What is the science of implementation? - with Laura Stewart

Triple R Teaching Podcast #212

Hello, this is Anna Geiger, author of *Reach All Readers* and creator of the Reach All Readers website. Today I'm bringing you another interview about implementation. This one is with the chief academic officer of 95% group, Laura Stewart.

Laura has more than 25 years of academic leadership experience in many different areas, which you'll hear about in today's episode. Today she walks us through the five stages of implementation. Here we go!

Anna Geiger:

Welcome Laura.

Laura Stewart:

Hello, I'm so delighted to be here!

Anna Geiger:

I'm so excited to talk to you. You were one of the first science of reading podcast hosts that I listened to when I was first learning about the science of reading. I binge listened to Teaching, Reading, and Learning that you did with The Reading League. If anyone's listening, that's still out there. It's not doing new episodes, but there's a load of wonderful episodes to listen to.

You've been in this space for a long time, and I'd love to give an introduction of you to our listeners, and then move on to talk about the science of implementation. Can you explain your history in education and what you're doing now?

Laura Stewart:

Sure. I've been education for a long time, and I started out as a teacher many moons ago. I always say it was when high tech was an overhead projector. I moved into administration at the building level, and then at the district level, but that really wasn't my calling.

I found more of my niche in working with teachers in professional learning. Unfortunately it was during the whole language years, so I did kind of teach some of what we now know are misconceptions.

But a kind of a watershed moment for me were the Reading First years. That's when my eyes were really open to the idea that our profession could be held to a high standard of research.

I was working in a professional learning organization that no longer is in existence, but we were hired to develop and train teachers and administrators in Reading First in the state of Wisconsin. I put together a development team, teams of coaches and trainers, and spent a couple of years doing that.

Then I moved to an organization called the Rowland Reading Foundation, and they published a primary reading program called Superkids, which is still in existence. I built and ran the PL department there.

When Superkids moved to another company, it was under the Highlights Education Group, so I was the chief academic officer of professional learning there, and I worked across several companies in that group.

From there, I went to The Reading League, which at that time was a very small organization. I was hired as their national director really to help start the chapter networks and, as you mentioned, I had the podcast there. Thank you for that shout out. It was really such a privilege for me to speak to such wonderful people.

So I was the chief innovation officer at The Reading League, and then about three years ago I came over to 95% Group as their chief academic officer.

When I look back over the arc of my career, I would just have to say that I feel really fortunate in that my career path has really been able to intersect with my passion, which is literacy.

I have an actual mission statement on the wall of my office, which says that I want to contribute in the best way I can to ensure that all children learn to read joyfully, enabling them to flourish as literate citizens of the 21st century.

I always tell people that I chose those words very carefully. I chose joyful and I chose flourish because yes, I want kids to learn to read, but I also want them to reap the benefits of a literate life as I have been able to do.

I recently contributed to an opening chapter in a book called *Climbing the Ladder of Reading and Writing* by Nancy Young and Jan Hasbrook. It's a wonderful book. In that chapter, I cited some grim life outcomes related to illiteracy or low literacy. But I also wrote about the need for us to focus our work on mitigating or eliminating those risks through instruction, which I fervently believe that we can do.

That's what I've devoted my career to, and I am privileged and honored to work with educators and people such as yourself that are engaged in the same mission that I am.

Anna Geiger:

When we think about the science of reading, which for you, the understanding of that came sooner than for many of us who really... I mean, for many people I talk to it was really more around COVID times when more people became aware of this. I think a lot of us have thought that if we just understand the science of reading and apply that to how we teach, that will fix everything. At least that's what maybe some people have hoped.

Now we understand that there's so much more to it. That is such an important piece, but there's also how you teach it, the science of learning, which is tied to the art of teaching, and then of course the science of implementation.

How do we even get started on a big scale with *all* the parts? We're going to talk about that.

Before we do, though, let's do some definitions. How would you define the science of implementation, and how that connects to all those other sciences?

Laura Stewart:

Yeah, well, first of I want to say thank you for stating that about how we've all come to it at different phases in our career. I would just say that I've been around a long time, so I think that's maybe why I had a little head start during the Reading First years.

Yeah, I think it's important that we're looking not just at the science of reading, but these other sciences as well.

For implementation science, I'm going to give you kind of the formal definition. It is "the scientific study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice."

