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

Richard D. Robinson
University of Missouri

Jeanne M. Jacobson
Western Michigan University

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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!)

Richard D. Robinson is Professor of Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri. Jeanne M. Jacobson teaches at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the Department of Education and Professional Development.