Hello, my name is Anna Geiger. I'm the creator of Reach All Readers website, and also

check it out. It currently has 84 five-star reviews on Amazon. I'm going to read one of those really quick before we get into our interview today.

B. Romero wrote, "This book should be required reading for every elementary school teacher. It thoroughly explains the theory in understandable terms, gives examples of what structured literacy looks like in the classroom, and gives ideas for lesson formats and activities that you can print and use today. Anna has created one of the most practical resources on the science of reading that I have seen so far." You can learn more at reachallreaders.com.

In today's episode, I'm interviewing Dr. Irene Daria, who is the author of a wonderful book called "I Didn't Believe Him." It's all about how her son years ago was not being taught how to read, and when he told his mom, she didn't believe him. In this episode, we talk about her experience with that, and then we go into a little bit of detail about the book. I highly recommend it. You can learn more about the book in the show notes. Here we go!

Anna Geiger: Welcome, Irene.

Irene Daria: Thank you, Anna! Thank you for having me!

Anna Geiger: We're here to talk about your book, "I Didn't Believe Him," which, as I've said, it reads like a novel. It's fascinating, horrifying, and entertaining at the same time. We're going to talk about that in a minute.

Before we do that, could you talk to us a little bit about your life story? What led up to you writing this book and what you're doing now?

Irene Daria: What led me up to writing this book is the fact that my son's school didn't teach him how to read. We'll talk about that in a minute. What I am doing now is directly related to the fact that his school did not teach him how to read.

I had been working as a journalist, and I went back before this happened with Eric's school to get my degree in psychology. I thought I was going to be doing clinical psych. Then when Eric's school failed to teach him how to read, I dove into the research and realized how many kids were being labeled learning disabled, not because there was anything neurologically wrong with them, but just because their schools were not teaching them how to read.

I thought that was a terrible tragedy. The library was giving a presentation on how children learn to read. This was back in 2007. The librarian said, "Your kids will be learning phonics in school."

After the presentation, I very politely raised my hand and said, "Not necessarily. They may not be learning phonics in a systematic explicit way in any event."

If kids don't learn phonics, often... Kids are not like adults. When we don't understand something, we'll raise our hand, and we'll say, "I don't understand." Kids don't do that. Kids move to the back of the room and become silent, or they become behavior problems.

Almost inevitably, the school begins thinking something's wrong with the child. The school, especially at that time, never thought that maybe its teaching methods were wrong, and the child was struggling.

I gave the parents tips again in a very non-alarming way. If your child isn't getting phonics in school, this is what you can do to help them.

A mother came up to me afterwards and said, "What you described is exactly what's happening to my daughter. Her school, as far as I can see, isn't teaching her how to read. They send home what we know are patterned books. They send home books full of big words that she can't possibly read, like peanut bar."

I remember she said, "What's a peanut bar anyway? Who eats peanut bars?!"

She said, "Would you teach my daughter how to read?" She was my first client.

School thought her daughter had ADHD, and they wanted to evaluate her. The mother said, "I'm sure my daughter does not have ADHD. If she did, I would do everything in the world to help her, but I really don't think that's the problem. I think she just needs to be taught how to read."

I taught her, and I really felt like I had saved this little girl's academic life. It was the most rewarding feeling.

I was at a school where you go for a master's first and then you apply to the PhD program, and I was on track for clinical psych. I was doing a book with the head of the department, and everything was great. I went to them and I said, "I want to switch to cognitive developmental psychology. I want to research reading. I want to learn about reading. This is what I want to do."

That's what I decided to do. My goal was to help prevent problems from happening as opposed to fixing them after they had already happened.

It was an immediate success. I passed out flyers at my local school. Parents came. Their kids learned to read beautifully.

The parents said, "You taught them how to read so well. Just keep them and do whatever you want." Now we're a K through 12 tutoring company, but my heart still lies in beginning reading. My heart still lies in helping kids learn how to read. That's a very long answer to your question.

