

# What School Leaders Need to Know About the Science of Reading

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## Agreements for Our Time Together

### Stay Engaged

Staying engaged means “remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue.”

### Experience Discomfort

This norm acknowledges that discomfort is inevitable, especially, in dialogue about race, and that participants make a commitment to bring issues into the open.

### Speak Your Truth

This means being open about thoughts and feelings and not just saying what you think others want to hear.

### Expect & Accept Non Closure

This agreement asks participants to “hang out in uncertainty” and not rush to quick solutions, especially in relation to racial understanding, which requires ongoing dialogue.

Adapted from Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations

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“Can you help a  
out a new  
administrator?”



3

In my email, I shared the following:

- Reading instruction is complex, not a simple equation
- Science requires inquiry, not dogma
- Multiple "sciences" of reading matter
- Authentic texts support skill development
- Programs ≠ responsive instruction

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“What  
happened with  
the new  
administrator?”



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## What I Believe About the Science of Reading

- Teaching reading is not simple.
- The science is anything but settled.
- Good intentions can lead to inequitable outcomes.
- One science is dependent on another.
- You can't buy the science of reading.

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## Expected Outcomes

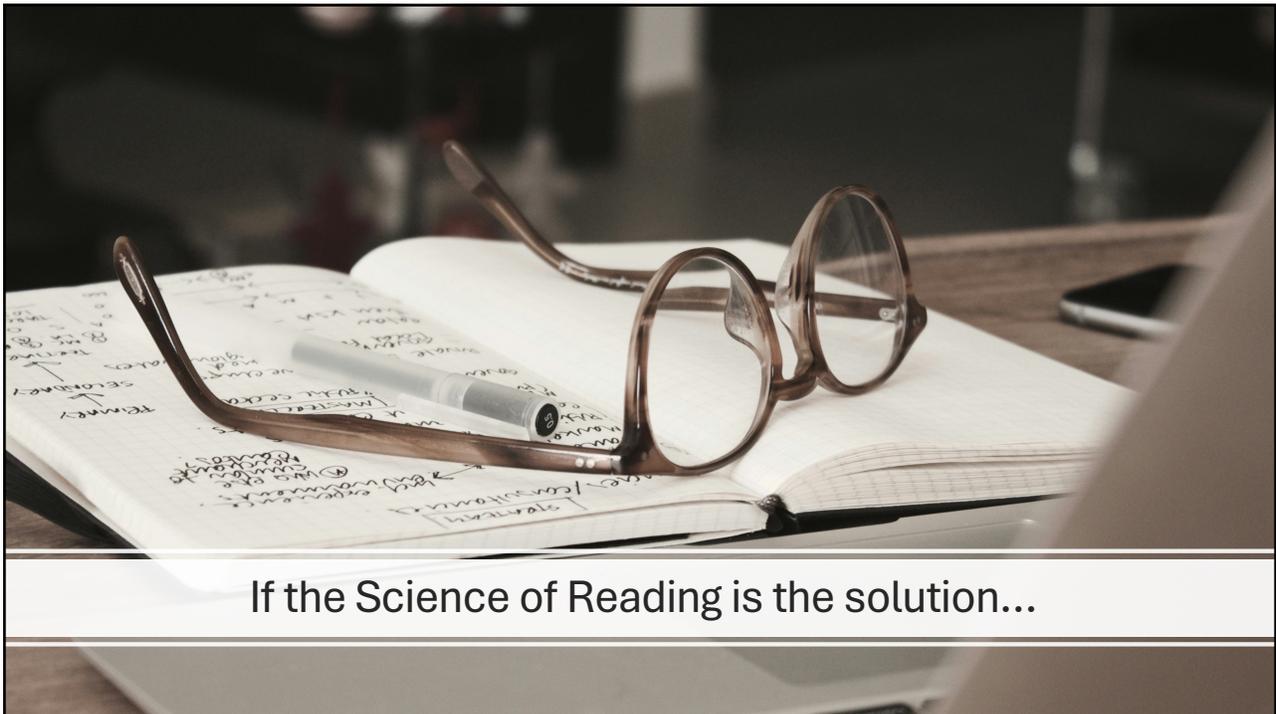
### The session will:

- Expand our notion of what "counts" in reading instruction
- Provide strategies for engaging in professional conversations
- Provide entry points for empowering teachers and students
- Build professional knowledge
- Explore our shared beliefs

### This session will not:

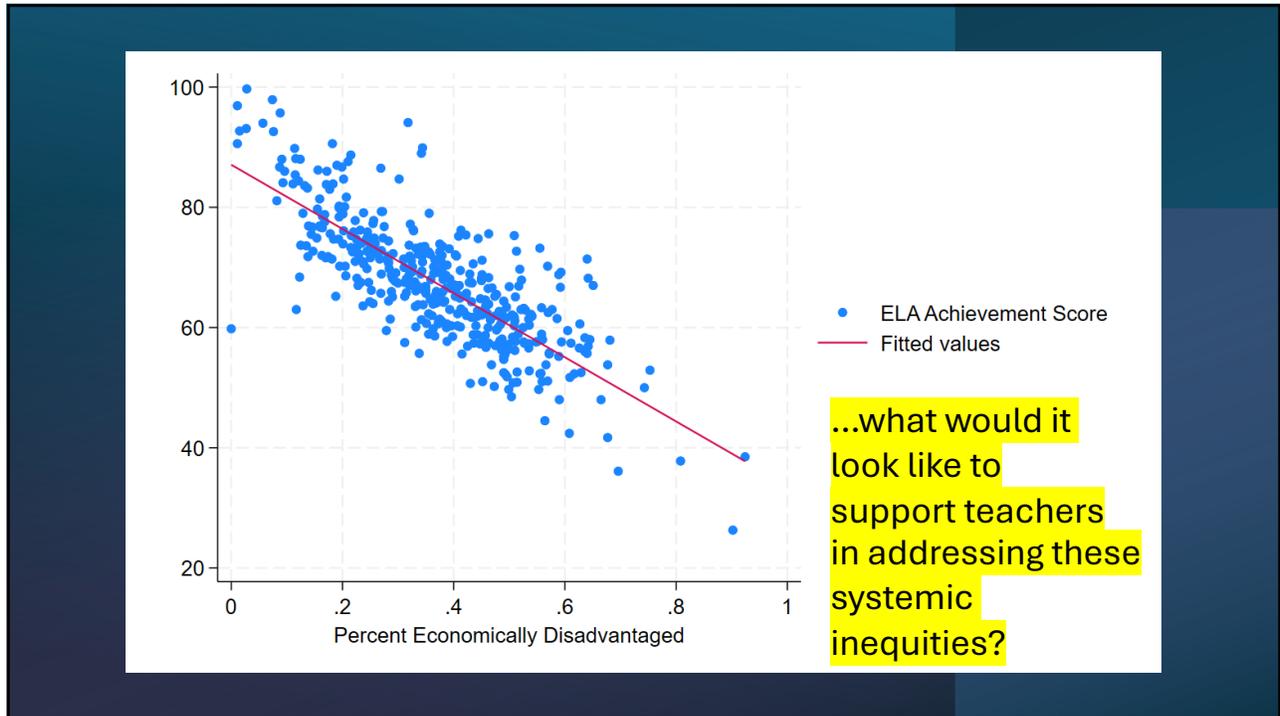
- Tell you which program to buy
- Give you a script to follow
- Settle the debate

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If the Science of Reading is the solution...

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## Influence and Variance

- 63% of variance = economic disadvantage
- 37% of variance = ?

63% of variance = economic disadvantage

37% of variance = ?

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#1 - Teaching reading is not simple.



