

## Supplemental Material: Commentaries:

October 4, 2022 | COMMENTARY

### **Struggling early readers can catch up over time; let's figure out how**

"Why do so many students struggle to learn to read?" An equally essential question is: Why were so many struggling readers improving before the pandemic?

August 22, 2022 | COMMENTARY

### **Other states, select California districts can inform our comprehensive approach to literacy**

California is making many investments to support literacy development; however, it is not yet clear how these could add up to a comprehensive literacy approach.

August 18, 2022 | COMMENTARY

### **What it will take to ensure literacy for all California students**

As the pandemic has raised concerns about "learning loss" and widening achievement gaps, California policymakers have focused increasingly on how to strengthen literacy instruction in the country's most diverse state.

May 19, 2022 | COMMENTARY

### **A comprehensive reading plan is the only way to address our early literacy crisis**

California's failure to teach 3 million low-income students to read is an existential threat.

## Reader Comments to Part 1

1. Great article. A lot to think about in there. Reading for Pleasure is key but how do children get there if they aren't taught the basics alongside?
2. **Cindy Mc Cartney** 3 months ago  
I was trained in Balanced Early Literacy for two years. I went to conferences given by lit leaders from all over at least once a month. I was teaching first grade at the time. All of my students displayed success in their reading skills. Phonics are just part of the balanced lit program, which turned out to be quite successful. Because I was the lit leader at our school site, I received more extensive training. Perhaps that is the key to successful teaching. What if all of the kindergarten and first grade teachers received the training I had the opportunity to receive? Incorporating balance with phonics, and offering explicit training is what gives positive results. Don't throw out the baby with the bath water.
3. **Erik Kengard** 5 months ago  
○

What happened to parents helping their kids? I don't recall reading being a problem in the 1930s and 1940s. It's insane to leave learning such an important skill as reading to K12 teachers. Same for basic math, physics, . . .

4. **Lois Horner** 5 months ago

○

I taught many first graders to read using a program called The Writing Road to Reading by Romalda Spaulding. Her program was based on the Orton-Gillingham method of teaching reading using structured phonics.

5. **Neiani** 6 months ago

○

Great article! Teaching the science of reading to teachers is a must!!

6. **Tina Costantino-Lane, EdD** 6 months ago

○

Thank you for an informative article; however, one aspect that was not presented was that the kindergarten standards have only recently included extensive phonics. Some kindergarten students are not ready for the abstract nature of phonics, others have underdeveloped language, and still others have no interest in learning how to read.

Some students who struggle with reading in kindergarten may not struggle, if extensive phonics was postponed until first grade. Learning to read is not merely learning letter/sound correspondences as English has 26 letters but 44 sounds, and some words cannot be decoded. When the reading curriculum takes up most of the day, there is little time for other subjects. The content areas develop language that enable decoding.

7. **Sylvie Matte** 6 months ago

○

This article is music to my ears!! I am a parent of a very high IQ kid who could not read, was diagnosed with dyslexia and was going to totally fail and probably drop out of school if I didn't intervene to get her the instructions she needed.

The system put the blame on me, on her but never on themselves. These years were the most stressful and frustrating of my and my daughter's life. I will do anything I can to help other kids not to go through this. It's a nightmare.

8. **Sharon M Thurmond** 6 months ago

○

Thank you Karen for this informative article. I will share it with my community. And yes, in order to enjoy reading and be proficient in any subject,..."children must be taught how to link the sounds of the words with the symbols on the page". Our educational system has failed the majority of our students, but those of us who care, like The Natoma Black Parents United group. can and will stimulate change.

9. **Robert Bowman** 6 months ago

○

As a reading instruction specialist, I have taught dozens of students how to read, using a phonics based approach. Every single student learned to read well. Teaching the sounds of letters is the key. Once a student grasps the fact that 16 of the 26 letters make only 1 sound, and 10 letters make more than 1 sound, the student begins to understand how to read.

10. **Sherry Goldojarb** 6 months ago

○

I was a kinder teacher for 23 years with Los Angeles Unified. Most of my students were 2nd language learners. I would tell parents that one of the challenges was making the connection between letter forms and sounds. I provided an eclectic manner of teaching reading in order to meet the varying abilities of each student. I would say that 95 percent of my students were reading and writing by the end of their kinder year. I would evaluate my success if the 1st grade teachers were happy with their incoming students.

One thing I found helpful with just learning the alphabet was to include something physical, so we would learn the alphabet also using American Sign Language. It really helped some of the struggles. Unfortunately, school districts go with a reading program that is one size fits all. It doesn't. They need to give teachers a little leeway to work in things that work for their own students and style of teaching.

11. **Harvey Daniels** 6 months ago

○

SOR is *not* settled science. This is all about political control of schools.

12. **Renae Skarin** 6 months ago

○

The author is correct in that the SOR systematic phonics instruction, along with, and not excluding the other strands of Scarborough's reading rope are essential to skilled reading. "The Reading Rope consists of lower and upper strands. The word-recognition strands (phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words) work together as the reader becomes accurate, fluent, and increasingly automatic with repetition and practice.

Concurrently, the language-comprehension strands (background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge) reinforce one another and then weave together with the word-recognition strands to produce a skilled reader. This does not happen overnight; it requires instruction and practice over time." (dyslexiada.org)

What needs to be emphasized is that phonics instruction alone is not enough for many kids to learn to read skillfully. The author places great emphasis on the reading wars and the issue of phonics vs. balanced literacy. While I agree that not enough training in phonics has disadvantaged kids, a lack of attention to language comprehension is equally as detrimental to reading development, especially for kids who arrive in classrooms with a different primary language than the one taught in schools.

