Triple R Teaching

Today is a very special interview with Margaret Goldberg. If you've read Emily Hanford's article, "At A Loss For Words," you might remember that Margaret Goldberg is the teacher that speaks with Emily Hanford about coming to understand that balanced literacy was not working for many of her students, and then switching to a more structured approach. I owe Margaret a lot because it was her quotes in that article that led me to give more thought to the problems with three-cueing, because she was actually an experienced teacher sharing what was working and not working for her.

Margaret, to me, is one of the most powerful voices in the move from balanced to structured literacy, because she has such a kind, gentle way of sharing information. And yet, she doesn't shy away from all this important knowledge we need to have. If you ever get a chance to read her blog posts or watch her on a webinar, I highly recommend it. She's one of my favorite people to learn from. We'll get right into the interview after this intro.

Intro: Welcome to Triple R Teaching, where we encourage you to think differently about education by helping you reflect, refine, and recharge. This isn't just about trying something new as you educate those entrusted to your care. We'll equip you with simple strategies and practical tips that will fill your toolbox and reignite your passion for teaching. It's time to reflect, refine, and recharge with your host, Anna Geiger.

Anna Geiger: Hello and welcome! Today, I'm very excited to welcome Margaret Goldberg to the podcast. For those of you that have been following along with me on my science of reading journey, you may remember that the article by Emily Hanford, "At A Loss For Words," is what really caused me to reconsider my balanced literacy approach, and, in particular, the quotes in that article from Margaret Goldberg, who is a teacher in California.

Most of the people I've talked to in this series really began to change their perspective about how to teach reading around the years 2019-2020. However, Margaret was there before us, because she was quoted in the article that was published in 2019. So she's here today to share her journey with us and share some insights. Welcome Margaret, we're so glad you're here!

Margaret Goldberg: Good to be with you!

Anna: I know you have quite a background in terms of teaching, you've been teaching for a long time, you've supported teachers, and you've taught different grades. Can you talk to us about what you remember about when you started to shift your understanding from balanced to a different approach?

Margaret: I was a balanced literacy teacher for six or seven years as a fourth grade teacher in a high performing school. All of my kids basically came to me reading, unless there were a couple of kids here and there who would go down the hall for reading intervention. So I didn't know how to teach kids to read from scratch, but I wasn't really confronted with that on a daily basis until I took a job as a literacy coach in one of Oakland Unified's lowest performing schools.

I went to go focus on literacy instruction in a school where just between 2% and 3% of students were proficient on state tests. I came in thinking, "Well, I was a good teacher. I was told that by multiple people. I had high test scores. I'm going to take on coaching other teachers to do the same things that I found to be successful." The district was rolling out their balanced literacy initiative that had programs like Units of Study and LLI, and so I was getting a whole lot of training in how to do those programs. My job was to teach other teachers to do that.

I want to say it was maybe no more than two months into the school year, and I was like, "This is NOT working." What worked so well for kids who could already read - long periods of time for independent reading, talking about books, seeing themselves as readers, talking about what good readers do with enthusiasm - all of that was falling totally flat at my school.

I was noticing independent reading time in classrooms that involved kids being really angry. Angry at being left there for long periods of time to read books that they didn't know how to read or being given low leveled texts that were really boring. They would do anything they could to avoid having to read during that time.

I was trying to cajole the teachers, saying, "Let's focus on the program we were designed to implement."

I realized as I was talking with kids, that the struggle for them was the words on the page. I remember sitting with a kiddo and being like, "Your teacher tells me that you're a great reader. I'm going to do this reading record on you right now. I'm looking forward

to hearing you read."

She was like, "I can't read."

And I was like, "Okay, well, what makes reading hard for you?"

And she said, "The words."

That was the moment when I realized that was true for so many kids at my school. I ended up doing assessments on all of the kids, K through 5th, and I realized that basically none of them knew their short vowels and didn't know how to tackle other more complicated spelling patterns.

