

Bold = original questions

Normal = answers to questions

Highlighted = clarifying questions

1. Why did you want to become a reading specialist?

“I wanted to become a reading specialist to understand students that didn’t know how to read. There were many students who were struggling, and I didn't know what else to do with them besides what I already knew. This journey has really helped me understand students and what is going on in their brains regarding reading. The school I worked for also asked me to be a reading specialist.”

Is there anyone who inspired you to become a reading specialist?

“The students, especially the ones who I knew really needed me.”

2. What is the most challenging part of your job as a reading specialist/coach? How do you overcome this challenge?

“The most challenging part of my job is getting older and tenure teachers to step out of their comfort zone and to try new things. Many teachers can get stuck in their ways and it can be hard for me to convince them to try something else that may work better for their kids.”

3. Part of your role as a reading specialist/coach is to coach other teachers and not only work with students. How do you work with classroom teachers and administration to coach them on how they can make their literacy instruction stronger?

“I would usually push into classrooms, offer to go to certain periods that have lower scores, pull out kids if the teacher or student wanted, or meet students in small groups. I held meetings every two weeks with the department to go over updates of SOLs or other standardized testing and show them new instructional tools and new resources. I also followed many blogs to get my hands on new resources or ideas.”

4. Have you ever had parents that denied services from you? If so, how did you convince them that your services are actually beneficial to their child's success?

“There was one child that I can think of off the top of my head that needed to go through child study. I was pulling him out daily to work with him. This student had more than reading disability, I believed he was dyslexic. We had the child study and mom denied services from me. After mom said no, he would not come to me because his mother

refused it. This child began to fail classes in multiple subjects after his mom refused for him to see me.”

What did you do about this situation?

“There was nothing I could do. If mom says no, then I can unfortunately not do anything about it.”

5. What would your advice be for a new literacy coach/specialist?

“Get used to presentations. You will be asked to present a lot during professional development. You want teachers to know you’re there to help and support them and to reach all of their students. Your role is to be constructive to your teachers. It is important to reassure teachers that were all in it together. If scores are bad, it looks bad not only on the teacher, but on the reading specialist, too. You are going to have to be good at math because there is a lot of data, lots of looking at class averages and pass rates. All of this does take up a lot of your time. There is also a lot of extra work involved. They asked me to be the dyslexia coordinator for the school because I was the only one who was qualified to do so. Be prepared to do a lot of extra work because your job will involve much more than teaching literacy.”

What would happen if there was something that you preferred not to do that was asked of you?

“I usually didn’t have a choice. I always tried to keep in mind that everything I did was for the kids.”

Reflection

There were some responses that I had expected and other responses that I did not expect. I loved her reasoning why she made the choice to become a reading specialist. I am inspired by her love and determination for her students. I did expect her to have experienced teachers who are hesitant to accept support or constructive feedback. Solely through practicum and student teaching experiences, I had cooperating teachers who were not supportive of my ideas because they were not traditional to what they were used to doing. This worries me for when I want to become a reading specialist, so I will have to prioritize being constructive and supportive to the teachers. I really liked how she went above and beyond to meet the needs of her students. She would pull students out, push into the classroom, or meet students in small groups. She kept herself updated with the most current versions of testing and best practice for instructional methods.

I think what was most frustrating to hear was the fact that many administrators and parents do not support the reading specialist. I can see how frustrated those situations can make someone, especially when they have been working tirelessly to support the student(s). It was discouraging to hear that there is nothing that a reading specialist can do if a parent refuses services for his or her child. I know that it would be very hard for me to watch a child fail because of denied services.

I really appreciate the advice that she gave to first year reading specialists. There were many aspects of the job that I would not have expected, such as presenting at professional development meetings and being asked to execute the role of the dyslexia coordinator. I liked the

point she made about teachers and the literacy specialist being “in it together.” They are a team and the team needs to do whatever it takes to help the students grow in literacy.