

Research Question

Is the role of parents of students within the reading recovery programme significant or influential in student achievement during the reading and writing intervention reading recovery offers?

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Introduction

I have been a reading recovery teacher for many years having trained in 1989. Even as a teaching and fully released principal I have continued to teach at least one child in the programme annually, thus boosting the programme in the school. Like all reading recovery teachers most children we teach are successfully discontinued and return to class at a comparable level of reading and writing as their classroom peers of similar age. However there are always a few who do not do so and reading recovery teachers work alongside peer reading recovery teachers and their tutor teacher to search their practice deeply to try to find the answers and the strategies that will best help each student. .

Schools involve parents in the learning process in as many ways as they can and reading recovery is no different. We believe practise of skills learnt in the programme at school and at home can strengthen the learning for the student.

“The most valuable preschool preparation for school learning is to love books, and to know that there is a world of interesting ideas in them” Butler and Clay 1979. Clay also states that “The best thing parents, caregivers and teachers can do to help children construct meaning, is to provide experiences which engage children in conversation and respond to their early attempts to speak, draw, read, and write (Heath, 1983; Clay, 2001).

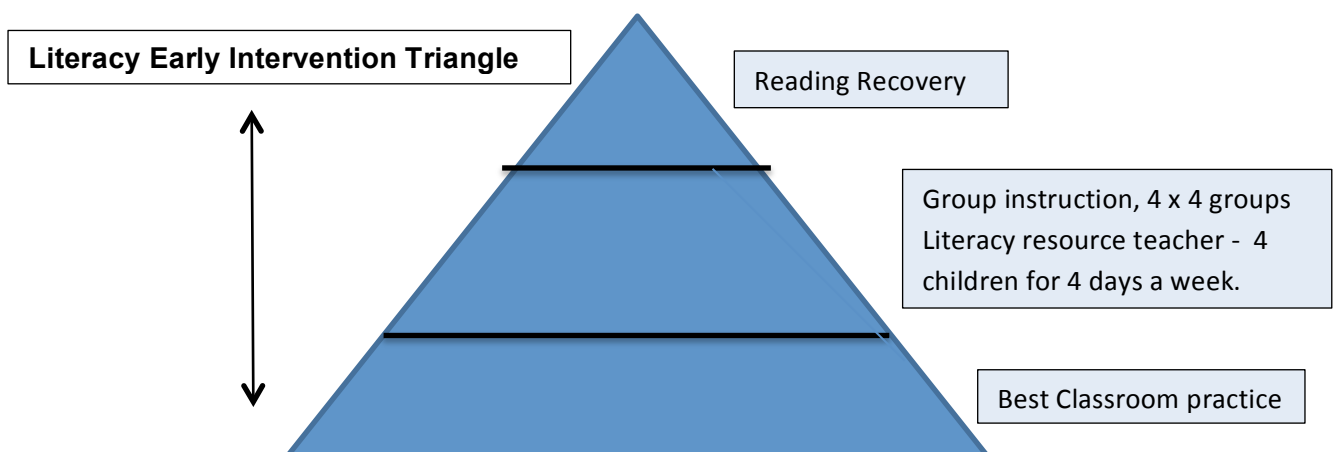
Therefore, if in the early years parents and caregivers can so successfully prepare children for future learning in literacy, might it not be likely that parents can support and influence the progress of their child whilst in a reading recovery programme. This then is the focus of my research.

Purpose

I planned to work across two countries with small samples from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada and the Hauraki area of the North Island, New Zealand. Originally I planned to create a report or presentation for www.educationallleaders.govt.nz that would show in some way the difference parental involvement at home in the reading recovery programme made to the student’s individual progress.. As the project progressed I realised that this would need to be a longitudinal study to be conclusive. The answers to my survey and discussions were variable and anecdotal. Because the samples are very small and only taken over a short period of time the evidence I collated is more anecdotal rather than quantitative. The research took the form of a questionnaire and interviews with parents in both settings. In Vancouver I worked alongside Sallie Merrial Boschung, Reading Recovery Teacher Leader and Enseignante-formatrice en Intervention Préventive en Lecture et Écriture (ILPÉ) Vancouver Board of Education who kindly arranged the schools to visit and reading recovery continuing contact teachers and some of their parents to meet with. In New Zealand I worked with the teachers in my own continuing contact group, and my tutor.