Now, to put it simply, it really is the understanding of what it takes to bridge research to practice. I think this is such a critical moment because, as you alluded to, in the science of reading, we have this body of research. It informs our practice. By the way, I believe it's a *dynamic* body of research that continues to inform our practice.

But what I have seen in the last few years is, and Mark Seidenberg talks about this, that little of that research is being actualized into class and practice. So I think we can learn a lot from the implementation science.

Now much of this implementation science field of study comes from the medical world, but implementation is implementation. I believe our task is to understand, in practical terms, what we can do to implement the practices that are evidence-aligned when we make it our goal to improve reading outcomes for all kids.

I would also say I don't think that implementation science stands alone. It is that bridge to practice, and that practice is informed by the science of reading, but also by the science of teaching and the science of learning. This is kind of all the sciences that are converging to help us not only build our knowledge base, but to put that into practice.

One of the things I think you were going to include in the show notes is this book, *Science of Reading 2.0.* One of the things I try to do in the *Science of Reading 2.0* is to kind of provide a mashup, if you will, of the principles of the sciences that inform our practice.

First, it's that science of reading. By the way, I think The Reading League does a really great job of helping us understand what the science of reading is in their *Science of Reading: A Defining Guide*. That, along with principles of learning.

There are two sources that I have found to be really valuable. One is Stanislas Dehaene's *How We Learn*, and one is the work of Deans for Impact. They've done quite a bit of work on the science of learning.

I would say for the science of teaching, I've learned a lot from Barak Rosenshine's work. He did a really good job of integrating the art and the science of teaching. His principles of instruction came from the cognitive sciences, but also by looking at what successful teachers have done that has achieved outcomes for students.

I like that integration of the art of teaching because the science of reading is that body of research. It doesn't tell us what to do all the time in the classroom. There aren't randomized control studies for all the instructional decisions we need to make. So having both the science and the art of teaching I think is really important.

What I tried to do is take all those sciences, reading, teaching, and learning, and really put them into ten principles of instruction in this *Science of Reading 2.0* book.

Anna Geiger:

I definitely recommend it, and that's a free download that you can get. We'll definitely put that in the show notes.

Laura Stewart:

Thank you, thank you.

Anna Geiger:

I think that some people wish, and I still see this happening, that implementing the science of reading is as simple as getting a new program and giving it to teachers. Then let's just run with it because, if it's a good program, that will do what we need it to do.

Laura Stewart:

Yeah.

Anna Geiger:

Of course, there's so much more to that. When I was talking to Maria Murray about choosing a program, she talked about how you could have the same program, and it could work at this school and could *not* work at this school down the street. Like you said, there's so much that goes into it.

Laura Stewart:

That's right.

Anna Geiger:

Something you talk about in the ebook was, I can't remember specifically what you were referring to so you can enlighten me, but it was about either letting it happen or helping it happen. Can you tell us what you mean by that?

Laura Stewart:

Yeah, sure. And I'm glad you said that about how we can take a program, but it doesn't necessarily work to scale. When we're talking about the implementation science, we're talking about how do we put *principles* into scale?

Programs or curriculum resources are tools that allow us to put these instructional principles into play, and implementation science allows us to put them to scale.

But Maria's so right. Believe me, I work for a publishing company, so I wish it were that simple that everybody adopted a curriculum and voila! It's all good! But it just isn't.

In the *Science of Reading 2.0*, I do talk about letting it happen, helping it happen, and making it happen. Let me explain those.

Letting it happen, and this is taken from a book called *Leading by Convening*, is when a program or an initiative is adopted or sometimes mandated, and educators are expected to just make that translation from information to practice with minimal support. Frankly, that rarely works, which is why we see initiatives fail.

Whether it is the adoption of a curriculum resource or whether it's a multi-year plan for improvement, the factors for implementation must be in place. We have learned that from the implementation science, and I'll go into that maybe in a minute. That's letting it happen.

Helping it happen is when an adoption is supported by training and perhaps some resources, but that really isn't enough either.

Making it happen is when we have all the factors in place for successful implementation.

In my book, *The Courage to Lead*, I adapt this formula for success from the National Implementation Research Network or NIRN. What this basically says is that we need effective practice, principles of instruction and resources, and multiply that by effective implementation. That includes implementation teams and systems and structures and professional learning and coaching. Then we have to multiply that by what are called enabling contexts, such as policies and leadership.

