

Evaluation of the i3 Scale-up of Reading Recovery

Year One Report, 2011-12

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

Reading Recovery (RR) is a short-term early intervention designed to help the lowest-achieving readers in first grade reach average levels of classroom performance in literacy. Students identified to receive Reading Recovery meet individually with a specially trained Reading Recovery (RR) teacher every school day for 30-minute lessons over a period of 12 to 20 weeks. The purpose of these lessons is to support rapid acceleration of each child's literacy learning. In 2010, The Ohio State University received a Scaling Up What Works grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund to expand the use of Reading Recovery across the country. The award was intended to fund the scale-up of Reading Recovery by training 3,675 new RR Teachers in U.S. schools, thereby expanding capacity to allow service to an additional 88,200 students.

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) was contracted to conduct an independent evaluation of the i3 scale up of Reading Recovery over the course of five years. The evaluation includes parallel rigorous experimental and quasi-experimental designs for estimating program impacts, coupled with a large-scale mixed-methods study of program implementation under the i3 scale-up. This report presents findings through the second year of the evaluation. The primary goals of this evaluation were: a) to assess the success of the scale-up in meeting the i3 grant's expansion goals; b) to document the implementation of scale-up and fidelity to program standards; and, c) to provide experimental evidence of the impacts of Reading Recovery on student learning under this scale-up effort.

This document is the first in a series of three annual reports produced based on our external evaluation of the Reading Recovery i3 Scale-Up. This report presents early results from the experimental impact and implementation studies conducted over the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years.

In order to estimate the impacts of the program, a sample of first graders who met the Reading Recovery target criteria for selection were randomly assigned to either receive Reading Recovery, or to continue receiving classroom instruction. The reading achievement of students in this sample was assessed using an externally standardized assessment of reading achievement - the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) - in order to determine the impact of Reading Recovery lessons on low-achieving students who were randomly assigned to receive the intervention. The data for the implementation study include extensive interviews and surveys with stakeholders at multiple levels: individuals at the i3 office, University Training Center directors, district-level site coordinators, teacher leaders, RR teachers, principals, and 1st-grade teachers. Case studies were also conducted with nine i3 scale-up schools to observe how Reading Recovery operates in differing contexts.

Key findings from the first two years of this five-year evaluation include the following:

Impacts on Student Reading Performance

- » Treatment students who participated in Reading Recovery outperformed students in the control group on each subscale of the ITBS Reading test.
 - » The mean of Reading Recovery students' posttest ITBS Total Reading scores was at the 36th percentile nationally, while students in the control group had posttest scores at the 18th percentile—a difference of +18 percentile points.
 - » The mean of Reading Recovery students' posttest ITBS Reading Words scores was at the 43rd percentile nationally, while students in the control group had posttest scores at the 27th percentile—a difference of +16 percentile points.
 - » The mean of Reading Recovery students' posttest ITBS Reading Comprehension scores was at the 39th percentile nationally, while students in the control group had posttest scores at the 19th percentile—a difference of +20 percentile points.
- » The estimated standardized effect of Reading Recovery on students' ITBS Total Reading Scores was .68 standard deviations relative to the population of struggling readers eligible for Reading Recovery under the i3 scale-up, and .47 standard deviations relative to the nationwide population of all first graders. These standardized effect sizes are large relative to typical effect sizes found in educational evaluations.
- » Effect estimates were similarly large for both the ITBS Reading Words and Reading Comprehension subscales.
- » The impact estimates of Reading Recovery vary substantially across schools, with most schools having moderate to large positive impact estimates (greater than .40 standard deviations).

Recruitment Successes and Challenges

- » Recruitment of schools during the first two years was 44 percent above the intended goal, recruitment of RR teachers reached 76 percent of the intended goal, and instruction of students reached 88 percent of the intended goal.

Key barriers to recruitment included the late start of the i3 project in Year 1 (after the school year had already begun), and concerns about the current economic climate. Scale-up grant funds are intended for use to train RR teacher leaders and teachers, however districts and schools are still responsible for paying RR teacher salaries. Thus, many are hesitant to hire additional staff or implement a new intervention during an economic downturn.

Training and Support of New RR teachers

- » The behind-the-glass training sessions were described as a very valuable part of RR teachers' preparation. However, logistic constraints sometimes made it difficult to conduct as many sessions as required by Reading Recovery.

RR teacher leaders provided critical feedback and intensive support to new RR teachers as they implemented the intervention during their first year.

School-Level Implementation Fidelity

- » School-level implementation of Reading Recovery was, in most respects, faithful to the Reading Recovery Standards and Guidelines.
- » There was strong fidelity to standards in the execution of Reading Recovery lessons, but less fidelity to the requirement to formally document each lesson.
- » Data from surveys, activity logs, interviews, and observations reveal that the job of a RR teacher is extremely demanding, with very busy schedules and many long days.

While most schools used the Reading Recovery Observation Survey (OS) to identify low-performing students, the students selected to receive Reading Recovery instruction were not always the students who scored the lowest on the OS.

About Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)

Since 1985, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) has brought together renowned experts from major research universities to improve elementary and secondary education by bridging the gap between educational policy and student learning. CPRE researchers employ a range of rigorous and innovative research methods to investigate pressing problems in education today. Having earned an international reputation for quality research and evaluation, CPRE researchers have extensive experience conducting experimental studies, large-scale quasi-experimental research, qualitative studies, and multi-state policy research.

CPRE's member institutions are the University of Pennsylvania; Teachers College Columbia University; Harvard University; Stanford University; University of Michigan; University of Wisconsin-Madison; and Northwestern University.

About the Center for Research in Education & Social Policy (CRESP)

The Center for Research in Education and Social Policy (CRESP) within the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Delaware conducts rigorous research to help policymakers and practitioners in education, health care and human services determine which policies and programs are most promising for improving outcomes in children, youth, adults and families.

Although research in prevention sciences and health care have long used rigorous designs to assess the effectiveness of programs, it was not until the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 that we witnessed a dramatic increase in the quantity and quality of research to evaluate the effects of education programs and policies. The education community began to focus on research that could measure the impact of these programs through randomized experiments and other research designs that support causal conclusions and can determine whether, how well, for whom, and why new programs and interventions work.

CRESP specializes in experimental and quasi-experimental research that uses quantitative and mixed methods to evaluate how and how well programs and interventions work to improve educational, family, and health outcomes in schools and communities.



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