Triple R Teaching

Hello, this is Anna Geiger from the Measured Mom, and this podcast episode releases on July 22nd, 2024, which is the day before my book, "Reach All Readers," is due to ship out from Amazon. If you've pre-ordered, maybe you've already received your copy. I've had my hands on my author copy for a little over a week now, and I'm really excited for you to get your hands on it, too.

In this episode, I'm resharing the podcast episode from Melissa & Lori Love Literacy last week in which they interviewed me about the book, so if you didn't catch it on their podcast, here's your chance.

I got a little vulnerable in the episode. Sometimes I wonder if I overshare talking about how much I didn't know in the past, but I always conclude that honesty is the best policy. I think it's important to be open about the fact that we may not have known something and now we do and, of course, we are still always learning. So I hope you enjoy this episode. Here we go!

Melissa: When I was first learning about the science behind teaching reading, I had to do a lot of learning on my own.

Lori: Me too, Melissa. I remember early on reading an article by Natalie Wexler, I think you read it too. It was about knowledge building and it made so much sense, but it also blew my mind because I hadn't heard about what she was writing about before and I hadn't read any of the sources that she had cited.

Melissa: Yeah, exactly. And there's just so much information out there, but it's hard to know which sources to trust or where to get information from, and a lot of it conflicts with other information.

Lori: That's right. But our guest today, Anna Geiger, she's proven to be such a trustworthy source of information for years. She started teaching using balanced literacy approaches and then learned about the science of reading and shifted course.

Melissa: We love her blogs and resources on The Measured Mom, and her podcast, Triple R Teaching, and she's the author of "Reach All Readers," a new book coming out this month.

Lori: Yeah, she's a fellow author. Her comprehensive book hits on every topic about teaching reading.

Hi, teacher friends, I'm Lori.

Melissa: And I'm Melissa.

Lori: We are two educators who want the best for all kids, and we know you do too.

Melissa: We worked together in Baltimore when the district adopted a new literacy curriculum.

Lori: We realized there was so much more to learn about how to teach reading and writing.

Melissa: Lori and I can't wait to keep learning with you today.

Hi, Anna, welcome to the podcast!

Anna Geiger: Thanks so much for having me, I'm thrilled to be here. Thank you.

Melissa: Yeah, we are so excited for your new book!

Anna Geiger: I can't wait. I can't wait to get it in my hands, any day now, I hope. You know how that goes.

Melissa: Absolutely, we do, yes.

All right, we're going to jump right in. We want to hear as much as we can about this book today.

We wanted to start with how you actually start your book with a really great overview of how literacy sort of changed over time from your lens, and we loved it. Can you just share a little bit for our audience about what went wrong with balanced literacy and the whole language approaches? We know we've heard of three-cueing, comprehension strategy of the week, leveled text, all of that, but we want to hear it from your side.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, so I started the book kind of placing everything through history. That's important for me to understand how we got to where we are now. I talked about the reading wars, and interestingly, this started way back when.

I listened to Emily Hanford speak at The Reading League event I think last year, and it was fascinating to hear all the things that these people were saying, these men from the 1800s, their disagreements about direct instruction and the place of phonics and alphabet knowledge. So this is not new that people thought that phonics got in the way of learning; this was way back in the 1800s.

Then the Dick and Jane books became popular, the sight word method. I look at my mom as a casualty of that era, she learned to read in the early sixties, and I'm pretty sure it was a whole word approach. She doesn't remember learning much else and reading was really tough for her. She always says, "I didn't really learn to read until I read to you guys." She did teach me to read using phonics, but that's not what she learned. Unfortunately, a lot of kids were casualties of that way back in the fifties and sixties.

Then I talked about Jeanne Chall and how she did all of her research to try to figure out whether a code emphasis or meaning emphasis was the best place to start. I don't remember where I read this, but I did read somewhere that she thought the meaning emphasis was going to win out, so she was maybe a little surprised to find out, nope, it was definitely the code emphasis.

When you think about a meaning first approach, that was definitely what I did as a

teacher with my predictable leveled books because I thought if we're focusing on sounding out words, it's very slow. It's going to take a long time. If I heard someone else's students slowly sounding out words, I have to admit that I felt a little smug because I heard what my kids were doing with their predictable leveled books, and they weren't stumbling over words. They sounded like fluent readers and they could understand what they were reading, so I thought.

The whole language movement was very much that meaning first approach. So much of it sounds so good; it sounds magical, and that's what teachers want. People become teachers because they love learning and they love the idea of having their own classroom.

It's funny, one of my daughters, my younger daughter, she's 10, and she's definitely a born teacher. She makes worksheets on PowerPoint and teaches the neighbor kids. She said to me the other day in the car, "I can't wait to be a teacher because I can't wait to set up my classroom." We think about those things, right? People become teachers because they want to be creative, and then it can feel like a very structured approach is going to take that away from you.