Differences and similarities in the school settings in New Zealand and Vancouver District, British Columbia

- Reading recovery teachers in New Zealand in the main are practicing classroom teachers who are released from class to teach their reading recovery children that the school is funded for.
- In some cases in New Zealand Reading recovery teachers are part-time teachers or those who hold several roles in the school.
- Reading recovery teachers I met in Canada were also Learning Support Teachers or teacher librarians who had other components to their full-time teaching position.
- A large number of elementary schools in British Columbia offer full immersion in French. Offering reading recovery in French while still in its infancy is now growing as teachers who are fluent in the language are becoming more available and the demand and or need is increasing.
- The reading recovery programme taught mirrors that which is taught in New Zealand. I was delighted to observe a lesson taken in French and despite my limited knowledge of French I could identify all components of the lesson and the strategies being taught by the teacher.
- Many of the schools have high numbers of ESOL students, much as we find in major cities in New Zealand.
- In the 2012-13 school year in BC, 10.3% of the students were Aboriginal, 10.1% were ELL students and 7.6% of the total students were in French Immersion.
- Children in British Columbian schools can enter full day kindergarten at the elementary school of their choice in the new school year in the calendar year they turn 5 years old. Starting in 2010, the Ministry of Education began phasing in full day kindergarten over two years across British Columbia. Full day kindergarten is now available for all eligible five-year-olds in the province. Full day learning is associated with improved reading and numeracy and smoother transitions to Grade 1,
- All children are required to begin formal schooling before they turn 6, so they then enter Grade 1. There is only one intake a year and it takes place immediately after the summer break.
- Most New Zealand children start school on or after their 5th birthday, but, as in Canada, are not required to start school until they are 6 years old.
- British Columbia has adopted a Literacy Early Intervention Triangle described to me as a three tier approach. Tier One at classroom level is Best classroom teacher practice, Tier Two for Group Early Intervention and Tier Three provides reading recovery for a selected number of children. Students in Grades 1-3 can move up and down the triangle as teachers strive to ensure literacy success for all students.



- The Changing Results for Young Readers (CR4YL) programme was introduced in British Columbia for the first time in 2012-2013 year. It is designed to target students that teachers feel are struggling with reading and aims to develop self-confidence. Resource teachers are encouraged to work with classroom teachers and students directly in the classroom.
- Classroom practices and school policy in British Columbia and New Zealand may vary at a ministry level, school by school and class by class, but the end goal is the same in both settings- Success for each and every child in literacy.

Research Process and Findings

A range of questions were posed to parents and to teachers. I also interviewed a small sample of interested parents in an effort to find a little more about their response to, and support of reading recovery and their child while in the programme.

I also posed similar but slightly different questions of reading recovery teachers to find out how schools went about involving parents in the programme.

Questions asked of parents were as follows:

1. How do/did you support your child while he or she is in the reading recovery intervention programme?

2. Did/Do you feel confident about assisting your child during this intervention? Yes/No
Explain

3. Has the school prepared you for assisting your child in reading and writing while he or she is in the reading recovery intervention programme? Yes /No. If yes explain

What else, if anything do/did you feel the school could do to assist you in helping your child while he or she is receiving the Reading Recovery Intervention programme?

4. Has the school prepared you for on-going support for your child once he /she is discontinued from the programme? Yes /No. If yes explain

5. What simple things did/do you think you can do with your child that will give him or her support once the intervention programme is completed?

I collated the responses to the parent questionnaire. (Appendix 1) This has led to some summary observations about parent involvement in the programme.

