HOW TO TEACH READING COMPREHENSION: WHAT'S NEW?

Robert Tierney and David Pearson take a close look at 10 major assertions that are often put forward by advocates of the "Science of Reading" (SoR) approach to literacy instruction.

SoR has gained a lot of traction recently, with its emphasis on explicit, systematic phonics as the most essential ingredient in teaching kids to read. Tierney and Pearson examine the research behind these SoR claims - and in most cases, find it lacking.

Throughout their analysis, Tierney and Pearson stress the need to look at the full body of research, not just selected studies that fit a particular agenda

Claim 1: When it comes to the argument that phonics is the key to effective reading instruction, they point out that the evidence shows phonics to have a stronger impact on word-reading skills than on actual reading comprehension. While phonics is important, it's not sufficient on its own.

Claim 2: Similarly, they critique the "Simple View of Reading" which asserts that reading is just decoding plus oral language comprehension. The authors argue this theory is not so simple after all, failing to capture the complex interplay of skills involved in reading development.

Claim 3: Another major point of contention is around defining what counts as "reading" in the first place. SoR advocates often focus narrowly on word identification, whereas Tierney and Pearson believe comprehension should be front and center from the start. Context, they argue, matters a great deal in learning to read.

Claim 6: The authors also take on the idea that learning to read words is an "unnatural" act that requires systematic phonics instruction. They present research on how children naturally engage with print from a young age as they try to make sense of the world. Direct phonics instruction can play a role, but it's not the whole story.

Claims 4 & 5: A few other key critiques: - The connection between phonics, automatic word reading and comprehension is more complex than often portrayed

Claim 10: - Teacher education programs do teach phonics, but within a broader literacy curriculum -

Claim 9: Sociocultural factors shape reading development significantly and shouldn't be ignored

In summary: While they see value in phonics, their ultimate recommendation is for a more comprehensive, balanced approach to reading instruction - one that incorporates phonics along with language development, building knowledge, comprehension strategies, motivation and engagement, and culturally responsive teaching.

Only by addressing all these elements in context, they argue, can we truly apply the "science of reading" in an equitable and effective way.