

**EDUCATION RESOURCES**

**Psychological Services**

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**The Evaluation of a Longitudinal Reciprocal Reading Programme in a South Lanarkshire High School**

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**Abstract**

*Reciprocal Reading is a teaching technique which aims to improve a pupil’s comprehension through the application of four strategies practised in a group setting.* (*Brown and Palincsar, 1989). The method has a sound evidence base and includes key components of effective comprehension instruction such as systematic teaching of key skills, the use of metacognitive questioning, peer–tutoring and opportunities for guided and independent practice (Swanson, 1999). Many studies report the impact of the approach on the comprehension of primary school aged children (Greenway, 2002) with fewer studies which evaluate the use of the approach with older learners (Alfassi, 1998).*

*The aim of this study was to evaluate the impact of a Reciprocal Reading programme on small groups of secondary-aged pupils in their first, second and third academic years who attended sessions twice or more a week, led by the Principal Teacher of Support for Learning (PTSfL), another member of teaching staff, and three Support Assistants. Reading tests conducted pre-intervention and after one or two years of intervention showed significant improvement in reading scores across groups. There was some indication that pupils with ASD made greater gains in reading comprehension than their peers, and also that pupils in the first Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quintile made relatively smaller gains.*

*Further qualitative data from focus groups conducted with pupils, parents, and staff leading the groups highlighted the positive impact on pupils’ reading comprehension, motivation, enjoyment of reading, and the benefits of practising skills in a small group setting.*

**Literature Review**

**Struggling Readers in Secondary School**

**Motivation and Engagement and Parental Involvement**

Secondary school pupils who are deemed to be ‘struggling readers’ usually have a long history of reading difficulties and are thus much more likely to lack to lack motivation and academic self-confidence (Phelan, Yu, and Davidson, 1994). Although the influence of parental involvement on level of reading engagement is well documented in the earlier years (Baker, L., Scher, and Mackler, 1999), less is written about home influences on older children, especially those who continue to find reading difficult. In several Australian studies, Rowe (1991; Rowe and Rowe, 1992) attitudes toward reading and reading activity at home explained significant proportions of the achievement variance for each of four age groups (5-6, 7-8, 9-11, and 12-14 years), whereas family socio-economic factors accounted for very small proportions of the variance. In addition, reading activities at home predicted the reading attitudes of children in each age group. Surprisingly, perhaps, the extent of the direct effect of home reading activity on achievement mediated by the indirect effect of attitudes, increased with student age. Other evidence is inconsistent regarding links between home factors, and achievement, perhaps because of measurement differences. Quinn and Jadav (1987), concluded that correlations between attitude and achievement among older children are almost always positive, but they share 10% or less of common variance. Skilled readers are not necessarily voluntary readers, as Morrow (1992) reported, implying that the environment conducive to the development of voluntary reading habits, may not be the same as that which fosters reading achievement.

Considering the classroom contexts which promote motivated, thoughtful reading in which learners seek to understand, enjoy learning and are responsible and confident in their reading abilities (qualities which he groups under the term ‘engaged reading’), Guthrie (2001) writes:

Teachers create contexts for engagement when they provide prominent knowledge goals, real-world connections to reading, meaningful choices about what, when, and how to read, and interesting texts that are familiar, vivid, important, and relevant. Teachers can further engagement by teaching reading strategies. A coherent classroom fuses these qualities.

Guthrie (2001)

Analysing a national sample of students in the United States, Guthrie et al. (2001) found that engaged readers from low income or education families achieved at a higher level than readers from high income or education backgrounds who were less engaged. Engaged readers can therefore overcome obstacles to achievement and become agents of their own development in reading.

Researchers have found several aspects of motivation, and differentiate between task-mastery and performance orientations. It is generally held that the task-mastery goal, which focuses on content understanding and the learning of flexible skills, is more likely to foster long-term engagement than the performance goal, which is associated with the use of surface strategies to complete a task and may emphasise external motivations such as the fear of failure (Thorkildsen and Nicholls, 1998; Meece and Miller, 1999).

Other aspects of reading motivation include self-efficacy, whereby students are confident in their abilities and see difficult reading tasks as a challenge (Schunk and Zimmerman, 1997), and social motivation, as children who like to share books and participate responsibly in a group with other learners have been found to read more and have higher reading achievement (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000). Guthrie (2001) notes that motivation per se is distinct from interest and other affectively oriented constructs.

By providing opportunities for concept-based learning and knowledge goals rather than materials-based instruction, the teacher promotes student autonomy and motivation (Alexander, Jetton and Kulikowich, 1996). Motivation can also be enhanced by giving children input over instructional sequence, making connections between activities, and promoting social interaction (Sweet, Guthrie and Ng, 1998).

Pressley (1997) writes that teaching children strategies for learning from a text through teacher modelling, scaffolding and coaching of techniques such as summarising gives them a sense of self-perceived competence. Guthrie and Cox (2001) describe the benefits of embedding such direct strategy instruction in a context of inquiry.

Central to the activation of students’ motivation and maintaining their mastery goal orientation is allowing students to construct knowledge socially in collaboration. (Guthrie, 2001). McCombs and Whistler (1997) write that students who are empowered to express themselves will develop an understanding of knowledge as contextual, and become effective in their use of strategies to build such knowledge.

With regards to evaluation and praise, research has found that students who are evaluated in terms of their personal effort rather than in comparison to other students are more likely to be task-centred rather than grade-centred (Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1984), and also that praise which is sincere and interpreted as recognition of achievement can increase students’ motivation and self-perceived competence (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000).

**Barriers in the classroom**

Struggling readers at secondary level must overcome many challenges in order to meet the demands in different classrooms. In high school, textbooks continue to be a major instructional resource in many subject classes (Bean, Zigmond, and Hartman, 1994; Okolo and Ferretti, 1996.) One evident difficulty is the disparity between pupils’ reading ability and the required reading materials. Texts in secondary schools are often chosen because of their relevance to the subject matter and fail to take into account the reading and comprehension skills of all pupils. For example, in an American study (Kinder, Bursuck and Epstein, 1992) the authors reported readability levels ranging from ninth grade to third year of college, with a mean of a tenth grade level, for social studies textbooks adopted at the eighth-grade level. Another challenge for struggling readers is the way in which textbooks are structured . Armbruster and Anderson (1988) reported that textbooks frequently lack "considerateness," in that they fail to provide definitions of essential vocabulary, and require inappropriate skill demands of learners. In particular, Science and Social Studies textbooks were found to prioritise breadth over depth in terms of content.

**Comprehension Skills and Inference Instruction**

Oakhill (1993) writes that understanding a text involves the construction of a ‘mental model’ of what it describes. This involves the integration of meanings within sentences and paragraphs, and the inference of implicit links between them.

Effective comprehension depends both upon an understanding of the main point of a text and an awareness of the relative importance of other information within it. To read effectively, readers must monitor their own comprehension and know how to resolve any difficulties they encounter (Oakhill, 1993; Yuill and Oakhill 1991).

Yuill and Oakhill (1991) report that perhaps 10-15% of children have specific comprehension difficulties when these are compared to their decoding abilities. These children tend not to derive the gist as a whole or go beyond the literal meaning of a text. Oakhill, Cain and Bryant (1998) found that poor comprehenders improved when they were asked to re-consider their responses and were directed to the relevant parts of the text.

In a report for the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2008, Anne Kispal reviewed research evidence on inference skills for reading, including the skills involved in inferencing and techniques whereby they can be taught. She concluded that ‘the ability to draw inferences predetermines reading skills: that is, poor inferencing causes poor comprehension and not vice versa’ (Kispal, 2008, p.2).

There is a consensus amongst researchers that the skills needed for comprehension must be explicitly taught, and that they will not be acquired simply through exposure to text, or due to maturation. For example, Baker (2002) writes: ‘teachers will not enhance student achievement simply by allocating more time to silent reading: rather they need to provide instructional scaffolds’ (p.90).

Kispal (2008) found that research evidence suggested that key characteristics of pupils who are good at inferencing are that they:

* are active readers who want to make sense of a text
* monitor their comprehension and work to resolve their misunderstanding as they read
* have a rich vocabulary
* have a good working memory

With regards to the best ways to improve pupils’ inferencing abilities, Kispal (2008) found evidence to suggest that the following are important:

* **Teacher modelling of inferencing**, whereby teachers ‘think aloud’ to demonstrate their own inferencing process as they read to pupils, asking themselves questions to show how they monitor their own comprehension.
* **Work at both word and text level**, including developing fluent basic reading skills, building vocabulary, lexical training, and awareness that fiction allows multiple interpretations
* **Questioning by the teacher**, including questions about relationships, characters, goals and motivations, questions to encourage comprehension monitoring, and asking ‘How do you know?’ when an inference is generated
* **Questioning by pupils**, including why, who, and when questions generated and answered in a group
* **Activation of prior knowledge**, through pupils’ discussion and clarification
* **Prediction and contextualisation**

A study by McGee and Johnson (2003) replicated that of Yuill and Oakhill in 1988 across an age range between six and ten years, and found that inference training raised performance in less skilled comprehenders by 20 months (as measured by the standardised Neale Analysis of Reading Ability test), while comprehension practice resulted in an improvement of ten months. The training consisted of lexical training in the function and meaning of words, question generation, and prediction. McGee and Johnson argued for the benefits of ‘a change of focus from a passive answering of preset questions to children having a more active role in making inferences’ (McGee and Johnson, 2003, p.58).

In a review of intervention methods for pupils with literacy difficulties, Brooks (2007) writes: ‘Children’s comprehension skills can be improved if directly targeted… Engaging the child in exploring meaning embeds the relevance of reading for life, expands vocabulary and broadens the range of texts. (p.31).

In a meta-analysis on comprehension interventions for pupils with literacy difficulties, (Swanson,1999), the author’s findings indicated the most successful interventions include instructional components such as small group instruction, modelling of steps by the teacher; teaching the pupils to use meta-cognitive strategies, and teaching ‘thinking aloud’. Mastropieri, Scruggs, Bakken, and Whedon (1996), in their synthesis of the literature, highlighted a set of common instructional features which include the use of clear objectives and a specific sequence for teaching which incorporates instruction, modelling, guided practice, corrective feedback and independent practice. Effective intervention components also included the need to inform pupils of the importance of the strategy; the ongoing monitoring of performance and the generalised use of specific strategies. Several studies have also documented that struggling readers require repeated and intensive opportunities to practise using these strategies before they become proficient (Alvermann, 2002). This implies that sufficient time must be allocated to the teaching of reading comprehension

Other robust findings into reading comprehension highlight the effectiveness of peer tutoring approaches. In one study conducted in a high school, (Mastopieri, Scruggs and Mohler, et al, 2001), seventh grade pupils with significant literacy difficulties were assigned to either traditional teacher-led instruction or to a comprehension strategy-based peer tutoring condition during which partners were trained to use a summarising technique during English classes. After a period of five weeks, those in the peer tutoring classes significantly outperformed the other group on a criterion-referenced measure of reading comprehension. Such approaches support comprehension development by promoting peer interactions and also discussion with a more knowledgeable other (Mastropieri, Scruggs, and Graetz, 2003). Research also highlights the role of the teacher and pupils’ own involvement in their learning as a means of developing their skills. Teachers contribute to adolescents’ sense of competence and self-worth when they are able to convince them that they care about them as individuals and want them to learn (Strickland, Dillon, Funkhouser, Glick, and Rogers, 1989).

**Reciprocal Reading**

Reciprocal teaching, also known as Reciprocal Reading, is an approach to teaching developed by Palinscar and Brown (Palincsar and Brown, 1984; Palincsar, 1986). They describe it as:

A procedure... where teacher and student took turns leading a dialogue concerning sections of a text. Initially the teacher modelled the key activities of summarising (self-review), questioning (making up a question on the main idea), clarifying and predicting. The teacher thereby modeled activities: the students were encouraged to participate at whatever level they could. The teacher could then provide guidance and feedback at the appropriate level for each student.

(Palincsar and Brown, 1984, p. 124)

Reading materials used are authentic (either narrative or expository), rather than worksheets specifically designed for instruction in comprehension skills. Brooks (2007) writes that the approach is ‘predicated on the idea that poorer comprehenders can improve by being shown and explicitly understanding and adopting good comprehenders’ strategies’ (p.77).

Reciprocal teaching is thus an instructional technique which views reading comprehension as a problem-solving activity (Palincsar and Brown,1985). It combines key elements of effective comprehension instruction such as the systematic instruction of techniques, peer tutoring, the use of metacognitive questioning and guided and independent practice. The technique is practised in a small group, during which students read a passage of expository text paragraph by paragraph, and acquire and practise four reading comprehension strategies. These are: generating questions; summarising; attempting to clarify word meanings or confusing text; and predicting what might appear in the next paragraph. The articulation of these four strategies promotes understanding and monitoring of comprehension.

During the early stages of Reciprocal Reading, the teacher explicitly models the four strategies on a selection of text. After the teacher has modelled the process, each student takes a turn in leading the dialogue and practising the strategies on the next section of text. The teacher uses the information provided by students as a form of informal assessment and, on the basis of this assessment, creates instructional scaffolding (e.g. cueing, prompting, questioning, and remodelling) to provide students with information that will allow them to reassess the meaning they have derived from the text (Duffy and Roehler, 1987). This is consistent with other comprehension research which demonstrates that providing pupils with clear goals for a comprehension task and then providing feedback on the progress they are making can lead to both greater use of comprehension strategies, as well as increasing self-efficacy. (Schunk and Rice, 1999; Brown and Palincsar, 1989). The teacher gradually reduces the scaffolding and pupils take more of a lead role. This group setting enables pupils to learn from their other peers whilst at the same time breaking the task down and making it more manageable.

**Research on Reciprocal Reading**

In a meta-analysis of rigorously conducted randomised controlled trials of 16 research studies on reciprocal teaching to boost primary-level children’s comprehension in the United States, Rosenshine and Meister (1994) produced an effect size of 0.32 on standardised tests. They found that the approach was especially effective in promoting student comprehension when the teacher-student dialogue was of high quality, engaging students with ideas, rather than simply their skill performance.

Though substantial research has been done on reciprocal teaching in the United States, there have been few studies carried out in the UK. Brooks (2007) analysed unpublished data on 88 children from Haringey. Though there was no comparison group, Brooks reports the result as ‘very clear – a useful impact on reading accuracy and a substantial one on comprehension’ (p.28).

Comprehension research suggests that strategies which have a positive impact on younger pupils can also be applied meaningfully with older pupils (Mastropieri, Scruggs, and Graetz, 2003). Research into the effectiveness of Reciprocal Reading has focused largely on comprehension gains in primary aged children. For example, one study detailed an intervention which employed the four cognitive strategies over five weeks to pupils in fourth and sixth grade during Science and History lessons (Takala, 2006.) Measures repeated prior to the intervention and at two different times afterwards, indicated that the intervention led to improved comprehension, especially to fourth grade pupils and for those pupils who had received 15 weeks of the intervention, rather than ten. Both teachers and pupils reported that they had benefited from the intervention.

In another study, the author reports on the implementation of Reciprocal Reading to a group of year 6 pupils for a three month period as part of the literacy hour (Greenway, 2002.) Although initial implementation factors led to the study being conducted over a short three month period, the improvement in reading comprehension scores reached statistical significance. The difference in the self-rating of confidence scores reached statistical significance using the Wilcoxon test (related) although the participants’ locus of control scores used showed no clear trend.