Anna Geiger: All right, so let's go back in time. Your son, Eric, is now in his mid-20s, but back when he was in kindergarten, that's when he told you that the school wasn't teaching him to read. Take us back and explain what he was telling you and why you didn't believe him.

Irene Daria: So, actually, Anna, before I answer your question, which I'm going to answer, I have a pressing question that is nagging me that I have to ask you. You said the book is horrifying and inspiring, and you know so much about reading and how kids

learn to read. I've followed your work for years. What was horrifying to you?

Anna Geiger: Well, first of all, a lot of it for me was horrifying because I was seeing myself in those teachers, because that's the way that I taught reading, balanced literacy. To get it all in place and to see that this is really happening, that teachers are actually telling parents that we don't explicitly need to teach phonics, and labeling children as having a problem because they're teaching them incorrectly. It made me look back, and I would say that the school he went to was what I would call an extreme form of balanced literacy.

As you know, balanced literacy has a million definitions, and everybody applies it differently, but I definitely saw myself in there in terms of dismissing a parent's concerns and assuming I had it all right. For someone who taught balanced literacy previously and to see the effect that would have in a child's life who's not successful is very sad. You guys overcame it, but it was hard going. Then to see how much effort it took for you to get things to change, that's just wrong. This shouldn't have to happen.

It's horrifying that this has existed in schools. Now, this was a long time ago, but we know that this is still happening. That to me is horrifying. The inspiration, of course, is that you got your way through it, through a lot of effort on your part and your son's part, and then it's also an entertaining story. There's a lot of humor in there too, so people can feel like this is a book they're going to sit on the beach and enjoy.

Irene Daria: And enjoy! I'm glad to hear you say that!

So, to answer your question, Eric came home at the beginning of kindergarten, a five-year-old boy, and the exact words that he said were, "Mommy, my school isn't teaching me how to read. They tell us to look at the pictures and guess what the words are, and that's not reading, Mommy. How do you read?"

He was going to a school named Lower Lab, but I didn't name the school in the book because it was too emotionally painful for me to use the school's name. It wasn't that I was trying to keep it a secret. I gave the geographical location of it. Anyone in New York would know what school it is, but it was so painful for me to revisit and write that that just took it to a different...

I changed the teacher's name, so it wasn't as if I was really... Because when you write, it's like you're in that moment again. The teachers' names were different, but I literally could not emotionally bring myself to use the school's name. It's a school for gifted kids

in New York City with a stellar reputation. Test scores are off the charts. You have to apply to get into it. It's a school on the Upper East Side.

We live in Greenwich Village, which at the time was much more low key than the Upper East Side, which is the wealthiest zip code in New York, full of very high achieving, driven families who work with their children at home. We didn't. Eric showed up and tested. We just brought him. We didn't do any prep or anything like that.

He got in, and I was so in awe of this school that when he told me they were doing something wrong, I didn't believe him. How could this amazing school do something wrong? My son just doesn't understand yet what they're doing, I figured.

Before he said those words, I attended a presentation where his school explained how they taught reading, and it made zero sense to me as a parent, just zero. They explained about how they used post-it notes to cover the words, to encourage the kids to guess what the words are from the pictures. They used context. They made a poster for the presentation and the strategies included ask your neighbor what the word is. Sounding out was at the very bottom.

His teacher WAS teaching letter sounds. They were teaching the letter sounds so the kids could use it in their invented spelling and writing. I thought they were doing it in reading. I did not realize that they were not sounding out words at all.

Anna Geiger: What finally got you to realize, "Hang on a second, something's wrong. I need to do something."

