

An Open Letter from a Specialized Instructional Facilitator of Reading:



My name is Kristen Kipps, and this is my third year as a SIF-R. I would like to share with you my perspective on what the role of SIF-R means because I know it can be difficult to concisely capture the nature of the position. That is because our roles and responsibilities are extensive, and the nature of our support can look different from school to school, from teacher to teacher within a school, and even from day to day with the same teacher.

To best understand the position of SIF-R, we must first look back at the WHY. Two key words from our mission are “EMPOWER” and “CAPACITY.” When I think about those words, I am continuously brought back to John Hattie’s research on influences related to learning outcomes in his book *Visible Learning*. How powerful an influence is on creating change is captured as a measurement called an effect size.

He found that effect sizes of 0.4 led to a year’s worth of growth for students on average, so anything greater than 0.4 results in more than a year’s growth. And yes, I know that I should probably be reading that as “four tenths,” BUT, I am not a math facilitator, so...give me a break.

The influence with the largest effect size, an effect size of 1.57, was “Collective Teacher Efficacy.” This sense of efficacy is defined as teachers’ belief in their ability to positively impact student learning, and that belief is formed by experiencing success. By success, I mean that the efforts and changes the teachers made led to positive results - results that include student growth and progress. My role was created to build this efficacy, and as a result, to positively impact student growth.

In LCPS, the position of a “facilitator” really includes four roles: facilitator, presenter, coach, and consultant. I want to focus on the last two: coach and consultant. I am going to return to the difference between a coach and a consultant, but I first want to look at what aspects of instruction we apply them with teachers.

My team provides coaching and consultation support to teachers throughout every step of the instructional process, starting with IEP development. Our main focus is helping teachers to summarize their specialized reading data so that the strengths and needs of our students are clearly defined and backed by data. This is critical because those statements in the Present Levels are what drive the rest of the IEP. Everything else: goals, services, accommodations... they should ALL be directly aligned to those needs we identified through data collection and analysis.

Next, we support teachers in using those identified areas of need to select an instructional match. We know that there is no “one size fits all” for reading intervention, so we engage teachers in conversations around the data and our instructional match charts. We look at which aspect of reading should be targeted, which approach will build on our students’ strengths while

addressing the needs, and where within a scope and sequence we should begin.

Then comes the implementation stage, which is where we spend a lot of our time. We provide support at each step: lesson planning, delivery, and data collection and analysis. During this stage, it is critical that our support follow a gradual release of responsibility. We use Anita Archer’s structure for explicit instruction, which follows the “I Do, We Do, You Do” model. This involves teacher modeling, guided practice, and independent practice with feedback. We expect our teachers to be engaging our students with this scaffolded instruction in order to promote student success, which in turn leads to increased student efficacy, so why would we not provide our teachers with that same form of support? We cannot expect our teachers to be trained in an approach and be 100% ready to implement without any form of support. That is where that modeling, or I Do, step comes in, but we have to be careful not to stay in that phase forever.

It is not my job to come in and do everything for our teachers. Trust me, sometimes it would be a lot easier for me if I did everything rather than taking the time to discuss, explain, model, and ultimately to teach. However, that does nothing to build teacher efficacy, and it creates a void if I am not available to step in when they need me. To really understand this, I relate it to a meme I saw that says: the true mark of adulthood is that instead of your parents scheduling your doctors’ appointments, you just avoid going to the doctor and hope you don’t die. My generation loves memes, and say what you want about us, but we are pretty good at laughing at ourselves. And there IS truth behind that meme: If someone does something for you your whole life, when they suddenly stop, you

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most likely are NOT going to start doing it on your own. That is because we never had to take ownership for it, and we never truly learned how to do it for ourselves.

Therefore, we NEED to engage our teachers in those steps of guided practice and independent practice with feedback so that they truly learn it and feel confident with it. This ensures that best practices will continue when I am not there.

My team looks at data from fidelity measurement tools, student progress on both mastery measures AND curriculum-based measures, as well as teachers' lesson plans to dictate the pace at which we move through this gradual release of responsibility. Just like every student is different, every teacher is different, too, which takes me back to the difference between "coaching" and "consulting."

A consultant is someone who comes in and acts as an information specialist. They have resources, information, advice, and sometimes they have solutions. There are times when my position needs to take on this role. We come in with the instructional match chart, we use county modules to discuss what is expected and required in our IEPs, we train teachers in instructional approaches, we provide structured lesson plan templates, and we use county decision-making documents to guide school teams in the RTI process, but my job is actually not to come in and tell teachers what to do.

No one likes being told what to do, ESPECIALLY if we have no ownership or say in the matter; it is just "because I told you so." I think it is safe to say that does not work for you with your kids at home, and I can tell you that it 100% does not work at my house with my dog...or with adults in this position.

At times, yes, I HAVE to come in with answers or possible solutions, but I need to make sure my teachers understand the WHY behind each decision AND how I arrived at it. I also need to make sure we set up a structure that allows me to step OUT of that consulting role and into the role of a coach.

A coach helps a group take actions toward its goals, while simultaneously helping the group develop expertise in planning, reflecting, problem-solving, and decision-making. Being a coach means that I come in and I talk a lot less than I did as a "consultant." Instead, I listen, and I ask questions, not just to clarify or to gain information, but to extend their thinking.