I think balanced literacy was just very appealing. When I started teaching in the late nineties, early 2000s, it was everywhere. I think "The Art of Teaching Reading" came out close to that time, and Fountas and Pinnell became really big around that time, so it was really a perfect storm for me to get into that. Also, my master's degree program was very, very balanced literacy based. So it came at me from all sides.

It did not occur to me that these books I was reading could have anything wrong in them. I figured, "Hey, it's a book. You can trust a book, right?" And then it just made sense; it looks like you're doing three-cueing. I know Marilyn Adams even said that that makes intuitive sense that that's how reading works, that you use these cues to figure out words, because it doesn't feel like you're looking at every letter or processing the whole thing.

So all of this made sense to me. That was the world I lived in. I know Nathaniel Swain from Australia, he talks about the water we're swimming in. You just don't look past that.

And so when Emily Hanford put out her articles and I finally looked at one of them, I think it was the second or third one that I finally saw, "At a Loss for Words," that was very jarring to have three-cueing criticized because I wasn't hearing that from anyone. I wasn't surrounding myself with those voices.

But that's where we are now. We're still working through that. I think it's a challenge because a lot of people are trying to move more towards a structured approach, but in doing that, there are maybe some overcorrections that are happening. So I think we have to spend some time figuring out how all that works. But I think in general, teachers are starting to see that we need to educate ourselves as to what the science really says and not believe our favorite voices necessarily.

Melissa: Yeah, I love that Nathaniel Swain metaphor, analogy, or whatever you might want to call it. It just makes so much sense because I think you can often ask, "Well, how did we get there? Why would we get to a place if there was no research behind it if it wasn't the right way to do it?" But it is so easy. We were in the same place, we learned the same things in grad school, and why would you question it? We went to good schools and it's like, "Why would you question your professors at a really great school that you're paying a lot of money to go to?"

Lori: I mean, schools that were even known for teaching! I mean, Melissa and I went to one of the same ones at some point that was known for education, known for teaching, like, formerly teachers colleges, if you will, in the sense of preparing teachers for service. Yeah, I totally get that.

Anna, I'm wondering if you might be able to just tell us what do we know now and how is structured literacy different and what does it mean or include?

Anna Geiger: Yeah, so I think about a few major understandings. Whenever I give short talks about the science of reading, I always start with the orthographic mapping, which for me was a big one, understanding that we're trying to connect the letters, the sounds, and the meaning of words altogether to map it in our brain.

If we're using incorrect beginning reader material, like those predictable leveled books, we're bypassing that process. Understanding how we learn words is really important. We're not memorizing pictures of words.

Another big concept just to get the person started, is understanding how the brain learns to read. I've watched Stanislas Dehaene's videos a million times. I've read his book. I can't say that I remember a lot of it. A lot of the time, I have to keep looking it up again. But the general idea is that we're trying to create pathways in the brain, and we do that through instruction. If we actually teach students to use context or pictures to identify words without going through the decoding and connecting the phonemes to the graphemes, then we're actually operating on the right side of the brain, which is an

inefficient process. It's an inefficient circuit.

We need to understand that we want to train the brain to read and to do that, we need this explicit instruction, understanding that practicing reading words will lead to orthographic mapping so we actually can read the words in the future.

Another thing I think is important to keep in mind is the importance of practice. When I taught reading, it was definitely a very haphazard approach to phonics. I did teach phonics. If someone accused me of not teaching it, I would have said, "Hang on a second. Yes I am. We're doing it in our Words Their Way lessons," or "I'm pointing out phonics patterns." But it was not taught systematically, and I did not have a system of review and assessment to see if the students were actually learning the patterns.

There was an analogy that a presenter gave to me somewhere along the way about when you walk across a field that's got grass up to your knees, you might not be able to tell you walked across it the first time or the second time, but the more you walk across it, you're going to build a path. That's what happens in the brain when we do lots of repeated practice, we build those pathways. But if you don't do lots of practice, it's not going to happen.

It's also important to remember that the amount of practice required is different for different kids. So a child, probably like the kind of reader that I was, I didn't need a lot of practice and some of my students too. That fooled me into thinking, "Oh, well this is the way it should work. It's not working for them, so something's wrong with them. It couldn't be something wrong with my instruction." Those are some big things.

Then thinking about structured literacy in general and what makes it so different from balanced literacy, a big one is the focus on the elements of language, things that I never had thought about before. These are things like actually thinking about how phonemes are represented in print, thinking about syllables, I know there's controversy within our world about how much of that is necessary, but also morphology. I only learned that word a few years ago; I had no idea what that even meant. But then to understand that morphology is so intrinsic to how words are spelled.

