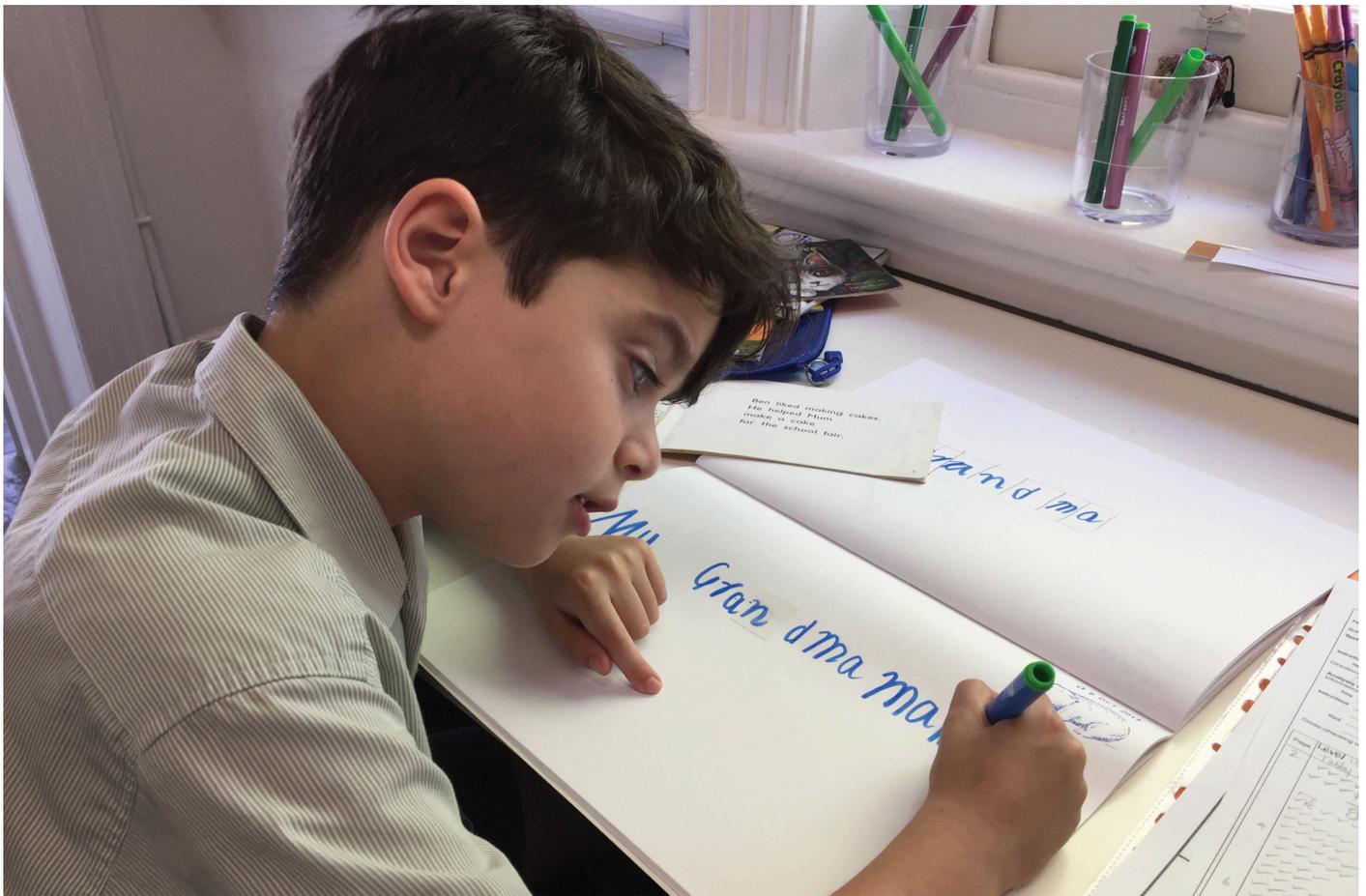


Reading Recovery: a literacy lifeline for lifelong learners

Marion Piper, Reading Recovery Teacher/Enhanced Learning Literacy/Numeracy (Foundation – Year 2)
Trinity Grammar School, Kew, Victoria, Australia



“To improve schools and create effective schools, we have to engage earnestly with managing teaching and learning... and with leading instructional improvement” (Spillane, Spencer and Olin, 2015).

