

January 20, 2011

Dear Study Participant,

During the spring or summer of 2010, you and/or colleagues at your school participated in a survey of knowledge about teaching beginning reading. The survey and analysis is complete and I am writing, as promised, to let you know the results.

Study Purpose: To evaluate the potential of a professional development and training program, Pathways to Reading (PTR), for enhancing teacher knowledge about preventing and remediating reading difficulties.

Participants: 265 teachers with varying levels of participation in PTR.

Data Collection: Online survey including items adapted from the Test of Basic Skills for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (Cheesman, McGuire, Shankweiler, & Coyne, 2009) and questions about level of PTR participation (i.e., None, PTR Beginner Option A; PTR Beginner Option B; PTR Intermediate; or PTR Advanced).

Results: In general, results indicated a linear and positive trend associating more advanced PTR training with higher performance on a test of knowledge about teaching beginning reading. See Table of Mean Scores. Also, regardless of experience, whether moderate (4-9 years of teaching) or extensive (10 or more years of teaching), teachers who had more advanced PTR training scored higher on the assessment of knowledge.

Implications: The PTR practicum may have played a pivotal role. Practicum teacher knowledge was clearly more advanced than that of teachers with no participation in PTR. The practicum may provide teachers the important opportunity to see student progress when they put into practice newly acquired knowledge and skills. The value of the feedback gained from seeing student progress is well-documented in research on teacher learning in education (Brady et al, 2009; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Stringfield, Reynolds & Schaffer, 2008) and lends support to the trend uncovered in the present study.

Limitations: The analyses are correlational and thus preclude attributing teacher knowledge to participation in PTR training. Second, the nested nature of the data with teachers clustered in schools creates a source of influence on the outcomes that was not accounted for in the analysis. Without accounting for school effects, the differences in mean knowledge scores associated with levels of PTR participation may have been overestimated. Third, the knowledge measure used in the present study sampled only a portion of the knowledge that PTR is designed to develop. The measure sampled phonemic awareness, phonics, and their relationship to reading and spelling instruction. The present results do not provide any indication of PTR's potential in developing teachers' understanding of other components of reading. Future research would be necessary to explore such relationships.

Table of Mean Total Knowledge Scores by Level of PTR Participation

	N	Mean	SD	Min - max
No PTR Participation (None)	32	44.06	10.11	18 - 63
1 st Year 5-Day PTR Training (Beginner: option A)	77	49.08	7.77	21 - 67
1 st Year 5-Day PTR Training plus Onsite PTR Support (Beginner: option B)	123	51.24	7.12	30 - 65
2 nd Year PTR Practicum (Intermediate)	16	54.06	5.37	44 - 62
PTR Trainer or Coach (Advanced)	17	54.88	7.68	38 - 66
Total	265	50.15	8.11	18 - 67

Data source: Pathways to Reading: A study of participant pedagogical content knowledge final report, November 23, 2010.

I thank you, your colleagues, and the PTR developers and trainer, Terry and Dennis Clinefelter, for the opportunity to conduct this study. Thank you for your participation and interest in educational research.

Sincerely,



Helen Apthorp, Ph.D.
McREL Principal Researcher



Robyn Alsop
McREL Study Director

References:

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