Irene Daria: So just to fill in, I don't want to give away too much of the story because like you said, it does read like a novel. But to make a long story short, Eric's kindergarten year was absolutely horrible for the poor little kid. He had been happy and extroverted in preschool, and he still was socially extroverted and happy on the playground. But in school, sitting in the back of the room, silent, just hanging his head in shame because he was in a classroom. What made this curriculum look effective was that the parents taught their kids how to read before they started school. The vast majority of the parents had worked with these kids at home. He was in a classroom of gifted children who knew how to read. One boy was reading Harry Potter in kindergarten. This is extreme.

Anna Geiger: Oh my goodness.

Irene Daria: My kid didn't know how to read a word. He started having nightmares, screaming, screaming, screaming, screaming during the night dreaming that he was drowning. He was drowning because he didn't know how to read. This was coming out like that. He was saying, "I don't want to go to school. I hate school." It still brings tears to my eyes. It was terrible.

I asked his teacher, "Do you know what's going on?" No, she had no idea.

I remember she sent an email saying, "I read with him today, and he figured out the pattern in the book and went with it."

How I wish I had asked questions, "What's a pattern in a book?" I didn't know what that meant. How I wish I had questioned things, but I trusted.

So what finally happened was in the summer, I realized he couldn't read a word. I tried to teach him myself. I did not yet know how to.

First grade came, and what he did... Now imagine the thought that went into this for a six-year-old child. I don't think he even knew what the word memorize meant. He could not tell me. He had memorized the books in his classroom and therefore appeared to be reading them. That's why he was bringing home great grades in reading.

He came home, and with a really angry expression on his face and anger in his voice said, "Mommy, you want to see how I read? I'll show you how I read."

I said, "Okay, yeah."

He put the book behind his back and "read" it, and he turned the pages really loud, and he on purpose made this kind of rustling sound so that I would recognize he was turning the page, and he "read" the entire book behind his back. That's when I realized he had memorized every little patterned book and was reciting them from memory. That's why his teacher thought he was reading, and why I thought he was reading, and why he wasn't reading.

Anna Geiger: That's so interesting to me how astute he was. You talk about that in the book, how this little guy knew that what he was doing was not really reading, but none of the adults around him were picking that up.

I think as a balanced literacy teacher and learning about the structured approach a number of years ago, a hang-up for me was, "I think they're not going to like reading if they have to read these decodable books."

I talked to a principal who called me up to talk about this, and he said, "At our school, these kids, at first, they can't read, so giving them these patterned books, making it seem like they're reading... They know they're not reading, but when you give them a book and they can pull the words off because they have the tools to sound it out, that's where the pride and the joy comes in."

Did you see that with your son?

Irene Daria: Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. I remember when he... He used to be afraid of books. When I first had him try to read a Bob book, he just was scared of it. Then he began to feel empowered. The more phonics he learned, the better he felt, and the more excited he was about reading.

I have to tell you, there's a scene in the book. I don't know if you remember, but I praised him when finally... I remember the shining moment was when he could read "Little Bear." That was when it all clicked, the frequently used important sight words and the phonics rules. He read a "Little Bear" story so perfectly, and it's how I finally got through to his school.

We need to talk about that too, why they thought he was not reading, and he was at home.

I said to him, "You know you're going to be the talk of your school because yesterday they thought you couldn't read, and now they realize that you can read 'Little Bear.'"

Instead of looking proud, he looked so guilty. I said, "Eric, what's the matter?"

He said, "Mommy, the only reason I could that read book was because I knew the words in it."

Anna Geiger: That is so-

Irene Daria: Can you imagine?

Anna Geiger: I remember that. Yeah, that is amazing. I mean, I don't even know what a word for that is, but just that he thought there was something wrong with that because that wasn't being communicated to him. That reading is reading every individual word.

There are a lot of moments like that in the book that just hit you in the face. As someone like me who was teaching kids to read with patterned books, there are a lot of moments where I was like, "Oh my goodness." I mean, I already have come to terms with what I was doing, and I feel really bad about that. I'm working to educate teachers about what was wrong with that.

