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Hypothesizing about Reading Recovery

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Professor Opitz's article is one of two in this special issue not written by a Reading Recovery trained teacher. The author has examined the literature on Reading Recovery and attempted to puzzle out the reason(s) for its success. Trained Reading Recovery teachers will find both points of agreement and disagreement, and many points on which to establish a discussion. Opitz writes, "...we do not, I believe, know why the program works." Yet as Clay suggests in this issue, answers are learned in the year-long and continuing contact training sessions. Our understanding of why the program works does not come from information or research alone, but from reflective practice. Reading Recovery teachers continue to reflect on their learning and practice, and implicit in the whole Reading Recovery process is ongoing research and evaluation. We have chosen the article because it reflects questions raised by those who have searched the literature on Reading Recovery and are contemplating involvement in the program. Professor Opitz's hypothesizing is based on wide reading in the literature about Reading Recovery, and should generate many powerful questions for the dialogue between trained Reading Recovery personnel and educators considering program implementation.

Reading Recovery is an early intervention program designed for young children at risk of failure in learning to read. Participants are first graders in the bottom ten to twenty percent of their classes. The program, developed by Marie Clay of New Zealand, is based on two assumptions. The first is that detailed observation of a given child as s/he reads and writes should be the basis of identifying what the child knows and needs to learn. The second assumption is that the reading behaviors of good readers can be taught to children who are not developing these behaviors on their own (Clay, 1985).

The program has three main components. The first is the Diagnostic Survey. Each child is administered each part of the survey and the examiner then uses the results when working with the child on an individual basis. The second component of the program is the tutoring session. Each child is tutored for thirty minutes daily in an isolated setting apart from the child's classroom. Although each tutoring session is unique to the individual and continually changes based on how the child performs, each session includes five components: 1) reading known stories, 2) reading a story that was read one time the previous day, 3) writing a story, 4) working with a cut up sentence, and 5) reading a new book (Pinnell, Fried and Estice, 1990). As the child attempts these literacy oriented tasks, the teacher observes very closely to see what the child is doing. Many of these observations are systematically recorded and form the basis of the succeeding lesson. The third component of the program is teacher training. Teachers who provide the tutoring are trained for one year to learn Reading Recovery procedures (Pinnell, Fried and Estice, 1990).

Proponents of Reading Recovery report that young readers having difficulty with learning to read overcome their difficulties after twelve to twenty weeks of instruction in the program (Clay, 1985; Smith, 1986; Pinnell, 1989). They further claim that Reading Recovery children, once released from the program, function within the average range in their classrooms and do not need remedial help again (Boehnlein, 1987; Lyons and Peterson, 1988). Assuming these claims are valid, the question of *why* this program appears to be successful remain. An analysis of the program and a review of the related literature led me

to generate several hypotheses that might be used to answer this question. The purpose of this article is to state and briefly discuss nine of these hypotheses.

The nine hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Reading Recovery is successful because it is based on a theory of reading that emphasizes meaning. Clay believes that reading is a meaning seeking, problem solving process; it is a complex behavior (Clay, 1979). She notes that readers should only spend as long on the details as necessary because understanding is the goal. In her words, "...the larger the chunks of printed language the child can work with, the quicker he learns" (Clay, 1985, p. 13). Thus, books used in the program are first viewed as a whole; individual pages are then read; and attention is paid to the smaller parts, i.e., words and letters.

Researchers have long proposed a holistic view of reading. Farnham (1895) developed a sentence method for teaching reading. He theorized that considering the sentence as a whole helped learners to acquire an understanding of the parts. His theory led others to propose a story method in which stories were first viewed as a whole as a way of teaching reading (Smith, 1965). Huey (1908) believed that the reader read in chunks and presented the findings of several studies to support his view. Huey concluded, "Word-pronouncing will therefore always be secondary to getting whole sentence meanings, and this from the very first" (Huey, 1908, p. 380). Gray (1948) and McKee (1966) were other researchers who viewed reading as meaning seeking. Current reading theorists who lend additional support to Clay's perspective of reading include Smith (1982), Goodman (1986), Durkin (1989), and Weaver (1988).

