



K-12 Literacy Dyslexia Research Network: Cohort 2

Session 2: Misunderstandings of the Science of Reading

Sharon Vaughn & Elizabeth Stevens

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mimtsstac.org



Note About Recording

Today's session is being recorded and will be available via the MiMTSS TA Center's YouTube page to those with the link

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PA 146, Section 7(a) – (f) Requirements

This professional learning series meets the requirements outlined in the following section(s) of Public Act 146:

- Section 7(f): “Evidence-based instructional methods and features of evidence-based interventions that are grounded in the science of reading and principles of structured literacy that are designed to effectively meet the needs of most pupils.”

For more information, please review the PA 146 Professional Learning Resources on the [MDE Literacy Professional Learning webpage](https://www.michigan.gov/mde/services/academic-standards/literacy/professional-learning) (<https://www.michigan.gov/mde/services/academic-standards/literacy/professional-learning>).

Disclaimer

Any mention of specific literacy curricula or intervention programs in this presentation is for instructional purposes only and does not constitute an endorsement by the MiMTSS TA Center or the Michigan Department of Education.

To view a list of approved literacy curricula and intervention programs by the Section 35m Committee for Literacy Achievement, please visit the following page:

[The Committee for Literacy Achievement/HQ Literacy Materials Grant](https://www.michigan.gov/mde/services/academic-standards/literacy/literacy-grants/section-35m)
(<https://www.michigan.gov/mde/services/academic-standards/literacy/literacy-grants/section-35m>)

Group Agreements

Use the chat feature for:

- Sharing comments and reactions
- Engaging with the discussion
- Responding to prompts and activities
- Clarifications during the session

Optional networking time:

- Individual questions/scenarios
- Topic-specific concerns
- Problem-solving discussions
- Peer connection and collaboration



Purpose

To support educators in understanding K-12 reading development, characteristics of dyslexia, and significant learning needs related to dyslexia. This includes making meaningful connections to Michigan's Public Act 146 of 2024.

Agenda

- 1.0 **Connections to Previous Learning and Public Act 146**
- 2.0 Misunderstandings of the Science of Reading
- 3.0 Application to Practice
- 4.0 Wrap Up and Next Steps
- 5.0 Optional: Networking Sessions



1.0 Connections to Previous Learning and PA 146



Connecting Session 1 to Session 2

- Understanding characteristics of dyslexia gives us an important lens for understanding reading difficulties.
- The Science of Reading gives us an evidence base for understanding how reading develops and how to teach it effectively.
- Together, they help us understand how evidence-based instruction can support students with characteristics of dyslexia, and strengthen reading instruction for all students.

Connections to PA 146

- Section 7(f): “Evidence-based instructional methods and features of evidence-based interventions that are grounded in the science of reading and principles of structured literacy that are designed to effectively meet the needs of most pupils.”
- Our session today explicitly addresses evidence-based literacy instruction, the Science of Reading, and principles of structured literacy.

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Presenters:

The content for this training day was developed based on the work of:



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Intended Outcomes

1

Define the Science of Reading (i.e., what it *is*, what it is *not*).

2

Identify myths or misconceptions about the Science of Reading.

3

Explain why these are misconceptions using your knowledge of the research.

4

Identify implications for practice.

5

Explain how you will apply today's learning in your teaching and/or coaching role.

Cohort 2 Training Schedule

Date	Time	Topic
September 15, 2026	10:00-11:30pm ET	Defining dyslexia
October 22, 2026	1:00-2:30pm ET	Misunderstandings of the Science of Reading
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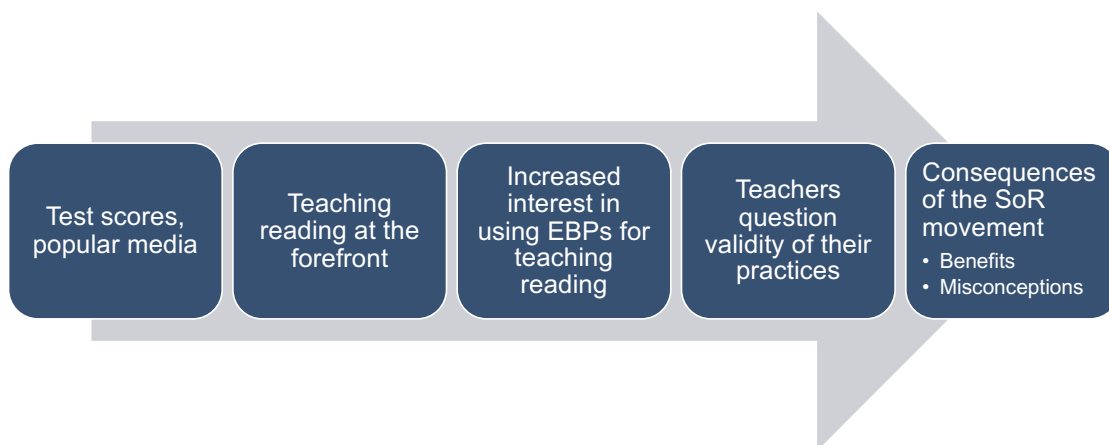
2.0 Misunderstandings of the Science of Reading

In the chat: Share one "big takeaway" you learned from session 1.



