
INTRODUCTION

I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.

—JOHN DEWEY (1887)

All children start their school careers with sparkling imaginations, fertile minds, and a willingness to take risks with what they think.

—SIR KEN ROBINSON (2009)

Over the years, we've watched young children interact enthusiastically with books they can't yet decode. We've seen children lie side by side on carpet swatches, rushing to be the first to name the figures on the pages of the newest Star Wars Lego book. We've listened to children read (in approximated ways) a favorite picture book that has been read to them at least a hundred times by grown-ups at home and in school. We've observed children read information books by naming what they see in the pictures. We've witnessed hundreds of children create stories, complete with dialogue and narration, based only on their interpretations of the illustrations in picture books they've never seen before.

As we observe children read books before they can read conventionally, we grow more and more fascinated by what we see. We wonder what children think about about as they make their merry way through the pages. How do they figure out how to read in these ways? What do they do to make sense of what they are looking at? What do they believe about reading? About themselves as readers? How can children's identities as readers and interest in books be strengthened and extended? What might this mean in classrooms?

These questions have been the focus of many of our conversations over the years, and our ongoing curiosity about what readers do before they can read the words turned into an inquiry to find out. We collected videos of young children interacting with books and analyzed what we observed. We talked to teachers and to parents about what they saw their children doing with books at home. Our curiosity and inquiry became the catalyst for writing this book together.

We arrived at our collaboration from slightly different pathways. Kathy brings her experience with teaching readers, whereas much of Matt's work has been concentrated on supporting writers. Kathy's work focuses heavily on children's comprehension and

engagement in reading, while Matt centers much of his work on composition and engagement in writing. But what initially brought us together (aside from long discussions about our own children, the brilliance of *The Wire*, and our baseball allegiances) is our fascination with children's thinking. We share a deep passion for nurturing intellectual development and joyful engagement as children both comprehend and compose text.

We also share a concern about some of the contemporary priorities of education, namely the changing notion of early childhood teaching and learning in these days of high-stakes testing, constant data collection, and the singular pursuit of the race to the top. We worry about the consequences when kindergarten is viewed primarily as a step toward college and career readiness. We worry when children in preschool spend ever-larger portions of their day doing worksheets at their seats. In schools across the country, we encounter teachers and children who are in a constant state of getting ready for the next big test within school cultures characterized by heightened anxiety.

With regard to early literacy, specifically, we frequently see instruction that is focused on moving young children to the next text levels as fast as possible, and whether children enjoy reading or fall in love with books or develop habits that will benefit them throughout their lives becomes an afterthought, not a priority. Early childhood teachers are struggling to acclimate to the intensity of academic demands while also tending to the humanity of their children.

There is a top-down sensibility at work in which the pressures and expectations for older students have been pushed down in ways that profoundly affect the school days of our youngest children. In many places, the big work for little children has become simply to get ready for the challenges of the next grade or to prepare for some upcoming assessment. The problem, we see, is that readiness, itself, has become the goal. We believe that if we provide rich learning opportunities by meeting children where they are and teaching them in a way that is ambitious but also considerate of childhood, readiness will be the by-product.

To be clear, we're not against readiness per se. We're not arguing for unpreparedness. No teacher would ever say she wasn't concerned about whether or not her students were ready for the challenges of the next grade. No teacher would be satisfied if his children weren't ready to handle upcoming work. We don't have an issue with the idea of being ready. Instead, we're concerned when readiness becomes the singular goal.

The fetish around readiness leads us to actions and expectations in classrooms that may not match the children in front of us and may not ultimately be in their best

interests. For example, when children are limited only to just-right leveled texts and word-solving instruction at earlier and earlier ages, they may develop decoding skills at the expense of meaning-making dispositions and a sense of playfulness with books. When three-year-olds are taught letter formation and pencil grip, it's at the expense of other motor skill-building opportunities that might be more aligned with the needs and interests of those three-year-olds. When we reduce recess time to increase instructional time, we may also increase children's distractedness and inability to focus. When we teach reading as if the only objective is to climb levels, we're inadvertently creating reading identity issues among those children who aren't yet reading the hardest books.

Our response to this emphasis on readiness as the goal is simply this: children are always ready for something, and our most effective teaching meets them where they are and nudges them toward what might be next. Therefore, in this book, we're advocating for supporting young children's reading in ways that nurture their healthy reading identities, that fosters an attraction toward texts and a love for reading, and that teaches them how to make meaning in any text they choose, whether or not they can read the words. It's our intention to first honor and then build upon the sophisticated thinking that children do in books even before they begin to read conventionally.

How This Book Works

Before exploring strategies for supporting readers, we want to make the case for why approximated reading matters. Throughout the book, we remind readers that we aren't diminishing the importance of conventional reading. Rather, we are expanding a view of reading to include and support all readers, regardless of how they are making meaning. Chapter 1 provides an overview and rationale for why it's important to support children's meaning-making dispositions and identities as readers before they can even read the words.

In Chapters 2 through 6, we examine what children do as they read familiar, unfamiliar, and informational texts and why experiences with all of these types of texts are important. We also offer specific ideas for nurturing and supporting children's thinking during reading conferences. In Chapter 7, we deal with issues of independence, and we suggest ways that we can help children become more self-initiated and engaged when they read any kind of book.

