



Triple R Teaching

Hello, Anna Geiger here from The Measured Mom, and you are listening to Episode 65 of the Triple R Teaching podcast. We are on the tail end of our reaction series in which I react to Fountas and Pinnell's blog series called "Just To Clarify," in which they answer questions and react to criticism of their work.

Today's question is question number nine, "Elevating teacher expertise has always been a hallmark of your work. What has led you to advocate so strongly that teachers are the single most important factor in a child's learning achievement?"

This is how Irene Fountas responds:

"Learning to read is complex and no reading program is an alternative to teacher expertise. Over the years, there have been many literacy programs, programs positioned as a one size fits all solution, and some acknowledging the complexity of literacy learning. However, students depend on the expertise of teachers - expertise in understanding the alphabetic system and how it works, expertise in the understanding of texts, including their opportunities and challenges, expertise in understanding each child's unique strengths and needs as a learner, and expertise in how literacy competencies develop in children over time. There is simply no literacy program that can take the place of a teacher's expertise in helping children develop an effective literacy processing system. With any set of resources, teachers will need to make moment-to-moment decisions based on their observation of children."

Okay, let's respond to that. I think there is a lot of good in there.

Number one, she acknowledges that learning to read is complex. Absolutely! If you want to make a first grade teacher mad, just tell her that anybody can teach first grade. Absolutely NOT true, especially because our first grade teachers have such an enormous responsibility in teaching children to read.

Louisa Moats has written a whole article called "Reading is Rocket Science," I'll link to that in the show notes. It's really important to remember that teaching reading is not

simple. It is complex and the experience and knowledge of the teacher is very important.

I think Irene Fountas is right when she says that some programs are positioned as one size fits all. That's what publishers are going to do because they want you to think that, but most teachers can tell you that a single program does not fit all their needs. They have to use multiple programs to teach all the facets of literacy understandings, including phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. They need multiple pieces and it is up to the teacher to use those pieces wisely.

Now I know there's a lot of talk about using programs with fidelity. There's something to be said for that, but I also think there must be teachers paying attention to what's happening right in front of them and not just reading from a script. That could be a whole other podcast series. Maybe it will be someday when we talk about out the qualities of explicit teaching and diagnostic teaching and just being a good teacher. Being a good teacher is way more than reading a script.

So I agree with what Fountas and Pinnell are saying here. I think the problem though, is that historically, balanced literacy and whole language advocates have put too much emphasis on what the teacher knows when the teacher might not know that much. We may feel that because we're in the classroom interacting with the kids every day that we can gather all the knowledge we need to make decisions, but we can't do that if we don't have anything to pin our knowledge on.

So let's say I'm looking at a student and I notice that she can't sound out words. Okay, that's good information to have, but what does that mean? Do I understand that when kids can't sound out words, it may indicate a problem with phonemic awareness and I may need to go back and work on that?

What about if a child is struggling to comprehend text? We can say he doesn't remember what he reads, but do we understand the elements of Scarborough's Reading Rope under language comprehension? Do we understand that we need to figure out where the missing link is and address that?

So making observations about our students isn't enough, right? We have to know what to do with that information. And we don't know what to do with it unless we educate ourselves.

Way back at the beginning of this "Just To Clarify" series, Fountas and Pinnell said that

teachers who are hearing all this criticism or all this talk about the science of reading should put their heads down and just keep doing what they know works.

I think they missed a really good opportunity there to tell us that teachers shouldn't just "put their heads down," they should be studying! They should be reading. They should be learning. They should be taking courses. When you do all those things, then you're more qualified to be the person who makes these moment to moment decisions based on your observations.

A few years ago when I started really studying the science of reading, I read a lot of books and then I also took some online courses to help improve my knowledge and understanding. I'd like to share the names of those here with you, and then I'll also link to them in the show notes so you can check them out for yourself.

