

10-1-1999

Strategic teaching and strategic learning in first grade classrooms

Kathryn Kinnucan-Welsch
University of Dayton

Dodie Magill
Partee Elementary School

Marie Dean
Mountain Park Elementary School

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons



Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Kinnucan-Welsch, K., Magill, D., & Dean, M. (1999). Strategic teaching and strategic learning in first grade classrooms. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 40 (1). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol40/iss1/1

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



Strategic teaching and strategic learning in first-grade classrooms

Kathryn Kinnucan-Welsch

University of Dayton

Dodie Magill

Partee Elementary School

Marie Dean

Mountain Park Elementary School

ABSTRACT

In this article the authors describe Reading Express, a collaborative program which brings together the expertise of first-grade teachers and Reading Recovery teachers to support all first-grade children in literacy development. In the Reading Express program, the Reading Recovery teachers spend one hour per day in each of the first grade classrooms. This time is spent in both whole class as well as small group instruction. The results of Reading Express have been positive for both first-grade children as well as teachers. End-of-year text-level scores and other data indicate that the program is having a positive impact on students' literacy development. In addition, the first-grade teachers have found they are more strategic in their reading instruction and have more knowledge of their students' literacy progress as a result of the collaborative planning and instruction.

Teachers at every grade level express frustration when students have difficulty reading. As a classroom teacher for fourteen years, Marie Dean, a first-grade teacher at Mountain Park Elementary School in Gwinnett County (Georgia), experienced a nagging feeling of frustration at the end of every year. She mused, "If I just had a few more months — or a few less students — maybe I'd be able to reach those handful of students who leave my classroom still not reading effectively." In the fall

of 1994, Reading Recovery, an early intervention program for first-grade children who are experiencing difficulty in learning to read and write, was implemented at Mountain Park and Dodie Magill was hired to be one of two Reading Recovery teachers in the building.

As the first-grade children selected for the Reading Recovery program began to make noticeable gains in reading by October, Marie and the other first-grade teachers saw the opportunity to address their frustrations about other children who would leave first grade with less than optimum success in reading and writing. The first-grade teachers decided they wanted to explore with the Reading Recovery teachers how instruction could be improved for all children in the first grade.

The purpose of this article is to describe how the first grade teachers and the Reading Recovery teachers collaborated in designing an instructional program which incorporated the research on best literacy practice and strategic teaching (Goodman and Watson, 1998; Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). In this article, the authors describe the Reading Express program; the results of the program for students, parents, and teachers; and the collaborative relationship that evolved between first-grade teachers, Reading Recovery teachers, and a university partner.

The Reading Recovery teachers and the first-grade teachers began to have conversations about how they might collaborate to support all first-grade children in the spring of 1995. Katie Kinnucan-Welsch joined the conversations in the fall of 1995 as a partner from a nearby university. The purpose of the conversations was to develop a model first-grade language arts program that was designed to extend the benefit of strategic instruction to all first-grade children (Kinnucan-Welsch, Magill, and Dean, 1997; Kinnucan-Welsch, Magill, Dean, and Schmich, 1998; Magill and Dean, 1998).

The development of Reading Express was consistent with the extensive research suggesting that successful early intervention programs for struggling readers and writers offer greatest benefit to children and are ultimately cost-effective for school districts (Dyer and Binkney, 1995). Reading Recovery is an example of an early intervention instructional program that supports the literacy development of children who have been placed most at risk for failure in reading (for descriptions of Reading Recovery, see Clay, 1979, 1985; Pinnell, Lyons, DeFord, Bryk, and Seltzer, 1994; Shanahan and Barr, 1995). The program is designed to support children in a one-to-one instructional environment where the Reading Recovery teacher purposefully scaffolds each child in the use of cues and strategies as part of the reading process (Schwartz, 1997). One of the dilemmas, however, facing teachers and school administrators is

how to ensure that all children in first grade receive the best possible instruction.

What about those students who struggle with reading, yet cannot be served by Reading Recovery? What about the developing readers who could become even more proficient if they had the tools they needed to improve? And what about the students who were served by Reading Recovery? Can they continue to make progress if they return to a classroom where the instruction may not support the strategies they have learned to help them read independently? Those are the dilemmas that were addressed in the development of Reading Express.