In Chapters 8 and 9, we consider classroom implications for this type of work, specifically in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. We provide suggestions for kinds of

structures, opportunities, and instruction that teachers and caregivers can provide to help young children do increasingly more sophisticated and intentional meaning-making work. In Chapter 10, we take a wide-angled look at what a year of instructional support for meaning making and identity building might look like. Finally, in Chapter 11, we offer some suggestions for turning the ideas in this book into plans of action.


Understanding Through Seeing: The Importance of Video Clips

We had the joy of reading with so many young children, and we wanted their presence to infuse our book. We began by including transcripts, but words on the page never truly captured Neve’s amazement as she read her horse book or Natalie’s persistence in turning each and every page of *Knuffle Bunny*. So instead of only transcripts or descriptions of what we observed, we’ve included links to videos of children reading familiar, unfamiliar, and informational books and clips of teachers leading lessons and sitting beside children in conferences.

You will want to watch these clips as they come up while you read because the text and the videos are dependent on one another for context. We found it difficult to represent in a written transcript everything that you can watch unfold in a video. Also, the videos provide space for differentiation: we trust that you’ll notice things in the videos that we didn’t and that the clips will bring to mind your own children’s interactions with books.

You may notice that in some clips you can’t see the book the child is reading because we weren’t able to secure permission from the publisher to show the book in the video. In any case, the focus of these video clips is not on which particular book the child is reading, but instead it’s about how that child is interacting with the book.

We’ve provided a couple of ways for you to access the clips while you’re reading:

1. For each clip there is a QR code that looks like this: 
You can scan the code with a free app you can download to your cell phone or tablet. When you scan the code it will take you to the specific video clip.
2. You can find the menu for all of the clips at: <https://heinemann.com/IAmReading>. Whenever you come across a link in the text, just go to this home page and select the clip you want corresponding to the clip number. It will help to bookmark the home page on your browser so you can access it quickly.

Whichever method you choose, our intention is for the videos to provide vivid examples of children reading familiar, unfamiliar, and informational books in approximated ways and to show how teachers can support young readers as they do this work.

It is our hope that children at any age identify themselves as readers, with abilities and strategies to make meaning in every text they encounter. That identity begins when they look through their first board book, and it continues to evolve throughout adulthood. Our biggest desire is that this book will expand teachers' and parents' views of what it means to be a reader, and as result, the reading lives of children will be consistently and intentionally nurtured and nudged both at school and at home.



CHAPTER 3

Instructional Implications When Children Read Familiar Books

Recently during center time, we watched Jesse paw through a few baskets of books in his preschool classroom's reading nook. He looked impatient as he started over a couple of times, flipping books from the back of the basket to the front. He was determined to find something in particular.

After half a minute or so, and just when we were about to intervene, Jesse found what he was looking for: *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, by Laura Numeroff. We waited and watched for a few seconds before sitting beside him. "My grandma gave me this book," Jesse said, unprompted. "I got it at home."

"Oh, so have you read it before?" we asked.

"My mom read it to me, and my grandma did, too," he said. He opened up the book and began to read it with a slightly singsong intonation. He was moving quickly through the book, clearly relying on prior knowledge of how the text goes to propel him from one page to the next.

In the old days, had we sat beside Jesse, we might have just smiled and said, "Nice job!" and moved on to another child or to another task. We might have struggled to find an "in" with Jesse, or the entry point for teaching him something in that situation. After all, Jesse

pursued this book with intention, and he was engaged as he turned the pages. He didn't ask for any help nor did he seem to need any attention. He was absolutely fine in this moment, so we would have probably moved right on by. Of course, the truth is that there's always something we can do or say, even when the child's work looks airtight.

Mia sat across from Jesse, on the other side of the reading nook. She was talking as she turned the pages of her book, *Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak. Her teacher had recently read it aloud a few times over several days. The children loved it. Mia jabbed at the pages with her pointer finger and "yelled" at the monsters in the book. She said, "You are mean, go away. You're mean, too. Go away, you."

Mia was mildly engaged but not totally committed to reading this text. After turning a page, she would pause and look up and around to see what was going on with her classmates, or she would focus on pulling apart the Band-Aid on her thumb. A couple of times, she looked as if she were on the verge of getting up to find something else to do. Her ties to this text in that moment were vulnerable. This had the telltale signs of a fragile moment about to vanish, the way a bubble will pop with the slightest contact. In the old days, we might have observed Mia briefly and then moved right along, not wanting to break the tenuous moment. We might have given her a thumbs-up and mouthed the words "Keep going" as we kept on going by. Alternatively, we may have decided to sit beside her and offer to read the book aloud to her in an attempt to hold her attention.

In the old days, we would have left Jesse and Mia to do their own thing with their texts. After all, they were both more or less engaged. That might have been the extent of our expectations as we watched young children interact with books on their own before they were able to read conventionally. These days, after observing so many children interacting with familiar texts in ways similar to Jesse and Mia, we can more easily see patterns of strength and vulnerability and natural instructional opportunities.

When we observe with intentionality—with both the intention to figure out what our children are actually doing and the intention to teach them—we are positioned to nudge them toward new options and skills or to support them as they overcome challenges as readers. In this chapter, we'll share some ideas for what we can say as we sit beside kids like Jesse and Mia as they interact with familiar texts.

