Triple R Teaching

Hello, it's Anna Geiger from Reach All Readers, and in today's episode I talk with

been operating there for a long time and has been selling on TPT for a long time as well.

A really neat thing about Deedee is that she was very much a balanced literacy/guided reading teacher and teacher educator for a long time, but when she learned about the science of reading, she made a big switch and she's open and honest about her journey and even was able to present at the Plain Talk Conference this past winter. Today she shares some highlights from her presentation at Plain Talk all about how to teach small groups in kindergarten. Here we go!

Anna Geiger: Welcome Deedee!

Deedee Wills: Hi, how are you?

Anna Geiger: Really good. I'm so glad you're here.

Deedee Wills: I am glad to be here.

Anna Geiger: Deedee was actually instrumental in my journey coming into the science of reading. I've shared before in this podcast how when I first learned that Emily Hanford's article, "At a Loss for Words" was throwing punches at three-cueing I felt pretty upset by that. I went into a Facebook group asking, say, "Hey, I know a lot of you do the same thing I do. You teach the idea of guided reading with leveled books. How would you react to this article?"

I was really surprised that people came out saying, "Yeah, actually she's right and here's why, and here's what you should read."

That really surprised me because that's not what I was expecting. I was expecting people to show me exactly how to break down her argument, but nobody did that.

You were one of the people that chimed in there and listed a lot of books for me to read. I didn't know you personally at the time, but that was really eye-opening for me because of all the success that you've had sharing resources online.

Then you said, "Finding out that MSV, (three-cueing) is bad for kids is like finding out that your only child is a serial killer."

I've shared that before and people might think that sounds a little over the top, but for people who know, they know that it really does feel like that.

Deedee Wills: Yeah, yeah.

Anna Geiger: It was just really tough, so hearing that from someone like you really, really helped a lot.

Way back when I was learning about the science of reading, I did reach out to a lot of people. You were one of them and I said, "Hey, can you just talk to me on a Google Chat because I'm really struggling with some of these things," and that was super helpful.

But you weren't always there, so can you go back in time and talk to us about how you got into teaching and what happened over time to shift your understanding?

Deedee Wills: Well I would love to say that I was always there, but I wasn't always there. When I first started teaching, I got hired at San Diego Unified School District where I taught as a first-year teacher. Out of 44 teachers, there were 40 of us that were first-year teachers because this was a state-watched school. It was at the risk of being taken over by the state because of being low-performing.

When we were all hired, they completely moved veteran teachers out and brought new

teachers in because we all didn't know any better, and so we spent a lot of time receiving additional training. We had experts coming in from all over the world, literally all over the world, to teach us about guided reading. We had three hours of professional development every week on guided reading.

We used that approach with a group of students who were 96% second language learners, 100% free and reduced lunch, the students who were the most at risk, at risk, at risk students, and we saw growth at the end of the first year. I taught second grade at the time, and then at the end of the second year, we also saw growth, and so that was, I'm doing air quotes, that was "proof" that guided reading worked to me and to everybody else at the time. Now this was the early 2000s.

Then we moved out of state, and I taught in Missouri and kept doing the same types of practices. Nobody was really using a differentiated approach to instruction, so we had a lot of students who were falling through the cracks. I started doing guided reading and I saw "gains," again, air quotes here, with my students, so they asked me to become the instructional coach after being there for a couple of years.

This is kind of a long story, and I know that you're probably sitting comfortably in your chair there, but they sent me for an additional two years of training on something called Guided Reading Plus, which was a Linda Dorn and Carla Soffos kind of approach.

So yes, I did that again and taught all of my teachers about the joys of balanced literacy and specifically guided reading.

I missed the classroom, went back into the classroom, and used guided reading in my own classroom.