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## This Equation is Incomplete

1. Teaching reading is not simple.

$$R = D \times LC$$

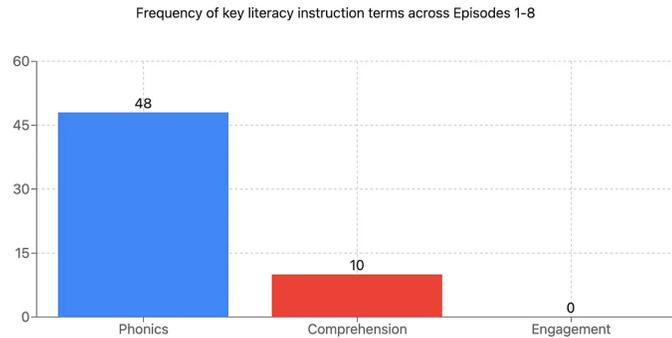
Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986)

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# Emily Hanford's "Sold a Story"

#1 – Teaching reading is not simple.

Word Frequency in "Sold a Story" Podcast Series (Episodes 1-8)

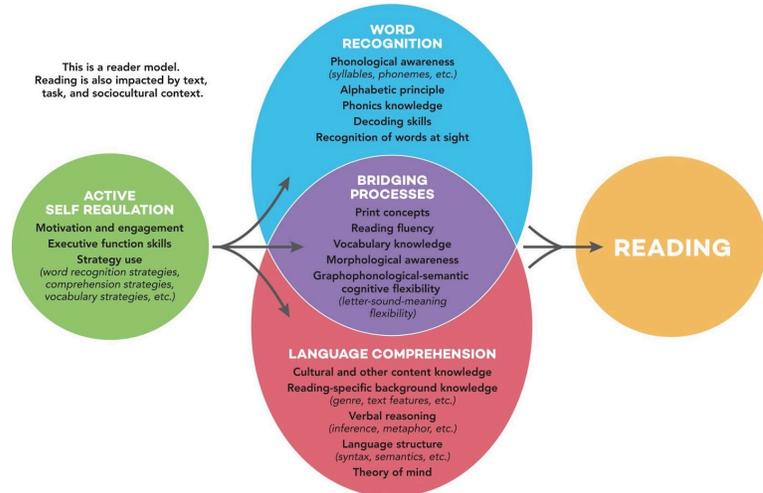


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# The Active View of Reading (Duke and Cartwright)

#1 – Teaching reading is not simple.

This is a reader model. Reading is also impacted by text, task, and sociocultural context.



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## Try it: Expand your reading assessment process.

#1 – Teaching reading is not simple.

Student	Oral Reading Fluency	Attendance	Behavior	Past, Current Supports	Teacher Observations



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## #2 – The science is anything but settled.

**Matt Renwick**  
@ReadByExample

🗑️ ⋮

I don't know who needs to hear this...

Teaching a literacy curriculum program like a script, lesson-by-lesson, to all kids without considering their current interests, abilities, and needs:

- is not scientific
- drains the joy out of learning
- leads to inequities

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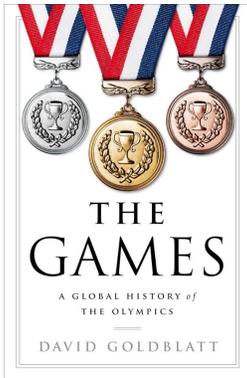
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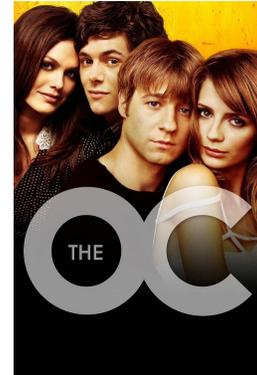
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# What gets excluded we say “the” Science of Reading?

#2 – The Science is Anything But Settled



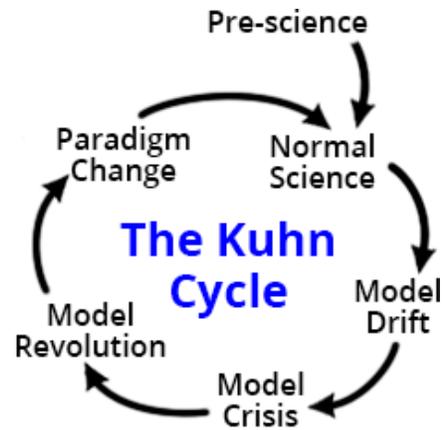
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# Paradigm Shift (Thomas Kuhn)

#2 – The science is anything but settled.