I think it's exciting because there's so much to learn. I think with balanced literacy, I never wanted to say this when I was doing it, but a lot of it is kind of guessing like, "Well, I'm not really sure what to do, but in general, I know this is what you need to learn, so this is what I think we'll do next."

Whereas with structured literacy, there's a much bigger understanding of the whole picture of language, and it helps you when pinpointing problems and then making instructional decisions.

Lori: Yeah, and I could see for balanced literacy, a pushback could be like, "Well, no, I do know exactly what to do next. For example, if I have a reader who's reading in a level C book, then I know that I'm going to move them to a level D at some point." I think the tricky part is all of those requirements are unclear about what puts both the reader and the text in those categories, if you will.

There are things that I think seem clear on the surface, but that once you actually dig a little deeper are very murky and are very subjective and very much confusing as a teacher and also as a student. I imagine my students were probably confused, like, "What actually is a level D text? Why can't I read that?"

Anna Geiger: "How come this level D is easier than that level D?" Right?

"Well, I don't know. This is what Fountas and Pinnell said, so this is the level."

Lori: Yeah, it's so tricky.

Let's talk about the components of structured literacy. Let's go to what we do know all about, or a lot about, I should say. In your book, just like in our book, and we love this fun organization, you have chapters for each of the big components of reading. You have phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and more. So much more! Your book is awesomely thorough, I would say.

So we thought we would dive into a chapter that really resonated with us as we were preparing for this podcast. It's not a topic that we think is highlighted as often as others, but that it should be. The topic is linking reading and writing. We know those are so reciprocal, and we just wanted to talk with you about ways that we could connect reading and writing for the purpose of decoding or spelling.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, so interestingly, at first, I wasn't going to have a chapter on writing because I really felt like that's a whole book, which it is, which it is. And personally, I'm still working through a lot of questions I have about Writing Workshop and what of that actually aligns with research and what doesn't. I definitely didn't feel

like I was ready to write something all about how to teach writing, but the more I thought about it, I realized I have to have a chapter about writing because one thing I've learned is that writing belongs with reading instruction.

I used to kind of brush that off. I know Lucy Calkins had some quote that I used to share all the time about how we have math class, we have social studies class, why don't we have a writing class? Of course we should have a writing class.

I'm not sure I disagree with that exactly, but that perspective led me to think adding writing to other classes was just not really worth your time.

Lori: A limited perspective.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, like you may say you're teaching writing, but what does that even do?

But then the more I learned, I found out that writing about your reading actually helps you learn more about what you're reading, which makes so much sense.

You can certainly attest to this as an author, writing a book is clarifying your thinking. Lyn Stone has talked about that. I'm not going to quote her because I don't remember exactly what she said, but it was something like, "I write so I can clarify things for myself," something like that.

For me, that's really what it was. You could write a book about each of phonemic awareness, phonics, etc., and people have done that. If you're going to write a book like both of us did that's more of an overview of all the parts then you really have to distill, is that the right word? You have to get it down to what's the most important. It was this understanding that I couldn't leave it out because it's important.

I did put in a few things about spelling and handwriting because, especially in the primary grades, those are so important. In writing the chapter, I focused a little bit on some tips for teaching handwriting and just some general tips for teaching spelling, because that's really important, especially for our primary teachers who wonder how to handle that.

But then I focus on writing about what you read and different ways you can do that. Those are some things we've been learning about, and I wanted to just narrow that down so that teachers could figure out how to add this to their reading lessons.

For example, in teaching students to write about what they read, I talked about starting with writing a very basic sentence.

It's so funny, when I was really into balanced literacy, I talked a lot about Writing Workshop, and I had people email me and say, "How do I teach my students to write a sentence?"

I was like, "Well, I don't know, just tell them to write a sentence."

That's one thing about structured literacy is that it takes you back to the beginning and you work from the beginning instead of, I think for me, balanced literacy was thinking where I want to go and just kind of floating along as if we're there, without understanding all the components that had to fit into it, and even knowing what to do about that.

I talk about explaining that a sentence is a who and a do, and taking a picture from a book that you've read aloud, maybe a nonfiction book, and modeling how to do this, and then helping students do it with you.

So much of this from the beginning can just be the teacher modeling and the students doing oral work. I think sometimes we might think that we can't start this until students are actually writing, but so much of writing is articulating what you're going to write and then getting it out.

I talked also about sentence expansion and sentence combining. Those are things you can do with a text you're reading. In the book I gave examples of things that you could do if you read the book, "Ladybugs" by Gail Gibbons. You could write a very basic sentence, "The ladybug flew," and then walk your students through what kind of ladybug, where did the ladybug fly to, and so on. Then I modeled how you could put that together. The book does have some specific lessons that teachers can use as a model.

