The principal's role in using MTSS to improve reading outcomes - with Sharon Dunn

Triple R Teaching Podcast #213

Hello, this is Anna Geiger, author of *Reach All Readers* and creator of the Reach All Readers website. I know you're going to enjoy my interview today with Sharon Dunn, who is an MTSS leadership consultant. In today's episode, she shares with us her experience as a principal of a high poverty elementary school. She walks us through how she and the school worked together to help the students achieve drastic improvement in reading outcomes.

In her current role, Sharon supports schools and districts with educational leadership for improved reading outcomes as an MTSS leadership consultant. I know you're going to really appreciate her emphasis on the role of the principal and what principals can do to make this process work. Here we go!

Anna Geiger:

Welcome, Sharon!

Sharon Dunn:

Thank you so much for having me, Anna.

Anna Geiger:

It's a pleasure to have you here today. We're going to talk about how school leaders can help move the needle when it comes to helping prevent reading failure through systems leadership.

Before we get into that, can you introduce yourself and tell us how you got into education?

Sharon Dunn:

Well, thank you. I'm happy to be here.

It's been quite a journey. A little bit about my history in education is that life takes interesting twists and turns. I actually graduated from UC Santa Barbara. I live in Bakersfield, California, and I graduated from UC Santa Barbara with my business degree in economics. There was a big push for women in business at that time.

But growing up, I always liked being with kids and working in church camps and teaching Sunday school classes and doing all that. I wanted to be a teacher, but the job market was closed really when I was going through my higher ed, and so I went the business econ route.

I tell you, it's interesting because I went to Los Angeles, lived there for a year, and did that commute - an hour and a half to downtown, an hour and a half back - in the business world. I thought, "No, this is not quite what I want to do for the next 30 years." And in the meantime, I got married and I moved back to Bakersfield, and I started substitute teaching and I absolutely loved it. At that time, the job market started opening up and there was a need for teachers, and I was hired actually on an emergency credential.

My first job was in a rural town with a high migrant labor population. I did not know how profound this was at the time, but the kindergarten teachers in this small little school used DISTAR, which is Reading Mastery, and I loved it! It was scripted, which was helpful to me as a new teacher, but what I found was I was teaching the kids that were of migrant farm working families, 99% Hispanic, to read and understand English. They could speak English and understand it, and knew how to read, by the end of kindergarten. That was monumental to me.

I was there for three years, then I moved to a more affluent district in Bakersfield. It was a middle-class school, and I taught kindergarten, third grade, sixth grade, and many grades in between. Actually, when I taught kindergarten, I made the *big* jump to sixth grade, and I quickly learned that, "Oh, these are kindergartners grown up in sixth grade bodies!"

But it was during that sixth grade year that I realized the disparity. I had kids in my class that were two or three years behind when it came to reading and understanding. I thought, "How can this be? How can they go through? I had them in kindergarten. How do they get so far behind?"

That kind of drove me to earn my master's degree. I went to the University of La Verne, and I had a wonderful professor, Dr. Bill Matthew. He really helped me understand the power in utilizing the right kind of assessments. He exposed the research behind direct instruction, which is what I had experienced in that little rural school using DISTAR and Reading Mastery.

I loved it. I did my own control group. By that time I was teaching third grade, and I collected data, and I implemented some direct instruction intervention, and I did my master's thesis on that. Those were just tools in my toolkit along the way. I learned more about the five big ideas of reading through this whole process in my master's degree.

Then I was appointed assistant principal. At the time of this, I was at a high poverty school in my district, and the school psychologist approached me and said, "Hey, you want to implement DIBELS Next? Do you want to help me do that?

And I thought, "Ah! Yeah, I think so!" And together we did. The principal at the time was just great. He allowed us to do this. We were trained, and we provided training for the teachers, and we began to group the kids in small group instruction. That was important because I was able to bring that into my school when I was appointed principal at Loudon Elementary.

Anna Geiger:

Let's go back a little bit. You and I had some previous conversations and we did some timing on this. When you were teaching in that rural community with the children of migrants, that was in the mid-eighties, which in California was a pretty heavy whole language time. Yet you landed in this little school using direct instruction.