An evaluative study conducted in a high school setting (Alfassi, 1998) explored whether reciprocal teaching methods (strategy instruction) were superior to traditional methods of remedial reading (skill acquisition) in large remedial classes. 53 students in five intact reading classes who received strategy instruction were compared to 22 students in three control-group classes. The results indicated that in this challenging setting, strategy instruction was superior to traditional reading methods in fostering reading comprehension as measured by experimenter-designed reading tests. No differences were found between the groups on two standardised measures of reading.

In a review of research on question-generating strategies, Rosenshine, Meister and Chapman (1996) compared reciprocal teaching studies to approaches which focused solely on question-generation, and found no difference in effect magnitude. They concluded that the key to effective strategy instruction was the importance of careful scaffolding of instruction, rather than which strategies were taught. This scaffolding process involves the presentation of strategies in small steps, the guidance of student practice, the provision of ongoing correction and feedback, and allowing students extensive independent practice.

**Implementation Science**

Examination of the evidence base for Reciprocal Reading (Greenway, 2002; Takala, 2006: Alfassi, 1998) serves to enhance its validity as an effective approach to develop comprehension skills. Adherence to the ‘Implementation Science’ literature, the study of what works and what doesn’t, also ensures that key contextual factors are taken into account when implementing such an intervention. This is especially important when the evaluation of such an intervention is example of ‘real world research’; carried out within an individual school, involving smaller numbers of pupils and conducted by educational practitioners. For example, in the study which analysed the impact of reciprocal reading on a group of year 6 pupils (Greenway, 2002), the author details the extent to which the initial reservations of staff and timetable constraints hindered the initial implementation of the programme and led to a delay of 12 months. The author also noted the impact of teacher willingness to engage on the eventual effectiveness of any intervention**.**

A further analysis of the implementation literature demonstrates the existence of other common factors which facilitate effective implementation. These include:

* **Fidelity of Programme Implementation.** Research that has explored the impact of fidelity on outcomes have reported that high levels of fidelity are associated with positive programme effects. (Durlak and DuPre,2008)
* **Accurate Identification of Need and Readiness to Change**. A theme running through the implementation literature is the importance of knowing the strengths and needs of a community, both of which will be influential in determining outcomes (Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, and Wallance, 2005).
* **Involvement of Stakeholders:** this is positively related to success of intervention implementation (e.g. Salanova, Cifre and Marton, 2004).
* **The Presence of Key Contextual Factors**: Graczyk, Domitrovich, Small and Zins (2006), recognise that factors such as hierarchical relationships within the establishment, peer interactions, class climate, and school and local authority priorities must be taken into account in the implementation of an intervention within a school based setting.
* **Ongoing Coaching and Consultation** Training is recognised as being insufficient when delivered in isolation (Joyce and Showers, 2002). In the implementation model proposed by Fixsen et al., (2009), the authors introduce a consultation and coaching phase which both expands the skills learned during initial training and facilitates application to practice.

An analysis of these findings demonstrates the need for a stronger emphasis on conducting a needs analysis prior to an intervention and obtaining an understanding of a school’s management and support systems, and staff readiness to change, all of which will ensure that a proposed intervention can lead to more sustained positive outcomes.

**Method**

**Setting and Participants**

Beginning in September 2013, theReciprocal Reading intervention took place over four consecutive academic years in Cathkin High School, a large high school of 1,100 pupils in Cambuslang, South Lanarkshire.

In total, six groups were selected to participate in Reciprocal Reading sessions. Of these, four groups, the ‘Individual Programme’ (IP) groups, were initially selected through information gained at the transition phase from primary schools. Most pupils had been highlighted as having poor reading comprehension and the majority had already received support from specialist support teachers at primary. Several of the pupils had been actively involved with the EP and had an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis (ASD). Three of the four IP groups had received the Reciprocal Reading intervention for two years, beginning in September of their first year of attendance at the school. The fourth IP group had completed their first year and thus had received one of two planned years of the Reciprocal Reading intervention at time of reporting. IP pupils attended Reciprocal Reading sessions twice a week in groups of five or six led by the PT SfL and another Support for Learning Teacher, instead of the French periods timetabled for their peers.

Two further groups, the ‘Reciprocal Reading’ (RR) groups, were selected to attend Reciprocal Reading sessions led by Support Assistants for around 20 minutes twice a week in groups of five or six. These pupils were selected from S1 and S3 by the PT SfL for inclusion in the RR groups on the basis of low attainment in reading. They attended Reciprocal Reading sessions at the beginning of their English periods, when their peers were engaged in personal, silent reading.

**Aim**

The aim of the Reciprocal Reading intervention was to develop pupil’s comprehension skills and confidence about reading. It was hoped that adherence to the Implementation literature and ongoing consultation between the PT of Learning Support and the school’s EP would lead to effective implementation of the programme.

**Intervention Design**

The intervention design was influenced by comprehension instruction research which highlights the importance of providing repeated and intensive opportunities to practise new skills (Alvermann, 2002). Each group participated in twice weekly Reciprocal Reading sessions lasting approximately 15-20 minutes. Sessions were teacher-led and focused on a range of texts chosen by the pupils from the class library, often from the Barrington Stoke range of novels. This ensured that texts were reflective of pupils’ own interests. The four strategies of predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarising were introduced and displayed visually in the classroom on a poster for reinforcement. Pupils were also issued with a copy of the key skills for their folders.

**Pre and Post Measures**

**Suffolk Reading Scale**

Pupils’ reading comprehension scores were assessed using The Suffolk Reading Scale. The Suffolk Reading Scale (SRS) is a standardised reading test used by schools to monitor the reading development of pupils from age 6. It provides a reading age, raw score and standardised score. It was chosen because it includes sentence-completion exercises which assess a pupil’s comprehension of passages, as well as testing single word reading. Table 1 below shows the dates of testing.

**Focus groups**

Pupils representing the S1 and S2 IP groups, and the S1 and S3 RR groups were asked open ended questions during four focus groups conducted in May, 2017. Parents were also invited to focus groups, in order to establish parental views about the impact of the intervention on their child’s motivation to read and comprehension skills. Focus groups were also held with the teachers leading the IP groups, and the Support Assistants who led the RR groups.

**Results**

Reading ages and standardised scores in reading comprehension were measured according to scores on the Suffolk Reading Scale, as described in Table 1. In cases where pupils left the school, did not attend their reciprocal reading group, or had standardised scores less than 69, they were not included in the calculation of means, and n (the number of participants included in the calculation of means) is adjusted accordingly.

**Table 1: Groups of students receiving reciprocal reading intervention**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group**  | **Year of intake** | **Year Group in May 2017** | **‘Individual Programme’ or ‘Reciprocal Reading’** | **Number of participants at first test** | **Dates tested** | **Mean chronological age** | **Mean reading age** | **Mean standardised score** |
| 1 | 2013 | S4 | Individual Programme | 12 | Sept 13 | 11:11 | 8:5 | 78 (n=10) |
| May 14 | 12:7 | 9:4 | 80 (n=11) |
| May 15 | 13:7 (n=11) | 10:5 (n=11) | 82 (n=10) |
| 2 | 2014 | S3 | Individual Programme | 19 | Sept 14 | 12:0 | 8:8 | 78 (n=18) |
| May 15 | 12:8 | 9:10 | 83 (n=18) |
| April 16 | 13:7 (n=18) | 10:6 (n=18) | 82 (n=16) |
| 3 | 2014 | S3 | Reciprocal Reading | 19 | Nov 16 | 14:3 | 11:4 | 86 (n=14) |
| April 17 | 14:8 | 11:10 | 87(n=14) |
| 4 | 2015 | S2 | Individual Programme | 17 | Sept 15 | 12:1 | 8:10 | 79 (n=15) |
| April 16 | 12:8 | 9:9 | 81 |
| April 17 | 13:8 | 10:7 | 81 |
| 5 | 2016 | S1 | Individual Programme | 15 | Sept 16 | 12:1 | 8:5 | 77 (n=11) |
| March 17 | 12:7 | 9:7 | 82 (n=11) |
| 6 | 2016 | S1 | Reciprocal Reading | 32 | Aug 16 | 12:0 | 9:6 | 83(n=32) |
| April 17 | 12:8 | 11:0 | 90(n=32) |

**Gains in reading comprehension measures**

All groups evidenced gains in reading comprehension between time of first testing (T1) and time of most recent testing (T2), as indicated both by reduction in gap between chronological age and reading age, and by change in mean standardised score on the Suffolk Reading Scale. These gains are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Gains in reading comprehension measures**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **Year of intake (Year Group in May 2017 and programme)** | **Time between T1 and T2** | **Gain in mean reading age between T1 and T2** | **‘Net gain’ in reading age (%)\*** | **Mean standardised scores\*\*** | **t-test comparing mean standardised scores at T1 and T2** |
| **T1** | **T2** |
| **1** | 2013 (S4 IP) | 20 months | 24 months | 4 months (20%) | 78 | 82 | *t* (8) = 2.11, p=.068 |
| **2** | 2014 (S3 IP) | 19 months | 22 months | 3 months (16%) | 78 | 82 | *t* (15) = 2.16, p=.047 |
| **3** | 2014 (S3 RR) | 5 months | 6 months | 1 month (20%) | 86 | 87 | *t* (13) = 0.05, *p*=.958 |
| **4** | 2015 (S2 IP) | 19 months | 21 months | 2 months (11%) | 79 | 81 | *t* (14) = 0.68, *p*=.508 |
| **5** | 2016 (S1 IP) | 6 months | 14 months | 8 months (133%) | 77 | 82 | *t* (10) = 3.17, *p*=.010 |
| **6** | 2016 (S1 RR) | 8 months | 18 months | 10 months (125%) | 83 | 90 | *t* (31) = 5.66, p=.000 |

**\*’Net gain’ in reading age is calculated by subtracting the time between T1 and T2 from the gain in mean reading age over this period. This is expressed as a percentage by dividing the ‘net gain’ by the time between T1 and T2.**

**\*\*In cases where pupils had a standardised score below 70 at either T1 or T2, none of their data was used in the calculation of mean standardised scores for their group.**

Paired-sample 2-tailed T-tests were used to compare the difference in mean standardised scores between T1 and T2 for all groups. While the difference in mean standardised scores for Group 2 was found to be significant (t(15) = 2.16, p =.047), for Group 1 this difference approached but did not reach significance (t(8) = 2.11, p = .068). The difference in mean standardised scores was not statistically significant for Groups 3 and 4 (t(13) = 0.05, p = .958; t(14) = 0.68, p = .508). Highly significant differences were found between the mean standardised scores in Groups 5 and 6, however (t(10) = 3.17, p=.010; t (31) = 5.66, p=.000).

That some of the differences between mean standardised scores did not reach statistical significance is quite possibly due to the small sample sizes of the groups. When the data from each of the four IP groups was combined, and the mean standardised scores upon entry to the school (in September of each intake year) compared with the mean standardised score at the end of the first school year in each case (May for Groups 1 and 2, April for Group 4, and March for Group 5), this difference was indeed highly significant (t(52) = 3.683, p = .001). Similarly, when the data of both RR Groups were combined, and the mean standardised scores at T1 and T2 (a duration of five months for Group 3, and eight months for Group 6) compared, the difference was also highly statistically significant (t(45)=4.588, p=.000).

**ASD**

Groups 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 included pupils who had been identified as having ASD by the school’s link Educational Psychologist. As it was considered that inferential statistical analysis of reading scores would be inapplicable due to the small sample sizes pertaining, and because some ASD pupils had scored below the threshold for a standardised score, differences between the mean reading ages of these pupils across T1-T2 were compared with the mean reading ages across T1-T2 of the other members of the group. Results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Difference between reading age means of pupils with ASD and those without**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **Year Group in May 2017 and programme** | **Number in the group identified as having ASD** | **Time between T1 and T2** | **Gain in mean reading age between T1 and T2** | **Difference in gain in reading age means between pupils with ASD and pupils without ASD** |
| **Pupils without ASD** | **Pupils with ASD** |
| 1 | S4 IP | 2 | 20 months | 19 months | 43 months | 24 months |
| 2 | S3 IP | 3 | 19 months | 23 months | 19 months | -4 months |
| 4 | S2 IP | 3 | 19 months | 21 months | 22 months | 1 month |
| 5 | S1 IP | 2 | 6 months | 14 months | 15 months | 1 month |
| 6 | S1 RR | 1 | 8 months | 18 months | 19 months | 1 month |
| Groups 1, 2, and 4 combined | 21 months | 26 months | 5 months |

Although a large difference in mean gain of reading age between pupils with ASD and those without is evident in Group 1, this is not the case in the other groups. It is therefore possible that the large gain in reading age of the ASD pupils in Group 1 is anomalous. To investigate further, the data from all pupils in Groups 1, 2 and 3 were combined (as these groups had attended Reciprocal Reading sessions for a similar period of time), and again the gains in mean reading age of ASD pupils compared with those of the other pupils. Here a difference in gain of reading age of 5 months between T1 and T2 was found between pupils with ASD and those without. Thus, although there is some indication that ASD pupils achieved greater gains in their reading age than their peers in the IP groups, the small sample size precludes definitive conclusion.

**SIMD**

A 2x4 Mixed ANOVA was conducted with Time (T1 and T2) as the within subjects factor and SIMD quintile (1, 2, 3, 4[[1]](#footnote-1)) as the between-subjects factor. A main effect of Time was found, *F*(1, 88) = 32.75, *p* < .001, indicating a significant increase of reading scores between T1 and T2. A non-significant main effect of Group was found, *F*(3, 88) = 1.05, *p* = .372. Also, a significant interaction between Time and SIMD quintile occurred, *F*(3, 88) = 3.46, *p* = .020. As can be seen in Table 4, an improvement in reading scores from T1-T2 was observed in SIMD quintiles 2, 3, and 4, but the improvement in quintile 1 was considerably smaller.

**Table 4: Means of standardised reading scores by SIMD quintile at T1 and T2**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **SIMD quintile** | **N** | **Mean standardised reading score at T1** | **Mean standardised reading score at T2** | **Difference between mean standardised reading score at T1 and T2** |
| 1 | 51 | 82.2 | 84.0 | 1.8 |
| 2 | 14 | 79.8 | 85.6 | 5.8 |
| 3 | 6 | 84.0 | 91.2 | 7.2 |
| 4 | 21 | 79.5 | 85.6 | 6.1 |

It might thus appear that the pupils in the lowest SIMD quintile made less progress than their peers in higher quintiles. However, a further mixed ANOVA, this time with Group (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) included as a between-subjects variable, shows the matter to be more complicated than at first approximation. In this 2x4x6 Mixed ANOVA (therefore with 48 possible conditions[[2]](#footnote-2)), we still find a significant main effect of Time, F(1, 73) = 14.20, p < .001. However, we do not find a significant interaction between Time and Group, F(1, 73) = 3.44, p = .344. The only other test that produces statistical significance is the main effect of Group, F(5, 73) = 4.97, p = .001.

Although there are sharp limits on the extent to which we can draw statistical inferences from the above ANOVA, an inspection of the means provides important extra information. If we inspect the differences between pre-and-post-test scores of pupils in SIMD quintile 1 across Groups 1-6 (Table 5), we find that SIMD quintile 1 pupils in Groups 1, 3 and 4 experienced almost no improvement in scores and actually showed a decrement in scores in Group 2, but showed an improvement in scores at a rate roughly in keeping with the overall improvement of other SIMD quintiles in Group 5 and 6.