That's when I realized that we weren't going to get them what they needed doing this approach that basically has a prerequisite, kids seeing themselves as readers and kind of faking it until they could make it. These kids were not down to fake it anymore. They had been let down by school for long enough.

I think one of the things that really stuck out to me was that I realized I wasn't the only person who didn't know what to do about it. I realized that as I was asking questions in these balanced literacy trainings, what I was being told was not to focus on the words too much, because that's just one part of reading, it's the visual part of reading, and it's really important to focus on meaning and focus on structure. You don't want kids to go too slowly sounding out words because then they'll become word callers.

I thought, "Okay," but I had that worry in my mind, and I realized, "But I think we actually do need to teach them how to read the words."

That's where I started my journey into reading scientific articles about how the brain reads words and how do you teach children to be able to make sense of English spelling?

Anna: So you saw the problem and you went on your own to do your own research to figure it out.

Margaret: Yes.

Anna: Which is very different from what teachers are able to do now because there's so much out there about it. So tell me, how did you know what to study? What really resonated with you, and what kind of light bulbs went off?

Margaret: I didn't, and I think that's the thing that was so interesting. I would type into Google the questions that I had like, "How do kids learn sight words?" I would get a whole bunch of strategies back, like flashcards and bingo and play this and play that with them, all of the strategies that were familiar to me from balanced literacy trainings.

But it wasn't until I started typing into Google the right terminology to find out the information that I needed, that I was actually able to start finding scientific articles that were describing what happens as the brain is processing the letters on the page. I had to get out of teacher publications and into publications that were designed for other fields. It meant reading a lot of stuff that was over my head.

I remember there was this one time I was reading this Seidenberg and McClelland article. I was like, "I can't even pronounce some of the words in here," like saccade, what is that? And so, yeah, it was a lot of long nights reading a lot of stuff and feeling dumb. Also feeling like I was just in awe of the amount of information that I didn't know that was known by other people.

I really needed to learn quickly how to read a study, how to understand basic terminology that they were using, how to use ... I can't even think of all of the questions that I ended up asking as a result of realizing I was in over my head, but it was a lot.

Anna: Was there a specific book or something that helped turn the page for you a little bit?

Margaret: The moment that stands out most clearly to me was that I had been starting to make sense of the infighting amongst the authors that I was reading. I made myself a Venn diagram and I was like, "Here are some people in this camp. Here are some people in this camp. Some people are liked by both of them. What's going on here?"

I started to realize, "Oh, this is seeming like a reading war that's happening. I've heard about the reading wars. They were settled many, many decades ago. Why is it that history is repeating itself in this way?"

I remember reading the article "Whole-Language High Jinks" by Dr. Mills, and she had a chart in there that was preparing the scientifically-based reading research approach, SBRR, with whole language derivatives. When I saw that, I think that was the first moment that I realized that balanced literacy was actually rooted in whole language. I had thought if it's got phonics in it, there's no way it can be whole language.

Anna: I know.

Margaret: But to see it there, I was looking at it and I was like, "Everything I know is in this one category that is a derivative from whole language, and there's this other approach that I really need to learn a lot about really fast."

Anna: That's really interesting that you say that, because I know for a long time I just dismissed criticisms, because like, "I'm not whole language. I don't do memorizing whole words."

Margaret: Exactly! You said word study!

Anna: Yeah, exactly! I've got "Words Their Way," so I can't be whole language.

Margaret: Exactly.

Anna: For me, I think reading Emily Hanford's article and the three-cueing thing was when I literally felt sick when I read it, because I finally realized that, "I think she's got something here." The first time I read it, I just was like, what does she know? But then I read it again and I really felt sick because it was turning everything up on its head.

Did you have any moments where you didn't quite want to go farther and learn, or were you just very excited to keep discovering things?

Margaret: I personally was really excited and I loved that the teachers at my school were so interested in it. I was a literacy coach and a reading interventionist and I was pulling first graders into my little tiny office space to do lessons with them. I was supposed to be teaching LLI and then when I realized that wasn't going to work, I was also teaching SIPPS at the same time, which is a more systematic approach.