One that I think is really useful and affordable is called "The Reading Teacher's Top Ten Tools" by Deb Glaser. She makes it really affordable so you can take it just for a month. If you have a month and you can just watch everything and study it, then you can cancel your account. It's not something that gives you permanent access; it is a monthly payment. At least it was when I joined it. So if you don't have a lot of money to invest, but you have time, I would take a month or two to go through her program. Study everything, print the reference sheets, and you will have learned quite a bit.

What I like about this program is that she has a lot of videos of her actually in classrooms with students that help you see how this works in real life. I should note that while there's a lot of really good stuff in "The Reading Teacher's Top Ten Tools," she doesn't really give you the nuts and bolts. There's not a lot about how this is going to actually look on a day to day basis in your classroom, such as how to manage students during this part of your day. There isn't that sort of thing, but I'd say it's definitely a good step and definitely an affordable one.

Another course I've taken is from The Big Dippers. That's definitely one that you can trust, and the course is very useful because it gives you a really solid understanding of the science of reading. It's pretty short, and I would say it's really not going to give you a lot of video. So if you prefer to take in content via video, this is not the course for you. It's pretty inexpensive at one hundred dollars, but you only get access for six months. It's definitely a knowledge builder, but not something you're going to get to refer to for very long.

I also took the "Online Elementary Reading Academy" from CORE. CORE is a very good website, very trustworthy. They've got a lot of great resources and webinars and things. The course is expensive, however, it is pretty in-depth. They do have a lot of helpful

videos and it actually is something that you're doing with a teacher so you can't sign up anytime. It's about seven to ten weeks, and while you can watch the videos at your own pace, you do have that time period to react with the instructor to ask questions.

So if you want a course in which you can connect with a teacher, this would be maybe a good one to try. It is currently six hundred dollars, so it's definitely on the pricey side. You do get a really fat book that comes with it which is really, really good. It's called the "Teaching Reading Sourcebook." Honestly, I would buy that even if you don't take the course, and also an assessment tool. So those two things are, I would say, easily worth a hundred dollars of what you pay.

Another one that I recommend is called "Keys to Beginning Reading" by Joan Sedita. I would definitely check out her website. She's got a lot of useful things on her blog and other things that you can check out that are free, but her course is excellent. It also includes a spiral-bound manual that walks you through a lot of the things that she teaches. So it really is nice because the course talks about all the elements of beginning reading. It gets very practical. There aren't a lot of student printable resources, but there are a small handful. So that's definitely another one to check out.

Of course, I would really love it if you would check out "Teaching Every Reader," which is my full online course. I published it with my colleague, Becky Spence, way back in 2017. That version of the course was a balanced literacy course. When we learned about the science of reading, we closed the course for about nine months and completely redid all the lessons.

When we made the course, we really wanted to make it into something that was accessible to everyone. So in each lesson there's usually a video, which you can speed up if you'd like, although most people tell me I talk too fast already. And then there is a transcript, so you can print the lesson to read it later. We have guided notes to guide you through the lesson.

There's a lot of teacher reference sheets you can print and, best of all, the course includes many, many, many, many student printables. It has resources for teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, and so on. These are all printables that you can print for your students. They're for centers, file folder games, editable resources, etc. It's a ton and we don't sell those anywhere else, they're only included in the course.

We even have a bonus module all about dyslexia.

When you join, you get lifetime access. So unlike some of the other courses where you join, but then after a couple of months you lose your access, you can have access to this for as long as Becky and I are operating online. We hope that will be for a few more decades. For example, people who bought the course in 2017 received all the updates completely free. When you join, you get all the updates to the course.

I'd love for you to check out the show notes today so you can learn more about all these courses that I've taken as well as the one that I've created. If you click through "Teaching Every Reader" and the doors are closed to the public, but you would like to join before the course opens, please send me an email, anna@themeasuredmom.com. I totally understand that when you're ready to learn, you're ready to learn, and so most of the time we can get teachers in between launches if you send us a private email.

Thanks so much for listening to this episode, and be sure to check out the show notes and all the courses I mentioned at themeasuredmom.com/episode65.

We'll be back next week for our final reaction to Fountas and Pinnell!