

6-1-1991

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Recommended Citation

Gaffney, J. S. (1991). Reading Recovery: Getting Started in a School System. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 31 (5). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol31/iss5/3

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Reading Recovery: Getting Started in a School System

Janet S. Gaffney

In this article, Professor Gaffney suggests a schema for school personnel interested in planning for the implementation of a Reading Recovery program in a local school district or consortium of school districts. Her emphasis that Reading Recovery is a system of intervention, not a bag of tricks or quickie methods, for the purpose of preventing reading failure is an important caution to would-be innovators. She also describes the nature of full implementation, its importance, and how to plan for it. In addition, she joins Professor Clay in cautioning us that the Reading Recovery procedures were not devised for the 80-90% of children who do not need them. Gaffney, a University of Illinois teacher leader trainer, expedites the thinking of any educational staff which desires to plan systematically for Reading Recovery implementation. A district could use this article as a sound basis for planning.

I would like to know how to do Reading Recovery. Please send the dates of future workshops in my area.

Please send me information about the Reading Recovery Program and a current catalog of prices.

I have a sabbatical year coming up in my district and I would like to be trained in Reading Recovery. Please send information and an application.

Our district has some staff-development funds available and would like to offer a series of workshops to our teachers on Reading Recovery.

These are samples of requests frequently made of educators who are trained in Reading Recovery. Though many articles have been published about various aspects of Reading Recovery, requests like these show that the educational community lacks sufficient information about the nature and purpose of Reading Recovery and the way to begin to implement the program in a school system. The purpose of this article is to provide assistance to administrators and teachers who are considering initiating Reading Recovery in their districts.

What Reading Recovery is and what it is not

Reading Recovery is an early intervention designed by Clay (1985) to be implemented in an educational system for the purpose of providing a second chance for success for first-grade children who are at risk of failing to learn to read. Reading Recovery is not a method of teaching, an instructional package, a prescriptive program, a commercial kit nor a predetermined sequence of skills or books (Clay, in press). Reading Recovery is a way for a system to intervene for the purpose of preventing reading failure.

Reading Recovery is a preventive rather than a remedial intervention. Teachers of young children are able to identify the children who are most at risk of failing to learn to read after one year at school through the use of systematic observational procedures. Early identification of children who are not making adequate progress allows a school system to implement an intervention early in a child's program before failure ensues. Without early identification of children who might be at risk of failure and an appropriate intervention, these children would fall further and further behind their peers until it was determined that they had failed and a remedial intervention could be implemented. Remediation, understandably, requires long-term

intervention because a larger gap has developed between the performance of the children and their peer group, and the children have practiced inappropriate behaviors for a longer time.

What Reading Recovery purports to do is accelerate the progress of the lowest achieving first-grade children, creating an opportunity for them to be successful that would not have happened otherwise. In order to change the probable path of failure, intervention must not only be early but intensive. Children are tutored on a one-to-one basis for 30 minutes daily by a teacher who has been specially trained to implement a different and individualized program for each child. Research in New Zealand and the United States has demonstrated that through the intervention of Reading Recovery, children are able to perform at levels commensurate with their average peers usually after 12-16 weeks of instruction (Clay, 1985; Pinnell, DeFord, and Lyons, 1988), and these children continue to make progress in their regular classroom instruction and independent reading after Reading Recovery services are discontinued (Pinnell et al., 1988; Slavin and Madden, 1989).

Who's who in Reading Recovery

A key to successful implementation of Reading Recovery is a three-tiered staffing scheme in which Trainers of Teacher Leaders, who are specially trained university faculty members, conduct training for Teacher Leaders, who in turn conduct training for Teachers. Training at each level requires a minimum time commitment of one school year. Training at the upper two levels requires a full-time commitment of the participant at an appropriate training site. If there is not a training site within a reasonable driving distance, individuals who wish to train as trainers of teacher leaders or as teacher leaders will often need to relocate for the training year. Teacher training is always conducted in the proximate area of the schools engaged in Reading Recovery.