The teachers that I was taking kids from realized that the kids that I was pulling for a more systematic approach to learning foundational skills were the only kids in the school who were learning how to read.

Anna: Wow.

Margaret: And so they started asking me questions like, "What are you doing? What are you using? Oh yeah, we have that in the supply room, it's covered in dust on the shelves. We haven't touched it since we got a grant for it, but we never got any training. Let's actually all get together to try to figure out how to make sure that every kid gets this kind of instruction." So we went into it together, asking each other tons of questions, trying to figure things out.

I was lucky enough to have a mentor who I could email thinks like, "I don't understand how you pronounce this sound," or like, "Can you explain to me why you use CK sometimes and K or C the other times," just little questions like that. I felt like I was getting some support and I started to notice that there actually was an answer for everything in a way that I hadn't gotten from the balanced literacy community. I felt really good about it.

I think what was surprising to me was that as I was starting to try to talk with other people in my district and other people who were doing balanced literacy trainings for us, for this cohort of coaches I was a part of, I was surprised that not everybody wanted to learn.

I think that was the thing that was hardest for me. I assumed that the enthusiasm that my school felt for this learning was going to be matched by everybody else because who doesn't want kids to learn how to read? But I think what ended up happening is that sometimes when you're really thoroughly invested in an approach and your name has been stamped onto this initiative that you are so proud of rolling out, and you have reason to believe that it's the right thing to do, it's really challenging to face the stuff you don't know.

Anna: It is, and I'm going to have to definitely link to your article. What is the name of the article you have, "Teachers won't embrace ...

Margaret: "Teachers Won’t Embrace Research Until It Embraces Them."

Anna: Yeah. Can you maybe summarize that article a little bit?

Margaret: So I wrote it after I went to a conference where I was sitting in the back of the room, and the person was bashing teachers and how teachers "just don't know what they don't know."

I was sitting there and I thought, well that's true, I've confronted this. I realized that I didn't know a lot and I had a lot to learn, but there was something about the way it was said. There was something about the attitude towards it, towards US, that I felt like I couldn't bring my colleagues with me to this.

There was a lot to learn in this session, there was a lot to learn in other sessions at this conference, but I can't invite anybody here because of the tone. It made me feel really alone in doing this work.

Then I was thinking, "Why is it all these people are annoyed with teachers for just not getting reading right?" I started thinking about all of the parent advocacy groups that are really upset about how their kids are or are not being taught to read. I empathize with them so much, but I felt like it would be helpful for them to know what they were up against. Helpful for them to know what it's like to be part of this warm, inviting community that is balanced literacy and what it's going to take to pull teachers away from that.

Anna: Excellent. Yeah, we'll definitely link to that, there's a lot of good stuff in there.

If someone came to you and said, "What's the problem with balanced literacy anyway?" what would be some main points that you'd give?

Margaret: Well, one thing is that no one really knows what we're balancing. Are we balancing phonics with a love of the meaning of text? Well, not really, because if you look at the instructional day, there's fifteen to twenty minutes for word work and then twenty minutes for independent reading and then a little bit of time for direct instruction. It's very out of whack if you look at it in terms of minutes.

It's also not very balanced if you look at it in terms of why would we do the same thing for lower grades as we do for upper grades? That doesn't seem to make sense with child development. So part of it is how we're using our time.

Part of it is, are we talking about instruction versus independent practice? Is that what we're balancing? Are we balancing phonics with these whole language strategies that have alternatives to phonics to be able to recognize words? Anyway, my point is just that balanced literacy is unclear.

I think one of the other things that was really enlightening to me is that with balanced literacy, one of the problems is that the words are seen as an imposition to the reader. They're supposed to be solving words like there's a problem on the page. They're supposed to have a wide variety of word strategies that they're supposed to use to be able to try to figure out what the tricky words are.