The name “Reading Express” depicts the close relationship between reading and writing as important means of expression. It also indicates the program’s goal of accelerating the reading and writing progress for all first-grade students by taking the “express” route the program offers. Children are instructed in whole groups as well as in small groups where students work in literacy stations, including a teacher-directed station for guided reading. One of the unique aspects of Reading Express is the collaborative relationship between the Reading Recovery teacher and the first-grade teacher. The organizational structure of Reading Express reflects that collaboration.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF READING EXPRESS

Reading Express was structured to provide both whole class and small group instruction by both the Reading Recovery teacher and the first-grade teacher. During the first year of implementation of Reading Express, Mountain Park had five first grades and two full-time Reading Recovery teachers. One Reading Recovery teacher worked with three first grades, the other with two. The Reading Recovery teacher spent one hour every day during the language arts block of time in each classroom. The Reading Recovery teacher led the whole class during that one hour on Monday, focusing on a literacy skill. On Tuesday through Friday, the Reading Recovery teacher worked in each of the classrooms during small group, or literacy station time. The typical weekly schedule for Reading Express is outlined in Table 1. Each component, whole group and small group instruction, is described in detail in the following sections.

Table 1.

The Weekly Schedule for Reading Express

<u>Monday</u>	<u>Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday</u>	<u>Friday</u>
Whole Group Instruction	Small Group Instruction in Literacy Stations	Individual Instruction and Assessment in Literacy Stations
Led by Reading Recovery teacher	Students grouped homogeneously by text level for guided reading instruction	New text reading
Focus on strategies	Flexible	Running records
		Assessment of sight words
	<u>2-4 students per group</u>	

Whole group instruction

The underlying goal of Reading Express is to provide for all first-grade children support in learning strategies that will enable them to become independent, strategic, self-monitoring readers. At the beginning of the school year, whole group instruction focused on five strategies that children can use when they come to a “tricky word.” The “Five Things Good Readers Do” when they meet a “tricky word” are as follows:

- Think about the story
- Check the picture
- Go back and reread, and get your mouth ready
- Look for “chunks”
- Ask yourself, “Does that make sense? Would we say it that way?”

The Reading Recovery teachers provided explicit instruction for each of these strategies to the whole group during Reading Express time. The Reading Recovery teachers and the first grade teachers decided that the Reading Recovery teacher should lead the whole group strategy instruction until the classroom teachers became more comfortable in explicit strategic instruction. Demonstration and modeling related to each strategy spanned several instructional sessions. The classroom teacher

and the Reading Recovery teacher provided support and reinforcement for the use of each strategy during literacy stations and language arts time. An example of language used by the Reading Recovery teacher to model each strategy is detailed in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Modeling Five Things Good Readers Do When They Come to a Tricky Word

Think about the story

“One thing you can do is to ‘think about the story.’ By thinking what the whole story is about, you may be able to figure out what the tricky word is. For example, if our story is about bears, and the sentence reads, “He likes to eat h _____,” you could guess that the word might be ‘honey’ since we know bears like to eat honey.”

Check the picture

“Another thing you can do is ‘check the picture.’ Pictures support the text. If you are reading *This is the Place for ME*, and you are stuck on cave, you can look at the picture of a cave and guess that the word might be ‘cave.’”

Go back and get your mouth ready

“Another way to figure out a tricky word is to use the sentence to help figure out the word. Go back to the beginning of the sentence and reread the sentence. Rather than stopping when you get to the tricky word, this time get your mouth ready for the tricky word by making the beginning sound of the word. Let’s take this sentence as an example: ‘I want a drink of w_____.’ If you have to stop for that tricky word, go back to the beginning of the sentence and reread it. But this time when you get to the tricky word [‘water’], make the “w” sound, and the tricky word will just POP OUT OF YOUR MOUTH!”

Look for chunks you know

“You are beginning to know lots of words now, and you have noticed some of those words have parts in them you know. Let’s look at these words you know: bat, cat, sat. Those words all have a part that looks the same, the at chunk. When you see a chunk you know, say the chunk you know, then cover up the chunk with a finger to look at the letters which come before or after, adding to the chunk. Looking for chunks words a lot better than ‘sounding it out.’”

