Selection of Children for Reading Recovery: Challenges and Responses

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Whether just establishing Reading Recovery in a school, expanding the program toward full coverage, or maintaining a mature implementation, a range of questions commonly arises around the selection of children for Reading Recovery service. These are among the most commonly asked questions:

- Why don’t we serve more children by selecting the higher end of the lowest-achieving group? Won’t they make faster progress than the children with the very lowest scores who will end up in special education anyway?
- Should we serve children who have been or soon will be identified as learning disabled?
- Why not exclude children with attendance problems and save the space for children we know will come to school?
- Because there are so many students who need to be served, shouldn’t we wait until the English language learners become proficient in English first?

In addition, schools are often faced with a variety of other challenging situations when deciding which children should be selected for Reading Recovery. As a result, the following questions are also often raised when faced with student selection decisions:

- Shouldn’t we serve only the children whose parents are willing to provide home support?
- Why don’t we give children an extra year of kindergarten or first grade so they can mature and learn to respond to classroom instruction?
- Do we have to select children who did not attend kindergarten?
- Wouldn’t it be better to save Reading Recovery for students who are likely to establish residency in our community?
- Because they are disruptive, shouldn’t we exclude students with behavioral or emotional problems?
- Should we select children with physical, mental, or sensory challenges?

Regardless of the questions an individual school faces, research clearly indicates that if struggling readers and writers are left without individual specialist help even for a few weeks it will be much harder to unlearn inefficient ways of responding to print (Juel, 1988; Pianta, 1990; Slavin, Karweit, & Wasik, 1992). In addition, such children will find it difficult to respond to classroom literacy instruction and will fall even further behind their average performing peers. Therefore, responding appropriately to the above questions is vital for administrators, classroom teachers, and Reading Recovery professionals. If some children are excluded from service they will never receive the intervention, or they will have their Reading Recovery lessons unnecessarily delayed until later in first grade. Equally, for school teams who select children based on careful responses to the above questions, a clear opportunity exists to spoil the predictions of failure for these lowest achievers.

In this paper we (a) present the rationale for the selection of the lowest achievers for Reading Recovery service, (b) respond to the above questions concerning the challenges to the inclusion of certain children, (c) discuss the student selection process and the role of the school team, and (d) propose four core principles schools need to embrace to maximize the chances that the children who need Reading Recovery will receive the intervention. We add an important caveat to any discussion of issues around student selection.

Questions about excluding particular children most often arise when a school does not have an adequate number of Reading Recovery teachers to serve all students who need the intervention. With full implementa-
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Rationale for Selection of the Lowest-Achieving Children for Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is designed to serve the lowest-achieving first-grade children without exception. Achievement is measured by scores on the six tasks of An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 2002) and no eligible child should be excluded for any reason: “Exceptions are not made for children of lower intelligence, for second-language children, for children with poor motor coordination, for children who seem immature, for children who score poorly on readiness measures, or for children who have been categorized by someone else as learning disabled” (Clay, 1991a, p. 60; Standards and Guidelines of Reading Recovery in the United States, 2004, p. 8). The list has since expanded to add that no child be excluded for any of the following reasons: high patterns of mobility; behavioral or emotional problems; absence of home support; or minor visual, hearing, or speech problems (New Zealand Reading Recovery, 2004).

The primary rationale for selecting the lowest-performing children first for participation in Reading Recovery is to raise the literacy achievement of these children so that they can benefit from classroom instruction and build a solid foundation for later literacy learning (Clay, 2001; Rowe, 1995). By moving children in the lower end of the achievement distribution into the average performance range, Reading Recovery also reduces the subsequent costs of these children to the education system (Lyons & Beaver, 1995). For the few children who do not reach average performance levels as a result of participation in the intervention, Reading Recovery serves as a prereferral intervention for children who need longer term specialist help (Clay, 2005; Jones, Johnson, Schwartz, & Zalud, 2005; Schmitt, Askew, Fountas, Lyons, & Pinnell, 2005).