When we think about effective practice, multiplied by effective implementation, multiplied by enabling contexts, all of those have to be in place to really achieve our outcomes, our goals. The reason I think that multiplication piece is so important, is the same way the Simple View of Reading is multiplicative, right? We can't just add those things together. They have to integrate and intertwine.

For example, effective practice has to be principles of instruction and resources, but we have to have effective implementation, professional learning, and coaching intertwined in those to make it happen. Leadership, which is part of enabling contexts, can't just be a standalone thing. It has to be completely integrated in the journey of practice and resources and implementation support. Does that make sense?

Anna Geiger:

Yes, and I think it sounds like a lot.

Laura Stewart:

Exactly. So you multiply all that together, and the socially significant outcomes that we want are equity and literacy for all.

So how do we make sure that all of those things are in place? That's a major commitment of time, energy, and funding. But that is the only way to *make* it happen, as opposed to letting it happen or just kind of helping it. How do we make it happen?

Anna Geiger:

I suspect, only because I've been in this situation and because I have people who email me wanting a very quick answer, that schools would rather let it happen because it is overwhelming sometimes to think about all those systems and things. People maybe don't know where to start, or they don't have the support, or they don't think they have the funds, or even just the wherewithal to know how do we get started.

Even when there's a new program there might be a little bit of training, and they might think "Okay, we checked our boxes. We've gotten the publishers to talk to us a few times. We're ready to go."

Why is that a mistake?

Laura Stewart:

Yeah, so again, you're spot on. I think sometimes we don't want to invest the time and the expense and the support, et cetera.

This is really interesting. IDA Perspectives published an article on implementation science, and they cited statistics from the National Implementation Research Network, as I mentioned before, NIRN. The research was really around the idea that without an implementation team using clearly defined methods, as we talked about earlier with that equation... If you don't have all that, it can take 17 years to move 50% of a new initiative into routine practice. 17 years to move 50%.

Now, if those factors are in place, if all those making it happen factors are in place, we can move 80% of a new initiative into routine practice in 3 years.

Anna Geiger:

What do mean by moving it into routine practice? What specifically are you talking about?

Laura Stewart:

Sure, sure. Let's say that we are embarking on a literacy transformation in our school. We want to ensure that we're moving all of our kids toward outcomes of literacy for all of our students. If we don't have all of those factors in place, if we don't have the leadership, if we don't have implementation teams, if we don't have goals, if we don't have professional learning, if we don't have all those factors that I mentioned previously, then we're not going to make it happen.

Without those clearly defined methods, it's not going to happen to scale. Their research shows that it would be 17 years to only move the needle halfway of that new initiative into our culture.

Anna Geiger:

That's a lot of years.

Laura Stewart:

I don't have 17 years. I don't know about y'all. Our kids don't either, let's be honest.

Anna Geiger:

Right. That's the big thing.

Laura Stewart:

Yeah, so we really need to invest in understanding the sciences, including the implementation science. We need to invest in putting that into play.

That's really why I wrote this book, *Courage to Lead*, because I wanted to overview the science of implementation and just take a look at what is that journey? What is that journey of putting all those factors in place? What does that entail?

I do think what you said is true. Sometimes we in schools are our own worst enemies when it comes to bridging research to practice. There's clearly a research gap in educational practice, and we need to be honest about what those blockers are that create the gap.

Sometimes the gap is created because there's misalignment between what our students need and our existing practice. Sometimes the gap is created because we adopt materials, but we don't use them as they're intended to be used. Sometimes the gap is created from research to practice because we keep following the next new project or the next new program or the new shiny object rather than giving something the time and intensity to allow us to really enact transformational change.

Finally, sometimes I go into schools or districts and we see what I call islands of excellence, but we're not scaling it.

The research to practice gap is real, and we've got to be honest about what's causing that gap and then study this implementation science because making it happen according to the implementation science, that's what's going to bridge that gap.

Anna Geiger:

Yeah, it's so interesting. It makes me think about dieting. Sorry for anybody that doesn't want to hear about that, because I totally understand. It's this idea of if I just try this new one, and I'll try this one, and then fail. I speak from personal experience. Try another one, fail.

Just like schools where we'll do this with curriculum. The next 10 years we'll pick another one, but nothing really changes. With the dieting nothing changed because I never changed my habits. I was just trying to follow this new set of rules but didn't really understand why I was doing it.

If you're just accepting a new program and the teachers are trying to follow along, but they maybe aren't sure exactly why, or, they don't have the support like you need whenever you're trying to make these big changes, it's probably very similar.