Does that make sense? Would we say it that way?

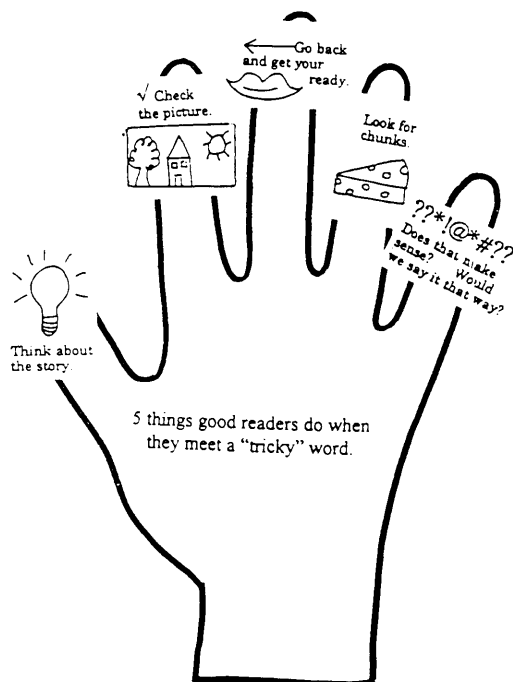
“The fifth thing to do when you come to a tricky word is to ask two questions. You know that when you read, it has to make sense. It has to fit with what you have already read and it has to sound right. If you read something that doesn’t make sense or sound right, ask yourself, ‘Does that make sense? Would you say it that way?’ If the answer is no, then try it again and think of how it should have been said.”

These five strategies provided the core of instruction during the first few months of the school year. Although the strategies were taught in isolated segments, it was intended that the child use the strategies as an interrelated set within the reading process. As the children became more proficient in integrating the strategies during continuous text reading, whole group instruction focused on supporting the children to select the most appropriate strategy at a given point in the text. Cross-checking, checking reading of text based on two sources of information, or cues, was also emphasized as the children progressed.

The five strategies were reinforced throughout the year, and language of the strategies became embedded in the language of literacy in first grade. Each first-grade classroom had a larger-than-life hand posted on a wall with each strategy accompanied by a mnemonic symbol. First-grade teachers used this language and provided support prompts for the strategies throughout the day. Parents received newsletters describing the strategies and each child had a smaller version of the hand or take home (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.

The Children's Version of the Hand Depicting the Strategies



The key to the Reading Express Program was that children become intentional in their use of strategies during reading connected text. The whole class modeling and individual support during small group literacy stations provided numerous opportunities within the context of reading and writing to develop strategic and fluent reading behaviors. The children felt empowered that they have choices to make when they come to a tricky word. No longer must they rely on a more expert reader.

Later in the year, whole group lessons included explicit phonics instruction or strategies to improve comprehension such as the development of knowledge of story grammar. Writing also became a focus during whole group as the year progressed.

Small group instruction in literacy stations

Children worked one hour each day Tuesday through Friday in literacy stations where learning activities were designed to engage children in small groups simultaneously. Two stations were teacher-directed; one by the Reading Recovery teacher, one by the classroom teacher. The remaining students worked independently at one of four or five other stations. The children were at a station for approximately 15-20 minutes, and changed stations independently as they completed the activities. Children were required to engage in literacy-related activities at three stations during the hour. Free choice literacy stations were selected upon completion of the assigned station activities. A choice board helped manage their selection of stations.

We used a dynamic grouping philosophy (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996) in our literacy stations. Children were grouped homogenously at the teacher-directed, guided reading literacy stations. This grouping was based on matching the child's reading ability to the appropriate text level for instruction. For instructional purposes, children should be able to read text at about 90-95% accuracy. Books used for guided reading were leveled according to certain characteristics such as length, size and layout of print, vocabulary and concepts, predictability and pattern of language, and illustration support (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996, p. 114). The expertise of the Reading Recovery teachers was instrumental in helping the first-grade teachers initially organize the classroom books by text level and in administering the text-level assessments at the beginning of the year.