In particular, Reading Recovery must not be withheld from the lowest-achieving eligible children as these are the least likely to respond to and benefit from classroom instruction. Clay clearly asserts that those who only want to serve the children who might seem to benefit the most are not using the full power of the program. According to Clay:

If this step is taken the program becomes one aimed at improving performance but not aimed at the prevention of reading and writing difficulties in the education system. It would be a case of selecting...
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children into the program who were most likely to succeed without it, and excluding from the program the children least likely to succeed without it. It becomes a program based on discrimination against a group of children compared with a program based on equity principles. (1993, p. 82)

An additional rationale for selecting the lowest-achieving eligible children for service first is that it is not possible to reliably determine who will and who will not meet the rigorous criteria for completion of Reading Recovery on the basis of entry scores. A study by Clay and Tuck found that individual children who had the lowest scores on some of the entry measures became part of the discontinued group (children who met the rigorous criteria for completion of Reading Recovery and returned to the classroom) while there were examples of children who became part of the recommended group (participated in Reading Recovery for the maximum 20 weeks and were recommended for longer term support) even though they scored relatively well on some of the entrance tests. They concluded it would be unwise to exclude individual children on the basis of entry scores (Clay & Tuck, 1991).

While these rationales for selection of the lowest achievers for Reading Recovery service are clear, we also must consider detailed rationales for arguments that arise to exclude particular groups of children, because such arguments are invalid. In the next section we present recommendations for each of the student designations schools commonly consider an issue when selecting children for Reading Recovery.

Serving Children Labeled Learning Disabled

For nearly 40 years, controversy has surrounded the term learning disability (LD). Early theories and definitions assumed an organic or neurological basis for learning disabilities although researchers have been unable to find differences among LD students, low achievers, and normal peers on tests of psychological functioning (Stanovich, 1988). Clay (1987) has argued that the majority of children labeled learning disabled have in fact learned to be learning disabled through ineffective classroom teaching, inappropriate instructional feedback, or isolated and decontextualized skills instruction. As a result of the learning disabilities label, they may have been socialized to become passive learners who do not attend to or engage with whole class or small group instruction.

Other definitions of LD point to a 2-year discrepancy between academic achievement and potential as measured by intelligence tests, or a difference of at least 2 years between the child’s chronological age and reading age (Clay, 1987; Lyons, 2003).

By federal mandate since 1975, schools are required to provide educational interventions to students labeled LD. Because ample federal and state funds are available to schools that identify students as LD, some schools administer a battery of several assessments over a period of time until the 2-year gap can be established. Consequently many students do not receive support for literacy until long after their difficulties first appeared in first grade.

Research supports the need for early intervention before identifying children as learning disabled. According to Vellutino et al., “to render a diagnosis of specific reading disability in the absence of early and labor-intensive remedial reading that has been tailored to the child’s individual needs is, at best, a hazardous and dubious enterprise, given all the stereotypes attached to this diagnosis” (Vellutino et al., 1996, p. 632). Research also shows that with Reading Recovery, a 2-year achievement gap is not allowed to develop in the first place (Center, Wheldall, Freeman, Outhred & McNaught, 1995; Iversen & Tunmer, 1993; Schwartz, 2005). Instead, many children who would be predicted to develop these gaps are helped to increase their reading achievement level to the average of their age group. Given this evidence there is no reason to delay Reading Recovery service for these children. As Clay states, “A wide acceptance of a large category of learning-disabled children is no longer tolerable in the face of successful early interventions” (Clay, 1991b, p. 344).

Therefore schools should refrain from identifying children as learning disabled until they have had an opportunity for a full Reading Recovery intervention. Schools can meet these students’ literacy learning needs early while the potential for learning success is greatest, not later after they have experienced failure and feelings of low self-efficacy related to literacy. (See Reading Teachers Play Key Role in Successful Response to Intervention Approaches, www.reading.org.) In the case of students who have already been identified LD, the school should consider offering Reading Recovery as the child’s reading intervention if the child meets the criteria for Reading Recovery selection.
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The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 for which federal guidelines are currently being written has the potential to change the way schools view struggling literacy learners. Under the IDEIA, school districts will be able to use funds to assist in the identification and assessment of students and will no longer need to label students first before providing services. Instead of an incentive to wait to serve these children until they fail, the guidelines of the IDEIA will encourage schools to implement early interventions such as Reading Recovery with a proven record of success (Lose, 2005).