Here's something that I really noticed is that when you start off the year, you see those four to five students in your intensive and intervention group. They are slow to learn, they are needing lots and lots of practice, and you meet with them every single day. I have this kind of mental image of me grabbing them by the shirt and pulling them through kindergarten, really sitting with them, they're working really hard, I'm working really hard. By the time we get to the end of the year, then they are just about at grade level, and I send them off to first grade and then all of a sudden I see them going down the hall in first grade to the intervention room and in second grade, the same students go to intervention. I mean year after year after year of them continuing to have this reading thing be elusive.

It was not only just those four to five students, it was the group that's a little bit higher than them, but not quite at grade level, the same type of thing.

When we started to see the test results in our schools, specifically the one in San Diego, because I did keep in touch with people, and then in Missouri, the same thing happened. We saw initial growth and then a leveling off where we were seeing what statistically we're hearing even now with about 40% of our fourth graders not reading at grade level.

So I was thinking, "Well, that's just the way that it is, right? 40% of the population aren't going to be proficient readers," and I carried on my day in this way. I carried on for years and years of me really being an advocate for balanced literacy thinking that's just the way that it is.

Then one of the things that I do as I do these webinars is ask, "What should my next webinar be about?"

Somebody asked me, "Well, would you tell us how you teach high frequency words or sight words?"

I said, "Yes, I will do that!"

As I sat there and thought about it I thought, "Well, how DO I teach them?" Then I realized that I didn't teach them, I assigned them, and then we practiced them, but I never really explicitly taught them.

So I went with my friend Google down a rabbit hole that led me ultimately to Emily Hanford's... Well, I went on to Reading Rockets first and then eventually made it to Emily Hanford's podcast.

It was a really painful period, not because I was wrong, and I'm just getting kind of teary thinking about it, but I was thinking of those students that were in my kindergarten class, that were in my first grade class, who year after year learned that they were not successful, and I believed, and those who worked with them believed, that they just weren't going to be successful, and this is just the way that it was. I know how that carries on to adulthood.

So I had a lot of guilt, but as soon as I started to really dig into it, I had so many aha moments that I knew I couldn't go back.

I kind of went public with the way that I thought this, and now I don't. One, hopefully encouraging people who were in the same shoes as I am to say, "Yeah, we can shift our thinking," and really we want to make sure that we're constantly shifting our thinking.

One thing that Emily Hanford said to me and a group of other people was that we want to always remain humble and curious.

If I were to ever get a tattoo, I don't have one, but if I ever were, I feel like that would be one that I would want to get. Because as an educator, everybody should be remaining humble and curious because the moment we think we know everything, we're going to hear something different that's going to shift our thinking a little bit and make our instruction a little more effective. So that's my journey.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, and I love that you're willing to be open about it. I just think that's so important because it's easy to pretend that we've known all along, and that certainly makes us look better, but people really need to know the struggles that we've had so that they can make those changes too.

There are just so many things that are hard to wrestle with, and one of those would be small groups. You recently presented at Plain Talk, which is incredibly impressive. Most people listening know about Plain Talk. It's one of the big, big, big science of reading conferences every year down in Louisiana.

You talked about small groups, so I'd like to talk today about maybe the difference between small group guided reading lessons versus more strategic small group lessons and how that looks in a classroom.

Deedee Wills: I mean, going to Plain Talk was certainly, I had a little bit of an imposter syndrome because I'm there with a lot of thought leaders and researchers. Although I am a researcher, I research what other researchers have done, I'm not actually conducting the studies myself.

But what I found was I could speak to the practitioner part of it, and that was something that I think I've always been able to do, and I was really glad that I had the opportunity.

When talking about small group, the first thing that we want to make sure that we have really clear is how we want to get away from that MSV model. For a lot of teachers, what I'm hearing when I go out and speak at different conferences or in other groups is yes, we are doing a science of reading approach to instruction as our core curriculum, but when it comes to small group, they're still using leveled text, and so there's a disconnect there for that.

