Dear Ms. Kerger and Ms. Just,

We, the undersigned, write to express concern about the PBS NewsHour segment on dyslexia, broadcast on April 30. As experienced senior scholars in the field of reading and literacy education, we found this segment to be inconsistent with the NewsHour’s stated aim of balanced and trusted reporting.

Our professional work is devoted to studying literacy and how it can be developed in schools to enrich the lives of all students. So, we well understand and share parents’ and others’ anguish and frustration when children are identified as experiencing reading difficulties. Competent reading and writing are fundamentally important in and out of school, and difficulties can shape children’s concepts of themselves as learners, while affecting virtually every aspect of their everyday experience.

Our concern is that the NewsHour received inadequate and incomplete scientific advice when producing the segment on dyslexia. The result perpetuates inaccuracies, misconceptions, and distortions related to reading, how it is taught, and the complexity of reading difficulties. It suggests erroneously that there is scientific certainty about dyslexia and how it should be addressed instructionally. In fact, the research evidence is equivocal and there is much room for debate about whether dyslexia is an identifiable condition, whether it can be reliably diagnosed, and whether there are instructional approaches that are uniquely effective in ameliorating it.

That ambivalence is reflected in the American Psychiatric Association’s decision to drop dyslexia as a diagnostic category in the current edition of its Diagnostic Statistical Manual, that field’s most respected and widely used reference source. Further, dyslexia is viewed, and often defined, differently in different countries, language groups, and cultures. Ambivalence is also evident in a research advisory about dyslexia posted by the Literacy Research Panel of the International Literacy Association, a respected professional organization that for many decades has served professionals who teach reading. It cautions that many assumptions about dyslexia remain unsettled and that research does not support a single certifiable approach to addressing reading difficulties, including some popular, widely used instructional approaches aimed at children identified as dyslexic. An addendum that addresses objections to the advisory from the International Dyslexia Association provides a more detailed glimpse into the uncertainties surrounding dyslexia. One of the most highly regarded, thorough and least biased contemporary analyses goes further. Elliott and Grigorenko (2014), in their book The Dyslexia Debate, concluded that the term dyslexia is so misunderstood and misinterpreted that its use may hinder rather than support successful teaching and learning. These are only recent examples of a long history of controversy and debate about dyslexia that have been on-going since its emergence as a hypothesized condition in the late 19th century.
We are particularly concerned about the dyslexia segment’s suggestion that a narrowly conceptualized instructional approach is unequivocally effective, not only for individuals categorized as dyslexic, but for all individuals learning to read. Such a suggestion perpetuates a view that there is a single approach guaranteed to transcend the incredible diversity of factors and individual characteristics that might explain why learning to read is easy for many but incredibly difficult for some. It is widely accepted that learning to read English texts entails instructional attention to sound-symbol correspondence and other phonemic aspects of reading. But, the amount and form of that attention, how it is balanced with other aspects of reading and learning to read such as motivation, and how it might deal with the orthographic irregularities of English spelling, cannot be reduced to a single, narrow, unquestioned approach. In particular, we worry that such a narrow view might divert teachers from attending to other scientifically based facets of good literacy pedagogy, such as attention to oral language, knowledge acquisition, motivation and self-efficacy, and sheer exposure to print. Again, such issues, in one form or another, have periodically blossomed into public controversies across decades and are often nurtured among the general public by shallow or misleading media reports such as the NewsHour’s segment.

We are also dismayed that the NewsHour segment implicitly questioned, even if unintentionally, the professionalism of teachers and American schools in regard to teaching reading. It was suggested that teachers were ignorant of or resistant to the scientific certainty of dyslexia and how reading can be effectively taught, not only to those children diagnosed with dyslexia, but to all children. Beyond the absence of such certainty, as we have explained above, the segment unfairly provided no opportunity for a rebuttal from qualified representatives of those groups. They could have pointed to a complementary body of scientific research that supports alternative explanations of reading difficulties and instructional approaches that have been shown to be effective for a wide range of students with reading difficulties. That lack of balance was exacerbated when the segment included emotional comments about how children’s needs were not being met.

Finally, we believe that PBS and the NewsHour missed an opportunity to do more in-depth, balanced, and accurate reporting about dyslexia. Beyond the perspectives we have outlined here, such reporting could examine the conditions that have allowed dyslexia to remain such an amorphous, shape-shifting, yet resilient, explanation for reading difficulties for more than a century. Nuanced and balanced reporting is also needed to critique the increasing number of states passing arguably ill-advised legislation about dyslexia.