Serving Children With High Patterns of Absence
Among the factors that place children at risk for low reading achievement are school attendance and time on task. Therefore, the lowest-achieving literacy learners who also have a history of poor school attendance are doubly at risk of failure. Sometimes educators have argued that preference for Reading Recovery services should be given to regular school attendees over those who are frequently absent, but such a practice would unfairly prejudice the poor attendee. Young children do not have control over their school attendance and eligible children should not be excluded from Reading Recovery because of poor attendance.

In the case of a child with a previous history of poor attendance who is selected for participation in Reading Recovery, teachers and administrators are encouraged to use a wide range of strategies to promote a higher level of attendance. These strategies include:

- Attempt to arrange attendance for the child. For example, a volunteer grandparent or retiree may be interested in transporting the child to ensure that he is able to receive Reading Recovery lessons and participate in classroom literacy instruction at school.
- Often the parents of children who do not attend school have had negative school experiences themselves and may not feel comfortable interacting with school personnel. The school needs to initiate and maintain regular contact with parents to explore the reasons for lack of attendance and to explain why it is important for their child to attend school.
- A special problem may exist in the family (e.g., a child taking care of younger siblings) that prevents the child from attending school. The school social worker might look at ways to get the child to school at least for his Reading Recovery lesson until school attendance becomes habituated. The school nurse might be asked to make home contact. Often parents will respond positively to a person in the medical profession, viewed as a member of a helping profession, versus a social worker or school administrator who may be seen as adversarial authority figures.

Whatever strategies are used, no child need be excluded from Reading Recovery services because of a history of poor school attendance. Rather the selection of the child for participation in Reading Recovery should be considered the beginning of a renewed effort to promote increased school attendance on the part of the child and thus increase his chances of success in literacy. Anecdotal evidence from various sites has illustrated how Reading Recovery service has improved the attendance of once chronically absent children.

Serving English Learners and Children With Low Language Skills
Regardless of their native language, children who are the lowest achievers in the classroom are eligible for Reading Recovery in English if they are receiving classroom literacy
instruction in English and if they can understand the directions to the six assessment tasks of An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 2002). However, while Clay has stated emphatically that the exclusion of children who are learning English as a second language has never been the practice wherever Reading Recovery operates, she also acknowledges, “it is not widely understood that RR has no problem with the selection of ESOL children as suitable for the intervention” (Clay, 2001, p. 278). She further clarifies that the only reason to delay entry of English learners to Reading Recovery is the child’s inability to understand the teacher’s directions when administering the tasks of the Observation Survey. As Clay advises

However, entry to RR may be delayed a few months if a child is unable to understand what he or she is being asked to do when given the tasks of the Observation Survey. As long as the child knows enough language to be able to engage with the tasks it can be predicted that his or her literacy achievement will be helped by RR’s approach in spite of low or zero entry scores. (Clay, 2001, p. 279)

In addition, evidence documenting the positive impact of Reading Recovery on the literacy learning of English learners (EL) has created an increasing awareness among Reading Recovery professionals of the value of serving these children. Regardless of their proficiency level, the best way to offer oral language support to children who are not native speakers of English or children who have some pronounced lag in language acquisition is to provide extensive opportunities for conversation between the child and a competent adult speaker of English. In addition, arranging opportunities for all English learners—even those who are placed in language immersion programs—to interact and

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Therefore, Reading Recovery school teams must ensure that English learners are not excluded from service in Reading Recovery. If the English learner is able to follow the directions, the framework of the 30–minute Reading Recovery lesson provides rich opportunities for conversational exchanges between teacher and child which will lead to an expansion of the child’s linguistic competencies. However, if during assessment children indicate they do not understand the tasks, the team should wait for a brief period of time while the child is provided with ample support for language learning in a rich language program. The progress of these children needs to be continuously monitored and a subsequent determination made whether to reassess them for participation in Reading Recovery. (See A Principal’s Guide to Reading Recovery, 2002, p. 29.)