In addition to the weekly two-and-a-half to three hour inservice sessions conducted by the teacher leader, teachers begin on-the-job training by teaching a minimum of four children daily in a one-to-one tutorial setting using specialized training procedures. For information about training and training

sites, see the response of Clay and Watson in the Questions and Answers column of a recent issue of *The Reading Teacher* (Jongsma, 1990). By contacting the closest training site listed there, you would be able to find out the current level of implementation in your area.

We're interested... what now?

The first step is to become more knowledgeable about Reading Recovery. The monograph *Reading Recovery: Early Intervention for At-Risk First Graders* (Pinnell et al., 1988) provides a comprehensive overview of the program. As soon as possible, begin to enroll key district personnel in considering Reading Recovery. You may want to talk informally with teachers of young children in your school. Distribution of a brief and informative article by Gaffney and Gillespie (1989) might generate some conversation and questions among interested teachers. Share your interest and that of your colleagues with persons in the positions of principal, curriculum coordinator, reading supervisor, early childhood/elementary coordinator, Chapter 1 coordinator, special education coordinator, assistant superintendent, and superintendent.

Next, consider the proximity of the closest teacher training site (i.e., a site with a teacher leader). Since a component of training requires participants to teach a Reading Recovery lesson with a child from the teacher's home school behind a one-way mirror three or four times during the year, distance is a consideration. Because of weekly inservice sessions for teachers and periodic transportation of children, it is recommended that travel time from the school to the training site not exceed one and a half hours.

Of primary consideration is the density of the population of first grade children and the proportion of those children who are in jeopardy of not learning to read at a level comparable to their average peers. Research has shown that approximately 10 to 20% of young children are at-risk of reading failure. Depending on factors within school populations, the proportion of children who require an intensive intervention may be less than 10% or may well exceed 20%. The effectiveness of Reading Recovery is partially dependent upon the full implementation of the

program within a system. Full implementation means that every first-grade child who needs Reading Recovery has the opportunity to participate in a complete, individualized program. Full implementation must be planned for and achieved at the classroom, school, and district level within each system.

Listing each school, number of first grade classes, average enrollment per class, and estimating the proportion of children who might be unable to read at average levels, will provide a basis for determining the number of teachers who will need to be trained in Reading Recovery procedures for each school and district. For a rough estimate of the total number of teachers you need to train in your district, consider that two teachers per school, each working half-time (0.5 FTE each, 2.5 hours per day) in Reading Recovery, can serve the 10-20% of children who are most at risk of failure in about four first grade classrooms of average size (approximately 25 children per class) during their training year. Thus, one is able to estimate the number of teachers a district would need to participate in this additional training.

Teachers who volunteer and are selected to participate in Reading Recovery training are experienced in Grade 1 reading instruction. Preferably, applicants have a minimum of three years of experience as a regular first-grade classroom teacher. We recommend that Reading Recovery teachers train in pairs, two per school. Training a minimum of two teachers per school increases the probability that all of the children who need Reading Recovery will have the opportunity to participate and provides a structure of mutual support to enhance teacher growth. The preferred model is that two Grade 1 teachers equally share responsibility for classroom instruction. Each teacher works in the first-grade classroom for half of the day and works in Reading Recovery for the other half day. Other models of augmented staffing are options in which Chapter 1, reading specialists, or resource room teachers allocate half of the day to Reading Recovery teaching.

A teacher leader typically trains a class of 10-12 teachers annually. Given this number of spaces available for training, one is able to develop a multiyear plan that will result in full

implementation of Reading Recovery in each school within a district. Several small districts may want to engage in a cooperative endeavor and support the training of one teacher leader. Small districts may want to request spaces in a training class of a larger district in the area. Alternatively, multiple districts may enlist the support of a college or university in the region in supporting the training of teacher leaders for the area. Given sufficient need, it is recommended that two educators from the same region train as teacher leaders during the same year. The partnership established during training facilitates collaboration during subsequent years of implementation and allows full implementation to occur more quickly throughout a region.

