

Heinemann Response to Johns Hopkins School of Education Evaluation Units of Study K-5 Reading Curriculum

The Units of Study (UoS) series published by Heinemann, 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 research from top national and global experts 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 the K–5 Reading Units of Study raised in by the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy report, which utilizes their ELA Knowledge Map to analyze ELA curricula in terms of the knowledge it offers students. Heinemann shares Johns Hopkins’ goal of ensuring that exceptional materials and instructional approaches are available to all students and teachers; it is our main mission. We believe it is important for readers of the Johns Hopkins report to understand that the evaluation tool used in this review only measures half the equation for developing strong readers by failing to also consider teaching literacy skills in addition to opportunities for knowledge development. Further, the evaluation tool only notes specific prescribed content and fails to acknowledge abundant opportunities for knowledge development within the Units of Study that are driven by wise teacher decisions and by student interest. The UoS reflects the belief that strong readers—and writers—need BOTH skill instruction and a broad knowledge set, and both are reflected across the Units of Study teaching framework.

We believe that the Johns Hopkins review does not accurately capture the depth and breadth of knowledge development opportunities in the Units of Study. Reviewers missed numerous important ways knowledge is developed in the series. Reviewers cited information from the core unit books but did not include crucial ancillary resources in their review. Reviewers also did not take into account the fact that instructional content is spread across three interconnected series: UoS in reading, phonics, and writing. The report acknowledges the fact that reviewers did not evaluate the entire curriculum: *“It is certainly possible that particular gaps in topical coverage might be addressed [in other curricula in the UoS universe].”* They also note that their analysis *“does not account for the fact that other texts could be used, especially during student independent reading or book clubs.”** In fact, book clubs and independent reading are the primary parts of reading workshop where knowledge is developed across the Units of Study. The instructional framework surrounding the UoS emphasizes a large volume of independent reading for students and provides support for teachers to help them guide students to appropriate texts. Students apply their ever-growing repertoire of strategies and skills during independent reading, and this reading absolutely includes deep and wide reading from text sets that build knowledge. Content is not dictated by the authors of the curriculum but is determined by teacher choice, based on considerations such as the social studies and science curricula and student interest. These are important oversights, and we are confident that a more nuanced and comprehensive review would have yielded different conclusions.

Our data and experiences from thousands of classrooms—urban, suburban, and rural, coast-to-coast and around the world—show that the Units of Study curriculum helps students grow into powerful readers and writers. We also know that to achieve the levels of growth we have witnessed, there needs to be more than just a good curriculum. It requires time, resources, a well-trained teacher, and the active engagement of learners. The UoS curriculum is simply a map with a compass. The teacher is the knowledgeable guide who brings UoS to life, leading students in real-time through the literacy terrain, beyond unforeseen challenges, and on to deep knowledge, skills, and wondrous discoveries.

*Clarifying note from the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy: The Institute reviewed all core texts required and endorsed by the Teacher’s Manual. Due to the variation of materials during independent reading and book clubs,

the level of knowledge building using such materials cannot be determined. We note Professor Calkins's statement: "The important thing to know about topic-based units is that when all or part of a nonfiction unit delves into a specific topic such as extreme weather, that topic is somewhat dispensable. You could substitute another topic and still maintain most of the teaching, because *the focus of instruction is not on the topic itself, but on the skills.*"¹ We also note her finding that "...the strength of a students' general knowledge has a close relationship to the students' ability to comprehend complex nonfiction texts."²

¹ Calkins, Lucy, *A Guide to the Reading Workshop, Intermediate Grades*, pg. 12.

² Calkins, Lucy, *A Guide to the Reading Workshop, Intermediate Grades*, pg. 24.