Report from the International Data Evaluation Center: Consistently High Results

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The 2008–2009 school year marked the 24th year of Reading Recovery in the United States. Each year, data on every Reading Recovery child served in the United States are collected and analyzed. The results of the national evaluation continue to demonstrate that with the support of Reading Recovery teachers, most at-risk first-grade children can reach the average band of achievement.

Summary of Reading Recovery Outcomes

During the 2008–2009 school year, 82,165 Reading Recovery children were served by 9,810 Reading Recovery teachers in 6,028 schools in 1,909 school districts. These teachers were supported by 464 teacher leaders at 361 teacher trainer sites. Twenty–two university training centers provided professional development and support (Table 1).

Table 1. Participation in Reading Recovery in the United States 2008–09

Entity	n
University Training Centers	22
Teacher Training Sites	361
States and Federal Entities*	47
Systems	1,909
Buildings	6,028
Teacher Leaders	464
Teachers	9,810
Reading Recovery Students	82,165
Random Sample for RR	11,326

*including Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of Defense Domestic, and Department of Defense Overseas

Table 2. Comparison of Spring Mean Scores on the Tasks of the Observation Survey for Discontinued and Recommended Reading Recovery Children, United States, 2008–09

Observation Survey Task	Discontinued Children	Recommended Children
Text Reading Level	19.2	10.1
Writing Vocabulary	56.1	39.5
Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words	36.0	32.9
Letter Identification	53.5	52.5
Ohio Word Test	19.1	15.5
Concepts About Print	21.0	18.3

Reading Recovery children represent different demographics than the other children in their schools (random sample students): fewer children are White; more receive free or reduced-price lunch; and more are male. During the 2008–2009 school year, 59% of the students participating in Reading Recovery were White, compared with 67% of the random sample. Reading Recovery children were more likely to receive free or reduced-price lunch (61% versus 47% of the random sample) and to be boys (58% versus 51% of the random sample). Of all the children served in Reading Recovery, 60% reached the average level of performance of their class and their lessons were *discontinued*. Another 20% were *recommended* for further evaluation; 14% received *incomplete interventions*; and 4% *moved* during instruction. Only 2% were classified as *none of the above*. Of the children served who received a complete intervention, 75% reached average levels of performance of their class in a mean of 15.5 weeks.

Table 2 presents the mean Observation Survey scores of children whose lessons were discontinued because they reached average levels of performance and for children who were recommended for further evaluation. At the end of their first-grade year, children who successfully completed the intervention (discontinued status) had Observation Survey scores within an average range of their peers. Although children who were recommended for further evaluation did not reach levels of average performance, they made impressive progress on reading and writing tasks. While these children may find typical second-grade instruction somewhat challenging, they will bring to the task considerable strengths — especially in knowledge of print concepts, letters, words, and sounds. Text reading continues to be the most-challenging task for these recommended children.

Reading Recovery children who reached grade-level performance (discontinued status) demonstrated a dramatic change in their ranking

Table 3. Proportion of Students Scoring in Each National Achievement Group on Text Reading Level: United States, 2008–09

National Achievement Group*	Discontinued				Complete Interventions			
	Fall		Year-End		Fall		Year-End	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
High	461	1	1,597	4	476	0	1,603	3
High-Average	5,720	16	5,071	14	6,185	12	5,159	10
Average	7,555	22	19,119	55	9,722	19	20,378	41
Low-Average	8,322	24	7,461	21	12,053	24	10,278	20
Low	12,098	35	908	2	22,751	42	11,769	23

*National Achievement Group as determined by statistical analyses of the national random sample.

in the national achievement groups from the beginning to the end of the year (Table 3). In the fall, 35% of the Reading Recovery children whose lessons were discontinued scored in the lowest national achievement group, whereas only 2% scored in that achievement group at the end of the year. Classroom teachers perceived 59% of these children as below average in reading in the fall; by year-end only 23% were considered below average and 73% were considered average or above.

Summary of Descubriendo la Lectura Outcomes

Descubriendo la Lectura (DLL), the reconstruction of Reading Recovery in Spanish, is for first graders who receive their initial literacy instruction in Spanish. During the 2008–2009 school year, 1,033 DLL children were taught by 138 teachers (see Table 4). These children were served in 120 schools in 34 school districts in 8 states. The teachers receive professional development support from 39 teacher leaders. Of the children who participated in DLL, 62% were boys and 98% were Hispanic. Most children (96%) qualified for free or reduced-price lunch.

