second edition

Beyond Leveled Books

Karen Szymusiak
Franki Sibberson
Lisa Koch

Foreword by Sharon Taberski

Supporting Early and Transitional Readers in Grades K–5

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Pages 40–46: "Organizing Book Baskets: Letting Kids In On the Plan" by Katie DiCesare
Pages 132–135: "Nonfiction Books for Independent Reading: Moving Beyond Content Connections" by Franki Sibberson
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Pages 144–146: "On Kidney Tables: Small Changes for Big Effects" by Karen Szymusiak
Pages 172–175: "Just Because They Can Doesn't Mean They Should" by Shari Frost

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To our families

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Foreword to the Second Edition

I would venture to say that there's not a teacher in our schools today who doesn't know about leveled books. We're under far too much pressure to move students through levels faster and faster, higher and higher. We're encouraged (advised, actually) to scour the leveled lists, to go online to search out levels, to sticker and label our books, and to tuck them safely into designated bins so that children are reading the right books—the ones at their level. If that's not scary enough, children often talk more about the levels they're on and the levels they want to read than about the books themselves. In this age of No Child Left Behind and the searing focus on increased achievement and test scores, levels have become an all-too-frequent gauge of how well we think kids are doing in the months before spring testing.

Leveling does have a place in our classrooms—a practical one. It can help match a child with a range of books he's likely to be able to read on his own and during guided reading, and it can play an important role in helping struggling readers become more proficient. But, as happens to a lot of good ideas in education, leveled books have turned into a dangerous national obsession. We know there's a lot more to teaching children to read than finding their levels and moving them upward. Children need to plateau in their reading. They need to consolidate their skills and strategies, to read widely and deeply, to increase their vocabulary, and to experience life and gain humor so that they have more knowledge and insight to bring to texts and consequently understand them better.

In this new edition of *Beyond Leveled Books*, Karen, Franki, and Lisa help us look beyond the levels, and beyond leveled books, to consider what else we might put into children's hands during reading time. They help us to see that, although we do want to match children with books they can read—books that support them as readers—this matching involves much more than percentages on reading assessments and numbered levels on texts. They bring us back to the reality that children are supported by books they love, books they crave, books about characters they admire, and books about topics that fascinate them. Kids, like adults, want to read books that move them—not to high levels but to tears, laughter, and wonder.

Beyond Leveled Books, Second Edition, provides ideas, suggestions, practical classroom advice, and articles from experts in the field about how we can deepen our understanding of the books in our classrooms. The authors show us how to organize our classroom libraries and give us expanded lists of books that support our youngest readers. They invite us to take a step back and examine our teaching, and then give us the tools we need to become more expansive and generous in how we look at readers and the books they read. What remains in this second edition is the strong focus on transitional readers in the intermediate grades. *Beyond Leveled Books* was one of the first books to focus on transitional readers, and, since the first edition appeared, the authors have continued teaching, learning, and expanding their wealth of knowledge. Several new lessons and ideas about teaching with series books and graphic novels are included, as well as new thoughts on supporting student book choice, and much more. The first edition helped us learn how to teach without buying into the old, and wrong, notion that kids in the intermediate grades already know how to read. This new edition provides us with a seamless look at how we can use leveling appropriately in the primary grades, and how we can continue to support, motivate, and teach transitional readers more effectively.

In essence, *Beyond Leveled Books* is about empowering teachers. It's about helping us understand that our job is more extensive and challenging—and more delightful, actually—than just moving children from level to level, faster and higher. It's about knowing about books ourselves so that we can motivate our youngest readers, our struggling readers, and our doing-just-fine readers to find joy and pleasure in reading so they'll choose to read even when they don't have to. That's our ultimate goal in the teaching of reading, and that's what this book can help you do—teach kids throughout the elementary years so they become lifelong readers.