I was just recently in a conference in Chicago and there was a teacher attending a session that wasn't on small group instruction, but she was really having a hard time seeing, "Well, what is wrong with MSV at those earliest levels? Why can't we stay with leveled text and let them go into this other type of instruction later on?"

When I broke down why that is an issue, she was like, "Now it makes sense," so if you would like for me to talk a little bit about that, I can.

When we talk about leveled texts, and I'm going to go to the kindergarten level, we really start with these super predictable texts that are, "I like the horse. I like the donkey. I like the whatever," and the pictures really carry all those meanings. If a student is really good at holding some oral language in their head, they can find that pattern, that sentence pattern, and it looks like they're reading. Obviously we want to have students exposed to those high frequency words, but if they're only memorizing those and not really reading them or looking all the way through, that becomes very problematic.

The example that I just gave is a simple example of a text, but when we get to maybe the end of first grade or maybe perhaps even the end of kindergarten, depending on the reader, you can have a text that has words in there the student doesn't know, maybe context words, and if they make a few miscues on those and the meaning is no longer carried with the picture, then you see how comprehension breaks down.

One example, I'm going to go ahead and look at my example from my slides, because I can't remember a thing by heart, but one example in a leveled text, the text says, "Deep inside of the ear is a membrane called an eardrum." If a student reads it, "Deep inside the air is a memory called an eardrum," you can see how meaning starts to break down. Within several sentences you can see where these misconceptions are happening, students are guessing, and now all of a sudden comprehension becomes an issue.

So we really want to make sure right from the very beginning that we can see truly what skills does the student have under their belt in the phonics world, the phonics and phonemic awareness world, so that we can make sure that we don't move ahead before they're ready. We don't want to move ahead before they have those skills grounded in that alphabetic principle.

We want to make sure that they really have all of their letters and sounds that they can blend and segment so that when they come to a word like membrane, they can look all the way through there and say, "Well, no, memory doesn't make sense because I don't hear the sound of B or an R really next to the membrane part." We don't have the N sound in there, and so all of those things.

We definitely use meaning as a way to check that decoding part, but we don't use it as that first line of defense, that guessing.

We think about balanced literacy, remember that activity called Guess the Covered Word?

Anna Geiger: Yes, I had the book.

Deedee Wills: I mean, I loved that activity! It was so much fun! I mean, we were just guessing, but then I think about it really we were guessing, looking at that first letter and maybe a couple more, but not really going all the way through.

The other part that is a problem with those leveled texts is we're putting words in front of them that they don't have the phonics skills yet to decode. That controlled text isn't there, so they're constantly having to guess this word, guess this word, guess this word.

Boy, if I want to have somebody practice a skill... If I'm going to be like a pole vaulter, I'm not going to be a pole vaulter, but if I'm going to be a pole vaulter, there would be no reason for me to practice throwing a football. That's not going to help me.

That's kind of what happened in small group. We did this little thing called word work, which feels like it's phonics-based, and it feels like we're doing phonemic awareness

practice. Then we say, "Now you're going to read this book and you may or may not basically encounter this phonics skill or this pattern, so godspeed, good luck to you."

That's kind of what happened in leveled text, so we really want to make sure we have that controlled text. That's where decodable texts come in. Yes, so that is why that's important.

Then your question of how does it look different is that we're not using leveled texts. We're using more of a controlled text that matches what the students' skills are at that time and kind of what they're acquiring plus that text really matches closer to an independent level than that-

Anna Geiger: Instructional level?

Deedee Wills: Yeah, that mystery level that we've done before, so that instructional level. So it's closer to independent than it is to that previously learned instructional level.

Anna Geiger: I think also when I think about guided reading and model lessons, it's kind of that phonics is the afterthought at the end of the lesson. So at the end, if you have time, you do some word work, whereas probably these strategic groups, especially in the primary grades, that leads the way. We're focusing here on our word-level skills, and then we're applying it, versus, "Oh, by the way, here's some word-level work we could do if we have time."

