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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *This Is Balanced Literacy, Grades K-6*, by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Nancy Akhavan. In this letter, the authors briefly discuss their view of what balanced literacy is and the impact it can have on teaching and learning.

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# LETTER FROM THE AUTHORS

## DEAR READER,

Imagine implementing literacy instruction in your classroom that is based on research and aligned to essential elements like universal design for learning (UDL), response to intervention (RTI), differentiation, and an increase in the use of devices to engage and excite learners. Your path to implementing literacy in this way is inside this book. We have written about balanced literacy because we believe it is the best way to teach reading and writing in grades K through 6. However, we have written about it in a way that doesn't ask you to depend on a program to implement balanced literacy. This book provides the plan. You can rely on your own intuition, collaboration with peers, and implementation of research-based strategies to implement high-quality instruction.

The components of balanced literacy that we lay out in this book—including the balance of skills and knowledge in phonics with meaning making, the balance of reading and writing with small- and whole-group instruction, and the balance of direct instruction with dialogic instruction—can be your guide to implementing a strong, successful balanced literacy program. This book will provide you the tools you need, including videos that show strategies in action in the classroom.

Universal design for learning (UDL) is an underlying component of the instructional practices we discuss. We focus on providing all students ways of succeeding that meet their needs, based on how they learn. This is why we show how to balance direct and dialogic instruction with small- and whole-group instruction. In a balanced literacy classroom, students will have a variety of ways of showing what they know. Through balance, we don't expect students to learn in the same ways, and we don't expect them to be successful in the same ways. By understanding our students' needs we—all of us—can appropriately plan lessons that highlight multiple ways of knowing.

As we have worked with districts nationally and internationally, we have been asked about how best to teach reading. Is it phonics or comprehension that matters more? We believe that it is the balance of instruction in systematic phonics instruction with high-quality, engaging comprehension instruction that grows readers who can make meaning of and bring meaning to text. Small-group instruction is another important component of balanced literacy. Through small-group instruction, we are able to teach students based on their needs, and through their

interests in subject matter, to engage and ignite their ability and desire to read. This is one way to respond to their needs through response to intervention (RTI). We intervene during small-group reading and writing instruction.

Essentially, RTI and UDL are about differentiating instruction so that all students learn to their maximum potential. Coherent instruction, which aligns teaching to students' needs based on grade-level expectations, doesn't focus on teaching to cover material, but instead on teaching from a well-designed instructional plan that considers the instructional needs of all students through different modalities. The learning activities, instructional materials, and grouping are designed and configured to the learning needs of the students so that all students have access to content and are able to learn to their maximum potential. This is differentiated instruction.

While we may not provide every activity describing how students could be using a device to learn, we are intentional in our thinking about technology. We see technology as a tool. Implementing the use of devices and applications in your room should not simply be about student engagement. The use of technology needs to answer the question: Which tool is right for this learning situation? Students can use devices in any of the balanced literacy components and activities in this book. They can read using print or virtual text, they can write in journals or in a Google Doc. What matters is how the technology will increase their learning and be the best tool for the lesson. All of us work with teachers who have different levels of technology implemented in their classrooms; some are one-to-one with devices; others only have a few devices available. You can implement balanced literacy with technology; just focus on it as a tool, not the answer to your students' learning needs.

Our hope is that this book provides you with a road map for implementing balanced literacy or deepening the implementation of your current literacy approach. We believe balanced literacy is *the* best way students can grow as readers and writers. We also believe that through implementation and collaboration with peers you can grow as a reading and writing teacher.

Thank you for your efforts to improve students' literacy lives.

**—DOUG, NANCY, AND NANCY**