
Hoping for the best is not a viable strategy

Margaret Goldberg



Where does the Science of Reading movement go from here? A literacy activist reflects on the current situation in the US.

We're keeping our worries about the Science of Reading movement quiet, afraid that voicing them will somehow increase the chances that it could fail. But anyone who cares deeply about its success is plagued by 'what ifs' that keep us up at night.

What if we fall short because ...

- we're expecting too much of teachers?
- we've underestimated the support schools need?
- funding dries up?
- schools overcorrect and provide explicit instruction at the expense of students reading and enjoying books?
- curriculum developers continue to offer topic-focused units instead of the lessons needed to help students understand complex texts?
- no one fights for the kids who depend on school for language instruction after decoding instruction improves and dyslexia advocates have moved on to other causes?
- people abandon the work when they realise there's still so much to learn?
- researchers continue using schools to conduct studies and extract data, but never learn how to actually help teachers?
- there's no system for monitoring implementations across the country to learn what works?

Anyone knowledgeable about reading research and what's happening in classrooms has worries like these. But most of us have remained quiet, afraid of seeming unsupportive or of slowing the momentum that's been building. I worry, though, what will happen if we don't speak up?

How will we feel if a summary of this period in history is:

The Science of Reading, a wide body of interdisciplinary research about reading, was dubbed 'SoR' and it became a brief movement in education. Teachers aspired to align their instruction with scientific evidence, but due to lack of support and misinformation, they failed to implement effective practices. Student achievement remained stagnant, and teachers came to believe that factors outside the classroom have a greater influence on student learning than classroom instruction.

A few brave people have said we're well on our way to that future:

Somehow, we have catapulted from a very helpful, informative body of research to this point where SoR is a movement, a



group to belong to, an overarching pedagogy, a belief, a rebuttal, a title, a platitude. We have so many experts across the globe disseminating information via professional learning who rarely have the practical expertise to support sound implementation, so en masse we've activated the adage of 'a little bit of knowledge is dangerous' ([McLean, 2024, para. 6](#)).

What I'm fearful of, cause I've seen it so many times, is movements sometimes gloss over detail. And here, the details are so critical ([Lyon, 2024, 13:50 minutes](#)).

Slowing things down might be a good thing. As the SoR movement picks up momentum, implementations are going awry ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and everywhere). School systems are complicated, political and resistant to change. State, district and school leaders are largely unaware of the [implementation science](#) that could help guide their work, so they act fast and without careful plans. Big bold promises, impassioned speeches and even large curriculum purchases, are easier than the daily work of helping teachers learn to teach reading.

None of us wants to undermine progress, but we need to temper the dogmatism and hurry of the SoR movement. Admitting that the work will be complicated is a step in the right

direction. Every worry I listed (and countless more) is a problem we need to slow down to fix.

District and state leaders are focused on reading right now, and while that focus won't last, they do want their initiatives to be successful. Now is the time to establish research to practice partnerships that can outlast the SoR trend.

The SoR movement may sputter out, as movements tend to do, or it could mature and permanently shift the foundation of our educational system. How we use this moment will determine how much reading research helps schools in the future.

This article originally appeared on [The Right to Read](#) blog.

Margaret Goldberg is currently a literacy coach at Nystrom Elementary, a school in California's Early Literacy Support Block grant. Within that grant, she supported a network of literacy coaches, all striving to improve early literacy achievement in California's lowest performing schools. Prior to this, Margaret held a variety of roles including district Early Literacy Lead, reading interventionist, and classroom teacher. In every role, she's worked to help schools and districts align instruction with reading research. Margaret is the co-founder of The Right to Read Project, a group of teachers, researchers and activists committed to the pursuit of equity through literacy. Her writing is published on [The Right to Read Project](#) blog and on [Reading Rockets](#).

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