Deedee Wills: And we never have time.

Anna Geiger: No.

Deedee Wills: It's so funny how we're always like, "Okay, well we'll try to get it next week!" and we don't. So yeah, there's never enough time.

We always want to frontload that with these more structured texts as well. That's part of it is the materials that we use are going to be different, but also the way that we structure those groups are going to be a little bit different as well.

Like I said, I'm constantly reading and learning more things, so there's a really good chance if you ask me to come back and talk to you about this a year from now that I might tell you something different. But this is where I am right now in my understanding is that not every student needs to have a thirty minute leveled text or guided reading or decodable text lesson. They don't all need to have a book lesson.

Some students need strategy lessons. I might pull a group of students who just need letter work.They might just need practice identifying the letter, handwriting that letter, and then producing the sound that goes with it. We want to do all three of those things at the same time, because we know that the way that the brain works is that they're all interconnected, and when you practice all three of those together, it helps anchor those letters to the sounds. Then that fine motor practice of handwriting, it also helps anchor that as well, so we want to include that in our strategy group.

If I had a strategy group that was letters and sounds, the letter-sound strategy group, I would meet with them for five to seven minutes and we would work on that strategy and would just be working on encoding, decoding, and recognizing.

The way that it might work is that I want to think about what my core curriculum looks like because I want to make sure that I'm delivering instruction that matches. If your core curriculum is good, I should just say that, if your core curriculum is good, then you want to make sure that it matches.

So if in the core curriculum, on an everyday basis, we are hearing the sound, saying the letter that represents that sound, and then hearing the sound and writing the letter that represents that sound, and those are things that are happening on a daily basis, then we want to make sure that we're mirroring that because we don't want to give them a completely different type of instruction because that sort of falls into...

This is my analogy that I use, but if I'm going to teach somebody something, I want to make sure I deliver the instruction the same way in, so that I can get the same output back. That memory needs to be tracked consistently in for a student, so it could be pulled out consistently for the students.

I always think about if I'm going to plant a garden and I have a hoe and I'm going to get my garden ready to put that seed in, I take that hoe and I'm going to hoe a row, and it doesn't make sense for me to go all over the garden hoeing rows when I need to make sure that I'm getting that little trough deep enough to drop the seed in. I don't want to go all over the garden doing it; I want to go over the same space again and again and

again so that I can build that pathway, or a neural pathway is the same way of thinking about it.

So if I'm doing that in my whole group instruction, I want to make sure that I'm duplicating that in my small group instruction so that students can retrieve that memory, right?

Anna Geiger: So are you saying using the same kind of lesson routines, is that what you're talking about?

Deedee Wills: Yes. I'm talking about the same routines. So instead of maybe using slide decks, which I do, PowerPoint slide decks, maybe I'm using letter cards. I could still use the slide decks if that's what I have, if it's easy for me, but I can also do little cards so they can see those and they can make the path of motion with their arm, right? T says /t/. Then we do another one and B says /b/, and all of those sounds. We will warm up with that, so that's going to be something that I want to make sure that I keep in there.

We want to stack that deck for student success. So if I'm meeting with my students who in the previous years I would identify as my intervention group, they may not know a lot of letters and sounds, they might only know five letters and sounds. I want to make sure I include those five, and then I add the additional ones that we're going to be practicing at this moment in time so that we have success, success, success, struggle, struggle, success. We want to have lots of successes for them.

I've also been learning a lot about cognitive load theory. We don't want to give them struggle, struggle, struggle, struggle because they're not going to hold onto those skills. We really shouldn't be introducing more than four at one time that they don't have solid already. We want to make sure that we're giving them a lot of reinforced things that they already may have in their long-term memory, and then the things that we're putting into their short-term memory with enough exposures to move over into their long-term memory.

