

FAQ Video Transcripts

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Question: *How does small group work in the new units promote transfer of phonics learning into kids' reading and writing?*

Christine Holley:

Really, to me what's most exciting is the idea that kids will now have an opportunity to take what they're learning in phonics work, perhaps in isolation, and transfer it to their real reading and writing. The nice thing about the small groups, they're all designed to be authentic, to be something that real readers and writers do. Kids are having fun reading poems together with their partner. Kids are playing around with editing. We have this fun storyline where we have this pretend neighbor, Gertie, who writes stories and books and things and the kids will edit it based on their phonics principles. So we might be like, "Holy moly! Gertie forgot her short vowels. Can you help her out and fix these up?"

The amazing thing is that it's not that the teachers doing the work, and I think that is very special about these groups. It's very much the kids are doing the work. It will be like let's give the partnership Gertie's piece and they do it together instead of watch me as I do it. It's more like, "Nope. Get busy. Get doing it." Then the work of the teacher becomes the coaching, like, "Oh, go back and check that. Which short vowel would fit there? Say the word again." That we're saying little prompts to help the kids do the authentic work.

I would say another thing that's important to note about the small groups is that there's opportunities to check in with kids and assess very quickly in the moment, on the run, as we'll say, formative assessments. How are we finding out what the kids can do independently? We have very short, one minute little things that kids can do together where we can check in and assess. For example, we might have a group where they're working on vowel flexibility with vowel E. Think about short E versus long E. So kids might be asked to read a set of word cards that have the vowel E in different ways, like get, between, feather, and we can coach kids to see are they being flexible or how they're doing with that. If it's a breeze for kids and not a problem, guess what, they don't need the group. Bye bye. They can go and get busy in their work. For some if it's hard, maybe we pulled them too soon and we can decide on other work that they might need, or perhaps in the moment it's perfect and we figured this is perfect for them and we'll go right to the shared poem where we practice it together. Then the kids get to keep the poem by the way in their baggie and continue reading it. I think that's always nice as well.

For more information on the Units of Study in Phonics from Lucy Calkins and TCRWP colleagues, visit: unitsofstudy.com/phonics

Units of Study in Phonics, Grades K—2
By Lucy Calkins and TCRWP Colleagues

All of the groups, I'm not sure if I mentioned this, but all of the groups end with the kids taking out their just right book baggie or their writing folder so that the transfer happens immediately. The work is them doing the phonics principle, whatever that may be, right then, right there, in their writing or in their own books so that it's not this disconnect, that it's this is why we're learning this, guys, to help you read and write, to help you be a stronger reader and writer all the time, not just when we're playing or doing a phonics focus, but to help you make meaning of reading and writing.