Triple R Teaching

Hello, Anna Geiger here from Reach All Readers. This week we're going to continue a

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Richardson and Dr. Michèle Dufresne, who are both very big in the guided reading world.

The point of their webinar was basically to refute what they feel are incorrect beliefs or assumptions about guided reading and how they want to show that guided reading really does align with the research.

Today, we're going to start with a quote that Dr. Dufresne shares from Marie Clay. Now I really would like to dig up this quote myself to see the context to see if there's any kind of referencing of research, but I'm not sure where it comes from. It says "BL page 197." So if you have any insight into where that is from, go ahead and leave a comment on the show notes.

I do want to say that Marie Clay is a bit concerning when it comes to quoting from her for supporting what you're doing. As you may know, Marie Clay created Reading Recovery, which is concerning for a lot of reasons. I know a lot of people really love it, especially Reading Recovery teachers, but there's concern about the use of leveled text and three-cueing within Reading Recovery.

I'm not going to open that can of worms here, but I just want to put this a little bit into perspective about who Marie Clay is. My understanding of Marie Clay is that she came up with a lot of her theories based on observation. As we know now, because reading is so complex, that's not a good way to draw conclusions about how reading works or how best to teach it. I just wanted to put that in there real quick. Let's go ahead and listen to the quote.

I'm hopping in here a few months later to let you know that Pioneer Valley issued a copyright claim against me for using their audio in this episode. So I'm keeping the episode here, but I'm going to paraphrase instead of using their audio.

Back to the episode, Dr. Dufresne quotes Marie Clay: "Changing a child from one type of text to another, natural language story to a contrived text with regular phoneme-grapheme relationships, will force the child to attend to new features previously neglected. This could make the child's reading more flexible for, according to Bruner's argument, such changes might stimulate the child to formulate more generic rules about the nature of written language."

Then Dr. Dufresne says that she and Dr. Richardson are very comfortable with moving back and forth between some decodable text and some natural language leveled text, to support what she calls "a good strong processing system."

Anna Geiger: Okay, let's unpack that. The quote from Dr. Marie Clay, which as I said is really not where I would go to get research-based opinions, but regardless, the quote says that switching a child from one type of text to another will force that child to attend to new features previously neglected.

I don't really know what that means. I really don't. I don't know what that means unless you believe in three-cueing, where you're supposed to use different types of cues to "solve words," context, cues from syntax, cues from phonics. Really what they need to be doing is sounding out the word.

Mark Seidenberg has said something famous recently in a response to Fountas and Pinnell. He said, "The only cue to a word is the word itself."

I don't understand why switching between different kinds of texts is going to be important. As long as you're using quality decodable texts that actually make sense, that's all you need for beginning readers. Is that what they should be using forever? No. But when they're first learning the code, that's the kind of text they need.

If you're switching back and forth, you're confusing children because with this one book you're saying, "You need to sound out these words to read them," and in this book you're saying, "Well, think about what I talked to you about before we read, or think about what's in the picture, or use just the first letter in the picture, or what would make sense." That's confusing. We need to be consistent when we teach them how to read.

After this endorsement for using a combination of decodable and leveled text, Dr. Dufresne goes on to share their decodable books. They're certainly very beautiful. I'm guessing a lot of them are good. There may be a higher percentage of non-decodable

words than some of us would prefer, but I have no reason not to think that those are good enough decodable books.

Here's what gets me though, and maybe it gets you too. It really frustrates me when people seem to be getting on board with the science of reading, at least in some areas, but they don't acknowledge that they had it wrong before. They're making it sound like they've always been believers in a combination of leveled and decodable books. But if you go to Pioneer Valley Books, which publishes Dr. Dufresne's books (possibly she publishes elsewhere too), but from what I'm looking at there, they've got complete sets of guided reading books for all the levels but have just started their phonics decodable books section, and I know that because they're still publishing the next set. You can pre-order it. It's not complete. And yet they had all that time to create the full set of leveled books?