Then I also talked about connecting sentences with compound words and then very, very basic about writing a paragraph about something that you've read. Then finally I concluded with a set of ideas for helping kids respond to text in writing, whether that's decodable text or a more complex text that you've read, maybe in second grade.

Melissa: Yeah, I love that you actually brought me right back to my student teaching. I'm having all these memories right now because I was thinking about it. I was only 20 years old, and I was a student teacher in a writing class. At the time there was a writing class, and then they would go over to reading class right next door. Even at that time, I always thought, "Why? This just seems so strange that these two things are separated."

We were having them write about the most random topics. I mean, it was anything because we were just practicing the writing, the standards, the process, whatever it was that we wanted them to practice. It didn't matter what they were writing about at the time, and I just thought that seemed crazy. But I was only 20, so it was like, "Who am I to question this?"

Lori: The water around you.

Melissa: Exactly! And my teacher was a fabulous teacher. I mean, she was so good that I was like, "Okay, this must be okay."

Anna Geiger: That's so funny. Whenever I think about writing and writing prompts, which I've changed my stance on writing prompts, I don't think they're always wrong. I definitely don't. But when I was in school, I just remember writing was like the teacher wrote a prompt on the board, a chalkboard, of course, and we were supposed to write about it, and that was it. I don't think the teacher even read it most of the time.

The one I can remember getting over and over was, "What would you do if you woke up and an alien spaceship was in your backyard?" I don't know how many times I wrote about an alien spaceship, like I cared!

I really think that what we're kind of waking up to is that writing about your reading is actually productive. Not that it can't be productive to write in different genres, I definitely don't think that, but why not take an opportunity to cement what you've already teaching?

That's a big thing about structured literacy too, is choosing quality texts that actually include something useful. Of course it can be fiction like fairy tales or just a good story, but it can also be nonfiction.

Why not use writing to help them remember what you're doing so your time is all well spent?

Melissa: The title of your book again for everybody is "Reach All Readers," so we really wanted to ask you, what are your top three tips to actually reach all readers?

Anna Geiger: Yeah, good question. Number one, I think teachers need to educate themselves, and that just comes with never ending learning. I know some people have taken LETRS, I have not because they won't let me because I'm not in a district, but I have educated myself through tons of reading and everything else. I've also been able to take some college programs, and that's been really helpful. But even if a teacher has zero budget, there's so much they can do. There are free trainings online that have it all organized. I think that's really helpful. I think Cox Campus has that, there's the Reading Rockets one, and I'm sure there are more. There are also ones that are pretty low cost.

I think that's really helpful, having the whole thing in one place so you can kind of wrap your brain around the whole thing and then dive into things. I hope that my book will provide that for people because that is what I worked on doing is starting from the beginning to the end, and then at the end of each section there's a learn more area. If you want to learn more, go check out this video or read this book if you want to dive deeper.

Just getting that big picture I think is really important for teachers, and then they can pick something that they want to learn more about. That's number one.

Melissa: Do you have any tips there, Anna, for like, I don't know, red flags, where if they see that the course or whatever it is talking about this, maybe stay away from it, or a green flag if they're saying these words?

Anna Geiger: Yeah, good question. So I personally like to take recommendations from people. In general, if I didn't have all the resources that I have, I would ask around. I would be careful with people, and I'll say this, people like me who are online business owners, because you don't know what you're getting unless you check closer.

I can certainly share my credentials, the things I've studied, the coursework I've done, and things like the certifications that I have, but not everyone has those. You need to be careful that you're getting your information from someone who has actually put in the effort, because it's easy to say this is "science of reading." Lots of people are saying that, books are saying that...

Lori: Everyone is saying that, yeah,

Anna Geiger: Programs are putting that on there. So do your due diligence, ask the right questions.

The questions could be, "What do you mean by the science of reading? What have you studied or what are your inspirations for learning about the science of reading?" This would be for talking to someone like me. Obviously if you're talking to a professor or someone that would be different, but things like, "What's the research support for this resource or this course?" If someone really cares, they will have that for you. Even if they don't have it that instant, they will make the effort to do that. I think those things are important.

Just as a side note, this is kind of funny, but five years ago when I had my old course, a balanced literacy course, someone actually asked me that, "What's the research behind your course?"

I was like, "Oh, I mean, it's based on the work of Lucy Calkins and Fountas and Pinnell." I just figured that they did the research, so I could just... I didn't understand how any of that worked. Hopefully that person turned around and walked the other way. Hopefully they realized, "Oh, she doesn't know what she's doing."

That's changed, thank goodness, and now I definitely understand that, but I'm constantly learning all the time and updating things. Anyone who's serious about learning and sharing is going to be doing that. Everybody knows what we know now is not going to be what we know in one year, three years, or five years.

