

Balanced Reading Instruction

Pembroke's Friday Freebie

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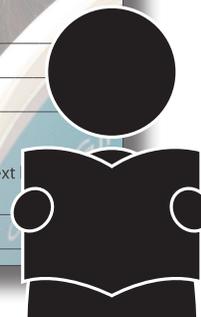
Independent Reading Inside the Box

How to organize, observe, and assess reading strategies that promote deeper thinking and improve comprehension in K-8 classrooms

2nd Edition

Rank It	Recommendation
Title: _____ Author: _____ Student's Name: _____	Title: _____ Author: _____ Student's Name: _____
Using the following scale, describe where this book fits in relation to the best book you've ever read.	Why did you choose this book? _____ _____ _____
The Best Book I've Ever Read  The Worst Book I've Ever Read	Who do you think would enjoy this book? Why? _____ _____
I Love it Because... Title: _____ Author: _____ Student's Name: _____	Initial Attraction Title: _____ Author: _____ Student's Name: _____
After reading, I was glad I chose this book because _____	After reading this book, I want my next _____

Reading



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Students' comprehension abilities depend on the instruction they receive, the quality of their literary experiences, and their ability to understand and use comprehension strategies (Block and Rodgers, 2004).

Introducing reading strategies through read-aloud is probably the most effective teaching technique, as it provides adequate support for students to observe a good reader at work.

Elements of Effective Reading Instruction

Students require very direct and clear modeling and instruction on a variety of reading techniques and strategies in order to become proficient readers. Research conducted by Michael Pressley (2002) showed that comprehension skills do not develop very well on their own; however, the comprehension strategies used by good readers can be taught, beginning with teacher explanations and modeling of the strategies, and followed by scaffolded student practice of comprehension strategies during reading. A balanced reading program contains a number of elements, of which independent reading is just one.

Read-Aloud

Read-alouds allow opportunities for teachers to model effective reading. Students gain experience with observing what good readers do when they are reading. Teachers should make it a practice to think aloud, encouraging students to engage with each other and with the large group while interacting with the text. Taking occasional breaks to invite comments, predictions, or connections helps to facilitate student learning and strengthen their skills.

Consider providing students with a purpose for listening prior to reading aloud to them. In this way, students become better able to filter out erroneous information and specifically target the reading strategy being taught. For example, a teacher may begin by saying, "Today while I'm reading, you need to try to use the clues from the book to determine how the main character is feeling." Assisting students by focusing their listening provides stronger awareness of reading strategies.

Shared Reading

Shared reading provides opportunities for students to share a common reading experience with their peers or teacher. Through shared reading, the teacher models proficient reading, and students are provided opportunities to practice together. Shared reading should not be about only the text, but the entire reading experience. Encouraging students to share their thoughts while reading provides insights into their learning.

Discussing elements like punctuation or italicized text helps students understand the reason behind the variation in the reader's voice. For example, a teacher may say, "The author used an exclamation mark here. That means that he wanted to show a strong emotion, so let's read that with an angry voice."

Guided Reading

Guided reading provides opportunities for teachers to provide explicit, direct instruction for small groups or individual students. Through guided reading sessions, teachers can monitor students' learning, provide responsive feedback, and help students with individualized goal-setting. Through guided reading, the teacher sets the stage for effective reading to occur. Guided reading should include a variety of instructional techniques.

During guided reading sessions, you should be introducing new vocabulary and concepts that students will encounter while reading, as well as providing

In *Reading Essentials* (2003), Regie Routman defines *scaffolded independent level reading* as the process in which “on their own, readers choose and read books they enjoy and understand. The process is carefully monitored by the teacher.”

guidance on how to apply reading skills and strategies they have been taught. For example, a teacher may say, “While you’re reading this next section, think about the character’s motivation for her actions.”

Independent Reading

Independent reading provides students time to practice and enjoy reading with texts of their own selection. Independent reading provides the essential time to consolidate reading skills and to become more adept in applying these skills to a variety of texts. Through independent reading, students gain confidence and experience as readers. Proficient readers enjoy sharing their books with others through book talks or by recommending books to a friend. Asking students to reflect on their own reading allows the teacher some insight into each student’s development, allowing effective tailoring of further instruction based on the individual student’s strengths and needs.