Teachers want their current literacy teaching practice to be relevant and effective. In order to do this, they must keep abreast of educational research findings as part of their ongoing professional development. By taking an active interest in recent de-

velopments, their classroom pedagogy and instruction to students will improve.

There is much debate in school communities concerning which programs best improve to inform current and future literacy intervention, thereby increasing learning outcomes for all students. Since completing my Master of Education degree in Reading and Literacy at Torrens University Australia, I have been employed by my current school (an independent school for boys in Kew, Melbourne) in their Enhanced Learning Department to improve the literacy

and numeracy outcomes (Prep to Year 2) for boys who do not find ‘easy learning’ effortless. As part of my appointment, I have undergone appropriate training in order to qualify and be recognised as a Reading Recovery teacher. This has enabled me to support Year 1 students one-on-one in their struggles to read and write, with confidence and understanding, and to better demonstrate their comprehension of the subject matter.

I consider educators must agree of the five pillars of reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 1999) – phonemic

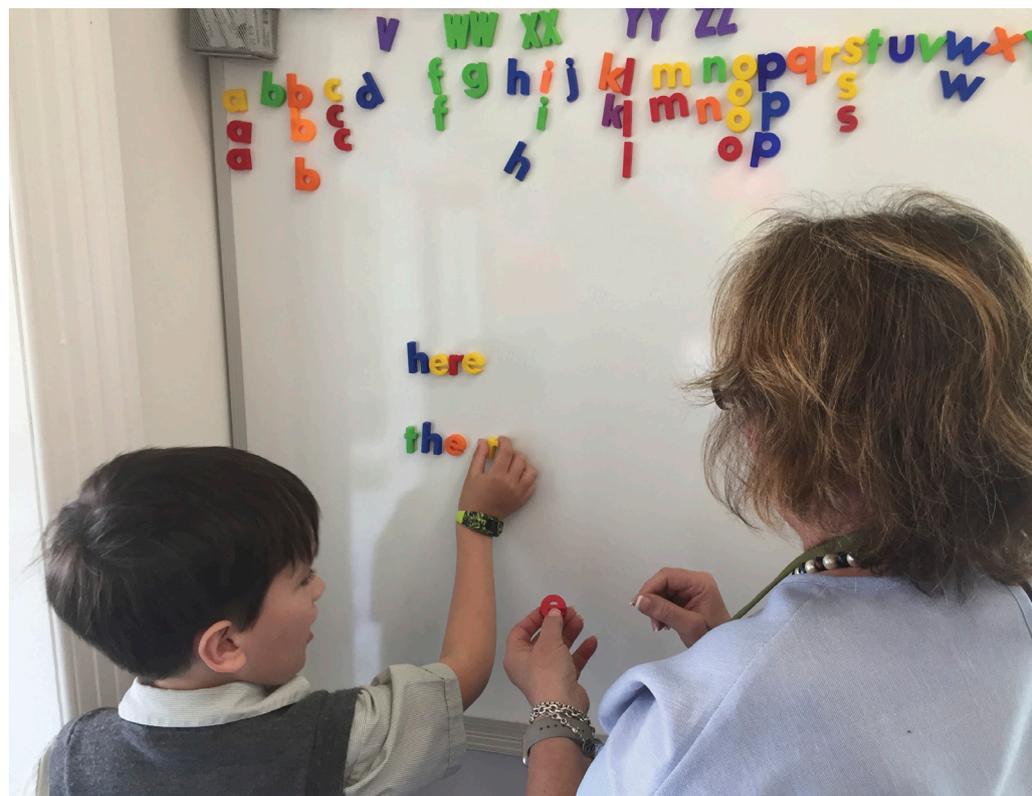
awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension – in order to be an effective teacher of all students. This enables the teacher to target each pillar appropriately as a ‘literacy lifeline’ in order to support the struggling literacy learner.

Reading Recovery is a research-based early intervention program that has been developed by the New South Wales Education Department (Curriculum Support) of the Australian Government. Developed by Dame Marie Clay and trialled in the 1980s, Reading Recovery has grown in popularity from being used in New Zealand and Australia to being successfully implemented in the USA, United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Bermuda and Denmark. It is considered an effective literacy intervention program for children aged 5-7 years.