Serving Children Without Home Support
Reading Recovery works with any classroom literacy program. It relies upon teacher expertise and does not require home support for children to be successful in the intervention. Home support can, however, provide some of the additional practice for reading and writing lesson activities. For example, one recommendation is that a parent or caregiver assist the child at home with the reassembly of the cut-up story from that day’s Reading Recovery lesson and listen to the child reread two or three
familiar stories. While this form of additional home support is very valuable to the child's learning, it can also be provided by an adult or an upper grades student volunteer before, during, or after school either at the school or at an after school care program. Regardless of the source of this support Reading Recovery need never be denied to a child who is unlikely to receive home support for whatever reason.

**Serving Retained Children**

Retention in grade and other versions of non-promotion—often referred to as transition, booster, or enrichment classrooms—function as a form of early intervention. However, research does not support the effectiveness of retention (Shepard & Smith, 1990). Retention can result in low self-esteem and later school problems for the child. In addition, retention is costly to the school: By keeping a child in the system 1 year longer it adds a full year of educational expense to the district's budget (Assad & Condon, 1996; Dyer & Binkney, 1995; Gómez-Bellengé, 2002). Moreover, a full year of the child's life has been spent in instruction that did not work the first time it was tried. In contrast, Reading Recovery has been shown to be a very effective intervention and is much less costly. In particular, Reading Recovery requires only an average of 30–45 hours of the child's time as opposed to spending a year's retention in grade (Gómez-Bellengé, Rodgers, & Schulz, 2005). Therefore recommendations for retention should rarely be made and Reading Recovery should be chosen as the alternative.

In a case where a child has been previously retained this need not be used as a reason to exclude a child from Reading Recovery service unless non-retained children are waiting to be served. In the case where two children both qualify for Reading Recovery services the child who has not yet received an early intervention—the non-retained child—ought to be selected first for service. If a school has the advantage of full implementation of Reading Recovery no restriction need be put on serving previously retained children.

In summary, schools need to allocate resources for the early prevention of literacy failure with Reading Recovery rather than adding a year of repeated classroom instruction that comes at a higher cost and which has been shown to be ineffective.

**Serving Immature or Developmentally-Delayed Children**

Sometimes arguments are made that certain children may not be ready yet for literacy learning and that educators need to wait before they start exposing them to literacy activities. Such arguments are informed by a particular interpretation of developmental learning that understands development in terms of maturation and readiness. According to this interpretation the timetable and direction of a child's development is biologically fixed and teachers are asked not to tamper with the child's naturally unfolding ability to learn (McGill-Franzen, 1992; Bodrova & Leong, 1996, pp. 12–13).

Contrary to the unfolding flower metaphor, Reading Recovery professionals embrace a Vygotskian concept of development. This view emphasizes the interaction between instruction and development and holds that appropriate, scaffolded instruction moves ahead of development and promotes the acquisition of more advanced performance levels. Teachers provide a stimulating, literacy-rich environment for all children and then support each individual child's learning through instruction appropriate to each child's needs.

The scaffold metaphor of developmental learning influences the selection of children for Reading Recovery service. It implies that first graders are at different points of an emerging literacy process and therefore the lowest among them should be assisted by a well-trained teacher to reach the outcome of literacy learning: “The goal is to help children move from where they are to somewhere else by empowering them to do what they can do and helping them engage in activities through which they can learn more” (Clay, 1998, p. 87). This view is consistent with current research in early literacy practices (IRA & NAEYC, 1998).