Familiarizing Ourselves with Familiar

HOW CHILDREN APPROACH AND READ FAMILIAR BOOKS

We've spent time in many early childhood classrooms observing children as they interact with books, and we've noticed trends, similarities, and challenges in the ways

children deal with familiar texts. Typically, these observations went like this: we would sit beside a child and offer a choice from an assortment of picture books. When the child selected a familiar one, we asked a variation of this question: “Will you read this book to me?” There was incredible diversity in the range of responses to this question—some children were enthusiastic and confident, similar to the way Natalie approached the reading of *Knuffle Bunny*, and some children stopped altogether and said, “I can’t read” or “I don’t know how to read yet.” Their levels of independence varied, which we discuss in Chapter 7.

We also studied aspects of children’s language—their expansiveness and elaboration or lack thereof, their close-to-the-actual text reading and their completely innovated reading—as they read familiar books. We were able to observe four discrete categories of language use, which we describe below. The categories, or levels, we named were influenced by both our observations of children and by the Sulzby Classification Scheme (SCS) for Emergent Reading of Favorite Storybooks (Sulzby 1985).

The SCS is used to observe students as they interact with familiar books that the teacher has read aloud several times. It names and describes eleven different levels of emergent reading of familiar texts. The first two levels include children who label objects and name the actions in the illustrations as they turn the pages, and the last level, the eleventh, describes children who have moved to reading the text conventionally.

In contrast to the SCS, which is applied to storybooks the teacher has read aloud several times to children, our language levels pertain to children reading anything that’s familiar—whether it had been read at home or in school, whether it had been read aloud twice or twenty times to the child, whether it’s a list book or a storybook. Although we are informed by and value the detail and incremental changes of the eleven levels of SCS, we name fewer language levels that are broader in scope than the SCS simply because the familiar book reading we observe is much broader in scope.

Our language levels apply to children reading familiar books that may have been read aloud to them at home or in school. Our levels apply to children who select familiar books that may have list structures instead of narrative structures. Our intention is to create a guide that will help teachers name what children are doing and consider ways to support them when they are reading *any* text that’s familiar, not just the books the teacher has made familiar.

We want to be very clear that we envision both the Sulzby levels and our levels coexisting in classrooms. We are not suggesting ours as a replacement or improvement. Instead, the language levels we describe are another option for teachers (or parents) when their children are reading *anything* familiar, not only teacher-selected books (see Figure 3.1).

Characteristics of and Criteria for Familiar Books per Sulzby's Emergent Storybook Reading, Kindergarten Literacy Program, and Scheme for Emergent Reading	Characteristics of and Criteria for Familiar Book Reading per Collins and Glover
<p>Children can select familiar books from those that have been read aloud by the teacher and designated as familiar/favorites/star books.</p>	<p>Children choose the familiar book they want to read.</p>
<p>Books become familiar because they are read aloud by the teacher to the whole class at least four times in a short period of time.</p>	<p>Books become familiar because someone has read them to the child before (not necessarily the teacher, and no mandate for how many times).</p>
<p>Familiar books meet certain criteria (i.e., storybooks, picture books, preferably contain a repeated refrain, line, or verse throughout story, detailed illustrations, strong picture/text match).</p>	<p>Books may be storybooks, list books, other non-narrative texts, a variety of genres (i.e., informational text). The only criterion for this familiar book is that someone has read the book to the child.</p>

Figure 3.1

OBSERVING CHILDREN WHEN THEY READ FAMILIAR BOOKS TO DETERMINE LANGUAGE LEVELS

As we attended to the language children used as they read familiar books, we noticed variety in the breadth and a range of sophistication of language choices children made. Even though the books were familiar to the children, some read by calling out random objects on the pages whereas others read the text in a way that sounded like they were decoding the words on the pages. Most all of the variations in the children's language use fell into four broad types or levels, whether children were reading books written as stories or books organized as lists, whether they were reading barely familiar books, very familiar books, or anything in between.

We are hesitant to use the word *levels* to describe these language differences because of what the word encourages us to prioritize as teachers (i.e., "Educational mission: raise the levels!") and because of what that word conveys to children ("Yay, I'm a 4!" or "Boo, I'm only a 1").

The levels we name and describe, first and foremost, detail the significance in what children do as they read familiar books. When we see what children can do, we can determine what might be next and teach other possibilities to add to their reading repertoires. The levels we describe are tools for gathering information about children’s understandings rather than tools for labeling them. We use these levels to help us calibrate what we might say as we sit beside a child reading a book they know so well.

Familiar Books Language Level 1

A child at this level may or may not state or even realize that she is familiar with the book although the teacher does know for sure that the child has had prior exposure to it. As the child reads, she’ll name the action, name the objects, or make comments on each page with or without an intention toward accuracy. As she turns the pages, she doesn’t try to connect one page to the next. It sounds like she’s beginning anew with each new page. If you were listening in, it would be challenging to figure out what’s actually happening on the pages. (Figure 3.2).



