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ABSTRACT

After the first year, funding for the Reading Recovery program in the Muscogee County School District in Georgia was to be contingent upon getting results that would document the success of Reading Recovery in the system. The following measures were used for program evaluation: An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 1993); Iowa Tests of Basic Skills; Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests; and a classroom teacher assessment of student progress. On the Gates-MacGinitie reading battery, the Reading Recovery group was superior to the comparison groups, and the differences were statistically significant. On the Iowa Test, the Reading Recovery group has significantly higher scores on four of the six subtests at the end of the year. On the Observation Survey, the Reading Recovery children made significantly higher scores than the comparison children on five of the six subtests. The classroom teachers rated the Reading Recovery children significantly higher than the comparison children in all four academic areas. Results of the evaluation indicated that Reading Recovery significantly affected the academic and social development of the children in the program. (NKA)

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Outcomes of the Muscogee County School District
Reading Recovery Implementation Year, 1997-1998.

by Betsy Harrell

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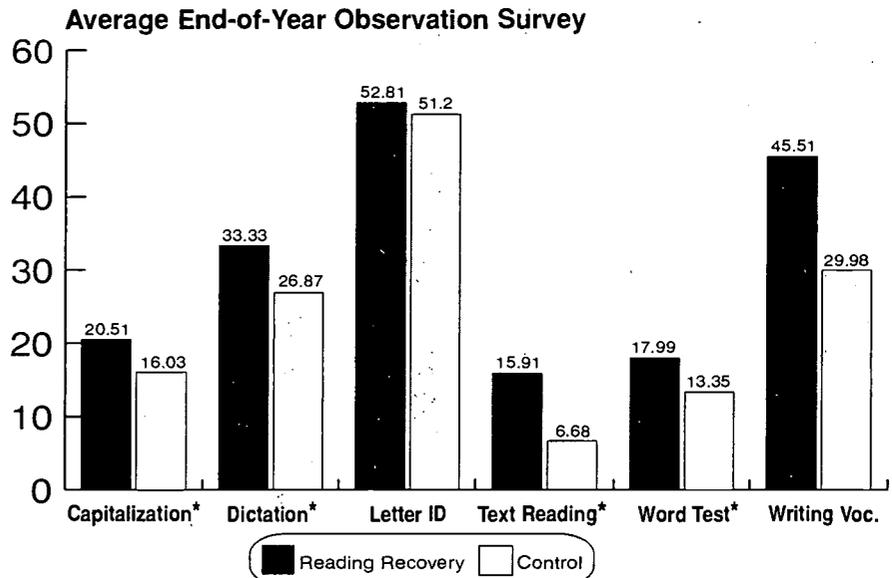
Outcomes of the Muscogee County School District Reading Recovery Implementation Year, 1997-1998

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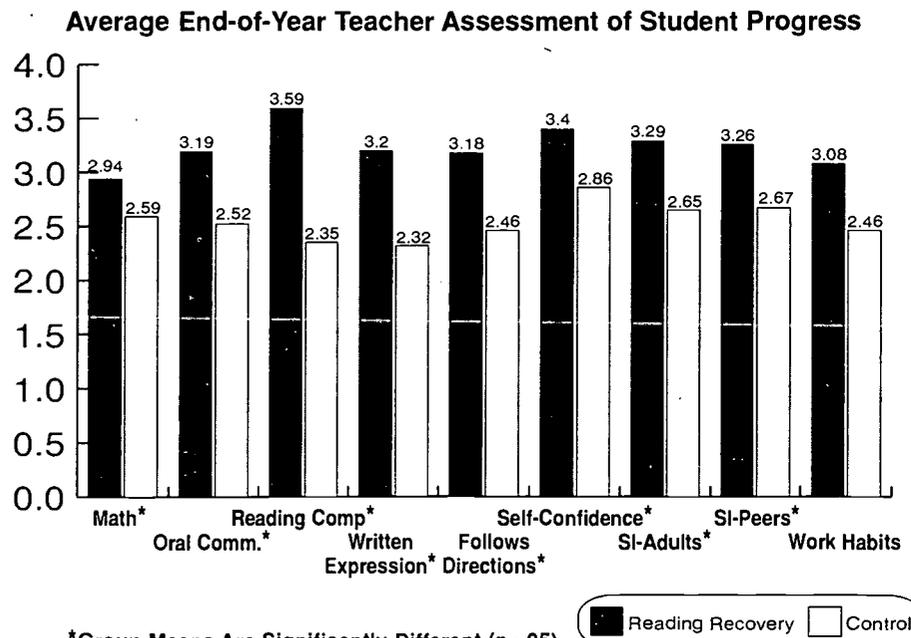
Reading Recovery had a big beginning in the Muscogee County School System in Columbus, Ga. In the first year of implementation, we had 34 teachers in training and a tremendous desire to make this highly acclaimed Intervention become a permanent part of the school system. Our superintendent, Guy Sims, was determined to bring Reading Recovery to our system, and he accomplished this through initial funding from an anonymous private donor who provided \$1.8 million for Reading Recovery in the first year. Funding for the following two years was contingent upon getting results that would document the success of Reading Recovery in the system.