If teachers do not intervene early to help children who are most in need of support in their literacy learning, they prevent children from making accelerated progress to meet grade expectations. As Clay states

To relax and wait for 'matura-
tion' when it is experience that is lacking would appear to be deliberately depriving the child of opportunities to learn. To fail to observe the child's early reading progress is blocked either by inadequate prior learning or by current confusion, and not provide the required complementary activities, must be poor teaching. (Clay, 1991b, p. 22)
Serving Children Who Did Not Attend Kindergarten
Reading Recovery is designed for children who have had at least 1 year of school. In the United States, that year is kindergarten. However, some U.S. states do not require kindergarten attendance. Regardless, schools need not deny Reading Recovery services to the child who did not attend kindergarten or who attended only sporadically. In effect this would be punishing the child for something over which he has no control. Instead schools need to include those children in the initial screening, assessment, and selection process for Reading Recovery. The key is not further jeopardize literacy learning for children who did not attend kindergarten if they need the Reading Recovery intervention.

Serving Children With High Patterns of Mobility
Reading Recovery serves children with high patterns of mobility including the children of migrant workers and children who are semi-homeless, who live in shelters, or who are temporarily displaced from their home residence. Reading Recovery also serves the children of incarcerated parents and children who move frequently because their family's supplemental assistance or social services support has expired. Like the child with frequent absences, the child with high patterns of mobility does not have control over his life circumstances.

Every effort needs to be made to provide Reading Recovery service to the child with high patterns of mobility. For example, with assistance from social services personnel the school can make arrangements with the parent, caregiver, guardian, or host family for permanent residency for the child during the time he is served by Reading Recovery. This will increase the likelihood of regular school attendance and access to Reading Recovery lessons. During a period of interrupted residency the school can also arrange to resume the child's Reading Recovery lessons and double up on lessons as needed. Finally, the school can arrange for additional familiar reading opportunities during school hours in the absence of practice time at home. The key issue for the school is to support the child in multiple ways so as not to further jeopardize access to a much-needed intervention that will be available to the child only during 1 year of a possible 13 years of public schooling.

Serving Children With Lower Intelligence
Intelligence test scores are generally not available when children are being considered for Reading Recovery. However, in the rare instances when IQ scores are available to educators, we recommend they not be used to exclude children from Reading Recovery service. As Stanovich has argued the concept of intelligence has been so controversial that most developmental and educational psychologists have given up the belief that IQ test scores measure potential (Stanovich, 1991). As a result most researchers have declared suspect any research that uses IQ tests as indicators of reading and writing potential.

While it is possible that a child with significantly low measured intelligence may be served by Reading Recovery, schools are advised to provide the most appropriate intervention that will best meet each child's immediate and long-term educational needs. For the child with extreme mental challenges, the optimum intervention will be a program staffed by a special educator.

Serving Children With Behavioral or Emotional Problems
Reading Recovery serves children who experience behavioral or emotional problems or who have been labeled behavior disordered (BD) or emotionally handicapped (EH). Children identified BD or EH may appear inattentive, disinterested or disruptive, and may have pronounced and idiosyncratic responses to learning tasks too difficult for them. Other children labeled BD or
Experience in Reading Recovery suggests children should not be excluded for services in Reading Recovery because of minor visual, hearing, or speech problems. Reading Recovery teachers work closely with other specialists in the school to find ways to better accommodate children with certain physical conditions. Adjustments to the size of print or to the positioning of materials on the workspace have been found to work well with children with visual problems.

In the cases of children with severe physical handicaps the school team should consider carefully the best way to proceed because the children's condition may require extra resources and/or considerable modifications in the delivery of the lessons. Clay has advised:

Children who are profoundly deaf, or have cerebral palsy, or other severe handicaps affecting eyesight, hand movements or language performance, could probably benefit from Reading Recovery instruction but they would be ideally served by a teacher with special training for the child's condition and, additionally, trained in Reading Recovery. (New Zealand Reading Recovery, 2004)

Serving Children With Poor Motor Coordination

Children who have been identified as having motor coordination difficulty and who may also need occupational or physical therapy need not be excluded from Reading Recovery. Good readers have developed controlled eye movements for scanning print and can generate and write words quickly. In contrast poor readers may experience difficulty pointing to and matching one word at a time while reading, forming letters in writing, and coordinating the hearing and recording of sounds in words in writing (Lyons, 2003).