Summary of Observations;

1. Parents really appreciate the opportunity given to their children who have been selected for the programme and are very grateful to the individual teachers of the programme. They value highly the expertise they bring to the programme and their child and nearly all parents were very keen to learn how they can best support their child during the programme. All parents want their children to be successful readers and writers and they want to know how to do this.

2. Parents definitely saw the importance of daily **reading with or by** their child at home during and even after the reading recovery programme was completed. A number of parents

talked about supporting, especially when the reading became difficult and discussing the story with their child. Some parents also talked about **reading to** their child, joining a library, playing board games, reading out and about the community- signs notices and so forth.

3. Communication between the reading recovery teacher and parents appears to be a key factor in helping parents to support their child successfully. Many parents were invited to and were willing to observe the teacher and their child during a lesson. Discussing the strategies being taught gave parents confidence to use similar support at home. Parents appreciated regular home and teacher contact and a range of avenues were used, face to face discussions and teachers answering parent questions, emailing the parent, workbooks, student homework book, teacher writing notes to parents in the homework book.

4. Parents of students in French Immersion programmes or parents of ESOL students who did not have a great grasp on the French or English language relied heavily on the reading recovery teacher. Some could cope at Grade 1 level, some had tutors, siblings helping at home, some said they were learning alongside their child. Some had games, simple library books, the internet for pronunciation assistance, and audio books to support themselves and the student with their reading. All commented on the importance of keeping in contact with the teacher and learning from her so they know what to do to support their child.

Questions asked of teachers were as follows:

1. Does the school see literacy learning as a home and school partnership? Yes ___
No ___ If yes, in what way does the school promote this with parent/caregivers?

2. Do you involve parents or a parent/caregiver in the support of the emerging reader and writer while in the Reading Recovery intervention programme? Yes ___ No ___ If the answer is yes, in what way do you or your school encourage parent participation and what is your expectation of the parent/caregiver? If parents/ caregivers are not asked or able to support their emerging learner how does the school offer further support outside the Reading Recovery programme, especially while the student is in Reading Recovery?

3. How does your school prepare parents for student support of the Reading Recovery intervention programme?

4. Before discontinuation how does the school prepare parents/caregivers for on-going support of their child?

5. Does the school have any data that shows the significant or effect size on student achievement that parent involvement has on the success for the child in the programme? Yes ___ No ___ If yes please explain:

The sample for these questions was small but the replies were remarkably similar. From my collation of the survey results (see Appendix 2) I have made the following observations about how schools work to involve parents in the reading recovery programme.

Summary of Observations:

1. At some point during the students entry to school or to the reading recovery programme, a letter or brochure is sent home or shared with parents. In Canada where students are in French immersion programmes or parents are non-English speakers the letter is translated or a translator is used.
2. Face-to-face meetings seem to be the most valued way to inform parents about their child's entry to the programme. The time is also used to prepare parents for their role in the programme, help them to understand the schools expectation and support they will be given, so that they can best assist their child in their literacy learning. This appears to be a strong element in the parental preparation and co-operation with the school programme.
3. In nearly all schools parents were invited to observe the teacher teaching their child. This is taken up by many but not all parents for a number of reasons. Teachers value the opportunity to demonstrate and explain how the programme to those who do attend.
4. Teachers consider opportunity to practice reading skills of paramount importance and so schools put in place a range of ways to support students who do not seem to be getting regular support from home. Buddy readers, senior student buddies, peer support programmes, 4x4 reading groups, classroom teacher or teacher aid assistance are some of the ways mentioned by the schools.
5. Preparing the family for discontinuation and assisting them to discover ways they can continue to support their child is important to reading recovery teachers and it seems that in most cases this takes the form of a teacher and parent meeting.
6. None of the schools I visited or surveyed had hard data to support their assumption based on the research of Clay, Butler, Arlington and others on the benefit of parental support of the reading recovery student. However some teachers did make comment based on their experiences and observations of the students they had worked with in the present and past.
7. Those comments are as follows;
 - *Students who have parent support make significant progress in reading and moderate growth in writing.*
 - *I see that home practice impacts on school outcome greatly.*
 - *I have noticed that R/R students who practice regularly usually progress faster and continually. Those who don't practice much struggle at the same level longer and slide backwards after holidays. There are a couple of exceptions with students with persistent learning difficulties.*