Presentation

Interested individuals have many opportunities to learn more about Reading Recovery. An annual Reading Recovery Conference is held in Columbus, Ohio, usually during the first week in February. Some states are beginning to plan regional conferences on Reading Recovery in various regions of the country. Presentations on Reading Recovery are frequently on the agendas of many state, regional, and national reading conferences. In addition, Reading Recovery personnel often are invited to present at teacher institutes and district conferences.

Both teacher leaders and trainers of teacher leaders will often arrange their schedules to make presentations about Reading Recovery, to increase the audience's awareness or knowledge about the program. Groups that need to be informed about Reading Recovery are parents; school boards; early childhood, elementary, remedial, and special education teachers; reading specialists and supervisors; principals and central administrators. If there are teacher leaders in your area with whom your teachers might train, requests for presentations may be made of them. If a district is considering training teacher leaders in the future, the administration may want to sponsor a presentation by a trainer of teacher leaders jointly with other districts and/or a regional college or university.

Because training at any level requires a commitment of a school year, it is inappropriate to conduct workshops on how to implement Reading Recovery teaching procedures. Clay (1985, in press) cautioned against using these specialized procedures with the 80-90% of children who do not require them or using them in classroom teaching or small group instruction. However, educators may be taught how to administer the diagnostic survey which, although used in Reading Recovery, is separate from the program. Two media presentations on Reading Recovery may be used in a presentation: "Something Extra" (New Zealand Department of Education and University of Auckland), a 20-minute videotape developed in New Zealand which has recently become available in the United States; and "Reading Recovery: Early Intervention for At-Risk First Graders" (Educational Research Service, 1989), purchasable as a slide and/or video presentation.

Visiting: Who, what, where, when and why

Two types of requests for observing different aspects of Reading Recovery are frequently made by district personnel who are interested in future implementation. One may observe a teacher working with an individual child during a Reading Recovery lesson in a school and one may observe the training of teachers at an inservice session.

- **School visits.** Although the program must be protected from too many interruptions, people find observing and talking with experienced Reading Recovery teachers informative. Time must be included in the schedule for discussion of the lesson with the teacher or teacher leader, who might accompany the visitors. This discussion time should be brief so that it does not interfere with the daily tutoring of other children. The principal may also want to discuss the implementation of Reading Recovery at the school level, when appropriate, with visitors. Those seeking a visit will need to contact appropriate staff members in the host district and follow their procedures.

- **Visiting teacher inservice sessions.** If a district is considering implementing Reading Recovery and there is the possibility that a teacher leader, already operating within the area, may be able to include some of their teachers in the next

training class, a visit to a teacher inservice session may be appropriate. A common misconception is that teachers need to observe an inservice session before applying for or undergoing Reading Recovery training. A few key decision-makers from the interested district typically plan to attend an inservice session together. Many teacher leaders designate a few sessions throughout the year that will be available for visitors; it is recommended that visitors not attend inservice sessions during the first few months.

Some teacher leaders prefer to arrange an additional, abbreviated session (e.g., a lesson and discussion of the lesson) for the purpose of giving visitors a sample of an inservice session. Interested parties will need to contact the appropriate staff member at the training site to make necessary arrangements. Time for discussion before and after the session, although difficult to arrange, is necessary. Teacher leaders may assist one another on these rare occasions or the site coordinator may serve in this role.

- **Fact-finding mission.** Once a district, group of districts, college, university, or other administrative unit without a teacher leader is giving serious consideration to system-wide implementation of Reading Recovery, approximately four to six key decision-makers will want to schedule a common visit to a teacher leader training site. Key decision-makers typically include persons in the positions of superintendent; assistant superintendent; curriculum supervisor; early childhood, elementary, Chapter 1, and special education coordinators; principal; Dean of the College of Education; chairs and faculty members of reading, elementary, curriculum and instruction, or special education departments. Teachers are not usually included in this type of visit unless they are candidates for teacher leader training.