Clip 3.1 *Colten Reads I Went Walking and Rosie’s Walk*
(Familiar)
<http://smarturl.it/Clip3.1>

Familiar Books Language Level 1

Description	Sample Transcript
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child may or may not express familiarity with the text. • The child attends to pictures and illustrations and may make editorial comments, unrelated to the story. • The child names and labels objects and actions from page to page. • The child may not connect one page to another. • The child may not rely on prior exposure to the text. • The child may not attempt to read with accuracy based on prior exposure. 	<p>Child reading <i>Knuffle Bunny</i>:</p> <p>“Daddy.” “Baby.” “Bunny.” “They’re walking” “There’s a dog.”</p>

Figure 3.2

In this video montage, Colton is given the option of several familiar books from which to choose, and he selects *I Went Walking* and *Rosie's Walk*. As he reads *I Went Walking*, Colton names what he sees on the pages, such as a cat and dogs. He turns the page and continues to name them, this time adding a quick editorial comment as he reads, "Whoa. A horsey. A horsey. That is so funny. A cow. A red cow. That is so funny." As he reads another familiar book, *Rosie's Walk*, Colton appears to be studying the pages. He doesn't name objects yet he does react to what he sees by saying, "whoa."

For many young children, the language level for reading familiar books is tied closely to the strengths and vulnerabilities they bring as language users across the day. Whether or not the challenges Colton faced as he reads *Rosie's Walk* and *I Went Walking* are connected to his expressive language skill is certainly important to consider, but what he did as he read these books is quite representative of how reading sounds at Language Level 1 for any children, whether they are native speakers of English, English language learners, or children with expressive language challenges. Of course, as a teacher confers with young readers as they read familiar books, he would observe the language level of their reading while also considering how to support the children's language use across the day.

Familiar Books Language Level 2

When a child is reading a familiar book at Language Level 2, he acknowledges his familiarity. He uses his prior experience with the book to read in a way that's intentionally more accurate contentwise and aligned with how the text goes. He relies heavily on pictures and illustrations and reads it in a way that's relatively true to the actual plot or story line. If you were listening in without looking at the text, you'd be able to get a gist of the story (Figure 3.3).



Clip 3.2 *Dion Reads Three Billy Goats Gruff (Familiar)*

<http://smarturl.it/Clip3.2>

As we watch Dion read *Three Billy Goats Gruff*, we can tell right away that this is a familiar book for him because Dion reads it with content accuracy. For example, he says the goats are looking for food, even though there aren't any picture clues showing that. He's remembering that detail because the story is familiar to him. Also, Dion calls the goats "billy goats." It's unlikely that he would call them that unless he had heard the book before.

Familiar Books Language Level 2

Description of Familiar Books Language Level 2	Sample Transcript
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The child expresses familiarity.• The child attends to pictures and illustrations.• The child names objects and actions with more detail.• The child connects one page to another to create a cohesive reading.• The child relies on prior exposure to the text to read in a way that's more accurate content-wise to the text.	<p>Child reading <i>Knuffle Bunny</i>:</p> <p>"I know this one. I have it at home!"/ "There's Trixie and her dad going to the laundry-mat."/</p> <p>"They walked in the park / and there's the school / and now they're at the laundry-mat / Look at Trixie. She's playing / There goes her doll. / She put money into the washer / Uh-oh."/</p>

Figure 3.3

It's important to note that the goal for our readers in these language levels isn't content accuracy or text accuracy for accuracy's sake. We wouldn't correct a child and say, "Those are billy goats, not just goats." Instead, we're observing and noting children's level of content accuracy to determine how much language and content a child remembers from prior exposures to the text. That helps us think about ways we can teach them to use those experiences to help them read the book independently and about how we might support acquisition of vocabulary.

Familiar Books Language Level 3

Children at this level express their familiarity with the text and use their schema to read in a way that's even more accurate contentwise. At this level, the language the child uses is also more closely aligned with the actual words in the text. Children still rely on pictures and illustrations to help them move with content accuracy through the text, but now they incorporate more of the actual words and syntax in their reading (Figure 3.4).



Clip 3.3 *Natasha Reads Go, Dog, Go! (Familiar)*
<http://smarturl.it/Clip3.3>

In this video, Natasha reads *Go, Dog, Go!* in a way that's largely aligned with the content of the book. As she reads, she's using more words and phrases that are directly from the

Familiar Books Language Level 3

Description of Familiar Books Language Level 3	Sample Transcript
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The child expresses high level of familiarity.• The child attends to pictures and illustrations.• The child names objects and actions with more text-based detail and story language.• The child connects one page to another to create a cohesive reading.• The child relies on prior exposure to the text to read in a way that's more accurate content-wise and language-wise to the text.	<p>Child reading <i>Knuffle Bunny</i>:</p> <p>"Trixie went with her daddy / They walked and walked and walked down the block / and in the park / the school / and into the Laundromat. / Trixie is helping her daddy."</p>

Figure 3.4

story. For example, on the pages where the dogs are greeting each other, Natasha says, "Do you like my hat?" and then "No, I don't." She could have conveyed this meaning based on the illustrations by using made-up phrases, yet she chose language that nearly matched the actual text. This is one of the most distinguishing characteristics of children who are reading with characteristics of Language Level 3.

We notice that as Natasha uses the pictures rather than the words to guide her reading, she doesn't read with a consistent sense of conventional left-to-right directionality. On one page, she tracks an illustration from right to left; on another page, she tracks from bottom to top. Yet, even so, she's monitoring for meaning in the pictures. On these pages she uses what she remembers about the actions in the story and what she can see in the pictures to make up words and syntax. In other words, Natasha doesn't use the exact language from the book consistently from start to finish, yet she's resourceful when her recall of the actual text breaks down. Although she moves between Language Levels 2 and 3 and can use support with directionality, we'd consider Natasha's reading to be mostly characteristic of a child who is using language within the Level 3 criteria.

