Independent Reading for the Secondary Student

“How long do I have to read?” “Do we have to read again today?” “Do I have to read all of that?” Do these comments sound familiar? These are comments I frequently heard and continue to hear in the classrooms I visit. It is sad to think about the number of students that feel this unhappy about reading, but there are millions of them out there. So what can we do? In Lent’s new book, Engaging Adolescent Learners: A Guide for Content-Area Teachers, she tells us that “if we want students to learn to read, they must be immersed in text. If we want them to become scholars of world history, they must be surrounded with biographies, documents, maps, historical texts, pictures, and all types of primary sources” (2005, p. 30). Lent goes on to say that “one of the easiest ways to ignite students’ passions is by creating a setting of immersion: a classroom overflowing with interesting supplemental texts, objects and resources” (p. 30). A great way to incorporate this into the demands of a jam-packed curriculum is through independent reading. The Florida Reading Program Specifications state that an effective reading program maintains a print-rich environment with ample supply of quality and up-to-date resources for students and teachers to read for a variety of reasons at numerous times throughout the school day. In addition, it also states that an effective reading program incorporates both instructional and supplemental materials that align with the reading level of the individual student. Giving students access to and experience with a wide variety of texts is crucial for effective reading instruction for older students. In fact, students who read more kinds of texts have demonstrated higher reading achievement (Campbell, Kapinus & Beatty, 1995).

So what does this look like in a classroom? Hoover High School allocated 20 minutes each day for SSR and provided the staff with resources and professional development necessary to ensure that students had time to read books of their choice. Reading levels, as measured by the Gates-MacGinitie Reading test, rose from 4.3 to 7.2. (Ivey & Fisher, 2005.) Sustained Silent Reading that provides students with time for independent reading during content area classes increases their motivation, background knowledge and vocabulary. In fact, students report that having time to read actually affords them the opportunity to think and comprehend (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). According to Gay Ivey, providing books that span the content areas, match students’ reading levels, and encompasses a variety of formats and genres is non-negotiable if we want struggling readers to improve (2004). The recent strong push for quality literacy instruction is helping educators to achieve the goal of more students reading, but in order to achieve better results, educators across the country must realize the importance of independent reading.

School and classroom libraries that offer a wide variety of texts which consider students’ reading levels and interests help to encourage wide and frequent reading. Classroom libraries should not be limited to just reading classrooms or the traditional English classrooms. When combined with effective instruction, the number and variety of books in a classroom has been shown to improve achievement (Guthrie, Schafer, Von Secker & Alban, 2000). Classroom libraries in content area classrooms along with the time to read those resources can make a significant difference in a student’s background knowledge on a subject as well as familiarity with the vocabulary specific to that subject. Studies have repeatedly proven that students need time to read and become engaged in...
text, and independent reading is the cornerstone for allowing this to happen.
Source: Cheree Davis (researcher)

References
_Educational Leadership, 63_(2), 16-23.

Independent Reading Websites for Secondary Students

Independent Reading
The National Teachers of English (NCTE) provides a variety of information on this topic, to include: Resolutions/Positions, Published Articles, Web Resources, and Additional Resources.
http://www.ncte.org/elem/topics/spotlight/119226.htm

Independent Reading Strategies
The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory’s book, _Building Reading Proficiency at the Secondary Level_, reviews the scholarly literature to determine: (a) current theoretical perspectives and research findings on building reading proficiency at the secondary level and (b) their implications for classroom instruction. _Independent Reading Strategies_ is one of fifteen strategies for supporting the instruction of struggling secondary readers.
http://www.sedl.org/cgi-bin/mysql/buildingreading.cgi?showrecord=6&l=effectiveness

‘Sustained Silent Reading’ Helps Develop Independent Readers (and Writers)
Article by Gary Hopkins by Education World’s Editor-in-Chief that discusses the purpose of a SSR program, enhancements, and the importance of a teacher to serve as a role model.
http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr038.shtml

A Daily DEAR Program: Drop Everything, and Read!

A lesson plan from ReadWriteThink.org that touches on the theory and provides student objectives, an instructional plan, and web resources for a daily DROP program. 

88 Generalizations about Voluntary Free Reading
Stephen Krashen, Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Southern California, provides a list of generalizations on research and guidelines for SSR.
http://www.sdkrashen.com/handouts.php3

Guided Independent Reading (GIR): A Programme to Nurture Lifelong Readers
This article by Victoria Y. Hsui, an associate professor at the National Institute of Education and a former editor of Teaching and Learning, describes a programme for developing independent reading among upper primary and lower secondary students. This paper originally appeared in Teaching & Learning, 20(2), 31-39 and is reproduced with permission of the author.
http://www.extensivereading.net/er/hsui.html

A Comprehensive Literacy Program
A chapter excerpted from Conversations: Strategies for Teaching, Learning, and Evaluating by Regie Routman.
http://homepage.mac.com/ericmacknight/reading.html

Reading Coach’s Corner

Star Reading Athlete of the Month
---- Caron Schiffman ----

Even before school started Caron approached reading coach, Lisa Cox, requesting reading materials for sustained silent reading for her physical education classes. Downtown Cycles in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida gladly donated and promised to provide more during the school year. Caron is an outstanding teacher, always diligently guiding her students to strengthen their bodies and their minds while becoming better readers.

Contact Lisa Cox for reading strategies and techniques for your classes.