Sharon Taberski

Foreword to the First Edition

Who among us hasn't heard the old adage that we learn to read from kindergarten through second grade and then read to learn from third grade on. This notion was pounded into the brains of so many teachers that we began to believe it, until that day of reckoning when we stepped into a fresh third-, fourth-, or fifth-grade classroom and faced a gaggle of enthusiastic, tousle-haired kids who were a far cry from using reading to learn. While some were actually engaged in reading, many were flitting from one book to another like butterflies to flowers, abandoning books helter-skelter after five or ten pages. Still others were dozing off while attempting to read the assigned chapter in the history textbook. And more than a few were staring out the window while their book lay undisturbed in front of them. Many of these children did not appear to be reading for content, sustaining comprehension, or lingering in books. Yet, based on what we had been taught, they were supposed to be reading to learn by this time.

Good readers don't stop learning to read in second grade and suddenly start reading to learn in third. Good readers never stop learning to read. I am a better reader today than I was yesterday and not as good as I will be tomorrow—and I survived my fiftieth birthday last year. Learning to read is a lifelong process. The more time we spend learning to read, the better we become at reading to learn. What bouncing, budding preadolescents need is more reading instruction, with methods and

strategies to help them read for information, read to discern themes, read to enhance understanding, and read for enjoyment. What intermediate kids need is having their teachers read this terrific book by Franki Sibberson and Karen Szymusiak, educators extraordinaire.

In *Beyond Leveled Books* Franki and Karen shatter the learn to read/read to learn myth into a kaleidoscope of practical shards of wisdom and insight about thoughtful reading instruction and practice. The many strategies and methods they describe are aimed directly at those vulnerable, transitional readers who run the risk of becoming stuck in the transitional stage if they do not receive the literacy instruction they deserve to become engaged readers who use reading to inform, understand, remember, and learn.

This is the first book I've come across that deals so naturally and directly with readers at the intermediate stage. Over the past few decades so many books have been written about emergent readers, so many resources have been aimed at early literacy, and so much staff development has been geared toward primary-grade reading instruction that the needs of intermediate-grade readers have often been relegated to the back burner. Not any more! Thanks to Franki and Karen, transitional readers will no longer be lost in the shuffle.

The authors define students at this stage as readers who have learned useful emergent reading strategies and who readily use decoding skills to decipher text. They are readers in transition between emergent and independent reading, who are capable decoders but who often have gaps in strategy use and understanding and who find it difficult to sustain comprehension over time. Transitional readers are not struggling readers. They are readers who have moved beyond the emergent stage and are beginning to encounter longer, more difficult text. Franki and Karen remind us that this is not the time to stop teaching reading. Rather, this is exactly the time to provide explicit instruction in a new set of strategies that will help readers at this stage understand and learn from more complex text, so that they will not become mired in the transitional stage, but will continue to develop as readers and move toward independence. The strategies, methods, and overall literacy practice described in this book are just what readers at this stage need to continue down the path to literacy.

Franki and Karen don't merely teach the content of a piece of text by focusing mainly on word level; they also look closely at "supports," the features and text elements that help transitional readers as they move toward independence. The section "Supportive Features of Text" in

Chapter 4 offers myriad examples of how to identify and use such supports. I am awed by how much the authors see in a text and how seriously they look at the writing and text elements to determine what they might teach. I found their discussion of the value of series books especially enlightening. I had never given the series genre its due; from now on I will think differently about the instructional usefulness of series books. In addition, considering supports when matching books with readers improves the chances of hooking transitional readers. As the authors write, "Bringing children and books together matters."

How I would love to be a child in one of Franki and Karen's classrooms! Clearly, they both are voracious readers and true book lovers. Their classrooms and schools burst with books of every genre and length. I am astounded by their knowledge of books. They seem to have read every new novel, picture book, and young adult trade book on the market. Whenever I see either of them, they have a passel of books to recommend—kids' books, adult nonfiction, poetry, and more. They understand that reading is about appetite and diet. They know that all readers have a broad spectrum of tastes, and they know their students well. They know them as people and as readers. They understand that interest plays a crucial role in engaging children in reading, and they strive to make books of every imaginable theme, genre, and topic available to all the students in their classrooms.