Hypothesis 2: Reading Recovery is successful because each child's reading and writing behaviors are thoroughly diagnosed. Clay's Diagnostic Survey is administered to individual children to determine what each child already knows and what needs to be learned. Clay (1985) provides an explanation of the purpose for each component as well as administration directions.

Figure 1: Essential Elements of the National Diffusion Network Reading Recovery Model

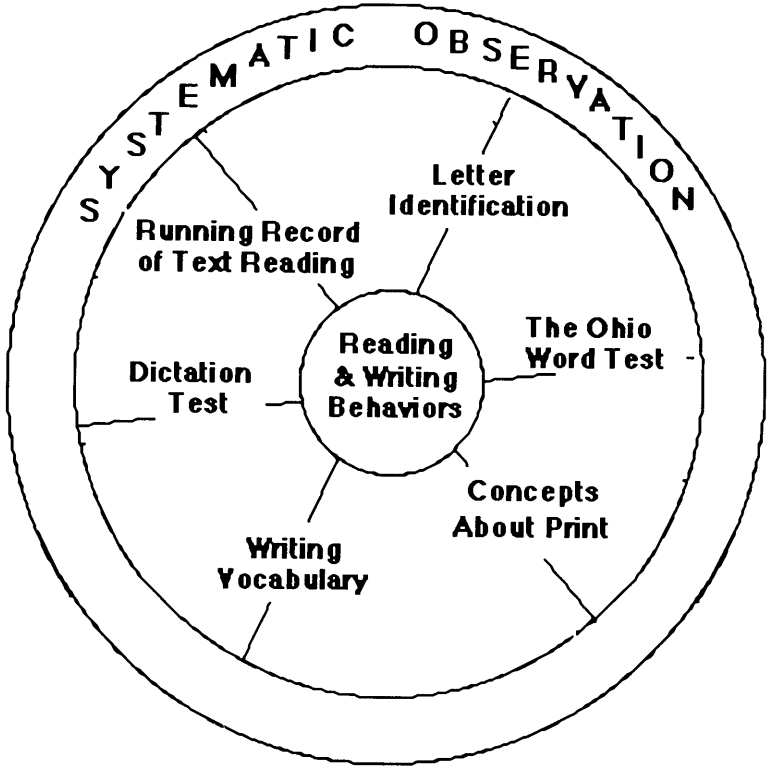

Figure 1 illustrates the components of this survey. It also emphasizes that, regardless of the technique, systematic observation by the teacher/examiner is essential. Although the Diagnostic Survey may appear overwhelming at the onset, Clay believes that each measure is necessary because each provides yet another view of the child's reading and writing behaviors. As much information as possible needs to be used when assessing reading and writing behaviors (Clay, 1985).

The use of several different measures to assess reading has been proposed for at least four decades (Robinson, 1946; Bond and Tinker, 1957; Strang, 1969; Harris and Sipay, 1975; Farr and Carey, 1986; Glazer and Searfoss, 1988). Farr and

Carey (1986) emphasize that a variety of measures, both formal and informal, must be used when assessing reading behaviors because each measure assesses a different set of reading behaviors. Glazer and Searfoss (1988) echo and extend Farr and Carey's view by noting that the effective reading teacher needs to use a variety of measures *in several settings.*

Hypothesis 3: Reading Recovery is successful because diagnosis is on-going and is part of the instructional process. Each activity completed during a Reading Recovery tutoring session is a "diagnosis" in that the teacher watches how the child responds, taking note of specific strategies the child does and does not use. The results of these observations are systematically recorded and used when planning successive lessons. For example, if the child is relying more on graphophonic cues to the expense of semantic cues, the teacher may plan to ask questions that will help the child to develop a sense for using semantic cues (e.g., "What word makes sense here?").

The importance of observing children as they perform reading and writing behaviors is advocated by other reading educators. Goodman (1978) states that teachers need to be "kid watchers," constantly watching what children do, and that they need to respond to their actions in a manner that will help children become independent learners. Hammill (1987) notes that continual observation is of value because it can confirm or disconfirm statements or hypotheses made about a given student. McCormick (1987) adds that on-going evaluation is one characteristic of remedial reading programs.