You want to make sure that the person you're buying from is educated but also humble, because there's not typically one way that you have to do anything, one specific way. But the big broad ideas are where we need to be in the same place.

Melissa: And just to recap, that was only our number one tip still!

Anna Geiger: Okay, that was number one. Number one, educate yourself.

Melissa: Number one, educate yourself, and I'm going to throw into that to keep learning, because I think that's one thing I admire about you, Anna. You talk about it very openly that you might've made some mistakes along the way and you learned more and you keep learning. I think all of us are in the same boat there. We want to continue learning because things keep changing.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, and it's so fun to do. That was one thing, learning about structured literacy kind of reignited the spirit of me about teaching because there's so much to know. You can just... Anyway, I could go off on that forever, but... So educate yourself and keep be willing to keep learning.

One more tip on that, if you feel overwhelmed by all the learning there is to do, I totally get it because there's so much stuff out there. I have a learning folder in my Gmail, so if I see, "Oh, I want to read that article," or "I want to watch that video," I just put it in there. Then when I have time, ideally it's every Friday, but it's not been that way for a while, I'll just go through and dive in and take notes in Google Drive. Do that for yourself. Save it and know that when I can, I'm going to go through this, and then you won't have to feel like you're always missing out. That's just a tip.

Lori: I love that. I love that. I do that with Safari on my phone, Anna. I'll open something in Safari, and then I have 29 things open in Safari. Then whenever I'm waiting at a doctor's appointment or sitting in a car at sports, I can pull open that Safari and be like, "Oh, okay, okay, let me read this now. Now I have some time to react to it." But I love the folder idea. I'm going to steal that.

Anna Geiger: Number two is have the right tools. This is a really hard one because there are so many different opinions about where to get those from.

I mean, as a teacher, I made all my own stuff. That's what I wanted to do. I did have some programs, but I usually went far away from them, and there's good and bad in that. I think for me it was a bad thing because there was really no accountability. I thought what I was doing was right, and some of it was of course, but some of it also was based on the wrong ideas about how reading works. There was nobody really

checking up on me to see that what I was using was based on actual research, so I don't really recommend necessarily that teachers just make their own stuff.

You guys talk a lot about high quality instructional materials. It's so hard though, right? This is the question I get the most in email. The thing is, nothing's perfect. It just isn't. Even if you get a really good program, it's not.

That's why the education is so important because you can figure out what's good about this and what isn't, what are my actual goals, and is this part of the lesson really going to get me there? I know a lot of schools are going with really big box programs, and there's a lot of good in those, but there's also a ton of stuff.

Lori: It's like that idea of the reader, the text, and the task, that triangle. Except for it's the teacher, the text, the curriculum, and the task that it's asking, and how do we massage it so that it is better or meets my students' needs.

I think that that's where the teacher education is so powerful, going back to your number one tip. It's super powerful to educate yourself and to have those bullseye pieces of research that you know, okay, this is solid. We know that this part is not necessarily going to change in the next 100 years because it's been a hundred years, but this stuff over here might shift a little bit, and I'm going to stay up to date on that and keep myself aware.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, and then back to choosing a program, I know there's a big, big debate on should we go to TPT? Can we buy stuff from regular people? I mean, I have things on TPT, that's not the focus of my business, mostly I'm on my own website, but I mean, I have things there. I wouldn't sell them if I didn't think they were appropriate. And there are a lot of people I trust that have things on there, but there's also people on there that just create stuff and put "science of reading" on it.

But to look at the other side too, I don't know why sometimes people think that just because something is a boxed program, it's going to be really great. Regular people write that stuff. Regular people! Just like regular people create for TPT, and not all of it is really...

I see some of the stuff that my kids bring home, their school's using Into Reading this year and it's fine, but with some of it, I'm like, "That's a really dumb question. Who wrote that question? I could do a much better job writing that question." Obviously some of it's rushed. So I don't think people should think that just because it's a

published program, it's superior to something else.

I do think that schools do need, if they can get them, evidence-based programs, but not everything has that research behind it to show that the program actually is effective. But yeah, that's why you need the knowledge about how to use it. That is such a long... We could talk about that for a whole session, but anyway.

Lori: Yeah, I know. Melissa and I haven't talked about this in a while, but when we were adopting, we had an RFP out, we were adopting stuff in Baltimore, and it was like every single program had the highest marks and the best research behind it. I mean, honestly, I was like, "This is really hard because everyone is such a good salesperson." There was only one, I think, Melissa, that you and I sat in together and I was like, "This feels kind of like, I don't know, BS. I'm not sold on this one." But the other ones all were pretty darn good and it was really hard. So we needed to know sources to go to find information that would actually help us learn more so that we could make better decisions and kind of peel the layers back.

