

An end to literacy failure: Follow-up on the London comparison study

The costs of literacy failure

Every year in England 30,000 children go into secondary school unable to read or write. Most are from socially disadvantaged environments. The human and economic costs of poor literacy are high.

Researching the solution

A study at the University of London, Institute of Education, published in 2006, explored whether every child could be taught to read and write early in their school lives.

42 schools in 10 London boroughs took part. These schools were similar in size (average 355 on roll) and had similarly high levels of children entitled to free school meals (average 41%), and children learning English as an additional language (average 49%). All of the schools offered some children extra tuition as well as classroom literacy teaching. Reading Recovery (RR) operated in half of these schools.

The literacy progress of the lowest achieving 6 year olds and of their Year 1 classes was first compared at the beginning and end of the 2005-6 school year. In July 2007, when the children had reached the end of Year 2, the researchers again compared these children's literacy progress.

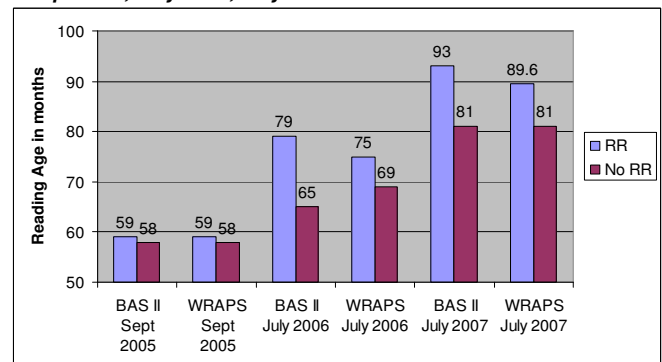
The lowest achieving children at the start of school Year 1 were assessed using a detailed diagnostic profile (Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement, Clay 2002) and a word reading test (British Ability Scales II). Their whole classes (1166 Year 1 children in all) were assessed on the Word Recognition and Phonic Skills test (WRAPS, Moseley 2003). Additionally in July 2007, 'Progress in English 7' was used - a broad measure of literacy skills suitable for transfer into Key Stage 2. National Curriculum Key Stage 1 assessment results were also collected for Reading and Writing.

Can gains from early intervention be sustained?

At the beginning of school Year 1 the 292 lowest achieving children were unable to read even the simplest texts, could only recognise a few letters and write about six words correctly. At the end of Year 1 most of these children had made very little progress, except for the group of children who received Reading Recovery. From similarly low starting points, children who received Reading Recovery, on average, gained 14 book levels, gained 20 months reading age and could write 45 words correctly. Aged around six and a half, they had now successfully caught up with their average peers.

The follow up study determined that, on average, at the end of school Year 2, the ex-RR children were still achieving at the level expected for their age, and the comparison children who had not accessed RR were still well below age related expectations. This is how progress in word reading and in phonic skills compares at the beginning and end of school Year 1, and at end of school Year 2.

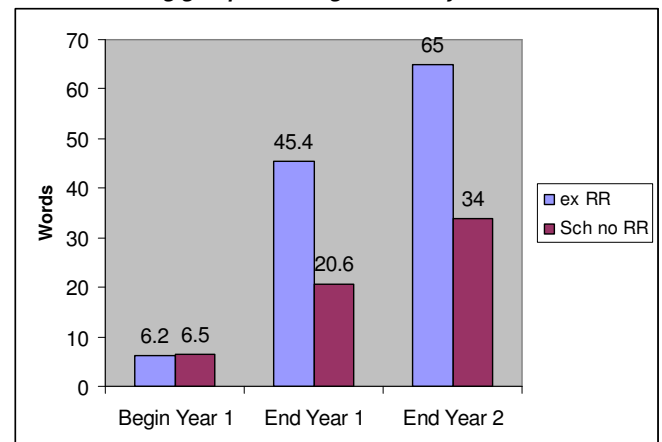
Word Reading (BAS II) and Phonic Skills (WRAPS), lowest groups at Sept 2005, July 2006, July 2007



Year 2 follow up July 2007- BAS 93 = 7yrs 9m WRAPS 89.6 = 7yrs 5.6m
81 = 6yrs 9m

In writing vocabulary assessment task at the end of Year 1 and the end of Year 2, the ex-RR children were still able to write twice as many words correctly as those in the comparison group.

Lowest achieving groups - Writing vocabulary means



In the broad measure of literacy (Progress in English 7) ex-RR children were achieving within their age band expectations, and 10 standard points ahead of comparison children. In the end of Key Stage 1 National Curriculum (NC) assessments 86% of ex-RR children achieved Level 2+ in reading, (2% ahead of the national average of 84%). In writing 83% ex-RR children achieved Level 2+ (3% ahead of the national figure of 80%).

