

The **C A F E** Book

Engaging All Students in Daily
Literacy Assessment and Instruction

EXPANDED SECOND EDITION

GAIL BOUSHEY *with* Allison Behne



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Welcome to room 132.

There are sixteen boys and thirteen girls, for a total of twenty-nine students who walk through the classroom door each morning. The district used to mandate that no class could have more than twenty-four students. Then a few years ago budgets got tight, and that number crept up a few at a time. Since then, classes have been as large as thirty-four students, so this year, twenty-nine seems like a good number.

Eight students are new to the school this year: three who transferred from other local schools, two who recently relocated because of changing family dynamics, and three whom we just welcomed from other countries.

This class is full of personality. The kids are very active, talk a lot, and are extremely inquisitive. When four particular boys get together, it is hard to keep them engaged. And a certain group of three girls can sometimes lean toward bullying, which doesn't mix well with the class's bully-free zone expectations, so we have frequent lessons to review the importance of kindness and empathy.

Looking at just the contextual factors of the students in room 132 you would see an extremely diverse group in terms of race, language, and socioeconomic status. Many students come from single-parent homes, two are foster children, and one has an incarcerated family member. Five students are only children, and eight are the youngest in their family. Four students are learning English as their second language, and five are on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), including one with autism who has a one-on-one associate supporting him at all times.

So, what do they have in common? They are around the same age and have the same teacher. They really are a great group of children, and their teacher has high hopes and expectations for what they will learn this year. And since they are the same age and in the same room, the teacher should be able to meet them where they are and move them forward. In fact, the school just adopted a new reading program with multiple resources, including below-level, on-level, and above-level practice pages. It also provides a copy of the same story for all students for each week of the year. A scope and sequence lays out instruction each day of each week, and it covers all the grade-level standards required for the year. This new program, along with the writing curriculum adopted last year and the word study program

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adopted the year before, provides hope that these students will grow as readers and writers.

But here's the thing: On the beginning-of-the-year assessment, they didn't all score the same. In fact, one student is reading at the emergent level and one is reading at a tenth-grade level, and everyone else falls somewhere between. Two students have already mastered grade-level standards, and seven are at-risk. Their strengths and struggles are different, and of course, they have multiple learning styles. So, despite the district's best effort to provide high-quality instruction materials, the reality is that a one-size-fits-all approach clearly can't be the best way to meet the needs in this classroom.

This class, room 132, is not unique. It is not Gail's or Allison's class, but instead is representative of nearly every classroom in the world. You can use any room number or almost any teacher's name to identify the class, because this is the reality of today's classrooms: diverse students, various needs, high standards, and, of course, increasing accountability for both students and teachers. This class belongs to all of us. We are in this together, and these students are our students.

So, how do we plan and deliver instruction for twenty-nine students so that each child is given an equal opportunity to meet his or her potential? How do we engage students as partners in this process and motivate them to take on the challenge of achievement? How do we document and organize student work and use it to inform our instruction?

These are hard questions, and for years we looked to any published resource we could find to answer them. Then we realized that the problem was bigger than what any one curriculum could solve. It required relationship building, conferring conversations, and triangulating data, and the only person who could do those things effectively was the teacher. So we took a step outside the neatly packaged curriculum box to assess the situation and develop a plan of action.

The first edition of *The CAFE Book* was the initial solution to the problem. It introduced the CAFE system to support teachers as they

- organized assessment data and used it to inform instruction;
- tracked each child's strengths and goals, maximizing time with them;
- created flexible groups of students, all focused on specific reading strategies; and

- helped students remember and retrieve learned reading strategies from the literacy CAFE Menu, which contained thirty-seven reading strategies fitting into four reading goals.

It was a perfect complement to the Daily 5 (our management structure for independence during small-group and individual instruction) and has been implemented in classrooms all over the world, changing the way teachers assess, teach, and keep track of student information, and the way students learn, practice, and talk about reading.