I think probably a lot of teachers could relate to that. We'll pick a new program every 10 years and our numbers, if they're even collecting numbers, aren't really changing.

Laura Stewart:

I think your analogy is great because you think about all the factors that have to go into actually maintaining a healthy weight. If you adopt a healthy eating style, adopt an exercise routine, a mindset, or whatever healthy practices, you can't just try it for a month and give up, right? You have to sustain your commitment to your vision.

That's really how the implementation science begins, it's a commitment to a vision.

Anna Geiger:

You talked about how this requires courage and I actually have an interview coming with Sharon Dunn eventually. I don't know if it'll be before after this one, but she talked about that too, about courage. I talked to Justin Browning and he said the same thing, that courage is really important.

Talk to us about why that matters and what kind of courage, specifically. What does that even mean?

Laura Stewart:

Well, first of all, Sharon Dunn and Justin Browning, I'm a big fan of both of them, and so that's great. I can't wait for those podcasts.

For courage... I want to read to you something from the introduction of *The Courage to Lead*, because I think this will answer that question.

> "I first became interested in the idea of courageous leadership when I read the book, *The Courage to Teach*: *Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* by Parker Palmer. (I read that about 25 years ago.) In this book, Parker reminds us that teaching begins with the exploration of our inner landscape to connect fully with our passion, identity, and integrity.
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> Teaching itself is a courageous act. You must have the courage to be in this profession as a fully present individual. The concept of teaching as a courageous act followed me through my transition from teaching to leadership, where it became clear to me that being a leader was not about assuming a position, but it was about assuming a stance of looking outward to serve others from an inward integrity.
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> As one of the authorities on leadership, John Maxwell states, 'I believe the bottom line in leadership isn't how far we advance ourselves, but how far we advance others. That is achieved by serving others and adding value to their lives.
>
> I have had the privilege of working with, mentoring with, and observing transformational leaders over many years. I have learned as a leader, often the hard way, that maintaining that stance requires inner fortitude, wisdom, vulnerability, compassion, and courage. Courage to be a continual learner, to self-reflect, and redirect when necessary, to grow and nurture future leaders, and to hold and protect a vision in service to others."

So that's what I mean by courageous leadership.

Anna Geiger:

Yeah, and some of that courage is something you maybe wouldn't equate with leadership. Humility, like you said, and self-reflection, that's not always very fun when you're doing it in a public way.

Laura Stewart:

That's right. And vulnerability.

Anna Geiger:

Very hard. Yeah, so putting yourself out there basically is the courage that that is required.

Laura Stewart:

Yes. That really was my reflection on my own experience as a leader, but also my own experience in, as I mentioned, working with or being led by or mentored by other leaders.

I also think that you can take that kind of framework and then really apply it to being a literacy leader. In the text, I kind of define a literacy leader this way:

> "One, a literacy leader knows that the primary objective is ensuring all students become readers and writers. Two, a literacy leader defends the stance that literacy is the foundation for student success in school and beyond. Three, a literacy leader cultivates a vision for transformation that guides every decision made in the pursuit of literacy excellence. Four, it sets a culture of collective problem solving to create a teamwork approach and offer educators and invested parties a system instead of a silo."

Anna Geiger:

Yeah, right.

Laura Stewart:

I'm going to add to this, I would also say that good literacy leaders know that literacy is a human right that must be guaranteed to all of our students because frankly, Anna, if we don't get literacy right, we don't get anything right.

Anna Geiger:

It's so true. When I was talking to Justin, he was saying how he did some teaching in upper grade math and he realized why they were failing. A lot of it was because they couldn't read the problems, not necessarily because they didn't understand the calculations.

Laura Stewart:

That's right.

Anna Geiger:

It will slow you down in every area.

Laura Stewart:

Yeah. I wanted to say one more thing about being courageous and vulnerable. I recently did a two-day symposium with my friend and colleague Terrie Noland, and we worked with school-based and district-based teams on really developing yourself as a transformational literacy leader.

In two days, of course, we just kind of started the conversation. But one of things we asked them to do is think about the challenges or blockers that they encounter and have gotten in their way of transforming literacy. We had them put those into two columns: things you can control and things you can't control. I think that was liberating for them.

I also think that at the end of the two days, we had them go back to that chart and look at what they thought they couldn't control and think, is anything moving? Can you influence anything more than you ever thought you could?

