

WHAT ARE THE ENTERING AND EXITING PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS  
PARTICIPATING IN A READING RECOVERY PROGRAM IN TERMS  
OF SELF-CONCEPT AS A READER?

THESIS

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to compare the entering and exiting self perceptions as readers of students participating in a Reading Recovery program. The subjects, eight first graders, attended school in Ontario or Batavia, New York. The students were referred to the Reading Recovery program by their classroom teachers and were considered to be in the lowest twenty percent of their class.

The study began in January 1997, just prior to the students' entrance into the Reading Recovery program. The students were asked fourteen questions from a researcher-designed questionnaire. The questions were read to the students in order to eliminate the possibility of the subjects failing to comprehend the question. The subjects were interviewed again after being discontinued from the program in June 1997. The structure of the interview was identical, however, five additional questions were added to the questionnaire which specifically addressed the students' perceptions of the Reading Recovery program.

The results of this research study indicate that participation in Reading Recovery has a positive impact upon students' self-concepts as readers. A significant improvement in self-concept was seen after the intervention. At this time, 100% of the subjects responded that they were readers, they could read to someone, and that they were good readers. In addition, 100% of the pupils believed they were a better reader after Reading Recovery. Finally, after intervention, 100% of the subjects were able to name a strategy they would use if they experienced trouble while reading.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Overview**

The current research on Reading Recovery has focused on such areas as student performance gains, cost effectiveness and comparisons of Reading Recovery to other early intervention programs. Little research has been conducted on the effect Reading Recovery has upon students' self-concept as a reader. This study compared the entering and exiting perceptions of students in terms of their self-concepts as readers. Students were interviewed using a questionnaire, prior to their entrance into Reading Recovery and upon completion of the program.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to compare the entering and exiting self-perceptions as readers of students participating in a Reading Recovery program.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Reading Recovery is an early intervention program which is being implemented in many local school districts. In order to be confident that an educational program should be adopted for use, school districts must rely on research to provide data that support the success of the program. Although ample research has been conducted on Reading Recovery, such research is limited and narrow in scope. For example, the majority of research studies on Reading Recovery concentrated on student achievement gains. Results from studies conducted in New Zealand, Ohio, New Hampshire and North Carolina indicated Reading Recovery is a beneficial intervention for at-risk first graders (Donley, 1993; Pinnell, 1989; Schotanus, 1992). Many studies

focused on comparing Reading Recovery to other early intervention programs. The results of these studies were mixed with some finding Reading Recovery superior (Spiegel, 1995) while others supported the use of different programs (Center, Wheldall, Freeman, Outhred & McNaught, 1993).

New research is needed to consider other aspects of the program such as teacher training, teacher perceptions of the program, parent perceptions, the impact of the program on students' self-concept as a reader and on self-esteem. Data gathered from research in these areas can benefit school administrators and Reading Recovery teachers as they refine and improve the program.

Research has shown a positive correlation between self-concept and achievement (Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Traynelis-Yurek & Hansell, 1993). Since students' self-concepts about themselves as readers can impact their performance, it is important for reading teachers to use their knowledge of students' self-concepts to develop instructional goals. An effective educator will use this information to tailor instruction to meet a student's needs and reinforce his strengths.

This study examined the impact of Reading Recovery on first grade students' self-perceptions of themselves as readers. Did these students have the developmental ability and time to construct a self-concept? What were their perceptions of the reasons why they had been entered into the program? Knowledge gained from this study regarding those issues will benefit educators working with students in Reading Recovery programs.

### **Research Question**

What are the entering and exiting perceptions of students participating in a Reading Recovery program in terms of self-concept as a reader?

### **Definitions**

**Early Intervention:** Alternative programs for at-risk preschool, kindergarten and first grade children designed to prevent reading failure.

**Reading Recovery:** An early intervention program for at-risk first graders designed to prevent reading failure by providing highly structured, intensive instruction. Students are tutored individually for thirty minutes outside their classroom. The students participate in the same five activities daily, however, the instructional goals vary for each lesson. Pupils participate in Reading Recovery until it is determined they are functioning at about average or above for their classmates. At this time, the children are discontinued from the program. The average length of this accelerated instruction is about 12-14 weeks.

**Self-concept:** The overall image we have of ourselves, including perceptions of "I" and "me," together with the feelings, beliefs, and values associated with them.

**Self-esteem:** The personal judgment one makes of his or her own self-worth; the sense of personal worth associated with one's self-concept.

**Discontinued:** Once a student reaches the point where he is functioning at the average level of his peers in reading and writing, he has successfully completed the Reading Recovery program and is considered discontinued.

### Limitations of the Study

- 1) The size of the sample was relatively small ( $n=8$ ).
- 2) The study was conducted in the middle of the school year due to time constraints. Several factors could have influenced the students' self-concepts during the time between the beginning of school and the start of the study.
- 3) The study looks only at the short-term effects of the program on the student's self-concept.
- 4) Self-concept is difficult to accurately measure.
- 5) Some of the subjects were interviewed by their Reading Recovery teacher. The teacher may have subtly influenced the students' responses.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of the Literature

#### Early Intervention Programs

Traditionally, the educational system has concentrated on providing remediation for students with reading problems rather than attempting to prevent those problems. Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan and Wasik (cited in Pikulski, 1994) use an analogy of a mythical town to illustrate how ineffective remediation has been for students. In the mythical town, contaminated drinking water caused 30% of the children to become ill. Some of the children died while others developed life-long disabilities. Millions of dollars were spent on health care for the children. An engineer suggested building a water treatment plant which would eliminate the illness. His idea was vetoed by the town council because it was expensive, the majority of the children (70%) never became ill, and because there would not be enough funds to continue to help the current patients.