When you talk back to the teachers having the workshop about how they taught reading, I wasn't there, so I don't know exactly what they said, but I'm guessing if it were me giving it back then, it would've been something about three-queuing and how reading is all about meaning, and we identify words in different ways, and phonics is only one way. Here are the other things that we do, and that's why these patterned books are so useful because then kids can read fluently.

It seems like they're fluent, because once they know the pattern, they just go through it really quickly. They're getting to meaning right away because they're not slowly sounding out words. It really just represents a complete misunderstanding of how reading works, right?

In the book, there's a lot of tension for you, which I completely understand, in terms of, "Well, I don't want to undermine the teachers. I don't want to teach him that teachers are wrong, but at the same time, I want to teach him to read. I don't want the school to label him." Can you talk a little bit about the tension between wanting to be supportive of the school, but at the same time, right some wrongs?

Irene Daria: I was terrified of the school. I think you need to live in a place like New York City. I'm not sure if San Francisco is still like this, but at the time, admission to public school, good public middle schools and high schools, was done on a competitive basis. You don't just go to your local neighborhood school. The principal carries so much weight and power. A word from her to another school and your child is kaput basically. So, that put a different layer on it.

For me and for my son, I wanted him to respect his school, and selfishly, I didn't want him to come to rely on me as his teacher.

In a perfect world, how amazing it would've been to homeschool him, but I couldn't! I had to work. I had to earn a living. I was in school.

I don't know if you remember, but I was in charge of giving him his spelling words. Not only was I teaching him to read, but the school let me give him his spelling words, which another school, like my older son's public school, would've said, "Get lost. We know what we're doing. Go away."

So I never came right out and said, "You're doing things all wrong."

I'm going to share this with you, Anna, and with your listeners. I haven't shared it yet. Like I mentioned, I've not been on any podcasts aimed at teachers yet, but I've been on podcasts talking about the book that are aimed at parents. I don't want to give away too much of the book, because it does read like a novel. I want people to turn the pages and say, "Oh, what happened? What happened? What happens next?"

But, I really do need to share with your audience that Eric's school labeled him learning disabled. Even though their evaluation found nothing wrong with him, even though he was high average or superior in every category, they were telling me, "Oh, he has a problem with phonemic awareness," as if that was a disorder. I didn't know what phonemic awareness was.

Anna Geiger: It means you need to teach it.

Irene Daria: It means you need to teach it! But I thought it was something wrong. "Oh, no, my son does not have phonemic awareness, and maybe he needs help."

But then my husband said, "The only way we're going to get through to them, the only way we're going to show them that nothing is wrong with him, is by letting them evaluate him." Indeed, an evaluation found nothing wrong, and then they labeled him learning disabled because his reading level did not match his high IQ. I mean, could you just die? Could you die?

Anna Geiger: That was a stunning moment in the book. Oh my goodness, I wasn't expecting that.

Irene Daria: I share this because I'm getting... I've sent out some advance readers copies, and I don't know if this book will sell. I don't know how it will do. I don't know who it will reach, or if it will have any impact, but already, I can sleep well at night because I've gotten one text and one phone call from people who had an advanced readers copy.

The text came from a teacher at a public school in Harlem that I worked with years ago in her classroom. I actually taught her students reading. She had me come in, and I volunteered in her classroom. She works in a K-8 school, and she said, "Your book has made me question every kid in my school who's been labeled learning disabled and has an IEP," because they were using balanced literacy. They were not teaching phonics. It made her stop and think, "Huh, is there really something wrong with these children, or is it just that we didn't teach them reading correctly?"

Another one came from a school psychologist. The phone call came from the school psychologist who said, "I've got to tell you, I could not put this book down." She said, "I was horrified." That's why I wondered what you were horrified by. She said, "I realized I was evaluating children, and seeing they have these problems with decoding, and I never realized they had never been taught to decode."

Anna Geiger: Yeah, exactly.