Franki and Karen are insatiably curious about kids' thinking. They spend time watching children, listening to them and studying their work to inform their instruction. They take notes of conversations, arrange opportunities for kids to talk to each other, and interview them to learn about their reading preferences and habits. This book abounds with methods for doing these things. I was struck by the practicality of many of the interview questions in Chapter 7, and I suspect kids would really love to answer them. The fact is, we cannot teach children if we don't know them. The authors understand this and take great pains to get to know their students' personalities, passions, quirks, and tastes in reading.

Every conversation I have with Franki and Karen leaves me thinking and wondering about how better to teach the children with whom I work. The authors are supremely thoughtful educators who never stop thinking about how to hone their own practice and strengthen their students' learning. Once again they've left me thinking, but this time about the ideas in their wonderful book. Franki and Karen have started a conversation about transitional readers that is long overdue. It is their sincere hope that teachers, staff developers, and educators of all types will continue this

conversation long after they close this book. Kids in the intermediate stage were the focus of many literacy conversations when they were in kindergarten and first grade. Let's not forget them now. They deserve the same treatment they received when they were younger. The authors of this book want to fill teachers' hearts and minds with strategies for transitional readers in the same way we have been filled with information on emergent readers.

Early in the book, Ryan, a third grader, was asked about the book he was reading. He answered, "When it is closed, it looks dull. The real stuff is inside." When this book is closed, it looks great, thanks to Stenhouse; but Ryan is right when he says the real stuff is inside. Franki and Karen have loaded this book with the real stuff. You are in for a treat. Count on it!

Stephanie Harvey

Acknowledgments

Dorothy Parker once said, "I hate writing. I love having written." We love having written the second edition of this book. Along the way, the tasks of sitting down to write, formulating our thoughts, taking care of details, and meeting deadlines were at times frustrating. But not one of us would say that we hate writing. We simply hate the challenge of carving the time out of our busy lives. Once our hands are on the keyboard, we are hooked. Writing a second edition gave us the opportunity to rethink what we had written, add new ideas, update book lists, and be honestly reflective about our practice.

We are thrilled to have added several short pieces from some of our favorite writers. These people shared their perspectives on books and children. Kathy Collins, Diane DeFord, Katie DiCesare, Shari Frost, Mary Lee Hahn, Adria Klein, Loren Long, Lynn Salem, Josie Stewart, and Larry Swartz have important things to say that inform learning and teaching. We thank them for their contributions, their work in the field, and their support of this project from the beginning.

We are honored to have the foreword to this edition by Sharon Taberski. She has always been an advocate for children, and her work reminds us to stay true to our beliefs about learning and teaching. We appreciate her friendship over the years.

We consider it a privilege to be a part of the community at Stenhouse. Bill Varner and Philippa Stratton helped shape our vision for this second edition. Bill was incredibly patient as we forged ahead in the process. We appreciate the collaboration of everyone at Stenhouse that made this second edition possible.

Jen Allen gave us great feedback about where to go with our thinking early in the process. Her thoughts were insightful as always and helped us create a book that we hope makes a difference for students and teachers.

So many people were supportive of the first edition. We have always been fortunate to have people to think with and talk to about issues in literacy education: Tom Bates, Louise Borden, Cathi Elliott, Bob Griffith, Dr. Gloria Flaherty, Ralph Fletcher, Stephanie Harvey, Shelley Harwayne, Debbie Miller, Jill Reinhart, and Cris Tovani. Brenda Power worked tirelessly as editor on the first edition of this book. Without her expertise and patience, we would still be talking about writing. Her support with the first edition of the book and since then has been invaluable.

We are lucky to know Sally Oddi and the staff at Cover to Cover bookstore. Over the course of our careers, Cover to Cover is the place we go to find great books for our students. Sally knows books and children better than anyone we know.

The students and staff in the Dublin City Schools have always given us the chance to explore learning and teaching and to examine more effective instructional practice. After all, our work with children is the most important thing we do. We have always been lucky to learn with great colleagues as part of the Dublin City Schools.

