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. 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. Moreover, follow-up studies have documented the long-term effectiveness of Reading Recovery early intervention. 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. 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a mistake to deny children access to Reading Recovery based on selective and distorted reporting of a few studies, some unpublished or published without peer review, with flawed designs and/or with very small populations.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 development⁵ and the dynamic nature of teaching in the program. ⁶ 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.

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Signature list attached.	
References on next page.	

Sincerely.

Lettie K. Albright, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Department of Reading Texas Woman's University

JoBeth Allen Professor Language Education University of Georgia

Richard L. Allington, Ph.D. Irving and Rose Fien Distinguished Professor of Elementary and Special Education School of Teaching and Learning University of Florida

Mark Alter, Ph.D. Chair and Professor Teaching and Learning New York University

Patricia L. Anders, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Language, Reading, &
Culture
University of Arizona

Terry A. Astuto, Ed.D.
Professor of Educational Administration and Department Chair
Administration, Leadership and
Technology
New York University

Kathryn Au, Ph.D.
Dai ho Chun Professor of Education
Teacher Education & Curriculum
Studies
University of Hawaii

Mary Kathleen Barnes, Ph.D. Assistant Professor School of Teaching and Learning The Ohio State University Constance Barsky, Ph.D. Director Learning by Redesign The Ohio State University

Eurydice Bauer, Ph.D. Assistant Professor University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Penny Beed, Ph.D. Associate Professor and Coordinator of Literacy Education Curriculum and Instruction University of Northern Iowa

Mary Bendixen-Noe, Ph.D. Associate Professor School of Teaching & Learning The Ohio State University

Jacques S. Benninga, Ph.D. Director Bonner Center for Character Education California State University at Fresno

Laura Benson
Literacy Consultant, Writer & College
Instructor
Literacy and Language
University of Colorado at Denver

Mollie Blackburn, Ph.D. Assistant Professor School of Teaching and Learning The Ohio State University

David Booth, Ph.D.
Professor
Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
University of Toronto

Gregory W. Brooks, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Education Department Nazareth College of Rochester Anthony S. Bryk, Ed.D.

Marshall Field IV Professor of Urban
Education and Sociology
Director of the Center for School
Improvement and the Consortium on
Chicago School Research
University of Chicago

Terry L. Bullock, Ed.D. Associate Professor Reading and Critical Thinking University of Cincinnati

Marsha Riddle Buly, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Elementary Education Western Washington University

Judith Anne Calhoon, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Teaching and Leadership University of Kansas

Lucy McCormick Calkins, Ph.D. Professor of English Education Columbia University Teachers College

Thomas A. Caron, Ph.D.
Professor
Reading Education
Marshall University Graduate College

Kathryn S. Carr, Ed.D. Professor Emerita Department of Curriculum and Instruction Central Missouri State University

Courtney B. Cazden, Ed.D. Charles William Eliot Professor of Education (Emerita) Harvard Graduate School of Education Harvard University Caroline T. Clark, Ph.D. Associate Professor Language, Literacy & Culture The Ohio State University

Thomas Cloer, Jr., Ph.D. Professor of Education Department of Education Furman University

Sheila G. Cohen, Ed.D. Associate Professor Literacy Education SUNY Cortland

Margaret Compton-Hall, Ed.D. Assistant Professor Department of Reading Texas Woman's University

Van Cooley, Ed.D. Professor and Chair Teaching, Learning, and Leadership Western Michigan University

Beverly E. Cox, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Literacy and
Language
Curriculum and Instruction
Purdue University

Ronald L. Cramer, Ph.D. Distinguished Professor of Education Reading & Language Arts Oakland University

Ronald Crowell, Ph.D.
Professor of Education
Teaching, Learning, and Leadership
Western Michigan University

Bernice Cullinan, Ph.D.
Professor Emerita
Department of Teaching and Learning
New York University

James W. Cunningham, Ph.D. Professor of Literacy Education School of Education University of North Carolina

