

## Let's Start Leveling about Levels: Concerns about Current Systems and How to Address Them

Presented by  
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### What's the important idea to remember?

- In order to get stronger, I need to spend most of my time with texts at my instructional level that allow me to problem solve without encountering frustration.
- In order to get more fluent, confident and comfortable, I need to spend some of my time with texts at my independent level.
- If I spend time with difficult texts, make them easier by mediating and scaffolding my experiences with your instruction. This can also help me grow stronger.

### What's the important idea to remember?

- Avoid allowing me to spend most of my time with difficult texts. It's hard for me to learn on my own with difficult texts.
- Avoid assigning me texts that will cause me to disengage from reading. The only thing I get better at is figuring out way ways to avoid reading texts.

### Let's Start to Level about Leveling

- Leveling takes a complex idea and makes it too simple
  - Leveling takes a simple idea and makes it too complex
  - Progress does not equal proficiency
  - Levels do not equal needs
- Must consider the impact of leveling...
- across the entire reading program
  - within shared and guided reading blocks
  - during independent reading time

### Principle #1

Leveling takes a complex idea  
and makes it too simple

### The Complexity of Reading

#### Reader Factors

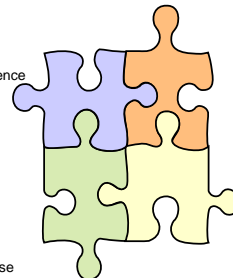
Motivation  
Subject Knowledge  
Background experience  
Vocabulary  
Purpose

#### Context Factors

Setting  
Task  
Outcome  
Environment

#### \*Text Factors\*

Content  
Format  
Concepts  
Organization  
Author's Purpose



All Contribute to the  
Potential Success of  
the Reader with Texts  
= 5 x 4 x 5 = 120  
combinations




## Principle #2

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Leveling takes a simple idea  
and makes it too complex

Dzaldo & Peterson  
"Book Leveling and Readers"  
*The Reading Teacher*  
November 2005



"We seem to be in the midst of leveling mania in which massive amounts of time, money and energy are devoted to organizing books by reading levels. It appears that teachers are driven to attach a level to every text that students encounter during their school day."



## The Oversimplification of Leveling Systems

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- Leveling simplifies something very complex
- Leveling complicates something very simple
- Leveling privileges the texts it classifies and categories
- Leveling may limit accessibility



## Principle #3

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Progress does not equal proficiency

In other words..

Motion is not always action!



## Principle #4

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Levels do not equal needs



## Five Patterns Observed During Oral Reading

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- **Was the reading correct?**
- **Was the reading corrected?**
- **Was the reading comprehended?**
- **Was the reading attempted?**
- **Did the reading stall?**

### Differentiating Response to Readers

Reader Performance	What pattern would teachers observe?	What is working	What needs to be worked on?	What else should be considered?
Correct	Accurate	The reader is reading with confidence, comfort and competence.	Consider adjusting the expectations for the reader.	Is the material being read an appropriate match?  What are your instructional goals for the reader?
Corrected	Accurate but with self-corrections	The reader is monitoring meaning and adjusting when errors are made	Look closely at self-corrections to see what cueing strategies might need to be strengthened.	What does the reader need to be more accurate as they make meaning?

### Differentiating Response to Readers

Reader Performance	What pattern would teachers observe?	What is working	What needs to be worked on?	What else should be considered?
Comprehended	Meaning-based miscues	The reader is making sense as s/he reads.	The reader may need to focus more closely on using graphophonic and visual cues.	Does the reader need to slow down, be more accurate with decoding and/or more balanced in his/her strategy use??
Attempted	Non-meaning based miscues	The reader is taking risks with reading.	The reader may need to focus closely on using semantic and syntactic cues.	Is the reader overrelying on decoding to the detriment of fluency & comprehension?  Does the reader need to be more accurate as they make meaning?


**“Behind Test Scores:  
What Struggling Readers Really Need”**  
  
 by Sheila W. Valencia and Marsha Riddle Buly in **The Reading Teacher**  
 (March 2004)

### The Need for Differentiation

Reader Profile	Accuracy	Fluency	Comprehension
Proficient	OK	OK	OK
Slow Steady Comprehenders	OK	Difficulties	Difficulties OK for finished sections
Slow Word Callers	OK with Self-corrections	Difficulties	Difficulties
Struggling Word Callers	OK with Great effort	Difficulties	Difficulties

### The Need for Differentiation

Reader Profile	Accuracy	Fluency	Comprehension
Automatic Word Callers	OK	OK	Difficulties
Word Stumblers	Difficulties	OK	OK but missed details
Disabled	Difficulties	Difficulties	Difficulties

### Principle #5

Must consider the impact of leveling across the entire reading program

**Levels...**  
Potential Gaps in % of Total Reading Time (Best Case Scenario)

Opportunities	Self-directed Reader	Disengaged Reader	Difference in a School Year
<b>In School Reading Time</b>	120 minutes	120 minutes	Even
<b>Out of School Reading Time</b>	20 minutes	0 minutes	3600 minutes
<b>Total Practice Each School Day</b>	140 minutes	120 minutes	60 hours

