Triple R Teaching

Hello, Anna Geiger here and thank you for joining me for this live video presentation. I am the creator of themeasuredmom.com website, the Measured Mom Plus membership site, two online courses, and this podcast, Triple R Teaching. If you're live with me on Facebook, then you're watching a recording of podcast Episode 43: Three Science of Reading Myths Debunked.

If you've been with me for a while, you know that we're in the middle of a series all about using the science of reading to improve how we teach reading. Let's take a look at some of the episodes that we've been through already. So far we've looked at what the reading wars are. We looked at my reaction to the article that reignited the reading wars - that was Emily Hanford's article called "At a Loss for Words." We took a simple look at how the brain learns to read. We looked at what the science of reading is based on. We talked about what's wrong with three cueing, that was an episode I never expected to record. We talked about whether you should use leveled or decodable texts with beginning readers. We talked about do's and don'ts for using decodable texts. Finally, last week we talked about the difference between balanced and structured literacy.

Today, we're going to take a look at three myths that people often believe about the science of reading. I know this, because a lot of people send me emails about them.

The first one we're going to tackle is that the science of reading is brand new information. A lot of people feel that the science of reading is a new fad. It's something that's just political. It's something brand new. It's the new thing to talk about. But the fact is that the science of reading is a body of research that's been around for a long time.

I want to share with you a definition of the science of reading. It's actually newly published on whatisthescienceofreading.org, which is run by The Reading League, I believe. This is what they wrote, “The science of reading is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. This research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages. The science of reading has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some have difficulty; and how we can most effectively assess and teach and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention of and

intervention for reading difficulties.” Again, that's from whatisthescienceofreading.org.

It feels like the science of reading is new because it's only recently that it has been discussed more in the teacher mainstream, among everyday teachers. I really think a lot of that is because of Emily Hanford's article. If you want to learn more about why it's only recently been openly discussed, I would definitely check out my episode about the reading wars. That will help you understand that a little bit better.

But I want to talk to you a little bit about this research that's been around for a long time. We have discussed this in previous episodes, but I think it's worth reviewing. In particular, the Simple View of Reading.

It is very simple when you look at it, but it has big implications for how we teach reading. Remember, the Simple View of Reading was proposed by Gough and Tunmer back in the eighties, and it is a model of how reading comprehension comes about. The model is a multiplication problem. It shows us that reading comprehension results when children can decode or recognize individual words and comprehend the language. They have to be able to pull those individual words off the page and understand what the words mean.

Then we also can talk about Scarborough's Reading Rope that was developed by Dr. Hollis Scarborough as a way to explain to teachers and parents the complexities of how we learn to read. She actually created it to share in workshops, but eventually it was published in the year 2001. So we'll just bring that up really quickly. Interestingly, Dr. Scarborough developed her Reading Rope separately from Gough and Tunmer's model. She actually created it without knowing about their model and yet they both came up with the two main domains, and those are language comprehension and word recognition - sometimes called decoding. They both came up with the same domains because they were both working from the same research. They both understood the same research. And so I find it very interesting that they came up with the two domains independently of each other.

Scarborough's Reading Rope is really helpful because it helps us break down the Simple View of Reading, which can feel very simplistic, but it's actually quite complicated.

Something else I think we need to do when we're talking about the science of reading not being brand new, is think about how the brain learns to read. I gave an episode all about that a few weeks ago, but here is a very quick summary. Proficient reading should happen on the left side of the brain, and through FMRI, Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging, scientists have seen that weak readers are doing their reading on the other side, the right side of the brain, which is actually the wrong side of the brain

for reading.

There is no one part of the brain designed for reading. We have a part in the left side that's for recognizing sounds like speech sounds, and we have one part that's used for recognizing images such as letters, but those two parts of the brain must be trained to work together. We train them to work together by teaching students to connect the phonemes to the graphemes, the sounds to the letters. In other words, we teach them to sound out words. And if we're asking them to do things like use the picture or the context to solve words, we're actually having them do their reading work on the right side of the brain, the side of the brain that weak readers are using. We're actually bypassing the important work they need to do to get those words permanently part of their sight vocabulary so that when they see them in the future, they can read them instantly.