Patricia M. Cunningham, Ph.D. Professor
Department of Education
Wake Forest University

Karin Dahl, Ph.D.
Professor
School of Teaching and Learning
The Ohio State University

Sandra Bowman Damico, Ph.D. Dean and Professor Educational Policy & Leadership Studies University of Iowa

William L. Dandridge, Ed.D. Dean School of Education Lesley University

Sheryl Dasinger Assistant Professor Early Childhood and Reading Valdosta State University

Pamela Dougherty-Smith, Ph.D. Lead Reading Teacher Dallas Independent School District

Ann M. Duffy, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Curriculum and Instruction University of North Carolina, Greensboro

Sarah Edwards, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Teacher Education University of Nebraska at Omaha Laurie Elish-Piper, Ph.D. Associate Professor Literacy Education Northern Illinois University

Warwick B. Elley, Ph.D. Emeritus Professor of Education Education University of Canterbury, New Zealand

Tammy Elser, Ed.D.
Director of Federal Programs
Arlee Public Schools

Charles Elster, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Literacy Education Department of Curriculum and Instruction Purdue University

Patricia Enciso, Ph.D. Associate Professor School of Teaching and Learning The Ohio State University

Lawrence G. Erickson, Ph.D. Professor Emeritus Curriculum and Instruction Southern Illinois University

Kathy Escamilla, Ph.D. Associate Professor Social, Bilingual, Multicultural Foundations University of Colorado, Boulder

Donna B. Evans, Ph.D. Dean College of Education The Ohio State University

Zhihui Fang, Ph.D. Assistant Professor School of Teching and Learning University of Florida Andrea Farenga, Ed.D. Assistant Professor of Reading Department of Education Malone College

Nancy Farnan, Ph.D. Professor School of Teacher Education San Diego State University

Leif Fearn, Ed.D.
Professor
School of Teacher Education
San Diego State University

Linda Fielding, Ph.D. Associate Professor Division of Curriculum & Instruction University of Iowa

Peter J. Fisher, Ph.D. Professor Reading and Language National-Louis University

Amy Seely Flint Assistant Professor, Language Education School of Education Indiana University, Bloomington

James Flood, Ph.D. Professor School of Teacher Education San Diego State University

Michael P. Ford, Ph.D.
Associate Dean
College of Education and Human
Services
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

Carolyn R. Frank, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
College of Education
California State University, Los Angeles

Lauren Freedman, Ph.D. Associate Professor Teaching, Learning, and Leadership Western Michigan University

Penny A. Freppon, Ed.D. Professor Teacher Education - Literacy Program University of Cincinnati

Michael Fullan, Ph.D. Dean Ontario Institute for Studies in Education University of Toronto

Elaine Furniss Senior Education Advisor UNICEF

Janet S. Gaffney, Ph.D. Associate Professor Special Education University of Illinois at Urbana - Champaign

Linda P. Gambrell, Ph.D. Professor and Director School of Education Clemson University

Judith G. Gasser, Ph.D. Adjunct Professor Reading Department Texas Woman's University

Joseph B. Giacquinta, Ed.D. Professor of Educational Sociology New York University

Christine J. Gordon, Ph.D. Professor of Education Division of Teacher Preparation University of Calgary

Sharon Greenberg, Ph.D. Director of Research Center for School Improvement University of Chicago Margaret M. Griffin, Ed.D. Cornaro Professor Emerita Texas Woman's University

Dana L. Grisham, Ph.D. Associate Professor College of Education San Diego State University

Lois A. Groth, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Graduate School of Education George Mason University

Lee Gunderson, Ph.D.
Professor and Head, National Reading
Conference President-Elect
Language and Literacy Education
University of British Columbia

Nancy Guth, Ph.D. Supervisor, Reading and Language Arts Stafford County Public Schools

