teachers plan.
• Or because the end of the school year is approaching
• Or for some other administrative reasons”(p. 216).

The above rationales for movement through text are neither from real student performance indicators nor from teacher-to-teacher collaboration where genuine programmatic conversation takes place. This is why consistency between perceptions held by teachers is pertinent to the RR student achievement, to create a unified perception of student performance.

*Purpose of the Study*

This study seeks to discover whether classroom teachers and RR teachers who communicated on a regularly scheduled basis about their RR students will have a higher incident of similar perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses of their shared students. The study also seeks to determine whether using communication logs to document conversations help perceptions become more comparable between teachers. End of program scores were also used to see if students whose teachers communicated on a scheduled basis made greater progress in the program.
Method

Setting

This study took place in six schools located in two connecting midwestern towns with a combined population of 100,000 residents. The schools were part of two districts with 5,000 and 10,000 students respectively. The school districts have an average minority population of 35%, with 54% of the population categorized as low socioeconomic status, as measured through free and reduced lunch qualifications. The English Language Learners in the districts represent 11% of the student population.

![School Statistics Graph]

Participants

The Study Group

The five schools included in the research group contained the grade levels preschool through 6th grade. The schools ranged in populations of 250 to 400 students, with an average of 320. The minority populations of the schools in the study averaged 46.4% and ranged from 10-92%. The socioeconomic population of these schools ranged from 20-86% qualifying for free and reduced lunch with an average of 61.6%.
The six classroom teachers participating in the study had two to twenty-one years of experience teaching with an average of 8.8 years. With experience teaching first grade, the participants had an average of six years experience with a range of two to eleven years. One teacher held a masters’ degree and four were in the process of obtaining masters’ degrees.

The seven Reading Recovery teachers participating in the study had been teaching Reading Recovery for two to twelve years with an average 4.4 years experience. They had an average of ten years of teaching experience in other areas. There were three Reading Recovery teachers with advanced degrees, the remaining four were enrolled in masters degree programs.

The fifteen student participants were first graders during the 2006-2007 school year. Four students began the study and were later removed for extenuating circumstances; one moved and one participating teacher with three students left for medical reasons. The participants were tested with the Observation Survey in the middle of the school year and from that test, were ranked the lowest 10% of the first graders in their school. They received an average of 46 thirty-minute individual lessons during the last fourteen weeks of the school year. The students ranged in age from six years four months to seven years eleven months old at the beginning of their lessons. The students included in the study were 73% female, 33% minority, and 73% free or reduced lunch. No participants in the study group were English Language Learners.

The Control Group

The four schools included in the control group contained grade levels preschool through 6th grade. The schools ranged in population from 250 to 480 students, with an
average of 350. The minority population was an average of 53.5% with a range of 10-92%. The socioeconomic status of these schools ranged from 20-86% with an average of 64.8% qualifying for free and reduced lunch.

The nine classroom teachers in the control group had one to twenty-seven years of experience teaching with an average of 9.3 years. With experience teaching first grade, they had an average of nine years with a range of one to twenty-two years. There were two teachers with their masters' degree and one was in the process of completing an advanced degree.

The five Reading Recovery teachers in the control group had been teaching Reading Recovery for two to six years with an average of four years. They had an average of eleven years of teaching experience in other areas. Three of these teachers had advanced degrees, and one in the process of obtaining a masters degree.

The seventeen student participants were all first graders during the 2006-2007 school year. Four students who began the study were removed because the paperwork returned was incomplete. Similar to the intervention group these participants were tested with the Observation Survey in the middle of the school year and from that battery of tests were ranked as the lowest 10% of the first graders in their school. They received an average of 49 thirty-minute individual lessons over the course of the last fourteen weeks of the school year. They ranged in age of six years, three months to seven years, five months old at the beginning of their lessons. Of the students included, 41% were female, 59% were minority, 17% were English Language Learners, and 82% qualified for free or reduced lunch.
Procedure

Study Group Data Collection

Teacher questionnaires

Questionnaires were administered to the classroom and Reading Recovery teacher at three points in the program: beginning, middle (approximately week seven) and end (Appendix A-F). At the beginning and middle of the lessons the questionnaires were identical for the two groups of teachers, with the exception of item #4. That question
pertained to the classroom teachers’ ranking of the student in comparison to the rest of the class.