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The Science of Reading Movement



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The number of states that have passed legislation on the SoR is:

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What is the focus of the SoR Legislation?

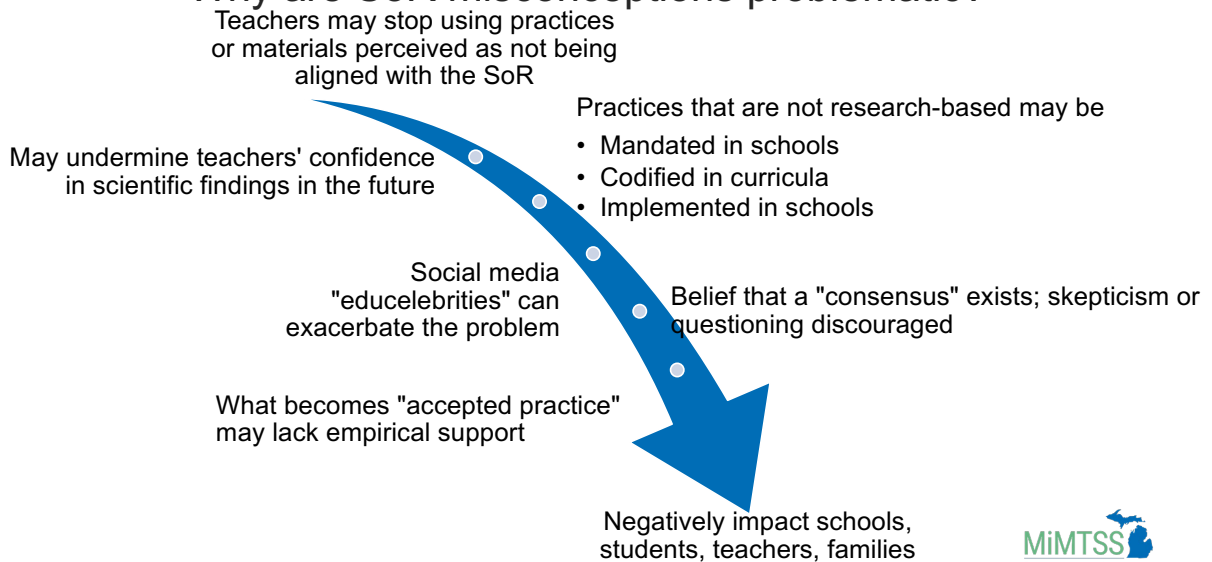
Curriculum Mandates – Bans “three-cueing” strategies.

Universal Screeners – Typically for K-3rd grade

Professional Development – Retrain Classroom Teachers

Teacher Prep Programs – Forces university TE programs to change how they teach.

Why are SoR misconceptions problematic?



Does SoR refer to a specific curriculum?

Do not edit
How to change the design

Clarification 1: Does the SoR refer to a program or specific pedagogy?

Misconception: The SoR is a package or specific pedagogy.

- We are “doing the SoR”
- We are a “SoR district” or a “SoR school”
- The only effective programs are named “Structured Literacy” or “Multisensory”

Effective reading instruction is **based** on the SoR.

- Not a program or pedagogy that can be purchased or adopted
- Program alignment with SoR exists on a continuum

The SoR is not a curriculum, but includes:

- A connection between PD and the curriculum.
- Screening and progress monitoring tools.
- Teacher knowledge and understanding about how skilled reading develops.
- Practices and strategies supported by evidence.



Is learning to read a natural process?

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Clarification 2: Is learning to read a natural process?

Misconception: Learning to read is a natural process.

- If we expose students to a lot of books and read to them a lot, they will figure out how to read!

Learning language is a natural process, but learning to read is NOT a natural process.

- Learning to read does not occur by simply being exposed to it (i.e., Watching and/or listening to someone read)

Research shows most students learn best when:

- Provided explicit, systematic, cumulative instruction in the alphabetic code and taught how to apply to code to read words.
- Taught vocabulary and oral language skills are supported.
- Given many opportunities to read and understand complex text.
- Provided opportunities to practice with support and feedback from the teacher.



Clarification 3: Has the SoR established there is only *ONE* effective way to teach reading?

Misconception: There is ONE way to effectively teach reading.