It's this attitude that doesn't really make sense because if you're thinking we need to get our readers excited about the words on the page, their precision really matters. It's not okay to think ... the one that they always reference is, is it okay to say "pony" instead of "horse?" No, it's not! Those are two different things, and it's really important that if we care about the author's message, the author's intent, if we care about writers and their word choice, if we care about that, then we actually really need to think about giving our readers a different attitude to the words on the page.

Anna: What would you say to people who have the same attitude that I had way back, not that long ago, to be honest, but that it's painful to have them sound out word by word and it's so slow, and then there's no comprehension. Those are the things that I said. I know how I would respond to that, but what would you say?

Margaret: I was really scared of that. I remember when I was teaching two programs. One group of kiddos, they were getting the balanced literacy approach and they were reciting their books and they sounded fluent. They appeared to be readers and it was so much more pleasant working with them. I loved to just pass out a book and do a quick picture walk and talk about it. They're going to read the book effortlessly and then we're going to do a little bit of writing about it.

And then had another set of students who were sounding out everything. So they were sounding out, "M...a...n o...n the m...a...t," and it was just mind-blowingly boring. I was really scared. I was like, "Is this what making word callers is? Am I doing that horrible thing?" But I was promised, by a mentor, that after that slow, laborious sounding out practice, that every reader would emerge automatic and be able to recognize the words effortlessly.

Anna: Was that John Shefelbine who said that to you?

Margaret: Yeah, and so listening to him talk about the grunting and groaning state and being told that there was promise ahead, I was like, "I will stick this out and see how it goes." What ended up happening is that it was totally true. They came out on the other side. They could read effortlessly, automatically, and made the brain space for comprehension for them. They could start talking about the things that they were reading and I could give them books and they would just sit down and start trying to read them. Instead of with the other kiddos, where I'd give them a book and they're like, "I don't know how to read this book," because they needed so much from me in order to be able to get into it.

I think the other thing I started to see with those kids who were being given leveled books is that they just wanted to read the books they already knew. They didn't have that enthusiasm for getting new texts and really sticking it out. I think that's when I started to realize that both of them require texts that no one's super excited about. Those boring predictable books, no one genuinely likes those, and those decodeable books, yeah, you can try to make some cute ones, but really they're not great literature.

It's that one is a more reliable path to get all kids to become fluent. The other is this path where kids, some kids, will start figuring it out themselves. They will start to attend to the words on the page, realizing that's their path forward. But other kids just get stuck and they get stuck in those little leveled texts for years and are unhappy about it.

Anna: And then as a teacher, who's a balanced literacy teacher with kids who are stuck in B, C, D, you don't know what else to do besides have them keep working at it. But like Emily Hanford points out in her article, they're just practicing bad habits. They're just practicing guessing.

I remember I was working with a group of kids at my kid's school, before school, a

couple of years ago, just to help them with their reading. This was when I was still balanced literacy and I was giving them level C books to work on and they'd be stuck on the word "machine" because that shouldn't be in the book, things like that. This was before I really understood all these other things, but I finally started doing short vowel work with them because I realized they didn't know their short vowels. Then we kind of switched to doing that more and just let go of the leveled books, not really thinking too much about it, except that it wasn't really helping. If I would've thought about it more deeply, I would've understood and I wish I would've known to get some decodeable books in their hands.

But the point you make about how they're both inauthentic is really good for people to realize, because I know as a balanced literacy teacher, you just love those leveled books and your school spends thousands of dollars on them!

Margaret: And you label your book bins and you label the books, absolutely!

I think the thing that happened for me is that I was in some ways fortunate to be teaching a scripted balanced literacy program because I was able to see that they were purposely giving me lessons with particular books. When I started realizing there's supposedly this promise that if a kid reads a level C book at an instructional level, that it will eventually become an independent level for that kid and that will move up this stair step of reading levels.

I remember laying the books out in levels, maybe it was A through E or something, and I was looking at them and I was realizing like, "Huh." So in one series of books, all about a dog, the kids are taught that when they see the picture of the bowl, they're supposed to say "bowl." But then a couple books later, in the same series about the dog, there's a picture of a bowl and now they're supposed to say "dish," but I haven't taught them the /sh/ sound to be able to do "dish." So, why did we just change from bowl to dish?

