




PREVENTING
Misguided
READING

NEW STRATEGIES FOR GUIDED READING TEACHERS



JAN MILLER BURKINS & MELODY M. CROFT

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For Nate and for Bob

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Jan Miller Burkins is a full-time consultant coaching teachers, coaches, and districts toward improving the literacy learning of children. She spent six and one-half years as a full-time coach at an elementary school in Athens, Georgia, USA. She has worked as a language arts consultant for a regional educational service agency, a district-level literacy leader, a reading specialist, a literacy consultant, and an elementary classroom teacher.

In 1989, Jan received her undergraduate degree in early childhood education from Birmingham-Southern College in Birmingham, Alabama, and in 1993, earned her master's from the University of Alabama. She earned her reading specialist certification and her doctorate from the University of Kansas in 1999. Her dissertation, which was a meta-analysis of the research on phonemic awareness, was the Dissertation of the Year for the University of Kansas School of Education and one of three finalists for the International Reading Association's Dissertation of the Year. Jan is also a part-time assistant professor at the University of Georgia, where she teaches classes to students pursuing graduate degrees in literacy education. She also developed a series of courses for educators interested in becoming literacy coaches.

Jan is the author of two other books, *Coaching for Balance: How to Meet the Challenges of Literacy Coaching* and *Practical Literacy Coaching: A Collection of Tools to Support Your Work*, which includes tools contributed by practitioners from across the United States. She is also the editor of *Literacy Head* (www.literacyhead.com), a virtual magazine for creative teachers and coaches.

Jan lives with her husband, Nathaniel, and her four sons, Christopher, Duncan, Natie, and Victor.



Melody M. Croft worked in public education for 30 years. She earned her bachelor's, master's, and specialist degrees from Valdosta State University in Valdosta, Georgia, USA. She began her teaching career as a second-grade classroom teacher in Tifton, Georgia. Over the next 20 years, she taught first, fourth, and fifth grades.

Melody began her work as a Reading Recovery teacher in 1994. She studied the work of Marie Clay and implemented Clay's ideas in Reading Recovery contexts for nine years. She served as her school's coordinator for Literacy Collaborative, a program based at The Ohio State University that initiates and supports school-level implementation of guided reading. When her district phased out Reading Recovery, she was the last Reading Recovery teacher standing.

Melody took her expertise in beginning reading and returned to work as a self-contained first-grade teacher for the last four years of her teaching career. She and her husband live in Athens, Georgia, where they share a home and a painting studio. She has two married children: Christian is 29 and Brittany is 25. Melody enjoys painting, gardening, and taking care of her two grandsons, Naaman and Gideon.

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FOREWORD

Guided reading is one of the most prevalent components of any reading program and, as we have discussed in our writing about this topic, it has a long history. Although most agree that guided reading is planned, intentional, focused instruction when the teacher helps students learn more about the reading process, misunderstandings about how to implement guided reading abound.

Herein lies the value of *Preventing Misguided Reading* by Jan Burkins and Melody Croft, nothing short of a fresh and mindful look at guided reading reminiscent of a second-generation model of guided reading that we have called for since 2001. Their explanation of guided reading encourages teachers to think about how to use it to support students in becoming strategic meaning makers rather than to serve a specific guided reading orthodoxy. Their larger aim is to clear up what they perceive to be misunderstandings of guided reading and to add to its evolving knowledge base.

Make no mistake. They accomplish their aim. They begin by offering a thorough explanation of their theoretical underpinnings and how they arrived at them as a result of their own teaching and learning. Part of this discussion centers on helping teachers see the complexities of reading. Their bottom line is that there are many tricky parts to guided reading that need to be acknowledged and addressed.

Fortunately, Burkins and Croft offer numerous ways to help teachers do just that. In this book, they list and explain 27 teaching strategies designed to show as much as tell teachers how to maximize the potential of guided reading as one part of their readers' workshop. These 27 strategies are divided among six chapters. In Chapter 1, they provide four strategies that help teachers better understand how to gradually release the responsibility of learning onto students' shoulders. Burkins and Croft make clear that the overall purpose of guided reading is to scaffold learners toward independence and that removing the scaffold when it is no longer necessary is the best way to help students become independent—rather than dependent—learners.