To put aside the ongoing debate in Australia, particularly in Victoria, about the cost of training staff as a teacher of Reading Recovery, I would like to focus on the benefits of a literacy program that enables the teacher to observe, analyse and interpret reading and writing behaviours through initial and ongoing assessment. In between pre- and post-assessments of an Observational Survey conducted by the Reading Recovery teacher (Clay, 2013) is the opportunity to design and implement individual lesson plans through the inclusion of a broad range of strategies and resources. These support the student’s learning needs on a one-to-one basis, for thirty minutes each day, five days a week and (generally) for twenty weeks, as opposed to small group/whole class teaching on which other literacy programs are modelled. My background training in Spalding (WRAP) and Cued Articulation and as a passionate advocate for teaching phonics explicitly to children in the early years, has enabled me to blend the best and most effective educational experiences within the structured daily lessons that a trained Reading Recovery teacher provides as part of their planned intervention strategy.

In Australia, students participating in this program are those identified, after a year at school, as academically achieving the least in literacy standards. For example, based upon teacher observation and assessment, they have demonstrated difficulty in learning to read and write.

The notable interventions include the



requirement to address letter identification, concepts about print, word recognition, writing vocabulary, hearing and recording sounds in words and text reading. Teachers trained in Reading Recovery are considered to be literacy experts in their schools: they specialise in literacy development and are able to make skilled observations about the students they support. This includes the student’s ability to read and write, with suggestions for appropriate intervention to support and build upon their current skill level.

During a fifteen-year research period, over ninety-eight thousand students across public schools in New South Wales were included in the Reading Recovery Program. Students participating in the program made progress from regular classroom instruction, on average, within fourteen weeks (approximately eighty-five lessons or less). Notable intervention is provided as a series of lessons for thirty minutes each day; individual instruction and delivery is provided within the shortest time frame possible, with the intention of bringing the lowest literacy

performers up to average classroom levels.

At the commencement of 2017, ten Year 1 students at my current school were identified on the Reading Recovery (RR) tentative selection list. Of these ten students, two were on text below Level 2. The remaining students were on text levels 3-6. As 2017 was my RR training year, my first

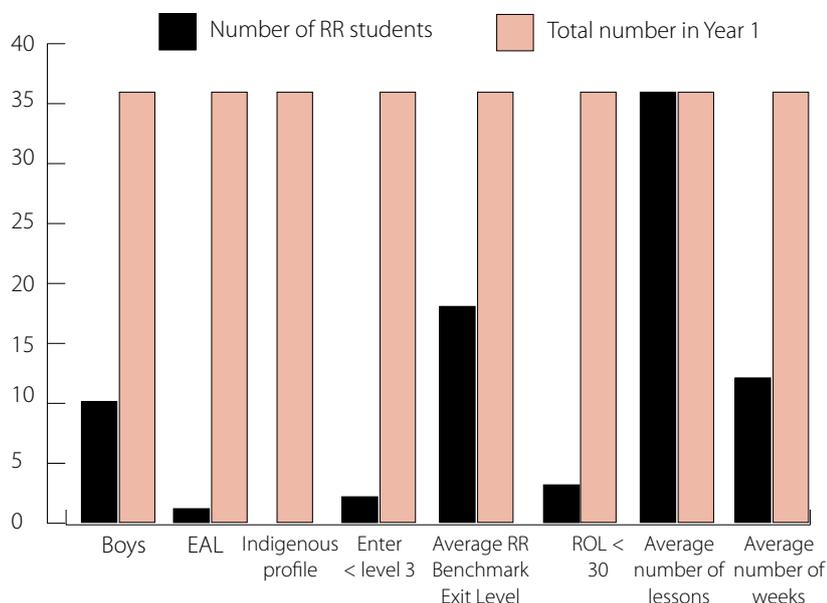
Teachers trained in Reading Recovery are considered to be literacy experts in their schools: they specialise in literacy development and are able to make **skilled observations about the students they support**

intake of four students included one student on Reading Recovery Level 5 to enable me to experience a broad range of reading abilities and Observation Survey results.

Eight students were prioritised for Reading Recovery sessions; it was hoped that there would be an opportunity to have an additional student participate in the Reading Recovery program as part of the second intake (Semester Two), if time and student growth through the sessions permitted.