That's kind of where we stumbled into places like the Knowledge Matters Campaign and Ed Reports and things like that. Those were helpful tools or resources. Even reading things from Natalie Wexler or Daniel Willingham, just kind of reading that stuff and being like, "Oh, okay, so this aligns with that," and drawing our own connections were really helpful in making those decisions.

But you're right, it does come from that knowledge and the drive of being a learner and being willing to take the time to consume that instead of just looking at who had the best presentation.

Anna Geiger: Unfortunately, what I see a lot of is schools are like, "We have to make a decision now. We have to pick a program now," without taking the time to really understand it first. What happens is then they spend thousands and thousands of dollars on this program and then two years later they realize that wasn't the best choice. I sympathize with them because what are you supposed to do in the meantime? That's really hard.

But if they can somehow communicate to the people who are insisting that they make a choice this second that we need some time. Maybe that could be a time where you do something from a trusted TPT seller or something while we tread some water, because those programs are way less expensive. If you have something good that you can just use for a year or two while you really figure this out, that might be a good place for them.

Melissa: I love when schools are able to do pilots. That's almost like, yes, you're just taking your time. You're piloting a few different options. That is just the way to go, if you can.

Anna Geiger: And then did I say my step three? I didn't.

Melissa: Nope. That's what I was going to say. We have two top tips. Now we're onto our third tip.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, so the first one was educate yourself. The second one was get good tools. I wouldn't say the perfect tools, but the right tools for your situation.

Then the third is to have a system for assessing students to figure out who needs what and then figure out what to do if they're not learning.

That's why the last chapter of the book is using MTSS to reach all readers. It talks about how your regular instruction, even when it's really, really good, is most likely, according to research, not going to be enough for everybody. We all know that, anybody who has spent a day teaching knows, even if you have five kids, they're going to be at all different levels as to how much repetition they need and how explicit they need you to be. So realizing that you're not going to be successful unless you have a system for seeing what they know, reaching them, and then supporting those who need extra help.

Melissa: I love that. And I love how all three of those go together, because I often hear people try and pit your first two against each other, right. They might say, "All you need is a really trained teacher," or, "No, all you need are materials." When really it's both of those, plus what you just said, which is if you're really seeing where each student is, you have the tools that you can use, but you have to have the knowledge to be able to see where they are, to see the tools you have and see what each student needs with those tools. You need all three of them together for sure.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, and it's a process. It takes time.

Lori: That's right. Okay, with the systems thought you really cued me up here for this question. We get questions all the time, Anna, and I'm sure you get this too. What does

a good schedule look like for teaching structured reading and writing to reach all readers? I think that this is something that is so important to think about, not just with the systems, but also with the tools that you're choosing.

I remember when I was a coach, I was coaching a middle school, and the program that we selected had a 90 minute block of time that you needed as a teacher in order to fully teach these lessons. At the school, the system that they put in place was for 45 minutes a day. I was like, "Oh my gosh! By the time the kids come in and sit down, you're already down at least five, or a couple of minutes."

So we want to make sure that those systems are set up so that we can set everyone up for success. Teachers, students, leadership even, I mean you're going to be hearing complaints from everyone involved, including parents, about everything.

I would love to hear about what a good schedule looks like in your opinion, and you could even go K-2 or K-3, if you'd like. Just throw out some ideas.

Anna Geiger: Yeah. Well, I'm going to go ahead and take the one that's in the back of my book, and this is a sample reading block for K to third grade. Of course a kindergarten schedule is going to be different from a third grade schedule, but there's a general idea of what you're trying to do.

One thing that I did in this schedule was that in the last column I wrote the skills addressed, because it's not like we're doing, like you said about your book, Melissa, you're not just doing phonemic awareness, and now we're doing phonics, and now we're doing fluency, and now we're doing comprehension. So much of it's integrated all through the day. That graphic of the five pillars is helpful to see what all is involved, but it can sometimes communicate that they're all on their own and that's just not true. They're all working together.

So what could it look like? In a primary classroom like K-2, it could be good to start your day with a morning message or a question of the day, something to build oral language. That does not have to take long, like five minutes.

Then we've got the word work. Honestly, the time required for this depends on how you do it. There is definitely more of a trend now towards whole class phonics instruction. That's not my preference, at least at this time. But either way, if you're doing whole class phonics instruction, you've got to have some differentiation, some small groups afterwards, because some of the kids are going to need a lot more support.

I put 60 minutes on here for this just because if you have a good strong whole class lesson, it's probably going to be 30 to 40 minutes because of all the pieces, including the decodable text reading and responding to decodable text. Then you're going to need some differentiation after, maybe two groups that you meet with or three groups for 10 minutes each, so it doesn't stop with that whole class lesson.