Familiar Books Language Level 4

Children at this level use their schema from prior exposures, and they rely heavily on pictures and illustrations to read in a way that's very accurate. Even more so than Level 3, children at this level incorporate more words and language from the text in their reading. They read with expression and intonation, imitating the way they've heard the book read aloud before. These children also transfer the language of the book into their real lives (Figure 3.5).

Familiar Books Language Level 4

Description of Familiar Books Language Level 4	Sample Transcript
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The child expresses high level of familiarity.• The child relies on prior exposure to the text in the book to read with accurate meaning.• The child attends to pictures and illustrations.• The child connects one page to another to create a cohesive reading.• The child reads aloud with accuracy, using words, phrases, and syntax of the text.• The child reads with intonation and expression.	<p>Child reading <i>Knuffle Bunny</i>:</p> <p>“Not long ago, before she could speak words, Trixie went on a errand with her daddy. / They went down the block / through the park / past the school / and the Laundromat / Trixie helped her daddy put laundry in the machine / She even put the money in the machine.”</p>

Figure 3.5



Clip 3.4 *Emily Reads The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Familiar)*
<http://smarturl.it/Clip3.4>

As we watch Emily read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, we can tell that not only has she heard the book many times before, she has also had opportunities to read this book several times before. She is immediately comfortable. Her reading for each page is either exactly the same as the actual text or almost the same. She maintains content and language accuracy throughout the text, rather than moving back and forth between levels. In fact, if you were sitting nearby as Emily (or any child at this language level) read this book, you would think that she is using print strategies to read conventionally due to how similar her reading aligns with the actual text.

A CAVEAT, OF COURSE

It's important to note that sometimes children might present characteristics from more than one language level within the reading of one text. For example, we sat beside Ava, a first grader, as she read *Click Clack Moo: Cows That Type*, a book that her teacher had read a few times to her class. Ava began the book tentatively, saying things like, “There are the cows.” As she read on, however, she began to integrate more of the language from the text, using words like *strike* and actual text syntax such as “There will be no electric blanket.” Within this one text, Ava was moving from one level to another.

Children also move among the levels from one book to another. We observed Devon and noted how his language levels varied from book to book. For example, he sounded like a junior teacher as he read *How Do Dinosaurs Say Good Night?* by Jane Yolen, whereas he largely improvised his way through other texts that his teacher said he knew well.

Devon and Ava and so many other children provide further evidence that these Language Levels aren't fixed, linear, or necessarily chronological reading-development milestones. We would never say that a child is "Language Level 3" because his reading may vary within a text and certainly across texts. Instead, we might observe that Sophia reads *Knuffle Bunny* with characteristics of Language Level 2, and then we'd use that knowledge to help us think about ways we can support her. As she proceeds through the book, we could teach Sophia to use what she knows of the story to talk like Trixie. We might nudge her toward some of the Level 3 characteristics, especially reading with the language of the text in mind.



Clip 3.5 *Jazzalynn Reads Clip-Clop (Unfamiliar)*

<http://smarturl.it/Clip3.25>

We invite you to watch Jazzalyn read *Clip-Clop* for the first time. Even though this is an unfamiliar text, it shows how children's language levels can change within one book. It begins with Matt showing her how she could read this book, and she reads it by labeling the animals she sees and telling where they are. Later, however, her language use and meaning making seem to surge. Rather than simply saying that the animals are on the horse, she infers that they are about to fall off. She even justifies her inference by pointing out that the cat is holding on tight to the horse's neck. Her language and her meaning making have become more sophisticated in a short amount of time. For Jazzalyn and most other children, it is likely that they will move back and forth between language levels, whether the books are familiar or unfamiliar.

Conferring to Support Students Within and to Nudge Students Across Levels

Lucy Calkins' groundbreaking conferring triad "Research—Decide—Teach" (Calkins 1994) continues to be a powerful mantra for teachers to bear in mind as they confer—whether we're conferring with young readers, writers, artists, mathematicians, scientists, playground

rivals, heartbroken friends, and so on. Still, even if we have an effective conferring architecture, it's important to realize that conferring is informed improvisation. Although it's true that we can anticipate conferring possibilities because we carry schema and prior experiences with our children as well as in-the-moment observations, it's not easy, nor very advisable, to tightly plan or script out a conference before it happens. In other words, even if we approach Luca with a certainty that he reads mostly at Language Level 3, we don't advise entering a conference as if your sole teaching duty is to move him from Level 3 to Level 4. He might need some support with other aspects of his reading that may be more urgent.

We can't know exactly what we'll want to say to a child, even if we know ahead of time what language level she tends to operate within. Each child demands from us an individualized and differentiated approach with regard to the reading instruction we offer and the personal connection we make.