- *We have noted with ESOL students those who have English language support at home tend to progress at a faster rate and retain their skills much better, Another factor is the students own English level and their motivation.*
- *It seems that those students who have home support are usually more successful.*

Classroom visits and parental interviews gave further insights

While in Vancouver, Canada I was invited to visit schools and junior classrooms and also meet and observe reading recovery teachers at work. The similarity between reading recovery as I know it in New Zealand and the lessons I observed in Vancouver were so similar and familiar I felt most at home. Little difference in the programme delivery was noticed at all. Teachers in training were mentored by their tutor teacher in exactly the same way, using Literacy Lessons Part One and Two, Clay 2005.

I attended a reading recovery in-service afternoon session and was able to share with the teachers some of our school junior classroom practices with a focus on whole language and literacy practices in the classroom.

While visiting the schools I interviewed some parents who willingly gave their time to discuss their impressions of the reading recovery programme and their involvement in it. These interviews were held with two or three parents at a time and were relatively informal but hugely worthwhile to capture the parent voice in the programme.

Comments made by parents included

- *“We knew our daughter was not progressing and were thrilled when we got the letter telling them that she was to enter reading recovery”*
- *Both families attended school to observe the lesson and find out how they could help. “We read daily and constructed the cut up story to read at home”*
- *Dad said “He could see progress and was thrilled when he realised his son was reading the signs in shops when they were out and about”*
- *Q’s Mum and Dad were thrilled when she was selected for reading recovery. Q is in a French immersion class and neither Mum nor Dad speak French so helping their daughter has been very hard. The parents had just arranged a tutor for Q when the letter came to say she would be entering reading recovery. Mum went to watch lessons from time to time, “this gave me confidence to help at home.” Both parents commented on Q’s growth in confidence and her willingness to take risks, learn new French vocabulary and to apply the strategies she is being taught. Dad commented “it is wonderful to see Q now translating the story into English for him so that he can understand what she is reading.” Mum commented that once families had entered full French immersion “parents would greatly benefit from guidance from the school as to how they could support their child at home.”*

- *Another, Mum to L was delighted when L was selected and paid a great deal of praise to the Reading recovery teacher. Her son is an active learner and she is delighted to see him reading to the dog, the other siblings, upside down in his bed, he practices anywhere and anyway. Mum listens and supports her son's effort to read. L was present and he said he felt proud of himself and knew he was reading better now. He likes to read. I observed L in his classroom and he was very engaged in the literacy activity he was involved with at the time.*
- *Dad has a son X who has now completed the programme. English is not the language of the home and Mum does not speak English. The family want to retain both languages. Dad has been the home support, although Mum listened to X. "X is now reading confidently." The parent appreciated help from reading recovery teacher who is still supporting X in a 4 x4 group reading programme. 4 children in the group reading with Literacy Support teacher 4 times a week. This is the same teacher as the reading recovery teacher.*
- *Mum to N valued the reading recovery programme. Reading recovery is provided to English and French immersion students. N is in an English speaking stream. Mum has supported N with lots of praise. "Her self-esteem has developed; she now reads aloud, no longer whisper reading. She now enjoys reading and can't wait to read chapter books." Mum and N read books together, complete the cut up story, go to the library and read lots of Dr Suess books to support word processing. N will also have summer vacation follow-up. Mum appreciates the on-going support the school gives over two to three years as the resource teachers will monitor and work with N and other children in small groups.*

Supporting Research

Researchers, schools and education ministries talk often of "parents as first teachers." It would be foolish of formal educational institutions to ignore the influence of parental and home influence on the pre-school experiences that children have in the first five years of their life. It is during the preschool years "that a child learns to use his home language ... The child has experience of using his interaction with people and things to make language match with what he experiences in the environment." Clay 1991.