Visual: <https://www.thwink.org/>

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## Try it: Facilitate Professional Conversation with an Article Study

#2 – The science is anything but settled.



Rachael Gabriel – “The Sciences of Reading Instruction”

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#3 – Good intentions can lead to inequitable outcomes.

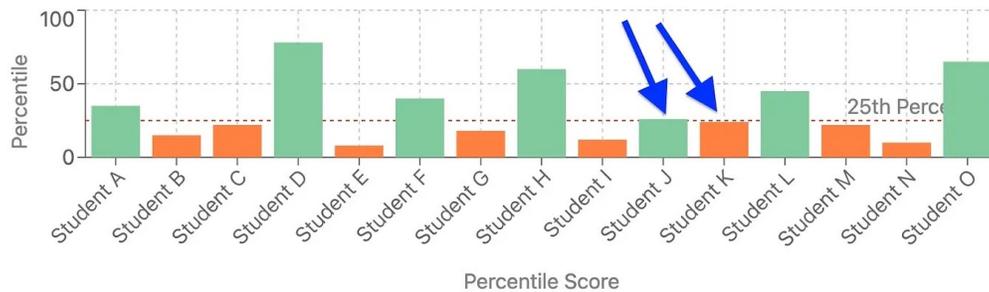


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# What's the difference between 24% and 25%?

#3 – Good intentions can lead to inequitable outcomes.

Individual Student Percentiles



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## The Potential Impact

#3 – Good intentions can lead to inequitable outcomes.

### What gets added via the SoR movement:

- Scripted curricula
- Limits on responsive instruction
- Isolated skill practice
- Decontextualized texts
- Assessments that measure what is easy

### What gets removed that students need:

- Voice and choice in what to read
- Robust classroom libraries
- Teacher professionalism
- Authentic tasks
- Culturally relevant texts
- Time to read and talk with peers

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## “The Myth of Average” – Todd Rose



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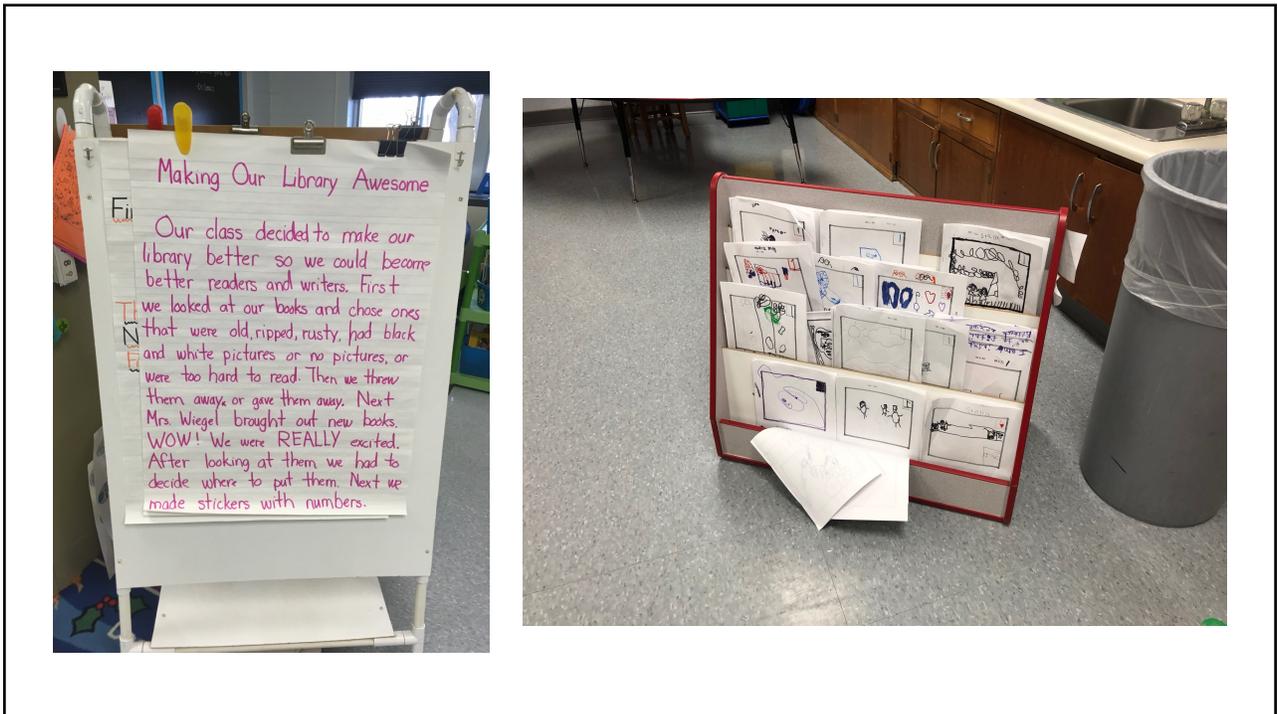
## Try it: Co-Organize Classroom Libraries with Students