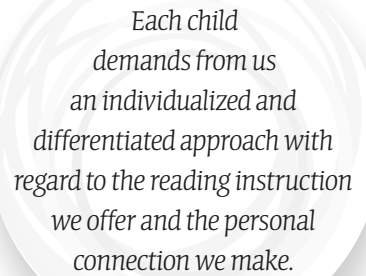
As we work with young children just beginning to read texts independently yet not conventionally, we always keep in mind that a conference is not a formal assessment opportunity or an assigned performance task. We're not trying to make the child jump through hoops. Our inclination when we work with young readers is always to go and meet the child where she is rather than trying to coax her or pull her over to where we want her to be. We watch what she does for a bit, and then, in a conversational tone, we help her make more meaning, engage more intentionally with the text, or talk about her thinking as she reads.

STARTING A CONFERENCE

We want to see what the child does in the name of reading books, so we might be inclined to ask the child, "Can you read this to me?" For some children, that question poses no problem or risk. The child will gladly do his version of reading as he's grateful to have an audience. Other children might shrink away from this request and say they can't read.

We've found that it often works to sidle our way into a conference. We might open with a question like, "May I listen to you read this?" This approach is different than "Can you read this to me?" by only a few words, but children tend to respond more comfortably when we ask if we can listen to them read rather than asking them if they can read. Beginning a conference with "May I listen to you read this?" presumes the child is reading, and it doesn't suggest to the child that she has to do anything different. Children are more likely to continue on, doing what they can do, whereas asking, "Can you read this to me?" might sound like we're requesting a performance or putting children on the spot. It also might imply that we're not sure if the child can read the book. Instead, we want to communicate that we know she can.

We pay close attention to what children say and do for a few pages before we jump in to confer. As we watch and listen, we get an idea about what they know already about reading and making meaning in general and what they know about the book specifically. We use this information to decide if it makes more sense to teach the children to do something new as readers or to support and strengthen what they're doing at that point, especially if it seems nascent or unsteady. We also make a point to jot notes about our observations and the instruction we offered during our conferences. We've included sample note-taking sheets for conferences in Appendix A (see pp. 167–168).



*Each child
demands from us
an individualized and
differentiated approach with
regard to the reading instruction
we offer and the personal
connection we make.*

CONFERRING: FAMILIAR BOOKS LANGUAGE LEVEL 1

When we're working with children who read familiar texts in a way that is mostly aligned with Familiar Books Language Level 1 characteristics, our big intention is to teach toward elaboration using picture clues and schema. We coax and invite the child to use more language to read the book and we also teach some strategies that readers can use to help them remember the story (Figure 3.6).

CONFERRING: FAMILIAR BOOKS LANGUAGE LEVEL 2

When young readers have moved beyond the one- and two-word labeling of texts as they read toward more elaboration, we can support their use of strategies to maintain cohesiveness in their reading (Figure 3.7). We can help them read the text with more content accuracy, teaching them to recall what they know about the book or the topic, and to use their familiarity to their advantage. We'll also add some fix-it strategies for when they encounter difficulties, such as how to regain their footing when they lose their place in the text or when they forget what they know about it.

CONFERRING: FAMILIAR BOOKS LANGUAGE LEVEL 3

In Familiar Books Language Level 3, children's reading is closely aligned with what's happening on the pages. They strive to remember how the text goes, and their reading holds content accuracy. They also express more vocabulary and phrasing that matches the text itself. They use characters' names consistently, or if the book is informational, they'll include more specific domain vocabulary. The child uses more literary syntax rather than simply relying on her own oral language patterns to represent the text (Figure 3.8), and the transitions between pages are smoother.

Familiar Books Language Level 1

Examples of What a Child Might Do While Reading	What Might We Do or Say to Support or Nudge This Child?	Example of an Interaction Between Child and Adult (Knuffle Bunny by Mo Willems)
Names and labels characters and/ or objects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We can ask what the characters/ objects are doing to help the child move from one- or two-word labeling to sentences and toward more elaboration. We can model full sentences and elaboration. 	<p>Child: "A girl and a Daddy." Adult: "Yeah, there's Trixie and her daddy. Let's think about and say what they're doing together." Child: "Walking?" Adult: "Trixie and her daddy are walking down the street."</p>
Calls out details on the page that may or may not be vital to the story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We can help to refocus the child toward the main action on the page or we can support the child in elaborating. We can model how to connect the details with the main action of the page. 	<p>Child: "There's a doggie!" Adult: "I see that dog, too. He's a little one, isn't he? He's doing something. Let's say what he's doing."</p>
Attends to pictures and illustrations, and makes editorial comments about them that may be unrelated to the story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We can help the child connect his thinking to the story or we can support the child toward elaborating on his ideas and thinking. We can model how to bring random ideas back to the text. 	<p>Child: "This looks funny." Adult: "What is funny?" Child: (points to Trixie's teeth) Adult: "What about her teeth?" Child: (points to spaces between her teeth) Adult: "Oh, I see what you mean. She's got baby teeth! With spaces between them! Trixie is a little girl with little teeth. That makes sense!" Child: "Trixie is a little like my baby sister!"</p>
May not connect or carry the text through from one page to another	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We can help the child carry character or story line or concept from one page to the next. We can model how to carry one page to the next to create cohesion between pages by using connecting words such as, "And then..." and "After that..." 	<p>Adult: "Oh, look. There's Trixie and her daddy again. What are they doing now?" Child: "Walking." Adult: "Trixie and her daddy are walking down the street..." (turns page). Child: "Park." Adult: "And then Trixie and her daddy walk through the park" (turns page).</p>