Slavin et al. (1991) compare the situation in the mythical town to our efforts to remediate reading problems. Enormous amounts are spent annually in efforts to remediate reading problems, or so-called "learning disabilities" while a fraction of that funding is expended on preventing those problems. This focus on correction rather than prevention continues in spite of an impressive and growing body of authoritative opinion and research evidence which suggests that reading failure is preventable for all but a very small percentage of children" (Pikulski, 1994, p.30).

Indeed, according to research evidence, it is possible to prevent reading failure for the majority of students (Pinnell, 1989; Reynolds, 1991; Taylor, Frye, Short & Shearer, 1992).

Researchers are beginning to question the effectiveness of remediation. Pikulski (1994) found little evidence in his review of the research to support the effectiveness of programs created to correct reading failure beyond second grade. Kennedy, Birman and Demaline (cited in Pikulski, 1994) conducted a study designed to determine the effectiveness of remediation programs. Their findings suggested remediation is ineffective after third grade.

A large portion of recent research in reading has focused upon early intervention programs. The basic premise of these programs is to identify at-risk students early in their school career in order to prevent failure and avoid the need for remediation. Spiegel (1995) discussed the unimpressive gains of children who participated in traditional Chapter 1 remedial reading programs in comparison with the gains of children who completed the early intervention program, Reading Recovery. "Studies show that Chapter 1 children make greater achievement gains than comparable children not receiving the services, but they make few strides in closing the achievement with their peers. Overall, Chapter 1 results in small gains for children with moderate difficulties, but gains dissipate by eighth grade" (Spiegel, 1995, p. 89). The growing body of positive research in support of early intervention programs has convinced many school districts to restructure their resources away from remediation programs into early intervention programs.

## **Reading Recovery**

Reading Recovery is an early intervention program that has been adopted by many school districts across the country, including upstate New York. The theoretical foundation of Reading Recovery is "...based on a view of children as active, constructive learners" (Pinnell, 1989 p. 169). The program's basic tenets include the beliefs that early intervention is beneficial for children, reading is a strategic process, children learn to read by reading, reading and writing are complementing skills, and the instructional program influences the students' concepts of reading (Pinnell, 1989). The major goal of the program is to help the student become an independent, successful reader. "From sound theory of the reading process the child is taught 'how to..., how to carry out operations to solve problems in text, how to monitor his reading, how to check his options, how to be an independent processor of print" (Clay, 1985, p.4).

The Reading Recovery program is structured so that the students receive daily, individual tutoring outside their classrooms. The children are tutored for thirty minutes. The sessions follow a predetermined framework, however, the teacher tailors the instruction to meet the individual needs of each student. The typical session includes the following activities. First, the student rereads one or two familiar books. Second, the child rereads a new book which was introduced the previous day, while the teacher takes a running record. The next activity focuses on letter identification. Fourth, the student writes a story that is cut-up into sentence strips which allows the

student to recreate the story. Finally, a new book is introduced to the child and he/she attempts to read it. The student remains in the program until he/she is achieving at an average level for his/her peers or for a maximum of 100 sessions. A child who successfully completes the program is considered "discontinued", while a child who fails to make progress is "exited" from the program (Pinnell, 1989).

The positive data from various research reports examining the effectiveness of Reading Recovery have convinced many school officials to implement the program in their districts (Pinnell, 1989; Pinnell, Deford & Lyons, 1988; Shanahan & Barr, 1995). The Reading Recovery research began with a field trial study in 1978. The subjects (N=122) attended five different schools in New Zealand. A control group, (further to be known as C) (N= 160), was used to compare the gains of the Reading Recovery pupils. Of the 122 students who participated in the program, 42 were still in the process of receiving instruction and were termed the not discontinued group (further to be known as ND). The remainder of the students successfully completed the program and were termed discontinued (further to be known as D).

The subjects and the control group were pre and post-tested in six different areas. All t-tests conducted for the six areas were above 2.69 and considered significantly different. The D group scored significantly higher than the C group in all tests. The ND group scored significantly higher on two tests than the C group and on the remaining four, the ND group was not significantly lower than the C group. On the Book Level test, the mean score for the D group was 18.53, the mean score for the ND group was 8.21, and for the C group, it was 20.86. The D subjects had a mean

score of 27.63 on Reading Vocabulary while the C mean score was 33.53, and the ND score was 14.76. The mean score on Letter Identification was 51.55 for the D group, 43.29 for the ND group, and 50.74 for the C group. The D subjects had a mean score of 19.79 on Concepts about Print in comparison to 16.00 for the ND subjects and 17.41 for the C group. On Dictation, the mean scores were 33.24 for the D group, 24.52 for the ND group, and 32.96 for the C group. Finally, on the Writing Vocabulary test, the D group scored 45.69 and the ND group scored 24.05. This test was not administered to the C group (Clay, 1985).

A follow-up study was conducted in 1979. Clay (1982) posed the following three research questions in this study. First, what gains were made? Second, did the groups maintain their status? Finally, did the tutoring help the students reach the average band of achievement? This study compared the mean scores of each group on the same six areas as in the previous study. A statistically significant difference was found in only two areas, Book Level and Reading Vocabulary. Differences were determined significant at the  $p < .01$  level. The mean score on Book Level for the D group was 24.66, for the ND group it was 16.23 and for the C group it was 26.36. On the Reading Vocabulary test, the mean score for the D group was 39.09, for the ND group, it was 24.59 and for the C group, it was 47.07. The scores for the D group fell well into one standard deviation of the C group in these two testing areas and were not significantly different for the other four areas. The researchers concluded that the D group was achieving well into the average band in these areas.

As Reading Recovery has been slowly introduced to the United States, school districts have participated in numerous studies to determine the effectiveness of the program. Pinnell (1989) discussed the research completed in New Zealand and in Ohio schools and determined that Reading Recovery is a beneficial program.