It is not realistic to begin the school year and expect students to be able to read for a sustained period of time without adequately preparing them for it. We need to gradually lead them in this direction and work toward the goal of increasing the duration of their reading time, while constantly monitoring their successes and challenges. It reminds me of a young woman I know who recently completed an Iron Man marathon. She proudly shared that she had completed the marathon in 15 hours and 38 minutes. I stood in absolute awe of her. How would one even begin to prepare for such a challenge? Although this was her first Iron Man competition, she had previously run a half-Iron Man, and had spent years training in preparation for this one day. She had learned strategies to overcome the challenges she would face, and developed stamina and perseverance to “go the distance.” She had found ways to maintain her focus and avoid distractions, and, in the end, the years of preparation paid off.

Differences Between Silent Reading and Independent Reading

Sustained Silent Reading (DEAR Time)	Scaffolded Independent Reading
Student independently chooses any book to read.	Student chooses books to read with the teacher’s guidance.
Daily reading time is 10–30 minutes.	Daily reading time is at least 30 minutes.
Optional classroom library.	Classroom library is an important instructional tool.
Books may be above reading level.	Students read “just-right” books.
No monitoring by teacher.	Teacher monitors comprehension
No writing involved.	Student keeps a reading record and writes a variety of responses to what has been read.
No instruction involved.	Instruction occurs during mini-lessons and conferences.
No reading goals are set.	Teacher and student set goals.

Adapted from Reading Essentials by Regie Routman

As teachers, we need to realize that we are training our students to reach the goal of becoming proficient readers. This is not an easy task, and certainly not one that will come about without adequate preparation. Our students are preparing for a marathon of their own. We need to provide them with the strategies to overcome challenges, the perseverance to go the distance, the focus to avoid distractions, and the skills to understand and enjoy the journey.

Remembering that independent reading is a time for students to enjoy, strengthen, and develop their reading, activities should be introduced and modeled before asking students to complete the tasks on their own. Time during read-aloud or guided reading needs to be devoted to instruction on the various reading skills, so that the students are not trying to “figure out the instructions” as they are reading and trying to apply these instructions to their text.

Consider the following to support independent reading in the classroom:

1. Allowing enough time for students to become engaged in their books is essential. Students should have a set time in their schedule for independent reading that is regular and predictable. This way, students are prepared for reading time.
2. Routines should be in place so that students need to consult the teacher, thus interrupting small-group instruction, only in the event of an emergency.
 - Implement a washroom sign-out with students, who know that only one (or two) students may be in the washroom at a time. Having the sign-out in a prominent place (e.g., on the board) makes it very easy to check where someone is if they are needed, or in the event of an emergency.
 - Students are permitted to use the independent reading time as a time to go to the library to choose or exchange books. In order to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to use the library, consider having a schedule in place. Perhaps use a library sign-out posted on the board (again allowing for a very quick reference as to where all of the students are at one time).
3. A classroom library with different levels and genres of books provides choice for students to select “just right” books. However, a classroom library would never match a school library, so encourage students to take advantage of the many resources available to them in the school library. The teacher/librarian has a wealth of knowledge and is usually able to help students quickly locate books that would match their abilities and interests.
4. The classroom environment must be conducive to focused reading. Reading is an active process that requires that students concentrate, free from distractions. If the teacher is using the independent-reading time to facilitate small-group instruction, students need to be mindful of the fact that others are reading, and conversations should be held in hushed voices so as not to distract peers.
5. It is essential to build opportunities to make thinking visible in independent reading. This serves a number of purposes:
 - It ensures that students are on task and engaged in purposeful learning.

No one teacher can do it all. It is important to partner with the other experts in the school.

If possible, have small-group instruction in a separate corner of the classroom, rather than at a table in the centre of the room.

It is important for you to have your finger on the pulse of what is new, exciting, and current in children's literature. You earn a great deal of credibility when you can converse intelligently about the hottest new book or series.

- It allows for deeper individualized instruction that connects directly to small-group or classroom instruction, strengthening students' skills as they practice strategies that have been directly taught or modeled.
 - It provides opportunities to assess students' understanding of their reading and their reading strategies, and to further guide instruction.
6. It should be fun! Don't hesitate to share with students books you have enjoyed, or ask to borrow one you see students reading that you think might interest you. It is also good to have students recommend books to each other.