

Can Reading Research Improve Literacy Outcomes?

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Reading Matters
Connecting Science and Education

www.seidenbergreading.net

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Hello everyone.

Thanks for participating

Sorry I can't see or talk with you.

I hope we manage to communicate
anyway.

I'm Mark Seidenberg, professor, reading researcher, author.

I'm interested in using reading research to improve
curricula
instructional practices and materials
teacher preparation and support
assessment

And most important:
literacy outcomes!

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Before we start....

For those of you who are teaching this semester:

Thank You.

I know nothing about remote teaching, except that it's a hardship for everyone involved. You're staving off an educational catastrophe.

Everything I'm talking about today is looking ahead to when the pandemic is over.

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I wrote a book that included

an overview of the science of reading
a discussion of the disconnection between this science and educational policies and practices.

I have been talking to many groups around the country who are

Interested in the science of reading
Want to know more about it
Are unsure about where to start or who to believe
Would like some help!

So, that is the focus of today's session.

The organizers gave me some questions that you submitted.

They're great!

So, fewer slides, more questions, answers, discussion(?)

(the slides will be available to download)

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Here are a couple of recent articles that may be helpful:

1. A short paper we wrote for teachers for The Reading League Journal.

Reading Science and Educational Practice: *Some Tenets for Teachers*

by Mark S. Seidenberg and Matt Cooper Borkenhagen

2. A longer paper we wrote for Reading Research Quarterly about uses and misuses of the “science of reading”.

 **READING RESEARCH QUARTERLY**

Lost in Translation? Challenges in Connecting Reading Science and Educational Practice

Both available free on our website: www.seidenbergreading.org

Along with other stuff.

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Topics for today:

1. What is the “science of reading”?
2. Why so much interest in it, now?
3. Why do scientists think it’s relevant?
4. How can I learn more about it?
5. What are the challenges to making good use of it?

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1. What is the science of reading?

The “science of reading” is any science relevant to understanding how reading works, how it relates to other kinds of intelligent behavior, how children learn to read, the neural and genetic bases of reading, the many factors that influence literacy outcomes, the bases of skilled reading, the causes of reading difficulties....

It has been conducted for many years in many countries, languages, writing systems.

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Reading research is conducted by people from many academic disciplines.

What matters is the quality of the science.

Not the definition.

Not who is an “authority.”

What’s the issue?

Scientific literacy is low in this country. COVID, vaccines?

Every approach to reading instruction, every curriculum claims to be “consistent with the science of reading.” Doesn’t mean anything. You have to look, evaluate.

Similarly, every approach claims to be “evidence-based.” True—if the bar is set very low. But, what is the quality of evidence?

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2. Why so much interest in this research now? It's been around for decades!

a. Frustration over educational establishment's intransigence, lack of effective response to concerns including

Chronic failures, especially with children at risk for reasons such as poverty, developmental conditions such as dyslexia

Lower literacy in US across the board than in Canada, Korea, Finland, etc.

b. Greater awareness that science has been ignored.

My book. Dana Goldstein's book on teacher education. Emily Hanford's documentaries. Other media coverage.

This has led to

c. Increased activity by professional organizations (such as IDA) and parent-led advocacy groups (such as Decoding Dyslexia)

d. Efforts to gain legislative remedies in most states.

screening, teacher certification, mandating specific curricula and practices

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Note: Not blaming teachers.

I will blame people who teach teachers, develop and market curricula, politicians who support the status quo.

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3. Why do researchers think it's relevant to education?

Understanding how reading works, children learn, and all the rest is relevant to what happens in the classroom.

The teacher's role.

Children's background and experiences outside the classroom.

Which activities promote progress and why?

How to plan an effective curriculum.

How to intervene with children who struggle.

Etc etc etc

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My favorite example:

Children's experiences before they start school have enormous impact on progress.

Knowledge of spoken language

Knowledge of things we use spoken language to communicate about

These experiences vary a great deal.

Some children are behind on the first day of school.

This is not because how they were taught to read.

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4. How can a person learn more about this science?

It looks intimidating especially if you lack relevant “background knowledge”

There are better options and worse ones.

Better:

You can read my book—preferably in a group.

There will be a study guide very soon.

It’s not easy but you can get help.

Even if you don’t read the book: look at the sources I mention there.

We will update them on our website seidenbergreading.net.

Dan Willingham, American Educator, IDA website is pretty good.

Facebook group: Science of Reading: What I Should Have Learned in College

What materials would you like to have? We will create them for you!!!

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Not so good:

Twitter. Everyone has an opinion. Lots of misinformation.

How can you tell who or what to believe?

It’s Pandora’s Box.

Do you need to be a scientist to benefit from this research?

No. We should be able to explain it.

But: It takes work.

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5. What are the challenges to using science to improve outcomes?

a. Educational establishment is still a problem.

Low literacy is not educational problem (to them)

Teacher preparation is adequate.

Problems arise outside of school.

b. Lack of consensus

People go back to their schools and get shot down by other teachers, principal, directives from the superintendent.

c. Have to start before the child gets to school.

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d. Overreliance on a small number of classic studies

the simple view of reading

the 5 pillars of reading instruction

the alphabetic principle

stages in orthographic development

the 4-part processor.

Good research, but out of date.

Weak in many areas, e.g., individual differences.

e. We know a lot about the science of reading.

We don't know enough about how to translate that science into effective practices.

This is a huge gap.

Example: phonics.

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e. Legislation is a blunt instrument

Certification/licensure exams to build knowledge?

Specify which curricula, practices are allowed?

Arkansas: no 3-cueing allowed.
Everyone in education: we don't use that approach!
Publishers: just change what you call it.

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That's a very brief overview of a lot of very serious issues.

Let's look at your questions:

1. "Based on the science, what do you believe is the single best move a school district can make in improving core reading instruction?"

End the pandemic? Go back to school?

Another answer: provide support for in-service teachers.
Coaches, trouble-shooters, PD

Teacher preparation isn't adequate. Teachers learn on the job. This is unfair to them. It needs to change. But if that isn't going to happen, at least provide high-level in-service support.

How to fund it: stop buying the fancy curricula.

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The best single move may be to **end** certain practices that are widespread:

1. Talking in the classroom, during other activities.

Discouraged in many schools. Emphasis on maintaining order.
Speak only when spoken to. NO!

Silent lunch? No talking!

2. Chopping reading into parts and never putting them together

5 pillars of reading → 5 different blocks

No! They are related, not independent. Learning one affects learning the others.
And leave enough time for reading!

3. Recognizing differences in language background. Dialect differences vs. ELL.

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2. “Most people attending this webinar today are in-service teachers.
What professional development do you recommend so they can become more effective teachers of reading?”

I’m not sure.

We are polling teachers to find out.

Many states are using LETRS. Louisa Moats has produced a lot of useful materials, books, etc.

The LETRS course may be too much for some.

Other on-line courses are out there.

Prof. Nell Duke, University of Michigan: <https://www.mooc-list.com/instructor/nell-duke>
AIM Academy, Stern Language and Learning Institute, others.

Should we develop one?

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3. "What's the most promising path forward?"

In our dream world or in our existing imperfect world?

I think we need to change the teaching profession for the better or it's going to change without us, for the worse.

Teachers need the tools to be more effective.
Teachers need respect, support, security—physical, financial, professional.
Who is going to go into teaching in the future?

Otherwise:

Software. Teachers' role is diminished. Social-emotional development perhaps.

Fewer teachers, fewer responsibilities.

Death spiral for the profession?

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Thank you!

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