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#4 – One science is dependent on another.

Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing  
by JUDY BLUME  
illustrated by Roy Doty

1980

It's a bad life

Writing By By  
Matt E. Remwick

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“Science of reading - I don't know what their theory is. They talk about ‘sequential’ and ‘direct, explicit instruction’, but that's not a theory.”

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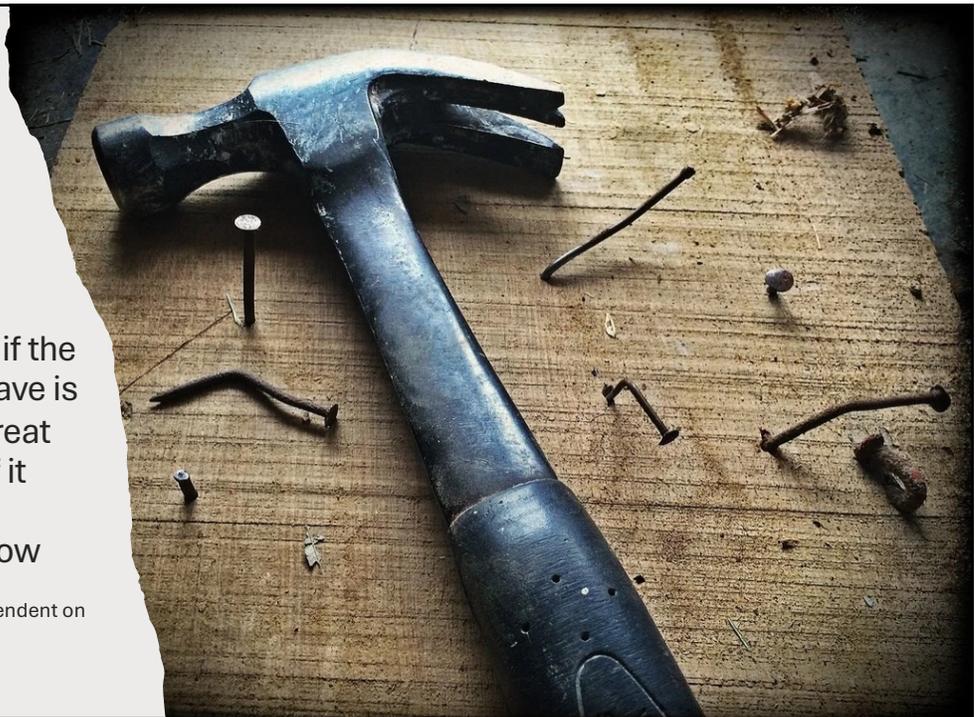
#4 – One science is dependent on another.



