

JULIE WRIGHT | BARRY HOONAN  
Foreword by Mary Howard

# WHAT ARE YOU GROUPING FOR?

How to Guide Small Groups Based on Readers—Not the Book

GRADES 3–8



*Thank you*

FOR YOUR  
INTEREST IN  
CORWIN

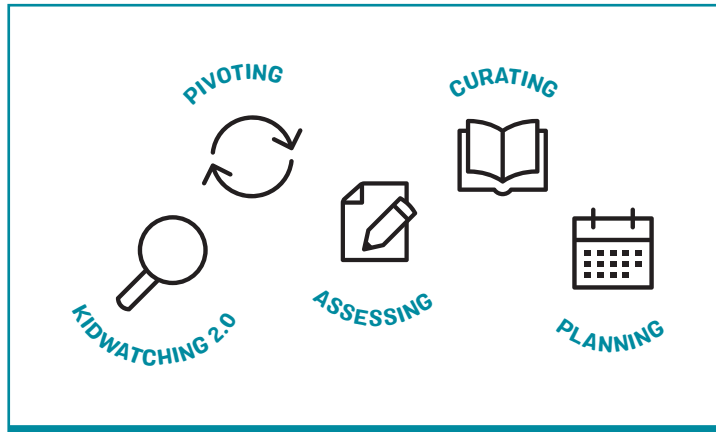
Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *What Are You Grouping For?*, Grades 3-8 by Julie Wright and Barry Hoonan.

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# The Five Teacher Moves

This graphic depicts how the five teacher moves work together to support students' reading independence through small group learning.

1. Kidwatching 2.0
2. Pivoting
3. Assessing
4. Curating
5. Planning



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## **MOVE 1: KIDWATCHING 2.0 (BECAUSE IT'S ALL ABOUT ORIENT, NOTICE, TAKE STOCK, AND INQUIRE)**

For starters, we encourage you to begin by studying students in your room. The beginning of the school year is an ideal time to do this; observing throughout the year is equally important. When we know our readers, the reasons for grouping arise naturally from students' curiosities, passions, habits, and needs. The more we know about our kids, the more likely we will strike a decision that will have value for them. Instead of being first and foremost guided by a reading curriculum, we invest in knowing as much as we can about the lives of our students. If we don't do this, we may as well cling to whole class mode. Once we can name what is going on in our students' lives—or what is not going on—we can begin matching kids' knowledge, experiences, interests, and needs to meaningful small group instruction. (See Chapter Four.)

## **MOVE 2: PIVOTING INTO FLEXIBLE GROUPS (BECAUSE IT'S THE TEACHER MOVES THAT KEEP READERS MOVING FORWARD)**

Flexible small groups require leaning into students' interests as people, their habits as readers, and their needs as learners. When we are pivoting—moving to the side as we move forward—we live out the promise of dynamic, versus static, groups. Our purpose is to move students in and out of working groups as needed or desired. They often originate from a teacher's careful, intentional planning for differentiated instruction, as well as from the “on-the-spot” decision making teachers do in the midst of daily instruction and in response to kids' evolving interests. (See Chapter Five.)

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## **MOVE 3: ASSESSING STUDENT WORK (BECAUSE LOOKING AT OUR READERS' WORK LIFTS THEIR STRATEGIES, SKILLS, AND THINKING)**

How do you know what to do each day with and for your students? We spent years playing guessing games—shooting to hit the middle—all in hopes that it would be something that our students needed. Then, we began worrying less about benchmark assessments and holistic district-anchored assessments (although they can be powerful when coupled with other assessments along the way), and we started looking across student work. That's when something wonderful happened. When we looked at students' work, we turned into brilliant planners. Why? Because students' work tells us a story of what they know and are able to do. Or, what they almost know and are almost able to do. Or, what they don't quite know and aren't quite able to do—yet. Assessing students' work gives us, the instructional architects, daily opportunities to dig into each student's literacy narrative. In doing so, we get smarter about what will make a difference for them. We can then figure out the next nudge or lift they need to move forward. (See Chapter Six.)

## **MOVE 4: CURATING (BECAUSE SELECTING THE RIGHT TEXTS INSPIRES READERS TO BE CONNOISSEURS)**

The hardest and most glorious part of designing small group learning is its dynamic and nimbleness. Here's how it goes: You preplan a unit of study, using

a backward design approach so that you outline your intent for student learning at the onset. We love that part. Next, you think through what resources you need: what mentor texts, models, and examples you plan to show learners. This is related to the what, when, how, and why of the content they are taking on. In this chapter, we show you how to curate your mentors so that they can support students as they clear up confusion, uncover new learning, and apply what they've learned in their work. Get ready—this part is messy! (See Chapter Seven.)

## **MOVE 5: PLANNING (BECAUSE WHEN WE USE WEEKLY AND DAILY PLANS TO CHART THE COURSE, OUR BIG IDEAS SAIL FORTH)**

Planning for small group learning experiences springs from kidwatching and all the other moves. Planning that prioritizes students' curiosities, reading habits, and needs is a multistep process focused on developing the big picture—unit planning—as well as weekly and day-to-day lesson planning. Kids grow. Readers evolve, and they change at different rates. That's why planning, with an emphasis on flexible, small group opportunities, keeps us focused on what the whole class needs *and* pushes us to design small group learning experiences that are responsive to individual students. (See Chapters Eight and Nine.)

## **TAKING TIME TO REFLECT**

As you use these five moves, remember that grouping is a cyclical process and that ongoing reflection is what keeps its wheels turning. Traditionally, small group instruction has a “lifer” feel to it. You are reading a level *N* book. When you are secure, you'll move to an *O* book, and then meet with other *O*-level readers for small group instruction until you are ready to move on. To break free of that, get in the habit of thinking about what's working and what's not. In the words of Margaret Wheatley (2002), “without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful.” We agree. Our students are the most valuable of human capital, and if we don't pause and reflect, we could move forward *blindly* and jeopardize opportunities for growth.