So the materials that we're going to use are going to be the similar types of materials, but the ones we're going to select are going to be really tailored to the students that we have in front of us so that we can give them lots of chances for success. Again, they might have it in their working memory, but they may not have it in their long-term memory, or they might have it in their short-term memory, so we want to make sure that we give them lots of exposures to move that over.

Anna Geiger: Okay. So you've described what you would do with a group that's still struggling with letters and sounds. What would be another group you might have?

Deedee Wills: Well you'll have students, depending on the time of year, those students might also, six months later, be struggling with blending and segmenting.

We would do the same type of a thing. I would give them the same type of skills, so I'm going to show them a CVC word, and we're going to practice tapping it and blending it. Then I'm going to tell them a CVC word, and they're going to practice spelling it and writing it. It's the same type of thing.

After we've done that kind of warmup, whether it's letters or segmenting and blending, then we could do some more handwriting activities. We could play a game so that we're really seeing those again and again. We want to make it highly engaging. After four to five minutes off you go, you're back to your student centers.

I typically would have two strategy groups during a day's small group period, and then two with a decodable text that I would have.

For that group, we would again provide the same type of instruction. We're going to do some phonemic awareness activities where we're blending and segmenting. We're going to be looking at words that are within that scope that they're practicing, maybe it's CVC words maybe it's digraphs. We're going to practice those words where they're blending across the line nine words in that little kind of family of what we're working on. Then they'll do some dictation along with sentence dictation. We just want to make sure that we're giving them both that in and out kind of type of instruction. Then we would go into using a decodable text.

Now that is something that there's a lot of different discussion about what decodable texts should look like.

When Deanna and I wrote our decodable texts, we really wanted to make sure that we got away from anything that looked like leveled texts, so we removed a lot of pictures from the book. We have a picture on the cover, and then in each of the text pages, we don't really have any pictures at all. The only pictures we might have would be a little rebus for a story word that's needed to carry the story.

I know a lot of other people will put that in an illustration, which I think there's no problem with that, but we just wanted to really have ours be removed from that possibility because sometimes, what do they say, the devil's in the details. Sometimes we just lean into that and sometimes it's really hard to know what students are doing or not doing.

So that rebus would be in there and students would have a highly decodable text. Most of our books are 70+% decodable, so they would be practicing that CVC skill again and again.

If we're now working with a group that has a silent E, they're going to be seeing CVC words and silent E words, because we want to make sure that we're not just doing the skill of the week, because students really figure that out quickly, don't they? "Oh, these are all short A sounds, or these are all short I sounds," so then they overgeneralize that. We want to make sure that they're not only just practicing this particular activity, but all of those previously learned skills that they've had. We want to make sure that we include those into the text as well.

Then the students will be able to take that book or that text home to practice or perhaps maybe with a partner in the classroom so that they'll have some additional exposures.

Also before we actually start to read the book, we're going to orthographically map any of those high frequency words that they need to have a refresher on or might be new to them. Maybe we needed those words in the text to carry the story, but they haven't been done as the whole group, so we'll go ahead and include that instruction right then and there.

Again, the same idea of what we do for our strategy groups, we don't want to throw a whole bunch of words at them, here are 72 words that we're going to orthographically map. We're going to keep it to a short number, three to four, so that the working memory isn't just overloaded. It's the same kind of idea.

That's really kind of the crux of that decodable text. We do ask some comprehension questions, but as you know, comprehension and a decodable text, it is tough. It's tough to have really deep conversations about a book that doesn't have the text complexity that matches their oral language.

In kindergarten, their oral language far exceeds their decodable language, so really we do all of our comprehension, most of our comprehension work, through a read aloud activity where I'm doing the decoding and the students are doing a lot of the thinking work. That's building their oral language and their ability to interact with the text in a deep way.

But we also want to ask a few questions on those decodable texts to make sure did they get that? There are times when I'll ask questions. Some of them are right there in the text like, "What was the color of the sled?" It was red. "What was the name of the dog?" It was Ted.