The questionnaire requested both teachers to list strengths in reading and writing and the most important skill the child needed to learn next. They were also asked to assign a current instructional reading level for where they perceived the student to be reading. Along with comparing the student to peers, both teachers were asked to predict if the child would reach the average reading level of his/her peers by the end of the program.

At the end of the program, questionnaire items 1-5 remained the same regarding strengths, weaknesses, and class comparison. In addition teachers were asked if the child was now performing a reading level commensurate with their peers and specifically “Do you feel that regular communication with the classroom teacher helped you to better meet the needs of this RR student?”

Communication logs

The teachers in the study group were asked to conduct a planned meeting, weekly or biweekly, to discuss each RR student’s progress. The RR teacher completed sections of a communication log prior to the meeting to guide the discussion. As shown in the sample log in Appendix G, the teachers were encouraged to discuss the reading and writing strategies that were a current focus in the regular and RR classroom. Suggestions were listed on the log to make it as efficient for the teachers as possible and also a space for notes was included (see Appendix G). The instructional reading level was discussed along with reminders to review classroom journals or independent writing. Independent writing is the work that the students do alone by using phonetic spelling and tools such as
Communication Between Teachers

word walls or picture dictionaries to spell unknown words. The teachers were reminded on the questionnaire to discuss adjustments in guided reading group placement and self-esteem development of the student.

Control Group Data Collection

Teacher questionnaires

Questionnaires were administered to the classroom and RR teacher during the middle (approximately week seven) and end of the Reading Recovery series of lessons. On account of a data collection error, there were no surveys collected at the beginning of the lessons. The questionnaires were identical for the study and control group of teachers except for item #4. That question pertained to the classroom teachers’ ranking of the student with control to the rest of the class.

Identical to the study group’s questionnaires, both teachers were requested to list strengths in reading and writing along with the most important skill the child needed to learn next. The questionnaire requested both teachers list strengths in reading and writing and the most important skill the child needed to learn next. They were also asked to assign a current instructional reading level, as they perceive the student’s reading level. Along with comparing the student to peers, both teachers were asked to predict if the child would reach the average reading level of his/her peers by the end of the program. At the end of the program, questionnaire items 1-5 remained the same regarding strengths, weaknesses, and class comparison. The teachers were asked if the child was now performing at the reading level of their peers and if the student would be retained in first grade for the following school year.
Results

This section will cover the results gathered from the study and control groups. It includes the RR program results from participating students and the results from the questionnaires and communication logs. Also contained in this section are teacher comments from the communication logs and comparisons of teacher perceptions at three points in the student’s RR program.

The study group

The program results for the participants in the study group were: 66.6% considered successfully discontinued from the Reading Recovery program and 26.6% with an incomplete program. “Successfully discontinued” according to the Reading Recovery Council of North America (RRCNA) means that “The child meets grade-level expectations and can make progress with classroom instruction, no longer needing extra help.” The students with an incomplete program made significant progress but did not achieve grade-level expectations. The RRCNA suggests “Additional evaluation is recommended and further action is initiated to help the child continue making progress.” Therefore the remaining participants were referred to another intervention, such as special education services. The majority of the students had an increase of 7-13 reading levels during their series of lessons. For the school districts in this study, the expected growth for a first grade student in the last semester is ten levels. The average was a ten level increase for these students, which shows the remedial program allowed the RR students to make the same progress through a different intervention. The remaining students began receiving special education services during or after the program and only grew 4 and 5 levels respectively.
At the beginning of the program:

- Sixty percent of surveys showed the Reading Recovery and classroom teacher ranking the students similarly when comparing them to their peers in the classroom.

- Forty percent of surveys showed both teachers recording the same instructional level at the beginning of the program for the RR student. The remaining surveys placed the students within two to six levels of each other. Of those surveys with a difference in reading levels, the RR teacher perceived the student to be reading at a higher level 78% of the time.

- Thirty-six percent of surveys demonstrated both teachers thought the RR student had the same likelihood of reaching the average level of their peers at the end of the RR program. The remaining 64% of surveys did not agree when ranking the students on the following scale: no, not likely, possible, very possible, yes.
At the middle of the program (week 7):

- Forty seven percent of the surveys revealed similar RR and CT ranking for students at the middle of the program when compared with their classroom peers. This was a lower percentage than at the beginning of the program, when sixty percent agreed. The remaining 53% of surveys placed the students within one ranking of each other. For example, the CT placed the student in the bottom 10% category and the RR teacher placed the student in the bottom 20%.

