

READING RECOVERY FOR YOUNG STRUGGLING READERS

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A significant minority of young students enters Year 1, following one initial year of instruction in school, with very poorly developed reading and related skills.

PROPOSED SOLUTION/ INTERVENTION

Reading Recovery aims to identify and 'recover' these young struggling readers by providing specific one-to-one literacy instruction from a specially trained Reading Recovery teacher for half an hour each day for up to 20 weeks. The Reading Recovery teacher follows a specified series of literacy activities in each lesson. The aim of the program is to return the recovered readers to their regular class functioning at the average literacy level for the class.

THE THEORETICAL RATIONALE – HOW DOES IT WORK?

Reading Recovery is based on a constructivist model of reading instruction developed by Dame Professor Marie Clay in the 1970s that is consonant with many of the tenets of 'whole language' philosophy. Explicit phonics instruction is eschewed in favour of an implicit approach in which children learn about letters and sounds as they occur in texts and in their writing. Teachers also encourage students to focus on non-alphabetic cues to the meaning of written text such as guessing on the basis of contextual or pictorial referents.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY? WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE FOR ITS EFFICACY?

Most of the research on Reading Recovery has been completed by RR enthusiasts who have not employed rigorous experimental procedures but who have favoured 'one shot' studies in which efficacy was

usually determined by assessing students on Clay's own battery of literacy measures, including her preference for 'running records' of reading performance. Research by independent researchers who have employed control group designs and who have used standardized assessment instruments have typically found that RR students make statistically significant gains but that these gains are more modest, are typically made by students with less severe reading difficulties, and that this occurs at considerable financial cost. The most methodologically sophisticated study completed in Australia found that RR was probably effective for only one in three children who entered the program, since one child in three did not benefit appreciably while another child would have been recovered without the intervention.

CONCLUSIONS

Reading Recovery appears to be mildly effective but possibly not as effective as it should be given its high cost and limited utility.

ALTERNATIVE OPTION

Interventions for at-risk Year 1 readers have been suggested and trialed using more explicit teaching of phonemic awareness and phonic decoding and in small groups of about three children instead of one-to-one instruction.

THE MUSEC VERDICT: PROBABLY ONLY MILDLY EFFECTIVE

Key references may be found at:
www.aces.mq.edu.au/musec_co_brief.asp

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