Now, I'm not certain, but I'll probably put this episode after an episode that I'm giving with Dr. Zach Groshell about explicit instruction. He and I talked about "big DI" and "little di," these different kinds of programs. This is an example of a "big DI" program, a program that is scripted, not to nth degree, because teachers are responsible for feedback and making sure their students are understanding, but it's a very specific way of teaching and you saw great success with it.

And then you were put into classrooms that I'm sure were more typical of what was happening in California and the rest of the country, probably more whole language/balanced literacy type schools where there may have been some phonics, but probably not very explicit or systematic.

Yet also during this time, you were blessed with a professor who taught you about universal screening, which helped you understand the important early literacy indicators, which many people do not learn in graduate school. I did not.

It's really exciting that you had these two really important experiences to lay the groundwork for you later on, so that when the psychologist said, "Do you want to implement DIBELS Next?" you were excited about that. Somebody else might not have been, but you saw the value in that. Thanks for laying out that foundation of where you started.

So what challenges did you face as a new principal?

Sharon Dunn:

Yeah, well, I loved my school, but I'll tell you the first couple years were really rough. The principal that preceded me, she was a beloved principal, and she left to open a new school within the district. Along with that, she took a third of the staff and the ones that were left were not so happy that they were not selected to go with her.

Literally, during the principal transition time, she said, "Good luck! You are going into program improvement." In California at the time we had the API, which was the academic performance index, a system of measuring school performance, and Loudon was a very underperforming school.

It was the perfect storm. There were teacher layoffs in California. We were one of 24 schools where teachers were involuntarily moved from affluent, higher-performing schools to my school, which was a high poverty school. The poverty rate of my school, which was an all-walking school, began to increase substantially as a result of the economic downturn.

At the time there were big changes also in the California Department of Education. Common Core State Standards were being introduced during my tenure, the API was eventually replaced by the CAASPP, the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, and that came on board around 2015.

The entire district was very much a whole language oriented district. The norm was really to stay status quo, just let me teach the way I want to teach. There was mostly an ad hoc approach to literacy instruction and a resistance to change. As you mentioned, there was phonics instruction, but it wasn't systematic or explicit enough to really address the needs of our students, and there was a wait-to-fail model for special education. The focus was on identification and placement rather than improving student outcomes.

The district also adopted a basil reading program. Treasures was the basil reading program that we had when I was appointed principal. Later, we transitioned to Benchmark Advanced, but there were a lot of different changes.

Like I said, it was the perfect storm.

The district had a lot of different reading assessments. The district created benchmark assessments that focused on Common Core Standards, we had STAR Reading, we had curriculum-based assessments, but none of them could really tell me where the kids were at Loudon Elementary in regard to reading, especially the five big ideas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Our school was one of the lowest performing schools in the district as measured by the API, the STAR, standardized testing and reporting system within the API score, so we had our work cut out for us.

Anna Geiger:

The first big challenge you faced, of course, was the principal took a third of the staff, which is crazy and just kind of wished you luck. That's hard. Then people coming in disgruntled because they didn't like how things were changing. Then, course, the low-performing and the poverty are things that are very hard to deal with. So what was the first thing that you did?

Sharon Dunn:

Well, everyone tells you in first year as a principal, don't make a lot of changes, and I didn't. I just tried to get the lay of the land and, like I said, that perfect storm was brewing. I just wanted to get to know my staff and let them get to know me and not make a lot of changes.

However, time was ticking, and I needed to know exactly how many students and which students were not on track for reading accurately, fluently, and with comprehension. I knew enough about the five big ideas of reading and as assistant principal, I had had that experience with DIBELS Next, and so that's what I did.

The next year I brought in DIBELS Next and that was a big change for my staff. They really didn't have any experience with that. We went through the training and that first year was just collecting the data, beginning of the year, middle of the year and end of the year.

By that end of the year data, that was my big aha moment. That's when I saw the kindergarten data, especially. Our kindergartners came in at the beginning of the year around 36-38% on track to become readers. But by the end of the year, they ended at 28% on track, and so they went *down*! I thought, "That's a whole year of instruction!"