As time has passed and our work with children has progressed, CAFE has continued to grow and evolve. As teachers, we are learners too—and there is so much to learn! Now, CAFE is all it was before and much more. We've made the following changes in this edition:

- A reworked framework that includes the Seven Steps from Assessment to Instruction and the Instruction Protocol.
- A deeper dive into strategy acquisition through the cognitive processes of reading.
- A close look at the instructional practices used to teach.
- The addition of significant resources to help with lesson planning, assessment, goal setting, and parent involvement.
- Updated Ready Reference Guides that include identifiers for who may need the strategy, language we use when teaching the strategy, instructional pivots, and partner strategies.
- A revised CAFE Menu along with a checklist of beginning skills for emerging readers.
- New and improved forms for the online conferring notebook and the pencil/paper notebook to support more effective conferring with students.
- The addition of CAFE's Essential Elements, a resource to guide your understanding and implementation.

We refreshed our practice through reflection, research, and hands-on work with students and teachers. Some days were long, and at times we even questioned whether we were on the right track. But we kept going, learning in the end that good teaching is good teaching, and there is a structure to good teaching. We studied many models, resources, programs, and lessons, and found that they inherently

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follow established research and a basic structure. They weren't particularly bad (most of them, anyway). But instead of focusing on the student, they focused on cutesy materials and expensive products. The updated CAFE model continues to provide a research-based structure that starts with student needs and then builds instruction around them. It provides the *what*, *why*, and *how* of instruction and, most importantly, establishes a structure that starts with the child and not the curriculum.

If you are familiar with the first edition of *The CAFE Book*, you may find the following figure helpful:

CONCEPT	1 ST EDITION	2 ND EDITION
Framework	Chapter 1	Chapter 1
CAFE Menu	Chapters 1 and 3	Chapters 1 and 6
Introducing the CAFE Menu	Chapter 3	Chapter 5
Emergent menu	Not included	Chapter 1
Conferring notebook	Chapter 2	Chapter 2
Small-group instruction	Chapter 7	Chapter 4
Instruction Protocol	"Coaching Toward a Target," in Chapter 4	Chapter 4
Cognitive processes and CAFE	Not included	Chapter 3
Instructional practices	Not included	Chapter 4
Assessment to instruction	Chapter 3	Chapter 3
Classroom design	Not included	Chapter 5
Conferring	Chapters 4 and 5	Chapter 4
Whole-class instruction	Chapter 6	Chapter 4
Accountability	Chapter 4	Chapters 2 and 4
Home connection	Not included	Chapters 3 and 6
Frequently Asked Questions	Not included	Chapter 6
Ready Reference Guides	Ready Reference Guides (previously referred to as Ready Reference Forms)	In their own section

You will see many similarities between the first edition and the expanded second edition, because the overall framework is the same. While working in schools during the last ten years, we've recognized a common concern. When asked to describe their literacy instruction, teachers often respond with one of the following:

- Workshop model
- Balanced literacy
- Guided reading
- Basal program
- Centers
- Daily 5 and CAFE

Instead of talking about students and how to address their reading needs, the focus seems to be on working out “the best” way to fit in whole-group and small-group instruction and individual conferring, trying to find the perfect blend of instruction and meet all students' needs. This common perspective caused us to lean forward with the outside-the-box questions, Do we really need a blend of whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one instruction? Is that the balance we are looking for? Because here's the thing: Purposeful instruction doesn't just consist of a set number of whole-group, small-group, and conferring lessons or, for that matter, a scripted program. Think about it: When we teach reading based on *setting*—whole-group, small-group, conferring, intervention—rather than focusing our efforts on teaching our *students*, we are in essence “doing” reading instruction rather than teaching children to read based on their actual needs.

Now we know more, so we must do more. And we're excited to share with you the insights we've gained from practicing what research has shown us for years: Reading instruction is not about the setting or the basal or the level of book a child is reading. Rather, reading instruction is based on each student we are teaching to read as we ask ourselves, What does this particular child need in this particular moment? This new understanding directs what literacy instruction currently looks like in our classrooms. All students are engaged in reading, with material that interests them, that they have chosen, and that they can read. And each day, each student is coached

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with the just-in-time next strategies he or she needs to move forward. (Yes, we are serious: This happens every day!)

And honestly, we find it is easier to teach this way than what we tried in the past. When we stop driving the instruction and instead give our students the wheel, they will learn. We start by structuring our literacy block to create an environment in which they're reading, writing, discussing, and questioning, and have us alongside them supporting, guiding, and trusting. This is possible with CAFE.