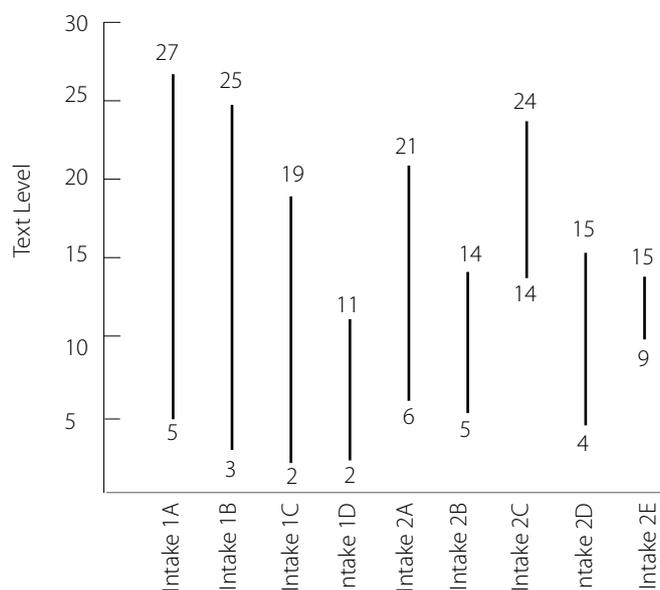
- The average entry text level for Intake One was Text Level 4.
- The average entry text level for Intake Two was Text Level 7.
- The average text exit Text Level was 18 on unseen texts, with the average growth of around 12 text levels. The

Reading recovery student background



Growth of Text Level:

RR Entry and Classroom Exit (November 2017) – First and Second Intake Students



Reading recovery students 2017

entire 2017 RR cohort successfully discontinued Reading Recovery at the conclusion of Intake One/Two.

- The RR cohort for the year ending November 2017 consisted of nine boys; 1 was an EAL student. Two students entered RR with a Text level less than Level 2.
- Three students entered RR with a Reading Oral Language (ROL) score of less than 30/42.

Some of the trends indicate that:

- There was one student who was able to receive more weeks and lessons than in previous years, due to circumstances related to absence/return to school at the end of Term Two/beginning of Term Three.
- Although the entry text level was lower, the exit text was at or above the expected Year 1 benchmark for the end of semester/end of year.

Student growth

Reading Recovery students gained between eight and fifteen text levels over an average period of 15 weeks in the program. Students operated on two levels above their benchmarking 'unseen' texts, when working with the Reading Recovery teacher.

'Predictions of Progress' were prepared for each student after initial Observation Assessments were completed. These predictions reflected what repertoire of reading skills each student would achieve within the RR program, as well as what specific skills I needed to focus on as the Reading Recovery teacher.

Growth was able to be monitored not only in text level reading, but in the acquisition of specific reading and writing skills. All children made progress in their reading and writing as part of their early literacy learning.

The evaluation of the benefits of the Reading Recovery program include the student successfully completing sequential lessons and revealing the ability to use new-found strategies when reading and writing independently. All students made valuable progress, with some identified as requiring long-term support and intervention beyond the program. Students whom have discontinued sessions were monitored as part of ongoing discussions in regards to their progress through observation and further assessments, including reading benchmarks. Because the Reading Recovery program is not a remedial one, but based on early identification of students at risk in literacy learning, the recommendation of a student to participate in the initial instance is in order to prevent reading failure and to assist the student by adding to their repertoire of reading skills.

Of the 2017 Reading Recovery cohort, all students successfully discontinued from the program. This means that they reached a level where they could access the class curriculum, with minimal support. Two students were identified as needing extra support as they did not reach the minimum benchmark. These students were referred back to the classroom teachers. Feedback and educational tracking for selected students provided ongoing monitoring.

From a teacher's perspective, Reading Recovery is a valuable experience for Year 1 students because it is based

on the early identification of those with reading difficulties, enabling the timely implementation of strategies designed to improve students' reading performance. Targeted 30 minute lessons are intensive, individually designed and are delivered by a trained Reading Recovery teacher to complement the classroom teacher's existing literacy program.