And don't get me wrong, we had dedicated, wonderful teachers who worked hard. They were wonderful. The kids, they came to school, they were smart and they wanted to learn, but it was clear that our instruction wasn't meeting their needs. How did I know that? It was through the data. The data was exposing that.

I heard *all* of the excuses like "These kids don't care. The parents don't care. I can't believe how much apathy these kids have. They don't have the vocabulary. They don't want to learn."

But honestly, that wasn't true. We needed to get the foundational skills in place. We needed to equip them with the right instruction to help them to become readers. We had a sea of red and yellow data and our ship was sinking and it was sinking fast.

It seemed like an insurmountable wall, but we rolled up our sleeves and we visited schools that were higher performing in other districts. We went to conferences. We equipped ourselves with more understanding and knowledge with the universal screener we were using that helped the teachers understand the essential skills to early literacy.

We needed to change our approach. We no longer could close our doors and do whatever teachers felt best. We had so much need, we had to change our delivery of instruction and go to a flexible delivery service model where we shared kids across the grade level because I needed all my teachers and the paraprofessionals to create small group instruction to target the needs as exposed through a universal screener.

We carved out a specific time within our English language arts block, which was a 45-minute block of time. We targeted that instruction, and we saw some growth. We did, but it wasn't really enough. Our API would bump up a little and maybe slide back, and bump up and slide back.

I thought, "We need more," because we had such pervasive need. When I went to the National Title 1 conference on the west coast, I met Dr. Susan Hall. I had one of her books, but I didn't know really who

she was. I saw her book on one of the kiosks that said *I've DIBEL'd, Now What?*, and I went to her booth and we had a conversation.

She showed me her diagnostic assessment. It was like electricity went through me. I remember exactly where I was standing the table, everything about that moment. I thought, "This is it! This is our missing piece! Our teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge of what exactly is the next lowest skill deficit that needs to be taught."

That was through the diagnostic assessment. What was tripping these kids up? How could we get them to read really accurately? And she not only had that diagnostic assessment, but she had the materials and processes to help clean it up.

The interesting thing is 95% materials, they're not only aligned with the science of reading research, but they also closely adhere to the principles of DI, of direct instruction. These materials, they feature structured and scripted lessons that have been supported by research, but the emphasis is on mastery learning and precise instruction. It's consistently evident throughout their materials.

So we went back and brought in the diagnostic screener and the professional learning journey launched with 95% group because Susan Hall was the co-founder and creator of that. That really took us to the next level. We implemented another walk to learn with Tier 2 instruction that specifically targeted creating readers who could read accurately and fluently and with comprehension.

Anna Geiger:

Thank you for laying that out so well. I'm going to go back in time just to review for some people who are listening. I know that some teachers who email me aren't quite clear on what a universal screener is, so I'm just going to lay that out really quickly, because I didn't know what that was five years ago probably.

The universal screener is the assessment that you give three times a year. It's very short. It takes fewer than 10 minutes per child, depending on the grade and what assessments you're giving. They are only one-minute assessments. For kindergarten, it might be saying the first sound of a word and eventually sounding out a three-letter nonsense word. For first grade it might be the same. Then in mid-first grade, you add the ORF assessment where they're going to be reading a grade level passage for one minute, and you're going to figure out their accuracy rate and their words correct per minute.

The point of these assessments... DIBELS Next is what you used, which is now called Acadience, and there are other universal screeners. The point of them is to figure out if students are on track to be okay readers. If they're not, if the colors on the printout that you get are red or yellow, that's a warning sign. You've got to do something about that.

It's not just something we do because we have to; we do it because it guides our instruction. That's of course what you realized.

You have talked to me about this being a journey driven by data. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Sharon Dunn:

Yes. In order to make accurate instructional decisions, it's essential to have reliable and informative data. Honestly, it just comes down to four key assessments. You need a universal screener to identify at-risk students, a diagnostic assessment to pinpoint the specific skill deficits, progress monitoring to track improvement, and the end of the year state assessment to measure reading proficiency.