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Imagine a reading conference with a child who is able to describe himself as a reader, and who names his strengths and challenges and the strategies that have helped him in the past. These are the rich, goal-setting conversations that take place after instruction using CAFE. Imagine a parent-teacher conference where you confidently show parents specific goals and strategies their child is working on, know what book their child is reading as well as the child's strengths and next steps as a reader, and have suggestions for parent support at home. This is what happens when you use the CAFE conferring notebook. Imagine a student reading independently and instead of abandoning the book or fake reading past a point of difficulty, looking up to the CAFE Menu on the wall to find a strategy that may help her in comprehending the text and then using it successfully. This is what happens when the CAFE Menu is provided as a visual aid.

We are always looking to improve and refine our practice to best meet the needs of our students. Whether we're looking to enhance our classroom management, literacy instruction, math problem-solving, higher-order questioning, or relationship-building techniques, we research, collaborate, and apply new practices all the time. We don't do this blindly; we search to understand the purpose and research behind the practice to provide the best learning experience for students. This is how CAFE was developed. So, what *is* CAFE?

CAFE stands for Comprehension, Accuracy, Fluency, and Expand Vocabulary. It is a menu of strategies readers use when reading. And it is much more than that. CAFE is a framework developed for assessing, teaching, and accountability.

- 1. SYSTEM FOR ASSESSING:** The Seven Steps from Assessment to Instruction guide us through the process of assessing and using what we observe to inform our instruction by outlining a plan for each of our students. (See Chapter 3.)
- 2. DESIGN FOR TEACHING:** The CAFE instruction method provides an Instruction Protocol, instructional practices to scaffold learning, and the cognitive process of learning that meets readers where they are to deepen their application of strategy use. (See Chapter 4.)

- 3. PRACTICE OF ACCOUNTABILITY:** The combination of CAFE's confering notebook, Quick Checks, and Touch Points provides a means of accountability for both teachers and students. (See Chapter 4.)

FIGURE 1.1
Brittany
confers
with Rhyen.



CAFE was created after the implementation of the Daily 5 structure (Boushey and Moser 2014). Using Daily 5, students were independently engaged in authentic literacy tasks, and teachers were able to differentiate instruction in small groups and one-on-one. It was beautiful! And it left a sense of urgency to make the most of the newfound instructional time it created, leading us to ask how teachers could

- best meet students' individual needs,
- make the most of the time in the literacy block, and
- use assessments to inform instruction.

These questions made it clear there was more work to be done. They also sparked conversations and deliberation about the assessments being given, the skills being taught, and how to best connect student understanding with the five components of reading: comprehension, phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, and vocabulary (National Reading Panel 2000). This led to the CAFE Menu, a visual aid for students that builds on those five components.

How would you summarize the CAFE system for colleagues, parents, and school leaders?

CAFE is an acronym for the four components of reading proficiency. The *C* is for Comprehension, *A* is for Accuracy, *F* is for Fluency, and *E* is for Expand Vocabulary. It is the *how*, *what*, and *why* of teaching literacy. The CAFE system provides a simple and direct way to assess, set goals, monitor progress, teach, and learn. No matter where they are in their learning journey, every student can learn strategies in all four goal areas to make them proficient, highly successful, and engaged readers.

The CAFE Menu

The CAFE Menu grew out of an effort to find a way to make reading strategies visible. Essentially, the menu is a sensible way to organize the strategies while giving students a blueprint on which to anchor their learning. The acronym *CAFE* begins with *C* for Comprehension, because without comprehension you aren't reading, followed with an *A* for Accuracy, which encompasses phonics and phonemic awareness. The *F* represents Fluency, and the *E* rounds things out with Expand Vocabulary to emphasize ways in which we continually learn new words through reading. This acronym is posted at the top of the menu, because the letters stand for the four main goals students work on to improve reading achievement. (See Figure 1.2.)

Since the first edition of *The CAFE Book*, we have seen many iterations of the menu, and although they are creative and different, the original sequence of the goals indicated in the acronym is essential. As mentioned above, the *C* had to come first because comprehension is the core component of reading. This is nonnegotiable. And drawing on what we know about constrained and unconstrained strategies, the order of the remaining strategies is nonnegotiable as well.