- If we don't teach in that prescribed manner, students won't learn to read.
- A specific "scope and sequence" must be used.

There are many effective ways to teach students to read.

- Most students do best with an **organized approach** to reading that includes
 - Alphabetic principle, reading words, learning word meanings, accessing complex texts
- **Differentiating instruction** for a range of learners is important
 - Using a set of practices and a strong curriculum will not automatically ensure all students learn to read



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Does SoR indicate that most reading instruction should focus on phonics?

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Clarification 4: Does the SoR say most of reading instruction should focus on phonics?

Misconception: Most reading instruction should be focused on phonics.

Reasons why phonics has been central to the SoR movement:

- There has been a longstanding debate over phonics (The Reading Wars).
- Many teachers - to no fault of their own - are unprepared to teach phonics.
- Phonics is often neglected in the "balanced" approach to literacy.

Decades of research shows phonics instructions is necessary for most children to learn to read. However,

- Phonics isn't the ONLY component of reading instruction (e.g., vocabulary, background knowledge).
- Phonics should not even be the majority of reading instruction.
- Curriculum developers may have overly weighted materials toward phonics.

Clarification 5: The Role of Pictures in Reading

Misconception: Pictures should never be used in reading instruction.

Referring to pictures to decode words is problematic.

- Effective reading instruction targets application of the alphabetic code to read words.

Pictures can be used to promote engagement with the story.

Pictures can also be used to promote comprehension.

- Helps students visualize what's happening in the story
- Verify understanding
- Used to ask and answer questions, make inferences, prompt discussion, connect to knowledge and feelings

(Vellutino & Scanlon, 2002; Scanlon & Vellutino, 1996, 1997; Vellutino et al., 2000)



Clarification 6: What is the role of comprehension in the SoR?

Why is comprehension so rarely the focus of debate around the SoR?

There has been considerable disagreement about the inclusion of phonemic awareness and phonics in reading instruction.

- Practices that help students build foundational skills for word reading, phonemic awareness and phonics are what has been missing from effective reading instruction.

There is no argument about reading comprehension; comprehension is the outcome of reading.



What Are Decodable Texts?

1. Texts students like to read because they can read them.
2. Texts that have sight words students know well.
3. Texts that have words that represent previously taught words or decodable words.
4. Texts that have phonemic awareness and few or no pictures.

Clarification 7: Does the SoR say decodable texts are a necessary part of instruction?

Misconception: Decodable texts are a necessary part of reading instruction.

What are "decodable" texts?

- A high proportion of words are phonetically regular and/or patterns students have learned.
- The assumption is that students should be able to read the words by sounding them out (i.e., because they've learned the patterns).
- Provide a scaffold to make text accessible and give students an opportunity to practice patterns learned.

Clarification 7 continued: Does the SoR say decodable texts are a necessary part of instruction?

What is the evidence on using decodable texts vs. authentic texts?

- There is little evidence using decodable text is superior to authentic text (Blevins, 2019).
- Other studies showed no benefit compared to authentic text (Jenkins et al., 2004; Price-Mohr & Price, 2019).

When should decodables be used?

- With beginning readers but their use should be faded
- Students should have practice with many text types
- Authentic texts expose students to increased vocabulary, syntax, and background knowledge

Clarification 8: Does the SoR say “leveled” texts should never be used?

Misconception: Don’t ever use “leveled” texts.

The problem was not the text themselves but how “levels” and leveled texts were used.

- Schools may throw out their leveled text sets to align their practices with SoR
- Waste of potentially valuable content for reading practice

Students should have practice reading a variety of text types across a range of levels

- Extensive practice opportunities
- Access to “stretch” texts



Does the SoR apply to emerging bilingual readers?

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Clarification 9: Does the SoR generalize to students who are English learners (ELs)?

Misconception: Reading instruction aligned with the SoR does not benefit ELs.

The SoR extends to ELs and accelerates learning to read (Vargas et al., 2021).

- What is the same about reading for ELs and non-ELs?
- Models of reading (e.g., The Simple View of Reading; Gough & Tunmer, 1986)
- Skills that predict reading proficiency or risk
- Intervention effectiveness

Keep in mind, though, ELs need additional support in oral language.

Clarification 10: Is the 3-cueing system helpful for ELs?

Is the three-cueing system helpful for ELs?

No; all students need to be able to read words.

- Three cueing is not an evidence-based way to teach ELs and non-ELs to read words.

Clarification 11: Is the SoR based solely on implementing whole-class instruction?

Is the SoR based solely on whole-class (core) instruction?

No; multiple group formats are associated with improved outcomes for readers.

- Whole group
- Pairs
 - Fluency practice
- Small group
 - Reteaching, preteaching, providing targeted, supported practice with specific feedback

Clarification 12: Does the SoR say phonemic awareness should be taught without print?

