



Reading Recovery® Council
of North America

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Reading Recovery and English Language Learners: A Response to the What Works Clearinghouse Announcement

Today the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) released a report saying that, “at this time, the WWC is unable to draw any conclusions based on research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of Reading Recovery on ELL.” In considering evidence, WWC limited evidence to randomized controlled trials and some quasi-experimental studies.

Despite this report, school districts can be confident that Reading Recovery works with English language learners. Ample evidence of effectiveness exists in other research studies and in annual evaluation evidence.

- In its own rigorous review of research evidence in 2007 and 2008, the What Works Clearinghouse awarded Reading Recovery high ratings across all four domains studied—and the highest rating for any intervention in general reading achievement. The What Works Clearinghouse agrees that Reading Recovery works.
- Numerous studies from the U.S. and Great Britain validate Reading Recovery’s effectiveness with English language learners.
- Thousands of Reading Recovery teachers across America submit data on each child’s progress (more than 90,000 students each year of which more than 15% are ELL) to the International Data Evaluation Center at The Ohio State University. National data demonstrate that Reading Recovery outcomes for ELLs closely parallel those of the general population.
- Teachers and administrators understand that the relevant question is “Does Reading Recovery work with English language learners?” They answer that question within their own context and implementation, and the response has been a sound affirmative.

The new director of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) overseeing WWC, John Q. Easton, recently suggested in an interview with *Education Week* that he is “interested in questions of usability,” for practitioners and policymakers. He said, “When you need evidence of whether something works or not, you do RCTS, [randomized control trials] but you also have to have

much more information about context and implementation so that you get an understanding of why or why not we got the finding that we did.” (Comments appeared in a December 2, 2009 article in *Education Week*: New Head of U.S. Research Agency Aims for Relevance, by Debra Viadero.)

As IES explores new ways to include this broader kind of implementation evidence, we are confident that Reading Recovery’s effectiveness for English language learners will be affirmed. Meanwhile, ongoing research and evaluation will continue to explore Reading Recovery outcomes for English language learners as well as for the full diversity of children served in our schools. Our dynamic data system provides the mechanism for monitoring the progress of children and our implementation processes.

Relevant studies:

Is Early Literacy Intervention Effective for English Language Learners? Evidence from Reading Recovery. J. Ashdown & O. Simic. (2000). *Literacy Teaching and Learning: An International Journal of Early Reading and Writing*, 5(1), 27-42. (available on the RRCNA website)

The Success of Reading Recovery for English Language Learners and Descubriendo la Lectura for Bilingual Students in California. J.C. Neal & P.R. Kelly. (1999). *Literacy Teaching and Learning: An International Journal of Early Reading and Writing*, 4(2), 81-108. (available on the RRCNA website)

Learner Outcomes for English Language Learner Low Readers in an Early Intervention. P.R. Kelly, F.X. Gómez-Bellengé, J. Chen, & M. Schulz. (2008). *TESOL Quarterly*, 42(2), 235-260.

Other relevant information is also available on the RRCNA website at www.readingrecovery.org