It might be something along those lines, or it could be more of an inferential. "Why do you think the dog took the blah, blah, blah? If you were in that situation, how would you get the blah, blah, blah back?" Something that's asking them to think beyond the text, but they have to get the big idea of the text in order to get there.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, and even if we might not be able to ask really deep questions, there are things we can do like teaching them to answer in a complete sentence, start with the end of my question. There is a lot we can do with oral language, even though, like you said, those texts aren't typically written for deep thinking.

Deedee Wills: Yes.

Anna Geiger: So overall, you're talking about starting with a lesson for everyone and then differentiating based on need.

Do you find that there's a way to challenge the kids who are beyond what you're teaching in the core lesson?

Here's my impression, you can tell me if I'm wrong, but my impression is a lot of teachers do this model, and they say, "Yeah, we meet the needs of everybody," but then what ends up happening is there isn't time to challenge the kids who are beyond the scope and sequence. What is your thought on that?

Deedee Wills: Well I think you do need to challenge the students who are beyond in the scope and sequence. Sometimes those are students that learn in spite of us, those are students who are like, you just got to get out of their way!

However, what we do know is that although their reading abilities might be really high, oftentimes their spelling abilities don't match that. Over time, that becomes problematic for them as well when they just keep moving on and on and on and on, versus really making sure that they understand that phonics skill and how to spell that as well.

So yeah, you can meet with your higher group. They're not going to need as much instruction as your students who need multiple exposures to master a skill, but meeting with your higher group once a week to do a decodable text that's above what you're doing as a whole group instruction, I think, is a really good idea.

In kindergarten, if you have students who come in who are reading at a first grade level, they're probably not spelling at a first grade level. That's kind of where you can begin with that group is to say, "Okay, they're reading really well, but when I look at their writing, I'm noticing that it's not transferring to their writing. That might be a place for me to pull them into a small group."

Again, the way that the lessons are structured is that we're not just reading, we're also spelling with that dictation part of it. Also, conventions are something where it's a little slower for students to learn, so you have a chance to practice that as well.

I've always believed, and I don't know where I heard this quote, but I know I didn't make it up myself, but every student deserves a year of growth. If you have a student coming in at a first grade level, they still deserve a year of growth. One, because that's our job, but two, as a parent, we don't want them to think that they've come and wasted a year, or that we want parents to think, "Oh, maybe they need to skip a grade," because I think that's really dangerous when we think about all of the skills they have to master.

Sometimes they're really strong in just one, and skipping a grade at those early grades is, I don't want to say dangerous, but I think it can be... It's not always beneficial for them to do that. Maybe their math skills aren't there, their writing skills might not be there, maybe their maturity level isn't there or maybe if they are... Do we want them to be the last person in their high school to get their driver's license or graduate when they're 15?

Those are things that we don't always think about as parents when they're five and six, but later on in life, sometimes it doesn't set them up to be necessarily a leader because

of the difference in maturity levels.

Keeping them challenged within the grade level, I think, is our responsibility as well.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, yeah, for sure. So basically the takeaway is if you're going to teach phonics with your whole group, it is required pretty much that you follow up with some small group instruction because, of course, they're not all going to be learning it at the same pace. Some kids are actually going to be beyond your scope and sequence and may need support in other ways, including spelling, but also challenging them with skills farther along in the scope and sequence.

Those groups are going to change based on mastery, so if someone is in that alphabet group, but they're picking those up pretty fast, then they're going to need to move into a different group.

Deedee Wills: Absolutely.

Anna Geiger: Do you think that this is overwhelming for teachers, this idea of what groups do I pull and how do I decide who's in them? Do you have any practical tips for working through that?

Deedee Wills: Yes. While I'm doing a whole group lessons, now, just to be clear, I go in and work with classrooms, I don't have my own classroom now. But when I go in and I work with classrooms now, while I'm doing whole group, I keep a clipboard so that as I am showing slides, I'm kid-watching the entire time. You can't watch 22 kids at one time, but I'm kid-watching at the same time.