- One third of mid program surveys showed that the teachers placed the students at the same instructional reading level at the middle of the program (the remaining 67% placed the students within two to six levels of each other). The conflicting surveys showed the RR teacher instructing the child at a higher level, which is a common occurrence since the RR teacher is instructing the student in a 1-1 setting. This percentage fell 7% from the forty percent that agreed beginning of program.

- Forty five percent of teacher surveys agreed with the likelihood that the student would reach the average reading level of his/her peers by the end of their RR program. This increased from the beginning of program survey when only thirty-six percent agreed.

At the end of the program:

- Seventy-nine percent of surveys showed that both the RR and classroom teacher ranked their students the same when comparing them to the rest of their peers. This was an increase from sixty percent agreement at the beginning of the program and forty seven percent in the middle.
• Twenty-nine percent of surveys indicated the two teacher groups (RR and CT) considered the students to be reading at the same level. The remaining 71 percent of surveys placed the students within two to eight levels of each other. Forty percent of those surveys that disagreed showed the RR teacher placing the child at a higher level.

• At the end of the study the teachers were asked on the last questionnaire “Does the child perform at the reading level of his/her peers now?” On 85% of surveys the classroom teacher and the Reading Recovery teacher agreed.

Communication logs

The results of using the communication logs were as follows: averages of five logs per student were completed, every 2.4 weeks, with a range of four-six logs completed for each student. The pattern that emerged from the logs showed teachers using their meetings to discuss reading and writing concerns. A majority of the logs mentioned district reading assessments and the students’ performance on them. Several logs recorded comments in two types of handwriting, showing the teachers were working together to record their thoughts as they met. Over half of the logs used the suggestions at the bottom and compared the writing done independently in the classroom and during the RR lesson. Many logs listed problems the students were encountering and also solutions to them after collaborating with the classroom teacher.

The following sample entries illustrate issues the teachers discussed:

• “CD is not trying his hardest.... I will start having him earn time outside with me (RR teacher) for working hard in lessons and reading group.”
• “We are both trying to get more into his stories, will work to make them longer and more elaborate. Teacher says she will probe with questions to enhance his stories.”

• “We need to work on improving her independence with her journal writing in the classroom. I (RR teacher) will visit during writing time to check in.”

• “I (RR teacher) encouraged more complex writing in her classroom journal and will talk about it during the lessons and check her journal once a week.”

• “Writing is becoming very independent but crooked-looking. Classroom teacher and I decided to draw a few pencil lines in the classroom and RR journal as needed.”

Most logs listed celebrations during the RR program:

• “His classroom journal is improving- he is actually writing!”

• “In the classroom he is becoming a leader in his (reading) group.”

• “Getting ready to discontinue in the next two weeks!”

• “Classroom teacher says she is much more active in small group than before.”

• “Classroom teacher says she tries on her own before asking for help.”

• “We are both pleased with her fast acceleration and agree she should be taken off the retention list.”

• “We are both seeing great growth and agree that retention is not necessary.”
Some teacher logs listed concerns to address:

- "B is not applying effective writing strategies in the classroom or using known information. This is still a concern."
- "Her spacing (between words) in the classroom and in the RR journal is different. We will continue working on this."
- "She performed lower on the classroom reading assessment than in her RR lessons."
- "She is using avoidance tactics when work gets hard, we discussed together how to handle this."
- "Doesn’t seem to be transferring what is learned in RR to her small group reading instruction."
- "Classroom teacher told me that B is beginning to notice gaps between her own ability and her peers."

A few logs listed a plan the teachers made together on how to support these students when they had completed the RR program.

- "She is using most of these reading strategies consistently. Classroom teacher will continue sending home an independent reading book and I will come into the classroom to listen to her read a few times this month."
- "Focus on generating the topic and story in her classroom journal and I (RR) will be in to check her journal periodically."
- "We both agreed that next year in 2nd grade she would benefit from extra comprehension instruction and a Title I group at the beginning of the year for a reading boost."
• "We have re-arranged schedules to allow for myself (RR teacher) to team teach writing with the classroom teacher."