The intent of Chapters 2 and 3 is to help teachers rethink reading levels and text gradients. Burkins and Croft offer 10 strategies that enable this

thinking to occur. Their main point here is that focusing on the many different types of readers and how to be responsive to them is centric to helping students maximize their full potential as readers.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Burkins and Croft offer numerous ideas about balanced instruction. They use eight strategies to round out their explanation, which ultimately helps teachers once again see the complexity of reading and how to address it by reconsidering what it means to be “balanced.”

Assessment guides instruction, and that is exactly the point of Chapter 6, their last chapter. Here they offer five strategies, each created to help teachers better understand how they can use assessment to design thoughtful lessons geared toward using what students know to help them learn what they need to know.

All told, Jan Burkins and Melody Croft offer a valuable resource that is sure to help many teachers more fully understand guided reading by rethinking, reconsidering, and renewing their efforts to use it to help all children become proficient readers.

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A Literacy Story: Ms. Benton Teaches Her Students to Work Through the Tricky Parts

Ms. Benton's first-grade students begin their daily literacy block with shared reading, during which the students read together a simple, patterned text that is the equivalent of a Level C reader (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The words of the text are written on cut-up sentence strips and then scrambled for the students to put back in order. Picture supports are drawn on the sentence strips, and students work through this exercise with increasing independence. Ms. Benton teaches strategies, such as considering print and story cues, which all the students can use regardless of their instructional reading levels.

During readers' workshop, Ms. Benton uses a cooking analogy to present a minilesson on problem-solving the tricky parts in work. After telling the story, she explains, "Today while reading and writing, you may get to a tricky part in your work. If you run into a hard part in your work today and figure it out, I want you to remember how you did it. Then, we will share our tricky parts and how we figured them out at the end of readers' workshop."

Ms. Benton then begins to pull guided reading groups, while students disperse to work on various literacy tasks. While the first group of struggling, emergent readers participates in staggered oral reading, Ms. Benton pays close attention to one particular member in the group named Liya. She has worked individually with Liya on one-to-one matching in text, and this is Liya's first day to join a guided reading group. Ms. Benton intentionally uses a text that matches the sentences the class read during shared reading. The text reads, "I have a green ball. I have a yellow crayon. I have a purple bike," and so on.

Ms. Benton observes that Liya consistently points to the words as she reads, so Ms. Benton shares this behavior with the group. She says, "I noticed that when all of you were reading, you were pointing to the words very carefully. Liya, what helped you match your pointing with your voice?"

"I just looked at the words and pointed at what I was saying," explains Liya.

At the close of readers' workshop, students share the problems they encountered during their work and the various ways they solved them. After several students, Ms. Benton can't help but grin as Liya tells her classmates, "I have been working on pointing at the words in the book and hearing what I am saying to make sure it matches. I just practiced a lot to figure it out, and today I did it just right!"

The Tricky Parts

Just as Ms. Benton’s students tackled the tricky parts of their work during readers’ workshop, we (authors Jan and Melody) have found ourselves over the last 20–30 years working through the tricky parts of teaching students to read. We did not even know each other over many of the years that Jan studied, practiced, and taught teachers about guided reading and Melody studied and taught students in the classroom and through Reading Recovery. We were, nevertheless, in parallel universes working through parallel tricky parts.

As we began to work together, we realized that we shared theoretical and practical perspectives around literacy learning. We both embraced guided reading and struggled with the ways the designs of various models for guided reading, or the ways we interpreted them, left us asking ourselves questions about our literacy instruction. The questions we asked of ourselves mirrored those we asked of the readers we taught: What did I try? What else can I try? Does this make sense? How do I know? Does this sound right? How do I know? Does this look right? How do I know? What can I do now?

Preventing Misguided Reading represents a synthesis of our thinking before, during, and after we heard about or implemented guided reading. This book presents our work of puzzling through the difficult parts of teaching guided reading. These challenges pushed us to reframe the ways we think about teaching reading and to act on this “revisioning” strategically. Perhaps some of these strategies will help you work through your own tricky parts as you guide groups of readers.

Why We Wrote This Book

Holdaway wrote about guided reading in 1979, and Clay wrote of it in 1991. However, it took the reading profession by storm in 1996 when Fountas and Pinnell (1996) wrote *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children*. Over the last decade, guided reading has helped us focus instruction on supporting young readers in ways that foster skill and

independence. At the same time, however, misunderstandings about this method abound, and confusion in the field seems to be on the rise.