The teacher-led literacy station instruction followed a guided reading lesson format (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). Each child in the small group had a copy of the text to be used that day. Rich story introduction

to prepare the children for successful reading of text began the instruction. This introduction can be characterized as “talking through the book.” Children had the opportunity to talk about the pictures, make predictions about the story, and hear language that may be unfamiliar to them in print. The introduction was followed by reading text, which varied in format and procedure, again depending on the needs of the children in the group. Sometimes the teacher had the children read the text independently. Children who needed more support may have participated in a choral shared reading. The small group allowed for the teacher to capitalize on those teachable moments as they occurred in the context of reading predictable stories rich in the natural oral language patterns of the children. The key point is that children read every day at their instructional level with immediate opportunity for strategic instruction based on strengths and areas of difficulty.

It is important to emphasize the flexible and dynamic nature of the groups. Children were placed in groups at the beginning of the year matching their oral reading with an appropriate text level. As each child developed and progressed, the text level placement came under constant scrutiny. The first-grade teacher and the Reading Recovery teacher were continuously assessing the appropriateness of each student’s group placement, which was directly linked to performance and text level.

The guided reading groups constituted only one activity during literacy station time. Those children not working with one of the teachers were at literacy stations, children were grouped according to either text level or to a demonstrated need in a specific skill or strategy area. They were also, at times, randomly grouped by virtue of choice of station for that day.

One station activity may have extended the whole group strategy instruction for the week. For example, if on Monday the Reading Recovery teacher introduced the at chunk, or word part, to the group, then one of the stations might have the children making words with tiles or magnetic letters with that chunk (Cunningham, 1995). Other stations may have incorporated the language arts objectives that had been developed by the first-grade team. These objectives were in alignment with the language arts curriculum adopted by the county school district. An example of one of these goals is: All first graders must recognize on sight the first one hundred words on Sitton’s word list (Sitton, 1995). Activities at one literacy station were structured to reinforce recognition of previously introduced words from the list. Examples included sight word bingo using these words, typing frequently used words from the list on the computer, using water colors to paint the words, underlining any

chunks they recognized in the words, and ordering words from the list in cut-up sentences.

Other station activities may have extended literacy into other contexts, including sending letters through the classroom post office, a writing/book-making center, dramatic play, puppetry, flannel board. The book center was filled with books on a variety of levels, but emphasizing those books that were easily accessible to the emerging reader. The stations were planned to incorporate speaking, reading, listening, and writing, all in support of a balanced literacy/language arts program.

One component of the program that extended the literacy station instruction into family literacy opportunities was that each child took a book at the appropriate text level home every night. These books had already been read during small group time, so they became an opportunity for the child to reinforce developing literacy competence through reading of familiar text. The parents and guardians were partners in this process. In addition, parents were asked to assist their children in learning sight words. Each child brought home a list of five sight words every week to practice with their parents.

Although Reading Express accounted for one hour out of each day, the first-grade teachers engaged the children in language arts instruction throughout the entire morning block of time. The time outside of Reading Express was devoted to language arts within the context of thematic units and classroom-based literacy activities.

SHARING AND LEARNING TOGETHER: COLLABORATING IN THE PROCESS

Reading Express evolved because the first-grade teachers were interested in knowing more about Reading Recovery instruction. Reading Recovery is a pullout program, and often the classroom teachers have little knowledge of the instruction offered to the children. As Marie recalled, "I wanted to know exactly what was going on out in the trailer." A key aspect of Reading Express has been the Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers shared knowledge, expertise, and responsibilities through a collaborative process of planning, implementation, and division of responsibilities. The teachers decided on the following division:

The responsibilities of the classroom teacher:

1. To provide primary reading/language arts instruction for first-grade students;

2. To plan cooperatively with the Reading Recovery teacher for small group and whole group instruction;
3. To maintain records of student progress in literacy development;
4. To observe the Reading Recovery teacher and incorporate the strategies into the routine of the classroom;
5. To confer with the Reading Recovery teacher about special student concerns;
6. In conjunction with the Reading Recovery teacher, to administer pre- and posttests and take running records.

The responsibilities of the reading recovery teacher:

1. To plan cooperatively with the classroom teacher to determine appropriate instruction;
2. To develop with the first grade teachers instructional strategies and techniques based on principles of research-based best practice;
3. To confer with the classroom teacher about special student concerns;
4. To keep records of student progress;
5. To support parents as partners in their children's reading by sharing information in newsletters;
6. In conjunction with first-grade teachers, to conduct assessments and analyze data on all first-grade students, including pre- and post-assessments and running records.

