

Science of Reading Superstar Teacher Award finalist



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Q: What does the Science of Reading mean to you?

The Science of Reading is becoming my North Star because it's guiding me to give the best that research has shown for my students. And it has made me more intentional and is giving me more confidence because now I feel like, okay, this is what I'm doing and I'm not wasting time, it's going to be right for them.

The Science of Reading has also helped me grow a lot in understanding the five pillars of reading, and how to teach them. The big thing is to be really diagnostic and the Science of Reading has provided all that understanding to me. I also think that there is a really creative element to the Science of Reading because now I'm really confident about what it is that I need to teach, but now how am I going to do it? I think it's a very delicate thing to be a really great teacher, because how you do it is also important.

You have this variety of students who come to you. Say it's a class of eight—it's really not a class of eight. It's these eight little individuals that you're teaching. And they come with their differences, linguistic, emotional, academic. So I think that the Science of Reading has really opened up my eyes to the complexity of things.

Q: Tell us more about your journey with the Science of Reading. How did you get started?

I started as a mom. A friend of mine gave me a phonics game to play with my son and he responded really well to the sounds of the words and the pictures. We got real success. At that time, I wasn't teaching, then I went back to teach and the emphasis in my school was on whole language and we didn't have a really well-defined reading program. So I took my little box with me and I would use it. I really didn't know what I was doing at the time.

Then I really learned a lot about the Science of Reading, and that was the first time I seriously learned about fluency, encoding, decoding, all those things. So I grew a lot, not really intentionally, I just did things because we were doing it.

Last year, I did a microcredential in early literacy at my district, which really opened up the doors and gave me a big umbrella under which all my little pieces began to fall. And not only that, I saw the potential that there was, which I hadn't seen before. There were so many gaps. So as a teacher, I began to grow. So, I started from mom to teaching, and now I also do coaching at my school.

Q: What tools/curriculum do you use to implement the Science of Reading? How did Amplify help? We've been using DIBELS® district-wide. At my school, it provided us a common vocabulary to understand where our students are going. We use our DIBELS scores to decide what kind of special services they need. I stumbled upon Amplify CKLA Decodables last year, and I really like them. I use the intervention materials in Amplify for my students because they help me group my kids.

And now, we're going to be using Amplify CKLA. Overall, using the diagnostic tool of DIBELS has been very helpful in terms of adjusting our training for the teachers and for the kids.

And recently, we've adopted the Amplify CKLA program. I could totally see how it's based on the Science of Reading. Right now, we are doing 10 days of training and I sit with each grade level and tell them about Scarborough's Rope, which has been fundamental for me. All of those things have really made me so excited in my journey.

Q: How did you see the Science of Reading transform student and classroom outcomes?

A successful practice definitely leads to successful outcomes for my students. I notice that when I'm really explicit in my teaching, I see a difference. And when I use the tools, I find that my lessons go really well. And when I used the progress monitoring in my class, I realized that not all of them are at the same level. So what I started to do was based on that, I divided them. And I find that when I leave them alone by themselves, I'm giving them more partner work, so they are more engaged and sharing a lot more. And because most of them are second-language learners, it's providing them an opportunity to interact more and share ideas. They answer each other's questions. So it has helped me to energize my classroom. My kids feel more motivated. I get more smiles in the hallway.

Q: What major obstacles did you overcome during your Science of Reading journey?

Although I don't think I was a bad teacher, I'm becoming better now, and I think there was a knowledge gap for me. I think that I'm overcoming that, partly by attending a lot of trainings, and partly because I read more and understand a lot more. Since a lot of my students are second language learners, they are still developing that ear for the phonemic awareness part. And I think that just learning about the importance of the articulatory feature, I've started using my sound wall and paying more attention to what's happening to my mouth. I didn't do that before.

In my class, we are always running short on time. We have to build a lot of background knowledge for my students. A lot of them don't come from very middle-class homes where they have a lot of exposure. I think we know how to do it, but that is an obstacle.

At my school, there's the issue of buy-in from the teachers. That is not a major obstacle, but sometimes I have to get them all on board to get the Amplify CKLA program. So when I'm working with the teachers, I bring in Scarborough's Rope, the Simple View of Reading, some of the knowledge I've acquired, and that helps me overcome that obstacle.

Q: How did/do you track your student's progress?

I talk to them many times and ask, "Okay, how was it? What was difficult for you?" And I call parents to gauge the level of confidence the kid has. I collaborate with the classroom teachers to understand where the kid is. I also use DIBELS, then I use the assessment tools. Progress monitoring is big.

I put kids' agency on the top; they do their own graphing and monitor themselves. Prompt, constant feedback, and making sure that when they come in, I listen to each one reading. That's my daily assessment.

Q: What news, materials, or information do you consume to help you teach?

I read a lot. I recently, big time, have been consuming the Amplify CKLA Facebook group. I'm part of all those Facebook groups and I like to hear what the teachers are doing, what they're saying.

It's been my summer of learning. I was listening to all the podcasts from Amplify by Susan Lambert. I love how they deconstructed the rope. I was particularly enamored by Bruce McCandliss talking about the brain and the things behind learning. I love listening to Louisa Moats. She actually came to our microcredential program.

I attend all my district trainings. I also heard Emily Hanford, which really put me on a good trajectory. I wasn't too strong on knowing the structure of language, so I joined a Facebook page on logic of English, and I'm still learning that.

Q: What advice do you have for teachers starting out with the Science of Reading?

Actually, I'm mentoring three teachers. They're new teachers and I've been sharing some of the things I've been learning. I would advise them to join my microcredential program. It's a very collaborative, well-guided platform to start, and you definitely begin to understand how we learn to read. I would really, really encourage them to get involved and join some Facebook groups.

I have also shared my growing knowledge of the Science of Reading with teachers in India who work at a school, as I am on their board of directors. Teachers are interested in learning about phonics and how to teach early literacy, and since I have learned about the importance of explicit, cumulative, systematic, and diagnostic teaching, I share my learning with them.