Of all the DLL children served, 51% reached average reading levels of their classrooms within a mean of 15.4 weeks. Another 22% were recommended for further evaluation, 4% moved, and 20% received incomplete interventions.

The DLL participants also showed progress in their reading and writing achievement between fall and year-end, as presented in Table 5.

Outcomes Compared to Random Sample Children

As part of the evaluation methodology, outcomes from Reading Recovery children who reach average grade-level performance are compared with two comparison groups in the fall, at mid-year, and at year-end. The random sample group is comprised of two students randomly selected from all first graders in every Reading Recovery school. In the 2008–2009 school year, 11,326 random sample children were tested fall, mid-year, and spring.

Using principle component analysis, researchers at the International Data Evaluation Center identify the lowest 20% of the random sample children. These children comprise the low comparison group. While children with the lowest scores in each school are selected for Reading Recovery, children in the low comparison group had fall scores with similar characteristics as Reading Recovery children. Figure 1 compares text reading level scores for Reading Recovery children with discontinued outcome status to the random sample of children and the low comparison group of children.

As shown in Figure 1, the fall-entry and spring-entry Reading Recovery children read texts at similar levels (approximately text Level 1) with the low comparison group. However, the

Table 4. Participation in Descubriendo la Lectura in the United States 2008–09

Entity	n
University Training Centers	5
Teacher Training Sites	31
States	8
Systems	34
Buildings	120
Teacher Leaders	39
Teachers	138
DLL Students	1,033
Random Sample for DLL	175

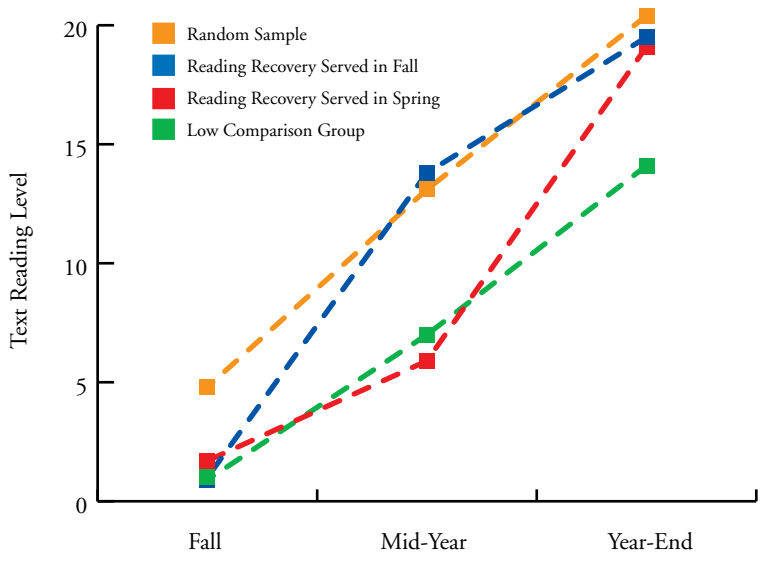
Table 5. Comparison of Fall and Year-End Mean Scores on the Tasks of the Observation Survey for Discontinued and Recommended DLL Children, United States, 2008–09

Observation Survey Task	Fall Mean Score		Year-End Mean Score	
	Discontinued Children	Recommended Children	Discontinued Children	Recommended Children
Análisis Actual del Texto	0.8	0.4	19.0	8.3
Escritura de Vocabulario	7.9	4.3	47.2	31.0
Oír y Anotar los Sonidos en las Palabras	19.9	10.4	38.2	33.5
Identificacíon de Letras	44.3	34.6	59.0	55.0
Prueba de Palabras	5.3	2.0	19.5	15.0
Conceptos del Texto Impreso	10.1	8.4	19.8	16.2

random sample group of children began the year with considerably higher text level reading abilities, demonstrating a gap between average performance of this group compared to both Reading Recovery children and the low comparison sample of children of nearly four text levels. By mid-year, Reading Recovery children were reading at text levels slightly higher than the random sample children and considerably higher than either the low random sample or children who were just entering Reading Recovery at this midpoint. Thus, Reading Recovery closed the achievement gap, which had grown for the low comparison children compared to the random sample by six text levels and a gap of seven levels for children who had not had Reading Recovery in the fall. However, children who entered Reading Recovery with this large gap ended the year with nearly the same text levels as the random sample children. Reading Recovery children who no longer received services after the mid-year continued to make growth and also ended the year with nearly the same text reading levels as the random sample. In contrast, the low comparison children still read six text levels below the random sample and the Reading Recovery children.

