



INFO DROP

Thomas, P.L. (2022). *The Science of Reading Movement: The Never-Ending Debate and the Need for a Different Approach to Reading Instruction*. 2022. National Education Policy Center.

LINK: <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/science-of-reading>

1) ESSENTIAL IDEAS

- Misrepresentation of the role of phonics in reading instruction has led to policies and legislation that mandate specific instructional practices that science does not support as improving reading achievement: such as Orton-Gillingham, LETRS training, while proclaiming them to be “scientific”.
- Policy patterns from a century of reform have not led to increased and sustained reading achievement; we keep repeating the same mistakes with no accountability for these reforms and no study or reporting of their negative side effects on students.
- Paul Thomas’s bountiful 15 pages of references provide a deep dive into understanding the “Science of Reading” as a movement, how and why we got here, what is debilitating about this movement, and what science actually does say, and not say, about reading and reading instruction. This is a ready reference for those serious about learning more.
- Eight recommendations for policymakers based on sound conclusions from rigorous research end this article.

2) MISINFORMATION EXAMINED

- The 80 years of continued debates over reading and reading instruction, including the current SoR movement and their dictates, lack scientific studies to establish causation between phonics instruction and lagging state reading scores. Rather, the proclamation that the lack of teaching phonics and the need for systematic phonics instruction for all students as universal solutions to raising reading achievement are actually predicated on conjecture, assumptions, accusations, and misrepresentations in the media—not science.

- Common theories of reading instruction have ideologies about what these theories actually are and what practices they support. The lack of a common understanding of these theories have led to misinterpretations of classroom practices related to them.
- Proclamations that neuroscience and brain research dictate how to teach reading are erroneous. Dr. Paul Thomas quotes Dr. Mark Seidenberg: “Our concern is that although reading science is highly relevant to learning in the classroom setting, it does not yet speak to what to teach, when, how, and for whom at a level that is useful for teachers.”
- Criticism of teacher preparation tends to be driven by anecdotal evidence in the media and non-peer-reviewed reports from think tanks such as the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ). NCTQ issues reports based on faulty methods and selective use of evidence, *not science*. A readily available, but ignored, robust body of research does exist for understanding and improving teacher education and preservice teachers’ knowledge and practice in teaching reading.

3) WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Media coverage of reading instruction and journalists portrayed as reading experts have proliferated conjectures, accusations, and assumptions regarding causation of lagging reading test scores, with no scientific studies documenting causation being reported. Scientific studies of literacy scholars that document causes have been ignored in the media.
- Misrepresentation of the role of phonics in reading instruction has led to policies and legislation that mandate specific instructional programs and practices that science does not support as improving reading achievement: such as Orton-Gillingham, LETRS training, while proclaiming them to be “scientific”.
- Those who appear to be most benefiting from the current SoR movement are companies and corporations that sell commercial reading programs and commercial teacher training programs such as LETRS.
- Other causes for stagnated or low reading scores could include underfunded schools, teacher shortages, lack of knowledgeable, certified classroom teachers, one-size-fits-all commercial reading programs used with diverse students, struggling readers with limited or no access to reading teachers.
- Some states have increased policies mandating grade retention based on high-stakes testing despite evidence that grade retention is harmful and primarily linked to students dropping out of high school.