Irene Daria: That is criminal. I hate to say the word criminal, I'm sorry, because teachers were as much victims as the parents and students were, right? I mean, I didn't know. You didn't know. All the teachers out there didn't know. No one certainly wanted to cause harm, but wow.

I think one of the reasons I wrote this book, because, as you know, writing a book is a

lot of work, and there could have been a lot of other things I was doing. It was to get the word out about that, and to prevent it from happening to other children, and a little bit of survivor's guilt because if my little boy had not come to me, and held that book behind his back...

Now remember, I ignored him the first time. If he hadn't finally figured out how to get through to me, my child would've been a struggling reader possibly for the rest of his life. My child would've been labeled learning disabled, probably would've had low phonemic awareness, which I would've thought was a disorder, and would have been on such a completely different academic track that I feel like we narrowly, narrowly missed a train wreck.

Anna Geiger: I would agree with you because especially, I mean, it's a blessing that you got this early. I know first grade... It would've been better to do it sooner even than that. But for many parents, this doesn't really come up until third grade, because that's when it really shows when those patterned books are gone. Then by then, you've got so many more issues to compound it. Your son was already dealing with a lot of feeling really bad about himself and feeling defeated by school, and that just compounds by the time you're in third grade. Then it makes it even harder.

What would you say made the most difference in helping him?

Irene Daria: Systematic, explicit phonics, without a doubt, and going step by step and celebrating each step. There's such joy. Phonics has gotten such a bad rap. Like you were saying, this is really fun and empowering and wonderful for kids. They go from not being able to... I'm not sure you know this, but I've written a series of workbooks that parents and teachers can use.

Anna Geiger: I'm familiar with those.

Irene Daria: They follow the order that I did with him. I taught him the word family "at" first. I taught him words that end in A-T, and then we celebrated him being able to read those words. Then we moved on to A-N. Every step that he took, there was a feeling of completion and accomplishment, and it was that continued feeling of accomplishment and awareness, and then giving him decodable readers. That was so difficult. For me to find decodable readers back then, it was impossible.

Anna Geiger: Oh yes.

Irene Daria: Now there are so many being written and being published, but even now if I go into a bookstore, they're really hard to find.

Anna Geiger: Definitely. That's true, but you found Bob Books, which is what we had back then, right?

Irene Daria: Right.

Anna Geiger: That was pretty much it.

Irene Daria: Right.

Anna Geiger: Eventually then, he was able to just read, like you would say, regular books. You talked about "Little Bear." I don't remember what other ones you talked about, because some of the ones that I would put in that category are probably more being published now, but that's the classic I Can Read book that was written for kids who are just starting to read. Nowadays, books at that same level would be like "Henry and Mudge" or "Poppleton." There are so many.

Irene Daria: We read those two.

Anna Geiger: That's where you want to go, right? It's when they've learned enough of the code that they can figure out some of those words they don't know, but still benefit from continued instruction. Would you agree?

Irene Daria: Yes.

Anna Geiger: Tell us now what you're doing in your tutoring. This is so fascinating, but you've actually worked with some famous people, so tell us about how that came about.

Irene Daria: Kate Winslet was my first famous client, and that happened because her kids went to the same preschool that Eric went to.

Anna Geiger: Interesting.

Irene Daria: I've been told I'm allowed to talk about this. I'm not going to talk too much about her kids, but the way she realized her daughter was having trouble reading. This is... I think US has that column called Celebrities are Just Like Us. Celebrities are just like us when it comes to reading, and their kids in school, and knowing, and not knowing.

Anna Geiger: Interesting.

Irene Daria: Her daughter was attending a private school in New York. At the time, Kate and her family were living in New York. They're now in London, but they had a house in Connecticut. They were in Connecticut at the time. This is a little similar to Eric's story. Her daughter picked up a book to read, and began reciting the words that were in a different book that looked similar that was in their apartment in New York City. So she was "reading" words from that other book thinking that it was the book that was in her hands.