This sharing of responsibility provided a strong network of support for the first grade as a whole. However, cooperative sharing of instruction requires joint planning time. This can only be accomplished by prioritizing collaborative meeting time. First-grade classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers met weekly as a Reading Express team. The agendas during these meetings, however, included topics beyond language arts instruction. Much of the planning, therefore, must be done informally during those hallway or lunchtime conversations that are short, but rich. In addition to the Reading Express meetings, the first-grade teachers planned cooperatively as a grade-level unit, mapping monthly curriculum goals which provided a framework for the weekly planning segments upon which literacy station activities are based. These monthly goals were shared with the Reading Recovery teachers during the Reading Express team meetings as well as with parents through first-grade classroom newsletters.

MONITORING LITERACY PROGRESS IN READING EXPRESS

One of the benefits first-grade teachers have found in the Reading Express Program is that they have a better understanding of their students' literacy development. All first-grade students are tested using the Observation Survey (Clay, 1993) at the beginning of each school year. This instrument is a collection of six informal assessment activities. The observations measure each child's ability to: 1) identify letters of the alphabet; 2) read a list of words in isolation; 3) understand basic concepts about print; 4) write and spell words from the child's own language repertoire; 5) indicate heard sounds in words by writing a dictated sentence; 6) implement reading strategies during a continuous text reading. The original grouping and choices for strategy instruction in Reading Express were based on the results of these observations.

The initial assessment was just the beginning. Throughout the year, student progress was continuously monitored. Each child in first grade had a literacy progress folder that documented growth in a systematic way. Included in these folders were running records, anecdotal records, and Language Arts Progress Reports and Writing Assessment, tools developed in accordance with Gwinnett County (Georgia) Literacy Standards. The detailed documentation was shared by the Reading Recovery teacher and the first-grade teacher. First, the Reading Recovery teacher kept a log of whole group lessons. Also, the first-grade teacher and the Reading Recovery teacher made anecdotal records of literacy accomplishments and areas needing support during the literacy station time. These individual records noted shifts in reading performance as well as areas of difficulty in reading or writing. Dated writing samples also contributed to the literacy profile of each child.

Running records, a recording of oral reading, were an invaluable tool in the program. Frequent running records were taken on each child and placed in the literacy progress folders. These records were used to assess the appropriate text level for each student. In addition, the running record indicated not only the child's accuracy in reading, but also supplied invaluable information about why errors were made. This information drove the strategic instruction tailored to each child. The information gathered as part of ongoing monitoring of progress was shared formally with parents during conference time and informally as the need arose.

READING EXPRESS IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE:
THE RESULTS OF THE PROGRAM

Reading Express has been a concentrated effort on the part of first-grade classroom teachers and the Reading Recovery teachers to support the goal that all children can read by the end of the first grade. The decisions that were necessary to support this program were not easy ones, however, and the entire Mountain Park Elementary staff was involved in those decisions. In addition to the hour spent daily in each first-grade classroom, each Reading Recovery teacher at Mountain Park served four first-grade students individually each day and about ten to twelve students over the course of the year. In the Reading Express model, the Reading Recovery teachers focused all energies on the first grade. In order to make the model affordable, the first-grade teachers relinquished paraprofessional support in their classrooms. The upper-grade teachers concurred with this concentration of resources in the first grade and agreed to have slightly larger classes in order to provide the necessary funds to deliver the program. Such a decision was a difficult one, but one that has been supported in the current research on Title I and remedial programs (Allington and Walmsley, 1995).

It has been important for us to document the effectiveness of this program through systematic data collection. The data include pre- and post-test scores on the Observation Record, periodic running records for each first-grade child throughout the year, anecdotal records, video tape clips of text reading, and writing samples. Text levels based on running records yielded information for individual children as well as for the entire first grade. The text level simply indicates the level of text at which a child is reading instructionally through an integration of the cueing systems. Table 2 outlines the grade level equivalencies for text levels as defined by Reading Recovery.