**Table 5: Mean standardised reading scores of pupils in SIMD quintile 1 in Groups 1-6**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **Year of intake (Year Group in May 2017 and programme)** | **Number of pupils in this group in SIMD quintile 1** | **Mean standardised reading score at T1** | **Mean standardised reading score at T2** | **Difference between mean standardised reading score at T1 and T2** |
| **1** | 2013 (S4 IP) | 5 | 78.0 | 79.6 | 1.6 |
| **2** | 2014 (S3 IP) | 5 | 82.5 | 78.8 | -3.7 |
| **3** | 2014 (S3 RR) | 19 | 86.5 | 86.6 | 0.1 |
| **4** | 2015 (S2 IP) | 11 | 79.5 | 79.8 | 0.3 |
| **5** | 2016 (S1 IP) | 9 | 77.7 | 83.9 | 6.2 |
| **6** | 2016 (S1 RR) | 10 | 84.4 | 89.3 | 4.9 |

These analyses show that it is difficult to draw firm conclusions as to the influence of SIMD quintile on reading scores across the groups considered. Whilst the data suggests that scores of pupils in the first SIMD quintile do not improve at the same rate as those in other quintiles, the extent to which this is attributable to the group in which they attended Reciprocal Reading sessions is unclear.

**Focus Groups**

Focus groups chaired by a research assistant were held in May 2017 with groups of pupils representing IP and RR groups which had attended Reciprocal Reading sessions in the last year; with the two teaching staff and three Support Assistants who had led the groups, and with three parents who responded to an invitation, several others having sent their apologies.

**Pupil Focus Groups**

Four focus groups were held with representatives of the IP groups in both S1 and S2 (Appendices 1 and 2), and the S1 and S3 RR groups (Appendices 3 and 4). Between five and seven pupils attended each group.

**IP Groups**

Feedback from the pupils attending the S1 IP focus group were that sessions were fun (especially compared to French lessons), and that they had helped with writing, spelling and reading, both at individual word decoding and comprehension level. They all felt that they had become more confident in reading over the course of the year, though they considered that their enjoyment of reading had not changed. Only one of the pupils reported reading at home, but some mentioned that they used Reciprocal Reading techniques in other classes. All were familiar with the approach, having first encountered it in Primary.

Some S2 IP focus group pupils described Reciprocal Reading sessions as helpful, though it was also felt that they could be boring. One theme was that the sessions had helped with confidence in sounding out unfamiliar words, especially as pupils had found a small group less intimidating than a large class: ‘You feel more confident because there’s less people, so if you mess up then you’re not scared because other people mess up as well.’ One reported a big change in enjoyment in reading since Primary School, but was not sure that this was due to Reciprocal Reading. Others felt that their enjoyment of reading had increased little, if at all, over the year. The S2 IP focus group members seemed to be particularly self conscious about their additional support needs meaning that they were perceived by their peers as being ‘special’, mentioning this several times. Considering ways in which Reciprocal Reading sessions could be improved, pupils suggested ‘more activities’, and perhaps the use of IT.

**RR Groups**

Most members of the S1 RR focus group felt that attending Reciprocal Reading sessions had helped them with spelling, reading comprehension, and confidence, though they also reported that these could be boring to attend in practice. A theme was that working in a small group had helped develop confidence in reading aloud. Most reported that they did not use the approach outside the sessions, however. All felt that Reciprocal Reading had had a marked positive impact on their enjoyment of reading since the beginning of the year.

Pupils in the S3 RR focus group were positive about the effects of attending the Reciprocal Reading sessions, reporting that these had helped with reading comprehension, and also mentioning writing and spelling. Several reported that they had been reading more this year than they had previously. A theme was that being called out of English classes to attend the sessions could be embarrassing. All agreed that the prediction strategy had enabled them ‘to get into the story more’. Most reported that they were regularly using the strategies they had learned in English and other subjects to aid comprehension and when writing. All but one felt that the sessions had had a considerable impact on their confidence when reading, and all reported large increases in their enjoyment of reading since the beginning of the year.

**Teacher Focus Groups**

Focus groups were held with the two teachers (including the PTSfL) who led the IP groups in both S1 and S2 (Appendix 5), and with the three Support Assistants who led the RR groups in S1 and S3 (Appendix 6).

**IP Group teachers**

IP groups were led by the PTSfL and another teacher, and were timetabled to take place during pupils’ French periods. Themes and details of the Reciprocal Reading sessions and their implementation included:

* A range in the pupils’ prior experience of Reciprocal Reading in Primary School, and in their personalities.
* The structure of sessions and the allocation of and focus on roles varies, depending on the group members and their needs. It is important, however, that all four strategies are mentioned in every session. Visual aids such as bookmarks and posters are useful in reinforcing the four strategies.
* Both teachers received training input from the school’s EP. The PTSfL has also led a training session for the Support Assistants, demonstrated sessions, and provided coaching.
* A significant aspect of the sessions is that of nurture: ‘building confidence, getting their anxiety levels down, getting them to want to engage with the text’.
* Pupils in the RR groups can feel shy and awkward due to being taken out of English class. Those in the IP groups feel less embarrassed, as ‘everyone’s in the same boat’. Pupils in both groups tend to enjoy the groups and become comfortable after a while, however.
* It has been very beneficial and useful to be able to screen test all pupils upon entry in First Year, to identify those with low reading comprehension and spelling scores who would benefit from the sessions.
* It is useful to have some range in ability in the group, so that those who are more confident can model for and help their peers.
* Though some teachers want to build on it and lead into a writing or project exercise, Reciprocal Reading should remain reciprocal, based on the book, and remain ‘all verbal’ to ensure that confidence and enjoyment of reading is fostered.
* Teachers mentioned the difficulties that can arise from limited accommodation.
* It is clear that pupils enjoy the sessions and are engaged in the material. Though embarrassed at first, they are often sad to hear that sessions will not continue at the end of the year. Many of the pupils have not made gains in their reading for years during Primary School, so it is very rewarding to see them enjoying and engaged in reading.
* Confidence similarly improves, with pupils who were at first embarrassed to take part later asking to read more and taking part in discussions.
* It has been challenging to administer and mark all the pre and post testing, but the data garnered has been very valuable.
* It is hoped that Psychological Services will be able to lead an in-service day for staff on Reciprocal Teaching. Many teachers are already incorporating reciprocal teaching strategies, for example when discussing learning intentions and asking pupils to summarise what has been learned.
* Implementation of Reciprocal Reading could be enhanced by having more Support Assistant time and regular refresher training sessions.
* It seems that pupils on the autistic spectrum might be making the biggest gains in reading, perhaps because the groups encourage verbalisation, and the taking of different perspectives.
* A principal aim of the Reciprocal Reading programme is to facilitate pupils’ gaining of a reading comprehension score of ten and a half, whereby they are ‘functionally able to access the curriculum’.

**RR Group SA staff**

Three Support Assistants led groups of around five pupils from both S1 and S3, taking them out of English for around fifteen minutes twice a week, occasionally longer. Themes and details of the Reciprocal Reading sessions and their implementation included:

* Feedback from both teachers and the majority of pupils is very positive, though some pupils have been reluctant to attend.
* All the Support Assistants now feel confident in leading the sessions, and benefitted from a training session, particularly the opportunity to observe the PTSfL lead sessions.
* All the Support Assistants report that they adjust the structure of the sessions to adapt to the ‘dynamics of the class’ and the character, Year group, and mood of the group members.
* One Support Assistant noted that close reading is a transferable skill useful across the curriculum.
* Benefits of attending the Reciprocal Reading sessions include increased confidence, greater enjoyment of reading, development of presentational skills, greater reading comprehension, and team skills including turntaking, supporting each other, and accepting help.
* Challenges to implementation include the pupils’ level of focus on the task, their attendance, and confidence in participation. Other issues are exam and timetabling constraints, gaps in momentum due to holiday breaks. Another problem is the availability of accommodation, and the time that can be wasted taking pupils to and back from a classroom. One Support Assistant mentioned the importance of clarity in defining the Reciprocal Reading roles.
* All the Support Assistants enjoyed leading the groups, and were clear that the pupils also enjoyed and looked forward to the sessions, and were now much more engaged in reading than they would have been during ‘private reading’ time in their regular English class.

**Parent Focus Groups**

Two focus groups were held with parents of pupils attending the Reciprocal Reading groups: one with a mother and grandmother of a pupil in an S2 IP group (neither of whom had attended the parents workshop or used the approach when reading at home), and later with three more parents, two of boys in S1 RR groups, and one of a girl in an S1 IP group. Open ended questions were asked in order to obtain their views of the Reciprocal Reading project and to discern if they felt that there had been any impact on their child. Details of these focus groups are described in Appendix 7. Main themes arising from the focus groups were:

* All the parents reported that they had noticed an increase in their child’s enjoyment, confidence and the amount of reading for pleasure and personal interest done at home.
* Those parents who had attended the workshop reported that it had been very useful: ‘By coming on the workshop and experiencing it myself, I was able to completely understand it and then carry it on with confidence.’ All who had attended felt confident in using the approach with their child, and did so regularly.
* Parents focussed on significant increases in their child’s level of reading comprehension in particular. One described the effects as ‘fantastic’ and reported that her daughter was now tackling bigger books and asking about and using an increased vocabulary. Another was pleased to recount that his son had a much greater grasp of the context and story than previously, and would now sometimes ask to continue reading at the end of a session: ‘He’s now really learning what reading is really about, not just reading off what’s on a page, it’s about understanding what’s on it… He wants to do it, and that tells me that he’s enjoying it and that he’s feeling more confident.’
* Other parents noted that their children were now noticeably more confident in other areas, including tackling arithmetic problems. One father attributed a significant change in his son’s attitude to going to High school, which had been ‘horrific’ in Primary School, to his attendance of the Reciprocal Reading sessions. He also reported that his son had shown significant improvement in his approach to planning and composing a written assignment.
* Similarly, all parents felt that their children’s enjoyment of reading had noticeably increased in the last year, and felt that this was due in great part to Reciprocal Reading.
* One parent noted that attending a Reciprocal Reading group had been beneficial in that it had introduced a group of friends during the process of transition to High School, and had reduced the stigma of finding reading difficult.
* Considering ways in which the Reciprocal Reading programme might be developed, one parent considered that it should be rolled out in more Primary Schools, and another noted that it would be a valuable component of the transition process to High School if it was introduced in P7. Another felt that it would reduce stigma of being taken out of class if all the approach was used with all pupils rather than only those who were struggling.
* Other suggestions were that parents be given a list of the readers used at school for purchase, or that pupils be able to borrow these to take home, in addition to library books, and that pupils be asked to report on the reading they did outwith school. Another parent suggested that the work of Aidan Chambers might be useful during Reciprocal Reading sessions, to encourage critical reading and foster comprehension.

**Discussion**

The study employed a quasi-experimental design (i.e. a pre-test/post-test design) (Campbell and Stanley, 1963). It is recognised that a lack of control group prevents a further analysis of results and decreases the external validity of the study. However, the study’s design provided an example of ‘real world research’ (Robson, 2002) where the EP adopted the role of researcher-practitioner. This enabled the EP to be involved in the study and liaise closely with the Principal Teacher of the Learning Support Department whilst still carrying out other functions within the school.

Although the small number of pupils in the groups means that the statistical analysis of results is somewhat unreliable, it seems clear that average reading age scores and standardised reading scores increased over the time that pupils attended Reciprocal Reading sessions, and these increases in standardised reading scores can be shown to be statistically significant when the data from comparable groups of pupils are combined. In all groups, a ‘net gain’ in reading age was demonstrated, with increases in reading age greater than the duration of the intervention. Previous studies have explored the impact of Reciprocal Reading over a shorter period of time (Alfassi, 2006; Greenway, 2002; Takala, 2006). In this study, the fact that scores were obtained on three different occasions over two academic years for several of the groups enabled the researchers to assess progress over a longer period of time and increases the study’s reliability. These results are also consistent with comprehension research which emphasises that struggling readers require repeated and intensive opportunities to practise using strategies before they become proficient (Mastropieri, Scruggs and Graetz, 2003).

Analysis of increases in reading age and standardised scores for pupils with ASD was also attempted. Although the sample size was too small for inferential statistical analysis, there was some indication that pupils with ASD made greater gains in comprehension than their peers. Young people with ASD often have well-developed word reading skills, but demonstrate poor comprehension, consistent with their difficulties carrying out inferential reasoning tasks (Nation, 2006). In addition, they may demonstrate difficulties structuring their ideas on paper as a result of poor executive functioning. This suggests that the use of very structured, systematic instruction such as Reciprocal Reading, which involves repeated practice of the same four skills, may have been easier to access for this group of learners. The oral component of the intervention may also have enabled pupils to share their answers and ideas verbally, thus reducing demands for those pupils on the autistic spectrum. Future research into the impact of Reciprocal Research approaches on the comprehension skills of this group of learners may therefore prove fruitful.

An Analysis of Variance was used to investigate the difference in reading gains according to the SIMD quintile in which pupils lived. Again, the sample size limited the reliability of the statistical analysis, but there was some indication that pupils in the first SIMD quintile made smaller gains in their standardised reading scores over the duration of the intervention than their peers in other quintiles. This effect may simply have been an artefact of the different groups in which pupils attended Reciprocal Reading sessions, however. Again, more research might shed light on this area.

Focus groups with staff who led the groups highlighted the increase in both confidence and enjoyment of pupils who had attended the Reciprocal Reading sessions. All felt confident in using the Reciprocal Reading approach, and the Support Assistants reported that they had benefitted greatly from having the opportunity to observe sessions led by the PT SfL. Staff mentioned the practical difficulties that arose from a limited availability of accommodation for the groups. They were also aware of the importance of adapting the structure of sessions to the mood and personalities of the group members, and mentioned the stigma of being taken out of English class that pupils in the RR groups might have experienced.

Pupils in the IP focus groups reported that their confidence in reading had improved due to attending Reciprocal Reading sessions, though they were less sure whether their enjoyment of reading had increased. A theme was that the small group environment had been particularly useful in fostering confidence in that it was less intimidating than a large class, and mistakes were understood and accepted by peers.

Pupils in the RR focus groups similarly reported that attending the Reciprocal Reading sessions had helped them improve their spelling, reading comprehension, and also highlighted the benefits of learning in a small group for the development of confidence in reading aloud. Pupils in the S3 RR group also mentioned that being called out of their English class could be embarrassing.

The themes which emerged from the parents’ focus group were especially positive about the impact of the intervention on their children's feelings towards reading. All parents, and particularly those who were using Reciprocal Reading approaches at home with their children, made repeated reference to their child’s increased confidence and motivation to read, as well as an evident progress in literacy.

**Discussion and Implications for Future Research**

Future studies should explore other ways of assessing gains in comprehension skills. The use of the Suffolk scale was appropriate because it is a standardised scale which assesses both reading at the word level and sentence level but was perhaps not sufficient to determine the impact of the intervention on pupils’ employment of the four Reciprocal Reading strategies on their comprehension skills. For example, a large scale study conducted in West Dumbartonshire and Inverclyde (2014) employed a bespoke multiple-choice assessment of comprehension skills. This might be an effective method of supplementing the Suffolk scores and of obtaining pupils’ views of the skills that they now employ when reading a text.

The parents’ focus group highlighted the parents’ awareness of the impact of the intervention on their children’s confidence and enjoyment of reading. Although research highlights the reduced impact of parental involvement on overall pupil outcome at secondary school age, there is very little literature which attempts to ascertain the impact of parental involvement on their adolescent child’s comprehension skills and motivation to read. It would be beneficial to determine what kind of involvement – whether direct involvement or indirect by liaising with the school – may contribute to increased engagement at a time when pupils are less motivated to read and more influenced by peers.