Ford and Opitz (2008b) surveyed 1,500 K–2 teachers to understand common classroom practices around guided reading. Ford and Opitz discovered much confusion in the field regarding what guided reading is and how to implement it. They suggest that “variations in understandings can often lead to significant differences in how practices get implemented” (p. 311), and their survey results indicate that this is the case with guided reading.

Meanwhile, teachers express concerns with guided reading in another venue—blogs. One kindergarten teacher writes on the website *A to Z Teacher Stuff Forums*, “So, I hate guided reading.... Each day I dread 10:40–11:25.... I just don’t know if I’m doing something wrong or what” (DrivingPigeon, 2009). Another teacher writes on the *Tales of a First Grade Classroom* blog, “Guided Reading...two words I have grown to hate.... Lately I’ve been thinking and I’ve come to the conclusion that Guided Reading has become institutionalized” (DeBacco, 2008).

These frustrations are not limited to digital conversations. Melody talked to a teacher whose literacy coach comes in to observe guided reading and uses a timer and a checklist to make sure she is spending the “right” amount of time on each part of the “lesson.” Jan recently talked with a literacy coach who said that her principal was campaigning against guided reading, stating emphatically that guided reading doesn’t work. The principal shared an article that denounced guided reading as a failed methodology. The article was distributed by a company that sells phonics readers without illustrations, so students will learn to *really* read without relying on picture cues.

Another literacy leader expressed frustration that teachers in her building are grouping students for guided reading based solely on word recognition accuracy. Yet, another literacy coach talked about how he quit using the term *guided reading* altogether, because it means something different in every classroom.

How Did Guided Reading Become Misguided?

We see several causes associated with the confusion surrounding guided reading and discuss each in the sections that follow. The order of the

causes does not imply importance or priority; rather, we connect them logically.

Lost in Translation

Historically, broad and rapid dissemination of ideas, as has been the case with guided reading, can lead to tremendous change in instructional practice. With fast and widespread change, however, come challenges. Most significantly, communication often grows congested, and misunderstandings become the unintended reality. As a result, we lose in translation the subtle or deep implications of a theory or practice.

Some argue that our most influential scholars, who by definition are the most widely read, are those most mistranslated, misunderstood, and misapplied (see Gredler & Shields, 2004). For example, in regards to writings that clarify misunderstandings of Piaget's theory, Gredler (2007) writes, "Unfortunately, these and other enlightening critiques came more than 30 years after Piaget had captivated educational theory and practice, long after the misconceptions and distortions had become institutionalized" (p. 233). These solidified misinterpretations remind us of the gossip game in which the first person tells a sentence to another person, who then repeats it to another person, and so on. In the end, the final sentence is often a laughingly unrecognizable permutation of the original.

Misinterpreted instructional methods run the risk of abandonment. Education is littered with the remains of educational trends lost in translation. Often, the reality is that we compromised the fidelity of their implementation. So, critics assemble and declare that the approach doesn't work, as researchers and publishers line up to set a new program in place. We see this trend surfacing with guided reading, and we lament the energy and resources that districts may expend in totally revamping literacy instruction that may simply need adjusting.

Unnecessary Complexity

Guided reading is a small-group model that mirrors elements of the Reading Recovery lessons. Reading Recovery and the most commonly practiced methods of guided reading are based, at least to some extent, on Clay's research on beginning reading. Reading Recovery and most

guided reading models share an effort to match students to texts, the use of predictable texts to scaffold beginning readers, and a focus on understanding and teaching for reading strategies.

Reading Recovery teachers, however, participate in extensive, in-depth professional learning that is ongoing. They work with students “behind the glass,” under the watchful eye of trainers and coaches, and their every instructional move is scrutinized. This effort helps Reading Recovery teachers develop skills necessary to support individually and expertly the beginning readers who struggle the most and who exhibit complex difficulties.

The difference between a Reading Recovery teacher and a classroom reading teacher is analogous to the difference between seeing a specialist and seeing a general practitioner: Both serve particular purposes. General practitioners will actually decrease effectiveness in general patient care if they focus like specialists. Similarly, classroom teachers set themselves up for frustration when they try to focus guided reading instruction as intensely as teachers of individual students, although this is part of the design of many guided reading models.

We suggest that, due to constraints on time and professional learning support, classroom teachers cannot approach reading instruction in the ways that Reading Recovery teachers do, and they do not need to. Many guided reading strategies, however, were actually developed for working with individual students rather than groups.