I might be looking at these four students today and those four students later, and I'm just watching to see how quickly are they responding, is there automaticity mastery there, or are they just kind of lagging behind and letting other students kind of carry it? There's nothing wrong with that, but that just tells me they don't have mastery, or that it could be one of the problems, they also could be doing pencil erasers, so that could be also the issue. While I'm also doing dictation, I'm noticing.

I'm looking for four pieces of information while I'm doing that whole group. I'm looking to see if they see the letter, can they name it? If they see the letter, can they tell me the sound that it makes most frequently. If they hear the sound, can they tell me the

letter that represents that sound and can they write that sound with the right path of motion? Those are the four pieces of information that I'm constantly gathering on this clipboard.

I have this table. It's nothing fancy, but I just code it, so I is for identify, E is for encoding, D is for decoding, and F is for formation. I just write down as I notice, "Oh, I'm noticing that this group of students all are having trouble with the /m/ sound," and letter formation for M, because they're all McDonald M's, which we don't want to even... No, we're not going to do a McDonald's M.

I'm noticing that, so that's telling me I can pull them for a quick letter group. Now, some students might need to see me three times and be like, "I'm good to go, I've gotten them straightened out." Other students are going to need to be in that group a little longer. It's very flexible.

I think that, I know we've always talked about flexible grouping, but sometimes we want to have them be in nice, neat groups so we can call it the blue group or the red group. I think that's kind of limiting for us when we put them in a group and leave them there because they should be moving in and out of that group very flexibly.

What I do is I say, "Can I see so-and-so?" I just call their names and they come to my table. I don't name them the hamsters or the guinea pigs or anything like that, because you might be a guinea pig this week, but next week you might be a fox. I don't know, it's keeping those groups really flexible.

When you have it all on one table, so you'll have the students' names across the top of the table, and then the letters down the side of the table, it's like graph paper, and you can really quickly go through and see the letter P, who needs that letter. You see which letters they need.

That's a really easy way for you to say, this is my small group maybe for this week. I'm going to pull these students for this week. Just don't be afraid to move students in and out.

You may have your letter strategy group. You might have two different letter strategy groups. You have the students who are further along in the alphabet, and you have students who are still learning several letters and sounds. You might have several different alphabet groups, especially at the beginning of the year. You'll have more alphabet groups than you'll have blending and segmenting groups.

Anna Geiger: Yeah. Thank you.

Before we kind of close off, maybe you could give us just a little overview of the whole literacy or reading block, about how much time would you spend in each area, like that whole group lesson. How much time might you, obviously it changes in each situation, but just in general, what might be the time for the small groups and then for the language comprehension piece that you mentioned earlier?

Deedee Wills: Sure. The whole group science of reading lesson, that's about 40 minutes when you include the phonics instruction and the high frequency word mapping and that sort of thing. That's a 30 to 40 minute drill activity, very explicit. Yes, we love to explore things, but we know that's not the best way for them to get that information. It should be very quick.

One thing I was just going to say, one thing that teachers tend to get a little bit bogged down with that whole group instruction is they're wanting their whole group to be with them so they don't move on to the next slide until everybody has answered the first slide, right? What we know is that there are going to be some students who are just going to be not quite there yet.

If you structure those lessons well, and that's a whole different time we could talk about it, but where first they're attempting and then they're verifying the work, so they're attempting and verifying. The students who don't know what's happening, they may not be able to attempt well, but when they verify, they're still practicing that skill.

You'll want to keep pace with about 60% of your class, so if 60% of your class is with you, then you're on the right pace. If you have only 20%, you're going too fast. If you have 100%, you're going too slow. You'll just want to keep pace with about 60% of your class with those lessons.