By using these assessments, educators can ensure that their instruction is targeted and effective and guided by the data collected throughout the year.

The universal screener, as you so eloquently described, identifies who needs who needs support. We used Acadience, which consists of the six brief standardized measures that function as indicators of the essential skills every child must learn to mastery to become a proficient reader. This is why a valid and reliable universal screener is so important. It identifies who needs support, not only the students, but which grade levels.

Next in this collaborative problem solving process is exactly what to teach next. That diagnostic assessment that I described, we used a 95% group diagnostic assessment, that guided us into exactly what to teach next. It gave us the lowest skill deficit of what the students were missing to become an accurate reader.

Then after that, we would plan the instruction according to the data. That showed us across the grade level exactly who needed what, and we could form groups in that grade level planning process and acquire the right materials and refine our instruction.

Then we would progress monitor along the way. That was a huge piece. It's a pretty heavy lift because at first it was just the beginning, middle, and end of the year benchmark assessments with Acadience.

Then I saw that we've got to bring in the progress monitoring to really refine even more because, especially with our struggling students, we had to know if our instruction was working or was it not? And how to adjust because we had groups of students that even with a differentiated core instruction and Tier 2 instruction, they even needed an extra scoop, an extra boot camp, after lunch to help them achieve that accuracy.

It was through that diagnostic data that we could really pinpoint exactly what those strugglers needed and how to clean their lowest skill deficits up to create that accuracy.

Then the fourth assessment is like, did it work? It’s your end of the year state assessment that's proof in the pudding. That really tells you as an administrator if you fixed the reading problem.

Anna Geiger:

I appreciate you walking us through the different types of assessments. Just as a reminder for those listening that the universal screener is what you do at the beginning of the year to see where you're at. Then to know specifically what to teach is the diagnostic, and you used diagnostic assessments from the 95% group, and then you ended up using that program eventually in teaching your foundational skills.

The way that your school did it was you did the diagnostic assessment and then you saw, “Okay, these particular students need to learn this next.” But not just from one classroom; you grouped across classrooms. You had a walk to learn model where students would walk potentially to a different room to get instruction from a different teacher.

This is where we come into systems, right? When people talk about systems being important for change, I think a lot of people hear that, I know I did, and really had no idea what that meant.

But it basically is the opposite of every teacher shutting their door and doing everything alone. It's having team meetings and grade-level meetings.

Can you talk a little bit more about the collaborative problem solving model, and the meetings that you had to work together on this?

Sharon Dunn:

The first two weeks of school we got our data, and then we launched our collaborative problem solving process. We would analyze that data and figure out across the grade level who was most struggling. We used the terms who needed “intensive” support and who needed “strategic” support. Those are kids that didn't meet the benchmark criteria according to Acadience. Those kids needed extra support.

For our kids that were on benchmark or above or way above, their learning needs were addressed as well.

Across the grade level, we would group the kids, depending on the manpower, using all of our teachers.

We had 106 students in first grade, for example, and four teachers, and I had five paraprofessionals because we were a high poverty school. I used my Title I funding to hire and train more paraprofessionals, so we could create several small groups because we had such great need. We would intensify the instruction and support according to the need across the grade level.

That goes into scheduling. We had to extend our ELA block. We were only 90 minutes at first, and we had to go to 150 minutes. That's including Tier 2 instruction, but 45 minutes of the core instructional time was really targeted instruction for those intensive and strategic kids.

Then we had another walk to learn for our Tier 2, which we had 30 minutes daily, five days a week, of intensive instruction to help clean up those lowest skill deficits.

From 95% Group, we learned about the science of reading through that professional learning. We had a coach come three times a year and help us walk through this collaborative problem solving model and help us refine that instruction. We'd look at the Acadience’s data and we would refine according to the materials and processes with 95% Group.

That Tier 2 instruction was so powerful. As I said, it's messy at first, but we took that Tier 2 instruction into core for our most struggling students because they needed their lowest skill deficits cleaned up. It was double timing to accelerate their learning so they would have a faster path to becoming at benchmark or above.