According to Pinnell (1989, p. 175), "Two-thirds or more of children who receive a full program in Reading Recovery make accelerated progress and perform within the average for their classes. Children retain their gains and continue to make progress at least 2 (sic) years after the intervention." These observations are based upon research studies completed in New Zealand schools and in Ohio schools. The results of the research in Ohio found over 90% of the discontinued children from Reading Recovery (n=55) met or surpassed the average range in letter identification, word test, text reading and dictation. In addition, 77% met or exceeded criteria for writing vocabulary, 68% met or exceeded criteria for a writing scale and 86% performed at or above average on an assessment for concepts about print. The most encouraging data, however, centered on the students' retention of gains in the second and third grades. Mean reading scores of discontinued children from Reading Recovery were compared with average scores of their peers. After completion of second grade, the Reading Recovery pupils (N=44) had a mean score of 16.71 while the average score was 18.60. The following year, their scores were compared again and the Reading Recovery children (N=44) scored a mean of 23.99 while the average mean score was 23.50. The scores were not statistically significant therefore, the

researchers concluded that the Reading Recovery students were raised to the average band of achievement (Pinnell,1989).

The New Hampshire schools also participated in a study to determine the effectiveness of Reading Recovery. During the 1991-1992 school year, a total of 348 students were identified in the lowest twenty percent of their class and at-risk for failure. Only 248 of these children were included in the research because either they had been discontinued or they had completed a minimum of 60 lessons. Students were tested prior to entering the program and upon discontinuation from the program. The results were very encouraging. A majority of the children (218) were successfully discontinued from the program and were assessed to be achieving at least at an average level in comparison with their peers enrolled in the regular classroom instruction. The remaining students (30) had made gains, however, they were not performing at the average level of their classmates. The researchers interviewed the Reading Recovery teachers, parents of the students, administrators and other teachers in the schools and found that 85.6% were supportive of the program (Schotanus, 1992).

The Wake County school district in North Carolina participated in a similar research study. The program was implemented in the 1990-1991 school year and expanded the following year. The Reading Recovery teachers and Chapter 1 teachers collected data on students who were discontinued from the program. The short-term results favored the program. The staff discovered that 77% of the students who were in the program in 1990-1991 and 73% of the students from the 1991-1992 school year,

completed the program successfully. These students showed overall greater achievement gains in reading than did a comparison group. Data on long-term benefits were mixed although overall in favor of the program. Children from the 1990-1991 program tended to have lower special education referrals and lower Chapter 1 placements than the comparison group (Donley, 1993).

Pollock and Morgan (1992) evaluated the Reading Recovery program and the Early Literacy program. Data were collected in two school districts. A total of six students participated in Reading Recovery and twenty-nine students participated in the Early Literacy program that utilizes small group instruction. The researchers focused on three areas: reading achievement, retention and parent involvement. All of the Reading Recovery pupils and 72.4% of the Early Literacy students reached Level 8 of Scott Foresman text reading testing. All of the subjects in the Reading Recovery group and 78.6% of the subjects in the Early Literacy program were promoted to second grade based upon available retention data. Parents of all the Reading Recovery students and 96.6% of the Early Literacy pupils were involved in the programs. These findings supported the continuation of the programs.

Pollock (1993) investigated the Reading Recovery program in the Columbus Public Schools. The subjects (n=117) were taught by 48 Reading Recovery teachers in various schools. The subjects either had been discontinued from the program (n=78) or had completed at least 60 lessons but were not discontinued (n=39). Data were collected from the Metropolitan Achievement Tests and the Scott Foresman text reading level testing. Results were positive with 87% of the subjects testing at Level 8

on the Scott Foresman test and 93.8% of the subjects were promoted to second grade. A majority of the children, (77.5%) of the 111 evaluation sample, gained 7.0 or more normal curve equivalents (NCES) on the Metropolitan Achievement Tests.

Tiwald (1995) conducted a case study on a first grade student who was identified as being at-risk for failure in reading and writing. The case study followed Deanna as she progressed through the Reading Recovery program. At the beginning of the research, Deanna did not know the alphabet. Upon completion of 81 lessons, she was achieving at the average level of her peers and she learned how to read strategically. This research demonstrated the positive effects the Reading Recovery program can have on an individual student.

Although the majority of the research on Reading Recovery supports the effectiveness of the program, a few researchers have questioned the cost effectiveness of the program, the reliability and validity of previous research in Reading Recovery, and the long term effects of the program ( Center, Wheydall, Freeman, Outhred & McNaught, 1995; Shanahan & Barr, 1985; Wasik & Slavin, 1993).

Shanahan and Barr (1995) concluded after an analysis of the literature that a tendency to overpredict failure for low achieving first grade students is a common problem in early intervention research and that many students make gains without any intervention. For example, Center, Wheldall, Freeman, Outhred and McNaught (cited in Shanahan & Barr) found that 30% of low-achieving students who did not participate in Reading Recovery, made substantial gains. Also, they believe much of the research conducted in Reading Recovery is biased due to the failure of the

researchers to include all subjects in their analysis of the data. For example, children who have poor attendance or fail to progress in the program are routinely left out of the data. Center, Wheldall, Freeman, Outhred and McNaught (cited in Shanahan & Barr) found that 25 to 30% of students were omitted from the New Zealand research based upon those criteria. Shanahan and Barr (1995, p.966) stated, "Depending upon the proportion of participants omitted in this fashion, this creates a substantial bias in favor of Reading Recovery gains, and there is no sound way to adjust the scores that are reported on this basis."

