As a former Reading Recovery teacher I tend to judge the success of this intervention by its discontinuation rate. Reading Recovery teachers work very diligently to ensure that the children they teach are receiving the most-powerful strategies to mold them into successful readers and writers. Many students have become successful members of the literary community with the help of these dedicated teachers.

But what happens to those students who just don’t make the gains to discontinue? Do they continue to struggle throughout their educational career? Are they so frustrated with their struggle that they give up? As a parent I witnessed the journey of one such child.

My son, James, was identified as one of the lowest-achieving students in his first-grade classroom. As a kindergarten student he just couldn’t seem to put the pieces together to make sense of what he was seeing on the page. This was very frustrating to me as a Reading Recovery teacher. Of course I worked with him at home, but sometimes a mom who is a teacher is not the best person to teach her own child. We live in a small community and at the time I was the sole Reading Recovery teacher in our school district. I knew I could not build the kind of rapport with James that is needed to make struggling readers successful. I was at a loss. The intervention that I had seen be successful

The Wright family celebrates at Morningside College, where James received a degree in business administration. From left to right are London, Randy, James, Pat, Matthew, and Michael.
with so many students was not going to work for my child because of me. Thank goodness for a very dedicated and supportive teacher leader.

Pat Fostvedt-Oxendale, the teacher leader at Northwest Area Education Agency in Sioux City, agreed to work with James. She was already teaching children in another district but stopped on her drive into the office in Sioux City to teach James. Unfortunately, James did not make the gains needed to discontinue and was placed in special education. James continued to be a part of the special education program throughout middle and high school. However, I believe, that even though he did not make the gains needed to label him discontinued from Reading Recovery, his time as a Reading Recovery student laid the foundation for future success.

As I watched him during the time he was in Reading Recovery I observed many positive things. First and foremost, he was starting to believe that he could read even though it was still very difficult. He learned that through hard work he could be successful and that there were people who believed he could read. Reading Recovery teachers are those who believe and encourage the students they teach while searching for the best methods and strategies to teach the struggling readers they encounter every day.

James may have not have been a positive statistic as far as Reading Recovery data are concerned, but his time in that intervention had a very positive influence for years that followed in his educational career. Even though he did not make rapid gains, the foundation needed to become a reader and writer was laid. With the support of many other teachers like Pat Fostvedt-Oxendale, James graduated from Woodbury Central High School in 2011 with a GPA of 3.0 and went on to attend Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa. As a parent, I am proud to say that he was a part of the recent commencement ceremony at Morningside College and graduated with a degree in business administration.

Discontinuation continues to be, as it should, the goal for all students served in Reading Recovery. However, those students whose outcome in Reading Recovery we often view as a disappointment, due to their lack of accelerated progress, have also been greatly impacted by the dedication of those involved with Reading Recovery. It is my belief that all students touched by this intervention have taken something positive away from this experience.

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