Instruction Driven by Commerce and the Standardization of Guided Reading

Generally, school districts do not have the time or financial resources to support teachers in ongoing professional learning in literacy. Few school districts that embark on this work with teachers are able to maintain it, as attention in districts shifts to new programs and new initiatives arise. Even teachers within schools that have literacy coaches and offer teachers consistent professional learning find themselves struggling because of the demands of the task and limitations of time.

Consequently, publishers create programs designed to standardize guided reading, which, paradoxically, is actually strongest when teachers consider the spontaneous, on-the-run learning of students. Guided reading, which generally springboards from teaching points that

surface during reading, does not neatly lend itself to lesson plans that are prepackaged. Nonetheless, scripted guided reading lessons abound, and teachers, working hard to make guided reading effective with their students, are understandably inclined to rely on them.

Although programs and prewritten lessons may support teachers as they work through the tricky parts of guided reading instruction, commerce has inadvertently “institutionalized” guided reading. There is much conversation among teachers and in published texts about how to do guided reading “right.”

Ironically, as we write this Preface, a book about guided reading that describes exactly what to say, when to say it, and how to implement the author’s “detailed descriptions and lesson plans for all stages of reading” (Richardson, 2009, p. 5) arrived in Jan’s mailbox. In many cases, guided reading has become prescriptive and regimented, even though guided reading lessons should be responsive to the needs of particular groups of readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), because sound reading instruction is all about knowing how individual students interact with text (Clay, 1991, 1993, 2005a, 2005b).

External Pressures to Get Students “Reading on Grade Level”

School districts often invest in commercial guided reading products because of tremendous pressure to make sure that all of their students reach performance standards. When students fall short of these goals, even if their teachers are obviously amazing, the teachers are subject to more directives, and districts buy more programs for them to follow. Furthermore, those who create specific guided reading models want their instructional designs to hold up under the pressure of intense scrutiny and accountability. Consequently, not only do states and districts tighten classroom controls but also publishers and authors become more prescriptive.

For example, Fountas and Pinnell (1996) explain that “the purpose of guided reading is to enable children to use and develop strategies ‘on the run’” (p. 2). The researchers go on to describe students in guided reading as “enjoying the story because they can understand it; it is accessible to them through their own strategies supported by the teacher’s introduction” (p. 2). Finally, Fountas and Pinnell write that the point of guided reading is “for children to take on novel texts, read them at once

with a minimum of support, and read many of them again and again for independence and fluency” (p. 2). In contrast, in 2009, Pinnell and Fountas defined guided reading as “small-group support and explicit teaching to help students take on more challenging texts” (p. 3). They have defined guided reading as a teacher working “with a small group of children who have similar enough needs that they can be taught together” (2009, p. 8). They go on to say, however, that the point is to provide “instruction to help the children read the text proficiently and at the same time learn more about the reading process” (p. 8).

We find the prominent roles of “explicit teaching” and “challenging texts” in this 2009 definition noteworthy in comparison to earlier references to enjoying and understanding the story with minimal support. We wonder how this change to “instruction to help,” as opposed to considerations of increasing student independence, connects to the pressures under which educators presently operate.

Human Nature

Although researchers and writers offer suggestions, teachers, engrossed in work at the closest point of contact with students, usually are not conducting research or digging deeply into the results of current studies. When research reaches classrooms, it is often diluted. Yet, we tend to accept it as universal truth. We may interpret (or misinterpret) these truths through our frameworks for understanding and then apply them with strict adherence rather than flexible alignment to core principles.

When working with humans in any situation, however, no theory holds up in all contexts. Rigid adherence to any instructional principle leads to forced fits and instructional confusion. Some teachers trust their instructional reasoning and the insight of their experiences and adjust their practice to meet the needs of their classrooms. Others don’t trust themselves and remain faithful to a “science” that is built on trends in human nature, travels by word of mouth, and cannot be universally applied. Opitz and Ford (2001) warn,

We need to be cautious when an educational practice, like guided reading, begins to develop the trappings of an orthodoxy. A *one-size-fits-all* viewpoint begins to shape practice, and teachers find themselves struggling to make the “conventional wisdom ideal” fit their unique contexts and classrooms. (p. 1)

We interpret these overgeneralizations as natural tendencies in human nature to take an idea and turn it into too much of a good thing (Hoffman, 1998).

