The impact of Reading Recovery three years after intervention

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Abstract

Reading Recovery is part of the Every Child a Reader strategy to enable children to make a good start in reading. Reading Recovery is well known to have impressive effects in the shorter term, but less is known about its long-term effectiveness. The present study followed up at the end of Year 4: 120 comparison children, 73 children

Background

One of the key tasks of schooling is to ensure that children become confident readers and writers, able to access the curriculum and to be prepared for the myriad of demands on their literacy skills in adult life. It is now widely accepted that children with reading difficulties should be offered early intervention, and this is supported by the evidence of its short-term effectiveness (e.g. Wasik & Slavin, 1993; Torgesen, 2000; National Reading Panel, 2000). Early intervention offers an opportunity to prevent a widening gap between poor readers and their peers as they move through school (Stanovich, 1986;

We now report on a further follow-up as the children reach the end of Year 4. We have used children's end of Year 4 National Curriculum Assessments to assess the longer-term impact of Reading Recovery on reading, writing and maths. In addition, we have conducted some mini case studies to give some insight into the broader range of issues implicated in the longer-term effectiveness of early literacy intervention.

Method

The design is a long-term evaluation comparing the literacy attainments of children who received Reading Recovery with children of similar literacy levels who did not. Children were assessed at the beginning of Year 1 (September 2005), selected children received Reading Recovery, all children were re-assessed at the end of Year 1 (July 2006), at the end of Year 2 (July 2007), and most recently, at the end of year 4 (June-July 2009). The present study reports on the children in the original study as they completed Year 4 (age 8 to 9 years), three years after the end of the intervention.

The Sample

The London boroughs

The 10 London boroughs selected for the Reading Recovery and comparison samples are among the lowest achieving in England, with very high proportions of children entitled to free school meals. These school contexts have been shown to be among the hardest for raising the achievements of the very lowest groups. In 2005, five London boroughs had Reading Recovery provision in some of their schools. In most cases this was re-activated or extended to enable a half time Reading Recovery teacher to work in selected schools through funding from the Every Child a Reader pilot. The other five London boroughs were selected to form the comparison group because they were similar in population characteristics and KS1 achievement levels. Their involvement was sought because they were to be among Local Authorities (LAs) beginning to implement Reading Recovery in 2006-07 when they would have access to Reading Recovery teacher training.

In the five LAs with Reading Recovery, on average 8.2% of children were achieving **below** the competency of a 7- to 8-year-old (Level 3) at the end of KS2, when they were 11, with a range from 6.6% to 9.5%. The five LAs with no schools with Reading Recovery averaged 8% of children **below** Level 3, with a range of 7.2% to 9.8%. This shows that the authorities were well matched in terms of overall levels of underachievement at the end of primary schooling. Both groups included some schools with much higher numbers achieving below that level. These were the schools that were recruited for the study.

The Schools

Across five London boroughs, 21 infant and primary schools were identified which in 2005-06 had a Reading Recovery teacher providing literacy intervention in Year 1. Across five London boroughs where no schools had any Reading Recovery teaching, 21 schools were nominated by the LA as of most concern for high numbers of children with poor performance in literacy. An earlier report (Burroughs-Lange & Douëtil, 2006)

		Year 2			Year 4 NCAs
		WRAPS	PiE7	NC read	

Page from a Level 1 book

Table 3: Baseline characteristics of sample children re-contacted in Y4, by group

	% Free School Meals	% English Additional Language	% no score BAS wr	% at or below Bk level 1	OS z-score Mean (sd)	WRAPS score Mean (sd)
Comparison children (n=120)	63%	55%	57%	91%	-.030 (.95)	10.6 (5.9)
Reading Recovery children (n=73)	44%	47%	34%	72%	.137 (.88)	11.6 (6.3)
Comparison children in RR schools (n=48)	52%	35%	54%	69%	-.032 (1.25)	12.0 (10.2)
Total (N=241)	54% *	48%	50% **	81% ***	.0 20 (1)	11.2 (7.1)

* p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

At baseline there were significant demographic differences between the three groups of re-contacted children on uptake of free school meals (chi-square=6.84, 2, p<.05), a higher proportion of the comparison group taking free school meals. There were also significant group differences in baseline literacy, with the comparison children on average scoring lower on the BAS word reading test (chi-square=10.01, 2, p<.01) and Book Level (chi-square=10.92, 2, p<.01). However, both these measures are crude at baseline as half or more children do not score. On the more sensitive measures for children at this level, the OS and the WRAPS, there were no significant differences. For the OS, scores were standardised to a mean of 0, so positive scores show higher than average scores, negative scores lower than average scores. Any group differences were controlled for in the 2006 and 2007 analysis of the children's progress, and in the current

study.

The comparison children in the Reading Recovery schools were somewhat weaker than the Reading Recovery group on literacy at baseline, significantly so for the BAS word reading (chi-square=6.38, 1, p<.05).

