Mesmer (“There are four foundational reading skills: Why do we only talk about phonics?” Education Week, 1/23/2020) proclaims that explicit instruction in phonics is not enough: children must be taught print concepts, phonemic awareness, morphology, and fluency.

Of course children should develop competence in these areas, but should all this be taught explicitly? There is considerable published research that challenges this view, that concludes that for these “neglected” areas as well as phonics:

1. There are many rules and generalizations that are extremely complex and have not even been well-described.
2. Deliberate instruction does not result in improved reading comprehension.
3. Competence in these areas has been shown to emerge without instruction.

A reasonable hypothesis, one not mentioned by Mesmer, is that competence in these areas is largely, if not completely, the result of reading, not the cause. To borrow terminology from second language acquisition, these competences are subconsciously acquired, not consciously learned.

Some (just a few of the many) publications presenting and reviewing these conclusions:

Fluency is not included in this list, but very few of the readers of this note have ever had instruction in fluency.