

Dr. Stephen Truch - BC DYSLEXIA OCTOBER 3RD TALK

(this is what Steve had written, but he spoke to these points differently on October 3rd, because of time constraints)

Thanks so much for this invitation. It's a pleasure and honor to be here. There is currently a great deal of attention being paid by educators to what the massive body of scientific research on reading has to say about initial reading instruction and remedial reading instruction. And it is affecting all levels of education from legislation to classroom instruction. This is an opportune time then, to evaluate what works well and what's in the best interests of students.

But it's also very important to keep some balance and not get locked into a single perspective. There is not a singular science **of** reading, but there is plenty of research **about** reading. We don't want to end up, as Dr. Mark Seidenberg, an expert from the cognitive sciences, tells us, as "just selling a new story."

A few months back, when Cathy invited me to say a few words for today, I was going to (1) recommend that the BC legislative assembly support a motion for early screening of all students in kindergarten to identify those who are at risk for learning to read and (2) provide literacy support to parents in particular who face a tremendous financial burden when attempting to remediate dyslexic students.

She told me recently there is now a recommendation #118 from the Report on the Budget 2024 Consultation and it reads:

"Support students with dyslexia by offering structured literacy programs and providing targeted funding and mandatory screening starting in kindergarten."

So, congratulations, this motion is a wonderful step in the right direction, and I would urge you to pass through to legislation.

I would also urge you to add an additional motion supporting funding to parents, like what already exists for students with autism spectrum disorder.

Parents of dyslexic students face a tremendous financial burden when seeking the intensive remedial support they require.

The following questions then arise: “What happens next?” And “how is the motion to be implemented throughout this vast school system? [I have one or two thoughts about that.] Of course, money will have to be spent on teacher training for those already in the classroom and for teachers in BC universities who are training to become teachers. The first place where instruction in scientific principles related to the teaching of reading should take place is at the university level. Teachers exiting with their degree need to be well-prepared in a practical way, on how to teach reading to minimize reading casualties, including dyslexia in the first place. And secondly, they need to know how to remediate those delayed readers, including those with dyslexia.

The next place of change is through and by professional development for those teachers already in the system so existing professional development funding will need to be channeled in that direction.

But my next recommendation is not to jump on a bandwagon. There are three important questions at this point to ask and answer:

1. What needs to be taught?
2. When does it need to be taught?
3. How should it be taught?

Scientific research gives us partial answers to each of them, but some careful reflection is needed from more than one perspective. For example, there are many “structured literacy programs.” They are structured in ways that differ from each other and some bring stronger outcomes for students much sooner than others. Each structured literacy program that might be considered for classroom and remedial implementation should be accompanied by research showing growth in reading scores for recipient students that outdo traditional methods or each other. I have my own opinion as to which approaches are likely to be more effective, as well as when and how they should be taught, but now is not the time to discuss them.

Scientific research on reading is ubiquitous. And the teaching components for comprehensive classroom and intervention programs based on research from the cognitive, neuropsychological and educational sciences continues to unfold. Using that evidence, we need to ensure, as much as humanly possible, the best outcomes for all students.

There is much to change in the classroom and much that is already very good. In our zeal for quick reform, let's remember to keep what's already effective.