**Levels...**  
Potential Gaps in % of Time with Appropriate Text

Instructional Routine	Below Grade Level Reader	At Grade Level Reader	Above Grade Level Reader
<b>Shared Reading</b>	0 minutes	30 minutes <small>if instructional level</small>	30 minutes
<b>Guided Reading</b>	20 minutes	20 minutes	20 minutes
<b>Independent Reading</b>	40 minutes <small>if engagement in independent level can be maintained</small>	40 minutes <small>if engagement in independent level can be maintained</small>	40 minutes
<b>Content Area Reading</b>	0 minutes	30 minutes <small>if instructional level</small>	30 minutes
<b>Total</b>	60 minutes	120 minutes	120 minutes

**Keep in mind what happens to the gap...**

*If I don't differentiate texts during small group instruction...*

60 minutes drops to 40 minutes vs. 120 minutes

*If I don't provide accessible texts during independent reading time...*

40 minutes drops to 0 minutes vs. 120 minutes

**Principle #6**

Must consider the impact of leveling within shared and guided reading blocks

**Levels...**  
Potential Gap in Differentiated Whole Group

	Support Group	Engaged Group
<b>Reading TO</b>	287 words	0 words
<b>Reading WITH</b>	143 words	0 words
<b>Reading By</b>	88 words	518 words

**Levels...**  
Potential Gap in Differentiated Whole Group

	Support Group	If not given support...
<b>Reading TO</b>	287 words	0 words
<b>Reading WITH</b>	143 words	0 words
<b>Reading By</b>	88 words	Maybe a few words

Levels...  
Potential Gaps in Word Counts

Level	Word Count Range	Middle Count	Total Read in 3 Books	Difference
H	165-247	206	618	
I	201-257	229	687	+69
J	238-282	260	780	+162

Potential Gaps in Text Sets

Above Grade Level	195 words 77 multi-syllabic
At Grade Level	95 words 17 multi-syllabic
Below Grade Level	45 words 10 multi-syllabic

Potential Gaps in Text Sets

Below Grade Level	45 words 10 multi-syllabic
<i>If Below Grade Level reads 5 similar books</i>	<i>225 words 50 multi-syllabic</i>
Above Grade Level	195 words 77 multi-syllabic

- Addressing Issues with Levels**
- Close the gap in the amount of words students are asked to read**
- Stay aware of word count differences
  - Repeat readings of low word count texts
  - Repeat readings of accessible sections of difficult texts
  - Read multiple related texts at same level

- Addressing Issues with Levels**
- Close the gap in the amount of words students are asked to read**
- Load text sets with mostly books accessible to all
  - Load classroom libraries with mostly books accessible to all
  - Provide support structures directly or indirectly to encourage reading of more difficult texts
  - Move students through equitable number of words during small group instruction vs time, texts and/or levels

**Principle #7**

Must consider the impact of leveling during independent reading time

## Makes Texts Acceptable and Accessible In and Out of School

Literary Merit	Reader Response
High quality	Positive
High quality	Negative
Low quality	Positive
Low quality	Negative

## Accessibility and Acceptability

- How do we make accessible texts more acceptable in intermediate classrooms?

Intentional use of all types of texts for instructional & recreational purposes

- How do we make acceptable texts more accessible in classrooms?

Scaffolded instruction and differentiated support around instructional texts

## Accessibility and Acceptability

Consider the texts you use/have in your classroom for read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, content areas, classroom library...

Are most of your texts acceptable and accessible to most of your students? If not, how can we move towards classroom collections that allow for greater access and have greater acceptance for more students?

## Addressing Issues with Levels

Close the gap in percentage of time student work with instructional and independent level texts

- Select Shared Reading materials at an instructional level for your grade level.
- Select Content Reading materials at an instructional level for your grade level.
- Supplement difficult core textbooks with sets of related instructional level texts.
- Structure instruction around whole class texts so that as many students as possible can be reading on their own.
- Use support during whole class texts sparingly but assist students to at least read accessible parts of difficult texts.

## Addressing Issues with Levels

Close the gap in percentage of time students work with instructional and independent level texts

- Increase the percentage of time students spend in small group formats such as Guided Reading groups.
- Select Guided Reading materials at an instructional level for each group.
- Adjust Guided Reading schedule so that more time can be devoted to those who need more practice with instructional level materials.
- Provide all readers access to plenty of independent level materials during time away from the teacher.

## Addressing Issues with Levels

Close the gap in percentage of time students work with instructional and independent level texts

- Increase the percentage of time students spend in individualized instructional formats (i.e., Readers Workshop) with independent and instructional level texts.
- Make all ACCESSIBLE materials ACCEPTABLE in your classroom.
- Integrate the use of more accessible alternative texts for independent activities.
- Work to create independent activities that sustain engagement for longer periods of time.
- Intentionally create structures to provide momentum for ALL readers to read beyond the school day and school walls.



## Addressing Issues with Levels

**Close the gap in percentage of time students work with instructional and independent level texts**

Integrate the use of more accessible alternative texts for independent activities:

- *Own writing*
- *Magazines*
- *Newspapers*
- *Plays*
- *Cybertexts*
- *Multi-level texts*



## Final Thought

**“...look at things that are in focus, things that are getting a lot of attention, look at them and try to get out of them their very best features. And then, as teachers put those things together in your own way that makes sense for you [and] for the children who happen to be your responsibility this year...”**

**--Delores Durkin--**