Anna Geiger: Interesting.

Irene Daria: That's when Kate realized there was a problem, and she came and she brought her daughter. Then she brought her son. She's just the loveliest person. She is so down to earth. She is such a dedicated mother. She rolled up her sleeves and worked with her kids. She was right there doing everything that she could to support them.

Anna Geiger: Super neat. Anyone else that you're able to share, someone famous we might know?

Irene Daria: I've worked with Kate Blanchett's kids. I worked with Philip Seymour Hoffman's son on reading comprehension. I worked with Tom Brady and Bridget Moynihan's son on beginning reading. Lots of really interesting people.

Anna Geiger: That's amazing. So, tell us... Well, maybe we should wait and let people read the book to know what your son is up to now, but spoiler alert, he's doing very well.

I would highly recommend your book for anyone, especially obviously, of course, primary teachers, but also parents with kids in school.

Would you say... Like I mentioned earlier, I would say this was extreme balanced literacy at your son's school. It was more extreme than I was as a balanced literacy teacher, but I definitely saw things that I had done that were incorrect.

Would you say that things have improved in your area in general? Are you seeing improvements overall? I know the conversation has shifted more to the science of reading, but what has been your observation as a teacher especially?

Irene Daria: So, Eric's school introduced Fundations the year after his first grade year. They never said anything to me. I mean, his teacher told me, but they never said, "Oh, we learned a lot from your experience," but I was glad that that change happened at his school.

Lucy Calkins' work is based in New York City at Columbia, and her curriculum was throughout New York City public schools. She actually said in her letter in response to Margaret Goldberg's open letter, I don't know if you remember. She said, "The proof is in how well New York City children are doing with my curriculum." Well, New York City threw it out.

Anna Geiger: We also know from your book that the dirty little secret of the school was that so many parents were teaching their kids to read.

Irene Daria: Exactly.

Anna Geiger: If they struggled, they taught them. They were filling in the gaps left by what was supposedly a good program.

Irene Daria: That's the elephant in the room. That's actually how that curriculum got into the public schools in the first place, because the school's chancellor wanted every school in New York to have what schools in the well off Upper East Side and Upper West Side schools had. They were using this curriculum, but the parents were tutoring.

Anna Geiger: Oh my goodness, that's so interesting.

Irene Daria: No one thought to look at that confounding variable.

Anna Geiger: Oh, that's so interesting. I never thought about that, but I often talk about how in the schools that I taught in, they were small parochial schools, that it made sense, and balanced literacy was working for most of the kids, because most of the kids came from average middle class homes with experiences.

If you have anyone who doesn't have the experiences that maybe middle class or upper class kids have, they can't get through those leveled books because they don't know the vocabulary. To use that as an example and then think that was what everyone else needed to choose is horrifying right there. Super interesting.

Irene Daria: Anna, did you see balanced literacy working in your classroom? Were your students learning to read?

Anna Geiger: See, I think a lot of my... The kindergarten teacher did a lot of sounding out with them, so they were mostly coming to me able to sound out words. But when I had kids who struggled, just a basic sounding out, just a basic sound...

Irene Daria: You were first grade?

Anna Geiger: I taught first and second, but the first year was just first grade. It was a combination classroom, but the first year, it was just first grade.

I did have a student that year who didn't know her letters and sounds. She'd been in kindergarten for two years. Looking back, I would guess she had dyslexia. I'm almost sure of it, and probably severe dyslexia. I didn't have a systematic way of helping her, so I knew some sounding out was good, but I was trying to get her to memorize "the." It

took three months before she could remember it. So obviously, what I was doing wasn't working.

I didn't have a plan for what to do for the kids who were struggling. I just had them do more leveled books.

To your point, at the very beginning stages, they didn't know your son was having a problem because he could memorize these patterns. I think that's what I was seeing with some of the kids.