I was like, "Oh, because the intention isn't for them to really pay attention to the letters that are in the word. They're supposed to look at the picture, look at the first letter and guess what the word might be. I'm actually supposed to be trying to help them realize that D and B are tricky."

I just started realizing, "Oh, these are purpose-written texts that are designed to teach kids not to attend to the words too much because I'm trying to convince kids that English is unreliable and that they need to balance their memory of repeated pattern with the use of the pictures, with a little bit of sampling of the letters on the page." That, I think, is when I started realizing that I had been reading work by Ken Goodman and others who talked about how the goal is to get kids to not pay that much attention

to the letters on the page. I realized, "Oh, this is grounded in whole language. I see it now."

Anna: Yeah, and then once you start understanding why it's so important for kids to actually decode the words, because that's how reading works obviously, then you see how inefficient three-queuing is. Because like you were saying, I always use that word too, "solving," because they weren't really reading it, they were solving it. It just took so much time and all these questions versus giving them words they can actually read based on what you've taught them.

Can you talk a little bit about the things that balanced literacy teachers hold so close, like the joy of reading and the love of reading. We know that it's not the goal of reading instruction (we'd like them to love reading, but we can't guarantee it), but the goal is to teach them to read. But can you speak to people who are concerned that this kind of teaching is going to be very lockstep and boring and then kids aren't going to like to read after all?

Margaret: Well, I think when we have this idea that what teaching foundational skills in a systematic way looks like - a teacher in front of a class where all the kids are sitting in rows. There's thirty-five of them, they might be wearing uniforms. The teacher has a ruler in hand and is hitting a chalkboard or something. We have this idea of what that instruction looks like and of course we don't want it. We wouldn't probably have wanted to be a teacher if that's what we thought instruction was going to be. So instead we have this idea of the teacher, who's kneeling down next to some kids on the rug and you're whispering with them about their texts and there's this beautiful hushed reading that's all over the class. You know, we have this warm and fuzzy thought about what it's supposed to be like.

But I think if we instead think about it from the kids' perspective and think about what's really engaging to them, it's different. Kids who don't know how to read don't want to sit there for twenty minutes with books. Five year olds don't want to do it and eleven year olds don't want to do it. That's a long time to be faced with something that you know you actually don't know how to do. We can't really speak things into existence by being like, "You're good readers. You're good readers. Do what good readers do." It doesn't work like that. We actually need to teach kids. When we teach kids and then give them the opportunity to practice the thing that we've taught them, they get so excited about their developing skill and there's some energy and enthusiasm about the instruction.

So I think the best way for us to think about it is that if you're working with the balanced literacy model in mind, you are remaking your guided reading instruction. You're still doing foundational skills in a differentiated manner. You still have groups of kids who are with you getting the opportunity to get your instruction, but then the

practice that they're doing, it's not just random books that they're picking from the library. It's carefully selected texts that you are giving to them because you want them to practice the thing that you taught them.

Anna: Yeah, for sure. I could talk to you all night long, but I know you're going to teach tomorrow.

If you could talk to somebody who's just getting started now and maybe doesn't have the capacity or interest in doing what you did, which was what we would all love to do, to sit down and really study those articles. What would be a good starting place for someone who wants to learn, but feels a little challenged by everything that's out there.

Margaret: I think if you can find other people that you like, teachers down the hall, friends from another school, from your teacher preparation program, wherever it is, connect with other educators. Make a list of questions that you have. So for me, I wanted to know, "How do kids learn to read words? How irregular is English spelling? What do I do for a kid who is at a particular grade level, say third grade, and isn't making progress on reading assessments? What am I supposed to do next? What's the diagnosis process for a kid who is struggling with reading?" Whatever the questions are that you've had in the back of your mind and you really wanted an answer to, but you haven't really been able to face the fact that it's a question that's been looming.

