

To continue to follow scientifically flawed and debunked theories from the whole-language/balanced literacy approach, which claims that all children learn to read through some sort of immersion or osmosis theory, is nothing short of negligence. The science is in, and it's been in for some time. As educators, parents, allied health professionals, community members, politicians and policy makers, we must come together to translate and systematically embed *The Science of Reading* approaches across all Tasmanian schools.

Thanks to developments in brain imaging and neuroscience, there is no denying that three cueing/balanced literacy simply does not work for all children – evident in Tasmania's ongoing literacy struggles whereby, '...50% of Tasmanians are deemed functionally illiterate.' (*Parliamentary committee findings*). However, there seems to be a misguided and tightly-held belief within pockets of the community, which views explicit and systematic reading, writing and spelling instruction as an 'intervention' approach and some sort of 'drill' that kills the joy of reading. This is not the case and those who seek to reduce *The Science of Reading* to phonics instruction alone, do not fully understand it.

Our current indecisiveness regarding the adoption of a system-wide *Orton-Gillingham* approach, which is an approach not a commercial one-size fits all program, as a core instructional practice (despite TAS Catholic schools making the shift – and some Independent) leaves many of our children at risk. It also indicates a current lack of state-wide cohesion, whereby the quality and scientific-underpinnings of the reading instruction you receive at school, could be determined by which school you attend.

*Orton-Gillingham* is often viewed as an 'intervention' approach; however, it currently serves as an 'intervention' in some settings because our common instructional approach to reading continues to help some and harm many. Therefore, *Orton-Gillingham* must be used to backtrack and close achievement gaps – yet this could be avoided entirely in the first place. *Orton-Gillingham* is a core instructional approach and if we explicitly and systematically embed this approach across all Tasmanian schools, the need for intervention will significantly reduce and the far-reaching domino effect of poor literacy attainment will lessen – alleviating the pressure at every level/on every front-line service within our state. Collectively, we must shift to a prevention rather than cure model - if we are to turn this ship around and help deliver the Premier's commitment to improving literacy outcomes via evidence-based and structured literacy approaches in our state.

Year in/year out, we churn out children who cannot read at the expected age level they need to freely participate in the curriculum (and this is not just children with Dyslexia). Without a clear and rigorous scope and sequence (roadmap to success) or evidence of progression (which the *Orton-Gillingham* approach provides) there is no real tracking of skill development and there is absolutely no accountability of instruction. Adding in phonics checks will not be the magic ingredient, as without adequate training and resourcing, teachers will not know how to intervene when students do not pass the checks. *Orton-Gillingham* training teaches us how to explicitly teach phonology, syllabification and morphology and how to map back when things are not sticking/orthographically mapping. Training in *Orton-Gillingham* also resources a teacher/teaching team with ALL required teaching and learning materials for life.

It is not something that requires additional costs and the rewards far outweigh initial investment.

In terms of the associated impacts of poor reading outcomes - each year, a significant number of students graduate their grade level without mastering the required reading, writing and spelling skills needed to fully access the curriculum. As a result, the curriculum rapidly moves on and innocent little kids stay stuck and eventually locked out of their learning – maladaptive behaviours often emerge, and the horse bolts. A lack of foundational literacy skills significantly impacts every facet of well-being, from poor attendance rates, suspensions, anxiety and mental health issues, long-term access and participation in one's community. Literacy is the foundational underpinning of wellbeing.

As educators, we are facing massive teacher shortages and competing demands and we simply cannot be left to our own devices (untrained) with something so critical as foundational language and literacy development - because as Professor Louisa C Moats states: *Teaching Reading is Rocket Science* (2020). We need specialist support, appropriate levels of funding for training, the prioritisation of evidence over belief statements and Literacy coaches who are qualified to teach reading. This can all be achieved via training in *Orton-Gillingham*. Whilst we require training at the university level, as we are drastically underprepared and undertrained in how to teach reading – at every grade level, until this occurs, there will continue to be students under our care, who are relying on us to follow the evidence and embed effective instruction. Training in *Orton-Gillingham* – an explicit, multi-sensory and systematic reading and language approach is already available here in Hobart, TAS with a local speech pathologist leading in the field and travelling the country to train schools, whilst also training schools locally. We have this skill set locally – locked, loaded and ready to go and it would be irresponsible to continue to have a disjointed, autonomous approach to reading instruction across our state.

Finally,

...in other submissions, I have read opinions relating to poverty being the leading cause of illiteracy. I disagree. Thinking deeply about this, I suggest that the cycles of poverty within our state, which sees families living in tents along the rivulet, children sleeping in cars and gut-wrenching decisions being made about buying food or heating – are direct results of years and years of flawed reading instruction in our schools. If our literacy rates indicate that half of our population is functionally illiterate, then we do not have a 'student' problem, we have a core instructional problem that is serving some and failing many. If education is the key out of poverty – why are we still so impacted by this on our Island state? We must go back, to the early years, to the common instructional practices - ask the tough questions and make the brave decisions.

*The Science of Reading* is the way out of this. Those who try to reduce it to phonics instruction, do not fully understand the important role that language comprehension plays in building skilled readers. *The Simple View of Reading: Decoding/Word Recognition x Language Comprehension = Reading Comprehension*, requires explicit teaching of language derived from rich texts. This is not about 'diluting' core instruction or reducing it to 'drill' and 'kill' – it

is following the science and building competence in decoding AND language comprehension.  
We will not develop skilled readers until we make this crucial shift.

Thanks to science, we now know better, and we would be foolish to drag our heels...

[teaching-reading-is-rocket-science-2020.pdf \(readingrockets.org\)](#)

*Simple View of Reading: Gough & Tunmer, 1986)*