Implementation factors were taken into account in an attempt to assist implementation and further embedding of the approach and to avoid a lack of engagement (Greenway, 2002). This led to increased support from parents and from members of the senior management team who ensured that pupils accessed the group on a regular basis. The EP also liaised regularly with the PT SfL and provided ongoing consultation and mentoring, a factor which has been shown to facilitate the application of skills acquired during training (Joyce and Showers, 2002). However, timetabling constraints makes it less easy to extract pupils from other classes as they begin their fourth year. As a result, there is a need to explore a means of using Reciprocal Reading across other subject areas so that pupils continue to practise the skills they have acquired. Initial steps have involved further liaison with the English department to aid staff to employ the techniques. Next steps will involve presenting the training video to teachers in other departments and working alongside teachers. It is intended that this will involve not only initial training but also ongoing consultation and mentoring.

Implementation science advocates adhering to the intervention and maintaining its fidelity. However, the literature also indicates that adaptation may be necessary as the context or participants change over time (Castro, Barrera, and Martine 2004). In order to improve sustainability and to develop the comprehension skills of a wider group of pupils, the approach may require some adaptation. This may be true of the approach when used with a wider number of students across different subjects. Further evaluation may attempt to ascertain the impact of approaches such as questioning based on Bloom’s taxonomy (Anderson, Krathwohl, and Bloom, 2001) as a means of increasing comprehension of a text in a number of different classes.

**Conclusion**

This study presents an evaluation of the Reciprocal Reading approach conducted over a longer time period and with older pupils than is documented in previous research. Although a limited number of pupils were involved, the data obtained demonstrates a significant increase in reading scores, and this was triangulated with information obtained from focus groups. Consistent with other evaluative studies of Reciprocal Reading which demonstrate its effectiveness as a method to increase comprehension skills and motivation (Alfassi, 2002; Talaka, 2006), the qualitative data highlighted improved literacy skills and pupils’ increased motivation and confidence. The results also highlight further potential areas of exploration, including the relative gains of pupils with ASD, the influence of socioeconomic background as measured by SIMD quintile upon development in reading comprehension and literacy, and the effect of parents using the Reciprocal Reading approach at home with their children.

The study also provides an example of the EP working as a research-practitioner in a real world setting where adherence to Implementation Science ensured the engagement of key stakeholders. In addition to the provision of initial staff training, ongoing coaching to staff and liaison with parents resulted in Reciprocal Reading becoming embedded within the Learning Support Department. The fact that the Reciprocal Reading programme spans more than one academic year also enabled teaching staff to form positive relationship with the pupils involved, making it probable that they have contributed to the pupils’ sense of competence and self-worth. (Strickland, Dillon, Funkhouser, Glick, and Rogers, 1989). One of the next steps will be to develop and apply the approach in other subject areas. Given that a number of Principal Teachers in the school are aware of the project, it is envisaged that this is a realistic aim.

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**Appendix 1**

**Focus group 1: S1 Individual Programme**

Five Pupils attended: four boys, one girl

**What do you think of reciprocal reading?**

P1: It helps you to read.

P2: It helps you to write better.

P3: It helps you to spell.

**What’s it like coming to the group?**

P1: It’s fun.

P2: It’s alright. It’s better than going to French (all agree)

**Did you learn anything else in the group about reading and writing apart from the four reciprocal reading strategies?**

P1: Not really. Just those four things.

All pupils felt that they had got better at using the four reciprocal reading strategies.

All pupils agreed that reciprocal reading had helped them with their reading, both with ‘reading words’ and also understanding.

**What do you do if you get stuck when you’re reading?**

P1: I’d try and spell each word out and then if I couldn’t I’d just try and ask the teacher.

P2: Just ask the teacher.

Other Ps: same

P3: I’d try and sound it out, use syllables.

**Has reciprocal reading helped you when you’re stuck?**

P1: It’s helped. It has helped a lot.

P2. It’s helped with spelling, reading and writing. I do better at it.

**Do you use reciprocal reading outside the group or at home?**

P1: No

P2: Yeah. I use it everywhere in school, but I don’t use it outside. Sometimes I use it in school but some stuff I knew how to do before I came here because I done it in Primary.

P3: I wouldnae be out with my pals and just start..

P4: Aye, same. I would do it in school, but I wouldnae do it outside the school because there’s no situation where I would use it.

**What about when you’re at home, would you use clarifying or anything?**

P: I don’t read at home, so..

**Do any of you read at home?**

One P indicates that he does. The rest say they do not.

P: If I don’t get a word I might try and figure out what it means.

**And would you use reciprocal reading in any other classes in school?**

P: Any classes where you need to read and write. I wouldn’t use it, but I could understand why it would help.

P1: In French

P2: In Spanish

**Are you more confident when you’re reading now?**

P: Yeah

All others agree

P1: I use it sometimes in other classes but I usually use it in here, but sometimes it comes in handy in other classes.

P2: We done this in Primary, reciprocal reading.

P3: We did a lot of it.

All Ps say they did reciprocal reading in Primary school.

P4: We done it in class, the whole class went every Monday to do it.

P3: We started it in P4. That’s when we started doing it.

**Has anyone noticed changes in you and your reading?**

P: Yeah. The teacher here, Ms J says that from the start of the year til now there’s been a big difference.

P1: That’s true.

P2: Ms D.

P3: Aye, she said we’d really improved since the start of the year.

All Ps agree

**What about at home, has anyone noticed?**

P: At home I don’t really read, so no.

**Out of ten, how much do you enjoy reading?**

P1: If I’ve got a good book, probably about 6

P2: If I’ve got a good book, maybe 5

P3: 5

P4: 7

P5: 5

**Has this changed since you began first year?**

All Ps feel that their enjoyment of reading has not changed since they began first year.

Would you recommend Reciprocal Reading to someone who was just starting first year? What would you say to them?

P: I would say it’s up to you.

P1: You’d probably tell them how much it helps.

P2: I’d probably tell them what I think helps.

P3: I don’t know.

**OK, so in general, I think you’re saying that it helps. It’s helped you with your confidence, maybe your enjoyment not so much. You’re not reading at home so much, so your parents aren’t noticing a change. But the teachers have definitely noticed that you’re more confident. And you’re using it sometimes not just in the group, but other places as well, is that fair to say?**

Most Ps agree.

**Appendix 2**

**Focus Group 2: S2 Individual Programme**

Seven Pupils attended: three boys, four girls

**What do you think of Reciprocal Reading?**

P: It can be boring at times. It helps a bit through some parts, but for example when you’re doing a test and you’re under pressure it doesnae help at all. But if you’ve got plenty of time and everything, then it helps.

P1: It can be helpful.

P2: It can build some people’s confidence. In my house class, yeah [it has built my confidence], but not in my point class, because I don’t like the people in there.

P3: I don’t know.

P4: It’s fine.

P5: It’s boring.

P6: It’s helpful but can be boring.

**What’s the worst thing about it?**

P: I don’t really like reading in front of people.

**What about coming to the group and working in a small group?**

P: I prefer little groups to massive classes. You can concentrate more because people judge you less. When I’m in class, I feel like people judge you more than if you’re in a small group with people you know.

P1: Most of them when you’re in a group, it’s people that have got the same disabilities as you, or the same level as you. In a class it’s all over the place, so people can be worse than you or they can be better than you. You get more support off the teachers, instead of a full class of thirty, she’s got a class of five.

Ps say they have between four and six pupils in their groups. One P had one-to-one support in first year, which she found ‘good’.

P2: You feel more confident because there’s less people, so if you mess up then you’re not scared because other people mess up as well.

**Apart from the four strategies, what else did you learn in the group?**

P: I think that’s the only four we learned

P1: We learned sounding out.

**Has Reciprocal Reading changed the way you understand what you are reading?**

P: Yes

P1: It can.

P2: Yeah, when you are stuck at something, the teacher will help you. If you spell something wrong, she’ll write underneath what the real word is. You’re more confident, if you don’t know what a word is then you sound it out, give it a try.

Most Ps agree Reciprocal Reading has increased their confidence in sounding out unfamiliar words.

**Is there anything else that you do if you get stuck when you’re reading?**

P: Ask a teacher.

P1: Usually if you’re stuck and you say it wrong, then the teacher would correct you. If it’s a hard one the teacher would just say it for you, if you can’t get it. But if it’s an easy one she would tell you to stop and then tell you to sound it out. Then at the same time, you could read on in the sentence. That’s how I do it, you skip that word, read on the sentence, and I’ll probably get it.

P2: You can break it up into small bits.

P3: I just miss it out and then I can’t even understand the sentence.

**Have you used any of the strategies other than in your group? Maybe in other classes or at home?**

P: In science we’ve started to do Reciprocal Reading.

P1: And English.

P2: Yeah, English we used to do it for homework, but it was just we used to read a passage and then answer ten questions. But we always had questions to answer.

**Do you read at home sometimes?**

P: If I’m bored, I’ll read before bed.

Four out of seven Ps say they read at home quite a lot.

P1: I don’t own books. I own one book, the one that’s in my schoolbag from the library.

P2: Maybe [I’ll have more confidence to work out] some words.

**How confident do you feel about reading? Has that changed since you’ve been in the groups?**

P: [Reading] out loud or into yourself are different. In my head I can read really, really fast. But when I read out loud I go really slowly and stutter a lot. So I prefer reading in my head. Reciprocal Reading has maybe made me a little more confident, but not much.

P1: I feel just the same. I feel fine when I’m reading.

P2: On a score of one to ten, it’s about nine and a half because in the group you have more confidence than if you’re in a bigger group. It just means that you have more tension within yourself. [Reciprocal Reading] has made me feel quite a lot more confident.

P3: It depends how many people are there. If it’s a small group like this then I’d kind of be OK, but if it’s like a big class, I’ll hesitate. I’m not too sure how much [Reciprocal Reading] has helped.

P4: It’s alright, I’ve got a wee bit more confident reading out, but reading to myself about the same. Reading to myself, I’ve always been able to do it with ease, but reading out is pure boring, I struggle with it. Generally just with reading, in the class and everything, [Reciprocal Reading] has helped.

P5: When I read out loud I stutter a lot, but if I stutter I can go back and read it again.

P6: I’m kind of [more confident]. [And it’s kind of Reciprocal Reading that has made the difference].

**Has anyone noticed that you’ve got more confident in your reading?**

P: Ms D.

P1: My Mum. I’m reading at home.

P2: Ms D she said she noticed it because I was reading at home and in English, and she was saying that it’s got a lot better. I think it’s just reading [practice that’s made the difference].

P3: My Mum [has noticed]

**How much do you enjoy reading? Has this changed since you began Reciprocal Reading?**

P: Seven and a half [for enjoyment]. It’s changed a little bit, I used to be seven.

P1: Zero [for enjoyment]. I hate it. It’s always been zero, I hate reading. Reading books is just too boring, cause they’re too long. You’re just sat doing nothing for a long period of time. But if I’m reading forms or anything like that then that’s fine.

**What about a magazine?**

P1: No.

P2: instructions?

P1: I don’t read instructions

**What about if a friend sends you a letter?**

P1: Nah. It’s the twenty-first century. Just text.

P2: About eight and a half [for enjoyment]. I used to hate reading in Primary, so a big change. I don’t know [how much Reciprocal Reading] has helped.

P3: A one [for enjoyment, up from a zero since first year]. It’s been reciprocal reading and people at home reading things out and asking me.

P4: I hate [reading], about a two or a three. [Reciprocal Reading hasn’t helped].

P5: Eight [for enjoyment]. It’s always been that [so Reciprocal Reading hasn’t particularly helped].

**You’ve been doing Reciprocal Reading for two years now. Is doing this year any different from doing it last year?**

All Ps say no, it isn’t, it’s just the same.

P: We’re getting better at reading, but not through Reciprocal Reading.

P1: I said that to my friend, she didn’t know what I was saying.

P: Reciprocal Reading’s just extra time to look at a book, basically. Kinda boring.

P2: I like predicting. I don’t like the other ones. The only reason I like predicting is because I’ve got a good imagination, I really do. People time me and say I have 20 seconds to say what I’m going to say, because I can take two minutes.

P3: I just find the books are getting harder. Sometimes you can get really interested in a book, and then other times you don’t like books.

**Would you recommend Reciprocal Reading as a way to get better at reading?**

P: Maybe in some subjects, but not in English, it’s a waste of time.

P1: At the beginning of a period in English, we do ten minutes of reading. It’s pointless. It’s less time to do your work. And especially with me, I take time to do my work, cause if I muck up something then I would need to go back ages.

P2: [The teachers] are always moaning that you don’t get enough work done.

P1: In theory it’s ten minutes, but it’s like 15, 20 minutes. Because the teacher’s always late to class, then by the time we actually get in, she does the register and everything else, then it ends up being 15, 20 minutes that we’re just sitting reading. Every Thursday we get told to go the library and pick a book, and then we read it.

**What would you tell me if I was just about to begin Reciprocal Reading?**

P: It’s boring. Don’t get into it.

P1: Well, it’s better than French, so...

P2: Everything’s better than French.

P3: I want to do French, I don’t want to do Spanish.

P4: Try it and if you like it then stick to it, and if you don’t then obviously don’t stick to it.

P5: The only good thing you get out of [Reciprocal Reading] is a trip [to go bowling] at the end of the year.

Some discussion of the merits of bowling ensues, including some repetition of the word ‘special’.

**Do you feel that because you get picked for the Reciprocal Reading group that you’re not good at reading?**

P: Well I kinda know I’m not good at reading.

P1: It makes you feel more special.

Ps laugh

**Special in a good or bad way?**

P: I’m that special, I’m going on a trip for special people.

P1: I’m dyslexic and I’ve got autism, so I feel special, and being in that group I feel even more special.

P2: It’s not optional to go there, you do a test and then they’ll say you go to it.

P1: Literally you’re good or you’re bad.

P3: They’re saying it isn’t optional but it is, because your parents get a letter home and then your parents have to sign the letter.

P4: Well my mum doesn’t trust me, cause my mum never told me anything about it.

**But how does it feel to be picked for the group?**

P: We get to miss four days of school. One day for bowling and then three [other] days.

P1: And we get to miss French.

**Do you have anything else you want to tell me about Reciprocal Reading?**

P: it could be more active, put it that way. Instead of just sitting talking about a book that nobody likes reading.

P1:. No-one wants to stand up.

P: I don’t mean that way, remove all the chairs from the classroom, I mean as in like more to do, more parts to Reciprocal Reading. So instead of just the predicting, clarifying, questioning and whatever, more things to do.

P2: More activities. Maybe go to a different classroom and use the computers or something, just not sitting at the table.

P3: We could write stories about it, on the computer, not [by] hand. Cause too much writing makes my hand sore.

P: That’s a good idea.

**Appendix 3**

**Focus Group 3: S1 Reciprocal Reading Group**

Five pupils attended: three boys, two girls

**How do you feel about Reciprocal Reading?**

P: It helps you to understand and it makes you more confident, so you feel better.

Four out of five Ps agree.

P1: I don’t like it, cause I don’t like reading. I like English though, and it takes time away from English, and so I don’t really like it.

**What do you not like about reading?**

P1: It’s boring.

**Do you find it difficult?**

P1: No, just boring.

**Has Reciprocal Reading made you more confident with reading?**

P1: Well, that wasn’t really a problem.

**And what about working in a small group, what’s that been like?**

P: I don’t like working in the group, cause there’s boys. I just don’t like boys.