I think brainstorming those questions and then actually starting to get excited about finding the answers to them. You start realizing one question leads to another question, leads to another question, in a way that makes you want to talk about it. The more you can talk to other people about what you're discovering, the more you can start pulling in people who actually have the answers to your questions. So not just keep doing more of same, but somebody who says something and you're like, "I have never thought about that before. That's a really interesting thing that prompts a whole lot of questions for me."

That's when you know that you're getting out of your echo chamber. I think that's the first thing that we have to do, is to start being willing to ask questions of people who aren't directly within our own community, to be able to get access to some of the information that hadn't infiltrated balanced literacy.

Anna: Now you are part of the Big Dippers course, correct?

Margaret: Yes.

Anna: Can you talk to us a little bit about that and what that can do for people? I've taken it, but I'd like to hear about that.

Margaret: So the history of that is actually that it was designed by people from a group of different organizations. So the Reading League and Hill Learning Center and Barksdale Reading Institute and Teachers Top 10 Tools, and then us, from the Right To Read Project. We pulled together to create a short course that was intentionally for TFA, people who were getting their credentials.

The idea was, let's give them access to the information that we hadn't gotten when we were becoming credentialed teachers. Then we realized that there was a lot of content in the course that we were excited about, like infographics and stuff that we had wanted to share and so it turned into its own course. The idea is really just an easy entrance point for people who are willing to spend a few hours, but don't want to have to sign up for months-long instruction on how to teach reading. I think one of the things that mattered to me in the design of that course was to really confront head-on, what are the differences?

Like I was saying, I saw in Louisa Moats article the differences between balanced literacy and scientifically-based reading. I really wanted to make sure that nobody had the haziness that I had, which was not really realizing the differences in those two approaches.

Anna: Awesome. Well, we'll be sure to link to that in the show notes so people can check that out.

Can you tell us a little bit more about the Right To Read Project and your website?

Margaret: Yeah, so that started because I was in a balanced literacy district doing a lot of work that was not on message. I needed to be able to figure out where is the advocate me who is trying to expose teachers to information about evidence-based reading practices, and where is the part of me that's a district leader who is working in a balanced literacy district. So I really needed to be able to differentiate between me, Margaret Goldberg, and my private life and advocacy life, and when I'm an employee in a balanced literacy district.

What I started to realize is that teachers, advocates, researchers, all sorts of people, wanted to be able to collaborate together, to be able to give reliable information to teachers about how skilled reading develops. And so it became, I don't know what the best way to explain it is, but it became the opportunity for me to do for other people what I had wished had been done for me. It is teacher to teacher, respectful communication, in short, small chunks that don't make you feel stupid when you're trying to get some questions answered.

Anna: I always send people to your website for that reason, because you have such a kind way of talking. Even in your open letters to Lucy Calkins, you're a lot more respectful than most people who write those. I just find that very refreshing and encouraging because for so many people getting into the big Facebook groups, while that can be extremely helpful, it also turns a lot of people away when they first get started, because there's always someone in there who's shaming them for not knowing something. You don't do that and I really appreciate that.

I also appreciate that you're very open about your experience with balanced literacy, because that makes people feel like they're not alone, that they weren't the only person who didn't have any clue. A lot of us, the people I talk to in this series, we're all like, "How did I not know this before?"

For me, when someone questioned me about three-queuing way back in 2014, which was just a year after I started my website, they said, "You know, this is not backed by research."

I was like, "What?" I had just gotten my masters a few years before. She couldn't be right. I was just sure she was wrong. So I didn't really ... I tried to talk to her about it in the comments a little bit, but finally I was just like, "I can't do this anymore. I've got four little kids," and just respectfully tried to disagree with her.

It was years later that I found all this stuff. Not because I wanted to, but because people were pressing me on it and asked me, "Hey, I read this article. What do you think?"