Barbra Guzzetti Professor College of Education Arizona State University

W. Dorsey Hammond, Ph.D.
Professor of Education/ Department
Chair
Department of Education
Salisbury University

Douglas K. Hartman, Ph.D. Associate Professor Instruction and Learning University of Pittsburgh

Andrew E. Hayes, Ed.D. Associate Professor of Education Watson School of Education University of North Carolina at Wilmington Hathia A. Hayes, Ed.D. Associate Professor of Education Watson School of Education University of North Carolina at Wilmington

Elizabeth Heilman, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Teacher Education Michigan State University

Roxanne Henkin, Ed.D. Professor Reading and Language National-Louis University

Margaret Hill, Ed.D. Associate Professor of Reading School of Education University of Houston - Clear Lake

James V. Hoffman, Ph.D. Professor Department of Curriculum and Instruction University of Texas at Austin

Carol J. Hopkins, Ph.D. Professor of Literacy Education Curriculum and Instruction Purdue University

Charlotte S. Huck, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus
School of Teaching and Learning
The Ohio State University

Gay Ivey, Ph.D. Associate Professor Reading Education James Madison University

Angela M. Jaggar, Ph.D.
Professor of Education
Department of Teaching and Learning
New York University

Ellen Jampole, Ph.D. Assistant Director of Graduate Studies and Professor Literacy Education SUNY - Cortland

Linda Janney Reading Coach K-2 Reading Initiative Plam Beach County School Board

Mary Jett, Ph.D.
Professor
Curriculum & Instruction
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

Denise Johnson, Ed.D. Assistant Professor School of Education The College of William & Mary

Lynn Nations Johnson, Ph.D. Professor Teaching, Learning, and Leadership Western Michigan University

Francine Johnston, Ed.D.
Associate Professor of Reading &
Language Arts
Curriculum and Instruction
University of North Carolina at
Greensboro

Marilyn Johnston, Ph.D. Professor Integrated Teaching and Learning The Ohio State University

Peter Johnston, Ph.D.
Professor of Reading
The University at Albany - SUNY

Kathy Jongsma Literacy Consultant Orlando, FL George Kamberelis, Ph.D. Associate Professor Department of Reading The University at Albany - SUNY

Rebecca Kantor, Ed.D. Professor School of Teaching and Learning The Ohio State University

Wendy C. Kasten, Ph.D. Professor of Curriculum and Instruction Teaching Leadership and Curriculum Studies Kent State University

Douglas Kaufman, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Curriculum and Instruction University of Connecticut

Barbara Kiefer, Ph.D. Associate Professor Curriculum and Teaching Teachers College Columbia University

Ronald D. Kieffer, Ph.D. Associate Professor School of Teaching and Learning The Ohio State University

Kimberly Kimbell-Lopez, Ed.D. Assistant Professor Curriculum, Instruction, and Leadership Louisiana Tech University

James R. King, Ed.D. Professor Childhood Education University of South Florida

Barbara Krol-Sinclair, Ed.D. Director Intergenerational Literacy Project Linda D. Labbo, Ph.D. Professor Reading Education University of Georgia

David Landis, Ed.D.
Associate Professor of Literacy
Education
Curriculum and Instruction
University of Norther Iowa

Diane Lapp, Ed.D. Professor of Literacy San Diego State University

Barbara Lehman, Ph.D. Professor School of Teaching and Learning The Ohio State University

Lauren Leslie, Ph.D. Professor of Education Marquette University

Donald J. Leu, Ph.D.
John & Maria Neag Endowed Chair in
Literacy and Technology
Curriculum and Instruction
University of Connecticut

Henry M. Levin, Ph.D. William Heard Kilpatrick Professor of Economics and Education International and Transcultural Studies Teachers College Columbia University

Libby A. Limbrick, Ph.D.
Principal Lecturer and Director
National Training Programme for
Resource Teachers: Literacy
Auckland College of Education

Wayne M. Linek, Ph.D.
Professor and Doctoral Program
Coordinator
Department of Elementary Education