I think that level of self-reflection and vulnerability is really a wonderful trait in a leader.

Anna Geiger:

I really, really like what you said about systems, not silos. I think certainly in my experience as a teacher, we were all silos. It's not that we were antisocial, we were just very, very busy. We were just buckling down. I think a lot of people enter teaching because they are self-starters, and they're excited to have this classroom that they're in charge of.

But they're so busy, and there's not necessarily any space made for them to do this collaborating that's required for a system change. That's why I think it's good to talk through the five phases of

implementation in your book, *The Courage to Lead*. You break it down very thoroughly in there, but we'll just give kind of an overview here because I want people to not just hear all of our general words, but actually how this looks in practice. So if you could kind of break that down?

Laura Stewart:

All right. Thank you. I do want to say that this book, *Courage to Lead*, is really based on this idea of transformation and transformational change. A transformational leader is a really important leader, right? Because transformational change requires us to dig deep, and sometimes it requires us to challenge our values and beliefs and assumptions.

One of the other things that I've done frequently with groups of leaders is I've asked them to just list all the questions you need to ask yourself as you embark on literacy improvements or improving literacy outcomes for your students through transformational change. Many times they would write things on this chart like what do we believe about how children learn to read? Do we believe that all children *can* learn to read?

That vulnerability and that self-reflection that's required of a transformational leader sometimes requires us to go really deep.

I had one person say it this way, and I've heard this before, do we have the skill, but do we also have the will? This couldn't be more important, because leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to students learning. Leadership is critically important.

Yeah, so in *The Courage to Lead*, I have this kind of graphic representation of the journey of implementation. I know in an audio podcast, we can't really show it, but you can see it in the book, which is a free download. I show this journey as a path with milestones, but also it's a windy path because I want to imply that this journey isn't a linear progression, and it isn't without obstacles and detours along the way.

I kind of define those milestones within a framework of phases. This is not my original work; this is an adaptation from the work of many researchers in the field. Here's a couple things I did differently. First of all, I used phases rather than stages because I want to imply, like in Linnea Ehri's phases, that these stages you pass through are not definitive, it's more dynamic than that.

I also stretch it out to five phases rather than four, which is what you commonly see in implementation because I believe sustainability requires its own phase. I think it's that important.

So the phases that I've identified and kind of the courageous leader moves in each of these phases…

The first phase is exploration. Exploration is when we are being clear on the scope of our initiative and beginning with the end in mind. What do we want our school, our classrooms, our districts to look like at the end of this implementation journey?

This is when we elevate the need for change and oftentimes that requires us to have bold conversations around our data. Are our children achieving? Are *all* of our children achieving? We know that with research-based instruction, the percentage of first graders below that 30th percentile can be 4-6%. That's where we get 95% or more. Are we clear that if we're not there, the gap between where we are and where we could be is that gap of opportunity. Have we had that courageous conversation?

During exploration, we're also creating our implementation team. This is a team of people from diverse experiences in our school that contribute to the design and the planning and the support of this implementation. Are we identifying our goals? Are we identifying our outcomes? That's all part of this exploration phase.

One of the most important things that we do in the exploration phase is we identify barriers. What's going to keep us from reaching our goal? In the past, what has kept us from reaching our goal? Is it funding? Is it staffing? Is it resources? Is it the will? Is it underlying beliefs? What are the blockers that have prohibited this transformation in the past, and how are we going to overcome those?

Finally, in the exploration phase, we are really committing to a shared vision. This is where leadership comes in. Although it's not a top-down vision, it has to be collaboratively bought into. At the end of the day, a strong leader is going to uphold and protect that vision. That's all part of that exploration phase.

Anna Geiger:

You talked about thinking about where you want to be when this is done, three years or however long this project, this implementation, is going to take. Can you give an example of what a school might say?

Laura Stewart:

Yeah, so it might be just as simple as this, Anna... By the way, this implementation journey can take anywhere from three to four or more years, frankly. We can be really specific. We could say, "At the end of year one, the number of students at grade level proficiency will increase by ____. At the end of year two, the number of students will increase by ____. At the end of this journey, 95% of our students will be reading." And I wouldn't say proficiently, I would say 95% of our students will be reading, because that is achievable.

I think we can also have goals around teacher knowledge and how is teacher knowledge increasing each year in this plan. I think being rather specific about our goals is really helpful in crafting that vision.

Anna Geiger:

Thank you, that's really helpful. Okay, so step number two was installation.