Then for small group, about 40 minutes a day for small group instruction would be about the minimum.

The problem is what are the rest of the students doing? That's the big thing. You don't want to have the bulk of the students doing work that's not allowing them to practice skills that they need, so you have to be very good at differentiating your centers so that

they're actually working the entire time and engaged in skills that they need to over learn to work on mastery.

Depending on how well you feel about your center time, that's a whole different time that we could talk about that as well. But you want about 40 minutes for your small group instruction.

Reading comprehension is about 20 minutes. It's teachers doing a read aloud. Five days is what we do for a close reading, very similar to the way Doug Fisher talks about his close reading, where we're re-engaging with the same text over five days to dig deeper. There is a ton of student conversation taking place during that time where the students are really doing the meaning-making while the adults have asked questions. You could do some writing response in that period of time, but really 15 to 20 minutes for that whole group interactive read aloud time.

Then writing instruction is also really important. You'll want to have about 40 minutes for writing instruction, and that's for that composing part of it.

Then the last part is your handwriting instruction. You want to make sure you're having five minutes a day of handwriting instruction. That's very explicit, not handwriting practice, but instruction. This was a statistic I really found surprising is that students need five minutes a day in kindergarten and first grade, every day through those two years, in order to really build handwriting fluency.

So yeah, I mean, that's just another thing that we have to make time for, but in small group and during dictation, we can add that practice part of it, but that instruction needs to be really explicit. Five minutes a day; it doesn't have to be a lot. It's better to do five minutes each day than one 25 minute lesson a week.

Five minutes each day working on handwriting fluency, making sure that we're starting on the right place of the page. We have so many first graders that are starting at the bottom, and second graders and third graders starting at the bottom. That's a big problem when it comes to fluency and really takes a toll by the time they get to fourth grade.

We want to make sure that we're including those parts, so I think I covered all of those. Did I cover them all?

Anna Geiger: Yes, yes. Great job.

Can you talk to us a little bit here at the end about your place online and where people can find you and maybe a little bit about the Educator Summit?

Deedee Wills: Sure. So yeah, I am Mrs. Wills Kindergarten. If I could talk to my 2010 Deedee Wills, I would've said, "You know what? You might go beyond kindergarten with your blog," but she didn't listen to me then. But it's Mrs. Wills Kindergarten on Teachers Pay Teachers, on Instagram I'm @deedeewills, and then on Facebook I'm also Mrs. Wills Kindergarten.

Someday I'm going to be a TikToker. I have a very sad little TikTok channel that gets ignored, so I haven't done much with that. But yeah, that's where you can find me.

Then the Educator Summit is an online virtual training conference that my husband and I started several years ago, and we've had some amazing people including you, thank you so much for being part of that, over the last three years. We are no longer the owners of that; we have sold that company, but I'm still on as an advisory. You've met the new owner, he's completely lovely, but it allows teachers to watch content online, on-demand, for ninety days.

We have some amazing subject matter experts on there, as well as some inspirational keynotes, but we're really content-driven. We're not the rah, rah, rah, but it's very entertaining on top of informational. Each summit has had over 6,000 people, and this year I think it's going to double, so we're really excited about that. It means that we have those same people returning. To me, it means that people are finding value there and that it's something that they are looking forward to. So yeah, that's going to be starting on June 1st this year.

Anna Geiger: Great. Well, thank you so much.

Deedee Wills: You're welcome.

Anna Geiger: It was, as always, a pleasure to talk to you and see you and to hear all these things explained for teachers who really appreciate it.

Deedee Wills: Well, I appreciate you having me. Thank you so much. I can't wait for your book!

Anna Geiger: Yeah, me too. Thank you for listening. You can find the show notes at reachallreaders.com/episode161. Talk to you next time!

Closing: That's all for this episode of Triple R Teaching. For more educational resources, visit Anna at her home base reachallreaders.com and join our teaching

episode of Triple R Teaching.