Our families were so supportive as we took another look at *Beyond Leveled Books*. We have all learned the most about finding books we love from our children Zac Szymusiak and Amanda Blankenship, Alexa and Ana Sibberson, and Alec, Elle, and Kyle Koch. We appreciate the support and encouragement of our families.

Introduction

There are times in our lives when storytelling brings out a sense of truth that knocks us off our feet and shakes our perspective. What Lisa has written is the perfect introduction to a new edition of *Beyond Leveled Books*.

My Son Clark Kent

Lisa Koch

The day my son Alec was born I read him Jules Feiffer's *Bark, George* in the hospital. It was a gift from my cousin who taught me the importance of daily reading to instill a love for books. Each day after that, I read to him. He attended early learning classes where he discovered literacy in a preschool setting. He became familiar with Eric Carle, and *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*. He yelled to the teacher, "Don't let the pigeon drive the bus!" And he continued to encourage George to bark as he reread his favorites and shared them with the other children in his class.

By the time kindergarten rolled around, he had dozens of books he loved. He begged to drive an hour to see Barbara Park, the author of the Junie B. Jones series. I waited with him in line for more than three hours just so she could "make his book special by writing her name inside of it."

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I remember the days of kindergarten when he just couldn't wait to tell me what Junie B. had done in school that day. She was his friend, and he was a reader. I will never forget the day I drove four of his friends to a birthday party and they insisted on listening to the CD version of Junie B. instead of watching a movie. His entire class was in love with Junie B. and books.

Then first grade happened. Alec arrived in his first-grade classroom excited to learn. He was ready with backpack in hand, supplies in his box, and lunch in his bag. He was really ready!

Maybe he wasn't really ready, because each day he came home with a different ailment. He visited the nurse each day. His knees hurt, his stomach hurt, he was tackled on the playground and everything hurt. This went on for days as we tried to figure out why. One day he came home complaining that his eyes hurt. Alec does have eyes of different sizes and colors (a result of a premature birth). I took him to the doctor immediately. Okay, I took him to three different doctors who each said the same thing. "His vision is fine and his eyes are healthy." Alec still complained that his eyes hurt.

The Monday after the third and final visit, Alec bounded off the school bus with a solution! "Mom, I wore Collin's glasses in school today, and I could see better. My eyes didn't hurt, either. I think I need glasses." He was quite certain glasses would solve the problem.

Since I was sure he didn't need glasses just yet, I asked him to tell me more about Collin. "Collin wears glasses and he reads a level L," he said. "My teacher says if you read a level L, then you are a really good reader. I think I need glasses to read a level L."

Three doctors' visits and $678 later, I discovered Alec wanted glasses to read at level L.

As educators we know kids need just-right texts to scaffold their literacy skills. We are all familiar with Fountas and Pinnell and their system for teaching with leveled books. I agree that kids need time with just-right books or books they can read independently. But it is the teacher's job to place those books with care into the hands of children, and then, teach children to choose those books themselves.

Did I miss the seminar that instructed us to run out and get bins labeled from A to Z so students could blindly (or with glasses, it seems) make their way dutifully to the end of each bin?

My son, who read all the time in kindergarten, stopped reading for fun. Alec stopped reading for information, and he stopped reading to and with me.

Each evening he brought home two books in an envelope. Each had a sticker with a capital letter proudly displayed on the cover. That letter became our nightmare.

Getting Alec to read those books was like pulling teeth. He had left the world of great illustrations and colorful language and entered a world of texts with generic pencil drawings and meaningless phrasing.

I realize that very short texts will not have intricately developed settings, characters, and plots, but these books seemed comparable in interest to the long-discarded Dick and Jane readers. Alec had lost interest in the stories, which wasn't surprising. Our conversations about books changed. Instead of questions about characters, words, or what might happen next, he asked, "Mom, what level is this?" He looked at the covers of books at home, almost expecting to find a label, and then exclaimed, "It has to be, like, a level X!"