We ask that you consider options to rectify what we believe has been an unfortunate disservice to parents, to students, and to professionals dedicated to helping all individuals learn to read. Doing so, we believe, would be an excellent opportunity for PBS and the NewsHour to demonstrate clearly the strength of its commitment to accurate, balanced, and unbiased reporting. We stand ready to assist in such an effort in any way that might be helpful.

Sincerely,

[Note. All of the following senior scholars and leaders in the area of reading and literacy have independently approved adding their names, thus indicating that they agree with this email/letter. Please feel free to contact any of them directly using the emails provided. To send a general response, you may reply to this email and I will forward it to all. On behalf of all of the individuals below, David Reinking, reinkin@clemson.edu]
Peter Afflerbach  
Professor, University of Maryland  
https://education.umd.edu/directory/peter-afflerbach  
afflo@umd.edu

Richard Allington  
Professor Emeritus, University of Tennessee  
Past-President, International Literacy Association  
Past-President, National Reading Conference  
richardallington@aol.com

Donna E. Alvermann  
The Omer Clyde & Elizabeth Parr Aderhold Professor in Education  
University of Georgia Distinguished Research Professor of Language & Literacy Education  
Fellow, Owens Institute for Behavioral Research  
Past President of Literacy Research Association  
Past-Editor, Reading Research Quarterly  
https://coe.uga.edu/directory/people/dalverma  
dalverma@uga.edu

Patricia L. Anders  
Professor Emerita, University of Arizona  
Jewell Lewis Distinguished Professor of Reading  
Past President, Literacy Research Association  
Past Editor, Journal of Literacy Research  
https://www.coe.arizona.edu/content/anders-patricia-l  
planders@email.arizona.edu

Richard Anderson  
University Scholar and Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois  
Member, National Academy of Education  
Former Director, Center for the Study of Reading  
Past-President, American Educational Research Association  
https://education.illinois.edu/faculty/richard-anderson  
csrrca@illinois.edu

Kathryn Au  
Professor Emeritus  
University of Hawaii  
Past-President, International Literacy Association, Literacy Research Association  
kathy@kathyau.com

Diane Barone  
Professor, University of Nevada  
Past-editor, Reading Research Quarterly  
Past-President, International Literacy Association  
barone@unr.edu
Heather Bell
Retired Elementary School Principal
Past-President New Zealand Literacy Association
Former Member International Literacy Association Board of Directors
heatherbell1992@gmail.com

Camille Blachowicz
Distinguished Research Professor Emerita
National Louis University
Co-Director, The Reading Leadership Institute
https://www.readinghalloffame.org/camille-blachowicz-inducted-2013
cblachowicz@nl.edu

Carole Bloch
Director, Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa
University of Cape Town
https://www.readinghalloffame.org/node/659

Carl Braun
Professor Emeritus, Applied Psychology
University of Calgary
Past-President, The International Reading Association

Brian Cambourne
Principal Fellow, Faculty of Education
University of Wollongong Australia
bcambrn@uow.edu.au

Barbara Comber
Research Professor, School of Education
University of South Australia

Patricia Cunningham
Professor of Education, Wake Forest University
https://education.wfu.edu/about-the-department/faculty-and-staff-profiles/dr-pat-cunningham/
cunningpm@wfu.edu

Henrietta Dombey
Professor Emeritus of Literacy in Primary Education
University of Brighton United Kingdom
H.Dombey@brighton.ac.uk

Gerald G. Duffy
Professor Emeritus
Michigan State University
Past-President, National Reading Conference
Patricia A. Edwards  
Professor of Teacher Education, Michigan State University  
Past-President, Literacy Research Association  
Past-President, International Literacy Association  
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patricia_A_.Edwards  
edwards6@msu.edu

Jill Fitzgerald  
Research Professor and Professor Emerita  
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Associate editor, *Journal of Educational Psychology*  
Past-editor, *Reading and Writing Quarterly*  
JFITZGER@email.unc.edu

Kenneth S. Goodman  
Professor Emeritus, Department of Teaching, Learning and SocioCultural Studies  
University of Arizona  
Past-President International Reading Association and  
Center for the Expansion of Language and Thinking.  
http://thosegoodmans.net/

