



Successful Students

Something Special About Serena

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Serena, first grade

We have many examples of students in our school who participate in the Reading Recovery Program and discontinue reading at or above grade level. These students' successes are cause for much celebration. Their ability to now do what good readers do within regular school-day instruction reaffirms our commitment to an intervention designed to give students the tools needed for reading success. The case I now share with you is particularly special because the student had a constellation of obstacles to overcome.

Serena Smith began her participation in our school community as a preschooler. During this time she was a bright, inquisitive, endearing child who was extremely distracted by visual information in her environment

and hampered by a severe articulation disorder. Serena began to receive speech and language therapy while teachers and her parents planned interventions to help her with her ability to focus and complete tasks.

As a first-grade student, it became official when Serena was formally diagnosed with attention deficit disorder and began taking medication. Her articulation was improving, as was her ability to attend to task. She continued to struggle with pre-reading skills. It was then discovered that Serena had a significant hearing loss and was fitted for a hearing aid. It became apparent that the need to attend to visual information in the environment along with severe articulation challenges were related to this hearing impair-

Serena's Mother Writes

Two of my daughters, Rebecca and Serena, were blessed to receive help from the Reading Recovery program.

Rebecca had a severe speech impediment which affected her socially. She never raised her hand in class and was below average in reading. People had a hard time understanding her, and she was hesitant to speak. She started in the Reading Recovery program halfway through first grade. It was the biggest gift she could have ever received. Her reading improved remarkably. Her self-esteem soared as new doors opened for her. She became confident, and her speech improved dramatically. The one-to-one she received with Mrs. Burnham no doubt saved her from falling behind. Throughout third grade she read a level above her grade. She now has the confidence to raise her hand and to be understood.

Serena has a diagnosis of ADHD and a hearing loss in both ears. She currently wears one hearing aid and is

being fitted for a second one. Serena was lagging behind a lot. I was very concerned for her and her future. Like Rebecca, the Reading Recovery program has opened doors for her. I believe it was much more challenging for Serena with her disabilities. Staying on task reading a book was a challenge after her medication wore off in the evening, but she was determined and she read at least five times a week. Her self-esteem also soared, and doors opened. She could read signs and notes and was eager to read books. During the read-a-thon at school last year she won many certificates, reading five or more books in the morning before school. I also saw her speech improve when she was able to read letters and words.

I feel very fortunate that both my daughters were able to receive this one-to-one help from the Reading Recovery program. Both of their teachers were wonderful and truly made a difference in their lives.

Jennifer Smith • November 14, 2004



Serena's mom, Jennifer Smith, says she feels fortunate that both her daughters received Reading Recovery. "Both of their teachers were wonderful and truly made a difference in their lives."

ment and subsequent lag in the development of letter-sound relationships.

Serena was enrolled in the Reading Recovery program. As her teacher, I found that teaching her sounds and words in isolation had no meaning for her. I felt that helping her relate letters to something that was familiar to her would help her turn the corner. Together, we filled her alphabet book with names of family members, including her pets. Almost immediately, Serena began to make these associations with the familiar to the beginning letter sound. She rapidly began to learn new words because she had a strong sense of

meaning and structure. Her ability to predict what was on a page of print was another reliable tool in her reading toolbox. Serena's transformation to a confident, excited reader was remarkable to witness. She looked forward with great enthusiasm to each Reading Recovery lesson, especially reading Rigby's *Bear* stories which were some of her favorites! During the schoolwide read-a-thon, she became one of the top readers in the school, submitting well over 100 titles to the school's reading log. She discontinued from the Reading Recovery program at Level 16, a self-assured first-grade student who understood the power of reading to open doors for her curious mind.

One can speculate what the outcome would have been for a hearing impaired, impulsive girl with a formidable speech disorder. Without Reading Recovery, she most certainly would have gone the special education route to get her reading support. Fortunately for Serena, the daily structured format, coupled with a classroom instructional method that supported the Reading Recovery model and a strong parent commitment to practice at home, helped Serena to recover from her early deficits and read at grade level.

It has been 9 months since Serena discontinued from the Reading Recovery program. Serena is now thriving in second grade. She is about to be fitted with another hearing aid. Her speech is quite intelligible, marked only by a distortion or "soft r". Presently she is reading at Level 20 and remains a confident, cheerful, enthusiastic learner.

As a first-grade teacher of 27 years and a Reading Recovery teacher for the past 7 years, I have had many rewarding moments, watching students learn and achieve. It is Serena's story that, for me, captures the essence of what success in reading is all about. This year, when I saw Serena in the hallway and asked what her favorite thing about Reading Recovery was, she replied, "Reading to Mrs. Holubecki. I learned to read really good!"