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Foreword by Mary Howard

WHAT ARE YOU GROUPING FOR?

How to Guide Small Groups Based on Readers—Not the Book
GRADES 3–8



Thank you

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INTEREST IN
CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *What Are You Grouping For? Grades 3-8* by Julie Wright and Barry Hoonan. In this excerpt, discover the differences between guided reading and small group instruction.

LEARN MORE about this title, including Features, Table of Contents and Reviews.

CHALLENGE: TRYING TO SHOEHORN THE GUIDED READING FORMAT INTO GRADES 3–8

Guided reading has a specific protocol based on the premise that books have levels of difficulty, and that grouping based on these levels helps students develop their reading abilities. In the following, we further explore guided reading principles. The challenge is that in far too many schools, guided reading is considered synonymous with small group instruction, and *so it becomes all that is offered to readers*. We know this travesty firsthand. Years ago in our intermediate classrooms, our solution was to try to shove the guided reading structure into the structures that already existed. What we learned is that guided reading is one approach, but it's not particularly indigenous to the landscape of readers in Grades 3 to 8. Let's take a closer look.

How We See It: Some *Similarities* Between Our Approach and Guided Reading

While this book nudges educators to think differently about small group learning opportunities, it's important to draw lines between our approach to small group instruction and guided reading. We believe both frameworks

- Hold student learning at the heart of purpose and process
- Tag voluminous reading as a key to student reading growth
- Prioritize early intervention, even in the middle grades
- Use small group table or small group space as a place to grow new understandings about literacy

How We See It: Some *Differences* Between Our Approach and Guided Reading

Where we depart from guided reading is highlighted in the chart that follows. In the most general light, we believe that time in school is never in abundance, so what we do with the time we have is what matters. Let's look at some differences in the way we see guided reading being implemented compared to effective small group instruction.

Guided Reading	Small Group Instruction
Data typically are focused on students' reading level.	Use of data does not focus exclusively on students' reading level, and includes data collected from interest surveys, teacher observations and anecdotal notes, work samples, and student reflections.

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Guided Reading	Small Group Instruction
This approach relies heavily on teacher-selected or program-selected texts.	This approach relies heavily on all members of the group contributing texts to the ongoing reading conversation.
Texts are often purchased as part of a program or boxed curriculum, focused on a level, and used year after year.	This approach uses a variety of authentic text types of varying levels, which change year to year based on students in each class.
Groups are more static than they are flexible.	Groups are nimble and change regularly based on students' interests, passions, curiosities, and needs.
This approach typically includes students meeting in small groups with the teacher present.	This approach includes students meeting in small groups with the teacher, and meeting even if the teacher isn't present.
Running records and reading assessments identify students' instructional reading levels and shape reading group membership.	This approach involves kidwatching so that we know students' interests, and student work and reading goals help shape reading group membership.
This approach does not typically rely on whole group instruction, read-aloud, or shared reading experiences to group students.	This approach relies on studying students during whole group instruction, read-aloud, shared reading experiences, small group learning opportunities, and individual conferences to group students.
This approach places teacher talk, or what's being taught in the guided reading lesson, at the forefront of guiding reading discussions.	This approach places student talk at the forefront of meaning making, reading instruction, and feedback.

Guided reading provides opportunities for teachers to observe students as they read from texts at their instructional reading levels—the reading level that students can typically read with some support. During guided reading, the goal is to help students develop strategies that they can then apply when they read independently. Through small group time, the teacher monitors student reading processes and checks that texts are within students' grasp, allowing students to assemble their newly acquired skills into a smooth, integrated reading system (Clay, 1994).

Individual lessons vary based on students' needs, but the general guided reading structure looks, sounds, and feels like the following components:

1. Familiar Rereading—Observe and make notes while students read books from earlier guided reading lessons.

2. **Book Introduction**—Ask students to examine the book to see what they notice. Support students as they preview the book and think about the text. Students may notice the book’s format or a particular element of the print.
3. **Guided Practice**—Rotate from student to student while he or she quietly or silently reads independently. Listen closely and take notes. Intervene as needed. Focus on decoding, fluency, and/or comprehension.
4. **Teaching Point**—Offer some suggestions based on observations made during reading. Teaching points are most valuable when pointing to new things that students are demonstrating or when asking for reflection on how they solved problems.
5. **Word Work (optional)**—Study words that may or may not be a part of the text students read, often in support of decoding.

The process of guided reading sounds pretty good, right? For younger students, we agree. We believe all students, regardless of age or grade, need a lift. Heck, even adults need a lift at times. The last time Julie and her husband put together a new gas grill, they needed to lean on each other and lift one another’s understandings to dissect the technical reading in the manual. Six pages of directions and four hours later, they had a working grill.

Teachers ask us, “Since guided reading works for most of our younger students, carrying that forward to older students (especially if they struggle a bit) makes sense, right?” No. Not always. It may work for some, but we believe it’s not the right structure for most—especially given that guided reading is often misused in the upper grades and becomes far more static than it is when implemented well. On the ground, in classrooms, what we see is this well-intentioned use of guided reading but with texts that are too long. Or the texts are leveled, may not be relevant, and do not hold the interests of all readers. Students in upper grades don’t really want or need a book introduction, and most students, because of their own experiences and literacy narrative, need different teaching points or nudges to grow their learning muscles. In real time, guided groups in the upper grades usually turn out looking more like a book club gone bad. Imagine a group of kids plodding through a leveled book about pioneers, for example, when really what they want to read—need to read—is a text about their favorite YouTuber. If we want kids to be able to read and understand the world later in

life, we have to let them gobble up texts that motivate and inspire them to read the world now.

To a great extent, this issue is tied to the schedule matter we discussed earlier. Too often, “small group reading” may appear as a belief, mandate, or prioritized practice at the administrator level, yet it shows up on teachers’ schedules as “guided reading.” In Grades K to 2, this autopilot embracing of guided reading makes more sense because guided reading has substantial research support going back to Marie Clay, her miscue analysis, and Reading Recovery, from which guided reading was developed. Beyond Grade 2, it’s far less compelling for teachers and students alike. There’s less reason for fourth and fifth graders to be in a guided reading group—it’s beyond what they need. They need connected and flexible small group instruction around reading and writing projects that have authentic purposes and audiences. For some, this can also be achieved through integrated units of study (see Chapter Eight on planning units of study).

SOLUTION: MEET IN SMALL GROUPS, KEEP THEM FLEXIBLE, AND GIVE KIDS WHAT THEY NEED

While planning, ask yourself,

- What are students consuming (reading, watching, and listening to)?
- What are students producing (writing, making, creating, designing, and talking about)?

Once you can name these things, you can begin to think through what’s going to “trip kids up” in their reading—anticipating where they may get stuck—so that you can then design learning progressions (or a series of lessons) during small group instruction to meet their needs. This is the lift that will keep them growing. We are going to show you how to design these progressions later, in Chapters Eight and Nine.

Okay, those were the four challenges you may be up against, and we want you to take stock and take time to see if you can resolve them so you can literally, and figuratively, clear a space in your mind and in your school day to put this new approach to small groups into practice.