Anna Geiger:

Thank you. I think for people listening, basically what you did was you figured out the lowest skill they haven't mastered yet and you teach it in those small groups, but you're not just doing that once a day. You also have that additional period so that these kids actually have a chance of catching up.

I think that's a concern a lot of people have with small group differentiated skills instruction in the primary grades. They say, “Well, then they're never going to catch up. They're going to be behind always.”

Knowing that you have an extra period of the day, and you even stuck in a third period…

When we talked about this previously, you said to me that it was a “whatever it takes” approach.

I think when we look back at the teachers who were teaching that year that the kindergartners actually went backward, like you said, they were good, dedicated teachers. But I think probably what we can narrow it down to in terms of what was wrong was they didn't understand what their students needed to learn, and they weren't necessarily specifically teaching it. Would that make sense?

Sharon Dunn:

Absolutely. I was new to this as well, and I'll never forget my first data team meeting. I had my kindergarten teachers in my office, and I just printed out the data from Acadience, and I gave it to them. I really asked the right question. I said, "Tell me what you see," and gave them some time to talk with each other and look through the data.

They said, "Well, we really see that they're struggling in phonemic awareness."

And I said, "Right, so tell me the difference between phonemic awareness and phonics." It was evident that they didn't have a firm understanding and that led to improving instruction. They realized this is where we need to target this instruction is phonemic awareness.

That started them on the journey to improving. In the phonemic awareness portion of the assessment, the first year they were at maybe 21%, where in four years they got to 93% of hitting that benchmark goal according to Acadiance. That's how you know you've improved your instruction, because that's an essential component. It's one of the big five ideas of reading. It's an essential literacy component, and that was profound.

Anna Geiger:

Yeah, and I appreciate that you understood that doing the assessment is not the end. There's no point to it if we're just going to do it. You sat down with them, and you didn't come in to berate them or accuse them of anything. You just said, "What do you see?" Then you talked about it, and that also revealed what they maybe didn't know that they needed to know to teach this.

Sharon Dunn:

Yes! Well, and it was the assessment data for Acadiance that guided the instruction because it measures those essential components of reading that need to be mastered. It goes hand in hand. We're building our teacher knowledge base along the way, and understanding that assessment piece is equipping them to become better instructors with reading. Then the ongoing professional learning, of course, with 95% Group was profound, and using that diagnostic assessment. Layering all those together is what helped create accurate and fluent readers.

Anna Geiger:

Now, what is the principal's role in all of this? Why is the principal so important?

Sharon Dunn:

So the principal is the linchpin, and the principal holds the keys to the kingdom. If your principal is not on board, it's hard to make sufficient progress in reading because the principal removes the barriers and the roadblocks. They open the doors, provide the funding, help with the hiring, and get the right materials and processes in place. The principal needs to understand the data, and I learned shoulder to shoulder with my teachers.

I was in every meeting. I didn't start a meeting and walk away, but I was part of the journey in the improvement process because it's so important for the principal to hear those organic conversations. What's working? What's not? How can I help support you? What type of grade-level planning time do you need? I learned to build in the budget and have money set aside for substitute teachers to provide grade-level planning days, and to provide also the ongoing professional learning to refine the reading process. The principal holds the keys to all of that.

Anna Geiger:

I appreciate you saying how you were there to hear the conversations the teachers were having, because there's so much more than just telling them what to do. It's, "How's this going? What support do you need? What's not working?" If we burn our teachers out because they're doing something because we tell them to, and not explaining why and giving them support, then we're not going to end up where we want to be.

Sharon Dunn:

Right. And when my grade levels would meet an all-day grade level planning session, that was driven by data. I didn't give them a script. We had enough discussions in that collaborative problem solving process that they knew what to look for. I would just go in and check, and then I got out of the way. They had their textbooks, they had materials spread out, and they were literally going student by student across the grade level. Who needs what? How do we refine this?

They really calibrated their instruction, which was huge. That leads to effective teacher efficacy, which is one of the highest effect sizes as John Hattie's research shows. That was key to equity of instruction across the grade level, which is very powerful.