Center, Wheldall, Freeman, Outhred and McNaught (1995) conducted a study in ten school districts in New South Wales. "The purpose of the study was to address some of the weaknesses of previous evaluations in determining the effectiveness of Reading Recovery in New South Wales (Australia) primary schools" (Center et al., p.246). Subjects were divided into three groups. Group one (n=31) contained the Reading Recovery students. Group two, the control group, (n=39) consisted of pupils who were low-achieving and able to receive other support for reading. Group three, the comparison group, (n=39) were low achieving students from comparison schools where Reading Recovery was not available.

These researchers questioned the long term effects of Reading Recovery after they found no significant differences in the Reading Recovery group of students and low-achieving control group subjects after one year. A MANOVA performed on the results of the Burt and Clay book level measures and the Woodcock Passage Comprehension tests found that for both groups there was no significant group effect

( $F(8,30)=0.262, p=.0268$ ). After an analysis of all the data, the researchers concluded that between 19% (underestimate) and 37% (overestimate) of the control group achieved average performance levels without participating in Reading Recovery. Approximately 29% of the comparison group achieved above average or average performance levels without attending Reading Recovery. The researchers hypothesized that these findings could be generalized to the Reading Recovery group, therefore, 30% of this group would have achieved average achievement levels without participating in the program. "Thus it would appear that only about 35% (65% minus 30%) of the original RR cohort may be said to have improved as a direct result of individualized, intensive assistance" (Center, Wheldall, Freeman, Outhred & McNaught, p. 255).

Jelks-Emmanuel (1994) reported similar findings from research conducted in a Chicago school district. The subjects ( $n=34$ ) were all minority students who lived in a low socioeconomic neighborhood. Fourteen of the subjects attended Reading Recovery while the remaining twenty were the control group. The children were administered the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in the spring of 1994. Analysis of the tests scores found no significant difference in reading achievement between the two groups.

A new trend in the research calls for modifications of Reading Recovery such as including an emphasis on phonological processing skills, expanding to small group instruction and altering the time of intervention (Center et al., 1995; Iverson & Tunmer, 1993; Shanahan & Barr, 1995; Smith, 1994).

Smith (1994) conducted a study in the Austin (Texas) Independent School District on a program that was an accelerated version of Reading Recovery. The program, Accelerating Literacy Program (ALP), was based upon the Reading Recovery and Whole Language theories. The subjects (n=367) were identified as low achieving and were enrolled in the four week, ALP program. A 26 item developmental checklist was developed because no common standard of comparison was found. The students increased their reading skills by 0.47 levels on a four-point scale which was determined to be significantly different. The length of this intervention was much shorter than the length of the Reading Recovery program and therefore, considered much more cost effective.

Similar research was conducted by Iverson and Turner (1993). The researchers modified the Reading Recovery program to include direct instruction in phonological recoding skills. The subjects (n=96) were divided evenly into three groups. The first group attended the modified Reading Recovery program, the second participated in the traditional Reading Recovery program and the third group was enrolled in a standard, group-based intervention program. The modified program included code instruction with an emphasis on letter-phoneme patterns. The two Reading Recovery groups scored significantly higher than the standard intervention group on the Diagnostic Survey, however there was no significant difference in scores between the two groups on this measure. The researchers concluded that both Reading Recovery programs supported the development of phonemic awareness and recoding skills. Both Reading Recovery groups also were accelerated to at least the

average performance level or above when compared to their peers. A significant difference, however, was found between the number of lessons each Reading Recovery group participated in during intervention. The modified group attend significantly less lessons (mean=41.75, SD=10.62) than the traditional group (mean=57.31, SD=11.22). The traditional group participated in 37% more lessons than the modified group. The modified approach proved to be more cost-effective, therefore, the researchers recommended providing explicit code instruction in Reading Recovery lessons.

### **Self-Concept and Achievement**

Another area of research in reading that would benefit from further studies is the impact of self-concept on achievement. Many researchers agree that this is an important area to explore, however, a difficult area to measure accurately (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Eder, 1983; Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Williams, 1973).

A common finding in research about self-concept is that it is difficult to measure it in younger children. Researchers provide various hypotheses for this problem and state a need for more research with young children. For example, Williams (1973) stated the fluctuating moods of a young child may influence self-concept measures as well as the fact that young children may not have internalized the value of reading. Filby and Barnett (1982) hypothesized that younger children are not developmentally capable of linking self-concept with achievement due in part to their limited classroom experiences. Finally, Nichols (1979) stated young children are

incapable of accurately assessing their abilities and analyzing causes for their successes and/or failures.

The most ambiguous research in the area of self-concept is its effect on achievement. Logically, many educators hypothesized that a negative self-concept would correlate with poor performance while a positive self-concept would correlate with achievement. However, the research in this area is conflicting. Williams (1973) studied the relationship between self-concept and reading achievement in first grade and found no significant correlation. Subjects (n=133) attended three first grade classrooms in Colorado. The study was conducted for two consecutive years. The subjects were divided into three groups: Experimental A, Experimental B and Control C. The mean IQ scores for the three groups were determined as 109.35 for group A, 103.95 for group B and 109.26 for group C. The children were tested using the California Achievement Test to test reading achievement (RA) and The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) to assess self-concept (SC). A step-wise multiple regression showed that self-concept was not a valid predictor of reading achievement in first or second grade. "The failure to find significant correlations between SC/first RA or second RA did not support the hypotheses that SC scores are positively correlated with RA scores in either first or second grade. Moreover, all SC relationships with the other prediction variables E, S, IQ, and RR, were essentially zero" (Williams, 1973, p. 379). The other prediction variables were E (ethnic background), S (sex), and RR (reading readiness). Williams (1973, p.379) concluded by stating, "Reading achievement and possibly school in general, at this age, may not

have had an overriding relationship with SC.” She also hypothesized that the moods of young children may also influence self-concept. "Secondly, the self-concept of the young child may be subject to wide fluctuations in mood and may vary temporarily according to situations or cyclically according to temperament" (Williams, 1973, p.379).