The effectiveness of Reading Express across all first grades was examined in terms of calculated median text level for all first-grade children over the course of three school years. The median text level represents the midpoint at which half of the first-grade children were above and half were below in terms of text level reading at the end of the school year.

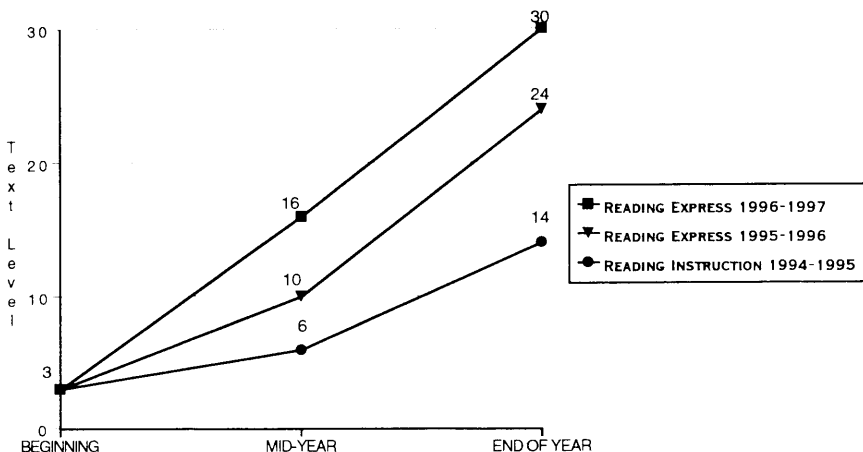
Table 2.

Text Level to Grade Level Comparison

Text Level	Grade Level
34	8
32	7
30	6
28	5
26	4
22-24	3.1/3.2
18-20	2.1/2.2
14-16	1
9-12	Primer
7-8	PP3
5-6	PP2
3-4	PP1
A-2	Readiness

The text level comparison for years 1994-1995 through 1996-1997 is indicated in Figure 3.

Figure 3.

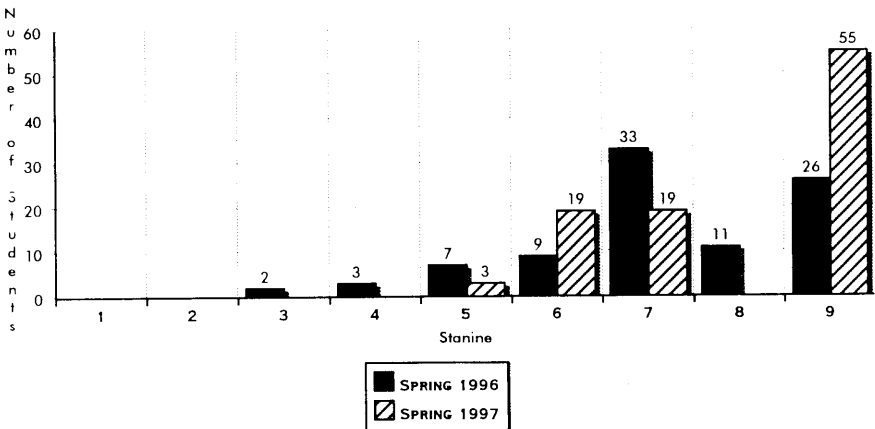
Median Text Level 1994-1997

During the 1994-1995 school year prior to implementation of Reading Express, the median student from all first-grade classes completed first grade reading at Reading Recovery text level 14, which fell within the expected range for children at the end of first grade in Gwinnett County. During the 1995-1996 school year, the first year for implementation of Reading Express, the median student from all first-grade classes completed the year at Reading Recovery text level 24. The 1996-1997 school year, year 2 of Reading Express, found the median text level for all first-grade students to be 30.

The median text level, however, does not provide a complete picture of first-grade performance. As part of the Reading Express data collection, end-of-year text levels from all first-grade children were collected during the spring of 1996 and 1997. Results from all first-grade children for each of those years are represented in Figure 4, including those who received one-to-one instruction in the Reading Recovery program. Two years, 1996 and 1997, are represented in the figure. The data are organized by stanines (Clay, 1993).

Figure 4.