Therefore Reading Recovery teachers can address the needs of the child with motor coordination difficulties. The teacher may take the child's hand and point his finger to guide directional movement across text, use Elkonin boxes to help him coordinate the task of hearing and recording sounds in words in writing, or guide his hand to form a letter while providing verbal directions to sequence the action. Over time the child learns to focus his attention and achieve greater control over the motor
tasks associated with reading and writing. In addition to the support the child receives from the Reading Recovery teacher, the school also needs to enlist the support of physical and occupational therapists and arrange for the teaching staff to coordinate interventions and treatment to benefit the child.

In summary, no good reasons exist to exclude any eligible child from Reading Recovery service for reasons of intellect, behavior, oral language proficiency, home support, school attendance, or sensory and physical abilities. To do so goes against evidence that has shown benefits to these children. If a school makes a decision to exclude an eligible child, predictable negative consequences will follow for that child. Many of the types of questions that arise around student selection can be effectively addressed when schools have sufficient teacher time to serve every child who needs the intervention. However, we acknowledge that not every eligible child can be chosen on the first day of school. In the next section we present the process by which the school can make informed decisions about the selection of children for Reading Recovery.

The Reading Recovery School Team and the Student Selection Process

Reading Recovery school teams consist of staff and specialists in the school (the principal, the Reading Recovery teacher(s), the first-grade teacher(s), a kindergarten representative, and other appropriate personnel such as special education representative, school psychologist, reading specialist, etc.). The Reading Recovery teacher leader also plays an important role in the function of the team. Early on she helps the school team set goals and organize itself to address issues related to the school’s Reading Recovery intervention.
When the team is up and running the teacher leader serves as a consultant on an as-needed basis when particular issues arise. The school principal’s active participation in the Reading Recovery school team as the school’s instructional leader is essential to the work of the team as well as to the success of the Reading Recovery implementation.

The Reading Recovery school team is vital to the effective implementation of Reading Recovery in a school system. The role of the team is to oversee the implementation of Reading Recovery in an individual school by discussing selection of children, monitoring the progress of children in Reading Recovery, following up on children after they leave Reading Recovery, examining data and preparing a school report at the end of the year, and overall by providing a forum for professional conversations among the school’s Reading Recovery teachers and the rest of the school staff around the progress of children. (For a more detailed overview of the role and functions of Reading Recovery school teams, see A Principal’s Guide to Reading Recovery, 2002, pp. 24–27.)

Children in need of Reading Recovery service are selected from Grade 1 classrooms containing children who are heterogeneously grouped. Children served by Reading Recovery need a suitable classroom program to extend and support their continued learning. This is best facilitated in a heterogeneous classroom with other average performing readers (Standards and Guidelines of Reading Recovery in the United States, 2004, p. 9). Reading Recovery teachers work with classroom teachers asking them to rank order children according to their current competencies in reading. First-grade classroom teachers do an alternate ranking of the class with the most competent reader entered at the top of the list and the least competent at the end of the list. Then the second most competent child is entered and so on until all children from that class are rank ordered. At the beginning of the year this ranking task may be difficult because teachers are working with limited information. The school’s kindergarten teachers may be consulted to confirm the ranking and look at stanines, as stanines allow comparison of a child’s performance across the tasks of the Observation Survey and how that child’s performance compares to the average scores for the age group: “It is probably a good idea to consider stanine scores first in selecting children for service, but to use raw scores to indicate differences within stanine bands” (Clay, 2001c). New adjusted stanine tables have been created in order to facilitate the selection of Reading Recovery students in the United States. (See Gómez-Bellengé in this issue.) Also the revised procedures for administering leveled text reading passages allow teachers to observe and record children’s early responses to text and thus enable them to make fine distinctions among children with a low repertoire of literacy behaviors (Fried, Briggs, Konstantellou, & Rosser, 2005, p. 4).

