

Heinemann Response to EdReports Evaluation, Units of Study, Grades K–5

The Units of Study (UoS) represents both a curriculum and instructional approach to literacy. It is based on the balanced literacy work of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) at Columbia University, which has been a literacy leader for more than three decades. The UoS reflects current and emerging thinking from top national and global thinkers, and an unwavering commitment to equity and access for all children. Heinemann is proud to publish this important body of work, which has been proven successful in thousands of classrooms across the country—and beyond. This response is to address concerns related to UoS raised in EdReports’ review of the curriculum.

Heinemann shares EdReports’ goal of ensuring that exceptional materials and instructional approaches are available to all students and teachers; it is our main mission. The EdReports’ tool for evaluating a “textbook style” reading curriculum, however, is not a good match for an instructional framework such as UoS. The EdReports’ rubric does not capture the ways the curriculum, instruction, and assessment operate interdependently in a workshop classroom to develop teacher capacity and expertise and to create lifelong readers, writers, and thinkers. Units of Study recognizes and values the research-based importance of choice and independence in the structures and routines that allow students to engage more deeply in reading books that interest them or to write on topics of choice. The units are built on a powerful foundation of conferring and small-group work to differentiate instruction for students in developing reading and writing skills. Above all, we honor the skill of teachers and curriculum leaders to adjust, modify, and enrich based on the students in front of them. UoS is not a basal-type standardized, textbook curriculum. The UoS is a powerful curriculum framework, *enlivened* with the instructional approach reflected in the reading and writing workshop model, and with empowered and collaborative teachers.

Possibly because the UoS resources are structured differently from most conventional teaching resources, reviewers have missed some important content in the series. Reviewers cited evidence from the core unit books in the series, but did not include crucial ancillary resources in their review. Reviewers also did not take into account the fact that important content is spread across the three interrelated series: UoS in reading, phonics, and writing. In the real world, teachers integrate this content in their classrooms every day. Given this context, the EdReports feedback on UoS is not surprising. Based on the EdReports rubric, reviewers suggested that there is some, but not as much of the following as they would like to see:

- reading of nonfiction texts
- opportunities to develop orthographic and phonological processing
- fluency practice
- vocabulary instruction across the year
- explicit instruction in grammar, usage, and vocabulary
- support for multilingual learners.

In fact, this feedback is consistent with much of what is currently planned for the development of forthcoming new editions of the UoS, slated for release beginning in spring of 2022.

Ahead of these new editions—as is standard practice for this ever-evolving curriculum—Heinemann and TCRWP continue to add new content to our Online Resources that reflects our ongoing innovation in reading, including additions to our phonics work. We are also working to develop resources to ensure that texts placed in front of students reflect the diversity of heritage, culture, and identities found in classrooms. We regularly publish these types of updates to our Online Resources based on evidence-based classroom practices and new lines of research-based thinking, adapting and innovating in real time, and ensuring educators have those ideas available ahead of publishing dates for new editions.

Visit the Heinemann website to review recent updates (www.unitsofstudy.com), the [Research Base](#) underlying the UoS, and the independent [American Institutes for Research analysis](#), completed in January 2021, that demonstrates the measurable success of students taught using UoS and its accompanying instructional approach.

The following responses address a few examples of findings and Heinemann responses summarized from the K–5 EdReports evaluations:

- **Finding #1**: UoS is not structured well to support teacher planning. The narrative that starts units is vague at times, expectations are unclear, and instruction does not draw students back to evidence-based reading and writing.
- **Response**: The UoS is a framework that gives educators and curriculum leaders a solid foundation from which to both differentiate and accelerate literacy learning, along with all the guidance and tools they need to do that work. Units are written in narrative form to develop teacher expertise and allow teachers to envision how a class may be structured. Teaching points are embedded and can be adjusted based on a teacher’s assessment of collective and individual student needs. The delivery of the content uses the workshop instructional model and individual and small-group conferring to create high levels of engagement, opportunities for student choice, and personalized learning. The curriculum materials alone do not reflect the depth and breadth of the literacy work happening in the classroom. They are the foundation from which teachers make important instructional choices on how to move forward with a particular group of students, and build a rich, vibrant, and engaging learning community in the classroom.
- **Finding #2**: Anchor/Mentor texts and Suggested/Recommended reading do not have an accompanying text complexity analysis. Some texts are low-level or of moderate complexity or may not be grade-level appropriate or appropriate to task.
- **Response**: In the context of the Reading Workshop, anchor/mentor texts are used as teaching texts, however, in the EdReports review, these are the only texts reviewers looked at to consider whether students are reading enough at appropriate levels of complexity. The books recommended in UoS for explicit, direct instruction are most definitely not the only texts students read. In reading workshops students need to read—a lot. During independent reading, students apply their ever-growing repertoire of strategies and skills supported by the teacher in conferences and small groups. Student engagement, independence, and success are fostered because students choose and use texts they want to read within the genre of study, and therefore attend to skill development more closely. Teacher guidance ensures that students read a high volume of texts at appropriate levels of complexity. Rich TCRWP Classroom Libraries offer abundant, appropriately complex texts to engage all students.

- **Finding #3:** A more systematic approach to phonics needs to be reflected.
- **Response:** It is universally accepted that phonemic awareness and phonics are foundational components of reading success. TCRWP has always advocated for systematic, research-based approaches to teaching phonics, and over the years supported professional development for teachers, using a wide range of phonological awareness and phonics curricula, including *Words Their Way*, Orton Gillingham, Lindamood-Bell, *Foundations*, and *Month by Month Phonics*. In 2018, Heinemann published TCRWP's *Units of Study in Phonics, K–2*. These units provide beginning readers with explicit, systematic phonics and phonemic-awareness instruction, and have a special emphasis on student engagement. In addition, the phonics units articulate ways to successfully transfer phonics work into reading and writing workshops. Overall, our study of research and our work in classrooms affirms our conviction that children need and deserve a balanced approach to reading: one that provides systematic and explicit instruction in foundational skills, as well as opportunities to engage in reading for meaning. UoS reflects the idea that early learners should be immersed in literature, alongside systematic phonics instruction.
- **Finding #4:** UoS does not provide enough text-based questions or teacher guidance on how to develop more text-based questions that support students in evidence-based discussions.
- **Response:** The UoS materials alone do not completely capture the entirety of the text-based, evidence-based conversations taking place in the classroom. The minilesson provides some opportunities to check-in—such as during *Turn and Talks*—on students' understanding of key story elements and interpretations. The heavy lifting in this area, however, is done through small-group and individual conferring, partner reading, and during read alouds. This is where teachers can truly differentiate and personalize instruction based on formative assessments. Teachers reinforce, review, or advance student understanding in the areas outlined in EdReports, found in the Common Core State Standards, and reflected on most state assessments. It is a critical area of reading instruction that is part of the TCRWP/UoS classroom.

The theme for further responses is the same. In short, we believe the EdReports rubric is narrow and does not capture the scope and power of the day-to-day literacy work happening in classrooms using Units of Study.

Through our own experience, confirmed by third party research, Heinemann knows that a wide range of students—urban, suburban, and rural, coast-to-coast, and around the world—have grown into powerful readers and writers under UoS. We know that to achieve these levels of growth there needs to be more than just a good curriculum. It requires time, resources, a well-trained teacher, and the active engagement of learners. Unit of Study is simply a map with a compass. The teacher is the knowledgeable guide who brings instruction to life, leading students in real time through the literacy terrain, beyond its challenges, and on to wondrous discoveries.