READING & WRITING Key Stage 1 NC assessments, 2007 Lowest groups

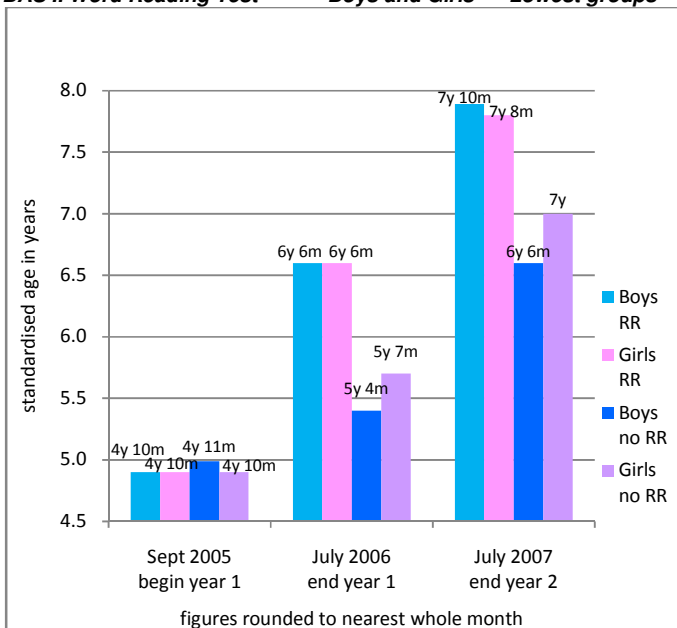
NC Level	Comparison group		Children who received RR in Year 1	
	Number	%	Number	%
Reading				
W	13	9.6%		
Level 1	45	33.1%	10	13.5%
Level 2	76	55.9%	64	86.5%
Level 3	2	1.5%		
Writing				
W	20	14.8%	1	1.3%
Level 1	37	27.4%	12	13.8%
Level 2	77	57.0%	65	83.3%
Level 3	1	0.7%		

These results show the effectiveness of the RR intervention, combined with good classroom teaching, in maintaining children's early gains and accelerated rate of learning.

The gender gap in literacy achievement

Comparisons showed boys and girls in the lowest achieving groups started Year 1 with equally low literacy skills, and boys and girls who received RR were doing equally well at the end of Year 1. At the end of Year 2 no significant difference was found between the sustained progress of ex-RR boys and girls. The literacy progress of those children had not received RR in Year 1 was much lower overall, and 3 month gap between boys and girls at the end of Year 1 had become a 6 month gap in reading achievement by the end of Year 2.

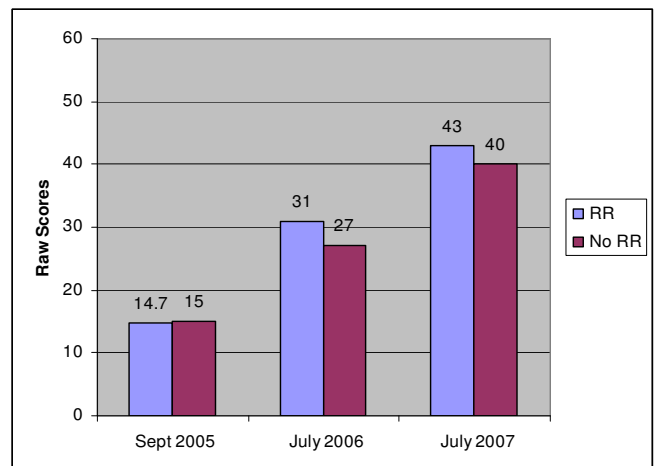
BAS II Word Reading Test Boys and Girls Lowest groups



Whole class literacy progress

The Year 1 study reported an average 4 months higher overall achievement in literacy for classrooms where the lowest achievers had access to RR. In the Year 2 follow up there was still a 3 months advantage in classes in schools with RR.

Classrooms in Year 1 & 2 WRAPS scores



This 2-year longitudinal study shows that a trained Reading Recovery teacher can provide accurate identification and detailed diagnosis of early literacy learning; can raise the achievements of the lowest groups of children; and impact on whole class progress.

This study of the level of impact on literacy achievement and its sustained effects provides strong evidence that schools could enable almost every child to read and write appropriately for their age, if those that were failing were given access to expert teaching in Reading Recovery at an early age.