

simply
small
groups

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Differentiating
Literacy Learning
in Any Setting

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CORWIN Literacy



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Visit the companion website at
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 for downloadable resources.

Dear Reader,

As a pandemic swept our world, the educational landscape was disrupted. What we'd done in the past changed overnight. Teachers faced many difficult questions: Which lessons should I record? What should I teach live? How can I engage and motivate my students? How can I help students who read at a wide variety of levels?

As we move through this great crisis and into whatever comes next, let's ask other questions: What do I believe about learning? What do I know from my experience that I can build on?

I believe that all children *can* learn; all children *want* to learn; all children *do* learn. To get the most from our time together, we must all *be* learners—educators and students alike. I believe that one way to help each other learn is by working together in small groups. No matter if we are in a brick-and-mortar building or if we are teaching online from our kitchens, I believe that what matters most is relationships! And small groups are one of the best ways to establish connections and build relationships with and among our students.

In this book, we will explore different types of small groups for literacy. We will look at groups focused on building oral language, groups for emergent readers who are learning to look at print, small groups for writing, and groups for kids who are learning to apply phonics. We will examine guided reading groups and book clubs, as well as inquiry groups and writing groups.

Because most classrooms have students in a wide range of different reading levels, I've arranged this book by developmental stages to make it simple for you to use. You'll find sections focused on *emergent readers*—those students just learning about sounds and letters—as well as *early readers*—children who are breaking the phonetic code as they read to comprehend. There's a section focused on *transitional readers*—students who are reading lengthier books but still learning new words and developing fluency and comprehension. And there's another focused on *fluent readers*—kids who can often decode many words but are expanding their view of the world as they explore new genres, study word morphology, and comprehend more deeply through text analysis.

I've included characteristics for each stage of literacy learning to help you zero in on the best work to engage children where they are, regardless of grade level, and help them to progress to the next stage. There are charts to simplify what to focus on at each reading stage and connected phonological awareness and phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension teaching tips. There are sample lesson plans and ideas

for online learning. The goal is to support you as much as possible as you support students who are moving through the full range of reading development.

Your school might use a leveling system, such as Fountas and Pinnell, Scholastic, DRA, Reading A-Z, or Lexile reading levels. Or you may have other schoolwide assessments used to collect data. You may be teaching face-to-face in a classroom; some of your students may be learning in an online setting. You may be providing synchronous and/or asynchronous instruction. Regardless of where you are, you can benefit from and tailor the information in this book to match your needs.

I encourage you to embrace a growth mindset as you use this book to plan and teach in small groups. Instead of thinking about closing learning gaps, let's build on students' strengths. Honor what each child brings to small group time and help them work toward meeting small but steady reading growth goals. Meet with your children regularly in small groups. Listen and learn alongside them. I believe that if we pay attention to what students know and what they are interested in *and* we understand literacy development, we will better serve our children as we guide them to read, write, and think in deeper ways.

Yours in learning,

Debbie



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