Some misinterpretations of guided reading practices mire intelligent and dedicated teachers in frustration and actually thwart the progress of young readers. We are concerned that this confusion will lead to a backlash in reading instruction that translates into misguided practices, such as taking all the pictures out of the books, so students will “really” read the words.

The Natural Evolution of Guided Reading

Melody returned to a first-grade classroom teaching position after working as a Reading Recovery teacher for nine years. Like many first-grade teachers of guided reading, she experienced mental and physical fatigue, because she tried to incorporate direct instruction daily into each of her four guided reading groups. She attempted to create a Reading Recovery–like format during each group. She soon realized that she could not reproduce in a small-group format the Reading Recovery lessons she had grown to understand so deeply.

In fact, as the year progressed, she concluded that she was most efficient and saw the most progress in her students when she presented new information in read-aloud and shared reading lessons and then reinforced and assessed the new learning in guided reading. She learned to limit her instruction during guided reading, using preteaching and reteaching in other instructional encounters, rather than derailing the guided reading session with the intensity of Reading Recovery lessons.

Instructional decisions such as Melody’s illustrate the ways that our problem-solving around the tricky parts of guided reading actually helps us make our guided reading instruction better. In many cases, the natural evolution of ideas that guide change in literacy instruction gives us forward movement.

In terms of guided reading, we believe there is merit in adjusting some of our practices for the sake of preserving an instructional model that focuses on reading processes rather than discrete reading skills. We maintain that, if guided reading lessons today were exact replications of the original conceptualizations in New Zealand almost 30 years ago, then

it would likely indicate that we as literacy educators were stagnant, rather than point to the infallibility of guided reading's original design.

Experimentation and refinement through research and practice have led to what Ford and Opitz (2008b) refer to as “second generation” (p. 310) models of guided reading. With the strategies we present here, we offer both another model for the next generation of guided reading and some instructional options for shaping your own model as you work to puzzle through the parts of guided reading that are challenging in your instructional context.

What Is Guided Reading Anyway?

Truly, there are so many permutations of guided reading that one is hard pressed to look at the variety of models dotting the educational terrain and draw consistent conclusions about what is most valuable about teaching reading to small groups of students. It is as if guided reading has become to small-group reading instruction what Kleenex is to tissues. However, by identifying the commonalities in these different interpretations and implementations of guided reading, we can at least talk about general trends in guided reading instruction (Ford & Opitz, 2008a).

Based on our study of and our experience with guided reading, we conclude that teachers of guided reading typically

- Teach lessons in small groups
- Attempt to match students to texts at their instructional reading level
- Use a text gradient of some kind to help them match texts and students
- Teach groups with a common text
- Assign students to specific groups that may change text levels but change little in terms of configuration
- Present an introduction of the text
- Listen to individual students read the text
- Scaffold student reading with prompts
- Ask students questions about the story or engage them in conversation about the text

- Engage students in some element of direct instruction based on reading behavior they exhibited during the reading

Educators tend to use the terms *guided reading* and *small-group reading* interchangeably. This works in the sense that guided reading usually *is* small-group reading instruction. Small-group reading instruction, however, is often *not* guided reading. Small-group reading instruction may also be shared reading, word work practice, read-aloud, and so forth. Throughout this book, we use *guided reading* and *small-group reading* synonymously, recognizing that the switch works well within this conversation but has limitations beyond.

It is worth noting that our understandings and definitions of guided reading are most closely aligned to those presented by Fountas and Pinnell (1996) in *Guiding Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children*. *Preventing Misguided Reading* presents the clarifications, adaptations, and supports that have helped us work through our own tricky spots as we guide student readers.

The bedrock of *Preventing Misguided Reading* is the premise that learning to read is about developing a smoothly operating reading process that efficiently integrates multiple cues and extends itself as students practice reading (Clay, 1993). Guided reading is not really about levels, benchmark texts, or offering the right prompts to students when they struggle with words. Rather, guided reading is, for us, about supporting students as they develop strategic approaches to meaning making.

Methodological Ironies

Of course, the irony of this endeavor is that we run the risk of our ideas being taken to an extreme. Calkins (2001) laments, “One of the distressing things about teaching is that in an effort to solve one problem we so often create new problems” (p. 310). When we read the works of leaders in the field of literacy instruction, they consistently tread lightly, making few (if any) absolute claims.