Figure 3.6

Familiar Books Language Level 1 (Continued)

Examples of What a Child Might Do While Reading	What Might We Do or Say to Support or Nudge This Child?	Example of an Interaction Between Child and Adult (Knuffle Bunny by Mo Willems)
<p>Reads passively or perhaps in a disengaged way, using one-word labels and naming actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can ask questions to help the child invest more in the book. We can ask the child to think about why things happened and what characters might be thinking or feeling. • We can show the child how to act out the story and how to give voice to characters. • We can model how to “get into” the story. 	<p>Child: “The girl and her daddy are walking (turns page). They’re walking (turns page). Walking.”</p> <p>Adult: “Look at Trixie and her daddy walking through the park. Maybe he’s saying, ‘Wait for me, Trixie.’ What might Trixie say to her daddy?”</p> <p>Child: “Running!”</p> <p>Adult: “Hey, Trixie, slow down! You’re so fast!”</p>

Figure 3.6 (Continued)

Familiar Books Language Level 2

Examples of What a Child Might Do While Reading	What Might We Do or Say to Support or Nudge This Child?	Example of an Interaction Between Child and Adult (Knuffle Bunny by Mo Willems)
<p>Expresses familiarity and attends to pictures and illustrations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can remind the child to use what she knows as she reads the text. • We can teach the child how to use the pictures/illustrations to remind her of the text if she forgets or loses her place or to help her add language from the text. 	<p>Child: “Hey, I know this book. I have it at home and my mom reads it to me.”</p> <p>Adult: “Oh, that’s so helpful to know the book. You can remember how it goes to help you read it.”</p> <p>Child: “Trixie and her daddy went for a walk.”</p> <p>Adult: (fingers walking on the page) “Down the block . . .”</p> <p>Child: “Through the park and this school. And they got to the, I forgot what it’s called.”</p> <p>Adult: “Look at the picture. They’re doing laundry in it . . .”</p> <p>Child: “The laundry-mat. In the laundry-mat.”</p>

Figure 3.7

Familiar Books Language Level 2 (Continued)

Examples of What a Child Might Do While Reading	What Might We Do or Say to Support or Nudge This Child?	Example of an Interaction Between Child and Adult (Knuffle Bunny by Mo Willems)
Names objects and actions with more detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can begin to remind him of the language of the text by saying, “What did the character say?” or “Oh, that’s called a _____. Remember?” • We can support her to infer what’s going on in the text. 	<p>Child: “Trixie said ‘apple apple aggle flaggle’ or something like that because her bunny is lost.”</p> <p>Adult: “Yeah, look at her face! She looks like this (makes face). How do you think she’s feeling right now?”</p> <p>Child: “She’s sad.”</p> <p>Adult: “What makes you think Trixie is sad?”</p> <p>Child: “She lost her bunny and she loves her bunny.”</p> <p>Adult: “That is really sad.”</p>
Connects one page to another to create a cohesive reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can support the child by modeling the language that connects pages. • We can show him how he can turn back a page to remind himself of what’s going on, in case he gets stumped. 	<p>Child: “Trixie said, ‘apple apple flaggle.’ She’s sad.” (turns page and looks at it; skips past the page where the dad says that they’re going home)</p> <p>Adult: (turns back page to “aggle flaggle klabble” page) “Trixie realized something, and she said ‘aggle flaggle klabble.’ She was sad (turns the page) but her dad said . . .”</p> <p>Child: “And the Daddy said, ‘Let’s go home’ because he didn’t understand her words.”</p>
Relies on prior exposure to the text to read with content accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can begin to support the child with more language-based accuracy, reminding the child of words from the text itself. • When the child reads with attention to accuracy to the plot and meaning of the text, we can support inferential thinking by pausing to talk about what’s happening on particular pages. 	<p>Child: “Then they left, and Trixie knew she forgot.”</p> <p>Adult: “A block or so later, Trixie realized something, didn’t she?”</p> <p>Child: “She realized something, that she forgot her bunny.”</p>

Figure 3.7 (Continued)

Familiar Books Language Level 3

Examples of What a Child Might Do While Reading	What Might We Do or Say to Support or Nudge This Child?	Example of an Interaction Between Child and Adult (Knuffle Bunny by Mo Willems)
<p>Continues building on the skills of Familiar Books Language Levels 1 and 2</p> <p>Expresses high level of familiarity</p> <p>Attends to pictures and illustrations</p> <p>Names objects and actions with more text-based detail and story language</p> <p>Connects one page to another to create a cohesive reading</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can continue to support the child in elaborating more and sharing her thinking about the texts. • We can support the child in reading with more expression and prosody because he knows the story so well. • We can continue to model full sentences and elaboration as well as cohesive reading across pages. 	<p>Child: "Later Trixie turned to daddy and said, 'apple flapple klabble.'"</p> <p>Adult: "Look how upset she is . . . let's try to sound like Trixie! How would she say it?"</p> <p>Child: (with worried voice and facial expression) "Apple Flapple Klabble?"</p> <p>Adult: "Ooh, you looked and sounded so worried and sad. Let's read it like that, okay? Let's sound sad and worried" (turns back to the page to where this occurs)</p> <p>Child: (with a sad, worried voice) "Later Trixie said to Daddy, 'APPLE FLAPPLE KLABBLE!'"</p>
<p>Relies on prior exposure to the text to read in a way that's more accurate content-wise and language-wise to what the text actually says</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can let the child know that she sounded just like an author when she read. • We can remind the child of the text-based words/phrases so he can integrate them into his reading. • We can support the child with oral language acquisition by checking to make sure she understands words and phrases she is using. 	

