



California Council on Teacher Education

Introducing the CCTE Working Group on Literacy

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For over 75 years, researchers have debated the best ways to approach reading instruction (Kim, 2008; Pearson, 2004). Often referred to as the Reading Wars, researchers and practitioners on one side of the debate call for a phonics-based approach to early literacy instruction, based on Chall's (1967) work, while researchers and practitioners on the other side argue for a more holistic, whole-language approach that includes attention to phonics along with attention to context and background knowledge, based on Goodman's work (1967). One difference this time is the way the popular media has also joined the conversation, most notably with Emily Hanford's 2022 American Public Media podcast, *Sold a Story*.

Partly in response to the ongoing debates, the California Legislature took action with the passage of SB 488 in October of 2021. SB 488 mandated the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) develop new literacy standards for all teacher preparation programs and new literacy-focused Teaching Performance Expectations (TPE). SB 488 also called for the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) to be replaced by a new performance assessment aligned with specific literacy TPEs by July 1, 2025. To comply with the SB 488 legislation, teacher preparation programs across the state currently are working to revise their programs to ensure alignment with the new standards, with implementation required by July 1, 2024. Meanwhile, any new programs proposed to the CTC, including new proposals for the PK3 Early Childhood Education Specialist Instruction credential, are already required to demonstrate their alignment with the literacy standards and TPEs.

However, for some groups, the efforts California has taken were not enough. This became evident earlier this year with the convergence of two events.

The first of these was the proposal in the current legislative session of AB 2222, sponsored by Assemblymember Blanca Rubio, which would have required focused, phonics-based reading instruction using only state-approved curricula in the early grades. Additionally, the Bill would have mandated all TK-fifth grade teachers, literacy coaches, and literacy specialists participate in 30 hours of "Science of Reading"-focused professional development. Among other things, the Bill also called for additional updates by the CTC to the literacy standards and shifts in the qualifications of members of the CTC's Committee on Accreditation. Ultimately, the Bill failed to advance past the Assembly Education Committee.

At the same time AB 2222 was circulating through the legislature, a collaboration of education advocacy groups—including Decoding Dyslexia, California Reading Coalition, and Families in Education—filed a formal compliance complaint against the Committee on Accreditation's decision to grant Initial Program Approval to Mills College: Northeastern University's preliminary Multiple Subject program, which had been granted program approval by the Committee on Accreditation, on January 25, 2024. Despite the fact that outside reviewers had found the program to align with the Multiple Subject Literacy Program Standards and TPE 7, the basis for this complaint referred to "instructional practices in the program's coursework that are not 'evidenced-based,' supported by research, or reflective of guidance in the English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework."

The convergence of these actions, both of which effectively worked to undermine the professionalism of teachers and teacher educators in California, prompted the California Council on Teacher Education (CCTE) leadership and the CCTE Policy Committee to take action. On March 11, during the CCTE Spring Policy Action Network (SPAN) Conference Opening Session, Policy Committee Co-Chair Pia Wong announced the creation of a CCTE Working Group on Literacy. Because of my role as a CCTE Board Member, a member of the Policy Committee, an Associate Professor of Literacy Education, and a California Writing Project Site Director and Executive Committee member, I was approached to lead this group. I also was part of the CTC's committee to develop the literacy standards. During SPAN and in the days after, others with literacy expertise and an interest in taking a stand against efforts of outside groups to mandate how we do teacher education reached out to express their interest in joining the group. Ultimately, we ended up with a Working Group team of seven.

Between April 4, 2024 and May 8, 2024, our team met five times. Our first task was to develop a

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definition of what we believe constitutes the Science of Reading and to draft the accompanying white paper. We began by pulling together various resources to help further educate ourselves. These included research articles, podcast interviews with experts, and documentaries. Just prior to our first meeting, Robert J. Tierney and P. David Pearson released, *Fact-Checking the Science of Reading: Opening Up the Conversation*, a text we found to be particularly helpful. Next, we took time to, individually, review the existing research, which included dividing the articles and chapters of Tierney and Pearson's text, and write summaries of what we read. We then, individually, reviewed the summaries each person had constructed for what we found to be the key points. These were compiled into a single document. Ultimately, we decided to use the following questions to frame our argument:

What do we mean by reading?

What constitutes robust reading/literacy instruction?

Why should the sociocultural contexts of reading instruction be included?

Collectively, we clustered our main points under each of these framing questions and then worked to revise our document into the white paper. Our hope is that this paper will serve to educate others on the robustness of what constitutes high quality reading instruction and the fact that, indeed, there is not one set Science of Reading. Instead, we see the research on reading instruction to be continually evolving, just like any other area of science, which is why we adopted the phrase coined by Mimi Miller, the "ScienceS of Reading."

In the coming weeks, we will be distributing this document to teacher educators and policymakers throughout the state and nation in addition to the membership of CCTE. As a Working Group, we are continuing to meet, as we recognize that attacks and attempted mandates are likely not over and it will be important to keep the CCTE membership and others in the teacher education community informed with the most current research and instructional theories and strategies in order to assure that teachers are prepared to meet the needs of all students in all of our schools.

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