Reading Recovery® theory underlies both my personal and professional practices. My journey with Reading Recovery began over 25 years ago when my school superintendent charged a colleague and me to investigate possible initiatives to support literacy growth. Our district population had increased poverty and diversity. Literacy scores were declining for the subgroups. As we observed many possible innovations, we discovered Reading Recovery. The results were significant for our young learners. Soon we had the opportunity to meet a dynamic young trainer, Linda Dorn, and the journey began. We embraced Reading Recovery and comprehensive literacy. It changed the trajectory of learning for children, teachers, and administrators, and this continued in the two districts where I worked.

Reading Recovery became the theory that became our belief system. Linda ensured we understood that Reading Recovery was more than a program — rather a system of change. It provided us the opportunity to see ourselves as a community of learners. Professional development was continuous and systematic. Often Linda would remind us of the work of Marie Clay and the impact Marie continued to have in our lives.

In the introduction to Changing Minds, Changing Schools, Changing Systems, Dorn noted that “minds of educators can be changed only through authentic, mutual experiences that are grounded in relevant events” (2015, p. 6). She ensured we studied, we asked questions, we observed, and we networked. We always studied our practices and knew that when we collaborated, we were better.

In Shaping Literate Minds (Dorn & Soffos, 2001) we find Eisner’s words: “Humans do not enter the world with minds but with brains. The task of education, acculturation and socialization is to convert brains into minds. Brains are born and minds are made and one of the privileges of the teaching profession is to have an important part to play in the shaping of minds” (p. ii).

Linda Dorn certainly played an important part in shaping our minds — mine especially. Her excitement for learning and results were contagious. Linda was always willing to step forward and be innovative. She ignited my desire to grow, collaborate, and listen to others in my network of literacy colleagues.

As we worked, learned, and grew with Linda’s support, we built our understanding of Reading Recovery and comprehensive literacy that formed the foundation of our systematic approach. We knew that we must have a common commitment and understanding at all levels of education in the district and school. Reading Recovery and the classroom did not stand alone. We focused our learning on ensuring we had common language and practices. Early on we had the recognition that special education, general education, and interventions must align with the same focus if acceleration was going to occur.

Secondly, Linda helped us understand that we must maintain high expectations for all learners — children, teachers, and administrators. Professional development was not an event; it was continuous. It went without a doubt that with these high expectations we also needed to hold ourselves accountable. As a learning entity, it was also important for us to develop a culture of teaching and learning focused on a team approach to problem solving.
No one was an island — rather it was how we developed our common language and practices. Linda always demonstrated and provided the understanding that collaboration around our learners was essential. Reading Recovery theory is who we were. It was our belief system.

Recently I have had the opportunity to participate as a member of the Reading Recovery Network Improvement Science Hub (outgrowth of our work with Anthony Bryk and the Carnegie Foundation; see related story on page 38 in this issue). As I have worked with this group, I am constantly reminded of Linda Dorn’s focus on learning and growing. I have learned to consider how this work has contributed to greater conversations among the members of the Reading Recovery network. We are taking the time to observe our practices and consider how we can with intentionality and precision improve in small ways so that we can later grow in bigger ways. I am always reminded of the example Linda would offer regarding the pebble in the pond. We are starting small with the intent of impacting big. I know that my work with the Hub is also paying respect to Linda.

As a network of dedicated educators, we must continue our commitment to children and teachers — just like Linda constantly demonstrated. It is with a great deal of gratitude and pride I share with you the opportunity to contribute to the Linda Dorn Reading Recovery Legacy Fund that will support the training of Reading Recovery teacher leaders.

Linda’s work was built on the foundation of Reading Recovery. She served in many volunteer roles throughout the years, including president of RRCNA in 2009–2010. As current president of the Council, I invite you to join me in honoring her by visiting the website and making a gift.

“The goal of teaching is to create the conditions where learners have the knowledge and motivation to extend their own learning to higher and higher levels” (Dorn & Soffos, 2001, p. 105). Linda created these conditions for us as learners. The challenge we have is to continue her legacy. This is how we honor her and our 35th year of Reading Recovery in the United States.


The Linda Dorn Reading Recovery Legacy Fund will support the training of Reading Recovery teacher leaders. A second fund, administered by RRCNA, will assist doctoral students at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

You’re invited to tell us what you think!