Laura Stewart:

The installation phase is really focused on, "Okay, we've done some exploration work. We're going to start this implementation. Who's going to be responsible for what, and how are we going to actually plan collaboratively how this actually rolls out?"

The number one thing we have to think about as leaders, and remember this book is really written for leaders, is to think about, do you have everyone in the same boat in the right seats rowing in the same direction? Do you have administrative leadership that establishes policy to support change, oversees the implementation, and delivers on a communication plan?

Part of installation is making sure we are relentlessly communicating both internally and externally, because I have to also say we want to engage our school community, and not just internal school community but the community at large. One of the mistakes I think we sometimes make is thinking that in schools or districts we are an isolated entity, but in fact we're serving our community. I think tapping into our school boards and other community entities it's really important because they want our students to graduate highly literate and contribute meaningfully to our communities.

We have to make sure that we've got the right engaged parties. We have our implementation team, but then we also have our grade-level teams and our intervention teams that are looking at data frequently

to see if our kids are making the progress that they need to make, and ensuring that all of our students have tiered support: Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 support.

During installation we are creating that literacy plan, and that literacy plan has to have adequate time for literacy instruction. I want to of course at this point say that for many of our schools and districts, that literacy plan is really MTSS, multi-tiered symptoms of support.

I think one of the places we go sideways in this installation phase is if we don't make time a priority for all of our students, and scheduling time for all those tiers of instruction, and making sure that those tiers of instruction are not a replacement of one another, they're additive to each other.

I was really heartened to read APM's latest reporting on Steubenville School District in Ohio and how everybody... It's all hands on deck during their Walk to Read model, and that gives students targeted instruction with what they need. It also carves out this kind of sacred time and day to make sure that that instruction can happen.

During that installation phase, we're looking at the overall plan, which again, structure-wise might be an MTSS model.

It's making sure that we have the right assessments in place, and I could go on and on about this. It's making sure that we have kind of Goldilocks assessments, not too little, not too much, just right. We have to have the right universal screeners, diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring assessments, and outcome evaluation, because we have to answer the question, how are our kids doing? Which students need more support or enrichment? What should be taught for those students?

We have to ask ourselves, is our instruction working? And if not, how do we right the ship? So we need those assessments in place.

Also during the installation phase, we have to check to make sure that if we are aligning tiers of instruction, that they're aligned under a common skills backbone. I like to look at a scope and sequence across K-5 and say, is that scope and sequence evidence-aligned, building upon one another, and providing what we would call a rich hierarchical skills backbone.

I would also say in the installation phase, we have to keep that vision in the forefront all the time, top of mind vision.

Anna Geiger:

So for anyone taking notes, this is a big step, right?

Laura Stewart:

Huge.

Anna Geiger:

This isn't just a big check off the box. This is where it's systems, not silos. That's what this is all about, right? Because you can't possibly do it all by yourself in your classroom. You have to work with the rest of the school. The leadership has to be on board. Yeah, lots of pieces there. That's why it's always helpful to have an implementation team help your school do this step because it's so complicated.

Laura Stewart:

I won't go into this now in the interest of time, but there's a piece in the book about why do we need to collaborate? Why is it so important to collaborate? Why we need diverse experiences and perspectives, and why do we need to support one another and create a supportive environment? That is all really critical. It's a critical part of this installation phase.

Anna Geiger:

Let's move on to initial implementation. What is that?

Laura Stewart:

Initial implementation is characterized by collaborative planning and also reinforcement of a school culture that is really focused on continuous improvement. One of the things we do as leaders in initial implementation is set up systems for regular cadence for collaborative problem solving around data.

That data cycle is assess, analyze, instruct. We assess our students, we get the data that we need, we analyze the data and group students, then we instruct students, progress monitor, and keep moving that cycle. I think it's really important that we have high fidelity to the data and feedback because we have to inform our decisions around instruction.

I call it a virtuous cycle: assessment, analysis, and instruction. And we do it frequently because we want to keep our kids out of what I call the cul-de-sac of intervention.

Anna Geiger:

That's interesting. Can you explain what you mean by that?

Laura Stewart:

Yeah, so what I've found in my own experience is that oftentimes we're not clearly focusing on pinpointing targeted needs of students, and that only comes through diagnostic assessments, right?

When I came up as a teacher, we would put our kids in groups based on universal assessments. The kids who were in the green got Tier 1 instruction. Kids who were in the red got intervention, and we had an intervention program.