Hypothesis 4: Reading Recovery is successful because it provides children with more time to learn necessary reading strategies. Once the Diagnostic Survey has been administered, a program is designed for each child. The child receives one-to-one instruction with a Reading Recovery teacher for thirty minutes every day. These children receive more instruction in reading than their classmates, giving them the opportunity to accelerate *faster* so that they can catch up to children making average progress in their classrooms.

The findings of other researchers lend support to this aspect of Reading Recovery. Kiesling (1978) found that the amount of instructional time was positively related to reading gains and that this relationship was strongest for students reading below or at grade level. Berliner's findings (1981) led him to conclude that student achievement was directly related to the amount of time students were engaged with tasks in which they were successful.

Hypothesis 5: Reading Recovery is successful because there is an emphasis on having the student read connected or "real" text. Clay notes that if the child's reading is to improve, time devoted to reading instruction should be spent on reading related activities using written language rather than on activities such as doing puzzles and writing numbers. Says Clay, "...it is foolish to prepare for reading by painting with large brushes, doing jig-saw puzzles, arranging large building blocks, or writing numbers. Preparation for reading can be done more directly with written language" (Clay, 1985, p. 13). Thus, using text is the emphasis of each tutoring session; the child reads at least two books every session. Many of the books are read more than once.

This use of connected text for teaching reading is empirically supported. Harris and Serwer (1966) found that an important variable positively correlated with reading success was the amount of time spent reading connected text, while Stallings and Kaskowitz (1974) found that higher reading gains were positively related to time spent engaged in reading in first and third grade classrooms.

Findings of studies designed to investigate the importance of using visual and auditory discrimination activities related to written language also support Clay's view. Barrett's review of research (1965) led him to conclude that matching pictures and shapes for prereading was virtually useless in predicting reading success in first and second grade. Harris and Sipay's conclusions supported Barrett's. As a result of their literature review they concluded "...visual discrimination practice using letters and words is more transferable to reading than discrimination of geometric forms. Auditory discrimination of words and

phonemes is more transferable to reading than discrimination of nonverbal sounds" (Harris and Sipay, 1975, p. 50).

The results of studies designed to investigate the value of using rereading lend support for having the child read a book more than once. Herman (1985) found that rereading significantly increased comprehension as did O'Shea, Sindelar and O'Shea (1985). Dowhower's results (1987) echoed these findings.

Hypothesis 6: Reading Recovery is successful because all modalities are emphasized. An examination of the word study teaching techniques reveals Clay's indirect suggestion that a variety of modalities must be used when working with individual children. That is, children's learning styles vary; consequently, their programs must be designed with this in mind. Thus, when teaching sounds or words, teaching suggestions include having the child trace, point, write in the air, and/or use materials such as sandpaper to incorporate use of the tactile sense (Clay, 1985).

The use of several modalities has been advocated at least since 1921 when Fernald and Keller outlined their method for teaching nonreaders. Essentially, they emphasized using a multisensory approach (i.e., visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile) with much attention given to tracing and writing words. Fernald (1943) continued to refine and advocate this approach. Harris and Sipay (1975) presented the findings of several studies that supported using this approach. LaShell (1986) designed a study to match instruction with students' learning styles. The majority of the students were identified as having a tactile/kinesthetic/global learning style. Therefore, a multisensory approach was used to teach reading. She reported significant gains within a ten month period.

Hypothesis 7: Reading Recovery is successful because reading and writing are emphasized. Clay believes that writing and reading are connected; both processes help the child learn about print. In her words, "...learning to write letters, words, and sentences actually helps the child to make the visual discrimination of detail in print that he will use

in his reading" (Clay, 1985, p. 54). Therefore, the child writes at least one sentence each session and practices writing specific words.

A large body of recent research lends support to this part of Reading Recovery. Blackburn (1984) offers a construct that illustrates possible connections between the two processes as does Durkin (1989). Sternglass (1987) provides an overview of three conceptual models of reading/writing relationships. Stotsky (1983) provides a synthesis of several studies designed tc show reading/writing relationships.