Calkins (2001) describes an experience she had with Donald Murray. He warned that “knowing” something is dangerous. He admonished, “Watch out lest we suffer hardening of the ideologies. Watch out lest we lose the pioneer spirit which has made this field a great one” (p. 6). Along

these same lines, Miller (2002) offers this encouragement: “There are many effective ways to teach children and live our lives. No one has a patent on the truth” (pp. 6–7).

So, we neither present this information as something we *know* as absolute truth nor as a prescribed approach to literacy instruction. Rather, we present it as a collection of ideas and informed interpretations of reading research and instructional experience. These ideas have made sense in our contexts. We invite you to explore them in yours.

Assumptions of Our Readers

Our intent has been to take discussions of guided reading, which has become a widespread model for teaching students to read, to a different, sometimes more practical, level. We spend little time addressing foundational ideas related to guided reading, such as the interaction of cues in the reading process or the interpretation of running records. Rather, we assume that the reader either has an introductory grasp of these ideas or that the alternative perspectives we offer can support further exploration. So, our discussions explore, but do not depend on, instructional methodologies within guided reading as they are commonly understood and sometimes misunderstood.

Respecting the Histories of Ideas

We have worked and talked with young writers about how stories usually have a beginning, a middle, and an end, without even knowing how our work connects to Aristotle, the first to label stories with these three parts. Long before Aristotle’s recording, this same concept was probably illustrated on the walls of caves. Usually, the theories we actualize in our practice grow from very deep roots. Considering an ancestry of ideas that precedes our current generation of literacy thinkers stretches our understandings of everything we do. Truly, there is little that is absolutely new, little that is original.

Opitz and Ford (2001) point out that Betts wrote about guiding readers in 1946. His work in reference to supporting readers has many similarities with later writings about guided reading. So, we water the seeds planted by Myrtle Simpson, Ruth Trevor, Don Holdaway, Marie Clay, Irene Fountas, Gay Su Pinnell, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Emmett Betts, and many, many others. We recognize the germination of ideas and the natural

growth and learning that support all thinking work. We respectfully roll our wheelbarrow of ideas along the ruts and grooves in the intellectual soil established by our literacy predecessors, some of whom are probably as far removed from us as Aristotle.

Our Theoretical Perspectives

Our philosophy of reading is rooted in an enduring respect for the complexities of the reading process as described by Clay (1979, 1991, 1993, 2005a, 2005b). We further recognize the idiosyncratic interaction of print, meaning, and structural cues, which is influenced by an array of reader factors (Rosenblatt, 2004), making each reading experience a unique interaction between the reader and the text.

In terms of learning theories, we maintain that a self-extending system is inherently constructivist (Piaget, 1967), as understandings of the reading process develop when students act on text to construct meaning (Wood, 1994). Clay (1979) describes students as enacting a “set of operations” toward the end of understanding the “precise words and meanings of the author” (p. 8). Throughout this text, we return to the idea that students learn to read with one foot in what they know and the other stepping into new understandings. This idea of dynamic support, whether from teachers or texts, is fundamentally Vygotskian (Vygotsky, 1962), and is a regular refrain throughout our descriptions of the theoretical and practical dimensions of the strategies in this collection.

Finally, although this book looks closely at some of the finer points of teaching students to read, it is rooted in the idea that teaching literacy is intrinsically political, as reading and writing are “emancipatory acts” (Christensen, 2000, p. vii). The texts we choose, the ways we define language in classrooms, and the sense of agency that we support students in developing around their learning are all elements of our embedded commitment to critical literacy that is furthered when we teach students how to read.

A Word About Collaboration

Right now, collaboration is prominent in practitioner and research literature, partially because it is such a challenge and partially because working together can lead to better student outcomes. Writing a book

together is among the pinnacles in collaboration (closely behind raising children with someone or committing to a life partner). We have supported and stretched each other through this collaboration and know with certainty that this book is better because of our chemistry of ideas.

In cowriting a book, authors must negotiate the ways that their voices work together. For Jan, as a literacy coach and university instructor, her recent work has been geared toward a macrolevel of literacy instruction across a building. Among Melody's 30 years as an elementary teacher, her work as a Reading Recovery teacher for nine years and as a first-grade classroom teacher for six years has concentrated on the microlevel of teaching students to read. As much as we have been able, we have chosen to merge these respective voices in this book. Occasionally, we share experiences from one of our specific backgrounds. In these cases, we refer to ourselves in the third person.