But what we have to do is we have to say, "If our kids are not at benchmark, where's the gap? And how do I fill it?"

To be honest, there are some kids that may show a gap here, but they don't need weeks and weeks of instruction to fill that gap. Now, if we're not progress monitoring frequently, that child may stay in that intervention group and it just becomes this cycle of intervention as opposed to acceleration. Does that make sense?

Anna Geiger:

Yes, and that is a mindset shift for some people who have not seen that in action.

Laura Stewart:

That's right.

The other thing I would say about initial implementation is if we already have not put into place really strong professional learning, this is when we have to get it done. Especially if our literacy transformation involves new curriculum resources, we have to have good professional learning.

I would say we have to customize that professional learning because it's for everybody. Everybody's a reading teacher. What do teachers need to know? What do coaches need to know? What do principals need to know? What do district administrators need to know? We all have to have a common base of language. We have to have a common base of knowledge, but the depth of that knowledge differs depending on the roles that we play. I think kind of looking at professional learning from a differentiated lens is helpful.

And I cannot state this strongly enough, that professional learning has got to include coaching. I'm sure you're probably very familiar with the Joyce and Showers research that says that if we just present theory, there's virtually no… We're not moving the needle on practice. If we demonstrate practices, we're still not moving the needle on classroom practice. If in a professional learning setting teachers are practicing something, then that will likely have some transfer to their classroom practice. But it's really through the ongoing coaching that we see the transfer to practice and the development of mastery and expertise in teaching, the art of teaching.

And so during this initial implementation, we have to support our teachers and any invested party in professional learning and coaching.

I would also say that during this initial implementation, we have to make sure that the resources align with the body of evidence called the science of reading, but also align with the science of teaching and the science of learning, and that those resources are consistent across tiers. Again, it's additive instruction, not replacement instruction, so we can accelerate our students.

Frankly, just simple things like making sure that the program that we're using or the resources that we're using have high quality, repeatable, replicable routines so that our kids are using more cognitive energy on the learning and less cognitive energy on what am I supposed to be doing right now?

All those things, I think, are critical for that initial implementation.

Again, continue to lead that vision. Protect the vision, create that relentless communication and culture of transparency. Those are things that will allow you to keep that vision moving forward into the next phase, full implementation.

Anna Geiger:

As a little review, basically exploration was a discussion about where are we going? What's the whole point of this? Let's get this all on paper.

The installation was what systems do we need to get there and start getting those set up. That's where guidance really helps because there's a lot to think through there.

Then the initial implementation was let's get started. Then in addition to possibly teaching with a new program potentially, we've got these collaborative meetings. We've found time in the day or whenever for the teachers to meet to discuss data and make decisions about what to do with it.

It's not just throwing a program at people, it's support. You talked about coaches and in addition to understanding the science of reading, how am I presenting this information? How am I giving feedback? How am I giving all my students as many opportunities as possible to participate in a lesson? This is going to take time, but we're getting started.

How does this differ from the next phase, which is full implementation?

Laura Stewart:

Yeah, thank you. Let's say it's adopting a curriculum program. In initial implementation, not everybody might be doing it yet. There might be some of our early adopters that are getting started. Full implementation is when we've moved our implementation so that we're all doing the implementation.

For example, during full implementation, everybody is in full swing. This has kind of become the way we do things in our school.

As leaders during this full implementation phase, we have to make sure that we continue to lead that vision and we have to put some accountability in place. I always say we have to inspect what we expect. We have to ask ourselves, are our staff members implementing this evidence-aligned practice? Are they teaching with precision? We had all this professional learning around principles of instruction, are we seeing that actually in the classroom? Are student outcomes moving in the right direction? Do we have support procedures in place for continued success? And are we continuing to look at the data? Are we continuing to examine the data in a collaborative problem-solving way?

Also during full implementation, we've got to keep a pulse on our school culture. Are we ensuring that all of us are on some sort of team, whether you're on the implementation team or the leadership team, intervention team, or grade-level team, so that we all have a vested interest in this implementation? We want to make sure that we're all invested in problem solving, we're all invested in professional learning, and we've got this ongoing communication so that people feel informed and in the loop.