Early in the first year of implementation, the Muscogee County School District Reading Recovery team met with Georgia State University (GSU) Reading Recovery trainers, Clifford Johnson and Sue Duncan, and GSU researchers, Lorene Pilcher and Don Steele, to discuss ways to evaluate the beginning of Reading Recovery in Columbus, Ga. This meeting resulted in the decision to use the following measures for program evaluation: An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 1993), Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests, and a classroom teacher assessment of student progress on academic and social criteria. One purpose of the evaluation was to compare the

Reading Recovery Evaluation for 1997-98 Pilot Year RR Group vs. Control Group



*Group Means Are Significantly Different ($p < .05$)



*Group Means Are Significantly Different ($p < .05$)

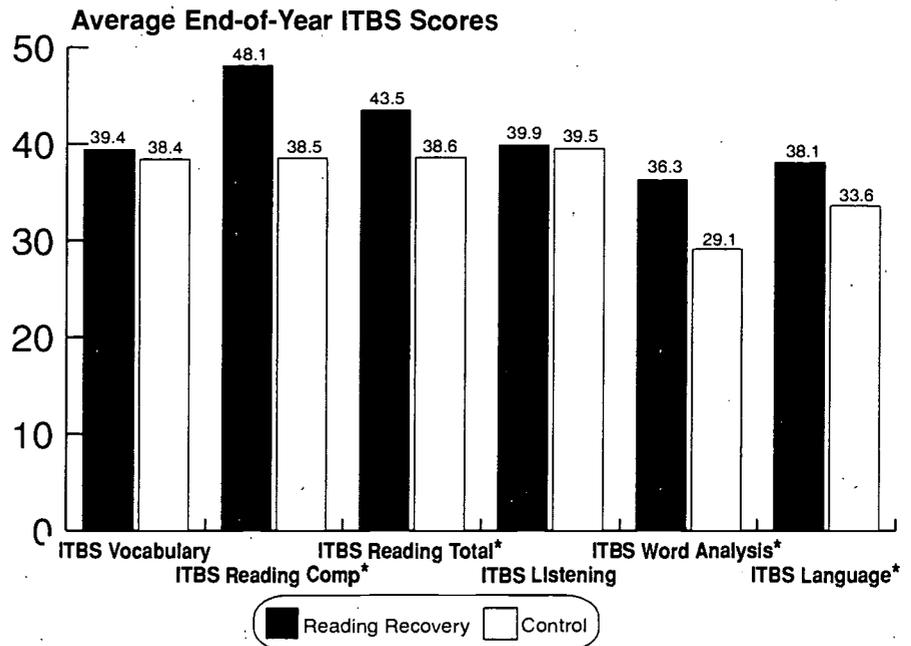
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progress and achievement of children in Reading Recovery with an identical group of children who qualified for Reading Recovery but for whom service was not available due to lack of coverage. A second purpose was to determine whether the two groups differed in the spring of the school year. In each of the 34 Muscogee Elementary schools, one or two classrooms were designated as Reading Recovery classrooms from which children were selected for Reading Recovery. In schools having more than one first grade class, another classroom designated as the non-Reading Recovery classroom provided children for the Comparison group. Reading Recovery teachers in each school tested the children who were in the lowest third of the designated classrooms, and 107 matched pairs of children were identified.