I talk in the book about possibly doing a walk to read model where you're working with other teachers so that kids are still getting a good 30-minute phonics lesson, and then there's maybe only 30 minutes where they're not meeting the teacher.

Maybe each teacher could take two groups. That's a way to really give differentiated phonics lessons, but not have kids on their own a lot. However you do it, I think it's reasonable to think this time could be a good 45 minutes, at least, 45 to 60.

Then I put interactive read-aloud in there, which should be for all grades, but K to three, certainly all of those. Of course that's with the teacher leading that. That's whole group.

Then I put partner reading. If you're in kindergarten and you're just getting started, maybe that's just alphabet games or something they do with a partner or letter sounds, but something where they're working with a partner to read versus a long period of independent reading. Here they're actually reading out loud, which is I think very valuable, especially in those primary grades.

The material they're reading can vary. Maybe they're reading a decodable text and they're taking turns reading pages as they get further along, or maybe they're reading a more complex text or rereading something they've read in a small group. That's maybe 10 to 20 minutes.

Then I put 10 to 20 minutes for shared reading of complex texts. I talk in the book about how you can do shared reading in the primary grades differently from how we understood it to be working in the balanced literacy world. It isn't exactly a way, necessarily, to teach kids how to read, but it's a way to share vocabulary, knowledge, and modeling of prosody.

As students move through, maybe even in later first grade, it could be the whole class reading a complex text. I talk in the book about how to support students in reading

complex texts. We hear a lot about that these days. That would be a longer period for third grade.

For third grade, that foundational skills piece is going to be much smaller, it will probably be more focused on morphology, and then you'd have more time, so you could adjust this time to be longer.

Then finally, I put in their written response. That would be some kind of written response to that complex text reading, or you could move that for primary grades and put that after your read aloud. Again, this does not have to be necessarily the kids actually writing at the very beginning. It could be an oral forming of sentences, but some kind of response to text in a written way.

That's just one way you could schedule it. I always want to see things like that. If I would go back in the classroom tomorrow, I would take this and try it, and I'm sure I would change it, but this a starting place.

Melissa: Can you talk a little bit more about the difference between that interactive read aloud and the shared reading?

Anna Geiger: I read a really interesting interview from way back when, I don't remember what year it was, it's referenced in the book, it might've been the eighties. It was between Don Holdaway and somebody else, and he was the one who invented shared reading. What he was trying to do was to replicate a child sitting on a parent's lap like you do at home, except in the classroom with a group of kids.

That's great, but in the interview, he's very clear, very clear that he's not a fan of phonics instruction, especially on learning to read individual words. He wants kids to read this text with the adult, this predictable text, and eventually they'll start to read words and whole sentences. It's very whole language; he was a big whole language guy. That's where shared reading came from.

I always say about shared reading... So many people say, "Well, we can't throw the baby out with the bath water when it comes to balanced literacy things," and there's some truth to that. But with this one, I always say, "We need a fresh tub. You've just got to start over. There's a lot of bad in there."

But it's not all bad. I've heard Jocelyn Seymour talk about this, she's an educator in Australia. She has her own podcast, and I've taken some of her courses, and I need to have her on my podcast and we can talk about this. She talks about using shared reading as a way to build oral language and vocabulary.

I think it's very tricky, but once you understand that the shared reading of a text, where you have an enlarged text and your students are reading as much as they can with you, when you understand that the point of this is not necessarily to teach them to read, we're doing that in our decoding...

I should say, it's not teaching them to pull the words off the page, we're doing that in our foundational skills work. But it is giving them access to oral language and knowledge.

You guys have talked a lot about how kids need to say these big words. They have to say them. They need them in their oral language vocabulary so that when they get to reading them later, they can land on the right word. They can have it in there, and this is a way to provide it. If the only reading they're doing or the only speaking with text they're doing is just the simple decodable text, we're blocking them from access to these words.

I don't pretend it's something easy to differentiate, but I do walk through what a lesson could look like about that in the book.

Then the tricky thing is that when researchers talk about reading to kids, they call it shared reading. That's what they call it. So for people like me coming from balanced literacy, that's confusing.

The thing I just talked about before with Don Holdaway, that's capital Shared Reading from the balanced literacy model. We can make it lowercase and talk about it in a different way.

I like to use interactive read aloud versus shared reading so there's no confusion when I talk about reading to kids. It's the same thing you can do in the shared reading, which is teaching vocabulary, asking questions, you can take a look at syntax and things like that, but typically with the interactive read aloud, they're not seeing the text. That's the big difference. You're doing more of the reading. You're not having them join in with you to read, but it's also a really powerful place to teach vocabulary, ask questions, and things like that.