That's a very, very quick summary of some of the science of reading research. Now remember, the research has been around for decades and it's much more than those three things, but I feel that those are the key pieces, the things you should keep in mind as we move through our presentation today.

The next thing we want to talk about is myth number two, that the science of reading is only about phonics. I certainly thought that at first, and you may feel that way too. It's not surprising that people feel that way, because if you join any conversation or Facebook group or discussion about the science of reading, I can almost guarantee you that at least 75% of the conversation is going to be focused around phonics. Now, there is more to the science of reading than phonics. There definitely is, and I'll get to that in a second. But I want to talk first about why. Why is it that the conversation so much revolves around phonics? Well, I think because balanced literacy often undervalues the role of phonics in beginning reading instruction.

I often would tell parents and other teachers that phonics is a piece of learning to read, but we need to not make it too big of a piece. We need to also make sure that students are thinking about what would make sense or what would sound right as they're solving words. We didn't want to move phonics too much into the forefront because then we would be, I thought, de-emphasizing comprehension. Well, that is kind of really misunderstanding how beginning reading works.

Let's take a look again at the Simple View of Reading. You can see that reading comprehension comes about because decoding is happening and language comprehension is happening. Decoding means that you could read those words anywhere. You could read them in a sentence, or you could read them all on their own. When we're using leveled texts and predicatable texts with early readers, and they're only able to read those words in context because they know the pattern of the book, they're not decoding.

So when we use those early texts with very beginning readers and teach them that they don't have to sound out the words, they don't have to connect all the letters to the sounds, and they can use other ways to solve the words, then we're de-emphasizing phonics. I think that is so much of why the science of reading discussion is centered around phonics because many people don't understand that it really is important that beginning readers learn phonics. They need to learn it because it helps them permanently map those words into their brains.

Way back when, when I had a series of episodes about phonemic awareness, I talked about orthographic mapping. This is the idea that in order to remember words for the future, children have to be proficient at phonemic awareness and phonic decoding. They have to be able to connect those individual sounds to the letters. They have to be able to pull words apart into their individual sounds, and then put them back together. To do that though, you've got to have an understanding of phonics. That's why I think the conversation surrounds phonics so much, because the other side hasn't allowed it to have the role that it needs to have.

Now, is the science of reading all about phonics? No, because as you remember with Scarborough's Reading Rope, we saw those two domains broken down and looked at all the pieces involved in language comprehension: background knowledge, vocabulary, language structure, verbal reasoning, literacy knowledge. There's a lot there, and structured literacy teachers will absolutely tell you those things must be taught. It's just that we have to understand that decoding has to happen before students can really comprehend. If we try to force comprehension with texts that students can't even read on their own, we're putting the cart before the horse. We need to make sure that we understand the role of phonics, as we can also think about all the other parts that are involved, when children are learning to read. We understand that our emphasis on phonics is going to be stronger at the beginning than it is going to be later. Unless the child didn't learn it, then we're going to focus on that later as well. But it's really key at those beginning years when we're teaching children the structure of language and how to sound out words.

The third myth I want to talk about today is that the science of reading will lead to boring drill and kill instruction that will kill the love of reading. For me, this is what gave me a bad feeling about the science of reading and structured literacy for a long time. I really felt that embracing this way of teaching reading was going to mean that I have to use a dry, scripted curriculum, boring, stilted decodable books, and that I was going to kill the love of reading before it could even start! That was a huge concern that I had about the science of reading, and maybe it's one that you have too.

