A BROADER VIEW OF THE EVIDENCE: READING RECOVERY AS AN EXAMPLE

We are an international group of scholars and researchers who have studied language, literacy, and learning in many contexts. We represent a wide variety of perspectives and a range of respected research methodologies.

On the national scene early intervention programs, specifically Reading Recovery, have recently encountered one-sided and biased attacks that have misrepresented the efficacy of these programs. We write this letter to provide accurate information for the policy decision makers who must protect the interests of children. Of particular concern are children who have extreme difficulty learning to read. Below are five points advocating a broad view of the relationships among education, research, and government.

1. Educational dollars belong to citizens, not to a small group of researchers who have a particular point of view.
   Historically, local educational agencies have made decisions, based on their own examination of evidence, about the programs that will best serve children in their communities. Educational decision makers deserve access to a full body of evidence documenting the effectiveness of programs like Reading Recovery.

2. A scientific stance requires a complete, evidence-based analysis of any educational program.
   Early intervention has been found to be effective in preventing literacy difficulties.\textsuperscript{1} For example, for more than 20 years, Reading Recovery has been the subject of numerous studies using both quantitative and qualitative methodology. The preponderance of evidence suggests that this early intervention program has a positive and long-lasting effect on reading achievement in young children. Empirically controlled studies that are published in high level journals and fit the Department of Education’s criteria for “scientifically based research” support the results of Reading Recovery.\textsuperscript{2} Moreover, follow-up studies have documented the long-term effectiveness of Reading Recovery early intervention.\textsuperscript{3} These studies have used nationally normed measures. Empirical studies as well as yearly evaluations document the fact that Reading Recovery children grow in self-esteem as they increase their literacy skills.\textsuperscript{4} It is a mistake to deny children access to Reading Recovery based on selective and distorted reporting of a few studies, some unpublished or published without peer review, with flawed designs and/or with very small populations.

3. Policy makers have the responsibility to consider evidence from a wide range of perspectives and validated research models.
   The attacks on Reading Recovery are based on a very narrow view of evidence that excludes a great many high quality and informative quantitative and qualitative studies. A variety of models of research have met rigorous criteria in the fields of education, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and other areas of social science. We need a range of perspectives in the search for educational improvement. For
example, qualitative studies provide evidence of Reading Recovery’s profound impact on teacher performance and development and the dynamic nature of teaching in the program. Qualitative research, carefully undertaken, represents accepted methodology in a broad number of fields and adds significantly to the body of knowledge we must consider in making educational decisions.

4. **Responsibly and rigorously collected evaluation data provide legitimate and strong evidence of program success.**
   All programs serving children in education should collect and publicly report evaluation data. For example, Reading Recovery’s success has been carefully documented through systematic and simultaneous replications of the program for over one million children in 10,000 schools since its introduction into the United States. This documentation provides for public accountability for the progress of every child served. Reading Recovery has consistently reported results of program impact using accepted standard measures that are appropriate for young children. These results are available to the public. When examining any program purporting to be “scientifically based,” policy makers should ask for documentation of specific program outcomes for children.

5. **An early intervention program like Reading Recovery is one part of a comprehensive literacy effort.**
   Early intervention programs serve as safety nets within comprehensive programs and insure that no child is left behind. Reading Recovery focuses on the lowest achieving first grade children and works in partnership with good classroom instruction, but it is only one component of a comprehensive program. Reading Recovery works as part of many different core instructional models for literacy education including basal approaches, Direct Instruction, Success for All, and other comprehensive programs.

We do not suggest that Reading Recovery or any other program be mandated or given preferential treatment. We do recommend that the federal government recognize the authority of local teachers, administrators, and board members to make educational decisions based on full and accurate disclosure of evidence.

Sincerely,

Signature list attached.

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