The control group

Results for the participants in the control group were 70.5% considered successfully discontinued from the Reading Recovery program and 29.5% with an incomplete program, meaning they did not meet the reading level necessary in the allotted amount of time to be considered discontinued. The majority of the students had an increase of 6-15 levels during their weeks of lessons. The average was a ten level increase during the program.

Questionnaire results

There were no surveys collected at the beginning of the program.

At the middle of the program:

• Fifty nine percent of teacher surveys answered with similar rankings when comparing the RR student's literacy development to their peers in the classroom.

• Forty seven percent of surveys showed the teachers placing the students at the same instructional reading level during the middle of the program. The remaining teacher surveys perceived the students within two or three instructional levels of each other.

• Sixty five percent of classroom teacher and RR teacher surveys agreed on the student's likelihood of reaching the average reading level of their peers by the end of the RR lessons.
At the end of the program:

- Sixty five percent of surveys showed that the teachers ranked the students similarly at the end of the program in comparison to the rest of their peers in the classroom. This percent was up slightly from fifty-nine percent with the middle of program survey.

- Forty seven percent of surveys demonstrated that the teachers placed their students at equivalent reading levels at the end of the program. The majority of the remaining surveys placed the students within 2 levels of each other. This percentage remained unchanged from the previous surveys completed mid program.

- Ninety four percent of end of program surveys agreed the student was currently reading at the average level of their peers. The one exception placed the student at the same instructional level, but the teachers disagreed whether that was the average level or not.

![Week 7 Questionnaire Results](image)
Discussion

Conclusions

The original purpose of this study was to determine if regularly scheduled meetings between Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers affected the perceptions the teachers held for the students. The study also intended to discover if communication logs to document conversations helped the perceptions become more comparable between teachers. Additionally end-of-program scores were collected to compare the students whose teachers communicated on a scheduled basis and see if they made greater progress in the program.

Results for this study suggest that regularly scheduled meetings do not make a measurable difference in the perceptions classroom and RR teachers have about their students. There was agreement on class rankings, instructional reading levels and probability of program success for teachers in the control group, all without having a set time to meet on a weekly basis. Consistently the control group agreed more often than the
study group with regards to questionnaire items. The only exception to this occurred at the end of the program when more teachers in the study group placed the RR student in the same category compared to the rest of the class (questionnaire item 4).

The control group had a slightly higher percent of successfully completed programs with their participants discontinuing 70.5% versus 66.5% in the study group. Both the study group and the control group participants increased an average of ten book levels during their program. The scheduled meeting and communication logs made no difference in how well the students performed during their series of RR lessons for this study.

The communication logs demonstrated reflective thinking that occurred as these teachers collaborated. The meetings and student observations ensured the RR students were receiving the best possible reading instruction and created greater chance for success because teachers were working together.

Implications

These study results were unexpected given that scheduled meetings between teachers would seem to achieve higher percentages of similar perceptions, and possibly increased student achievement. While this study documented the scheduled meetings that were held by teachers, it did not control any informal meetings or discussions that were held between RR and classroom teachers the control group. Therefore it did not take into consideration how well the teachers in the control group communicated with each other. The only requirement to be part of the control group was that they were currently not holding scheduled meetings with their teachers.
It is likely the act of completing the questionnaires may have led the control group RR and classroom teachers to more communication because of the focus on one particular student while answering the questions. This behavior could have naturally led to discussions about the particular students, which may not have normally taken place. The study did not control communication between the study group and the control group; therefore the control group may have known what variables were being studied and may have taken this into consideration when answering questionnaire items. Future studies could counteract this study effect by working with similar groups not known to one another. It is intuitively obvious that thoughtful communication between co-responsible teachers will have positive impact on instruction and consequently, student performance. Once control group participants completed the survey this researcher has reason to believe teacher-to teacher communication increased for all groups. Though it likely contaminated these results for both experimental and control groups, the outcomes suggest the power of communication for influencing perceptions and elevating student achievement. Teacher responses to the final survey question suggest this interpretation is reasonable.

*Teachers’ responses to the study*

The end of program surveys contained the following question, “Do you feel that regular communication with the Reading Recovery teacher helped you to better meet the needs of this RR student?” The teachers were also encouraged to comment on the study. The majority of RR teachers and all of classroom teachers responded yes to the question. They reported that the communication encouraged by the study was helpful. Some of the comments received from the classroom teachers were (all names have been changed):
• “Yes! My communication with Mrs. Miller has been vital to Kelly’s success in first grade”

• “It has been helpful knowing what she (the RR student) has been doing one-on-one versus in the whole group.”

