Reading Recovery® in Kansas 2001-2002

Program Description
Reading Recovery is a highly successful, research-based, short-term early literacy intervention, which targets the lowest performing literacy learners in first grade. It is designed to be the early literacy safety net component of a school-wide comprehensive literacy program and is supplemental to good classroom instruction. Individual students receive a half-hour daily lesson for 12-20 weeks with a specially trained Reading Recovery teacher. The program serves the lowest achieving first graders regardless of IQ, ethnicity, language proficiency, or disability.

The first outcome of Reading Recovery is the expectation that children will successfully complete the program reading and writing within the average of their classmates and will continue to profit from good classroom instruction. The second outcome of Reading Recovery is referral for further specialist help for those students who have benefited from the intensive diagnostic intervention but do not meet the rigorous criteria to successfully complete the program. The goal of the program is to dramatically reduce the number of first grade students who are having difficulty learning to read and write and reduce the cost of these learners to educational systems.

Effectiveness of Reading Recovery
Published Reading Recovery studies, by both internal and external researchers, show the program is highly effective in helping the lowest achieving students obtain literacy skills. Since 1985 Reading Recovery has served over one million children. Nationally, in 2000-2001, 59 percent of all children served and 78 percent of students who went through a full Reading Recovery program successfully completed the Reading Recovery program reading and writing within the average of their peers. Of the 86,366 students who successfully completed the program and for whom data were available, only 137 (four percent) were placed in literacy-related learning disability programs. Of all the children served only one percent were placed in a learning disability program for reading - the same proportion as the children in the random sample (Reading Recovery Council of North America [RRCNA], 2002).

Reading Recovery was implemented in 127 Kansas schools during the 2001-2002 school year. Of the 1,302 students served in the state, 77 percent of children who completed a full program were reading and writing within the average of their peers. Only two of those students were referred and placed in special education for reading and one was retained for reading difficulties. In comparison, the random sample group had four students referred and placed in special education for reading and three students retained for reading difficulties.

Description of Study
The purpose of the Kansas Retrospective Longitudinal Reading Recovery Study was to
document the sustainable results of Reading Recovery on Kansas children. It was proposed children who went through the Reading Recovery program as first graders in 1998-99 would continue to score as well as a comparison group of students on a standardized reading test in fourth grade in 2000-2001.

Archival data from Reading Recovery’s National Data Evaluation Center in Columbus, Ohio, was used to identify Kansas Reading Recovery students in ten school districts who had completed the Reading Recovery program during the 1998-99 school year. From this list, teacher leaders were asked to identify which students were still attending school in the school districts as fourth graders (n = 295). Permission was requested from each of the school districts to select a random sample for participation in this study. All but one school consented to the request. The treatment group random sample consisted of 56 students. These students were further disaggregated by Reading Recovery categories:

1. number of students who had successfully completed the program (n = 42),
2. number of students who not completed the program (n = 9), and
3. number of students who were recommended for further intervention after going through the full Reading Recovery program (n = 5).

The comparison group was formed using fourth grade students from three different elementary schools. These schools were selected in part because they did not have Reading Recovery programs implemented in 1998-99. This ensured a total distribution of student participation rather

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**Figure 1: Comparison of Discontinued Reading Recovery Students and Comparison Group**

<table>
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<th>Discontinued</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>Vocabulary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>30.93</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Definitions:**

- **Discontinued** - Reading Recovery students who successfully complete the program.
- **Full program** - Reading Recovery students who receive a full series of lessons.
- **Comparison Group** - First grade cohort students who are not served by Reading Recovery.
- **Random Sample** - a randomly selected group of same grade students used for comparison purposes.
- **Incomplete** - Reading Recovery students who did not have enough time during the school year to complete a full program.
- **Referred** - Reading Recovery students who, after receiving a full series of lessons, were referred for further specialist help.
than only the top 80 percent. (Reading Recovery targets the bottom 20 percent.) All fourth grade students in the three elementary schools were tested \((n = 79)\).

The Gates MacGinitie Reading Test (Level 4, Form K) was used in the study. This assessment yielded a vocabulary, comprehension and total reading score. The test was administered to the whole class by either the classroom teacher or a Reading Recovery teacher in the spring of 2002. Answer sheets were returned to the Reading Recovery University Training Center at Emporia State University where they were scored and statistically analyzed.

**RESULTS**

Using an Analysis of Variance and post hoc testing, results showed students receiving a full series of lessons and successfully completing the Reading Recovery program in first grade scored the same as the comparison group at fourth grade (see Figure 1). These results show Reading Recovery students, within 12-20 weeks, were able to make accelerated progress to catch-up with the average students in their class and sustain those reading gains through fourth grade. Students in the "Recommended" category and the "Incomplete" category scored lower than the "Discontinued" cohorts and the comparison group (see Figure 2). These findings are consistent with state and national data and confirms Reading Recovery selects the lowest performing literacy learners in the first grade for the program.

**DISCUSSION**

One of the criticisms of Reading Recovery is

**Figure 2: Comparison of Discontinued, Recommended, Incomplete, and Comparison Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
</tr>
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<td>29.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discontinued - Reading Recovery students who successfully complete the program.

Full program - Reading Recovery students who receive a full series of lessons.

Comparison Group - First grade cohort students who are not served by Reading Recovery.

Random Sample - A randomly selected group same of grade students used for comparison purposes.

Incomplete - Reading Recovery students who did not have enough time during the school year to complete a full program.

Referred - Reading Recovery students who, after receiving a full series of lessons, were referred for further specialist help.
that it is not cost effective because of the one-to-one intervention between a highly trained teacher and the low-performing literacy learning student. Acceleration to average reading and writing levels in a short period of time (12-20 weeks) and teaching reading skills which encourage children’s learning abilities can only be achieved under those circumstances (Pinnell, Lyons, DeFord, Bryk, & Seltzer, 1994; Jones, 2002). The cost effectiveness of the program is demonstrated in its ability to reduce the numbers of children who are referred and placed in special education programs (RRCNA, 2002), limit retention, and produce sustained results. Reading Recovery evaluation data reveal two key points:

1. most students who successfully complete Reading Recovery sustain their gains over time, and
2. performance after Reading Recovery intervention becomes stronger over time.

Follow-up studies from seven states demonstrate sustained gains over time (Askew, Fountas, Lyons, Pinnell, Schmitt, 1998; RRCNA Fact Sheets, 2002). This longitudinal study of Kansas Reading Recovery students confirms the cost-effective benefit of sustained gains in reading for the lowest performing literacy learners in first grade.

REFERENCES


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Dr. Connie Briggs,
Director of Reading Recovery Regional Training Center

Brian K. Young, Research Assistant

Terri West, Editor

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