

Best Uses of Independent Reading Time

Summary: Teachers have their students use the time after a whole-class reading lesson in variety of ways. In an article for the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, a group of university researchers and elementary school staff conducted a study to find what independent reading time activities were the most effective at boosting students' reading growth.

Practical Applications

The authors studied students in grades 2, 3, 4 and 6 over a year and had teachers use a series of different activities to be done in a 20 minute block following a normal 70-minute whole-class reading lesson (which utilized the basal anthology reader). The different activities were:

- *Workbook practice* (meaning pages of practice containing short passages)
- *Individualized schema-based learning* (meaning that the teacher circulated in the room and had mini-conferences with students, providing one-on-one support with a three-step strategy of praising the student, doing a quick re-teach and/or think aloud, and then returning to check back in with the student later on)
- *Situated practice* (meaning that students were asked to use their independent reading to practice the skill that had been taught during the whole-class lesson)
- *Conceptual learning* (meaning that students choose two non-fiction books on the same topic and read them back-to-back, and use that to answer higher-order questions)
- *Transactional learning* (meaning students read a teacher-chosen book related to a thematic topic the class had been studying and then had a 5-minute class discussion)
- *Traditional instruction* (meaning the control condition where students simply read out of the basal reader for 20 minutes)

What the researchers found was that:

- Far and away, the three interventions which had the most significant impact were **individualized schema-based learning, conceptual learning, and transactional learning**. The impact of using these strategies was major; on average, a student who would, with traditional instruction, land in the 50th percentile in vocabulary would instead land in the 69th percentile.
- Results were evident within 6 weeks of using one of these effective interventions, and were most effective for struggling readers.
- The overarching finding is that “it is the specific actions that teachers take to support students during silent reading periods that produce significant growth in students' comprehension.”

Conclusion and Citation

The authors conclude that these results show teachers need to seriously think about the way they are having students use independent reading time: “these results support a call for reanalysis of the common practice of spending 90 min of a school day solely on traditional (basal) instructional approaches or 70 min in traditional instruction and 20 min in workbook or situated [applying the day's skill independently with no teacher support] practice.”

Brock, C. et al. “Instructional Approaches that Significantly Increase Reading Comprehension.” *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101.2 (2009), pp. 262-281.
<http://tinyurl.com/44lfhc8> (subscription only).