One individual could be designated as the contact person to coordinate the arrangements with the teacher leader training site. Visits should be scheduled as early as possible in the academic year because most of the teacher leader sites have a March deadline for teacher leader and site applications. To begin to establish a relationship with the prospective faculty, the

visit ought to be conducted at the teacher leader site at which your candidate will most likely train. The agenda for this visit may include a presentation, school visits, discussions, and observation of an inservice session.

Role of teacher leader

Following the decision to implement Reading Recovery in a system, the most important decision is the selection of nominees for teacher leader training. These individuals participate in a rigorous, year-long, full-time training program which prepares them to be experts in implementing Reading Recovery in their districts. Due to the location of the few teacher leader training sites, most trainees are required to relocate during their training year.

As well as being an effective classroom teacher of young children, a candidate will have demonstrated leadership in the district, effective communication skills, knowledge of the theoretical base underlying the program (Clay, 1987) and have completed a master's degree in a related area. During the training year, teacher leaders learn how to implement the specialized procedures with children, develop knowledge of theoretical and research bases underlying the reading process and reading difficulties, and train teachers in a challenging yet supportive manner. The teacher leader is trained to lead the local education community in the implementation, maintenance, and expansion of this innovative program. Clay stated that the role of teacher leaders is to "act as advocates for whatever cannot be compromised in the interest of effective results" (1987, p. 47). It is the responsibility of the educational community to listen and to support these leaders in whom they have invested so much.

Role of site coordinator

Successful implementation of educational programs requires the knowledgeable and enthusiastic support of administrators. Reading Recovery is no exception. In addition to the unqualified support of the principal in each participating school, a central administrator must be involved. Many of the services required are typical of those required for the efficient operation of any educational program: appropriate scheduling, timely

ordering of materials, assuring the assignment of adequate space for teaching children, communicating with parents and the general public, and promoting cooperation and understanding among all of the professional staff.

The nature and intensity of the teacher training associated with Reading Recovery presents unique administrative challenges. The program requires that teacher leaders have the authority to insure the integrity of the services delivered to children. At each teacher training site, an administrator who actively supports implementation of Reading Recovery serves in the role of site coordinator. This person must be willing to become thoroughly acquainted with all aspects of Reading Recovery and must be allowed the time to do so. Strong leadership qualities and communication and problem-solving skills will enable them to provide effective administrative support.

If several districts join together to establish a training site, each district must designate a "contact person" but the group must grant one person the role and responsibilities of site coordinator. The role of the site coordinator is to support the teacher leader in the effective implementation of Reading Recovery. The responsibilities of the site coordinator are to: 1) facilitate and promote the training function; 2) insure the availability of appropriate training facilities, equipment, and office space; 3) provide general administrative support for the teacher leaders associated with the training site; 4) work with district and building administrators to assure understanding of and compliance with training requirements and implementation requirements; and 5) serve as the contact person between the training site and participating universities.

What's next?

Reading Recovery is a way of initiating change in a system for the purpose of increasing success in literacy learning of young children. As such, implementing Reading Recovery in every system, whether the system be a country, state, district, consortium, or school, is a new event. Multiple factors in each of these complex systems continually interact with one another and with the unique nature of this intensive educational

innovation in order to guarantee the integrity of the implementation within each new system. What makes these systemic adaptations worthwhile are the consistent results that Reading Recovery has maintained across systems. To enable first-grade children who are most at-risk of reading failure to perform at levels commensurate with their average peers in a few months time and to have these children continue to progress in reading and writing is an extraordinary accomplishment. Extraordinary results are achieved by extraordinary effort. Where this article ends is where interested personnel begin to investigate the possibility of Reading Recovery for their system.

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