We want to make sure that we have systems in place now, this is what's really important in full implementation, to be reflective. As leaders, that's one of the most important things we can do is to be reflective leaders. Is what we are doing is having the desired literacy outcomes we established back in the exploration phase. Are people engaged? Are people thriving? What, if any, shifts to this implementation have to be made to meet those outcomes that we have set out at the beginning and that we keep reiterating with our vision? And what's the next step? Like we said, the sciences are always evolving, so what's our next step for growth and innovation?

I outlined several ways that we as leaders can be really reflective, both for our school community and for ourselves as leaders.

Anna Geiger:

Talk to us about the final phase, sustainability.

Laura Stewart:

Sure. Sustainability is really about how are we going to keep this initiative going? Because I will tell you one of the most common mistakes that I have seen over and over again, it goes back to something you said earlier, that we see this change as a short-term fix, and we don't understand how long change can really take. This is a multi-year journey and there really aren't any shortcuts.

Sustainability is really about how are you as a leader nurturing this idea that this is an ongoing journey? How are you committing yourself to delegating and investing in future leaders? I quote Simon Sinek in the book here, “A star wants to see himself rise to the top. A leader wants to see those around him rise to the top.” Part of sustainability is making sure that you've got a plan for others to rise up as leaders.

Also the one thing I think is really important to remember in any sort of transformational change: it's progress, not perfection. You have to put a strong system underneath a big vision. A strong system

underneath a big vision, because you have to be able to withstand ups and downs that the future can bring.

We have to be able to continue to see it as an ongoing process, not as something that comes to an end and then we move on to something else.

Anna Geiger:

Right, and we can go back to that dieting analogy, right? You're going to have bad days where you fall off the wagon. But if you just quit and throw in the towel? What is the point of doing that? I mean, that's what we do, but we get back up.

Laura Stewart:

I think sometimes we do think that change is some place that we arrive to or we complete, but change is dynamic. That's one of the beauties of our profession, frankly; teaching and learning are dynamic.

I always tell people when I speak to groups of people, I say, stay curious, follow your inquiry, keep growing. That's one of the beauties of our profession.

Anna Geiger:

We talked about a lot of things today, and I wonder if you have any final bits of advice for people about implementation, maybe people who are just getting started or leaders or classroom teachers who are ready to get going with this.

Laura Stewart:

Well, thank you so much for inviting me on here. I have so much more we could talk about. I'm sure you probably do too. Maybe another time.

I do want to encourage people to check out this *Courage to Lead* book because one of the parts of this book that I just want to highlight is... I not only provide kind of a roadmap of ideas to think about on an implementation journey, but a significant section of this book is devoted to some of the courageous literacy leaders I've had the privilege of working with. Many of them have been on webinars and podcasts with me: Louisa Moats, Mitchell Brookins, Danielle Thompson, Terrie Nolan, Kymyona Burk, Kelly Butler, and more and more.

One thing I've devoted this book to is give *their* advice. What advice would you give? How do you see yourself as a leader? What have you done that's been successful or maybe not? What would you do differently?

The other thing that I really want to say is that I joined 95% Group because of my belief that it's not only important to build knowledge, but we have to provide teachers with the right resources to do their jobs. One of the things that I would hope that some of our listeners would do is check out 95% Group. I firmly believe that we are doing really great work, and one of the things that we've done in both *Courage to Lead* and *Science of Reading 2.0* is profile some success stories from districts we've worked with that have gone through transformational change.

To really look toward practitioners and visionary leaders who have done this work and learning lessons from them, that's been a great privilege of my life as an educator. Again, going back to why I wrote this book, because I've had the advantage of working with visionary leaders, and I want to pass on that

knowledge and that wisdom and elevate them and elevate our future leaders and all the people that are doing the hard work to get this job done. I count you among those, Anna. You're doing the hard work. I appreciate you so much in the work that you're doing to advance our shared mission.

Anna Geiger:

Thank you so much for all that you've done and continue to do. They are excellent e-books. Again, we'll link to those where people can download those for free. then certainly also to 95% Group, which is always one of the phonics programs I list when people ask me what they should be considering. I know it's an excellent program.

Thank you again, and maybe we'll talk again in the future. I really appreciate all that you shared.

Laura Stewart:

All right. Thanks so much, Anna. Take care.

Anna Geiger:

You can find the show notes for today's episode at reachallreaders.com/episode212. Talk to you next time!

Closing:

That's all for this episode of Triple R Teaching. For more educational resources, visit Anna at her home base, reachallreaders.com, and join our teaching community. We look forward to helping you reflect, refine, and recharge on the next episode of Triple R Teaching.