Hypothesis 8: Reading Recovery is successful because the child is taught to be aware of the strategies used in reading. The overall goal of Reading Recovery is to have children become dependent on themselves. To accomplish this goal, each child is taught to use specific strategies and the ability to know when to use a given strategy. To learn to rely on themselves, the teacher poses questions to the children such as, "Why did you say _____?" "How do you know?" In other words, the teachers helped the child develop the *why* and the *how* of reading.

Findings of studies designed to explore metacognition, knowing about a cognitive process and exercising control over specific cognitive actions, offer support for this component of Reading Recovery. Reciprocal teaching (Palincsar and Brown, 1984) was used successfully to teach students four strategies deemed essential for comprehension. Paris (1983) designed and implemented a curriculum entitled Informed Strategies for Learning (ISL). Findings of his studies indicated that children in the ISL program made significant gains on comprehension tasks and on reading awareness when compared to control groups. After a review of these and other metacognition programs, Opitz (1989) noted that the value of metacognition programs was seen as enabling readers to understand and have control over their own learning.

Hypothesis 9: Reading Recovery is successful because the teacher employs several strategies identified as being characteristic of effective teachers.

Reading Recovery teachers are encouraged to model appropriate behaviors to students and to provide feedback (Clay, 1985). For example, teachers model how they want the children to point under the words as they read. The teachers also provide immediate feedback to the students so they know how well a task has been completed.

Modeling and feedback are but two teaching strategies supported by current research as being effective. Duffy, Roehler and Herrmann (1988) describe a specific modeling process that can be used to help children labeled as "poor readers." McCormick (1987) notes that feedback to students is positively related to student learning.

Conclusion

I have presented nine hypotheses that might be used to explain the apparent success of Reading Recovery. To review, Reading Recovery appears to be successful because: 1) it is based on a theory of reading that emphasizes meaning; 2) reading and writing behaviors are thoroughly diagnosed; 3) diagnosis is on-going and is part of instruction; 4) it provides children with more time to learn necessary reading strategies; 5) there is an emphasis on having the student read connected text; 6) all modalities are emphasized; 7) reading and writing are emphasized; 8) the child is taught to be aware of the strategies used in reading; and 9) the teacher uses strategies identified as being characteristic of effective teachers.

Perhaps these hypotheses are inclusive and provide the explanation for the apparent success of Reading Recovery. Further research would lead us to more than hypothesizing as I have done here. Research designed to discover *why* this program appears to work is necessary for at least two reasons. First, it would advance our knowledge of Reading Recovery and the children for whom it is designed. That is, it would help us to identify and retain the essential elements. Perhaps each variable is as important as the others and all must exist in concert in order for the program to be a success. On the other hand, it may be that a large percentage of the results stem from activities that consume ten percent of the time. This research might

also reveal missing components that, once added, would help children even more.

A second reason that further research is needed is that awareness of *why* this program works would empower teachers; it would allow them to control the program rather than being controlled by it. While Reading Recovery teachers are permitted to make decisions about which books to use with individual children and, to some degree, specific teaching techniques, they are controlled by the framework of the program; every lesson includes the five components I listed earlier. Perhaps further research designed to determine the effectiveness of the framework would reveal that the framework could and should be adjusted to individual needs to accelerate reading growth. Regardless of the apparent success of Reading Recovery, much research remains. We appear to know that most children enrolled in Reading Recovery make substantial gains but we do not, I believe, know *why*. Clearly, our search must continue until we know not only *what* appears to work, but *why*.

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READING RECOVERY ANECDOTE

Adam is a very quiet student. Early in the year he relied on his friends to read while he sat back and listened. In this way he could memorize the text. After about twelve Reading Recovery lessons, his class was taking turns putting on a play from their reading book. Adam came to a word he was having trouble with. A friend who was used to helping him started to tell him the word. Adam looked at his friend and said, "I'm a good reader. I can figure it out myself." He then did figure out the word and went on to do a very good job in reading his part.

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