

April 1991

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Recommended Citation

Stebbins, Jo Ann and Vliek, Mary G. (1991) "Emphasis: Early Intervention," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 24: Iss. 2, Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol24/iss2/4>

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Emphasis: Early Intervention

by Dr. Jo Ann Stebbins and Mary G. Vliek

"No! I won't move! I'll go to a foster home. I want to stay at Pleasantview School!" John, a first grader, was talking with his mother about a planned move that the family was going to make this spring. John didn't want to move because he was learning to become a reader and a writer. The family listened to John and are staying in the school district. John's mother also recommended to her sister-in-law, whose child is having reading problems, to move so that the child could go to Pleasantview School and receive help through the Reading Recovery program.

Reading Recovery is an early intervention reading program developed by Marie Clay, New Zealand educator and psychologist. Reading Recovery is based on the premise that early, high-quality intervention has the greatest potential for lasting impact and for reducing the need for continued remedial help. The program is an intensive one-to-one intervention program for the poorest readers in first-grade classrooms. The primary goals of Reading Recovery are to reduce reading failure through early intervention and to help children become independent readers. The program accomplishes this by: 1) bringing children who are "at risk" of reading failure up to the average of their class within a short period of time (an average of 12 to 15 weeks), so that they can profit from

ongoing classroom instruction, and 2) helping these children develop a self-improving system for continued growth in reading, so that additional remedial help is not necessary.

The Reading Recovery Program at Pleasantview Elementary School, Hastings Area School System, began in the fall of 1990 under the direction of Kindergarten/Chapter 1 teacher Mary Vliek and Principal Jo Stebbins.

Mary has been receiving intensive Reading Recovery teacher training from Western Michigan University under the direction of Dr. James W. Burns, Director, Reading Recovery Program and Professor, Education and Professional Development. The training program is one of the most important features of Reading Recovery and is essential to effective implementation of the program.

The Reading Recovery teacher works daily in one-to-one, thirty minute sessions with the students. The students are tutored individually to help them develop the kinds of strategies that good readers use. The strength of Reading Recovery is in the framework of the lesson itself and in the development of teacher knowledge and problem-solving ability. The approach combines the use of wholistic reading and writing experiences, close interaction between teacher and child within the lesson, and careful selection of materials for reading. The teacher

follows and guides the child individually in his or her use of reading and writing strategies. The teacher closely assesses and monitors progress and makes appropriate decisions to accelerate the child's progress.

The first graders in teacher Merete Power's class were tested in the fall of 1990 using the Reading Recovery Diagnostic Survey so the poorest readers could be targeted. Using classroom teacher judgment and the results from the diagnostic Survey, four students began the Reading Recovery Program at Pleasantview School. As a student becomes an independent reader with a self-improving system in place he/she is "discontinued" and a new student begins the program.

Every day, in individual lessons, students read two to three familiar books to bring together all the reading behaviors and strategies he/she is learning. Daily the child is tested on a

new book that was introduced the day before so that the teacher can observe the reading strategies that the child uses and build upon the child's strengths as a reader. The teacher assesses the student's reading using a "running record of text reading" to record the child's reading behavior and chooses several important teaching points based on this assessment. The child dictates a sentence and writes a sentence that is related to the reading he/she has completed. The sentence is written on a strip of paper and cut up so that the child can reconstruct the sentence and reread his/her own story. It gives the child practice in writing and rereading his/her own stories. Each day a new book is carefully selected and introduced by the Reading Recovery teacher. The new book is selected to provide a greater challenge to the student. The new material is introduced and the child reads the new book as



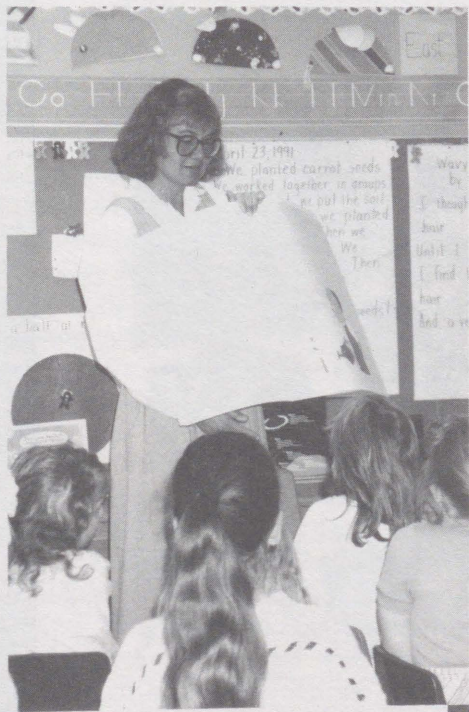
Mary Vlieg and Reading Recovery students (l to r) Charlie Hoffman, Amber Smith, John Holden, Jenna Burbank, Jessica Davis, and David Miller enjoy all the little books used in the program.

independently as possible. The book is then reread with the child to model fluency and a flow of words. At the next session the teacher checks for accuracy to see what strategies the child is using in reading. The cut up sentence and a familiar book are taken home daily as homework for the child to practice.

The first grade students have been very successful due to the close teamwork of the Reading Recovery teacher, the first grade teacher, the support of the administration, and the involvement of the Reading Recovery parents. Hastings Area Schools' Superintendent, Carl Schoessel, states, "I am impressed with what I've seen in the program. The program has wonderful potential for students that are in need of basic skills so they can be successful in all school activities."

The Reading Recovery supportive classroom can be described as a classroom with a balanced literacy program where reading and writing activities permeate the classroom and flow across all areas of the curriculum. A balanced literacy program uses a variety of child-centered approaches. The balanced literacy program includes reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading. Writing experiences include shared writing, language experience, writing by the teacher, and children writing.

The Reading Recovery program has had a positive impact on the kindergarten and first grade classrooms. Pleasantview kindergarten and first grade students are taught with a literature based whole language approach this year based on training



First grade teacher Merete Powers and first grade students read "The Carrot Seed!"



Kindergarten student Nicolas Strickland enjoys reading and writing with friends!

and knowledge that Reading Recovery teacher Mary Vliek has received and shared with first grade teacher Merete Powers. Merete has also attended workshops, observed Reading Recovery in action, and made changes in her instruction based on current research in teaching of reading. The teachers encourage daily reading of many books, students share many books, students share many books with each other, students write in journals, individual and group stories are written as the teachers model writing conventions. The teachers are using strategies to help children apply their own knowledge. They are teaching children to be independent by self-monitoring, cross-checking, predicting, confirming, and using multiple sources of information while reading and writing. The children do the work and solve the problems because they are active learners.

Throughout the district much interest has been shown by early elementary teachers and administrators. Workshops have been conducted to inform teachers about the positive impact of the program and reading strategies to be used with students.

Parents of Reading Recovery students have been excited and cooperative about their children being included in the program. Parents have completed the homework with their children and have shown interest by visiting lessons and talking to the Reading Recovery teacher regularly about their children's successes.

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