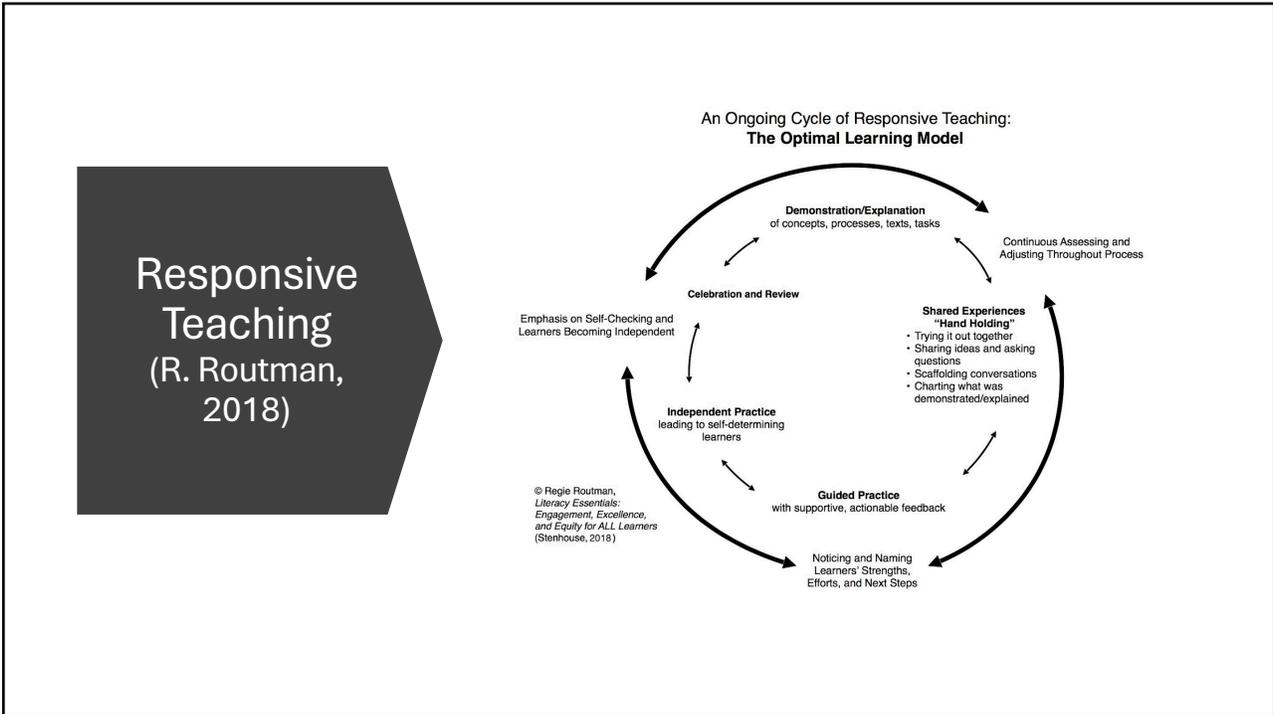
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“It is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail.” – Abraham Maslow

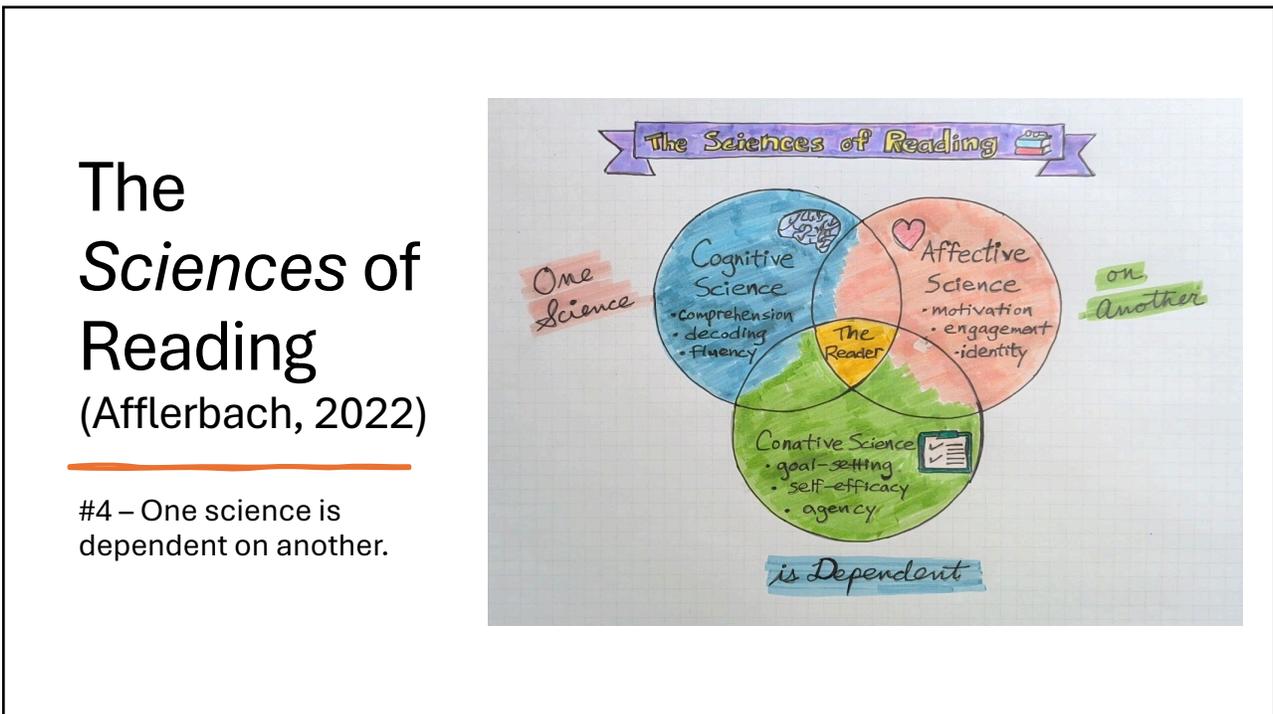
#4 – One science is dependent on another.