My heart was breaking. At age six my son was now reading for competition. His purpose in reading was to get to the top. He didn't understand or care about any other aspect of the reading experience.

I was devastated, and it became clear that I had to set up rehab. Books that even resembled those books in the lettered bins were forbidden at home. I needed Junie B., and I needed her now!

As I presented the newest Junie B. book to Alec, I saw it. It was the sparkle in his eye as he remembered his good friend Junie B. and realized these characters he loved were going on vacation in *Aloha Ha Ha*. We stayed up and read together until we'd finished the book. When it was over, we both fell asleep knowing he would have to take his books back to school and tell his teacher he hadn't read the books he had blindly chosen from his bin. He didn't read them because he didn't want to. He felt no ownership that comes with choice. He never browsed the bin, because he saw no variety in the books.

Teachers, please reorganize those bins. Divide your books by genre, author, series, topic, fiction, nonfiction, or favorites, but please stop with the bins of leveled texts with the A–Z or numbered labels.

Leveled books were intended to help teachers get just-right books into the hands of children. But please allow kids to choose in an authentic manner and allow them to fall in love with books again. The levels were never meant for the students to know.

Alec has been wearing glasses to school for the past four days as I write these words. They have no lenses in them, but he is sure they will help him get to level L. He wears his glasses and he's asked me to sign the note he has written:

Dear Mrs. T,
Please let Alec be a letter L.

chapter one

Challenging Leveled-Book Mania

Reading is devalued if the books we read are not worth the effort of reading—when what we read adds nothing of significance or importance to our lives. Reading should be life work, not just school work. Students can discover the many pleasures of reading when they are treated to books with authentic, rich language and convincing stories about life. Children can identify with Max when he is naughty and sent to his room in Maurice Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are. *They fly with him on his journey of imagination and return home to forgiveness and a hot supper.*

Kathy Short, Literacy as a Way of Knowing

Some of the children's books we have collected over the years stand out as landmarks on our journey of teaching and learning. We must have read *The Napping House* (Wood 1984) hundreds of times to our children, who joined us in reciting this cumulative rhyme and enjoying the wonderfully amusing illustrations. We recall reading *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* (Fox 1984) and encouraging our young learners to talk about their favorite memories. Together we explored the land of

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Roxaboxen (McLerran 1991) and imagined worlds of our own. We read stories with universal themes like *Fireflies!* (Brinckloe 1985) and remembered when we had captured lightning bugs in jars on warm summer evenings. We could not forget the adventures of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle 1981) or the rollicking family in *The Relatives Came* (Rylant 1985). We marveled at the beautiful language in *All the Places to Love* (MacLachlan 1994) and *Twilight Comes Twice* (Fletcher 1997). There were patterned texts like *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* (Martin and Archambault 1989) and *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* (Martin 1992). There were books representing several versions of familiar stories like *Gingerbread Baby* (Brett 1999). Our classrooms were filled with high-quality books that almost guaranteed that our young readers would fall in love with reading.

Just as cartographers map the world, we were happy to be the architects of classrooms filled with wonderful children's literature. One could walk by any classroom and see the most-loved books propped up on the chalk ledge and hear wonderful stories being read to children. If you looked more closely, you could see children scattered around the room with treasures of books in their hands and eyes of wonder as they explored the pages of wonderful literature. Our students took their first steps toward reading in the pages of these authentic, superbly written books.

Anyone who has ever taught kindergarten or first grade knows just how exciting it is to watch five- and six-year-olds learn how to read. Children move from chanting along to a familiar and repetitive text to following along in a story read aloud to them. Before we know it, they are reading on their own.

Sometimes our students needed books that provided more obvious supports. Having access to books they could read independently was critical, so we were thrilled when The Wright Group and Rigby published the first leveled books. We remember the characters and stories that our children enjoyed. We came to love *Mrs. Wishy-Washy* (Cowley 1988), and we can still remember the words to *Dan, the Flying Man* (Cowley 1988). These leveled books had a valued role as a small part of our classroom library, where the best of children's literature still occupied center stage.