Anna Geiger:

So tell us about the outcome. What happened to these kids that started out, and where did they end up when they were in sixth grade?

Sharon Dunn:

Yeah, I love this because when the CSASPP, the SBAC for California, was launched in 2015, that was the first year of data for that. The API went away. Now we have a percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards. Our first year in 2015, out of 24 schools in my school district, Panama-Buena Vista, we were the lowest performing school.

Here I had been a principal there for a couple years, and we were creating our walk to learn, and we were bringing in the diagnostic, and we were doing all this. Honestly other principals or leaders would look at us and think it's not working.

Well, it takes time. We had just implemented our diagnostic assessment and gotten the right materials and processes in place. I went back that first year, and just kind of I felt like I was gut punched a little bit.

But I went back and looked at the Acadience data and I thought, "Oh, but wait! Our reds are getting less red. Our yellows are going into green. It's not coming out on the end of the year assessment yet, but it will. We're in the midst of fixing this reading problem."

That's the exact conversation I went back and had with my staff. We had to stay the course. We're on the right track. How do we know? Because the data is showing it. It's like an ocean liner in the ocean; you change course a degree at a time. So we stayed the course.

Dr. Susan Hall was on my campus. I said, "What do I need to do differently?"

She goes, "Continue to do what you're doing. You're on the right track."

Sure enough, we were. In the next year, 2016, we made a huge jump in our end of the year data. It was 10 or 11 percentage points. The next year, it was another huge jump, 10 or 11 points. Then another huge jump.

By 2019, our percentage of met or exceeded standard was nearly 60%! We went from 21% to nearly 60%. The state was at maybe 46%? Here we were a high poverty school, and we jumped up.

Then in 2020, what happened? We had COVID. They couldn't take the end of the year assessment, and honestly, the kids at my school were a little disappointed in that. The kids wanted to see how much better they were going to do on the end of year assessment, because we had so much improvement year after year.

However, we shared the mid-year Acadience data. We had that. That was the last face-to-face assessment with Acadience. It was January data, but we gave the assessment in December. It was that assessment piece when we realized, "Okay, Acadience shows that 93% of our sixth graders could read accurately, fluently, and with comprehension." 93%. That was huge! I literally cried when I saw that data.

Anna Geiger:

I bet you did!

Sharon Dunn:

Because they had an opportunity. They had a chance in life. No one could take their reading away from them. They would have a chance to go into junior high and high school with understanding what they were reading. They had access to opportunity.

Anna Geiger:

Thank you. That is such a fascinating story, and a reminder that this doesn't happen overnight. It takes time.

These sixth graders were the kids who you started with, and other kids were all, of course, making gains as well. But here we see how it worked with a particular group of students. Like you said, that does change their future in so many ways.

Sharon Dunn:

It does! And we had a high mobility school and the systems in place. We had kids moving in from other districts that didn't have the foundational skills that we were providing, and we had to catch them up. If we couldn't get all our first graders, we'd get them in the next year in second grade. If we couldn't get all the second graders, we'd get them in the next year. It's that systems approach.

As you pointed out, those sixth graders taking the mid-year assessment with Acadience, that was proof that we were truly fixing the reading problem. It was disheartening to see that we couldn't continue that upward climb with end of the year CAASPP results, because even after skipping that year, it was a modified version, so there wasn't any true comparison. Then we had changes in the district. I had retired, and then there've been three other principals, and the district leadership changed in superintendents.

Anna Geiger:

But we can see that there is a roadmap for success. It's the proper systems in place with a strong leader. I know that your work now is to support schools and principals in implementing MTSS.

Sharon Dunn:

Yes, it's coming alongside principals and district administrators in data analysis and putting the systems in place and guiding them through that collaborative problem solving process. It's helping to navigate teacher pushback along the way and to stay the course.

It takes courage. It takes a lot of courage to lead the way. You'll never have everybody a hundred percent on board, but you can't argue with the data. You can't argue with creating accurate, fluent readers who can read with comprehension.