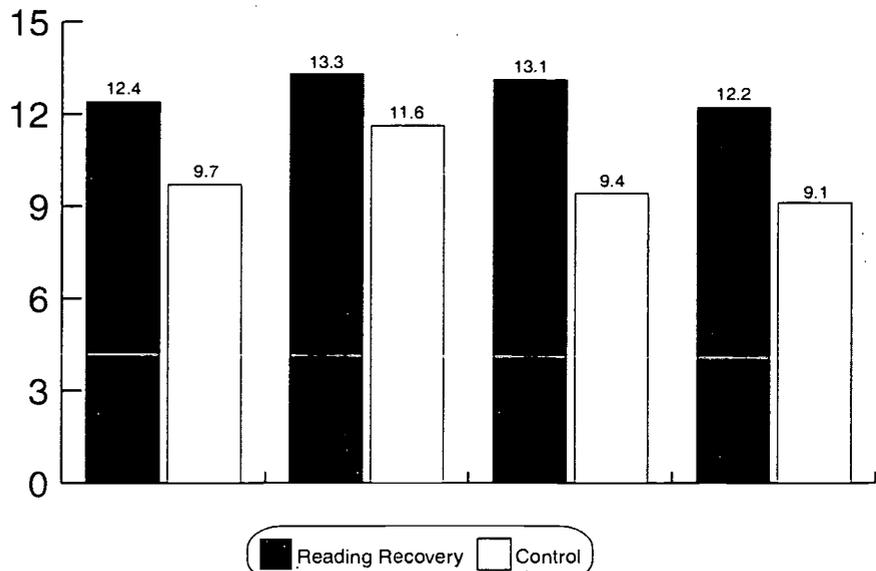
I remember clearly the spring day several months later as I sat surrounded with mounds of test results, knowing that GSU would collect this information within two hours. In my heart I knew what a profound influence Reading Recovery had had on the children served, but, nevertheless, I wondered if the data would confirm our success. I was a newly trained Teacher Leader in my field year, already having survived ordering and disseminating materials and supplies for 34 Reading Recovery teachers, assessment training to 34 new teachers, teaching the training class (and being extremely thankful for the assistance of two teacher leaders from the Atlanta City Schools!), teaching my own children, and completing my first site visit. The reason I mention this very busy time is to explain why I had not been able to explain the assessment results before

Reading Recovery Evaluation for 1997-98 Pilot Year RR Group vs. Control Group



*Group Means Are Significantly Different ($p < .05$)

Average End-of-Year Gates-MacGinire Reading Test Scores



*Group Means Are Significantly Different ($p < .05$)

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they were collected by GSU. So it was that I awaited the news with bated breath...

Later that summer, we received the following summary of the results (and word that our funding would be extended for another year):

An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 1993). The Reading Recovery children made significantly higher scores than the Comparison children on five of the six subtasks. Only on the Letter Identification task was the difference not significant, since this task has a ceiling of 54 and almost all children in both groups could identify all letters at the end of first grade.

Gates-MacGinite Reading Tests (1989). On all subtests of the Gates-MacGinite Reading Battery, the Reading Recovery group was superior to the Comparison group, and the differences were statistically significant.

Iowa Test of Basic Skills (1996). Although the two groups did not differ on any of the ITBS reading and language arts subtests at the beginning of the school year, the Reading Recovery group had significantly higher scores on four of six subtests at the end of the year. On the remaining two subtests, Vocabulary and Listening, the Reading Recovery group had higher scores, but the differences were not significant. These two tests do not directly measure reading ability on continuous text.

Classroom teacher assessment of student progress. The classroom teachers rated the Reading Recovery children significantly higher than the Comparison children in all four academic areas and on all five personal/social characteristics.

The results of the evaluation indicated that Reading Recovery significantly affected the academic and social development of the children in the program. The Reading Recovery children were provided an early intervention/prevention opportunity

which enabled them to have a strong literacy foundation upon which to continue their schooling, and it is highly probable that without this intervention, these children would have gone through school as failing readers and writers (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). There is also a good possibility that because of the impact of Reading Recovery, these children will not experience many of the social problems that struggling readers experience in year after year of failure.

Of course, it is not really children who have failed in the educational system; rather, the system has failed *them*. However, the Muscogee County School System is a system with the determination to meet every child's needs. Throughout our schools, Marie Clay's words can be found on teachers' and administrators' walls, e. g., "If children are apparently unable to learn, we should assume that we have not as yet found the right way to teach them" (Clay, 1991).

We are extremely fortunate to have a superintendent who has always placed children first, a strong administrative team, an anonymous donor who provided the seed money for Reading Recovery, school board members, Reading Recovery teachers, classroom teachers, principals, family members, children, a site coordinator, teacher leaders and many more supporters who have all come together to make Reading Recovery work. We also have a tremendous support system in our



Cliff Johnson (center), GSU Reading Recovery trainer, presented the Muscogee County results at the National Conference. Susan Krysack (left) and Florence Thorton-Reed (right) are teacher leaders in Muscogee County.

trainers at GSU who have facilitated and guided our growth.

We will continue to strive as a system to stop the cycle of failure and replace it with a cycle of success, always keeping in mind that this can only truly happen when every child who needs Reading Recovery has the opportunity to be served. To this end, and as a result of the Reading Recovery's success, the system has increased the number of Reading Recovery teachers and trained another teacher leader in preparation for further expansion in the coming years.

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