Triple R Teaching

You've heard it everywhere - the science of reading. what is it, anyway? Is it a fad? Is it a pendulum swing? Is it sound walls? Six syllable types? The definition isn't as complicated as you might have been led to believe. We'll get into it right after the intro.

If someone tells you, "This curriculum IS the science of reading," they are inaccurate at best, misleading at worst.

If someone tells you, "Sound walls ARE the science of reading," they don't understand the definition of the science of reading.

If someone tells you, "I teach phonemic awareness BECAUSE of the science of reading," they just might have it.

Here's a definition of the science of reading from the Reading League's Science of Reading: Defining Guide,

"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."

Let me condense it for you. The science of reading is a body of research. That's it! It's not a pendulum swing, it's not a philosophy, it's not a political agenda, a program, or a curriculum. It's not even a specific component of instruction like phonics. It's a body of research.

The problem is that many reading teachers don't know this research because they weren't taught it in their schools of education, and therefore they don't apply it to their classroom teaching.

The fact is the science of reading has been around for decades, this research has been conducted for many, many years. But it became especially clear in the year 2000 when the National Reading Panel identified five core components of early reading success. Those are phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. These are the basic ideas. The things we need to understand to teach reading well.

Now you'd think that after the National Reading Panel released its report, our schools of higher education would be scrambling to make sure that all of this was included in their curriculum for teaching future teachers. Unfortunately, that has not been the case for many schools of higher ed.

In 2011, a group called the National Council of Teacher Quality wanted to find out if what had been learned from the National Reading Panel was being applied to what future teachers were being taught. They sent letters and inquiries to 1400 institutions of higher education in the US. They ended up selecting 1,130 of these institutions to study, to analyze their curriculum. That includes 99% of the teachers trained in traditional college-based programs. So this was a VERY comprehensive study.

They wanted to find out what percent of these programs adequately address the five components I mentioned earlier: phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary. Believe me, the qualifications were not high. To qualify, a school of higher ed only had to have a single text and two lectures or a single text and a quiz on one of those topics.

So what would be your guess? What percent of these schools included all five components in their instruction? We would hope 100% as this is just the bare minimum! Unfortunately, only 18% of those schools included even the most basic instruction in all five components. 11% included instruction in four components, 13% in three components, 30% in two components, 15% in one component and 30% did not have even the most basic instruction in any of the five components.

I don't know about you, but to me, this is staggering and very upsetting! I can certainly attest, however, that this bears out in my own background. I went to school before 2013, but in my undergrad AND my graduate school programs, I learned precious little about phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In graduate school, I instead learned about balanced literacy, three-queuing, and running

records, NOT how to implement something like systematic and sequential phonics instruction.

That explains why this episode is actually a replacement of my first, first episode of Triple R Teaching. When I began to dive into the research in 2020, I began to realize that a lot of what I believed and taught was not based on the science of reading after all. I'm committed to you to replace these first 33 episodes of the podcast with scientifically based episodes that will truly help you refine your teaching. So stay tuned for that.

In the show notes for this episode, you'll find a link to the article, which explains the National Council of Teacher Quality results so you can learn more about higher educations in the US and how they're failing our future teachers. I'll also link to the Reading League's Science of Reading: Defining Guide and other resources that may be helpful as you try to figure out exactly what the science of reading is and what it means for you. You can find those show notes at reachallreaders.com/episode1. I'll talk to