Then the other kids, we know from Nancy Young's work that 40-50% of kids are going to learn to read with balanced literacy because they're built that way. They're going to figure it out. I think that most of my kids fit in that percentage.

What I look back and am really sad about is the kids that weren't in that, and even though they had good oral language and good background knowledge, they couldn't crack the code. Instead of giving them explicit phonics instruction using a diagnostic to finding out where they were at, I just said, "Well, we just need more practice."

That was something else you talked about too in the book, how you were showing that he was reading "Little Bear," which is in Fountas and Pinnell, it's like level J, but he was still stuck in the lower levels at school because those lower levels have so many words they can't sound out.

Irene Daria: Exactly.

Anna Geiger: If they can't figure out the pattern or the pattern's hard... I should say they shouldn't figure out the pattern, but they can't figure out that final word on the page, then that's where they get stuck.

I remember working with some kids, and the book was called "Amazing Machines," and it was like Level B or C, but you're supposed to tell them the title. Because I believed in this so much, I thought, "Well, I just need... If they can't do this, then we can't move on." It doesn't make any sense once you understand but...

Yeah, so I thought it was working. I mean, this is what I had learned, especially in

graduate school, I would say. We didn't talk about this too much in my college, because that was late '90s, but in graduate school, early 2000s, it was very, very heavy balanced literacy. I didn't have any reason not to believe them.

I've talked about this before too, but I was swimming in that world. I wasn't reading anything else. I was reading Fountas and Pinnell, Lucy Calkins, Regie Routman, Sharon Taberski. They were all on that same page, and their books were so much fun to read and inspiring.

So, I thought... I don't know. I could go about that for a long time, but yes, I thought it was working.

Looking back, I can absolutely see the problems, and I think I would've seen them more if I'd have taught them in third grade, but I wasn't. I was teaching them still with those patterned books. I think maybe some of the gaps were being filled at home too, which I maybe just wasn't aware of.

I think it's exciting to see the tides changing. I think there's still a lot of work to be done, as we know.

I'm not sure if this is still true, but not long ago, Fountas and Pinnell was still the most widely used program in American schools. I think that people are becoming wise to that, and there are so many things, but the first step is getting the foundational skills piece, which is what you were aware of and were able to attack.

Irene Daria: Anna, do we still have time for a little bit, for one more thing?

Anna Geiger: Oh yeah, absolutely.

Irene Daria: You asked something else about what am I seeing as a tutor? So, New York is getting rid of Units of Study in two phases. Last September, it got rid of it in some schools. This September, it's getting rid of it in District 2, which is where Eric's school is located and other districts as well.

What I am seeing as a tutor... I tutor kids, a lot of kids, from a school that is still using

Units of Study, but it's using the one that has the phonics element in it, and they also use Fundations. The kids are getting that phonics base, but I'm getting a lot of kids from the school anyway, because what they do, they teach Fundations, but they zip their way through it. The kids come to me, and they can recite their phonics rules. A little boy says, "I've learned short vowels, digraphs, r-controlled vowels".

I'm like, "R-controlled vowels? You're six years old! How can you know that phrase?" But they learned them. They know what they are.

If they're reading the decodable books, they are applying and reading, but the school is still sending home patterned books for them to read for homework.

Anna Geiger: Yes, exactly.

Irene Daria: I am seeing kids struggling. I'm seeing... I have a video that I actually... When I have time, I must put it on my website. It's of this little boy reading a patterned book saying, "How am I supposed to know that word? How am I supposed to know that word?" He knows his phonics rules; he knows what he's been taught. He knows what he can read. I mean, kids are a lot sharper than we give them credit for. They know what's up.

Another girl who is maybe a little less confident than this boy is, she's bringing home the patterned books, and she hates reading now. Even when a school thinks it's doing everything right, we have to get rid of those patterned books.

Anna Geiger: No, I 100% agree. That is something I hammer all the time, because you can't teach how to sound out words over here, and then give them practice material that doesn't let them do that.