Hansford and Hattie (1982) found a low correlation (.21) between self-concept and achievement in their meta-analysis of studies in this area. These researchers utilized the results from 128 studies to create a common measure which was correlation coefficients. A total of 202,823 subjects participated in these studies. The researchers produced 1, 136 correlations between self-concept and performance measures. The correlations ranged from -.77 to .96 with the average being .21. Several variables including ethnic background, grade level and socioeconomic status modified the average relationship. Specifically, the correlation between reading achievement and self-concept was found to be .18 with a SD of .27. This correlation was determined using 47 studies with 31,786 subjects. Hansford and Hattie concluded by suggesting further research in this area should be conducted with young children.

### **Self-Concept as a Reader**

Recent studies have demonstrated that young children are capable of constructing a self-concept as a reader (Edwards, 1994, Freppon, 1991 & Shapiro, 1991). Edwards (1994) conducted a qualitative study with her 24 kindergarten students. At the end of the school year, each pupil was interviewed individually and asked a series of questions about his/her concept of the reading process. All of the

subjects responded yes to the question, "Can you read?" Approximately 75% of the children stated they had learned to read in kindergarten or at the age of five. The majority of the students (55%) indicated they learned to read by themselves without help. Seventy percent of the children responded to the question, "What happens when you learn to read?" by describing the process of reading. Sample responses to this question included, "You think about the letters" and "You figure things out" (Edwards, 1994, p. 140). A large percentage (60%) of the subjects indicated they found reading to be easy. Edwards believed this study helped demonstrate that very young children are capable of constructing a self-concept as a reader.

The purpose of a study conducted by Freppon (1991) was to discover if instruction and the developmental stage of learning to read affected the reading concepts of 24 first graders. The subjects were divided into two even groups (n=12) based upon the method of instruction utilized by their classroom teacher. One group was classified skill-based (SB) while the other was classified literature-based (LB). The children were interviewed and they provided oral readings. The results of the study showed that there were differences in the students' concepts about reading depending upon which type of instruction they received and that first graders have definite concepts about reading. When asked what they do when they encounter a word they did not know, both groups responded with "sounding the words out." The LB group responded with more strategies, however, including use of context, rereading and skipping words. Both groups stated good readers "know words" and "sound out words." The LB group, however, also stated that good readers

"understand the story, think hard and read a lot." The SB group mentioned factors such as paying attention to the teacher, reading speed and reading group placement. When asked whether it was more important to understand the story or to get the words right, 92% of the LB group said understanding the story or both understanding the story and getting the words right. Forty-two percent of the SB children said getting the words right was most important, and 50% of this group said both getting the words right and understanding the story. In a discussion about learning to read and traits of a good reader, the SB group mainly focused on such components as finishing homework and workbooks, sounding out words, and saying words correctly. About half of the LB group discussed finding the meaning of books. Freppon stated, "The findings of this study suggest that both instruction and the developmental stage of learning to read influence beginning readers' concepts" (1991, p.159).

In a similar study, Shapiro (1991) compared 467 elementary students' concepts about the reading process. The study was conducted in Vancouver with children in grades one through seven. One group, NOTEACH, attended a school that did not formally teach reading. The other group, TEACH was enrolled in a school that taught reading using a basal series. The children were asked four questions regarding reading as a part of the research. For the first question, "Why do we read?", a difference appeared between the two groups. Children in the NOTEACH group were more likely to respond that they read for pleasure (40% vs. 30% for TEACH). The NOTEACH children also indicated they read for knowledge (47%) more than the other group (20%). The TEACH group were more likely to respond that they were made to read

(10%) or give "utilitarian" responses (21%). No significant differences were found between the two groups' responses to the question, "What is reading?". Younger children in both groups, however, were more likely to indicate that reading was either a process of decoding or gathering meaning but did not believe it was a combination of both these skills. For the third question, "What do you do when you read a new word?", the majority of the children in both groups responded they used decoding. The children in the TEACH group were more likely to use this strategy (77%) than the children in the NOTEACH group (58%). The final question was "Why do teachers ask you questions about your reading?". A majority of the students in the TEACH group (86%) answered that teachers use questions for assessment as compared to 62% of the NOTEACH group. Children in the first grade were more likely to respond, "I don't know" than children in any other grade level. The researcher concluded that "Children's perceptions of the reading process and the role of teachers was also effected (sic) by type of instruction and by grade level, but not by gender" (Shapiro, 1991 p. 63).

### **Self-Concepts of High and Low Readers**

An area of research in self-concept that provides concrete findings is the different conceptions low and high readers possess about reading. Borko and Eisenhart (1986) found various differences between the conceptions of good and poor readers about reading. For example, they discovered low-group students focused on

behavior, procedures, materials and general (non-reading) ability. High-group students focused on reading ability, reading skills and they had a more holistic view of reading. Johns (1974) also discussed the different conceptions good and poor readers have about the reading process. He reported poor readers have difficulty defining reading while good readers define it in terms of comprehension and word recognition.