A similar pattern of outcomes was demonstrated by those children participating in Descubriendo la Lectura. Figure 2 presents the outcomes for the DLL participants in comparison to a random sample of their peers and a low random sample of children in the bottom 20th percentile. The DLL students who entered DLL in the fall scored much lower on text reading level than their random sample peers during initial testing. By mid-year, the DLL students that started in the fall had caught up with the random sample, and by spring both of the DLL groups were closing the achievement gap. The low random sample, however, was still behind their peers in text level reading.

Figure 1. Gains on Text Reading Level for Reading Recovery Students with Discontinued Status, Random Sample Students, and the Low Comparison Group: United States, 2008–09



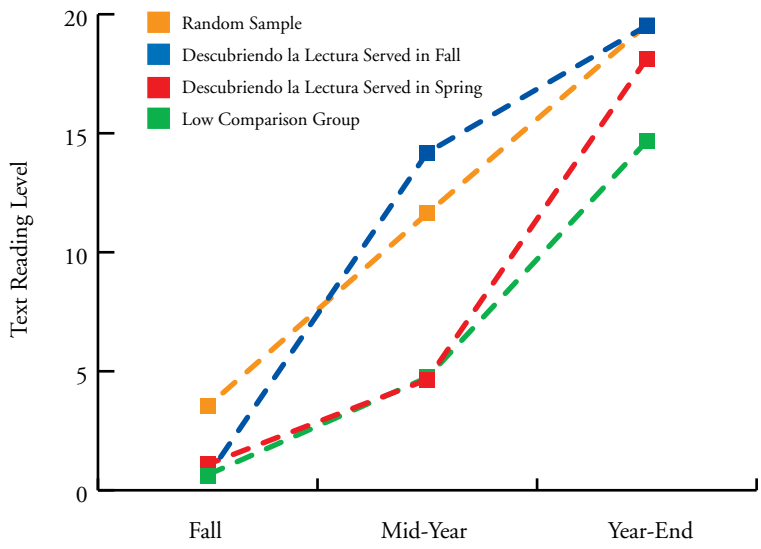
Conclusion

Reading Recovery and DLL provide the lowest-achieving first-grade children with the high-quality intervention instruction they need to close the literacy gap with their peers. Without Reading Recovery, the achievement gap demonstrated at the beginning of the year between the lowest achieving readers and writers and their peers only gets wider both at mid-year and at the end of the year.

Children who participated in Reading Recovery and were recommended for further evaluation also demonstrated significant gains in reading and writing performance. While their text reading level remained behind both the random sample children and Reading Recovery children whose lessons were successfully discontinued, they will bring many strengths for their teachers to draw upon when planning future instruction for these children. Second-grade teachers will benefit from the outcomes of both groups of children. The members of the school's literacy team will be charged with providing effective instruction to meet the needs of former Reading Recovery children to ensure continued progress.

Evaluation data provide support for Reading Recovery's role as a response to intervention (RTI) approach. Because most of the children with complete interventions reached grade-level expectations, the number of children with extreme literacy difficulties was dramatically reduced. For those who made progress but did not reach grade-level expectations, Reading Recovery offered an intensive diagnostic period of instruction that provides important data on the child's abilities for future instructional decisions. Both outcomes yield countless benefits for the child, the teacher, the school, and the education system.

Figure 2. Gains on Text Reading Level for Descubriendo la Lectura Students with Discontinued Status, Random Sample Students, and the Low Comparison Group: United States, 2008–09



About the Authors

Jeff B. Brymer-Bashore received his bachelor of science in mathematics from The Ohio State University. His background is in computer network management and software engineering specializing in the area of data processing related to research. He supports various research initiatives at universities in the United States and the United Kingdom with the help of the IDEC staff.

Lea M. McGee received her Ed.D. from Virginia Tech and has previously taught at the University of Alabama, Boston College, and Louisiana State University. She is author and co-author of nine books and numerous book chapters and articles. She is past-president of the National Reading Conference and directed two Early Reading First grants. Dr. McGee frequently works with teachers in their classrooms and is a recognized expert in preschool literacy programs.