End of Year Text Level 1996 and 1997



As this figure indicates, students are making progress toward the goal that every child is a reader by the end of first grade. During Spring 1996, the end of the first complete year of Reading Express, most children's performance put them in the seventh stanine, with slightly fewer children in the ninth stanine. During Spring 1997, the end of the second year of Reading Express, only three children had text level scores which fell in the fifth stanine, and 55 children were reading at the ninth stanine level.

The most important indicator of success, however, was how first-grade children developed as successful, independent readers and writers. It is clear from the text level data reported above that children are experiencing success. But what does this success look like? Anecdotal data and writing samples from two children offer insights into their progress.

Abby

Abby (a pseudonym) was a female with limited text knowledge when she entered first grade. She had successfully completed one year of kindergarten, but came from a home environment that did not support easy transition into school literacy learning. She began the year knowing 50 of 54 letters and could identify 30 of 37 phonemes. She could read 5 of the 20 words from the Ohio Word Test. Her Concepts About Print score was 9 out of 24. Her text reading level was 3.

The teachers saw that Abby needed a high degree of teacher support, particularly in her knowledge of print. She had not yet grasped the one-to-one correspondence concept, did not understand return sweep, and was inventing text based on picture cues. She had limited sight word knowledge, and was not always able to transfer word recognition to text. She did not self-correct or use phrasing and fluency in her reading.

The teachers worked with Abby and other children who had similar knowledge of how our oral and written language system works. Literacy station activities were designed for her and other classmates that focused on the essential concepts of print and on transferring her knowledge of print from one context to another. By January, Abby was reading at a text level of 16 with a good self-correction rate. She was using a self-extending system based on meaning, visual, and syntax cues. These cues had been emphasized in large group instruction as well as in Literacy Station activities. Fluency and phrasing had improved considerably. Her balanced approach to reading sparked a high degree of interest in books and in reading outside of the school environment. Her mother became more supportive of reading in the home after conversations she had with the teachers and as she saw her daughter's interest in books increase. In

May, Abby had made remarkable progress in reading. She demonstrated a self-extending and balanced reading system and was reading at text level 30 at 96% accuracy rate. Her self-correction rate was 1:1.5.

Robert

Robert entered first grade as a reluctant male reader. He demonstrated little interest in books and exhibited low time-on-task behavior. He knew 48 of 54 letters and 30 of 37 phonemes. Robert, like Abby, did not yet have basic concepts of print at his command. He did not understand one-to-one matching, return sweep, or the difference between letters and words. He could not identify known words within a text, but was able to use pictures to construct meaning. He was hesitant to take a risk when faced with an unknown word. He was reading at text level 3.

Robert also engaged in whole group and literacy station activities that were designed to build on his strengths. By January, he had extended his knowledge of sight vocabulary and was able to move beyond using the pictures as his only cue. His text level reading had progressed to 13. He was using the initial sounds of words to guess (for example, shout for should), but was not monitoring using all cueing systems. His phrasing and fluency were choppy.

By the end of first grade, Robert demonstrated a more balanced approach to reading. He was monitoring and cross-checking using visual and structural cues as well as meaning cues. He ended the year reading at text level 24.

As indicated through these examples, the children in Reading Express have a broader range of reading and writing strategies and are able to apply those strategies as they read and write. They are making significant gains in reading and writing. They are exhibiting enthusiasm and confidence in their reading and writing. They prefer reading to other activities. They are "hungry to read."

REFLECTIONS ON READING EXPRESS

What factors contributed to the success as measured by median and stanine text level data? How have we managed to continue this program after the initial years despite resource pressures? First, Mountain Park School continues to embrace the idea of early intervention and wholeheartedly supports that effort. Available resources were intensified at the first-grade level in an effort to reduce the need for remediation at the higher grades. The entire Mountain Park staff was involved in this commitment. That commitment has continued.

Second, parents continue to play a key role in Reading Express. The team communicates regularly with parents through a newsletter describing the Reading Express program and the strategies the children are developing as part of their reading process. Included in the newsletter are practical suggestions for parents in how they can help at home. Parents are active in their children's literacy experiences and they have expressed satisfaction in their increased ability to help their children at home.