Margaret: I think it's that same thing where it's like, if someone confronts you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, it's very difficult to engage with them and nearly impossible sometimes to learn from them. But if we can talk to teachers respectfully, understanding that they have, in many cases, years and years worth of experience that tell them that something works, right? No one is teaching in a balanced literacy classroom and feeling like a failure. We stick with it because we see it works for a percentage of kids. I think what's important is to be able to validate the experience teachers are having and then to help us understand, and there is a way where you

could reach all of them.

I think one of the things that doesn't happen enough is that we don't acknowledge the expertise of teachers. We don't acknowledge the evidence that they have in front of them that is telling them that something seems to be working. And what we really have to do is to be able to say "Yes, and let's share some other strategies that you'll start realizing are working better for those kids that were always out of reach before." Then you start realizing, "Well, why don't I just use that for everybody?" And then everything starts getting a little bit clearer in your mind.

Anna: That was true for me when I was joining the big science of reading Facebook group called, "What I Should Have Learned in College." I will say that when I first joined it, I could only be in it for ten minutes a day because I literally felt sick to my stomach reading all that stuff that scared me. It really calls to question how I taught. But what really helped was a day when one person mentioned balanced literacy does seem to work for some kids. It may work, but then sometimes they get to third grade and they hit a wall. I just needed someone to say that because I taught my own kids to read with balanced literacy, and they're fine readers. I mean, they could be better, if they knew all the structured literacy stuff, but they're good readers. Then many of my students learned to read using balanced literacy. So that acknowledgement, I think, is really important.

Margaret: Absolutely, and maybe it worked. I was a whole language kid. I didn't learn how to genuinely spell until just a few years ago teaching phonics to kids. I always thought, "Oh, I'm a good reader, but I'm not such a great speller," and I didn't realize how interconnected those were.

I also, like I told you, I felt so stupid when I was reading those scientific articles. Part of it is because I didn't have strong word attack skills. So I was realizing that I was missing a good portion of words on the page because I actually didn't have the strategies that I needed to break apart words with Latin and Greek suffixes and roots and all of that stuff.

I think one of the things that can be helpful is for us to realize that what we're trying to do for our students, in a lot of cases, it's doing better by them than what was done for us. We don't want our students to have to say, "Oh, I'm not that good of a speller."

Anna: Yeah. Interestingly, I learned to read the old fashioned way.

Margaret: Did you?

Anna: Yeah, that's why I'm so against it all the time. I learned to read in the eighties and my teachers, that was in Virginia, were whole language. I don't know what it was for you, you were in California? Did you grow up in California?

Margaret: I did.

Anna: That was the home of whole language, big time.

Margaret: I had whole language.

Anna: So I think for me, I just thought reading class was boring because I was an advanced reader and I was very bored by just reading through the basal and everything. But yeah, it's curious to me that I was against that structure when obviously that worked for me learning to read and spell.

Margaret: It did, but if you think about the boredom that you're talking about, that reminds me of what we were speaking about earlier, of why teachers would be afraid of giving up balanced literacy. They wouldn't want to bore a child like you. I think that's why I really emphasize the importance of teaching foundational skills in differentiated groups so that no one does have that experience of being bored.

Anna: Agreed, agreed.

Margaret: Instead they're actually being given the instruction that they need at a time that they need it.

Anna: Agreed. Yeah, I beat that drum a lot. I think that we could talk a whole other episode about that sometime. I know that there are some people who say, "Well it's okay if some kids are bored for thirty minutes." Yeah, but there's so much we could teach them now that would be better for them and then they're not taking over the lesson for the kids over here that really need more focus. But yeah, that's for another day.

Thank you so much for talking with us. I'm going to link to all of the free webinars and things that I've heard you speak at in the show notes. I definitely recommend that people go check those out and to listen to you whenever they see that you're giving a talk because I always learn something new.

Margaret: That's lovely. Thank you so much. It was good to talk with you.

Anna: I'm sure we can all agree, there is so much to learn from Margaret Goldberg! I encourage you to check out the show notes where you can find links to some of my favorite blog posts that she's written, as well as links to online videos and other workshops that she's done. You can head to reachallreaders.com/episode86.

I'll talk to you next week!