I don't know for sure, but my guess is that both of these ladies have promoted the use of leveled books to the exclusion of decodable books and now are trying to get on the train because they know this is what people are talking about and they want to keep selling. Now that's my personal opinion. I don't want to make judgements, but that is the impression that I get. I wish they could just be more honest and clear and say, "Hey, we had this wrong in the past, but now we know that decodable books have their place too."

We go back to Dr. Dufresne, and she says we need help everyone understand why we're using Level A and B books, what their actual purpose is, so that we don't use them too long.

She reads from a level A text. "Dad is driving. Dad is cooking," and so on, and then another story, "Look at me. I am running. Look at me. I am sitting."

She asks, why are we using them? She says that these kinds of texts are not teaching kids to look at the picture and guess at words.

She says we should call these books pre-decodable books because we need them to help children learn concepts of print, such as what directionprint goes, how to match your finger to the words, and to see repetition of high frequency words.

Then she sayas not to use a Level A or B book that doesn't have a useful high frequency

word. She says you want your students to keep seeing those repeated high frequency words.

Dr. Dufresne goes on to say that these books expose children to simple English sentence structures that will get more complex through the levels. She says that these early books can be very helpful with kids just learning English because they support oral language and vocabulary.

Then she says that these level A and B texts help help children crosscheck known letters and meaning. She says that since they're just learning consonant sounds, they can use the first letter and picture and check them against each other. She says that they are learning that there's a relationship between the letter on the page and the picture. She says this is not something they're guessing at.

Anna Geiger: Oh boy! I feel like this is just trying to save all those beautiful Level A and B books that have been written and published, like an excuse for keeping them around. Yes, children come to school not knowing letters and sounds, so guess what? We should spend our time teaching them their letters and sounds instead of wasting time in these little books that are teaching bad habits.

Now, if you want to teach concepts of print, do that. Do that as a whole class activity or a small group activity with a shared text, but don't give them these little books and tell them they're reading. They're not reading. It's confusing.

For many kids, trying to figure out words by using pictures, which I know people hate to hear it, but yes, that is guessing. If you can't know for sure because you can't sound it out, you are guessing. Many kids are going to hold onto that habit because it's easier than attending to all the letters in a word. It's much easier.

Yes, teaching concepts of print, oral language, yes, all important, but we don't have to do that with these expensive little books that also teach bad habits. We need to find a different way to teach concepts of print that does not involve teaching kids to use three-cueing, which is exactly what these little books do.

One more thing, she talked a lot about using these books with high frequency words to help kids get exposure to those words over and over. If you've done some study into the science of reading, you know that simply seeing the words over and over is not what teaches us to read them. It's actually sounding them out. We want to teach high frequency words in the context of phonics lessons. When we do teach irregular words,

we can explicitly look at those letters and talk about the sounds they represent, not just see them over and over in a book. Will some kids memorize words that way? Yes, but memorizing words is not a good long-term strategy.

She also says that students should have some letter and sound recognition. She says that teachers are keeping kids at Level A and B too long. She says that she thinks a lot of the criticism is coming because some kids are spending months and months at Level A and B. She says to ask for help if you're not sure how to get kids out of those levels, that they should not be spending the first half of kindergarten in A and B. We want them to move into Level C and D. She says to give them more support in guided reading lessons so they can move out of this highly repetitive text.

Anna Geiger: I think the best way for me to respond to this is to read for you what Jan Richardson wrote in her book, The Next Step Forward in Guided Reading for the Early Reading Levels, she actually calls it A, B, and C. For these early levels, as kids finish level C, she says that kids should be able to match one-to-one, go left to right, discuss a story with teacher prompting, and read and write about thirty sight words. (The Next Step Forward in Guided Reading, 2016, p. 54).

Read and write about thirty sight words as they're just learning the alphabet? That really doesn't make any sense to me at all.

I find this very interesting too. It says, "Once children recognize the sentence structure in the story, they might read the entire text accurately, but not really attend to the print" (p. 55).

Then they're not reading! They're not reading if they're not looking at the words.