Third, the emerging readers and writers have the benefit of two professionals in first-grade classrooms for one hour every day. The collaboration among the Reading Recovery teachers and the first-grade teachers has been one of the most powerful aspects of the program. The first grade teachers acknowledge that the collaborative planning and the whole group instruction offered by the Reading Recovery teacher has supported professional growth for all involved. As a result, the first-grade teachers have become more proficient in supporting strategic reading and writing for all students. The true challenge, however, lies with those children who were reading at levels 14, 15, and 16 at the end of the school year. Modifying Reading Express to ensure that the Reading Recovery teachers have more access to these students during the literacy station time may be the solution to that problem.

Reading Express began as a program designed to improve the quality of instruction for all first-grade students, not just those identified as having greatest need. The purpose of Reading Express was to bring into alignment instruction in first-grade classrooms with the sound literacy practices and strategic teaching upon which Reading Recovery is based. It has resulted in a powerful, ongoing professional development experience positively impacting the entire first-grade community. Students have made substantial gains in reading and teachers have grown professionally through the implementation of Reading Express.

An idea that began as a series of conversations among professionals concerned about the literacy development for all first-grade children in a school has found its way to other districts, other children, and other teachers. Dodie is now implementing the Reading Express Model in the first grades at Partee Elementary, a neighboring school. Katie is currently working with the first-grade teachers and Reading Recovery teachers in a rural district in Indiana. Marie is teaching with new staff at Mountain Park and further refining the model. It is our hope that our experiences can support attempts by other teachers to ensure that all children will be readers by the end of first grade.

REFERENCES

- Allington, R.L., & Walmsley, S.E. (Eds.) (1995). *No quick fix: Rethinking literacy programs in America's elementary schools*. NY: Teachers College & Newark DE: International Reading Association.
- Clay, M.M. (1979, 1985). *The early detection of reading difficulties* (2nd & 3rd eds.). Auckland: Heinemann.
- Clay, M.M. (1993). *An observation survey of early literacy achievement*. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann.
- Cunningham, P.M. (1995). *Phonics they use: Words for reading & writing* (2nd ed.) NY: Harper Collins.
- Dyer, P.C., & Binkney, R. (1995). Estimating cost-effectiveness & educational outcomes: Retention, remediation, special education, & early intervention. In R.L. Allington & S.E. Walmsley (Eds.), *No quick fix: Rethinking literacy programs in America's elementary schools* (pp. 61-77). NY: Teachers College & Newark DE: International Reading Association.
- Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (1996). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children*. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann.
- Goodman, Y., & Watson, D. (1998). A sociopsycholinguistic model of the reading process & reading strategy instruction. In C. Weaver (Ed.), *Practicing what we know: Informed reading instruction* (pp. 113-139). Urbana IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Kinnucan-Welsch, K., Magill, D., Dean, M., & Schmich, B. (1998). Reading Express: Supporting literacy in first-grade classrooms. In C. Weaver (Ed.), *Practicing what we know: Informed reading instruction* (pp. 443-461). Urbana IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Kinnucan-Welsch, K., Magill, D., & Dean, M. (1997, May). *Bringing Reading Recovery into first-grade classrooms*. Presentation made at the 42nd Annual Convention of the International Reading Association, Atlanta, Georgia.
- Magill, D., & Dean, M. (1998, February). *Reading Express: Strategic teaching for strategic learning*. Presentation made at the Reading Recovery Conference, Columbus OH.
- Pinnell, G.S., Lyons, C.A., DeFord, D.E., Bryk, A.S., & Seltzer, M. (1994). Comparing instructional models for the literacy education of high-risk first graders. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 29, 8-39.
- Schwartz, R.M. (1997). Self-monitoring in beginning reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 51, 40-48.
- Shanahan, T., & Barr, R. (1995). Reading Recovery: An independent evaluation of the effects of an early instructional intervention for at-risk learners. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30, 958-996.
- Sitton, R. (1995). *Rebecca Sitton's spelling sourcebook number 2*. Spokane WA: Author.

Kathryn Kinnucan-Welsch is a faculty member in the Department of Teacher Education, at the University of Dayton in Ohio. Dodie Magill is a teacher at Partee Elementary School in Lithonia Georgia. Marie Dean is a teacher at Mountain Park Elementary School in Lilburn Georgia.