I might ask them what their goals are for a particular lesson and what evidence they might see or collect to know that they have achieved that goal. I ask about what the data says and what actions they did during a lesson that promoted student engagement or achievement. I ask teachers to reflect and pull from knowledge they have learned in trainings. I still provide resources and point them in the direction of how to access resources and information, but I facilitate their thinking to arrive at solutions WITHOUT me. Now, that does not mean I am not going to step in and "consult" if needed, but my goal is to guide them, NOT to provide directives.

It is this role as a COACH that is the ULTIMATE purpose of my position because it is in THIS capacity that I can facilitate growth in our teachers. It is as a COACH that I can work toward our mission of empowering our staff and ultimately building their sense of efficacy. I want my teachers to feel confident and prepared and CAPABLE of making a difference, and I want them to feel supported and respected in a

profession that may not always feel that way in our society. Our teachers MATTER, and their belief in themselves matters. The belief, built upon success and outcomes, that, as EDUCATORS, they are capable of influencing positive and LASTING change...that belief MATTERS.

It is through this increased sense of efficacy that we will see student growth, just look at that 1.57 effect size from Hattie's work. And yes, data and numbers matter, whether we are talking about student scores or teachers' fidelity. YES, those are critical, but we know that our students are SO much more than a test score, and our teachers are no different.

I see success every day in my teachers. I have teachers reaching out to me saying that they have been looking over their data and the instructional match charts. That term, "instructional match," was not even in some teachers' vocabulary 2.5 years ago. I have teachers asking me to come in for fidelity checks because they want to ensure they are implementing an approach

correctly. Teachers are actually ASKING for feedback and then really APPLYING it. They are not ignoring my requests to come in and meet, they are not canceling on me last minute without explanation, they are WELCOMING support.

I had a teacher ask how he should respond to a parent about why their child's specialized reading instruction was focused on word recognition and decoding rather than comprehension. Before I could even speak, he told me that he had explained to the parents that yes, their child's comprehension of text was the ultimate goal, but there are two main skills that need to be intact: Word Recognition and Listening Comprehension. He cited data from eligibility testing and classroom observations that the

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student's listening comprehension was indeed intact while decoding was an area of need. I was speechless. This teacher had explained the entire premise of the Simple View of Reading and the Reading Rope within the context of an actual student's needs based on actual data!

I could continue on with several other examples, but I will share just one more, and this one includes some QUANTITATIVE data. This one also has an extra special place in my heart because it involves a student that I met during my first year in this position - 2.5 years ago. I actually modeled several OG lessons with this student's reading group as part of the I Do, We Do, You Do support for the teacher, and I continued my coaching support the next year with the next case manager. So this student received OG instruction in the resource setting for all of 2nd and 3rd grade.

This year, the new case manager asked for support in writing an amendment IEP. She planned to transition the support from the resource room to the general education setting, and to be completely honest, I was a bit terrified to consider that. I asked her to please bring all the data from this year and we could take a look at it. When we sat down, she had everything prepared: MAP scores, DRA scores, fluency scores, last year's SOL scores, updated eligibility testing, everything, and because she had prepared all of that, I was able to TRULY be a coach and facilitate her thinking through questioning, rather than telling her a solution.

And she was SPOT ON with her analysis. This student had tested OUT of the audio accommodation (I know that can be a little scary...but it's GOOD!); the student had EXCEEDED the DRA benchmark, had a Fast Bridge fluency score that fell within a Tier 2 level of support

(rather than Tier 3), and was 1 point (ONE POINT) away from the MAP benchmark. You may be thinking, well the student did not ACTUALLY meet the MAP or FastBridge benchmarks. Correct. But let's look at where the student started:

In the fall of 2nd grade, this student read 2nd grade level texts at a rate of 14 wcpm with 78% accuracy. This score was at the 9th percentile.

In the fall of 4th grade, this student read 4th grade level texts at a rate of 93 wcpm with 99% accuracy. This score is at the 21st percentile. Our students ARE making progress.

Now, we know that this student still needs some targeted instruction. We are not taking that away. This teacher and I engaged in a conversation about how she could target that instruction to meet the student's needs, BUT in a less restrictive environment. She will still be addressing some gaps in decoding skills, but she will be doing it in the classroom through differentiation and integration of morphemic analysis within the existing curriculum. This student will be completely accessing the curriculum while SIMULTANEOUSLY receiving targeted and individualized instruction. And yes, it can be unbelievably scary to remove some scaffolded supports, but isn't that integration WITH and access TO the general education curriculum our ultimate goal? This teacher wasn't making random instructional decisions; she was analyzing the data and using that to drive the rest of the IEP.

THAT is progress. All of these conversations - instructional match, fidelity, the Simple View of Reading, data to drive instruction - those were not happening 2.5 years ago. Now they are.

I feel so honored to be able to continue supporting our LCPS teachers so that these types of stories and conversations become the norm in our district and that ultimately our students benefit and grow from them, reflected in both qualitative AND quantitative data.

So, in conclusion, I have finally arrived at a concise answer for the question of "what do you do?" I am a teacher. My students are just a little older now, but I have, and will always be, a teacher.