Misconception: Phonemic awareness should be taught without print.

Misconception: Phonemic awareness should be taught in the upper elementary grades.

Misconception: Advanced phonemic awareness skills are necessary for learning to read.

- Adding, deleting, substituting phonemes

What does the research show about teaching PA?

- Reading outcomes are better when PA is taught with letters (NRP, 2000; Stelega et al., 2023).
- PA without letters is appropriate for students who haven't learned letter sounds (e.g., PreK or early K).



Clarification 12 continued: Does the SoR say phonemic awareness should be taught without print?

Why is PA important for beginning readers?

- Segmenting -> encoding
- Blending -> decoding

Good phonics instruction naturally integrates PA.

- K, 1st, and 2nd graders who received stand-alone, oral PA did not do better than students who did not receive it (Coyne et al., 2021; Little et al., 2024).

There is no evidence to suggest training in advanced, oral-only PA skills is necessary to improve reading performance (MacCandiss et al., 2004)

- PA can be practiced while students read and spell words.



Clarification 13: Does the SoR deem it necessary for students to learn syllable division rules?

Misconception: The SoR shows that students must learn syllable division rules.

What does the research show about teaching syllable division rules?

- Not established these rules are necessary for learning to read well
- Approaches developed before a lot of the reading research occurred

Concerns with syllable division rules:

- English orthography is opaque
- Rules are inconsistent (Johnston, 2002; Kearns, 2020)

Clarification 14: Does the SoR say that reading nonsense words is a key part of phonics instructions?

Misconception: Students should practice reading nonsense words.

What does the research show about having students practice reading pseudowords?

- Important for **assessing** word reading
- No studies documenting extensive practice in pseudoword reading is beneficial
- Some interventions that greatly improved students' pseudoword reading did not translate to improved reading of real words and connected text (Flynn et al., 2012; Scammacca et al., 2007; Stevens et al., 2021; Torgesen, 2006; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007)

Reading real words is the goal; have students practice with real words.

Implications for practice

Teach on EBPs (not programs or buzz phrases)

The SoR is more than a curriculum

- Screening
- Progress monitoring
- Teacher knowledge about reading development
- PD

Provide explicit, systematic, cumulative instruction in word reading and spelling

- Teach PA with print!
- Use real words for practice



Implications for practice

Teach vocabulary and support students' oral language development

Provide multiple opportunities for students to read a variety of texts

- Decodable
- Authentic
- Stretch

Differentiate instruction

- A "one-size-fits-all" approach will not work for all students
- Customization is key!



Implications for practice

Don't be afraid to use pictures to support reading comprehension

Practices that work for non-ELs also work for ELs

Use flexible groupings based on the instructional objective and students' needs

- One-on-one
- Small group
- Whole group

Think fluidly about "The Big Five"

- Integrate instruction across these components
- Don't forget about BK, writing, and spelling

3.0 Application to Practice

Reminder: Our Breakout Room Norms

- Identify the **facilitator** who will lead discussion and keep the group moving forward
- Identify a **notetaker** who will document key ideas and share those with the larger group (in the chart or aloud)
- Identify a **timekeeper** who will keep track of time and support with making sure the group answers all questions



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In your breakout rooms...



Identify other misconceptions that weren't presented today.

Share 2 things you learned today that are relevant to your teaching and/or coaching role.

Share 2 action steps related to these misconceptions.

Consider core instruction, intervention, and coaching/supporting teachers

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Let's debrief!

What questions do you have for us related to...

- Lessons learned from today
- Other misconceptions
- Action steps



4.0 Wrap Up and Next Steps

More Resources to Explore

Dyslexia Knowledge Measure

Clemens, N.H. and Vaughn, S. (2023), Understandings and Misunderstandings About Dyslexia: Introduction to the Special Issue. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 58(2), 181-187. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.499>

(Open access)

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What's coming up?

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Resources from Today's Session

- Slide deck is available on the K-12 Literacy Dyslexia Research Network page of the MiMTSS TA Center's website
- After today's session, we will post a 1-page "Learning Guide" with highlights from the session and any resources shared
- Do not forget to access the FAQ for any questions you might have

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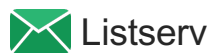
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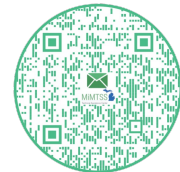
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5.0 Networking Session

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Optional Session Prompts

- **Explore:** Dig deeper into a resource or idea from today's session
- **Connect:** Discuss how today's content connects to literacy priorities and practices in your context
- **Apply:** Identify one idea, resource, or strategy you could apply in your practice
- **Share:** Develop a plan for sharing key takeaways or resources with colleagues, staff, or other stakeholders. Outline talking points to increase staff or colleague understanding

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