P1: I prefer working in a group, it’s more fun than just being by myself.

P2: I like it.

**Do you feel that the people you’re with are the same level of reading and have the same interests as you?**

P: Yeah, I feel like it’s good to be in a group so you can hear how other people are progressing and it also makes you more confident to speak out in front of other people.

**Apart from the four strategies, have you learned anything else through doing Reciprocal Reading?**

P: Say if somebody was reading out loud in front of a class: not to judge them, cause that’s not nice. So if you watch them progress, then you won’t judge them, you’ll learn not to laugh at them or anything.

**What about understanding what you’re reading? Has Reciprocal Reading changed that?**

Several Ps say yes.

P: Sometimes, you know when you get questions, I can understand it easier in English questions. I think because of reading, because you know how you find the meaning sometimes when you read?

P1: It’s helped me with my spelling, seeing all of the words, cause I’m bad at spelling so when I see all the words, it’s helped me.

P2: [It’s helped me with] understanding words.

P3: I think it’s helped to understand more words and to understand what the story’s about, so when you’re writing something in English it can give you a bigger imagination, if you were doing free story writing.

**Since starting Reciprocal Reading, what do you do differently now when you get stuck in reading?**

P: I’m getting more confident.

P1: I probably don’t get stuck much more with my spelling as what I used to, when I’m writing. [Agrees that she’s now more confident in trying to decode a word].

P2: When I started I refused to read out loud, but that’s OK [now] if I have to do that. It’s also helped me to understand when I’m reading. [When I get stuck] I just keep trying. Cause at the start I could follow a book but then I’d just lose my place. But it’s taught me to just keep going.

P3: I’m more confident, yeah.

**Have you used the Reciprocal Reading strategies in other classes or at home when you’re reading?**

Most Ps say No.

P2: I’d need to think about it. I don’t really pay attention to whether I’m doing that.

**How confident do you feel now reading, compared to when you started, out of ten?**

P: `Now I’m six or seven, before I was about four.

P1: Now I’m seven, before I was the same.

P2: About eight. When I started I was about two.

P3: A seven. But before I was a four.

P4: Eight. [Before I was] one.

**Has anyone noticed these changes? Parents or teachers?**

P: At home, sometimes I’d use bigger words. And my mum’s noticed that like, ‘I’ve never heard you say that word before’.

P1: I didn’t really use to read in the home, but I bought a couple of books, and I was reading in the house and my mum noticed that I was actually reading and not doing anything else. [She was happy to see that]. I’m reading a horror book, cause I like stuff like that, I don’t like other books.

Other Ps are not aware of others noticing.

**How much has your enjoyment of reading gone up?**

P: Five. I started at two. Cause I like going outside.

P1: I started at three because I didn’t enjoy reading at all, now I’m like a seven because I like reading.

P2: Probably a two to begin with, because I didn’t really understand what I was reading, so I didn’t know for instance how a character’s emotions were, or how they were feeling. But now it’s like an eight because I can understand what the story’s about. [I’m reading at home more]. I like a book called *Gen X the Takeover Tour.* It’s by a person called Ollie White, he does Youtube as well. I was reading another one at the start of the year that I finished already.

P3: [I’ve gone from] four to six. Because I didn’t really like reading, but it was a tiny bit that I liked it. [I’m not reading at home], I’m reading at school.

P4: Started at a three, now I’m about six.

All Ps agree that Reciprocal Reading has a lot to do with the increase in their enjoyment of reading.

**What advice or information would you give to someone who was just about to start Reciprocal Reading?**

P: It’s a bit boring, but it helps.

P1: It’s boring, but it can help with a lot of different things: spelling, reading and being more confident.

P2: Do it if you like the book. And if you like it, you can get into it and enjoy it, but it also helps in bringing your confidence up again and reading in front of people and to understand spelling and stuff like that. But it can be quite boring if you don’t like it, if you don’t like the book you’re reading.

P3: It helps.

P4: It’s alright, but it helps with vocabulary and stuff and spelling [and confidence].

**Appendix 4**

**Focus Group 4: S3 Reciprocal Reading Group**

Five pupils attended: four girls, one boy.

**How has Reciprocal Reading been for you this year?**

P: It’s been good. It’s improved things, like my writing has got better, reading too. [It’s helped me know what a book is about].

P1: It’s helped with spelling and reading.

P2: It’s helped me to understand a concept when I’m reading and stuff, like helped me understand the meaning of a book and what it’s about.

P3: [I think it’s helped me with my reading]

P4: Aye [it’s helped]. I don’t know really [with what].

**Are you reading more now than you did before?**

P: I think I read more now. I don’t know [whether Reciprocal Reading has played a part in that].

P1: I read more since I started [Reciprocal Reading].

P2: I’m reading a lot more than what I used to. This year [there’s been a big change]. I read fiction and non-fiction. Right now I’m reading *The Falling Stars.* It’s fiction.

**What about being in a small group, how’s that been?**

P: Getting took out [of English] in front of the whole class is bad.

P1: Everybody’s looking at you [so that can be a bit embarrassing].

P2: I just say I’m going to go and stand outside and wait for [the Reciprocal Reading tutor]. That’s what I’ll say [to the English teacher]. My English teacher knows what’s going on, cause when she comes, I just say ‘Can I go outside?’ And she says ‘Aye’, so I just go.

P3: Yeah [I feel a bit uncomfortable getting called out of class as it begins]. But it’s good, cause you get out of English, [which is a bit boring].

P4: I don’t mind it.

**Have you learned anything other than the four Reciprocal Reading skills through coming to the group?**

Initially, Ps say they don’t know.

P: Using a dictionary

P1: Better at spelling

P2: Better at writing

P3: Spelling

**Has it changed the way that you understand what you’re reading?**

P: Aye.

P1: It makes me think about the book more, think about what’s happening, what might happen.

P2: If I look at it and read it carefully, then I’ll understand it. I just read the back of the book, so I know what’ll happen at the end.

P3: You read the last pages to find out what’s happening.

P4: I think by being able to understand the book more, you’re able to know what’s actually happening, and it makes me realise... as if I’m there.

**Which of the four strategies helps you imagine you’re there?**

P4: I’d say predicting.

All Ps agree that predicting helps to ‘get into the story more’.

**When you get stuck now reading, do you do anything different from what you used to do?**

P: I skip the word

P1: Just ask.

P2: If there’s a word I don’t know, I just say ‘I don’t know that word’ and ask what it says.

P3: I read round about it. If it’s a word I don’t know how to pronounce then I’ll try to sound it out, but if it’s a word I don’t understand or know what it means, I’ll read the rest of the sentence and see what it could mean, compared to the rest of the sentence.

P2: Same, I’ll read round about it.

P4: I just skip it.

**Do you use the strategies when you’re in another subject, or reading at home?**

P: When I’m in my other subjects, I do exact same as I do when I’m in Reciprocal Reading. It helps me to understand what more words mean.

P1: Yeah [I use the strategies when I’m reading] in all my subjects.

P2: I don’t read outside the school. I would only ask the teacher in English, to ask what it means. But first I’ll read it over, but if I still don’t get it then I’ll ask the teacher.

P3: I’m using [Reciprocal Reading] in other subjects, when I’m writing. If I’m reading in English and I don’t know the meaning of a word, I’ll find myself reading around it. [Maybe summarising when I’m reading at the beginning of the period].

P4: I’m the same.

**How confident were you reading at the beginning of the year compared to now, out of ten?**

P: Eight. [No change since the beginning of the year]. I’ve got a bit of stage fright, so I hate being in front of big crowds and reading, cause people are judgemental. So it’s an eight for me. As long as I’m not looking at them and just reading straight from... then I’ll be fine.

P1: Nine. Before I’d say it was about five, and I wasn’t as confident. But now I am. {Reciprocal Reading’s got a lot to do with that].

P2: Eight now, and before, a five. [Reciprocal Reading has helped with] reading a lot.

P3: Nine now, and then a five before.

P4: I think at the start I wasn’t confident in reading at all, I couldn’t read presentations or things, but now, through Reciprocal Reading I can read in front of people without getting mixed up with my words and thinking about it too much. [I’ve gone from say about a three to about a nine]. A big part of that [has been because of Reciprocal Reading].

**Has anyone noticed any change in your confidence reading?**

P: My parents at home, yeah.

P1: My English teacher, she said I’m reading more.

**How much do you enjoy reading now, out of ten, compared to the beginning of the year?**

P: Seven [now], three [before].

P1: From a two to a six. Because when I’m reading, because I can understand it more, it’s making me enjoy it more, the books. So that’s why I enjoy it more.

P2: A three before, and now an eight. [I’m finding myself reading more].

P3: Before I’d be like a two, I’m an eight now.

P4: Two to six. [Before] I didn’t like reading unless the teacher helped spell out some words for me, then I would be alright.

Most Ps attribute the change in their enjoyment and confidence to Reciprocal Reading.

**How would you sum up your Reciprocal Reading experience? What advice would you give me if I was thinking about doing it?**

P: Do it. If it helps you, it helps you. Knowledge comes in different ways.

P1: Do it. Even though it’s a bit embarrassing, it’s still going to help you with your English.

P2: Do it. [It will be fun, and it will help].

P3: It might not help fully, but it still improves, and it makes a bigger improvement from the start, so.. [It’s better than normal English, because] Reciprocal Reading teachers help you understand the text of a book.

**Appendix 5**

**Focus Group 5**

Two Reciprocal Reading group teachers (IP Groups)

**How have you found it leading the groups?**

T: I have found that it varies, depending on which group you have. This is the first year that we’ve had some children who have had Reciprocal Reading in their Primary, so they are more confident with the roles and know what the roles are, whereas usually when I take a group this is new to the children, especially because I tend to take First Years. So I tend to have to do a lot of modelling in the early stages so that they know what the roles are and gradually build up the roles so that they’re confident taking them on. And that’s something we work on over a longer period of time.

As far as I’m aware, two of our feeder Primaries seem to be doing Reciprocal Reading in Primary now, so the children are used to it, which is really good.

T1: I’m taking the Second Years, so my experience is slightly different, because they’re used to the roles. It just depends who’s in the groups, some are easier to lead than others. I [still need to model] the questioning, I think that’s the same as First Year as well.

T: I think some children are naturally more receptive to Reciprocal Reading. You get the ones with bigger personalities who have struggled to get it down on paper, and they’re quite keen to chat and to tell you all about it. They get quite involved in the stories, they really get quite carried away, especially with predictions. But you do get other children who are still a bit anxious about being in a group, and generally having support for learning, and take a bit longer to warm up to the idea of ‘it’s OK, it’s a safe place, you can say what you think.’ And that takes a bit of time for them to get over.

T1: Some like to hear their own voice, so they love to go on at great lengths about their predicting. They love to come up with mad, quite outlandish ideas.

T: And that’s a skill for us, being able to curb that and not let them dominate the group.

T1: And other pupils are maybe shy.

**What is the hardest skill?**

T1: I think probably questioning, and then maybe summarising. Predicting’s the easiest, I think. For clarifying I usually just ask if another pupil can answer the question, and they usually can.

T: One day we had to look up Google. It was a question on towpaths, with technical things like barges. So we got a visual for them as to what a towpath was. So we’ve done that as well before. Usually someone in the group has some experience of it, and it’s sometimes lovely to hear. One lovely example is one of the books was about a cornsnake, and one of the kids in the class who was quite shy had a cornsnake, so it was her time to shine. She was able over the course of the book to bring in stuff about her cornsnake and show us pictures on her phone of her cornsnake and explain the whole thing, so it really helped her to engage with the text, which was lovely. It made it real for her, and she would show off to the rest of the group that she actually knew quite a lot about this, and we knew very little about it, so it was nice.

**How are the group sessions structured?**

T1: It changes. I used to set out the roles and say to each pupil ‘Today you’re going to question, today you’re going to predict, today you’re going to clarify’. But now we just read the chapter, and then I ask, just so that they’re not sitting for the whole twenty minutes thinking ‘What question am I going to ask?’ I just feel it’s sometimes better maybe for them just to concentrate on the chapter. And then they’re maybe thinking of the four strategies as well.

T: I’ve done a mixture of that, when we started doing Reciprocal Reading four years ago I would be more specific with the roles, but I would say now, at the moment with the First Years, for the last month I’ve had a particular focus on questioning because I want them to get more confident with questioning, so they’ve all been doing questions. It’s not just two people on the questioning role: they’ve all got to come up with a question. And I model the question, so as we’re reading the chapter I’m pulling out key points all the way through, and I say to them ‘You can use one of my questions that I’ve asked or one of my key points, or make up your own’. So it’s a really differentiated way of doing it, and then gradually they get more and more confident with it.

Sometimes I do it that they all share the roles. If I feel like their concentration’s slipping, we all do the roles. So clarifying comes up naturally within the book, but for summarising they summarise round the table: ‘Can you start for us, can you summarise what happened in the last chapter, can you add that?’ And we add to it throughout the table. And then when we get into the discussion and the questioning, again it’s points throughout the whole table.

I think that’s what I like about Reciprocal Reading: you can vary it depending on the whole cohort you have in front of you. You can be flexible with it.

**What advice or training did you receive on Reciprocal Reading?**

T1: The input I had was from [the PT of Support for Learning], who showed me the video that the Educational Psychologist had showed her [*this is the video available on the school’s website*]. And there’s handouts and things like that. And I observed the PTSfL doing groups as well.

T: The school’s link EP did a training session with everybody who was in the department, including the support assistants who were with us at the time. She showed us a video from a Primary School in East Kilbride that must be four or five years old now, and we did a workshop on Reciprocal Reading. That was maybe five years ago.

We only started using support assistants this year when we tried to expand support for learning up to English. I did a session with them where we did the same: we watched the DVD, we went through the written materials, and then I got them back in to see me doing it with a group a couple of times as well. So they could drop in whenever they wanted, see me with individual programmes, see how I organise it, how I model it, how the children respond. And then I also went round the groups when the support assistants started, just to check that they were doing all four roles and that they were doing it correctly.

I think you learn on the job, through trial and error yourself. As long as you’ve got a good understanding of what it is you’re trying to achieve, what the purpose is. The EP’s powerpoint on what the simple model of reading is all links in. The training I’ve done in other schools, we do look at cognitive stuff. So I think when you understand that, you know what you’re aiming for.

T1: Depending on what group you have. Sometimes it works if you tell the pupils ‘you’re going to question today, you’re going to predict’, sometimes it’s better just to have a big discussion. And the pupils sometimes can be very chatty, and all join in with questioning or clarifying, so it is more spontaneous. It can depend on their mood. Sometimes they can come in and be quite tired, and they do need more direction. But then other times they can be quite lively.

T: If you were delivering this as an English teacher in a class, or a Primary teacher in a class, and you wanted groups of children at different ability levels doing Reciprocal Reading, then I think you would need to be a lot more prescriptive. Eventually you would want to say ‘You’re the Boss today’. And I think that’s how Primary X do it, they ‘ve got wee cards [ascribing roles]. So the teacher’s going round and monitoring the learning: you can obviously use Reciprocal Reading in that way for that whole class environment, with different children doing different books round the class, and they’ve maybe got their half hour to do them. We’ve adapted it for our groups because we don’t have large numbers, it’s all wee groups. But I think the type of child we’re supporting, a lot of it is nurture: building confidence, getting their anxiety levels down, getting them to want to engage with the text. For me a lot of it is just like your own children at home when you’re doing the bedtime book at night, that bonding thing. You do get that same bond with them, because at the end of the two years, they don’ t want to leave, having been dragged in kicking and screaming ‘I’m no going to support for learning’, after two years it’s ‘Do we get this next year?’