• “The study allowed us to discuss what we were seeing and work together to give Holly the instruction she needed to succeed.”

• “We compared how our students were doing with her (RR teacher) to what they were doing in the classroom.”

Some responses from the RR teachers were:

• “Yes- it gave us some good ideas for discussion.”

• “We talked a lot about how much growth we have seen in Michelle, but she is still a fragile learner. These insights and discussions helped plan instruction for both RR and classroom teacher to meet needs of this student. We will continue to have scheduled meetings next year!”

• “Yes the study helped me to have a scheduled time to sit and talk about the RR student. We were then able to plan instruction together and set short-term goals. There were better connections between the RR lessons and classroom instruction. I plan to do this with all my classroom teachers next year!”

• “The study was somewhat helpful. Collaboration and additional interventions will help this student receive more help next year. I would like to see her being instructed at a higher level in the classroom.”
• "The classroom teacher did not see what I was seeing and did not 'push' for higher reading levels in the classroom"

Although the raw data does not illustrate greater achievement, the benefit from regularly scheduled meetings is seen in the teacher comments to this last question. Teachers typically see benefits on multiple levels. The communication logs, the documentation of scheduled meetings, are a record to show parents and teachers of the ongoing conversations about the RR students' literacy development. This is invaluable information when planning the students' subsequent interventions.

Recommendations

It is recommended that this study be replicated again in a different setting with a larger population rather than in neighboring communities with limited access to participants. This may yield different results by avoiding the possibility of contamination. Further, the teacher survey should be designed carefully to more effectively mask study interactions so that control group participants behavior would not be altered by participation. Although the data did not show that teachers agreed more frequently on their perceptions of the RR student, there would be merit in holding structured meeting for the following reasons:

• Some classroom teachers may be unfamiliar with the RR programs and its goals and lesson components. Scheduled meetings could improve communication and inform the classroom teacher.

• Some classroom teachers are not as knowledgeable in the process of how children learn to read. They may need more examples and modeling of how to use prompts for specific reading strategies and education on the strategies
early readers use and occasionally neglect to use. These are specific areas of training provided to RR teachers.

- Some Reading Recovery teachers may not be as comfortable sharing information and anecdotal experiences in an informal manner but on a regular basis. Barriers to this communication can be: tight schedules between RR lessons and other teaching assignments, the distance between classrooms does not allow time for teachers to converse between other teaching responsibilities, non-common planning time, and possibly a strained relationship between teachers.

- By using the communication logs there is a record of discussion context for each RR child. Filling out notes ahead of time reminds teachers of what to cover during scheduled conversations.

Askew and Frasier argue “These children begin their first grade year with the lowest literacy profiles in their classrooms. Therefore the notion of accelerated progress resulting in successful performance within an average classroom setting calls for an exploration of this phenomenon relative to children’s’ performance and teachers’ perceptions” (p.88).

Summary

While a majority of RR students make accelerated progress they still remain at risk after the program has been completed. It is essential that teachers responsible for these children’s reading instruction communicate regularly to ensure they continue to progress. Clay (1993) suggests that schools monitor former RR students closely and provide further help if needed. “Although RR children may perform well in their classes
they remain at-risk children for two or more years after completion of their program” (p.59).

With time constraints becoming prevalent in schools, teacher communication and collaboration are pushed aside. By planning ahead and putting some thought and reflection into the current goals and strengths students are demonstrating, we can ensure that all teachers are working towards common goals and expectations for each student. What is clear from this study is that communication of one kind or another, whether formally organized or informal is critical to students’ achievement. Further studies may determine how best to facilitate those conversations. It will also be important to examine the content of conversations to determine just what information is most effective for teacher-to-teacher collaboration and student success.
References


References Continued


Appendix A
Teacher Questionnaires from beginning and middle of the RR program

Date: _______________ Week in Program ____________

Classroom TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What are the strengths in the area of reading this child demonstrates?