I've told this story before, so people who listen to my podcast know this, but when my youngest... We have six kids, and our youngest is going to be in third grade. When he was in preschool, I taught him to read because I wanted to teach all my kids to read even though I don't homeschool them.

By that time, I understood about... I was learning about structured literacy and the science of reading, and I realized, "Okay, it's really important that I do structured phonics with him. I'm going to do that, and we're going to use these decodable books,

which I had sparingly used with my other kids, very little, but I don't want to get rid of these leveled books. I really like them, so we're going to do both."

The very first day of teaching him to read after I knew he had good phonemic awareness, he had letters and sounds, we used the decodable book first. It was a Flyleaf book. It was like, "Sam. I am Sam. Sam." It was about a snake. Then I got the leveled book, and he started to read it very, very slowly. He was getting to those words at the end of the pattern, and he was trying to sound it out with what little knowledge he had. I said, "Oh, well, you actually can't do that. Let's use the picture."

That's when the light bulb finally went off. I'm like, "What am I doing? I'm completely confusing him. What is the point of this?"

So then I put them away, and we didn't get them back out again until he was just reading any old book. But those early patterned books aren't all that entertaining, so I don't think he ever picked those to read by himself.

But yes, that is the thing. I think Fundations is a very structured program, although people may have different opinions about its pacing and everything, but I think the problem is it doesn't actually come with decodable text. You have to buy those separately, and the Geodes, I think, go with them. I may not be right about that, but that's important.

If people get a structured phonics program, they need to make sure the reading material comes with it, because otherwise, teachers will have to say, "Well, what do we have? We're going to do this." That's very interesting.

Hopefully more schools will see that those are not useful for beginning readers. They might be something for teaching concepts of print with preschoolers, but when we're teaching kids to read, that's not what we should be using.

Any final words for people who are listening? I'll make sure to link to your website and your workbooks and your book, of course. Anything else you'd want to share?

Irene Daria: My hat really goes off to teachers. I think there's this massive change that's happening across the country. I lived through the previous change, or am aware of, in the year 2000 when the National Reading Panel first released its findings, it seemed like everything was going to change, and it didn't.

Now, it seems like... There have been other times where it seems like everything is going to change, and it didn't. I really think the reason change will happen now, why I really believe in it, is because of teachers. Being a teacher to me is the hardest and most important job that there is, I think. I think teachers are so underappreciated.

I especially think first grade teachers are so important because that year, if they learn to read or they don't, it makes or breaks a child's confidence.

Those are my parting words. You go, ladies and gentlemen, you teachers!

I think the reason things didn't change when whole language turned to balanced literacy... Ken Goodman wrote a book, and in the dedication to it, he dedicated it to teachers who... This is a loose quote, but something like they politely nodded when they were told what to do, and then closed their classroom doors, and continued doing what was not working.

But now, those doors are open, and teachers are on board, and that's going to make a world of difference for children.

Anna Geiger: Wonderful parting words. I can't say enough for teachers, and I love the work that I get to do. I'm not in the classroom now, but supporting teachers who I agree have the hardest, most exhausting job. When it goes well, when they have the right support and the right tools, it is so incredibly rewarding. We're so thankful for all those people, like you said, with their boots on the ground, doing the hard work.

I think teachers will enjoy this book, and I'm excited that hopefully we'll get it in more hands. Thanks so much for talking with me today.

Irene Daria: Thanks, Anna! It was great.

Anna Geiger: If you've ever seen my science of reading book list, it is very, very long. I've read all those books cover to cover. It's not often that I have one sitting on my desk, and I just pick it up to read while I'm having a snack or just sitting outside, but this was one of those books. I hope you will check it out. You can find links to Irene's book and her workbooks and her website in the show notes, which you can find at

reachallreaders.com/episode183. 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

episode of Triple R Teaching.