Triple R Teaching

Hello, Anna Geiger here. Today in Episode 111, I'm responding to Jan Richardson and Michèle Dufresne. They recently shared a webinar called Getting the Facts Straight on Guided Reading. Buckle up because this week, the first thing we're going to do is listen to Jan Richardson's defense of three-cueing.

Dr. Richardson says that three-cueing is tricky because it's been twisted out of shape. She says that three-cueing is not a program for teaching reading. She says that In Reading Recovery circles, meaning, structure, and visual are better described as sources of information that students use when they try to figure out an unknown word in connected text.

She then quotes the Science of Reading: Defining Guide, which says, "In recent years, our knowledge of how the brain acquires the skill of reading has evolved. We now have a deeper understanding of how the brain processes multiple sources of information while reading."

Anna Geiger: She says, "It's not a program." People who are criticizing three-cueing do not think it's a program. We know that it's exactly what she just said it was - when kids are using multiple sources of information to land on a word.

And nice try quoting from the page in the Reading League's Science of Reading: Defining Guide. Her quote is actually from the page about how reading is processed in the brain, so she's taken it out of context. She didn't bother reading the quote on page 22, which says, "Examples of instructional practices not supported by scientific evidence: implicit and incidental instruction in word reading, visual memorization of whole words, guessing from context, and picture cues.

Dr. Richardson goes on to say that the cueing systems have been attacked and even banned, not she says, "because anyone disagrees that students need to use these multiple sources of information, but because of misinformation and misunderstandings."

Anna Geiger: Hang on a second. We know that students use multiple sources of information to check their reading, right? If you read it and it didn't sound right or didn't make sense, you'll go back and fix it, but that's not how we IDENTIFY the word. We identify the word by actually reading it - looking at the word, sounding it out. She's being very tricky here.

Next, Dr. Richardson says that some people are misunderstanding the V. She says that watched a recording of the Virginia Education Summit and during the meeting, a senior policy fellow said, "Children are being asked to rely on visual cues, to look at the picture to determine what the word is." She continued by saying, "None of the cueing systems require students to look at the word and decode it."

Dr. Richardson says that this is completely wrong, it's a misunderstanding among science of reading cognitive psychologists. She says that received an email from an expert that said, "With MSV, children are encouraged to use those three cues as the way to recognize a word without decoding it. They are taught to guess at the word based on its possible meaning."

Dr. Richardson goes on to say that If that's what people think V is, no wonder some departments of education are banning reading programs that mention MSV. They don't understand that the V is about decoding. She says we should call it MSP, so people know that the P is actually about phonics.

She then says that meaning is about more than the meaning of the word. It includes the knowledge of the word, your sentence structure, and the context of the word in the sentence.

The S, is for structure, which is syntax - the grammatical feature of a word that's in the sentence.

Anna Geiger: Okay. So first of all, when I was a balanced literacy teacher, I had no confusion about what the V meant. I knew that it meant I was supposed to use phonics to some extent. However, the professional reading that I did from Regie Routman and Lucy Calkins, Fountas and Pinnell, and others like them, did not elevate the visual cue. In fact, sometimes I read that I should use it as a last resort; sound it out was a last resort because it took the focus away from meaning.

I don't like it that she starts this with some misunderstandings by a speaker at an event. I don't think that's representative of most teachers. I don't know for sure, but

that seems to be a stretch for me.

Back to Dr. Richardson. She says that her point is that there's this misunderstanding that the visual is the picture. It's not the picture. The visual is about phonics.

Anna Geiger: Again, I really don't think this is the issue. I don't think people think that visual stands for picture. I think they know it stands for looking at the letters and sounding out the word. The issue is that we're also combining these other cues when really, we only need one to identify a word. Can we use other clues to confirm a word? Yes, but it's not how we read a word.

Dr. Richardson says that the multiple sources of information a child uses to decode unknown words and construct meaning are sources of information. She says that MSV is grounded in "an integrated, theoretical model of reading derived from observational and experimental research." Then she tells teachers to never prompt a child to guess a word.

Anna Geiger: You notice that she mentions observational research? I really think that's where three-cueing came from; watching people read. It looks like that's what they're doing, but now we know that that's not how we read words. It's not how efficient readers read words.

I really don't like it when people defend their program by saying that "research says" without putting any research up on the screen. It wouldn't be hard. If she really believes research proves that three-cueing is what we're supposed to be doing, she should pop up some studies right there, but there's nothing.

Her next slide tells that we should prompt readers for visual information, then meaning, then structure. In other words, have them sound out first. That's all well and good, but when you give them these books where they can't sound out the word, I'm not sure how that's going to work.

She says, "Avoid patterned text once kids know letters and sounds." Yeah. That's what they say, that's not what they do.

She says, "Teach emergent readers to crosscheck. Teach early readers to attend to every letter." It's just not true when they talk about in their material how you're

supposed to cover the picture so that they look at the word and then try to read it, but then if they can't get it, then look at the picture. How are they attending to every letter? It just doesn't add up.

Next there's the audio of a video where Dr. Richardson is teaching kids at a level B text. The kids are reading the book, "Look at me. I am jumping. I am walking. I am sitting." Dr Richardson says, is the word swimming or sitting? The kids say, "sitting." She says, "How do you know?" One little boy says, "it's because it doesn't have a w." Then a girl says it's because it's swimmING but it doesn't have an ING in it.

Dr. Richardson replies, "It does have an ING, let me show you. There's your ING part. So, every one of these words has an ING at the end of it, doesn't it?"