The study created by Borko and Eisenhart (1986) demonstrated that high and low readers possess different conceptions about reading. The subjects (n=16) were divided into two groups, high and low, based upon their reading ability. The students attended second grade in a rural Appalachian school. Open-ended interviews were conducted to attain the students' conceptions of the reading process. A difference was found between the two groups perceptions of how they learned to read. The high group focused on skills (77%) and holistic reading (76%) while the low group responded with behavioral skills (68%) such as raising your hand and procedural skills such as belonging to a reading group. All subjects, with the exception of one student, chose someone from the highest reading group when asked who was the best reader in the class. Also, all the subjects chose someone from the lowest reading group when asked to name someone who was having the most difficulty with reading. When asked to give characteristics of good readers, 44% of the high group responded with answers pertaining to assessments of reading performance such as "gets words right away." The low group (37%) tended to focus on behavioral concerns such as "acts right." The high group concentrated on the lack of decoding skills (42%) when asked to give a characteristic of poor readers. The low group tended to name misbehaviors

(43%) as a characteristic of poor readers. The researchers posed the question, "Are young readers' conceptions of reading related to their classroom experience?" They determined, "The answer to our fourth research question seems to be a qualified yes. That is, patterns in the data suggest that students' conceptions of reading are related to their reading experiences" (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986, p. 606).

Schell (1991) studied the perceptions students possess of good and poor readers. The researcher interviewed the subjects (n=562) using an eight-item semantic differential scale. The subjects, in grades one through six, attended a public school in Kansas. Three attributes were used to compare students' perceptions of good and poor readers. These were grade level, gender and reading group assignment. Significant differences at or above the .05 level for the test were found for student perceptions of good and poor readers. The subjects attributed more negative personal and social characteristics to the lower readers than to the higher readers. This was found at every grade level, regardless of gender or reading group assignment. The author noted that these negative perceptions were formed in the first grade by the spring. " These perceived differences are pervasive because even students who reported themselves assigned to the low reading group-poor readers in all likelihood-perceived poor readers more negatively. These differences were clearly established by March of 1st (sic) grade" (Schell, 1991, p. 24).

Studies in self-concept have shown children are capable of constructing perceptions of reading and comparing their performance with classmates. These studies found that environmental issues such as classroom organization, ability

grouping and teacher behavior impact students' self-perceptions ( Eder, 1983; Filby & Barnett, 1982 ).

Interviews were conducted with 102 students in second and fifth grades for the research completed by Filby and Barnett (1982). Reading instruction varied within the students' classrooms with the subjects either receiving instruction in a whole group situation or in small reading groups. A significant difference ( $\chi^2=133$ ,  $p<.001$ ) was found between each group for their choices of the better readers in their classes. The subjects receiving whole group reading instruction determined better readers by assessing task performance. The students who were segregated into reading groups tended to choose the better readers based upon assignment of reading groups. Filby and Barnett (1982, p. 444) concluded, "The structure of the classroom clearly influences the meaning that students attach to the phrase "better reader," the factors they consider when comparing the performance of two students, and, therefore, how much agreement exists about who is better."

The impact of ability grouping on self-concept is an important theme in research. Eder (1983) studied 23 first graders who were separated into reading groups based upon ability. The students were interviewed during the first, fifth and eight months of the school year. The students' self-concepts were assessed in the eighth month using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI). "A comparison of the average self-concept of students who had high or low standing within their groups provides support for the previous finding regarding the relatively greater importance of within-group comparisons in this classroom. The results in table 3 (sic) suggest that

while members of the highest ability group had relatively low academic self-concepts, high-standing members within all groups had relatively high self-concepts"

(Eder,1983, p. 157). The members with the highest standing in the top reading group had a mean score of 6.35 on the SEI while the highest members of the lower reading group had a mean score of 6.25 on the SEI. The lowest members of the highest reading group had a significantly different score on the SEI (mean=4.00) than any other group. Eder (1986, p. 160) concluded by stating, "In summary, the results of this study indicate that even in first grade, several different and somewhat conflicting processes may affect students' academic self-concept."

### **The Effect of Early Intervention and Remedial Reading Programs Upon Self-Concept**

The impact of early intervention programs and remedial reading programs upon self-concept is an area that has received little attention in reading research. The majority of studies focus on the attitudes of students toward reading after participation in intervention programs. Danielson and Tighe (1994) administered a reading attitude test prior to participation in a literature discussion group and after the conclusion of the program. The subjects (n=18) attended third grade and were identified as at-risk for failure. The pre and post-test scores of the reading attitude survey were analyzed to discover if an improvement in attitude toward reading could be found. A significant difference ( $p<.05$ ) was found on three questions from the survey. In addition, the boys post-test scores were significantly higher overall than their pre-test scores ( $p<.05$ ). The

researchers believed that the intervention program had a positive effect on the students' attitudes toward reading.

Chandler and Aldridge (1972) found no significant change in first grade children's attitudes after completion of an eight week program that focused on shared readings. Twenty-four subjects from a large, inner city school participated in the intervention program. The Attitude/Appreciation Assessment was used as a pre and post-test measure. After a one-way analysis of covariance, no significant difference was found in the first graders' attitudes toward reading. The authors hypothesized that the length of treatment was too short to affect the subjects' attitudes.

Sanders and Helm (1983) examined the perceptions of remedial reading students and their classmates on a remedial reading program. This study provided results in general attitude as discussed earlier and the students' perceptions of the program. The general findings indicate that both the participants in the remedial reading program and their peers had positive attitudes toward the program. Both groups of students tended to perceive the program in a similar manner. For both groups of children, 95% stated the remedial reading students attend the program "to learn to read better" and 85% believed they attend "to learn that reading can be fun." The pupils enrolled in the program realized they needed assistance and responded favorably (89%) that remedial reading class "helps them learn better." In addition, the remedial reading program appeared not to have a negative impact on the children's self-concept because 84% of the students stated they were good readers and 90% indicated they had a lot of friends.