Although Jan's slight bent is toward the theoretical and Melody's is toward the practical, we are both at home in these complementary universes. One does not coach literacy in an elementary school without a considerable amount of hands-on, up-close experience and action with students, so Jan is nimble in making the moment-to-moment decisions that make up the application of the ideas within this text. Likewise, one does not spend nine years as a Reading Recovery teacher without scrutinizing literacy on a theoretical level. Melody is well versed in literacy theory and can speak authoritatively to the understandings that support the decisions a teacher of literacy must make.

The overlap and diversity in our experiences make us particularly suited for this collaboration, and we have both been directly and deeply involved with all aspects of this text. We did not each go to our separate corners and draft our parts to cut and paste them together. Rather, we talked extensively about all aspects of the book, holding ourselves to a high standard of true collaboration. Consequently, we are equally invested in both the general and practical dimensions of this effort.

Measuring Our Words

We deliberated extensively in choosing the words that organize *Preventing Misguided Reading*. We agonized over each label in this book, arriving at final decisions that seemed certain, only to revise again and again. We both engage in constant reflection around our language and

appreciate that these vocabularies serve to engage us in conversations; they are not the end of ideas, but rather the beginning. We chose the title not to criticize ourselves and others as literacy educators but to engage a sense of urgency and offer hope. Misguidance requires a shift in direction, an adjustment in thought or practice. In our misguidance, the aim of educators was honest; we just need to reflect and adjust.

We hesitantly chose the label *strategies*, because it is closely linked to Clay, whose work informs ours. The term is overused and misunderstood, however, a rather ironic twist in a book written to offer instructional clarity. Clay (1991) explains that strategies are the “in-the-head” processes that readers engage as they work to gain control while they read (p. 3). Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008) further clarify this term by pointing out that, if students are working to gain control, their use of strategies is necessarily intentional. Automatic behaviors are no longer strategies, but rather, skills. As you try some of the strategies in this book, we hope those that work for you and your students will become part of your repertoire of skills.

For us, *strategy* furthers our analogy between the ways students problem-solve in guided reading and the ways teachers problem-solve as they *teach* guided reading. Students deliberate consciously as they work in their heads, following up with changes in behavior as they use strategies in reading. Similarly, teachers can think through theoretical ideas and make strategic shifts to shape their instruction.

We talked into the wee hours of the morning, considering the nuances of miscue versus error versus mistake, processes versus systems, misunderstandings versus misconceptions, new versus assimilated, integrating versus consolidating, and on and on and on. We are “word people” who don’t order french fries without scrutinizing the subtext of our language. In the end, sometimes the words we chose held up throughout the revision process, and other times labels made the cut—not because they were perfect, but because it was time to stop changing them. Our intent is always to communicate clearly and honor the expertise you bring to this book.

Organization of This Book

Preventing Misguided Reading opens with an Introduction that presents a basic orientation to a simple model of the reading process. This model

undergirds all of the ideas presented in this book. After the Introduction, the volume is divided into six chapters, each one clarifying a point we consider a misunderstanding about guided reading instruction. Each chapter is preceded by a vignette that illustrates the subject of the chapter. These are nonexamples around common guided reading practices. All of the hypothetical teachers in these examples are composites of us, as we have worked through these tricky parts and engaged in these inefficient practices.

After we offer theoretical support for our clarifying idea in each chapter, we describe specific strategies for reframing your thinking or adjusting your practice. These instructional strategies are located under a common heading, “Working Through the Tricky Parts.” Each chapter ends with a “Putting It All Together” section and a series of questions to support your reflection and conversation.

In Chapter 1, we take a hard look at the gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), maintaining that guided reading’s place in this continuum of increasing student proficiency needs adjustment. We reframe guided reading’s relationship to shared and independent reading. We also suggest that the role of the teacher is sometimes too prominent in guided reading, particularly in light of its positioning in the gradual release continuum.

Chapter 2 establishes a foundation for later chapters by scrutinizing the common definition of instructional reading level. We recommend that you adjust your quantitative definitions and adopt some qualitative definitions of this term. We argue that texts presently defined as instructional level may, in many cases, frustrate readers. The chapter goes on to present specific recommendations for modifying your considerations of text difficulty.