Melissa: So it sounds like interactive read aloud is more of an oral language practice, and shared reading is more of a bridge from the oral reading to decoding?

Anna Geiger: I would say shared reading is the oral language because you're doing a lot of talking with them about it. You're putting it in a place that they can see it, you're reading it out loud, and then you're giving them a chance to read it with you if they can, or read parts of it if they can. Sometimes you might pick a poem where they can kind of pick up on the phrasing, and, I'm using quotes here, "read it."

Then you're also giving them access to knowledge, so the material you use is probably different than we would've used in the old days. I know you guys taught older grades, but for me it was like, "Well, whatever big book I have, I guess that's what we're using."

Lori: That's what I was going to say, the big books. Yeah, the big book idea really resonated. So the big book idea would be in the uppercase Shared Reading, is that right?

Anna Geiger: It's funny because when I did that, I would see some of these big books that were filled with words my students couldn't read yet, and I thought, "Well, what am I going to do with that?" That actually probably would've been a better choice because it was actually something they could learn from. You can still point out words, you can still review phonics concepts you've taught by picking them out, but understanding that this is adding on to what I'm already doing. This is not the primary teaching.

I think in the past we thought... I mean, I actually went to this conference back in the early 2000s where she showed us how you should put a piece of calculator tape, if you remember that, on the wall next to your big book so you could date and keep track of all the times you've taught these skills to show your administrator. We didn't have a scope and sequence! We didn't have a phonics program! It was when it comes up, teach it.

We have to shift from that to know that this is not our primary teaching method, but we can support what we're doing in our foundational skills if that helps.

Lori: Yeah, I'm even thinking in a book where we're having that kind of shared experience or interactive read aloud experience, you could pull out a word that would

be challenging for your students that has a part of it with a phonics pattern that you've taught. You could focus on that little part and then help them extend that learning and extend that understanding, like, say the rest of the word and help them learn that word. Then you can build vocabulary.

You can build their phonics knowledge because what will happen when they encounter a word like that? They should try different sound spelling patterns for that part, but they're going to start with what they know. And so we're helping them access those bigger words in context.

Anna Geiger: I think that's a good point too. I think one part of over-correcting with structured literacy might be, well, I don't want them to see words that I haven't explicitly taught them how to read. But you're there to support them; you're there to show them how big words work. There's nothing wrong with that. Those kinds of texts can provide those experiences.

Melissa: You've told us a lot about some things that are in your book, but is there anything else that you want our listeners to know about your book?

Anna Geiger: Yeah, the reason I wrote it was because I really wanted a place to send people to who are wondering, "Well, now what? I have all this information. I can't figure out how it all goes together."

I really tried to answer a lot of the questions that people have. Even if I couldn't give them a straight answer, I still addressed it, like, "This is what we know, this is what you have to think about."

I did address briefly the speech-to-print, print-to-speech debate. I addressed things like, "How do you know when to get kids out of decodable text?" I addressed the knowledge and the comprehension strategies conundrum. I addressed phonemic awareness with and without letters. How does that work?

I hope that people find that, not only does it kind of walk them through and give them a broad picture so they don't have to feel overwhelmed, but it also helps them tackle some of those tricky questions.

I also am very available via email, hello@themeasuredmom.com, and I will be offering a

course in the fall using the book as the textbook. That's where I'm really going to get deep into things that I couldn't necessarily get into deep in the book. Although the book is pretty comprehensive, it's about 300 pages, but you could always write a 1,000-page book. In the course, I will be going more into detail about some things, and it will also have about 40 or 50 classrooms snapshots of me doing this with students so people can see how it looks in real life.

Melissa: I love that! Everyone will love that. When is the book out again?

Anna Geiger: July 23rd is the date. So as of this recording, it's less than a month.

Melissa: I'm sure they can find it Amazon...

Anna Geiger: Everywhere, yeah.

Melissa: Absolutely, and we will link that in our show notes, so if anyone's looking for that link, they can find it easily.

Lori: For sure. Okay, so the book is called Reach All Readers, and it's by Anna Geiger or The Measured Mom.

Lori: We are so grateful. This is so much fun. It's so much fun to do this author series this summer, and we are so glad that you're a part of it!

Anna Geiger: Thank you so much. I love talking to you guys always. Before we started recording, we finally just had to say, "Okay, we've just got to record. We could talk all day!"

Lori: I know we could have talked all day about reading and writing.

Anna Geiger: Thank you. It was a pleasure and I appreciate the chance to talk about it.

Closing: That's all for this episode of Triple R Teaching. For more educational resources, visit Anna at her home base, themeasuredmom.com, and join our teaching community. We look forward to helping you reflect, refine, and recharge on the next episode of Triple R Teaching.