I'm looking at the back of Jan Richardson's book and she has charts - sight word charts - for monitoring progress. Let's take a look at the words that students are expected to know for Level A: am, at, can, go, is, like, me, see, the, to. Then in level B we're going on to: dad, he, in, it, look, mom, my, on, up, we (p. 317).

Why are we putting so many decodable words into a sight word list that kids have to memorize? Am, at, can, dad, mom, on, up, those are words that we just sound out. There's a lot of confusion here about what it means to bring kids to automaticity with words.

If you go on to Level C, there are, again, more words that are simply decodable. You can just teach them within your phonics lessons.

Now I've said before, I do believe it's useful to have kids memorize a very small set of words at the beginning, such as the word "the" so they can read decodable books. But that's all. That's the only purpose. This long list of "sight words" is definitely concerning.

The book goes on to explain how to choose a text for your emergent readers. You want to choose a text that matches your focus, which could be, as they write, identifying sight words, matching one-to-one, using meaning, using first letters and crosschecking.

Now matching one-to-one, making sure what you read makes sense, those are important things to teach, but we don't have to do that with these little books that will also simultaneously teach bad habits. We want to save this differentiated learning time for things that really make the difference at this stage of the journey, and that is teaching letters and sounds and teaching kids to sound out words, VC words and CVC words.

Let me read you the emergent lesson procedure in Jan Richardson's book. The first thing you do is sight word review, so they write three sight words you've taught them. That sounds a little crazy to me for kids who don't even know concepts of print yet, but they're supposed to be writing sight words.

You're supposed to introduce the book, read and discuss the book, make a teaching point, and that's going to be probably something like use the first letter and the picture to help you "read the word."

Then a word study activity, which includes teaching a new sight word and developing phonemic awareness, and then do guided writing where students write a sentence that is crafted and dictated by the teacher.

Now, for sure, dictation is really important, but I'm not seeing any instruction here that's going to equip them to do dictation. There's nothing in here about explicitly teaching letters and sounds, not in the guided reading lesson.

This is really funny. On page 75, Jan Richardson wrote this, "The patterned books at Levels A to C help children experience success, but they can be memorized. If children are reading quickly, they probably aren't looking at the words. One child told me he could read the book with his eyes closed." Duh! "Insist that students use their finger or a pointer to point under each word. This will foster attention to print and support one-to-one matching."

You would hope that as she wrote that, she would get an epiphany that maybe this isn't the best reading material for teaching beginning readers, but alas, that conclusion was not reached. Teaching points for this level include this one, crosscheck letters and sounds with meaning. Richardson writes that you "should cover the picture and have students read the text. When they come to the challenging word, point to the first letter and say, 'Make the first sound.' Then reveal the picture. This action demonstrates the importance of checking one source of information, visual, that is phonics," (even though you're only looking at one letter) "with another, meaning" (p. 77).

It also is promoting guessing, and it's also promoting sloppy reading because they're not actually reading through the whole word!

You can teach them to read decodable words and sentences if you're actually teaching them letters and sounds explicitly and how to blend them into words.

As I'm looking in the word study book by Dr. Richardson and Dr. Dufresne, which, of course, came after the guided reading book, it's just very confusing as to how all this is supposed to come together. In the end of the book, I see a summary of word study skills and activities for Levels A to Z. Blends are taught in Level E, initial blends, like fl, sl, sw. But when I look into the book and I look at the pre-A lesson plan, I see one that's been filled out and the dictated sentence is, "I can swim" (The Next Step Forward in Word Study and Phonics, 2019, p. 57).

Now I know you're going to be doing that with the students, it's called interactive writing, but really? Why would we be introducing blends here at the beginning when apparently students don't even know other letters and sounds in pre-A? They probably hardly know any. Why are we wasting our time with dictation of something you haven't taught?

I think they like to have this idea that their program is all structured and explicit, but it's just very scattered. That's what I see when I look at the book. It's a beautiful book, but it's very scattered.

Today, we reacted to Dr. Dufresne's discussion about the use of Level A and B texts. Next week, we're going to react to Dr. Richardson's defense of three-cueing. Join me next week for that one.

You can find the show notes for this episode at reachallreaders.com/episode110. Talk