The leveled books that were first published focused on great stories matched with text that our newest readers could handle. Authors and publishers understood what our kindergarten and first-grade readers needed to grow. Books were created thoughtfully by publishers who had a strong understanding of this stage of reading development. These first leveled books built skill and confidence in our emerging readers, and promoted reading fluency.

Our emergent readers needed high-quality books that they could read independently, and these leveled books provided a foundation for us to teach strategies to them. It's important to understand the historical developments that have led us to leveled books. Understanding the development of published reading materials for children over the last century is important to consider. Diane DeFord and Adria Klein help us recognize the positive aspects of leveled books and caution us to think about how we are going to use them with our students.

Teacher Decision Making Is the Key to Choosing Among Leveled Books and Going Beyond

Diane DeFord and Adria Klein

Levels, Levels, Levels

In the prologue to Nila Banton Smith's newest edition of *American Reading Instruction* (2002), Richard Robinson quotes George Santayana, a turn-of-the-last-century writer, as saying, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." With today's fast-changing educational trends, instant communication, and political mandates, this comment is even more pertinent. Current-day practices in reading education, such as the use of "little books," book rooms, leveled book lists, leveled book collections, leveled testing, and incentive reading systems based on leveling children's books, have historical roots that may inform us about effective practice.

These historical roots go back to the early 1800s when William H. McGuffey published McGuffey's Readers (1836–1844), "the first author to produce a clearly defined and carefully graded series consisting of one reader for each grade in the elementary school" (Smith 2002, 99). This series was popular until the last published edition in 1907, and it spawned a host of other reading series grade-level materials for readers. For the most part, basal reading materials emphasized high-frequency or phonetically regular words through the 1950s and 1960s, and these graded texts constituted a significant portion of the basal market (Smith 2002).

Materials began to change with new research in the '60s through the '80s to include natural language structures and high-quality stories for children. The first literature-based program was produced in the late 1980s for California (Hoffman 1998), and these materials caught on across the United

States. The popularity of grade-level texts waned as many publishers abandoned graded leveling procedures that emphasized carefully controlled vocabulary to meet the call for more authentic literature and natural language texts (Hoffman et al. 2006). Literature anthologies, as they were called, were still organized by grade level, but they depended on more features than the grade level of the passage as determined solely by readability formulas. An analysis by Hoffman et al. (1994) showed that approved programs in Texas in 1993 consisted almost entirely of literature-based materials. However, there has always been a market for materials to meet the needs of special populations (adult basic education, adolescent readers, English language learners, and others) and core reading programs that do not put struggling readers at a disadvantage.

The more recent use of leveled texts as "little books" that has dominated the market, and professional material about how to level trade books, has provided greater access to materials, but the influence of previous movements and emphases is still visible in today's books in the form of phonetically regular or decodable texts, predictable language structures, high-frequency vocabulary, and so on. There are several reasons why the shift occurred in favor of little books, leveled-book collections, and book rooms and has extended to leveled assessments. Criticisms of the literature anthology movement of the 1990s indicated that these materials were not meeting the needs of struggling readers (Hoffman et al. 1998), especially at the earliest stages of reading. Teachers wanted greater flexibility in matching student interests and abilities to good books at every level. There was also increased dissatisfaction with basal reading programs promoting a one-size-fits-all philosophy (Allington and Walmsley 1995). Consequently, many new resources for leveled books emerged. Some of these resources have helped teachers organize existing children's literature to better advantage, and some materials have been published just for the "leveled little book" market.