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# Try it: Read Professionally, Share Your Knowledge with Staff



- International Literacy Association (ILA): *The Reading Teacher, Reading Research Quarterly*
- National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE): *English Journal, Voices From the Middle, Language Arts*
- Phi Delta Kappan: *Kappan Magazine*
- ASCD: *Educational Leadership*

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# #5 – You can't buy the Science of Reading.



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“If everything is the Science of Reading...”

#5 – You can’t buy the Science of Reading.



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## The Reader’s Braid



A BETTER READING MODEL – A READER’S BRAID

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### A Pathway to Becoming a Reader

- Identified for more support (skills and strategies)
- Resistant to intervention (lack of self-efficacy, growth mindset, executive functioning)
- Drew student in with Venus flytrap, related texts (motivation and engagement)
- Became a more confident, competent reader over time (skills and strategies)



#5 – You can't buy the Science of Reading.

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## Try it: Develop Shared Beliefs

#5 – You can't buy the Science of Reading.

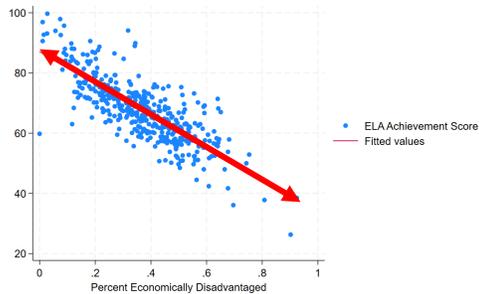
### Our Beliefs About Reading for Understanding

- 1 Choice in what students read and how much they read influences motivation and achievement.
- 2 The easiest texts for English learners to understand are those in which the concepts and vocabulary are familiar.
- 3 Students can have good comprehension even if they do not read well orally.
- 4 Rereading is an excellent strategy when comprehension breaks down.
- 5 Students need to do lots of independent reading of self-selected texts.

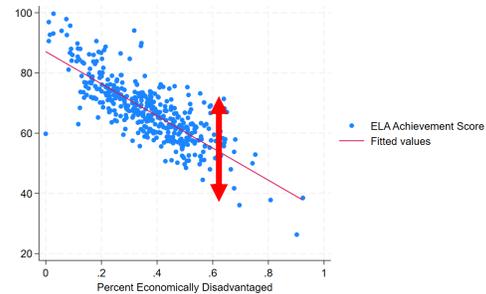
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## Do we choose:

Destiny?



Agency?



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## What high-performing schools with similar demographics had in common:

- No shared programs; shared *commitment*
- High expectations for every student
- Inclusion as default
- Sustained investment in teachers

Simple stories → Complex reality → Actionable leadership.

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How do you choose to see your readers?

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