Chapter 3 takes on common assumptions about text gradients. It presents advantages and disadvantages of working with leveled texts and offers ideas for making the most of these tools. We also offer suggestions for practicing mindful language around students and text levels and for avoiding traps that lock students into narrowed identities and experiences.

In Chapter 4, we explore in depth the ways students use visual cues, or print, and the ways they use meaning and structural cues, or story. We maintain that instruction emphasizing one set of cues over another compromises students’ opportunities to develop smoothly operating

reading processes. The chapter includes specific strategies that you can engage to support students as they develop competency in using all of the cues a text offers.

In Chapter 5, we look at the ways students put together the cues they access during reading. We talk extensively about how to consider a student's integrated processing of cues and what an individual student's reading process says about that student's instructional needs. Then, we offer specific strategies that fit the different patterns of integrated processing common among readers.

Finally, Chapter 6 wraps up the book with a close look at the ways our formative and summative literacy assessments can inform our reading instruction. We end with assessment not because it is a last priority, but because the preceding chapters build understandings necessary for reading this chapter. Chapter 6 looks specifically at employing assessment tools to understand student reading processes. The strategies in this chapter can help you dig deeper into the stories that your literacy assessments tell you about your students.

A Few Last Words Before We Begin

We do not claim to be the last word on any idea in the area of literacy (or anything else for that matter). Rather, we simply aim to extend ideas, push thinking, and initiate conversations. We invite you to interrogate our work and extend it in ways that promote your learning to the benefit of the students with whom you work. This text is riddled with qualifying statements, such as, "We think this may be true...," "This might improve your instruction...," and "Perhaps we should look at it this way..." These phrases serve as reminders that we do not intend to offer you ideological premises to claim as absolutes, but rather we want to share some of the thinking and "fix-up" strategies that have helped us negotiate the tricky parts of guided reading.

Take our offerings into your action research and gauge which of these ideas and strategies work for you; it is up to you to determine the truth of our work in your context. We count on your scrutiny to hold us accountable, just as we rely on you to translate our ideas into your classroom practice thoughtfully.

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In publishing a book, one inevitably encounters tricky parts, and one's editors are the guides for navigating the bumpy terrain. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to work with the International Reading Association in general, and Corinne Mooney and Charlene Nichols specifically. They have earned our deepest loyalty for their flexibility, their interest in helping us preserve our voice, and quite simply, their care for the project and for us. We also appreciate Tony Hart, who donned his graphic artist cape and was a hero when we all needed help materializing a vision for the cover. If you need a graphic artist rescue, you can contact him at anhart20@alumni.scad.edu.

Usually, when authors craft books, the process lasts months or years, and the writers incur debts of kindness to all those who support them along the way. *Preventing Misguided Reading* took us 50 collective years of prewriting, so there aren't enough pages to acknowledge the people who have nurtured our thinking over these many, many years of literacy work. Such a list would include everyone who has taught us and everyone we have taught.

Although imagining and shaping the ideas in *Preventing Misguided Reading* took decades of thinking and practice, we densely packed the years it took to craft this story into only a few months of writing. We wrote down all the first words over an intense two weeks and then revised periodically through equally intense weekends across several months. As we put all our energies into this demanding endeavor, our husbands without hesitation assumed the roles we stepped out of, while also making sure we were not swallowed whole by this project.

Our work consumed us like the search for alchemy consumed José Arcadio Buendía in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Márquez, 2006), who stopped eating and sleeping for the sake of his undertaking. And our husbands took care of us, like Rebecca, whose vigilance and care for José “kept him from being dragged off by his imagination into a state of perpetual delirium from which he would not recover” (p. 76).

If our husbands had not brought us food and made us stop writing to eat, we would now be skeletons around our keyboards, our remains among a pile of books about early literacy. If they had not forcefully taken

our work from our hands and led us to places of rest or distraction, we would now be unable to form even the simplest sentences. If they had not loved us enough to say, "I will go with you to the coffee shop [or book store or library] just to be close to you while you write," we would have had less passion for our work and more emptiness now that it is done.

Although our literacy endeavors have always been supported by many, our personal lives, and the ways they fit into our professional work, have been nurtured by Bob and Nate. Thank you for working through life's tricky parts with us. We know, Nate and Bob, that you have worked as hard as we, and this book is as much yours as ours.