

Where do we stand?

Recently, several questions were brought to the attention of WSRA leaders and we felt it important to respond to these questions.

Is WSRA in favor of Science of Reading (SoR)? Why or why not? Why are we fighting Science of Reading instead of working with it?

WSRA operates with our organizational [mission](#) and [beliefs](#) always at the forefront. In alignment with this stated purpose, WSRA is not fighting against using science to support reading instruction and learning. Rather, WSRA is compelled to stand **FOR** the appropriate use of research and science, the freedom for teachers to use their expertise, an understanding of the complexity of literacy learning and instruction, and appropriate instruction for ALL learners.

An important question we need to ask is, *What is the Science of Reading?* There is currently no single, agreed-upon definition for this question. In their introduction to the International Literacy Association's 2020 [special issue of the *Reading Research Quarterly*](#), editors Goodwin and Jimenez noted "that the authors almost universally emphasize that narrow interpretations of the SOR (often taken up by the media to make its way into practice, policies, and schools) are problematic. Taken together, the articles in this special issue suggest that the SOR is both a body of knowledge (defined broadly by researchers and scholars) and an interpretation of that body of knowledge (often defined narrowly by audiences outside the academy)." (P. S8)

WSRA's concern is about narrow interpretations that limit the scope of literacy instruction, confine teachers to using preplanned and/or scripted programs that limit teacher expertise and their responsiveness to students, and misrepresent what appropriate literacy instruction includes. In any conversation about the science of reading, it is important to consider what research evidence is being promoted and what evidence is being ignored or marginalized and to avoid accepting unsubstantiated claims, especially those made by for-profit companies.

For example, in his recent book, Dr. Peter Afflerbach (2022) reminds us that "productive discussions about the diverse factors that influence students' reading development never devolve into an either-or debate, as is the case with decades-long and ongoing 'science of reading' that should inform our instruction. Students' self-efficacy when trying to comprehend a challenging text is as important as using phonics to unlock the meaning of a printed word. And learning and using vocabulary are as important as making appropriate attributions for one's reading performance. It is time to focus on *all*

of the factors that influence reading development, to examine their power, to understand their relationships, and to realize their promise in nurturing accomplished and enthusiastic student readers. It is time for teaching readers.” (p. 4)

Dr. Aflerbach goes on to describe important research-based elements of instruction missing, and sometimes demonized, in the SoR debate, including:

- Metacognition, Executive Functioning, and Mindfulness
- Self-Efficacy
- Motivation and Engagement
- Attributions and Growth Mindsets
- Epistemology and Epistemic Beliefs

WSRA will continue to support and advocate for the appropriate use of scientific evidence in teaching foundational skills, as well as in all other aspects of literacy.

Aflerbach, P. 2022. *Teaching Readers (Not Reading): Moving Beyond Skills and Strategies to Reader-Focused Instruction*. The Guilford Press.

Goodwin, A. & Jimenez, R. 2022. The Science of Reading: Supports, Critiques, and Questions. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 55(S1) pp. S7–S16. International Literacy Association.