Figure 3.8

CONFERRING: FAMILIAR BOOKS LANGUAGE LEVEL 4

There is a small and nuanced difference between characteristics of readers at Familiar Books Language Level 3 and Familiar Books Language Level 4. In Level 4, children read the text in a way that is largely accurate, both with regard to language and content, and they also read with fluency and expression. The child's transitions between pages are smooth, and, similar to the highest Sulzby levels, if you were to close your eyes, you might think the child is reading conventionally. Additionally, at this level, a child might begin to recognize and read some of the words of the text conventionally, or at the very least, he might be interested in locating words on the page (Figure 3.9).

CONFERRING WITH YOUNG READERS IN FAMILIAR PICTURE BOOKS: AN EXAMPLE

Mary Alice Berry, our friend and a wonderful teacher, kindly videotaped conferences she had with young readers who were reading familiar books before they could read conventionally. We invite you to watch and notice how Mary Alice affirms and supports what the children are doing while also trying to nudge them toward growth and new approaches.



Clip 3.6 *Hannah Reads Bad Case of Stripes (Familiar)*
<http://smarturl.it/Clip3.6>

In this conference, Mary Alice shows Hannah something she can add to her reading repertoire. Instead of simply listening to Hannah read this text or just noting her language level, Mary Alice uses in-conference research to help her decide what to teach in that moment. Hannah begins by talking about the pages as if she's describing them and not reading them (i.e., "Here I think she doesn't know what to wear"), which suggests that although Hannah knows this book, she may not know it very well. It may also suggest that Hannah isn't quite sure how to begin a book in a literary way. To help Hannah shift from narrating the pictures to putting them together into a more cohesive text that sounds more storylike (because in this case the familiar text features a story), Mary Alice nudges her to attend to the characters and use the action in the pictures to think about what the characters might say. The combination of Hannah's schema of the text (however slight it may be at this point) and her inventive dialogue will help her sound like she's reading rather than simply describing what's on each page. This is something that she can do across pages to help her

Familiar Books Language Level 4

Examples of What a Child Might Do While Reading	What Might We Do or Say to Support or Nudge This Child?	Example of an Interaction Between Child and Adult (Knuffle Bunny by Mo Willems)
<p>Continues to build on the skills of Familiar Book Levels 1, 2, and 3</p> <p>Reads in an accurate and fluent way, perhaps missing a word here or there</p> <p>Expresses high level of familiarity</p> <p>Attends to pictures and illustrations</p> <p>Names objects and actions with more text-based detail and story language</p> <p>Connects one page to another to create a cohesive reading</p> <p>Reads with content accuracy and language accuracy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can continue to support the child in elaborating more and sharing her thinking about the texts. • We can support the child in reading with more expression and prosody because he knows the story so well. • We can continue to model full sentences and elaboration as well as cohesive reading across pages. 	<p>Child: (pauses as he reads and points under a word) "Does that say 'Trixie?'"</p> <p>Adult: "What makes you ask?"</p> <p>Child: "I saw it on this page, too" (goes back a couple of pages).</p> <p>Adult: "What makes you think it says 'Trixie?'"</p> <p>Child: "It's the part with Trixie and it's like Trey's name here with the T."</p> <p>Adult: "Well, huh. You are right. It does say 'Trixie.' You can read it like this" (shows the child how to point under the words in that part).</p>
<p>Reads the text with accuracy with regard to content, language, and literary syntax</p> <p>Reads with intonation and expression that matches the tone of the text</p> <p>May read with attention to print or may attempt to read the text conventionally</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can let the child know that she sounded just like a storyteller when she read. • We can check for understanding in natural and supportive ways. • We can support the child with oral language acquisition by checking to make sure he understands words and phrases he is using. • We can ask the child to point to some words as she reads. 	<p>Child: "Long ago, before she could say words, Trixie went on a errand with her daddy. / They went down the block / through the park / past the school / and in the laundry-mat / Trixie helped her daddy put laundry in the machine / She even could put the money in the machine. / Then they left."</p> <p>Adult: "Wow, you sound just like a grown-up reading this."</p> <p>Child: "A block later, Trixie said, 'Aggle Flaggle Klaggle!'"</p> <p>Adult: "Ooh, what's happening here?"</p> <p>Child: "Trixie left her Knuffle Bunny in the laundry-mat and she's trying to tell daddy."</p> <p>Adult: "But he says let's go home."</p> <p>Child: "Yeah, he doesn't understand because she's talking in baby talk."</p>

Figure 3.9

make it sound like a book. Mary Alice first shows her how this strategy works, and then she extends an invitation for Hannah to try it on another page.

Although we've categorized the ways that children may approach the reading of familiar texts into language levels and offered ideas for what to say to children to nudge them forward, we want to be clear that our biggest priority in these conferences with early readers is to make connections with them and to enjoy the book together. It's important to bear in mind that we aren't just teaching children how to read, we're also supporting them so they love to read.