Texas A&M University - Commerce Carol V. Lloyd, Ph.D. Professor of Education Teacher Education Department University of Nebraska at Omaha

Rachelle Loven, Ed.D. Professor Education Department University of Sioux Falls

David M. Lund, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Reading Education Department of Teacher Education Southern Utah University

Sarah Mahurt, Ph.D. Associate Professor Curriculum and Instruction Purdue University

James Marshall, Ph.D. Associate Dean Teacher Education University of Iowa

Mona Matthews, Ph.D. Associate Professor Early Childhood Education Georgia State University

John S. Mayher, Ed.D. Professor, English Education Department of Teaching and Learning New York University

William McInerney, Ph.D. Professor Educational Studies Purdue University

Marilyn McKinney, Ph.D.
Professor
Curriculum and Instruction
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Maria J. Meyerson, Ph.D. Professor of Literacy Education Curriculum and Instruction University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Judy Nichols Mitchell
Dean and Professor
College of Education
Washington State University

Jane Moore Lead Reading Teacher Reading Department Dallas Independent School District

Gary Moorman, Ph.D.
Professor of Education
College of Education
Appalachian State University

Susan L. Nierstheimer, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Literacy Curriculum and Instruction Purdue University

Dale Nitzschke, Ph.D. Chancellor Southeast Missouri State University

John O'Flahavan, Ph.D. Associate Professor Curriculum and Instruction University of Maryland

Glennellen Pace, Ph.D. Associate Professor Teacher Education, Graduate School of Education Lewis and Clark College

Jeanne R. Paratore, Ed.D.
Associate Professor of Education
Department of Developmental Studies
and Counseling
Boston University

Leo W. Pauls, Ed.D. Executive Director The Jones Institute for Educational Excellence Emporia State University

P. David Pearson, Ph.D. Professor and Dean Graduate School of Education University of California at Berkeley

Katherine Perez, Ed.D. Professor of Reading School of Education St. Mary's College

Jerry L. Peters, Ph.D. Interim Dean School of Education Purdue University

Shelley Peterson, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Ontario Institute for Studies in Education University of Toronto

Lorene Pilcher, Ph.D. Professor Emerita Early Childhood Education Georgia State University

Nancy Place, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Education University of Washington

Gordon M. Pradl, Ed.D.
Professor of English Education
Department of Teaching and Learning
New York University

Taffy E. Raphael, Ph.D.
Professor of Literacy Education
College of Education, Curriculum and
Instruction
University of Illinois at Chicago

Frank Rapley, Ed.D.
Professor and Former Dean
Teaching, Learning, and Leadership
Western Michigan University

Timothy Rasinski, Ph.D. Professor of Curriculum and Instruction Department of Teaching, Leadership, and Curriculum Studies Kent State University

Timothy Reagan, Ph.D.
Associate Dean, Professor of
Educational Linguistics and Pediatrics
Neag School of Education
University of Connecticut

Victoria Gentry Ridgeway, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Reading Education Curriculum and Instruction Clemson University

Victoria J. Risco, Ed.D. Professor Department of Teaching and Learning Peabody College of Vanderbilt University

Richard Robinson, Ed.D. Professor Middle School and Secondary Education University of Missouri - Columbia

Flora V. Rodriguez-Brown, Ph.D. Professor Curriculum and Instruction University of Illinois at Chicago

Rebecca Rogers, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Department of Education Washington University Deborah Wells Rowe, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Early Childhood Education Peabody College Vanderbilt University

Michael R. Sampson, Ph.D. Professor and Literacy Researcher Department of Elementary Education Texas A&M University - Commerce

Nancy R. Santucci Reading Specialist Highlands Elementary

Seymour B. Sarason, Ph.D. Professor Emeritus
Department of Psychology
Yale University

Patricia A. Scanlan, Ph.D. Associate Professor College of Education and Human Services University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh

Diane L. Schallert, Ph.D. Professor Department of Educational Psychology University of Texas

Patricia L. Scharer, Ph.D. Associate Professor School of Teaching & Learning The Ohio State University

Barbara R. Schirmer, Ed.D.
Dean, Professor of Special Education
School of Education and Allied Professions
Miami University

Patricia Ruggiano Schmidt, Ed.D. Associate Professor of Literacy Education Department Le Moyne College Barbara Seidl, Ph.D. Associate Professor The Ohio State University

Paul Shaker, Ph.D.