**What have you changed or adapted when you lead the groups?**

T: We still have the four – predicting clarifying, summarising and questioning – that is still a focus in every single session, definitely.

We change the time we spend on particular roles, depending on the focus you want to have in that particular session. If you wanted to do something about clarifying, you would explain ‘how do you clarify?’ so you could do a session on all the different ways you could clarify, so you would spend more time picking out phrases or text that you want to clarify, and then actually clarifying, reading before, or trying to work it out, using a dictionary, asking each other, peer support. You go through it all with them. You vary the time spent on each skill, depending on how you’re teaching it.

But I would say that it’s crucial [to mention all four skills]. I’ve got it all up there [on a poster], and they can see it. They’ve also got a sheet in their folders that they look at, and also bookmarks, so the visual’s there all the time, they need to look at each of these things every single session. I want them to internalise so that they can do without even thinking.

T1: I’m the same. I only adapt it sometimes if I feel sometimes maybe the group aren’t discussing, or aren’t summarising maybe as much as they could. That’s the only reason I may change it. I’ve read quite a few things about Reciprocal Reading and everyone has their own slant on it. Because you can also ask a child to be the teacher and then that child would decide ‘I want you to summarise, I want you to predict.’ Upstairs when I was taking a group out, I felt they weren’t as engaged, and I felt that if they took turns to be the teacher that they were far more interested. There was one boy in particular who I didn’t feel was as engaged as he could be, but after that he was dying to tell people what to do, who was going to question, and who was going to summarise. But apart from that it doesn’t really change. I’ve used the Boss with the First Year [RR] Group that I take out of English, just for twenty minutes at the start of the period. But in the IP groups they don’t feel the same kind of peer pressure, so they feel much more engaged, whereas if they’re coming out of class [for the RR groups] they can be a bit shy and a wee bit awkward. Because I take them out of class, sometimes I think they can feel like they’re being treated differently, like other kids can see them coming out. Whereas down here [the IP groups] they don’t really feel like that [because they don’t go to French, they just come here]. So that strategy works well [for the RR groups].

T: They’ve always done personal reading for the first fifteen minutes of the period in English in First, Second and Third year. That’s the time we’re using to access the groups. But the IP groups come out of French for the full period, twice a week. It used to be three times a week, but unfortunately it’s now down to two times a week.

T1: When they’re in the IP groups, they get so used to coming here and they feel that everyone’s in the same boat, so they don’t feel as embarrassed. Whereas upstairs every time they come out they pretend ‘Oh no’, but when they come out, they’re happy enough. It is peer pressure, I think, and I think they are a wee bit embarrassed at times. So I just thought that that [Boss role] strategy worked better with them.

T: The support assistants were saying when I was going through all the post testing data with them, just to show them the difference of how children had come on in their groups, they were saying they’ve noticed a difference in some of the kids in First Year, from being quite anxious coming out to quite enjoying the groups. So I think they’re a bit like [the IP groups], it’s just taken them longer to get a bit more comfortable with it.

T1: And they really do enjoy it when they’re out. One boy in particular, as soon as he’s out of the class and the other kids aren’t watching him, he’s totally fine and he loves it. But he improved and is now at the stage where he’s not going to be in the group because his reading age has improved. Quite a few are not moving on because they’re not doing so well.

**What factors have helped you implement Reciprocal Reading? What advice has been most helpful, what’s worked well?**

T: I think a huge thing for me this year is this is the first year where I’ve been allowed to screen test the whole of First Year. So I felt much more confident that I had the right children in the right groups. The children here in Support for Learning have got the most significant learning difficulties, and the ones who are getting taken in English time are not as far behind with their reading, so I felt as if the groups were better balanced. I felt more confident that we had the right children in the right groups. Previously we were only allowed to screen test children who were alerted [to us] by the Primaries. But loads slipped through the net, as we found this year when we did actually screen test the whole of First Year. A lot of children were flagged up as having low comprehension and spelling scores who the Primary hadn’t told us anything about. And the reason for that is they’re in differentiated groups in their Primary class, doing fine at that level. When you move them to mainstream Secondary and mixed ability classes, suddenly they’re not in a nice wee group at their level any more, they’re being asked to do the same work as the others in the class.

T1: When you’re with a group and you get to know their personalities, you can think of ways to approach that session. I’ve adapted a lot to different groups, but it’s just natural, quite organic.

T: I think when you’re introducing the four roles there are some children that are better at summarising, they’re quite good at remembering the key points, they’ve got a good working memory. So you tend to let them all be in their own wee comfort zone for a while. The more anxious ones I tend to get to be the clarifier, that’s simply because they’re highlighting the phrases that they’ve watched you read, and everybody else in the group helps out with that. So I think you look for placing the roles where they’re in their comfort zone, initially, until they’re used to the roles and understand them, and what you’re trying to do.

The bookmarks are useful, to keep them focussed. I think you need to keep coming back to the things on the wall, the visuals and the bookmarks, because it just helps to reinforce in your head these four roles. I think having the group small is really important as well. We have always had small [IP] groups, but in English [RR], I’ve deliberately had no more than five children in a group when I’ve sorted out the groups. I would also say it’s not a good idea to have them literally all at the same level, it’s quite good to have a slight variation in reading ages, because the ones that are more confident help their peers. For example, they might be more fluent readers. And I think it’s also important to take a turn at reading. I always take a turn at reading, because you need to model fluency and what it is to put expression in everything. And the children that are more confident at reading in the groups, they model as well, for the ones that are poorer. I’ve definitely got some that are very good at summarising in particular, so that’s good for the other children to see it’s not just the teacher who can do this, he can do it, or she can do it, and I’m watching them every week to see how they do it. They start to pitch in and I pull it out of them. So for example J has just mentioned these things: do you agree with that, can you add anything to that, and you get them to verbalise what they’re thinking.

When I’ve delivered this training to other PTs of Support for Learning they immediately want to get the kids to write something. ‘They could do that then maybe do a writing project’.. I think a huge turn off for these children is that they have really struggled with their writing. They’re not all dyslexic, but may have dyslexic difficulties, and I think they now see me and they don’t associate me with writing, they just associate me with chatting about books, and the pressure of having to write your answers down is not there. Keep it reciprocal, don’t be tempted as many teachers are, especially English teachers, who immediately want to start doing a wee project. Like the book *Betrayal*, ‘they could maybe do a wee writing project on World War 2, or the Jews, ,or whatever..’ No! Just keep it about the book, keep it verbal, all verbal. That way we get them to enjoy it. Previously we’ve had parents in and they ‘ve asked for a couple of novels over the summer, and the children themselves have started to talk about actually beginning to enjoy reading. And I think it’s because we’re not asking them to write anything about it.

**What differences have you noticed in implementation between the IP and RR groups, and across years?**

T1: As I said, saying to the RR groups that they’re the teacher today and they can choose who’s going to question [can work well].

T: Just from a very practical point of view, If I have an IP group, I have my classroom, the children are all timetabled, they come to me. Whereas, when we’re going to English, you’re into another teacher’s classroom having to collect the children, not necessarily all from the same classroom. You’re then having to get them to a different location, trying to find spare classrooms or offices or whatever nearby. It’s more [hassle and more time is wasted]. It’s just so tight for accommodation. I could say to English that I want the children to come to me, but I can’t guarantee this room will be free, because we’re so tight for accommodation as well.

This year we just started a group in Third Year, [rather than moving them organically from First to Second to Third Year]. So we had to pull out a group in Third Year who had not had all of this before, and I think going in cold in Third Year is a non-starter. The children are not wanting to feel stigmatised. They feel it much more in Third Year, [especially when it’s out of the blue].

T1: The students feel very secure in here, like safe and comfortable, whereas upstairs [in RR], sometimes a room might be used. When you take them out at the start of the week (they come out twice a week) you might use one room, and then you might go back to that room later in the week and someone might be using it, so you’re in a different room. And then, just walking along the corridor, they feel that maybe ‘the eyes are on them’. Once they’re out and they’re settled in a room, they’re great then.

T: It’s the best we can do with the resources and time we have. We can’t really get a workaround.. Just now, the First Years are getting used to seeing this happen in their classrooms. When they go into second year, it’ll be normal. Then when they go into Third Year, it will be really normal. Not all of them are, we’ve still got some heels-in ‘we’re not doing this’, totally disengaged. I think just with their age, they feel quite embarrassed. With the current First Years’ progress, we’ve not got any issues like that.

**What is the effect of Reciprocal Reading on levels of enjoyment of reading? How do you know?**

T: They enjoy it more: they’re smiling and laughing. Body language, facial expressions. And then pupils in First and Second Year that I have ask ‘can we do this next year?’ And when you say this is only a First and Second Year course, they’re quite sad, they’re so used to coming out. You build up a bond with them.

T1: They’re keen to read. When I get a group initially in August or September, they will sit like wee mice, looking at each other. If you were to come into one of our First Year groups now, they’re animated, chatting, looking at the books, they’re reading away, their inhibitions have mostly gone. And they also start supporting each other, so say one was stumbling on a word, someone will jump in and help them with a word, or will read that wee phrase. They actually start to intuitively start like a wee support group.

T: They’re very supportive of each other, actually. There’s one pupil who struggles when he’s reading, and he sounds out all the words, but the others are very patient and they try to help him with the words. But they also come in with their own books that they’re reading at home, and they’ll say ‘I’m reading this, Miss’, or they’ll tell me of other books that they’re reading.

T1: I started a book with them, the *Betrayal* book. All the groups always like that kind of book. It’s about a Jewish family during World War 2, and I started it just before IDL (?) started. And I said to them ‘I really hope we can get this book finished, I know you’re off timetable for the next three weeks’. And all the groups were quite anxious about getting it finished. Really, they were engaging with the text and quite upset at the thought that they might not get to the end of the story, which I thought was just lovely. In terms of enjoyment, they were engaged.

T: They sometimes ask ‘can we not just read the next chapter?’ because they’re desperate to find out what happens next. So they are very engaged.

**What about the effect of Reciprocal Reading on confidence in reading? Again, how do you know?**

T: I don’t think they’re as anxious anymore. I would say their confidence improves because they’re not as anxious and they sometimes ask ‘can I read more, Miss?’

T1: Initially they start off and they’re just desperate to get their bit over with, but then they start wanting to read a page and ask if they can start. They’re wanting to read more and to discuss.

**What have been the challenges in delivering Reciprocal Reading?**

T1: I think a big challenge has been us having to administer and mark all the pre and post testing. But I think it’s absolutely worth it. I think it’s really worth doing, and that’s something I’ve learned through the EP’s involvement, how important it is to be really rigorous with the pre and post testing to see the improvement. That’s important, and to identify the ones that are maybe needing a bit more input next year. And also to identify the ones that can disengage because they’re actually up and running and have got a functional reading age. There’s only two of us, and we’ve got a school of 1100, and we’re not just doing Reciprocal Reading, we’ve got lots of other work to do. So that has been a challenge, but it’s so worth it. The cost of the test as well is an issue just now because we’ve got money, but when that goes, there’s an issue too. Also we managed to buy in 500 odd pounds of books, which was great, because the books we had were all about 15 years old and were starting to fall apart.

T: That was difficult when you had five in, and you only had three books or something. That was challenging, they were all fighting for their own copy. But it’s much better now.

**How much are other teachers in the school implementing Reciprocal Reading strategies? How can we ensure this takes place?**

T: They’re not, because that was our stretch aim. What I’m hoping to do in the coming year is start to dip our toe in the water of looking at Reciprocal Teaching. I’ve asked the Head Teacher if she can liaise with Psychological Services to do an in-service day for the staff, a training for everyone on Reciprocal Teaching. Because that was one of the stretch aims of this project, looking to see if we could implement that. Interestingly there was a training at X High School, the special ed school that’s part of our building. They were saying the literacy levels are very different there, as they are special ed. But they’re doing a lot of Reciprocal Teaching without even thinking about it. They’re asking the children to summarise back the main points of the lesson. Even our teachers when they’re doing their success criteria and learning intentions, part of that is being really clear with the children what your intentions are and then getting the children at the end of the lesson to summarise back what the main points of the lesson were. In science, you use your clues and predict what you think’s going to happen next. When you actually take each of these [Reciprocal Reading] points [they are present in teaching], like children asking each other questions in the group like in Home Economics for example, when they’re doing the demonstrations. I don’t the teachers are aware they’re using them. I think when and if Psych Services come in and if we can get the funding for it, the teachers will realise they’re doing a lot of this already, it’s just making it clear in their head.

We were thinking of using the Literacy Committee as a vehicle for getting departments to volunteer to pilot it in certain classes. I think that will be a good starting point.

**What could be better about Reciprocal Reading?**

T1: More time, more support assistants. There’s an opportunity cost here: I’m taking them out of something else to do this. If we had additional support assistant hours in for this project, I wouldn’t be taking them away from anywhere to facilitate this, so that would be good.

Training – I think it would be good to do a refresher every year, even all of us to get back to the research. Why do we focus on these four strategies, what are we trying to achieve here. Just to keep it fresh in your head, so you’re not losing the point of this. Now that the support assistants are doing it, their in-service days are in August, so that would be a good opportunity for me to say ‘right, we’re all going to send an hour going back over this, just to remind ourselves why we’re doing this, what we’re trying to achieve.

English teachers could be doing this when they’re delivering texts in class, their dramas, when they’re reading out. They could easily be doing this, and using the terminology ‘we’re clarifying this, we can predict’..

T1: I just think it’s such a great motivational thing, it’s just lovely to see the kids enjoy reading, and seeing them happy.

T: Yeah, and when you see the results.

T1: And I also think there’s a definite nurture thing here. When things are bad at home, and things are not good elsewhere, they can start to enjoy books as a way of zoning out, to help with stress and anxiety. The other thing is I definitely have seen a big improvement of children on the autistic spectrum. There’s one girl who’s bucking the trend just now, but there’s other stuff going on with her. But for the rest of them, we’ve not got a huge number, but they seem to make the biggest gains. It’s almost as if listening to other children’s perspectives in something they start to see there are other perspectives, they’re not just seeing it from their point of view. They learn to verbalise more as well, and to think through things.

T: I think it’s really nice when you see them coming in, and you see them start to get all comfortable and cosy, and they’re settling down to a book. I think it reminds you of kids in Storytime. There’s one boy, I get the impression that he really enjoys settling down to a book, and it is really like nurture.

T: A lot of these children have made no gains for years in Primary, so to see any gains and to get them to enjoy and engage with a text is fabulous. My real aim here is to get their reading comprehension score up to about ten and a half, so they’re functionally able to access the curriculum. That’s the underlying thing for us, really. A reading age of ten and a half is the gold standard. If we can get them to there, we’re doing well.

**Appendix 6**

**Focus Group 6**

Three Support Assistants (SAs), who lead Reciprocal Reading groups (RR groups)

The Support Assistants lead groups of around five students from both S1 and S3, taking them out of English for around fifteen minutes twice a week, occasionally longer.

**How have you found it leading the Reciprocal Reading groups?**

SA: I’ve been working with four groups. I’ve enjoyed it. [The students] participate fully in Reciprocal Reading, and also feedback from the teachers is that they’re doing well. It depends on the individuals. I did have one boy from the very beginning refused from the very start, so he’s never done it. And the testing at the start and the end of the session reflects that.

