

Reading Recovery and parent participation

Marilyn Blakeney-Williams

Department of Arts and Language Education, University of Waikato

Introduction

The New Zealand Reading Recovery programme (Clay, 1987), an early intervention programme designed to provide extra individualised help for the lowest achieving six-year-olds with reading and writing, has gained international recognition in recent years. It is a programme that incorporates feedback from educators in the field and endeavours to address research findings. As a former Reading Recovery tutor and teacher, one such finding that particularly interested me was that of Glynn, Crooks, Bethune, Ballard and Smith (1989). They found that there was limited communication with parents and concluded that greater parental involvement in supporting the Reading Recovery programme would be beneficial. Their position with respect to the value of teacher-parent partnership in enhancing the literacy learning of children is now well recognised (see, for example, Biddulph and Tuck, 1983; Cairney and Munsie, 1995; Epstein, 1983; McNaughton, 1995; McNaughton, Glynn and Robinson, 1981; Robinson, 1989). The small-scale research study reported here investigated the Reading Recovery teacher-parent relationship in a number of schools in 1996.

Method

Twelve Reading Recovery teachers and twelve parents from eleven schools were involved in the project. All were interviewed individually using a semi-structured interview format. My original intention was to interview a sample of parents whose children ranged from unsuccessful to successful in the Reading Recovery programme. However, due to circumstances beyond my control, the sample turned out to be somewhat biased; all the parents were those of children who had been successful.

Findings

Reading Recovery teachers in this selected sample were making an effort to communicate with parents. However, communication mainly took the form of teachers transmitting particular information to the parents. This was especially so during the 'entry' phase and in the course of the children's participation in the programme. It was less evident at "discontinuation" where over half of the parents were surprised to learn from sources other than Reading Recovery teachers that their children had finished the programme. Further, they were unaware that their children remained at risk and required support for some time to come.

Little evidence of partnership, in the manner defined in current literature, emerged from the data. Given that the I.E.A findings (Smith and Elley, 1994) revealed that the gap between the reading literacy levels of minority and majority language speakers is greater in New Zealand than in any of the other countries surveyed, there seems an obvious need to consider the potential of parent/teacher partnerships to enhance the language/literacy development of children in New Zealand's increasingly multicultural society. Reading Recovery could usefully explore parent partnership as the next phase in its development. Such a partnership could enable Reading Recovery teachers and parents to understand the way each defines, values, and uses literacy as part of cultural practices. In this way aspects of Reading Recovery could be adjusted to take into account different family values, needs and strengths. Parents in turn would be better able to support their children's developing forms of literacy, forms which ultimately empower us to take our place in today's society (Cairney and Munsie, (1995).

References

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