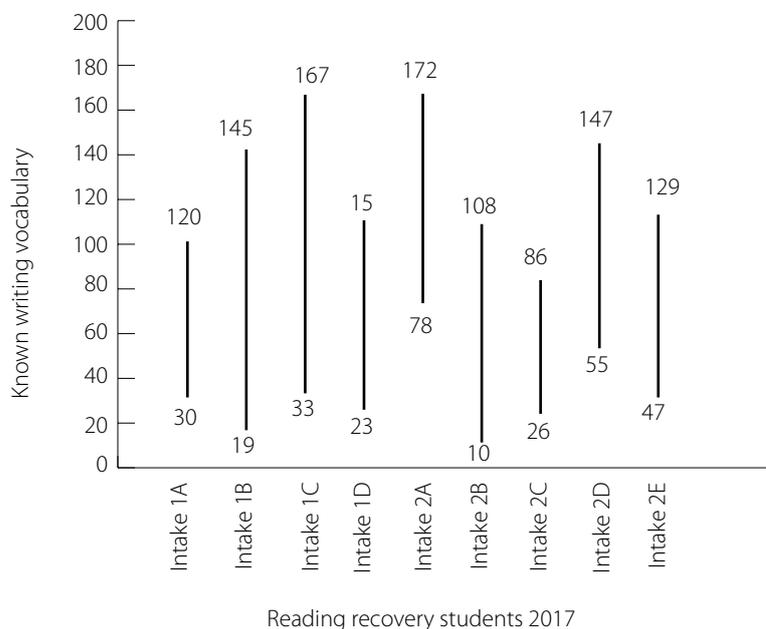
Whilst I recognise that there are a variety of literacy intervention programs already available to schools – including MultiLit, MiniLit, Jolly Phonics, and Spalding/WRAP - they are often implemented according to budgetary constraints and considerations of which available resources are cost-effective or able to meet teacher/classroom requirements. Additionally, I also know that one method of teaching intervention will not meet the learning needs of all students: if my Reading Recovery students are not making adequate progress the onus is on me to find other ways to engage their interest and teach them. For this reason, understanding the literacy needs of my students is paramount when designing appropriate individual interventions.

Hattie (2009) states: 'The biggest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching' (p. 1). The end goal for each student I support is to see them return to the classroom able to fully participate in literacy activities with others due to adding to their repertoire of reading and writing skills and behaviours. In the interim, nothing gives me greater joy than to see the student who, at the conclusion of their daily lesson with me, is able to reflect on their session recognising what that they have been able to achieve one-on-one within their thirty minute session, and – unconsciously knowing – that a lifeline through explicit teaching targeting their needs in the Reading Recovery lesson has supported them in their journey as a lifelong learner.

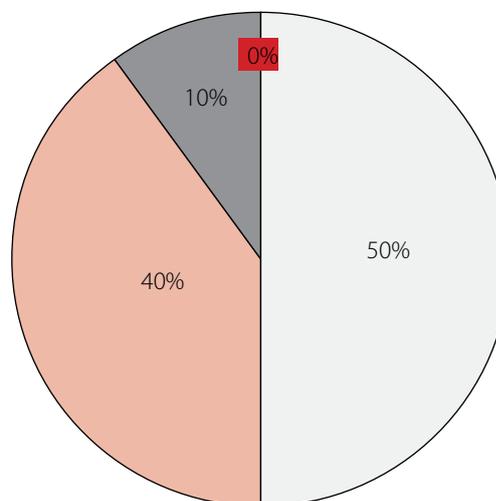
References

- Clay, M. (2013) *An observation survey of early literacy achievement*. (3rd ed.). Auckland: Marie Clay Literacy Trust. Retrieved from <http://readingrecovery.org/reading-recovery/teaching-children/observation-survey>
- Hattie, J. (2009) *The Argument: visible teaching and visible learning*. Retrieved from <http://users.ugent.be/~mvalcke/CV/visible-learning-chapter-3-hattie.pdf>

Growth of Writing Vocabulary Level: Reading Recovery – First and Second Intake Students – 2017



TGS Reading Recovery Cohort 2017 Exit Text Level Range – Discontinued Students



National Reading Panel. (1999). Retrieved from: <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/nrp/Documents/report.pdf>

Spillane, J. P., Spencer, T., Olin, A. W. (2015). Man-

aging instructional quality and leading instructional improvement: engaging with the essence of school improvement. *Australian Educational Leader*, 37(1), p. 23.

Marion Piper has been an educator in the Independent School sector for over 30 years. Her roles have included Curriculum Coordinator, Deputy Head and Acting Head of Junior School. Marion recently completed her Master of Education (Reading and Literacy) degree through Torrens University Australia with several of her research papers published in educational journals. These have provided management strategies and technology inclusion for classroom teachers. Marion has a dual role in her current school (Trinity Grammar School, Kew, Victoria): Reading Recovery/Enhanced Learning (Literacy and Numeracy) Foundation – Year Two. She can be contacted via email: pipermm@trinity.vic.edu.au