Dean

Kremen School of Education & Human Development

California State University at Fresno

Brenda A. Shearer, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Literacy Education Department of Reading Education University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

Harold Shepherd Senior Lecturer Arts and Language Education Massey University

John Smith, Ph.D.
Principal Lecturer, Head of Department
Department of Education
Dunedin College of Education

Lawrence L. Smith, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
Department of Elementary Education
Ball State University

Diane Snowball Independent Literacy Consultant Australian United States Services In Education

Nancy L. Sorenson, Ph.D. Dean School of Education Saint Mary's College

Anna O. Soter, Ph.D. Associate Professor College of Education The Ohio State University Dixie Lee Spiegel, Ph.D.

Professor and Senior Associate Dean

Education

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Rand J. Spiro, Ph.D.

Professor

Counseling, Educational Psychology, and

Special Education

Michigan State University

Norman A. Stahl, Ph.D. Professor and Chair Department of Literacy Education Northern Illinois University

Steven Stahl, Ed.D.

Professor

Department of Reading Education

University of Georgia

Les Sternberg, Ph.D.
Dean and Professor
Department of Educational Psychology
University of South Carolina

Peter W. Stevens

President

The Cambridge Stratford Study Skills

Institute

Elizabeth G. Sturtevant, Ph.D. Associate professor and Program Co-Coordinator Graduate School of Education George Mason University

Karen F. Thomas, Ph.D. Professor of Literacy Education and

Director of McGinnis Reading Center and

Clinic

Teaching, Learning and Leadership Western Michigan University

Robert J. Tierney, Ph.D.

Dean Education

University of British Columbia

Michael Townsend, Ph.D. Associate Professor School of Education University of Auckland

Rick Traw, Ed.D.

Department Head and Associate Professor
Curriculum and Instruction
University of Northern Iowa

Miriam P. Trehearne National Literacy Consultant Seconded, Calgary Board of Education

Philip Uri Treisman, Ph.D. Director, Charles A. Dana Center College of Natural Sciences University of Texas at Austin

JoAnne L. Vacca, Ed.D. Professor Department of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Studies Kent State University

Richard T. Vacca, Ph.D.
Professor of Literacy Education,
Graduate Program Counselor of
Curriculum & Instruction
Department of Teaching, Learning and
Curriculum Studies
Kent State University

Carolyn A. Walker, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Elementary Education Ball State University

Sean A. Walmsley, Ed.D. Chair, Professor Department of Reading The University at Albany - SUNY

Nora L. White, Ph.D. Associate Professor College of Professional Education Texas Woman's University Ian A. G. Wilkinson, Ph.D. Assistant Professor School of Teaching & Learning The Ohio State University

Cheri Williams, Ph.D. Associate Professor Literacy Education University of Cincinnati

Karri Williams, Ph.D. Associate Professor Teaching and Learning Principles University of Central Florida

Nancy Williams, Ph.D. Associate Professor Childhood Education University of South Florida

Kenneth G. Wilson, Ph.D. Youngberg Distinguished Professor Department of Physics The Ohio State University

Shelley Wong, Ed.D. Assistant Professor School of Teaching & Learning The Ohio State University

Catherine Zeek, Ed.D.
Department Chair and Assistant Professor
Reading
Texas Woman's University

Nancy L. Zimpher, Ph.D. Chancellor University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

Jerry Zutell, Ph.D.
Professor of Education
Language, Literature, and Culture
The Ohio State University

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