Making Informed Instructional Decisions

Teachers Must Be Critical Thinkers and Informed Consumers

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Simply put, I believe that it is the teacher, not the program, who teaches the child to read. A skilled teacher can take a weak program or a poorly written activity and make it work. Conversely, an inexperienced and uninformed teacher can be handed an excellent program or a tried-and-true set of materials and use them ineffectively.

Here is what I recommend.

- Teachers should be encouraged to see themselves as critical thinkers. They, along with their students, are the integral consumers of educational practices.
- To be critical consumers, teachers must be actively engaged in the process of making informed decisions. This requires deep content knowledge of language structures—as well as the knowledge of the reading process itself.
Most importantly, teachers should receive support from their school and district administrators to ensure that they are using the tools that have been selected to teach reading most effectively.

Our children—especially those most vulnerable due to dyslexia and other learning challenges—must be taught by teachers who are not only knowledgeable and experienced but who are also thinkers—well-supported as they critically consume the materials they select and use.

Excerpted from the forthcoming IDA Examiner. Dr. Gillis serves on the Editorial Board of IDA’s Perspectives on Language and Literacy. Subscriptions to these publications are among the many benefits of IDA membership.

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Dr. Gillis established the Anne E. Fowler Foundation and Fellowship to help address gaps in teacher knowledge and to provide the expert support—through a supervised practicum—that most teachers need. (See above!) Reading and Language Development Program candidates who work in an urban or priority school district are eligible to apply to the Fellowship.

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- Practice developing and delivering lessons that incorporate these six elements and the principles of instruction that are associated with Structured Literacy—that is, systematic, explicit, cumulative to mastery, diagnostic, and prescriptive.
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