No matter what his experiences are, the sense he makes of the world around him, the language of his mother tongue is, the patterns and structure of language he has learned to control, "in all cases the child has already learned how to learn language" Clay 1991. Parents have been an integral part of that learning.

Having good preschool experiences available to all pre-schoolers is the first essential step toward reading and writing success. Exposure to a wide range of interesting and challenging opportunities to develop their brains, prepares children for the formal learning school will provide once enrolled. These opportunities include being able to explore their environment and share activities with interested adults, talking, reading books and writing about their experiences. Such approaches will stimulate cognitive thinking, develop mental awareness and the confidence to look for new things to do and learn about.

If the pre-schoolers world is a literate one, they will have stories read to them, sing, learn chants and rhymes, enjoy poetry and raps, see parents writing in a variety of ways such as lists, letters, cards and have experience of a range of visual images, art, movies, television, signs, posters, notices etc. All these “interesting and challenging opportunities to explore their world are an insurance against having difficulties once ... at school.” Clay 2005.

All preschool age children need rich language and literacy experiences so they are prepared to benefit from reading and writing instruction in school. Children who have high quality preschool experiences with an emphasis on language and literacy are more likely to acquire strong language and literacy skills that translate into achievement in the early grades and throughout their schooling. Morrow (2005)

Family members are the first teachers children have. They are also the teachers children have for the longest period of time. Quality preschools engage family members as an integral part of the language and literacy programs both in school and at home. Morrow (2005) Parents have been the centre of their child’s development until they enter formal schooling and so they naturally still want to be involved. If for any of a number of reasons they find their child is having difficulties to achieve success at school they want to know how they can help.

One parent wrote this extract, in a letter to his reading recovery teacher, about her support of her son once he entered reading recovery. It makes for powerful reading.

“Last Tuesday, I observed (my son’s Reading Recovery lesson when he worked with his teacher behind a one way mirror at the class). At the end, the teacher asked me to say a few words. I explained that I am really impressed with the programme. After I left, I was asked if I could write down some of what I said to share with other parents.

It is, for me, very important to share in the learning process. I try to be as involved as I can be. Every night, except Saturdays, Marcus, me, his sister and brother all climb into one bed and Marcus reads his books to us. I also let them choose a book that I read. I am not sure, out of the three of us, who is getting the most enjoyment. It is a very quiet, loving, sharing time. One night Marcus’ two year-old brother began “reading” one little book. We all laughed and Marcus took pride in the fact that he had taught Charles to read.

Because of my husband’s work schedule, I take responsibility for the book reading for I feel that it is important to set a specific time each day for reading. But the sentence is where his dad can share in the programme, and the “fun”!! At dinner, they will discuss the “sentence of the day” whether it is at home, in a restaurant or even in the drive-thru lane for fast food. He talks to Marcus about what tomorrow’s sentence could be. Another thing we do with the sentence is play games. For instance, tonight’s sentence was: “I played basketball in the living room.” We arranged it to read, “I played in the basketball.” We talked about what the new sentence meant. Would Marcus have a big ball that he would be able to fit in or would Marcus have to shrink down to fit in a normal sized ball?” (Buchanan 1994.)

Success in reading recovery is dependent on three dimensions; **the reading recovery programme, quality classroom teaching and teacher support and parental involvement.** We know that schools which create early sound partnerships between the teacher and the home are better placed to support and scaffold all children’s learning.

So how can we successfully involve parents in the reading recovery programme. Edwards, Porter and Norman (2009) suggest schools should try social networking, providing parents

with a support group of other parents in the programme, a parent survey to find out what help they may like the school to provide for them, parent workshops, signed contracts, video taping a lesson so parents who cannot attend a live lesson may still find out how reading recovery works and a question and answer sheet which may address their particular concerns or wonderings.