SA1: I’m in a different situation: my S3 group are quite high tariff children and they’re very reluctant. I had a group of five and one hasn’t continued, he’s actually dropped out of it and refuses to come. A girl also refused, but after numerous talks with the PT of English, she’s actually quite enjoying it now. The feedback is very good. I feel the First Year group are brilliant. I feel that because they’re starting in First Year and they’re going to carry on to S3, that will be beneficial.

SA2: I found it quite daunting at the beginning, I wasn’t quite sure what I was doing. The PTSfL did give us training, but because I was on my own I was unsure if I was doing the right thing. The response from S1 was good initially, but in the last six or eight weeks another person was added into the group and when that happened everything changed. The group just clammed up. The girls had been much more responsive than the boys, but the boys did have something to say and they were quite keen to summarise or predict what may be happening. But once this girl came in, and they all seemed to get on well in other classes, it seemed fine, but in the group even the girls didn’t want to participate. So I decided to change it. Unfortunately with the exams, timetables have been all adjusted. But I decided maybe this is the time now to have them doing the roles instead of me doing it. Up until now it’s been me doing it, the clarifying, the predicting. They said they would like to try it, and I thought maybe it would stir things up a wee bit. They seemed quite keen, but we’ve only had one session of doing it that way.

I see them in other classes, three girls and two boys, and they’re fine even in English class. One of the lads is very shy, and the other one is led by the stronger one and influenced by the stronger personality. He seems to read a lot of double meanings into the words that we were reading and taking great delight and laughing. When the girl came, then it started, lots of giggling. Before there had been nothing like that.

But S3 have been fantastic from the word go. I only had girls for my S3, I don’t know if that made a difference. There was one boy but he came once and then never came back, I don’t know what happened. There were issues in class with his behaviour, and I don’t know whether the teacher felt that he wouldn’t cope with being out of class, or whether she didn’t want to put him on to me because of the behaviour and the way that he’d behaved in the class, I don’t know. Maybe he didn’t want to come. He’s off a lot.

**How confident did you feel at the beginning and do you feel now about delivering Reciprocal Reading?**

SA: I come from a training background, so I have that knowledge of the dynamics of a small group which is beneficial to a classroom scenario. The boys are always well behaved with me, and they’re actually less behaved in a classroom of 30. As a whole, they enjoy it. I feel very confident delivering it, I don’t have any qualms doing it.

SA1: At first it was quite daunting. The training did help, and about two weeks ago we had the VSE in. So that was a bit daunting, but it was very relaxed, and now I feel very confident with the children. They know me and I know them. You get to know the personalities and now we all just gel, so it’s quite good.

SA2: Now I feel confident. What helped was that in the beginning we spoke about what was going to be happening, and then the PTSfL said feel free to come and watch and observe me doing it. And that made all the difference. It gave me lots of pointers. It really helped to see. She also said we could come back again, not just once, and that really helped. Now I feel really confident about it.

All SAs agree that observing the PTSfL was very helpful.

**Was there anything that you remember as being particularly useful during training?**

SA: Each child has a bookmark, so they know the four stages.

**How much do you adapt and change the structure of the group lesson?**

SA: You have to adapt to the dynamics of the class. Most of the Third Years, sometimes it’s a counselling session rather than Reciprocal Reading. It depends on the individuals and how they’re feeling at the time.

SA1: I don’t really, I think my class is quite structured. I go in the same each time because they know what to expect: this is what we do. I put this list in the middle of the table, the kids have got their wee bookmark. I always start with ‘what is the four stages of Reciprocal Reading?’ and they’ve got it all in front of them. Then I’ll maybe say at the beginning of the lesson ‘how are we today?’ or I’ll maybe say because of absences or whatever that we’ll read an extra page today to make up for the time. And they’ll say whether they’re happy with that or not. |The dynamics of the group are important, whether they’re up for it. If you just instruct them, they’re really up for it.

A lot of the time if you’ve got a stronger character they’ll always be the person that wants to answer. So you say ‘great, thank you for your feedback, but what about [someone else?]’ Everyone has a chat, that’s what the PTSfL encouraged, because everyone gets a part then.

SA2: It depends on the actual book as well. Unfortunately we don’t have a lot of time. It takes time to find the children, find a room. It would be ideal if it was a longer period. We always do the four stages. We might change the amount that we read, depending on the individuals and how they’re feeling that day and their mindset and what’s happening with them, especially Third Years.

SA1: I always start with the bookmark in front of us, and ask ‘now could you tell me the fourstages?’ and then I’ll say ‘could you summarise?’, because one of my period’s a Monday, and the other one’s a Wednesday. When we had the Easter break we looked over the last couple of pages too.

**What works well in delivering Reciprocal Reading?**

SA: I would say being able to watch it being done, definitely. Seeing the input from the PTSfL and how long she waited, giving the pupils time to respond. She didn’t jump in, and I think that would be my fault, to think that they don’t know it and so I have to answer. Just to give them time and allow them time to think about it. Just the way that she delivered it, she was very much in control, and I think in the beginning I felt I wasn’t, because I didn’t know what I was doing. She came over very calm, and that really said quite a lot to me.

SA1: When we went back in to see her, that helped tremendously, because the way you were doing it and bits you were unsure of, the PTSfL was in control and very calm. It’s not like a class teacher, it’s all very relaxed. She’s making you relax but at the same time you are in control of the children. I thought it was very useful [to observe].

SA2: It was a gentle style, a very gentle approach.

SA:I always start with summarising, what happened last week. Where we are in the book, how are you enjoying it, tell me about something that you remember. We start from there.

It’s all about communication at the end of the day, so to communicate on their level for feedback [is important]. Especially with Third Year, they are a more challenging year, feisty. So you have to adapt to their way of communication. For the First Years it’s a totally different scenario, they’ll do it no problem at all. Whereas Third Years, whatever’s going on will affect how they’ll be in class and how they’ll respond to me. So it is different every week.

{There’s a stigma attached in third year] depending on the individuals. I’ve got a girl who decided to stop it, her behaviour changed. But on the feedback from testing before and after, she was doing very well. I just thought she didn’t need to be in the group anymore so she stopped coming a few weeks ago as well.

SA1: This is not just a skill for English. Close reading is also a skill that can be taken right across every subject. The PTSfL had a meeting with them to ask what they thought about it and how they felt it had gone, and I’d already spoken to them, the S3s, not the S1s, and asked them how they felt now when they come to close reading. They said ‘oh it just makes things so much easier, because now we’re looking for things as we’re reading it, we’re thinking we’ll need this when we come to the questions’. So the noticing that they’ll have to remember, to be able to summarise and put into their own words, that’s a huge part of close reading. [So they’re getting transferable skills.] And we find that aspect very difficult with a lot of pupils.

**What has been the effect of Reciprocal Reading? How do you know?**

SA: The feedback from the English teacher has said it’s definitely a positive. They’re more confident. At the start, one of my girls wouldn’t read aloud, but now she’s more confident reading aloud, instead of hesitating or making excuses or diverging from the subject, going back to what we were meant to be doing in the first place.

SA1: At first S3 were quite reluctant, but now meeting some of the kids in the corridor: ‘Miss, have we got that wee reading group?’ They look forward to it now. ‘I’ll see you on Monday, and I’ll see you on Wednesday’, whereas before it was such a chore. And that in itself was really nice to hear. Enjoyment, and one of their skills in English is presenting a solo talk. A lot of them do have a confidence thing as well. All children find standing up in front of a class [difficult], maybe one per cent like it. But I feel this is improving, even the some of them who don’t like it in a wee group. I think it’s great. I think if you start them off in a wee group and then continue, I think this will definitely benefit the First Years now. Maybe not the Fourth Years, but by the time our First Years now go into Fourth Year, I think they’ll be an awful lot better.

SA: Presentation’s a part of the curriculum in all subjects now, so I think it will help them with their confidence and their literacy.

SA1: General life skills, reading as well. When they’re interviewing, across the board, Reciprocal Reading a lot of things. So I think it’s great.

SA2: I had a very willing Third Year group, so I’m not in that category at all. But there were two quite strong personalities who wanted to dominate, and the others sat very quietly. And now it’s not like that. The balance has shifted because of the control aspect. Thinking back to the PTSfL controlling the whole thing and not just allowing them to speak all the time. Everybody’s view is valid, and the quieter ones are volunteering, even without me saying in a way that they didn’t. Their heads were down at the beginning. The PTSfL did stress at the beginning that this is not about their reading ability, and a lot of them think that is what it’s about. This is why they’re being taken out of class. Because in earlier years we have had reading groups to help people with their reading, so they assume this is what it’s about. This is about reading out loud. Most of them can read quite well, they can read the words, but their retention and their understanding of what they’re reading isn’t very good. This is why you need it across the subjects and in life. And once we had that established and clear, they had a different attitude then. Before they had a stigma and thought it was about ‘we can’t read in this group’. Once they got that it was comprehension, you could feel the attitude lifting. So that’s confidence as well, which is good.

[Being part of a group and knowing how to take turns and not be down on yourself or others and to accept help] is a huge part of it. Team skills, of course. Depending on the subject of the book that you’re reading: there was a wee bit in it about bullying, and the quiet ones said ‘this is how it can be sometimes in school’. They’d never volunteered anything like that, it’s just been the book and that’s it. But they’re now thinking this is how it is in life. So they’re understanding it’s not just a wee story in a book, they can relate it to their own life.

SA: I’ve had two girls wanting to join, not just to get out of class, but because of close reading. She asked me what we do and why, what it was for, and asked how come she wasn’t selected!

**What are the challenges when leading the groups?**

SA: I’m down to three in the group for my First Year: one boy didn’t start, one girl left. There’s a challenge in having them actually focusing on the book in general because of what’s going on with individuals themselves. We do get started, though sometimes a bit later than I would like to. But they do focus, they do get into it and relate to the book. I have a less structured scenario, but all four areas are covered. Whatever point’s not been covered, I do it that way, depending on where we are in the text. I find focus is an issue sometimes, I have to bring them back to what we’re actually there for in the first place. The three girls that I have, my Third Years, they like to start, they like to do it, there’s no problems taking them out of class. I’ve no problems at all with the First Years.

SA1: Sometimes resource accommodation [can be a challenge], finding the room takes time, walking there and getting them to walk back. With regard to the structure, I always start with the summarising, I think that’s a great place to start, refreshing their memory with where you left off in the book. And I always finish with predicting. In between, I’ll say to them about the clarifying and the questioning. I think it’s just more confidence, getting to know the kids, getting to know their weaknesses. There’s a few that will maybe say ‘I don’t want to start, Miss’, and the group are quite happy with that, I would never put anybody on the spot and say ‘now you must start’, even though you like to give them all a wee turn. I’m really happy with it. At first they were very reluctant, but we’ve got over that hurdle now.

There’s one particular individual in my Third Year class whose attendance is appalling. That’s a challenge, because she’s not getting the service.

SA2: It’s a challenge for the pupil when they’re not there, when they miss so much of the story, because they don’t know what it’s about, although you try and summarise just roughly. Or when we have a big holiday, we recap on what’s been happening. With holidays I feel it’s been very broken up. I haven’t felt it’s flowed, and with exams as well. I was off ill for quite a while as well, and felt really bad about that, because they’re missing it then, there’s no-one else to take them, we’re all timetabled in other subjects. Accommodation is a problem, because of time wasted. [Because the room changes each time, and it can take a while to get there, and take the students back, not always to the same class].

SA: If I run out of time, I’m actually doing the predicting on the way back to the class!

SA2: I would say my challenge is this group: I don’t know how it’s going to be because we’ve only had one day of them having a turn of being the predictor. And I don’t think I explained it very well. On the way back, I spoke to the two boys, they were sharing a role, because usually we have five and we only have four because one was off. And his friend chose his role, so I said they could help each other. When you have that role, you don’t have to come up with an answer, you’re presenting it to the group. And I don’t think I made that clear, I think that was my own fault. Each of the pupils took on a role, like one being the predictor, so that he would ask ‘who can predict here, who knows what can happen here?’ He leads it, and asks the group. That’s what I had been doing up til then, and that was my understanding that that was the way it would go.

**What could be better about the Reciprocal Reading programme?**

SA: Accommodation, designated rooms.

All SAs agree accommodation is an issue.

SA2: And on your own, because the rooms that I go into mainly, the teacher has an empty classroom, so we use the room but the teacher has work to do, and they’re very aware. They’re different when there’s no-one else there.

SA: Sometimes we have to use the library, and everyone’s not focussing on what we’re doing, they’re focusing on their friends walking by.

SA1: Also the time it takes [to go there]: five minutes walking there, five minutes going back, it’s a waste of time. Resources could be put into what we have allocated.

We’ve recently got new resources.

SA2: Maybe it would work twice, three times a week or more. I do S1 twice a week, and S3 once a week.

SA: The group I have, I’m going to do it three times a week. I could do it longer. Because one of the girls that I have is going to counselling on a Tuesday, I can take her on a Monday.

I’ve really enjoyed it. You get to know the class. I’m only with that English class once a week anyway, and when you’re only in a class once a week you don’t get to know them. So it’s good for me on a personal level, and the girls get to know me a bit better. It’s more fun, more rewarding, and a wee bit more respect, which is a bonus.

SA1: I just think it’s great. I really enjoy doing it, and the kids enjoy it as well. What really hit the nail on the head for me was when the kids were asking ‘are we going to reading?’ and they’re looking forward to it, because at the beginning it was such a chore for them, they hated it because of the stigma.

SA2: I think the fact that they’re having to do all of this [Reciprocal Reading means that] they’re much more engaged in reading the story. They’re much more focused because they know they’re going to have to summarise it, they know they’re going to have to predict. So they’re much more engaged instead of just reading for reading’s sake.

They have reading at the beginning of English, every English class I think, right up to S5, S6. Fifteen or 20 minutes, just private reading. That’s the format in English. For many of them it’s much more beneficial for them in that period of time rather than just sitting pretending they’re reading, just waiting for that 20 minutes to go.

**Appendix 7**

**Parent Focus Groups**

Although twelve parents representing a cross-section of pupils attending the different Reciprocal Reading groups were invited to a focus group, most were unable to attend. It was possible to speak to one parent and one grandparent of one of the members of an S2 IP group, though they had not attended the parents’ workshop on Reciprocal Reading and were not familiar with the approach. Their comments are summarised below as Group A.

It was later possible to speak to three more parents, two of boys in S1 RR groups, and one of a girl in an S1 IP group. Their comments are summarised below as Group B.

**Group A**

Ms T, mother of D, a girl attending an S2 IP group, and her mother attended. Their comments are summarised below, with some relevant quotes.

Neither Ms T nor her mother had attended the school’s workshop for parents introducing Reciprocal Reading, and did not use the approach when reading with D.

The school’s link Educational Psychologist, who was present at the meeting, explained that a body of research had found that Reciprocal Reading helps reading comprehension, and mentioned that it did not involve any writing tasks, so is useful when working with pupils who are reluctant to write or do not enjoy writing. She also mentioned that the approach was useful in increasing confidence, as the set structure of the group helped those pupils who might feel shy.

D’s mother noted that D was often shy in a group situation, and had trouble writing, and that she would find reading aloud and discussion easier. The EP commented that D had become more confident with her as she had got to know her, and expected that she would become more confident in a small group after a while ‘once she knows everybody, knows what she is doing, and there’s no writing asked of her’, so considered Reciprocal Reading to be an appropriate approach for D.

D’s mother noted that if D had difficulty reading a word, she might guess it, using context to help her. She mentioned that she had used predicting strategies when reading with D, asking her what might happen next, and talking about the story. She said that she tries to help D with her reading ‘to a certain extent’ because she felt that D ‘gets quite a lot of help with her reading’, and felt that if she tried to help her more ‘she would just leave me to read, she would rather me just read it’.