Matching Books to Readers

One early intervention program that had a real impact on this new direction was Reading Recovery (Pitcher and Fang 2007). Started in New Zealand in the 1970s (Clay 1985, 1993), Reading Recovery used a variety of leveled materials that teachers could draw upon from different publishers to make learning to read easier for those first graders at greatest risk of reading failure. When Reading Recovery was implemented in the United States in the early 1980s and it began to grow quickly (Pinnell, DeFord, and Lyons 1988), there was greater demand for these little books that pro-

vided leveled material. The Wright Group secured the rights to publish The Sunshine Books (1987), a collection of leveled little books that were originally published in New Zealand and Australia. Shortland Publications produced The Story Box (1981) and Jelly Beans (1985) that The Wright Group also distributed, and Rigby brought an Australian series, Literacy 2000 (1988), to the United States as well. Other publishers scrambled to produce or make available more books like these for instructional and assessment purposes. These books are assigned levels using a progression of difficulty from more simple to more complex and challenging texts (Brabham and Villaume 2002) that take language, story structures, and text features into account (Peterson 1991).

The idea of matching books to readers caught on, not only at kindergarten and first grade, but on through eighth grade. The Reading Recovery procedure for leveling materials was researched and described by Peterson (1988, 1991). This process takes into account students' background of experience and interest, familiar language structures, print conventions, match between and placement of picture and text, conceptual load, vocabulary (considering known and new), and strategies that readers are currently developing. These books were referred to as *predictable books* because of the way the story and the language led readers to actively predict as they read. The leveling process used in Reading Recovery was then adapted and expanded for classroom teachers by Fountas and Pinnell (1996, 1999, 2001, 2005), offering book recommendations for use in a guided reading framework. They recently launched a web page of more than 16,000 leveled-book titles. Their recommendations for leveling books include both published little books and children's literature up through eighth grade using an alphabetic system from A to Z. The emphasis behind these professional materials is on using materials to build strategic readers.

Although leveled books serve many important instructional purposes, especially helping to focus strategy instruction, they have also contributed to what many call "leveling mania" (Szymusiak and Sibberson 2001, 16). Lest leveled little books go the way of many other good ideas that bad things happen to (Hoffman 1998), or that by forgetting our past, we are condemned to just repeat it, we would like to suggest some notions that need careful consideration.

Positive Aspects of Leveling Books for Readers

- Readers make the most progress when books are not too easy or too difficult (Allington 2006). Texts should be easy enough to develop students' confidence and facilitate comprehension, but difficult enough to

provide a challenge and require the reader to do some "reading work" (Clay 1991).

- Considering a just-right level helps readers read fluently and comprehend better; thus they take on the traits and skills of better readers (Allington 2006; Rasinski 2003).
- Students who meet success in reading are more likely to persist, to read more with less off-task behavior, and to achieve more (Gambrell, Wilson, and Gantt 1981; Allington 2006).
- Acceleration in learning, or increased achievement, is possible for struggling readers when the text/reading level is matched (O'Connor et al. 2002).
- Groupings of books into levels can make it easier for teachers, parents, and children to select books to read. Having multiple ways of grouping materials, such as collections by favorite authors, genre, topics, and seasonal reading addresses the different ways readers read and the purposes for which they read on a daily basis. Keeping high-quality literature among the books read and displayed keeps the richness needed for broad conceptions of reading to develop and flourish (Pierce 1999). Watson (1997) suggests that the first questions we need to ask are "How appropriate are the stories to the lives of my kids? Will they be interested?" (638).
- Books that are used for instruction can be selected with emphasis on student needs at a certain point, but selections should be different for independent reading. The way in which the features of the text are used in the instructional setting may emphasize some aspects of the book but not others, allowing book titles to be used differently at other times.
- With the variety of books now available with these leveling features, schools can adapt a greater number of their book collections to support their particular students.

Cautions for Using Leveled Books for Readers

- Focusing solely on text difficulty limits students' choices, which can lead to boredom and resistance (Worthy and Sailors 2001). The books may be "easier to read" but lack relevance and significance in the lives of the children forced to read such a limited diet. For example, until recently, leveled books have consisted mostly of fiction, with few nonfiction books listed.
- When difficulty or reading level is the only criterion used for book selection, students may have a skewed vision of the purposes of reading (Worthy and Sailors 2001) and of themselves as readers. They may not