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The Multi-faceted World of the Reading Teacher - or- this vs. that vs. Empowered Choices

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The Multi-faceted World of the Reading Teacher

-- or --
this vs. that
vs. empowered choices

Richard D. Robinson
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Whole language vs. the basal

If I use the basal reader, am I too traditional? ...not attentive to the latest research? If I use a whole language approach, will my program seem revolutionary? ...too non-traditional?

I have choices. I can explore ways to use a whole language approach. I can incorporate whole language ideas into a classroom where the basal is used, or I can use a basal system imaginatively, to meet the needs and interests of my students.

Workbooks vs. student developed materials

If I use the workbook for supplementary activities, does that mean I have limited creativity? If I use student developed materials, am I ignoring the district's traditional program?

I might ask to spend money allotted for workbooks on multiple copies of tradebooks. I might laminate some top-notch workbook pages for learning center activities. I'm certainly going to develop my ability to teach reading skills through mini-lessons based on students' ideas and students' writing.

Combining writing with reading: yes vs. no

If I have my students write along with their reading activities, am I diluting my language arts program with extras? If I don't combine writing with reading, aren't I ignoring current research?

Who says writing is an extra, and not an essential part of the language arts? Not me! Of course writing and reading go together — and this year I've got some brand new ideas to try. I keep in touch with current research and practice.

*In fact, I'm reading **Reading Horizons** this very moment!*

Test results: to use vs. not to use

If I use results of standardized reading tests, am I being controlled by a batch of numbers? If I don't, am I ignoring useful information?

Here's a problem I know how to handle. I'll spend time reading cum folders and looking at test results — and I'll also do some informal testing (what about some cloze exercises?) as well as just watching my kids in class — and make my own intelligent judgments about my students' strengths and needs.

Collegial interaction vs. independence

If I work with the special reading teacher, will people think I'm ineffective as a classroom reading teacher? If I don't, will people think I'm provincial, and afraid to let anyone see what I'm doing in reading?

Well, what other people think depends a lot on what I think — and I know I'm a good teacher who still has more to learn. If I want to use cooperative learning with my students, I ought to be ready for some cooperative learning myself. Our special reading teacher has some terrific ideas — and so do I.

**Back to school at night
vs. my school day is long enough already**

Are teachers who continue their education in reading just interested in getting more money? Are those who don't just too set in their ways to change?

This is a tough choice, that depends on so many things. But even if this year isn't the right time to take university courses, I will go back someday — and meanwhile, I'll see if I can't help plan for some good inservice, right here in the district.

Professional development: yea vs. nay to IRA

If I join IRA, people may think I'm just trying to impress the principal with what I know. If I don't, people may think I'm being shortsighted, and unwilling to share new ideas with my teaching colleagues.

Professional development is a strong point with me — I love getting new ideas; my students profit from what I learn and do. It's good to meet with other teachers too. (Am I glad to be a teacher? You bet I am!)

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