It's knowing how to layer in… Not to forget that vocabulary development and that writing process, and all of those things to help schools on the path of not only creating an accurate and fluent reader, but tackling the complexity of texts and the writing process.

Anna Geiger:

What advice would you give to principals or district leaders who are working to make school changes so that everyone is on track to be a good reader?

Sharon Dunn:

Very rarely do I ever speak on this topic or share information without this quote. "Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets," by W. Edwards Deming. I hated that quote when I first became a principal. Then I ended up loving that quote because it is so true.

Reading proficiency is one of the greatest equity issues of our time, and it's up to us to prevent the reading failure.

As I mentioned before, the principle is the linchpin when it comes to improving reading outcomes. The steps in the process or the advice I would give would be to get a valid and reliable universal screener. Collect that universal screener data and build consensus and a sense of urgency that we've got to fix the reading problem.

Learn about the science of reading with ongoing professional development year after year because as you become more knowledgeable and the data changes, the needs change. We all need that ongoing professional learning because these are kids' lives at stake and we want to do the very best we can in preventing reading failure.

Then implement a data-based decision making process, such as the collaborative problem solving model. We want to use the universal screening data to analyze the Tier 1 curriculum and instruction, revise the schedule, have a great scope and sequence, routines, materials, grouping, and adopt a flexible service delivery model. Make sure your Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 are aligned and speak the same language; that there's a common thread moving through.

With my experience, that is what is so helpful in preventing reading failure.

Anna Geiger:

Okay, as we're rounding out our conversation, are there any pivotal experiences or people that have really helped you on your journey that you want to make sure that you share?

Sharon Dunn:

Yes, I would love to talk about this because throughout my educational journey, there were significant moments that served as pivotal turning points. I am so grateful for the valuable opportunity I had early on in my career with direct instruction, Reading Mastery, as well as my experience in higher education and conducting the research for my master's thesis on direct instruction and Project Follow Through.

I was so fortunate to attend the National Institute for Direct Instruction in Eugene, Oregon, where I had the amazing privilege of learning from Dr. Siegfried Engelmann for a week. It truly was amazing.

Then I'm incredibly thankful for the guidance and mentorship I've received from respected professionals like Dr. Susan Hall, the co-creator of 95% Group and Dr. Stephanie Stoller. Dr. Hall equipped me with the foundations of the science of reading before the term was even coined. I mean, her materials and processes were totally aligned with the research. She was a national trainer for Dr. Louisa Moats early on, and I had the incredible opportunity to learn from her.

Then Dr. Stephanie Stoller not only provided me with my initial training in DIBELS Next and Acadience's reading, but she equipped me with the understanding of data analysis, and also instilled within me the importance of data-driven instruction and the role that MTSS plays in enhancing reading outcomes. I will forever be grateful for the mentorship and friendship I've received from those two professionals.

Anna Geiger:

Yes, and Stephanie Stoller is the one that connected the two of us! We met at one of her events at one of the conferences. I also have a podcast interview with her that I'm replaying before this one comes out about MTSS. If people want to learn more about that, that's a great place to go. She also has a new book coming out as of this recording and a course. For learning more about the way your school implemented MTSS, they can learn more from Stephanie.

How can teachers and administrators find you?

Sharon Dunn:

Yeah, you can find me on Facebook, specifically on the Facebook social group page I co-created with Dr. Brent Conway, Assistant Superintendent in Massachusetts. I think you've interviewed him on your podcast as well.

Anna Geiger:

A couple of times, yes.

Sharon Dunn:

It's called, "Science of Reading for Administrators-What Teachers Want You to Know." You can find me on LinkedIn and X, and also you can find me at The Reading League, California. I'm a founding executive board member, and currently I'm serving as the president of The Reading League California.

Anna Geiger:

Well, thank you so much, Sharon. It was so nice to talk to you and to learn more about your journey and know how you can help others.

Sharon Dunn:

Thank you so much for having me, Anna. It was a delight.

Anna Geiger:

You can find the show notes for today's episode at reachallreaders.com/episode 213. 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.