Clay has cautioned that we should not do arithmetic with stanines and raw scores: “Observation Survey stanines should not be summed or averaged…when selecting children for placement” (Clay, 2002, p. 121). Indeed, no numerical shortcuts are possible in ranking children. The misguided practice of adding up raw scores or stanine scores to determine which children are the lowest ones is problematic for several reasons: Item numbers are different, each test measures different aspects of literacy, scores and resulting stanines do not take into account children’s partially correct responses, and in some cases a very few more items may result in a significant change in stanine.

Following assessment the team meets to select the lowest-achieving first graders who are to be served first in the school year. The Reading Recovery teachers—and teacher leader where appropriate—examine the children’s records using stanines and raw scores to carefully guide selection decisions. First the teachers...
understanding and professional judgment on each child’s performance. This judgment is informed by not merely looking at the numerical score but in checking the child’s ways of responding in each measure that may not be captured by an individual score. (See Jones, 1993.)

Ideally a school has enough Reading Recovery teachers to serve all the children who need the supplementary help. However, for students with similar scores when the school is only partially implemented, the team has to deliberate carefully to ensure selection of the lowest achievers. If selection decisions need to be made among children with very similar scores then the input of classroom teachers is critical in determining which child is least likely to survive in the classroom environment without the extra help.

Fulfilling the Promise to All Children Who Need Reading Recovery

Unfortunately, complex educational policies and demanding economic circumstances create pressure on many schools to eliminate some children from consideration for Reading Recovery service. Reading Recovery is intended to be an inclusive, not exclusive, intervention that aims to intervene early for the children most challenged by literacy learning in first grade. The ideal of Reading Recovery is full implementation with smoothly operating school teams who support all children’s reading and writing development. Without full implementation some children will be denied an opportunity to take advantage of an intervention that clearly works.

We acknowledge there are many challenges to meeting the literacy learning needs of a diverse student population. Yet specific steps can be taken to ensure that all eligible students experience literacy learning success. When taking these steps we strongly recommend schools be guided by the following core principles:

• Recognize that Reading Recovery works for the lowest-achieving children.
  Research evidence demonstrates that Reading Recovery is an effective intervention that makes a difference to the literacy performance of the lowest-achieving children regardless of intellect, behavior, oral language proficiency, home support, school attendance, or sensory and physical abilities.

• Use Reading Recovery as a prereferral intervention.
  Schools should try out the least restrictive environment whenever possible and provide eligible children with an opportunity to experience early and complete Reading Recovery services. By doing so children’s learning needs can be met early while the potential for learning success is greatest.

• Move toward full implementation of Reading Recovery as soon as possible.
  By working diligently toward a full implementation of Reading Recovery, schools can reduce referrals to longer term, more costly interventions, reserving lengthier interventions only for those students who truly need them. Partial coverage is
problematic as it forces the school’s Reading Recovery team to make decisions to exclude certain children in the sub-groups of low-performing children we have discussed here. With full implementation schools avoid the problem of putting teachers in the uncomfortable position of having to choose which children among those who need a powerful intervention will receive its service. While working toward full implementation, full coverage in one or two classrooms will quickly allow teachers and their students to experience for themselves the benefits of Reading Recovery.

- Embrace shared ownership to ensure a successful Reading Recovery implementation. School teams are one of the most important steps that a school can take to ensure Reading Recovery services for all eligible students. With a smoothly functioning school team, all children benefit from the extra attention their teachers devote to literacy issues and their professional development.

In the past some schools have mistakenly excluded children from the benefits of participation in Reading Recovery. This is unfortunate as Reading Recovery is intended to be inclusive, and evidence clearly indicates its benefits to low-achieving children with diverse causality. In the quest for a literate society Reading Recovery provides a well-documented response to tackling the problem of early literacy difficulties. While the challenges to the smooth implementation of Reading Recovery are real, they can and must be met. The long-term benefits to children, schools, and society are well worth the effort and investment.

References