Holloway's (2004) research on family literacy found that parents if they had or were given the skills, and had the time to spend on literacy activities at home, were well placed to ensure that their children can be supported to succeed in their literacy learning.

Conclusion

Parents of struggling readers want to be able support their child to become successful readers. This was reinforced for me by the eagerness with which parents completed the questionnaires I had devised.

Their responses and their willingness to meet and discuss their contribution to their child's learning spoke volumes about their commitment. The frustration of parents of full immersion French classes or parents who were struggling with literacy in a language other than their mother tongue all had the same theme. "We want to help and support our child, tell and show us how we can do this."

Parents from all walks of life are frustrated and concerned when reading and writing is hard for their child to learn. They want help for their child and for themselves. Knowing how to help is the key.

Marie Clay (1991) warns of the dangers when parents and teachers become too intensive during the reading and writing instruction. Just as over-correction can damage the oral language development of pre-schoolers so too can the same be said of supporting readers and writers, in particular struggling readers and writers.

Reading recovery teachers can help prepare parents for the support they can give to their child and this happens in a variety of ways. Parents like the face to face contact, the regular discussions and contact with the teacher and the opportunity to observe the lesson being taught. They like to be shown what to do, and they appreciate that their contribution is to be easy, building the child's security, self-confidence, self-esteem and sense of success. Praise, reading together, talking about their daily experiences and the books they read will enrich their reading and writing learning.

Books the child has control of and can read with fluency are sent home each night by the teacher which can be read several times because, as Reading Recovery's founder Marie Clay notes, "re-reading familiar books encourages confidence and fluency and provides practice in bringing reading behaviours together ... (and) allows the reader to discover new things about the print during the rereading."

The same applies to the cut up sentence. The child constructed this sentence at school while in the programme, so it is familiar and the task should be easy. It takes the writing task back into a reading one.

While my research did not conclusively prove that parental involvement in their child's reading recovery is significant in student achievement, it is certainly influential. Parents and caregivers can add to the success of the programme. Reading recovery teachers are convinced it makes a difference. It is our task as reading recovery teachers to involve the family, so that they understand the why, the how and what to do when supporting their child. Then the triangle is complete, the intervention needs all three components; the expertise of the reading recovery teacher, quality classroom teaching and the support, love and time for practice that the family can provide.

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Appendix 1 Parent survey 57 participants

Question 1 How do / did you support your child while he or she is in the reading recovery intervention programme?

Read daily/ homework	Board games	Observe teacher / learn skills / tchers tips	Praise, encourage	Discuss text Ask questions	Contact with teacher	Library
55 96.5%	1 1.75%	7 12.25%	20 35%	7 12.3%	2 email 3.5%	1 1.75%

1 Family practiced printing every day some families also **read to** their child ✓✓✓✓✓ I parent attended the sessions every day after school

Listen to read- don't understand what he is reading- French - tutor 2x a week Listen to French songs and audio books Programme valued highly by parent ✓✓

Question 2 Do/Did you feel confident about assisting your child during his/her time in Reading Recovery? Yes ___ No ___

Yes	Progress is a key	No	Family difficulties/frustration	School support and communication	Programme knowledge	Language difficulties ESOL and French immersion, learning together
53 93%	7 12.25%	8 14%	4 7.0%	22 38.6%	3 5.3%	14 24.6%

3 parents said yes and no- some insecurities French immersion parents coping at basic level, learning alongside student, one parent using tutor,, one using internet and elder son, one survey filled in by sibling because Mum doesn't speak English, all kids are smart, some just need more help

Question 3 Has the school prepared you for assisting your child in reading and writing while he or she is in the reading recovery intervention programme?

Yes ___ No ___ If yes, how?