Yetta M. Goodman  
Regents Professor Emerita  
Department of Teaching, Learning and SocioCultural Studies  
University of Arizona,  
Past-President National Council of Teachers of English and  
Center for the Expansion of Language and Thinking  
http://thosegoodmans.net/  
ygoodman@u.arizona.edu

Micheal F. Graves  
Professor of Literacy Education, Emeritus  
University of Minnesota  
Past-Editor, *Journal of Reading Behavior*  
Past-Associate Editor, *Research in the Teaching of English*  
mgraves@umn.edu

Vincent Greaney  
Lead Education Specialist  
World Bank  
Former fellow at the Educational Research Centre at St. Patrick’s College, Dublin,  
vmgreaney@yahoo.com

Judith Green  
Professor of Education (Literacy)  
University of California, Santa Barbara  
Past-Editor: *Review of Research in Education*  
https://education.ucsb.edu/judith-green  
green@education.ucsb.edu
Kris D. Gutiérrez
Carol Liu Professor
University of California, Berkeley
Past-President, American Educational Research Association
Past Vice-Chair, Institute of Educational Sciences
https://gse.berkeley.edu/kris-d-guti%C3%A9rrez
kris.gutierrez@colorado.edu

Jane Hansen
Professor Emerita, University of Virginia
Past-President, Literacy Research Association
Past-President, Reading Hall of Fame
jh5re@virginia.edu

Colin Harrison
Emeritus Professor of Literacy Studies in Education, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom
Founder Editor, Journal of Research in Reading
Past-President, UK Reading Association
http://www.colinharrison.eu/home/
Colin.Harrison@nottingham.ac.uk

Shirley Brice Heath
Margery Bailey Professor of English and Dramatic Literature, Emerita
and Professor of Linguistics and Anthropology, Emerita
Stanford University
http://shirleybriceheath.net/
sbheath@stanford.edu

Elfrieda H. Hiebert
Former professor and researcher at the Universities of
Kentucky, Colorado-Boulder, Michigan, and California-Berkeley.
President, TextProject
http://textproject.org/about/textproject-board-members/ehh/
hiebert@textproject.org

James Hoffman
Professor of Language and Literacy and
Priscilla Pond Flawn Regents Professor in Early Childhood Education
University of Texas, Austin
Past-President, National Reading Conference
https://education.utexas.edu/faculty/jim_hoffman
jhoffman@austin.utexas.edu

Gay Ivey
William E. Moran Distinguished Professor in Literacy
University of North Carolina-Greensboro
Past-President, Literacy Research Association
https://soe.uncg.edu/directory/faculty-and-staff/bio-gayivey/
mgivey@uncg.edu
Jerry L. Johns
Distinguished Teaching Professor Emeritus,
Northern Illinois University
Past-President, International Literacy Association
jjohns@niu.edu

Peter Johnston
Professor Emeritus, SUNY Albany
Oscar Causey Award for contributions to literacy research (Literacy Research Association)
johnstonnz@aol.com

Stephen Krashen
Professor Emeritus, University of Southern California
https://sdkrashen.com
skrashen@yahoo.com

Judith A. Langer
Vincent O’Leary Distinguished Professor Emeritus, SUNY Albany
Past Director: National Research Center on English Teaching & Learning;
Albany Institute on Research in Education
Past Editor: Research in the Teaching of English
jlanger@albany.edu

Diane Lapp
Distinguished Professor of Education
San Diego State University
http://go.sdsu.edu/education/ste/dr_lapp_bio.aspx
lapp@sdsu.edu

Donald J. Leu
Emeritus Neag Endowed Chair in Literacy and Technology
University of Connecticut
Past-President, Literacy Research Association
Past-Director, The New Literacies Research Lab: https://newliteracies.uconn.edu/our-team/
donald.leu@uconn.edu

Marjorie Y. Lipson
University Scholar and Professor Emerita
University of Vermont
Past Board Member and Co-Chair, Committee on Response to Instruction,
Literacy Research Association
marjorie.lipson@uvm.edu

Dianne L. Monson
Professor Emerita
University of Minnesota
Past-President U.S. Board on Books for Young People
monso001@umn.edu
Donna Ogle  
Professor Emerita, National Louis University  
Co-Director Reading Leadership Institute  
Past-President, International Literacy Association  
https://www.readinghalloffame.org/Donna_Ogle  
DOgle@nl.edu