Commenting on whether D had become more confident in her reading over the last year, D’s mother mentioned that she had ‘pulled out a few books’, something which she had never done previously, due to her low confidence. ‘Before she would just push it away, but now she’s more confident in picking a book and having a wee sit down.’ Her grandmother said that she had been quite surprised to see D come round to the house and choose a book from the shelf to take on a trip.

D’s mother noted that D reads more often by herself, and will come to her to talk about it if she is having difficulty reading. She mentioned that previously D’s brother would ‘put her down’ and tell her that she couldn’t read, but that in the last year her confidence has improved so that she is standing up for herself and saying that she can, and saying to her brother which books she has read.

‘He’ll say ‘Can you spell such-and-such?’, and she used to just walk away. But now she’ll spell. She is getting more confident.’

D’s grandmother also noted that D was also beginning to sign Birthday and Christmas cards, sometimes adding a short message, whereas previously she had asked others to do this. ‘She’s definitely coming on this year’.

D’s mother felt that she does not read with D ‘as often as I should’, but does so sometimes. She said that she was often busy with her other children and household tasks, and it could be difficult to get D to take part in reading. She felt that D was getting a lot of support at school, and was happy with the level of this.

**Group B**

Three parents attended, two with children in different S1 RR groups, one with a child in one of the S1 IP groups.

**How much do you know about Reciprocal Reading? Did you attend the parents’ workshop?**

All had attended the Reciprocal Reading workshop for parents. This had involved a presentation, and an opportunity to practice each of the Reciprocal Reading roles, as described on the bookmark. They also watched the video made for the school about Reciprocal Reading, available on its website, which gave them a chance to see the approach being used in the classroom. One parent described the workshop as ‘fantastic’, and felt that it had explained Reciprocal Reading in a similar way to that in which she herself had learned to read. Another commented that ‘the workshop is all anybody needed, in my opinion’, and noted that the practical activity had been particularly helpful: ‘By coming on the workshop and experiencing it myself, I was able to completely understand it and then carry it on with confidence.’

One parent summarised her experience of the effects of attending Reciprocal Reading groups and its use in supporting her daughter J with reading over the year:

‘For me it was about J being able to understand texts. Before, J would look at a bit of paper and it would just be words, she found it hard to understand that they would form sentences... she was always very reluctant to read, very small books for youngsters would be her level, and I think she was embarrassed in a lot of ways to read in class. But I think Reciprocal Reading really did make a difference, in that now she’s tackling bigger books, books that she should be reading... And she’s able to understand, and she’s able to come forward and say ‘what does that word mean?’ And I’ve also noticed instances where she’s slotting new words into conversation. Fantastic effects.

Another parent described his experience with his son, B.

‘With B, words on the paper, that’s all it was. With reading, he wouldn’t get every word correct, but would never realise it, because he had no idea of the context in which it was being used... So you would never see him go back and correct it. We’d go at a pace that would suggest that he wouldn’t want to stop because if he stopped it would show that he didn’t know what he was doing. He would just keep reading and reading, no pauses at commas... But now one of the best strategies, which is so simple, is the summarising. When we pick up the book to read, just asking the question and having the discussion of [what happened before], suddenly they’ve pieced together the story and they’re ready to go on... It’s great now, sometimes when time’s up, he’ll ask to keep going.’

One parent commented that, although she tends not to use it currently, initially the bookmark with prompts as to the Reciprocal Reading strategies had been very useful.

**Do you use Reciprocal Reading when reading with your child? Do you feel confident doing so?**

All parents reported that they felt confident using Reciprocal Reading approaches with their children, and did so regularly. They agreed that it gets easier with practice, and that the first few times they sat with their child it felt ‘prescribed’, but that later it became more comfortable to use a Reciprocal Reading framework when reading with their child.

One parent commented on the benefit of Reciprocal Reading approaches in her own reading, and therefore in the strategies which she modelled for her child.

‘After you practice it a couple of times, it becomes second nature. I would call it a work out for waking your brain up before you read a book, and stimulating your thinking, get some ideas flowing. Whereas I wouldn’t do that before. Before I would just have a quick look at the cover, and then open a book. But now I would look at the front, I would look at the back, I would look for clues... Because if I’m being asked to make a prediction, I need to look for clues, symbols, signs, and I’m asking ‘What might this be about, what might happen?’. So I would say that I become more focused, the awareness is heightened. And because I’m learning that, then that’s transferable. Your children learn so much off you just by watching... If you’re doing, they learn.’

Describing his approach to reading with his son, one parent said that they would take turns to read a page alternately, and take time between each page to ask questions such as ‘What do you think that part actually meant?’ and ‘What do you think is going to happen?’ Thus prediction would be for the next page or so, rather than a chapter ahead. He also reported using the bookmark to help in the process of applying the four skills, and noted that the spy fiction series his son was reading lent itself well to clarifying and prediction. He also mentioned that he has used Reciprocal Reading techniques while watching TV with his son, pausing it to ask ‘What’s going to happen?’ and ‘What has happened?’

One parent reported being quite ‘organic’ in her application of the Reciprocal Reading approach, asking her daughter to predict and clarify quite casually in conversation when discussing a book that she was reading independently.

**What effect do you think Reciprocal Reading has had on your child’s confidence in reading? How do you know?**

One parent commented that ‘to be able to say back what you know the story is about, or what you think and be able to contribute is confidence in itself’:

‘If he did predict something, through the cover or through the blurb, if he did say what he thinks might happen next and something along that line does happen, then there you are! I’d say ‘Where did you get that clue?’ So you’re in the story more, I’d say definitely confidence in that area. Engaging in the story, getting into it, and being able to participate.’

One parent reported that her daughter had always been self-conscious when reading, and had never really enjoyed it. It had only been recently that she had picked up quite a thick book, which her mother had thought that she was not going to be able to complete. She was able to read it independently, however, making her mother very proud.

One father noted that his son was far more confident when tackling written arithmetic problems. Another parent agreed.

One mother noted that her daughter had had quite a lot of support with her reading in Primary school, particularly paired reading sessions, and also at home. She reported trying ‘everything’, even coloured paper to help with dyslexia, but that it had only been when she attended High school that there was a step change in her reading. She felt that this was attributable to learning the Reciprocal Reading strategies, particularly predicting, summarising and ‘knowing that if I don’t understand a word, there’s no shame in that, I’ll go and find out, I’ll go and ask someone’. She described Reciprocal Reading as ‘something to help’:

‘I was really needing something to help [my daughter]. And from the things that I had tried online and all my approaches, it just never clicked. And to find something that was going to work, it was like a wee gift, it was lovely.’

Expressing the effect of Reciprocal Reading on her child’s confidence in reading, she described this increase as ‘massive’, going from perhaps zero to eight on a notional scale out of ten in the last year.

‘Before she was so, so scared of books, even going to the library… then that day when she read that book in two days, I was ready for dancing. Because we’ve always been big readers in our family, and it was nice to have something to share with her. She’s bought a book with her pocket money, and we’re able to go to Asda and she would feel so left out, when her sister was looking at all the books.. but now she’s choosing books.’

A father reported that his son had ‘never once refused to go to High school’, whereas his attitude to going to Primary school, especially in early years, had been ‘horrific’, especially on Wednesdays, which were reading day. He had also found reading circles in Primary school very distressing. This year, although he does not enjoy making presentations, he has been able to do so several times. The father described the difference in his son’s attitude to school between Primary and High school as ‘incredible’, and considered that ‘a huge part of his confidence to go into a class, any class, and participate has been down to [Reciprocal Reading].’

One parent reported that her son had been moved up to a higher level in Primary school and that that had reduced his confidence, and also spoke of changes in the group that had had an impact:

‘Coming up to High school the pace was a bit too fast, and that knocked his confidence. He felt he wasn’t fast. He would compare himself with other people in the class, and he would feel that he wasn’t good at reading. The pace was fast, people were able to think of answers quickly. It kind of [became a problem] when he was tested for comprehension. [Reciprocal Reading] is giving him a deeper understanding of what he’s reading. He’s now really learning what reading is really about, not just reading off what’s on a page, it’s about understanding what’s on it. Now when I’m reading a story with him, and I’m asking him questions about what the story’s about, he’s able to answer them. He wants to do it, and that tells me that he’s enjoying it and that he’s feeling more confident.

‘He’s very aware of his learning. He would come to me at the beginning and say ‘Mum, this isn’t working, we’re not getting as much time as we think, by the time we get there and the time we get back [from class]’. So he was saying maybe the group was shy, they were at that age where they’re maybe not speaking out as much. So then I reported that into the school and changes had been made, and he said ‘Mum, it’s much better, we’re getting full time, people are discussing it, I’m talking a bit more, and others are talking a wee bit more.’ And he’s enjoying it now. I’m not sure what the mechanics [of the change were], but he wants to learn, and now he’s reaping the benefits, and he wants to continue to do it.’

**Similarly, what effect has Reciprocal Reading had on your child’s enjoyment of reading? How do you know?**

All parents felt that their children’s enjoyment of reading had noticeably increased in the last year, and felt that this was due in great part to Reciprocal Reading. One parent felt that the main effect had been an increase in enjoyment of reading rather than confidence, but acknowledged that these were quite closely linked. As an example of impact on reading enjoyment, she reported that her son had asked her to buy him a book, and had then read it within two or three days before asking for another.

Similarly, another parent reported that this year his son has been able to find a series of books which he is interested in and enjoys, and that to see him want to read the next book is very encouraging. There have been nights when his son has been keen to keep reading after lights out, which shows the increase in his son’s enjoyment of reading. ‘There’s nothing nicer than walking in and seeing him asleep with a book. That’s great.’

‘I’ve had a book where [my son has said] ‘It’s boring, I hate it. But there’s been others where he’s picked it and he’s finished the book. So that’s come from [a stage where he’d seen] words on a page [and said] ‘there’s too many words, not enough pictures’… So being able to turn it from ‘No, it’s boring, I don’t want to read it’ to something enjoyed has been great. That was a win moment.’

Another parent reported that her daughter now enjoyed reading, whereas before it was solely a homework task. She has recently been reading some biographies, and some fiction, and often picked magazines to read. Her mother felt that it was ‘hard finding books appropriate for her reading age that aren’t childish’.

One parent remarked, however, that getting his son to read remained ‘a battle, against the iphone and the Xbox, and playing football.’

One parent felt that Reciprocal Reading groups were beneficial in that the pupils ‘don’t feel alone. They don’t feel it’s just them. With the paired reading, their only point of reference is themselves.’ He also noted that joining a Reciprocal Reading group had helped as part of the transition process to High school, as it had introduced a group of friends: ‘Walking around the playground, I’m sure there’s eye contact [to say] ‘You’re in the same boat as me, and we’re doing well.’’

One parent felt that it was useful to begin Reciprocal Reading intervention early, as ‘if you leave it too late, they lose heart and think ‘What’s the point, I’ll be leaving in a couple of years’’.

**Have you noticed any other changes in your child’s reading or other benefits since they started Reciprocal Reading?**

One parent noted that he had been looking for and found more opportunities to read with his son in the last year, such as buying a magazine or newspaper in an airport, or a football programme at a match to read at half-time, and noted that there had been less resistance to reading in contexts such as these as there had been previously.

One parent was particularly happy to report that her child’s reading age had increased by three years over the course of the year, from pre- to post-test, as measured by the Suffolk Reading Scale. She noted that this test focused on reading comprehension, and reported that she had seen large improvements of her son’s understanding of a text, and that he was aware of it. She also mentioned that her son was aware that these improvements were attributable to the Reciprocal Reading intervention.

Another parent agreed, noting that her child ‘sometimes doesn’t seem to recognise that I’m helping or encouraging her to read, it goes over her wee head.’ She gave the example of her child helping her with recipes, whereas ‘before she wouldn’t even have come into the kitchen in case I asked her, and now she’s even capable of looking for dates and things like that. Obviously reading makes sense… Even for timetables for buses, before she would be [reluctant], and menus too.’

Similarly, a parent reflected:

‘It’s hard to explain [the impact of Reciprocal Reading], because it affects your whole lifestyle. Making something in the kitchen, ‘What’s that?’, or ‘How long do I put something in the oven for?’ It’s life skills. They understand it, then go and do something on the back of what they’ve read.

Considering effects upon writing, one parent saw some development, noting that his son would previously ‘write one sentence instead of filling a page’ in response to a question. Recently, however, he was able to read articles in research preparation for writing an assignment, and, with help from his father, was able to plan and compose a structured piece, with an introduction, main ideas and conclusion. This task took two hours to complete, whereas a year ago, ‘there would have been tears’. Reflecting on the benefits of reading practice on writing, he considered: ‘Now I can ask [my son] what he wants to write, and he can tell me. Actually getting it on the paper is still to be worked on, but at least the understanding is there.’

Another parent, of a dyslexic child, felt that her daughter did not enjoy writing, however, and used letters ‘to fill up as much space as possible’. The parent was hopeful that improvement in reading would have a subsequent impact on writing ability in the future.

One parent reported the social benefits of being in a Reciprocal Reading group:

‘I know he’s feeling more confident within his [group of] friends, because one of his good friends is in this [Reciprocal Reading] group as well, so they’re able to share that. Sometimes boys can’t talk about things like that, because reading might not be trendy or cool, but he’s able to share that, and that’s a good thing. They’re able to share that commonality about something that they both might find difficult, and talk about it outwith school as well as in school.’

**Are there any drawbacks to using the Reciprocal reading approach?**

No parent reported any drawbacks to using Reciprocal Reading.

One parent noted initial concerns that her son was being taken out of English class, and that therefore he might be missing out, but now reflected that ‘This crosses everything in life, and is core to everything, so I don’t mind. Now I would like more time [for Reciprocal Reading opportunities].’

**Is there anything else the school could do to help you use Reciprocal Reading at home? What could be better?**

Although one parent reported that ‘at first it was quite scary’, she now felt that after watching the video and having it explained at the workshop, she had ‘all the tools to take on board’ and that it ‘really did make sense in my head about what I want to achieve when I pick up a book. It did make a big difference.’

Another reflected that ‘the timing was right as well, because had they introduced the parents right at the start when the kids were still getting used to it, they would have thought it was homework and there would have been resistance. Whereas they let the kids do the group for a few months, and then got us involved, so they were comfortable with it.’

One parent felt that Reciprocal Reading had the potential to be very useful if it was rolled out in more Primary schools, and that it would reduce the stigma of being taken out of class if the approach was used with all pupils rather than only those who were struggling. Another suggested that High schools introduced Reciprocal Reading as part of their transition activities to pupils in P7, and felt that this would help pupils to look forward to High school.

One parent reported that she had taken some photos of the books selected by the school as suitable readers when she had attended the parents’ workshop, and suggested that pupils be allowed to borrow these books to take home (in addition to those available from the library), or that parents were given information as to their titles so that they could purchase some. She also suggested that pupils could then be able to report on reading which they did in the evening, ‘to extend their reading outwith school’.

A parent also suggested that the work of Aidan Chambers might be useful during Reciprocal Reading sessions, to encourage critical reading and foster comprehension. Chambers has suggested a list of questions to structure discussions around children’s experience of reading, detailed in his book *TELL ME: Children, Reading and Talk* (Thimble Press).

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1. Only quintiles 1-4 were considered for inferential analysis, as quintile 5 contained only three pupils. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is an excessive amount of conditions and thus constrains the extent to which the statistics derived from this particular analysis can be considered reliable. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)