## **Reading Recovery and Self-Concept**

Few research studies have been conducted concerning the effect of participation in an early intervention program upon students' self-concept. For example, a search of the literature regarding Reading Recovery uncovered only one study which examined the self-concept of students after completing a Reading Recovery program. This study focused on how the students felt about their reading ability, how they perceived others felt about their reading ability, and how the students felt about the Reading Recovery Program (Traynelis-Yurek & Hansell, 1993). The researchers developed a questionnaire which the subjects completed anonymously. The results were very positive and the researchers concluded early intervention can have a positive impact on self-esteem. For example, 94% of the students indicated they were glad they completed the program, 87% felt they were reading better in class, 87% liked reading better and 89% would recommend Reading Recovery to a friend who needed help in reading.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Design**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to compare the entering and exiting self-perceptions as readers of students participating in a Reading Recovery program.

#### **Methodology**

##### **Subjects**

The subjects consisted of eight first grade students who were identified as being in the lowest 20% of their peer group in emergent literacy. The students attended public schools in Wayne County and in Batavia, New York.

##### **Materials**

A researcher-designed questionnaire, created to elicit responses from the students regarding their self-concepts as a reader, was used in the study.

##### **Procedures**

The students were interviewed prior to enrollment in the Reading Recovery program. The interviewer read the questions from the questionnaire designed for this study. This eliminated the possibility of students failing to comprehend the questions due to difficulties in reading the questionnaire. This format also allowed for discussion which provided valuable insights to the students' self-concept. The students were interviewed again after being discontinued from the program. The

structure of the interview was identical, however, additional questions were added to the questionnaire which specifically addressed the students' perceptions of the Reading Recovery program. Both interviews were taped in order to ensure accuracy.

### **Analysis of the Data**

Data were collected from an interview with students prior to their entry into the Reading Recovery intervention and upon their completion of the program. The students' responses to the items on each questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively to discover their self-concept as a reader before and after participation in Reading Recovery. Each students' responses to the items on the two questionnaires were compared to determine if a change in self-concept had occurred during this time frame. Also, the data were analyzed qualitatively to determine if any trends were found for the whole group of students such as gender differences and environmental influences.

## CHAPTER IV

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to compare the entering and exiting self-perceptions as readers of students participating in a Reading Recovery program.

### **Analysis of the Data**

Data gathered from the questionnaires are listed in charts on the following pages. Five additional questions were added to the Post Intervention Questionnaire and are found on a separate page.

Question	Pre Intervention	Post Intervention
Are You a Reader?	88% YES 12% NO	100% YES
Could you read to someone?	88% YES 12% NO	100% YES
How do/did you learn to read?	63% Teachers/ parents 25% Using a strategy 12% Hooked on Phonics	38% Reading Recovery teacher 25% Classroom teacher 25% Practice 12% Word knowledge
Are you a good reader?	63% YES 37% SOMETIMES	100% YES
Why/ Why not?	38% Practice 13% Unsure 13% Ability to read words 12% Make mistakes 12% Look at pictures 12% Look for a good location to read	50% Use of reading strategies 38% Practice 12% Knowledge gained from class
Why do/did you want to learn to read?	25% School success 25% To read to others 25% Discover meaning 13% For pleasure 12% Didn't want to learn	25% School success 25% To read to others 25% I don't know 13% For pleasure 12% Didn't want to learn
What do you do when you read?	38% Read 13% Use a reading strategy 13% Learn 12% Practice 12% Look at pictures 12% Look for a good location to read	50% Use a reading strategy 25% Read 25% Look at words/ pictures

Question	Pre Intervention	Post Intervention
Do you like to read in school?	75% YES 25 % NO	88% YES 12% I DON'T KNOW
Why/ Why not?	50% For Pleasure 25% To Difficult 13% Ability to read 12% It is good	50% For pleasuse 25% I don't know 13% To teach others 12% To read to others
What do you do when you have trouble with reading?	63% Ask for help 37% Use a reading strategy 12% Gave more than 1 response	100% Use a reading strategy 63% Gave more than 1 response
Do you like to read at home?	88% YES 12% NO	88% YES 12% NO
Why/ Why not?	38% Receive help from family 25% Read to family 13% Not fun 12% To proactice 12% Own easy books	25% To practice 13% For pleasure 13% Own easy books 12% Don't like it 12% I am a good reader
What do you like best about reading?	25% Pictures 25% Fun activity 13% Knowing words 12% No response	38% Pictures 25% Learning 13% Easy books 12% Reading to parents 12% Sounding out words
If you could do two of the following things, what 2 would you do? Play outside, read a book, watch TV, or play a game.	38% Reading first choice 38% Did Not choose reading	50% Reading first choice 25% Did not choose reading

Question	Pre Intervention	Post Intervention
Are you a writer?	63% YES 25% YES, hesitantly 12% NO	75% YES 25% YES, hesitantly
Why would/did you come to this class?	38% Learn to read 37% Learn(gave no specifics) 25% Unsure	75% Learn to read 13% Learn (gave no specifics) 12% Unsure

## Post intervention Questions

Question	Response
What did you learn?	63% To read 38% Gave specific reading strategies 12% Reading is fun
Are you a better reader now?	100% YES
What is easier now?	63% Figuring out 25% Reading 12% Fixing mistakes
What did Mrs. ____ teach you?	50% Gave specific reading strategies 63% To read
Would you tell your friends to do this if they needed help?	100% YES

### **Findings and Interpretations**

This study was designed to compare the entering and exiting self-perceptions of eight first graders enrolled in the Reading Recovery program. Overall goals of the research included determining if the students had the developmental ability and time to construct a self-concept, as well as discovering the pupils' perceptions of the reasons why they entered the program. In addition, specific areas of self-concept as a reader were examined by analyzing the results from the questionnaires.

The students did possess self-concepts of themselves as readers prior to the intervention, however, they were underdeveloped, often negative, immature, vague and lacking confidence. The majority of the children (88%) classified themselves as a reader at this time, however, they lacked firm knowledge of the reading process. For example, 63% of the subjects relied on external sources of help when they encountered difficulties with reading. The students also demonstrated a lack of full understanding of the reasons for their enrollment into the Reading Recovery program. Only 38% of the subjects gave the response, "to learn to read" while 25% were unsure of the reasons. The remaining 37% gave the generic response, "to learn".