Table 4: Comparison between traced and untraced children

Sample	N	% Free School Meals	% English Additional Language	% no score BAS wr	% at or below Bk level 1	OS Z score Mean (sd)	WRAPS score Mean (sd)
Comp. traced	120	63%	55%	57.5%	91.5%	-.01 (1)	10.7 (6.0)
Comp. untraced	27	50%	46%	46%	75%	0 (1.1)	13.4 (6.6)

The Reading Recovery children were still doing significantly better in reading (β=.200, p<.001) and writing (β=.184, p<.002) than the other two groups. The differences between the Reading Recovery children and the comparison children in non Reading Recovery schools were the greatest (reading, β=.231, p<.001 and writing, β=.207, p<.001). The Reading Recovery children had reached an average of 3b in reading and 2a in writing, ahead of the comparison children in non Reading Recovery schools by just under half a National Curriculum level in reading and a third of a level in writing. The comparison children in Reading Recovery schools were in the middle. They were doing better than the comparison group in non Reading Recovery schools, though not significantly so. They were not doing as well as children who had received Reading Recovery, but again differences were not statistically significant when assessed using the same multiple regression models. This suggests that there may be some wash-over effect for children in Reading Recovery schools, even though they do not receive the intervention. There were no significant group differences in maths.

Table 5: Mean National Curriculum Assessments levels and point score equivalents at the end of Year 4, by group

[redacted]up	N		[redacted]		
Comparison children	120	NC level	2a	2b	2a

His mother comments that the Reading Recovery teacher “helped him a hell of a lot”. She says: “Mark is a very confident reader, learning all the time. He likes to read to himself – information books, encyclopaedias, books he brings home from school. He reads if he can’t sleep.”

Mia does not speak English at home and has serious problems with the English language which limit her ability to understand what she is reading. Her language problems are likely to reflect underlying cognitive difficulties. She made many errors while reading. Although she can “sound it out”, her inability to call upon vocabulary, understanding and syntax to help her meant that errors went uncorrected. Mia and her mother both report she likes reading, though her teacher is under the impression she is not a keen reader because of her decoding problems. Mia reads at home, but at school the teacher comments on difficulties with finding appropriate books. “Decoding is difficult with the language barrier. She is quite slow, but if she is given easier books she thinks they are babyish.” Mia is not able to securely access the curriculum (National Curriculum Assessments 2a in reading, 2a in writing) and reads in a group daily with the Teaching Assistant (TA) who also helps her access the curriculum, e.g. helping with a maths problem.

St Patrick’s (Reading Recovery school)
St Patrick’s Roman Catholic Primary school provides a safe and effective environment for its pupils, with an overall ‘good’ in its OFSTED inspection 2008 and ‘outstanding’ for personal development and wellbeing. Pupils do well at the end of KS2, especially bearing in mind the high uptake of free school meals and pupils for whom English is an additional language: 85% achieving Level 4 in English. The school has a number of literacy systems in place: Renewed Primary Literacy Strategy (RPLS) one hour daily throughout school (some sessions 1½ hours for older children), plus additional Guided Reading. A “catch up programme” is provided for weaker readers in Years 2-6, delivered by trained TA’s. Reading Recovery is still active. As in Agincourt, pupils and parents interviewed were uniformly very positive about Reading Recovery. The RR teacher and the deputy are concerned that RR “exists in an SEN withdrawal bubble and does not reach class teachers”. They are planning for the RR teacher to take a more whole-school role, disseminating RR ideas through the school and introducing levelled books in classrooms. Currently Year 4 children have free choice of books in the classroom, many of which would not be at instructional level. The RR teacher runs a homework club supporting older children, particularly those she knows well from RR whose families she also knows well.

Max is an enthusiastic and confident reader, though there are concerns about his ability. He reads widely at home, books, newspapers and comics. His teacher confirms that he loves to read and that his knowledge has improved. However, although he is about the 40% level for his class, with National Curriculum Assessments levels 2b in reading, 2a in writing, there is clearly some cause for concern. Max is not receiving extra help with reading but is on School Action Plus, mainly because of behavioural issues, but also because of problems with speech and language. He currently attends a group once a week to work on behaviour. He has received speech and language support, but the Deputy Head questions its quality as this is delivered by a TA who only went on a short

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Appendix 1

National Strategy Sublevels: point score equivalents

(http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/169521. Accessed 09/11/09)

Level	Point score
1c	7
Level 1	9
1b	9
1a	11
2c	13
Level 2	15
2b	15

Level	Point score
Level 3	21
3b	21
3a	23
4c	25
Level 4	27
4b	27
4a	29

Many schools are finding that by assessing pupils using National Curriculum sublevels on a regular basis, pupils who are making less than satisfactory progress are quickly identified and support for them can be given. A common way of dividing the National Curriculum levels is the use of an a, b, c indicator:

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Caution should be used with sublevels as the National Curriculum level was designed to indicate representative attainment at the end of a key stage, a sublevel only gives a indication of the certainty of this achievement but can be extremely useful in identifying progress and support requirements. For calculation purposes some schools have represented levels as decimalised values.