2. What are the strengths in the area of writing this child demonstrates?

3. What is the most important skill in literacy this child needs to learn next?

4. Where does this child rank in control of his/her literacy development with the rest of your class?
   Bottom 10%  Bottom 20%  Middle  Upper 20%  Upper 10%

5. What instructional level would you place this child at today? _______________

6. Do you foresee this child reaching the average reading level of his/her peers at the end of RR?
   Circle one: no  not likely  possibly  very possible  yes
Appendix B

Teacher Questionnaires from beginning and middle of the RR program

Date:_______________ Week in Program___________

Reading Recovery TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What are the strengths in the area of reading this child demonstrates?

2. What are the strengths in the area of writing this child demonstrates?

3. What is the most important skill in literacy this child needs to learn next?

4. Where do you think the classroom teacher would rank this child in control of literacy development with the rest of their class?
   Bottom 10%   Bottom 20%   Middle   Upper 20%   Upper 10%

5. What instructional level would you place this child at today?_______________

6. Do you foresee this child reaching the average reading level of his/her peers at the end of RR?
   Circle one:
   no         not likely         possibly         very possible         yes
Appendix C

Study group questionnaires from the end of the program

Date ____________________  Week in Program ____________________

Classroom TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What are the strengths in the area of reading this child demonstrates?

2. What are the strengths in the area of writing this child demonstrates?

3. What is the most important skill in literacy this child needs to learn next?

4. Where does this child rank in control of his/her literacy development with the rest of your class?

   Bottom 10%  Bottom 20%  Middle  Upper 20%  Upper 10%

5. What instructional level would you place this child at today? ____________

6. Do you feel this child is performing at the reading level of his/her peers now? Circle one:

   no  yes

7. Do you feel that regular communication with the Reading Recovery teacher helped you to better meet the needs of this RR student? Any other comments about the study?
Appendix D

Study group questionnaires from the end of the program

Date ________________    Week in Program ________________

Reading Recovery TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What are the strengths in the area of reading this child demonstrates?

2. What are the strengths in the area of writing this child demonstrates?

3. What is the most important skill in literacy this child needs to learn next?

4. Where do you think the classroom teacher would rank this child in control of literacy development with the rest of their class?

   Bottom 10%    Bottom 20%    Middle    Upper 20%    Upper 10%

5. What instructional level would you place this child at today? ______________

6. Do you feel this child is performing at the reading level of his/her peers now? Circle one:

   no              yes

7. Do you feel that regular communication with the classroom teacher helped you to better meet the needs of this RR student? Any other comments about the study?
Control group questionnaires from the end of the program

Date ___________________     Week in Program: ____________

Classroom TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What are the strengths in the area of reading this child demonstrates?

2. What are the strengths in the area of writing this child demonstrates?

3. What is the most important skill in literacy this child needs to learn next?

4. Where does this child rank in control of his/her literacy development with the rest of your class?
   Bottom 10%   Bottom 20%   Middle   Upper 20%   Upper 10%

5. What instructional level would you place this child at today? ______________

6. Does this child perform at the reading level of his/her peers now? Circle one:
   no               yes

7. Will this child be retained?
   no               yes
Appendix F

Control group questionnaires from the end of the program

Date ____________________  Week in Program: ____________

Reading Recovery TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What are the strengths in the area of reading this child demonstrates?

2. What are the strengths in the area of writing this child demonstrates?

3. What is the most important skill in literacy this child needs to learn next?

4. Where does this child rank in control of his/her literacy development with the rest of your class?
   Bottom 10%  Bottom 20%  Middle  Upper 20%  Upper 10%

5. What instructional level would you place this child at today? ______________

6. Does this child perform at the reading level of his/her peers now? Circle one:
   no  yes

7. Will this child be retained?
   no  yes
Appendix G
Communication Log

Student Name: _____________________________

Date: _________________________________

Week and lesson in program: ___________________________

Instructional Level this week in lessons: ___________________

Strategies currently focusing on in reading:

(M) picture clues    re-reading    looking through words (V)
Monitoring known words   self-correction   reading with expression
Sounding phrased and fluent   using chunking or parts of words

Notes:

Strategies currently focusing on in writing:

Using known words independently    spacing between words    punctuation
Generating topic/story    capitalization    grammar/structure of story

Notes:

Other comments or concerns:

Other topics to discuss:

Is a change in guided reading group necessary?
Review class writing or journal
Child’s self-esteem, do they view themselves as a reader or writer?