In addition, English learners may need support in contrasting the sounds of their home language as compared to English, along with a lot of oral language development to familiarize themselves with the sounds of English (which may be different from the home language). "Students may not be able to "hear" or produce a new sound in a second language. Students who cannot hear and work with the phonemes of spoken words will have a difficult time learning how to relate these phonemes to letters when they see them in written words." (Colorin Colorado). In addition, some of the topics in texts may not be familiar to students from culturally diverse contexts, and if they are not taught vocabulary and background knowledge, they will be reading without comprehending what they are reading.

We must be careful not to oversimplify the complexity of literacy instruction to “Just give them phonics and it’ll solve everything.” I don’t imagine that was the intention of the author, but the other important aspects of the reading rope were greatly deemphasized.

13. **Cynthia Damico** 6 months ago

○

Great article! Thank you for the in-depth research and clarity of expression. I believe that the “science of reading” must not stop with reading words. Students further benefit when taught how words work within the structure of a sentence and are provided with the metalinguistic tools to discuss syntax and structure when reading and writing.

14. **Beto** 6 months ago

○

Thank god I learned to read and write in another country. Americans’ obsession over this is nuts.

15. **Olive Josuweit** 6 months ago

○

We are at a time of change. Thanks for writing this article. Children deserve the right to be explicitly taught how to read.

16. **Caroline Grannan** 6 months ago

○

The battle between phonics and the various names of the alternate concept has been going on for decades. I’m 68, and my mom taught me to read before I started K with a book called “Why Johnny Can’t Read,” which demonstrates that the battle was happening in the ’50s. (Of course we have no idea if or how well I’d have learned without the phonic focus.) My take as a longtime watcher of education is: people learn in different ways; it’s not like it was \*better\* in some magical past when phonics was the mode of the day; and it’s unrealistic to believe there’s a watershed moment coming. Hope I’m proved wrong (but don’t place any bets you can’t afford).

17. **J J** 6 months ago

○

*And...*cursive needs to be taught again. How can a newly employed individual read a handwritten messages from an upper level staff member?

18. **Kathy DAIGLE** 6 months ago

○

Excellent article Karen D’Souza. Thank you for summarizing so many issues on one article.

19. **Tom Adams** 6 months ago

○

Readers of this article should examine California’s English Language Arts/English Language Development Curriculum Framework. It combines the ELA and ELD standards into a coherent curriculum. The framework is available at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/cf/>.

20. **Dr. Bill Conrad** 6 months ago

○

This is a beautifully written article! Thank you! I spent a career as an assessment and accountability director advocating for scientific approaches to the teaching of reading only to be consistently rejected. I had to resign my position for my advocacy of the science of teaching reading. The teachers are not to blame. The state board, administrators and governance are to to blame. State Superintendent Tony Thurmond continues to advocate that it is up to school districts to choose their reading curriculum. This is unacceptable. Read The Fog of Education! Thank you again for a fantastic article!

21. **Rivkah Sass** 6 months ago

○

As a former public librarian, I don't know whether to laugh or cry. A wise woman once told me that reading scores had not fundamentally changed in 50 years which might have served as a clue to educators that the approach to teaching reading using whole language and context was part of the problem, not the solution. Instead, as Emily Hanford pointed out in her excellent podcast series on the science of reading (2019), former educators were making lots of money selling their products making it difficult for school districts to make substantive change that would actually benefit children. The result? Frustrated teachers who know better, kids who are behind and parents who blame themselves. What a shame.

22. **ann** 6 months ago

○

Oh, so much to comment on. In 1989 when I was home with my infant child and not yet an educator, I avidly read the once great Los Angeles Times. That year they had a long form article called, no less, "The Reading Wars." So comprehensive was the research stated there I naively believed that our educational institutions must be rapidly adjusting to systematic reading instruction. I believed the "war" had been won. Yet when I did enter the field a decade later, even with the National Reading Panel out and available across the country, I came across the hard heads and bullies in the California educational system from Sacramento down to the district and school level, who refused to "accept the science" (ironic). Our "teaching institutions" have stubbornly resisted preparing our teaching workforce to teach reading, saddling our schools with teachers who either adopt a resistant stance to teaching reading systematically, grow frustrated and dissatisfied with education and leave the field, or just spend a career thinking some kids just can't learn.

This also has led to over referral to Special Education. Hundreds of thousands of students have lost the opportunity to learn to read and we all know the damaging consequences to them personally and to society. This institutional failure of teacher training has also been documented clearly by reports from the National Council on Teacher Quality, first in the early 2000s and continuing today but literally denied by tax payers supported public universities in California! Though I appreciate this reporting today, Ed Source has also been wishy washy on the subject over the past decade since I have been following. The comments by Webster and Boui are nonsense. Reading science is not difficult to learn and doesn't take years to learn. If Mississippi can do it, why not California? By the way the brave reporter in Mississippi was named Emily Hanford, a true and rare hero journalist and her piece can be listened to here: <https://www.apmreports.org/episode/2018/09/10/hard-words-why-american-kids-arent-being-taught-to-read>.

Finally, though I am passionate about this subject and have much more to say, when Tony Thurmond, the State Superintendent, cannot be a firm supporter of the science, he does not deserve (never did in my view) to hold his position!