Jeanne Paratore  
Professor Emerita, Boston University  
Project Director, Transmedia Approach to Science and Literacy Learning in Early Childhood Classrooms,  
CPB/PBS Kids Ready to Learn Initiative, 2010-present  
Past Director, Boston University Reading and Writing Clinic  
http://www.bu.edu/wheelockreadingclinic/reading-writing-clinic/  
Former Member, International Literacy Association Board of Directors  
jparator@bu.edu

P. David Pearson  
Professor Emeritus, Former Dean, Graduate School of Education  
University of California, Berkeley  
Past-President, National Reading Conference  
Past-Editor, Reading Research Quarterly  
Former Advisor to Children’s Television Workshop  
https://gse.berkeley.edu/p-david-pearson  
ppearson@berkeley.edu

Gay Pinnell  
Professor Emerita, Ohio State University  
Albert H. Harris Award for Research, International Reading Association  
Charles A. Dana Foundation Award for Contributions to Education  
https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/2005122028_Gay_Su_Pinnell  
gspinnell@yahoo.com

Victoria Purcell-Gates  
Professor Emeritus  
University of British Columbia  
Former Tier 1 Canada Research Chair-Early Literacy  
Past-President, Literacy Research Association  
http://faculty.educ.ubc.ca/vpurcell-gates/  
vpurcell.gates@gmail.com

Taffy E. Raphael  
Professor Emeritus and University Scholar, University of Illinois at Chicago  
Past-President, Literacy Research Association  
Former Board Member, International Literacy Association  
https://education.uic.edu/profiles/taffy-raphael/  
teraphael@gmail.com
Timothy Rasinski  
Professor, Curriculum and Instruction, Kent State University  
Co-Director of KSU Reading Clinic  
Past-Editor, *The Reading Teacher* and *Journal of Literacy Research*  
Past President, The Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers  
https://www.kent.edu/ehhs/tlcs/profile/timothy-rasinski-phd  
trasinsk@kent.edu

David Reinking  
Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Clemson University  
Past-President of the Literacy Research Association  
Past-editor, *Reading Research Quarterly* and the *Journal of Literacy Research*  
http://www.davidreinking.info/  
reinkin@clemson.edu

Victoria Risko  
Professor Emerita, Language, Literacy, Culture  
Vanderbilt University  
Past-President, International Literacy Association  
victoria.j.risko@Vanderbilt.Edu

Donna Scanlon  
Professor  
Director, Child Research and Study Center  
The University at Albany  
https://www.albany.edu/education/faculty/donna-scanlon  
dscanlon@albany.edu

Norman A. Stahl  
Professor and Chair Emeritus of Literacy Education  
Northern Illinois University  
Past-President Literacy Research Association, Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers, the  
College Reading and Learning Association  
flowercjs@aol.com

Eufimia Tafa  
Professor of Preschool Education  
Dean, Faculty of Education  
Director, Laboratory of Pedagogical Research and Applications  
University of Crete, Greece  
https://www.readinghalloffame.org/eufimia-tafa-2014-inductee  
etafa@edc.uoc.gr

Barbara M. Taylor  
Professor Emeritus, University of Minnesota and former Guy Bond Chair in Reading,  
University of Minnesota  
Founder, Early Intervention In Reading Program, 1995-present  
bmtaylor@umn.edu
Denny Taylor
Professor Emeritus Hofstra University
Distinguished Alumni Teachers College, Columbia University
https://www.dennytaylor.com/
Denny.Taylor@Hofstra.edu

Rob Tierney
Former Dean and Professor of Education, University of British Columbia
Distinguished Visiting Professor, Beijing Normal University
Former Dean and Honorary Professor of Education, The University of Sydney
Past-President, National Reading Conference
http://lled.educ.ubc.ca/profiles/rob-tierney/
rob.tierney@ubc.ca

Jan Turbill
Senior Honorary Fellow
University of Wollongong
Past-President, Australian Literacy Educators’ Association
Australia
https://scholars.uow.edu.au/display/jan_turbill
jturbill@uow.edu.au

Sheila Valencia
Professor, University of Washington, Seattle
Former Chair of Legislative and Policy Committee, Literacy Research Association
valencia@uw.edu

MaryEllen Vogt
Professor Emerita
California State University, Long Beach
Past-President, International Literacy Association
https://www.readinghalloffame.org/node/661
mevgot1@outlook.com

Karen K. Wixson
Professor and Dean Emerita
School of Education
University of Michigan
http://www.soe.umich.edu/people/profile/karen_wixson/
kwixson@umich.edu