Here's something I want to address about the idea of the science of reading killing the love of reading. We need to remember that when you teach reading, you need to

connect the science of reading with the art of teaching. They must be married; you can't have one without the other. You can be a really great engaging teacher, but not have the knowledge to teach reading well. Or you might have the art of teaching, but you don't have what you need to know, in this case, the science of reading. You may understand the science of reading, but not be able to communicate that clearly to students, even with a scripted curriculum. You might not know how to play off of your students in front of you, right? This would be understanding when they're not getting something and supporting them, or understanding when they've got it and you can move a little faster, so pacing. Or it means things like keeping students engaged, knowing how to do that back and forth with question and answer, and knowing how to involve them more.

There's so much involved to being a good teacher. It's not just the head knowledge. I think it's really important to accept this, that just because a teacher knows the science of reading does not mean they're going to be good at teaching students to read. Both parts must be there.

I think we also need to think about the purpose of teaching reading. For so many years, my main goal for teaching kids to read was to get them to love reading, and certainly I want them to love reading, that is so important! But they can't love reading if they don't know how to read! So the way that we teach them how to read is by giving them this strong base of skills that they need:phonemic awareness, phonic decoding, and other things connected to language comprehension.

I heard a quote recently, I believe it was from The Reading League podcast. I think it was Anita Archer, and she said, “Success breeds motivation.” You may have heard that many other places as well. Children who can read can learn to love it when they realize that they are the ones actually pulling those words off the page! They're not guessing based on the pictures. They're not guessing based on the pattern. They're actually connecting the sounds to the letters. They could read those words in isolation. They can read them in a story. They are doing it! That's where enjoyment comes in.

When we're able to adjust our thinking a little bit and think about the purpose of reading instruction, as well as our goal of reading comprehension, and when we combine decoding and language comprehension, and we can get all those pieces together clear in our brains, then we can start to get behind the science of reading and the structured literacy approach.

Today we addressed three myths about the science of reading. We talked about this idea that the science of reading is new - it's not! The research has been around for decades. We talked about the idea that the science of reading is only about phonics - it's not. It's just that the science of reading seeks to correct misunderstandings about phonics, and then it also seeks to teach children about the structure of language and

language comprehension. Finally, we talked about the myth that the science of reading and structured literacy will kill the love of reading. We learned that's not true either, that children can enjoy reading when we teach them how to do it! I will be talking more about that in upcoming episodes.

I want to thank you for joining me, and I also want to let you know about an exciting opportunity to learn more about the science of reading.

Coming up on May 3rd and May 4th, I will be sharing a live workshop with my colleague, Becky Spence of This Reading Mama. We're going to talk about Four Simple Ways to Bring the Science of Reading into K-2. If you're listening to this podcast in real time, not a year from now, please mark your calendar for May 3rd and May 4th. You can pick one of those dates, the presentation will be the same. We're going to be talking for about an hour and 15 minutes about the science of reading.

These are the things that we're going to be discussing in the presentation. You will get an easy to understand explanation of the science of reading. You'll discover exactly why phonemic awareness may be the missing key for struggling readers. You'll learn a new, powerful way to teach sight words. You'll get the do's and don'ts for using decodable text and discover a little-known, but powerful strategy for boosting comprehension. You will also get to learn all about our online course, Teaching Every Reader, which is currently getting a complete revamp to reflect the science of reading. We'll talk more about that, how you can join us, and you'll also get an offer to join that course at a special price.

So the doors for Teaching Every Reader are going to reopen on May 3rd and they will close on May 10th. They'll be open for one week and we're excited to share the details with you about that and how that will help you transform how you teach reading.

To sign up for the workshop, you can go to themeasuredmom.com/liveworkshop. You'll see the two days and times; it will be at 8:30 PM Eastern Time. Expect the presentation to be about an hour and 15 minutes, and you'll also get a chance to watch the recording if you sign up. Make sure even if that time doesn't work, that you sign up so you can get a link to the recording, which will be available for a couple of days. So schedule some time to watch that!

I thank you so much for joining me for this episode. And if you'd like to check out the show notes, you can do that at themeasuredmom.com/episode43. Thanks again, and we'll talk to you soon.