The intervention did have a significant impact on the subjects' self-perceptions as readers. Overall, the students displayed more confidence, had a stronger sense of the reading process and took ownership of the reading process after participating in Reading Recovery. After intervention, 100% of the subjects named a strategy they would use if they experienced trouble while reading. Prior to the intervention, 63% of the students would have asked for help from an external source first. The subjects had

difficulty answering the question, " What do you do when you read?" before participating in Reading Recovery. In fact, one student responded, " Find a good spot to sit". The subjects developed a better sense of the reading process after completion of the program and were able to give more sophisticated answers to that question such as, "Read the whole thing, if I get something wrong, I go back and start over".

A significant improvement in self-concept was seen after the intervention. At this time, 100% of the subjects responded that they were readers, they could read to someone, and that they were good readers. In addition, 100% of the pupils believed they were a better reader after Reading Recovery.

The subjects felt that Reading Recovery was beneficial for them. A majority of the students (63%) stated they learned to read because of the program, and they found decoding words easier. In addition, 100% of the subjects would recommend the program to a friend.

A large percentage of the students (63%) believed that either the Reading Recovery teacher or the classroom teacher was responsible for their learning to read. This is in contrast to a study completed by Edwards (1994) in which 55% of the subjects stated they learned to read by themselves. These students had just completed kindergarten when interviewed for that study. Participation in the Reading Recovery program may have influenced the subjects' perceptions of their role in learning to read. As they realized they were attending the program for help, they may have decided that they were able to learn to read due only to the help of their teachers.

The pupil's responses remained consistent for the question, "Do you like to read at home?" A majority (88%) indicated they do like to read at home and they gave varying reasons. A low percentage (13%) stated they read for pleasure. Only 25% of the students stated they read to family members and the same percentage indicated they like to practice reading at home. A Home-School intervention program that stresses the importance of reading in the home may be a beneficial addition to Reading Recovery. It is important for students to realize reading is pleasurable and an integral part of everyday life.

### **Summary**

A significant difference was found in the self-concepts of the subjects upon completion of the Reading Recovery program. The results demonstrated that the students possessed a more positive view of themselves as readers, developed a more sophisticated sense of the reading process and took ownership of the reading process by naming strategies they use when interacting with text. The subjects also indicated they believed the Reading Recovery program was beneficial for them and they all would recommend it to a friend. The results confirm the fact that Reading Recovery is a positive experience for children. The subjects believe this program helped develop them into better readers. Many previous studies have supported the use of Reading Recovery on the basis of academic achievement and cost effectiveness in the long term. This present study adds to the support of the Reading Recovery program by demonstrating the positive effect the program has on students' self-concept.

## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusions and Implications**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to compare the entering and exiting self-perceptions as readers of students participating in a Reading Recovery program.

#### **Conclusions**

The results of this research study indicate that participation in Reading Recovery has a positive impact upon students' self-concepts as readers. All the subjects stated they were good readers upon completion of the intervention and they all believed that Reading Recovery was beneficial for them. In addition, the subjects developed a more comprehensive view of the reading process and learned reading strategies.

Similar findings were reported by Traynelis-Yurek and Hansell (1993) in their research. The majority of their subjects demonstrated a positive response to the Reading Recovery program. For example, 88% stated they were reading better upon completion of Reading Recovery and 89% indicated they would recommend the program to a friend (Traynelis-Yurek & Hansell, 1993, p. 143).

The present study also found areas that need to be addressed in Reading Recovery. First, the majority of the students (63%) believed that their teachers were the sole reason they learned to read. It would be beneficial for students to learn that

they also contribute to the process of learning to read. If they take ownership of this remarkable accomplishment, they will gain more confidence and better understand the process. Second, the research found that the students need to learn that reading is a pleasurable activity that is an important part of everyday life. They need to internalize these beliefs in order to continue to improve their reading skills and to be motivated to read outside of school. The addition of a Home-School program to Reading Recovery may address these issues.

The present research study supports the continuation of the Reading Recovery Program. Prior research has focused on academic achievement following discontinuation from Reading Recovery. This study focused on the human aspect of the program in terms of the students' self-concept. It is critical for students to develop a positive self-concept in order for them to succeed in school and life. The results of this research demonstrates the positive impact Reading Recovery has upon the students.

### **Implications for Research**

The current study was conducted between January and June of the 1996-1997 school year. It would be beneficial to replicate this research earlier in the school year to see if this influences the student's ability to construct a self-concept as a reader. Further research is needed to see if these results are specific to Reading Recovery or if they would be found after completion of other early intervention programs. Finally, a

long term study would provide valuable information regarding whether or not the students retain their positive self-concepts in later grades.

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## **APPENDIX**

Questions (First Interview) :

1. Are you a reader?
2. Could you read to someone?
3. How do you learn to read?
4. Are you a good reader? Why or Why not?
5. Why are you going to Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ 's class?
6. Why do you want to learn to read?
7. What do you do when you read?
8. Do you like to read in school? Why or Why not?
9. What do you do when you have trouble reading?
10. Do you like to read at home? Why or Why not?
11. What do you like best about reading?
12. What don't you like about reading?
13. If you could do two of the following things, what would you do? (watch tv, read a book, play outside, play a game).
14. Are you a writer?

These 14 questions were asked again at the second interview upon discontinuation from Reading Recovery. In addition, the following 4 questions were asked.

1. What have you learned in Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ 's class?
2. Are you a better reader now?
3. What is easier now?
4. What did Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ teach you?