Yes	No	School support, observing a session & communication,	Set homework daily- cut up story/word to learn	Regular report on progress	Read in language of home as well as instruction
47 82.45%	4 7.0%	30 52.6%	15 26.3%	6 10.5%	2 3.5%

10 didn't complete the question 2 parents asked for more information about the programme, two parents not confident with the writing component, More 1 on 1 support in class

Question 4 Has the school prepared you for on-going support for your child once he or she is discontinued from Reading Recovery? Yes ___ No ___

Yes	No	School support helps parents	In school support -early	Regular report on progress	Read with child at home, books
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		use the strategies taught	intervention tcher, library		that interest child
20 35%	26 45.6%	12 21.05%	4 7.0%	3 5.3%	8 14%

11 parents did not complete this question The NO parents have children still in the programme, some have had some conversations about what will happen in Grade 2 or after the programme ends but this depends on the school. Some schools provide group support for another year – with Early Intervention Teacher in the school, or with a teacher aid.

Question 5 What simple things do/did you think you can do with your child that will give him or her support once your child’s Reading Recovery intervention is completed?

Daily Reading at home, to with	Joining a library	Helping with reading difficulties/ word meaning	Encouraging, praising	Tutoring, summer school	French books/i-pad games, scrabble, TV
47 82.45%	7 12.25%	9 15.8%	10 17.5%	4 7.0%	10 17.5%

10 parents didn’t complete this question. A number of parents also said they would continue to help with writing.

Appendix 2 Teacher Survey 25 participants

Question 1 Does the school see literacy learning as a home and school partnership? Yes ___ No ___ If yes, in what way does the school promote this with parent/caregivers?

Yes	Home reading programmes	Daily reading writing at school/library visits	volunteer help/ learning assistance reading, oral language	Parent education in variety of ways	Close communication with class teacher-reporting progress often	Formal reports interviews, PACT, reports
25 100%	22 88.0%	15 60%	6 24%	15 60%	7 25%	7 25%

Parent author celebrations- parents invited to school to celebrate student writing. In some schools, individual teachers implement the home reading programme- some do, some don't.

Question 2 Do you involve parents or a parent/caregiver in the support of the emerging reader and writer while in the Reading Recovery intervention programme? Yes ___ No ___ If the answer is yes, in what way do you or your school encourage parent participation and what is your expectation of the parent/caregiver? If parents/ caregivers are not asked or able to support their emerging learner how does the school offer further support outside the Reading Recovery programme, especially while the student is in Reading Recovery?

Yes	Letter home to introduce programme and explain	Observations and teacher parent discussion	Adult volunteers help/ classroom teacher/ senior student buddy	Constant communication on progress, difficulties
25 100%	16 64%	22 88.0%	18 31.57%	11 44%

Kids Safe and Writers Room programme after school. Regular attendance an expectation! Senior class buddy reading system, peer tutoring, or librarian works with children. Non English speaking parents pose problem for effective communication- translation of reading recovery brochure helps. Interpreters are used if needed.

Question 3 How does your school prepare parents for student support of the Reading Recovery intervention programme?

Brochure or letter home	Meet and discuss with teacher	Observation of the lesson by teacher	Explain expectation of parent
15 60%	22 88.0%	8 32%	12 48%

Question 4 Before discontinuation how does the school prepare parents/caregivers for on-going support of their child?

Discuss continuation of home reading	Borrow books from classroom/ library	If referred on meet with parents, Discuss class and other support given	Provide report on progress made and or concerns
19 76%	8 32%	9 36%	17 68%

Question 5 Does the school have any data that shows the significant or effect size on student achievement that parent involvement has on the success for the child in the programme? Yes _____
 No _____ If yes please explain

<p>0 5 10%</p>	<p>Personal statements or observations; <i>Students who have parent support make significant progress in reading and moderate growth in writing;</i> <i>I see that home practice impacts on school outcome greatly;</i> <i>I have noticed that R/R students who practice regularly usually progress faster and continually. Those who don't practice much struggle at the same level longer and slide backwards after holidays. There are a couple of exceptions with students with persistent learning difficulties;</i> <i>We have noted with ESOL students those who have English language support at home tend to progress at a faster rate and retain their skills much better, Another factor is the students own English level and their motivation;</i> <i>It seems that those students who have home support are usually more successful.</i></p>
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