

Units of Study for Teaching Reading
A Workshop Curriculum, Middle School Grades

FAQ Video Transcripts

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Question: *How can administrators best support implementation of the units?*

Mary Ehrenworth:

Administrators, what can you do to support your teachers as they move into units of study? So, first, you need to love them because it's going to be a lot of work, and it's going to be a lot of high-level planning. So, you need to think, how will I love my teachers? One of the first things you could do to love your teachers, and make sure that this work will thrive, and not be so difficult that it turns them off of reading or writing a workshop is you have to think about time. For teachers to really dive into the work, they need collaborative planning time.

So what you don't want to do is find your teachers in June, and say, "Here, I got you these." As if the teachers are supposed to read over the summer. So, you can go back, and you can read Michael Fullan's book, *Professional Capital*, there's a lot of great research on this, but all the research agrees that teachers planning on their own does not change a building. Teachers planning collaboratively changes a building. So, what you don't want are to create conditions where teachers are supposed to be alone at Starbucks desperately trying to read some of these units. Instead, you want to create some kind of system, and some protocols, which you just can come together, increase their readiness, pile it and try the units, study with their response to instructions, get ready for the next unit.

And it's going to be worth the release time, and I know release time is really hard in some schools, but if you want to increase achievement, sometimes you have to make sure that teachers have the time to work on it. So, I think one of the first things that you need to do, we're just going to talk about reading now, assuming that you already have some of this place for writing, is you need to give teachers time first with reading to look across the year and plan their units, and then think, okay, which reading units and which writing units am I going to do?

So let's pretend that they're going to start with A Deep Study of Character, and then they're going to go into... Maybe they're going to start right after that, their Personal Narrative unit, or they're going to do Personal Narrative first, and then A Deep Study of Character. So, the reason this matters is by the time they get to the character unit they have to have books. So, one thing that admin really needs to do is create planning time for the teachers to lay out their year, and then say what are the book orders that we need, and when do we have to have those books in? Because sometimes there's nothing worse than trying to teach reading with no books. It's like trying to teach skiing with no snow. If you've got great books, teaching reading is so easy. If you have no books, teaching reading is really really really hard, so part

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of your job as an admin is to help them pace out their calendar, then say what book orders do we need, and then ask teachers, what kind of release time do you need?

When they get release time to plan, you want to come out of it with a plan for we've rehearsed our read-aloud, we've marked up our read-aloud text together, we've rehearsed our major mini lessons, we've printed out the digital resources that we need, we've practiced the teaching a little bit, and we've planned a little bit of our small group work. Can we get all that done in a double period? Yeah. Beginning of the unit? Sure. Will they probably need to meet again as they're like one bend into the unit? Yes, they will, especially when they're new to the units.

So, I would say a little bit of release time going into the unit and making sure that someone's on the plan for getting the books in are both important. And then once they're in the unit, giving teachers a chance to study their student response to instruction, to study reading notebooks, to study the work that kids are doing, to look at reading logs. One of the tricks that teaching reading is, as you're teaching the unit you also want to be making sure that your readers are moving up levels of complexity. If all the kids in your grade and your school read at and above grade level, you can let this go. But if you're in a school with kids who are language learners, kids who are IPs, kids who came to reading late, you're going to have a bunch of kids who not only need the unit, they need someone paying attention to their reading levels. So, if that's true, that's sort of your moral imperative, is to be asking teachers, "Can you give me a list of the kids who read below grade level going into the unit, and then what are the books they're going to read? Lets do a little mapping of like what books will the kids read across this unit? What series will the kid read across the whole unit of study, so when he finishes that unit, "he's reading at a higher reading level." That is in your hands to make sure that that conversation happens. If you have a literacy coach, get your literacy coach in to say this parallel teaching that has to happen. Kids moving up reading levels, the teaching of the unit, they're intersecting and helping each other, both those things go together, but somebody does need to be tracking reading levels a little bit if you have kids below grade level.