Anna Geiger: Okay. They said kids should not be using Level A and B if they know letters and sounds. That one very smart little boy knew that sitting could not be swimming because it's missing the W. Hello! He knows a lot about letters and sounds. Why is he not reading decodable books? And then you have that little girl who's really confused and who doesn't think the word has I-N-G. So, what is she really learning from this? This just seems very messed up to me.

I should note that after that lesson, she teaches them about I-N-G very quickly. We're talking maybe fifteen seconds, kind of as an afterthought, because that little girl got confused. But clearly, they're not following a scope and sequence for teaching their phonics skills, and they're not teaching in a systematic way.

Back to Dr. Richardson. She says that she's going to share some prompts you can use so that students aren't guessing. She says if they say an incorrect word, not to let it go. But also not to tell them the word. You provide corrective feedback. She says to tell them to "check the word" so they're using letters and sounds. Then she tells a story about two girls reading together. They come to the word WANTS. They sound it out, /w/ /ă/ /n/ /t/ /s/, and she's thinking to herself, "There is no way they're going to get that." One of the girls self-corrected, one of them did not.

She says that this is where meaning comes in. She says that when we try to reduce reading to a merely sounding out letter by letter, not prompting kids to use the meaning of the passage and think about what would make sense, we're actually making reading harder for them.

Anna Geiger: That example she gave there with the two girls who were reading and

they sounded out wants as /w/ /ă/ /n/ /t/ /s/, and then one of them corrected it, that's exactly what we want kids to do in, quote, "the science of reading." Though that's not really the correct use of the term because as we know, the science of reading is a body of research.

It's called set for variability, where you read and then you realize it doesn't quite sound right, that's not how we say it. Then she fixed it, and sure, she used context to do that. That's great! If you know anything about the four-part processor by Seidenberg and McClelland, we know that we use these different processing systems, but that's not how we read a word. We read a word by decoding it and then we can check it.

But I think she's conveniently leaving out the fact that in many, many, many, many, many classrooms, because we've been taught to do this, we teach students to "read" the word by using context. It's very different than correcting it based on context.

In the next section, Dr. Richardson shares some of the phonics activities they do during their word study, which is part of their guided reading lessons. I don't see anything problematic with those. I think it just feels like an add-on, and that's the problem. It really should be what you start with, and then you can apply it in your reading. They've got it backwards because it's tacked on to the end of their lesson.

I think that these great activities that they have included can be confusing for people and they think, "Well, this must be the right program."

You need to make sure that the people whose programs you're buying have the big picture correct. Do they understand how students read words? Do they understand orthographic mapping or just use the phrase? Do they understand that three-cueing is not how we read words? Do they understand how best to teach high frequency words rather than memorizing sight words? I think that's what you really need to look at when choosing a program. Can you trust these authors?

We're going to continue on with the conclusion here, where Dr. Dufresne shares some general thoughts about research.

Dr. Dufresne says that when we claim something is settled science, we need to look and see if the study is referenced.

She says we want to be asking, has the study been peer-reviewed and published? Is there evidence for the claims? Are there studies that dispute the results?

She says that we have to be aware of the research, and we have to demand that our administrators are really looking at the research.

She says that people are misrepresenting what the National Reading Panel said.

She says that the NRP found that "Systematic phonics instruction should be integrated with other reading instruction to create a balanced reading program," that "phonics instruction is never a total reading program. Phonics should not become the dominant component in a reading program, neither in the amount of time devoted to it, nor in the significance that is attached to it."

She says that very little research has been done about decodable text, and if someone says you should only use decodable text, ask for the research. Don't be swayed by people with a different agenda.

Anna Geiger: Okay. There's a lot to unpack there. I think when she talks about her basic caveats for looking at research, I think a lot of that is very worth looking at. When she talks about the National Reading Panel and some things that were shared there, yes, the National Reading Panel does say that phonics instruction is never a total reading program, but guess what? That's not what science of reading advocates are saying.

We're saying that phonics is important for the word recognition strand of Scarborough's Reading Rope, for the word recognition domain of The Simple View of Reading, and that we can't try to bypass that by having kids use context to identify words. We are certainly also advocating the teaching of vocabulary and the building of fluency and comprehension.

Phonics should not become the dominant component in a reading program? I think we have to think about what kids need when they need it. When kids are first learning to read, they have to learn the code, so yes, they need a lot of phonics. Is that going to be the main thing for all their years through school? Definitely not. It's a focus at the very beginning, and as they get proficient, then their cognitive load is freed up and they can focus on other things; more specifically, comprehending the text they're reading. But automaticity has to occur first, and we can't get there without attention to phonics. A lot of attention to phonics.

She talks about very little research determined the contributions of decodable books. That is absolutely true; however, we recommend the use of decodables based on research that shows us how kids learn to read words. If she's going to go ahead on that line and tell people to show the research, I would like to see her research that says that leveled books are best for beginning readers or even that a combination is best, because I don't know of any of that research either.

My final response to this webinar is that there are some things that are true, and there are some things that are meant to distract you from the big issues. There is a false representation of what people in the science of reading community are saying. I think this webinar is unfortunate because it confuses people and makes them believe that these authors really are in line with the science of reading, when, in my opinion, it looks like they're just trying to defend what they've always done.

Those are my thoughts. If you'd like to share yours, please leave them in the show notes for this episode, reachallreaders.com/111. We'll be back next week for