

Scaffolded Silent Reading (ScSR)

Advocating a Policy for Adolescents' Independent Reading

KAREN P. WALKER

A research report by the National Endowment for the Arts (2007) titled *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* states that trends show Americans are reading less and, in particular, that early adolescents and young adults “read less often for shorter amounts of time when compared with other age groups and with Americans of the past” (p. 7). This decline is often associated with aliteracy, which is defined as “the lack of the reading habit in capable readers” (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Allington (2001) suggests that citizens should be concerned that as students progress through the upper grades, the amount of reading they do declines. In light of this claim, he suggests redesigning literacy programs so that students are expected to read more during the school day. I wholeheartedly agree with Allington’s suggestion and have worked with school districts to advocate for a policy to increase independent reading time among adolescents. Independent reading may be practiced in or out of school, allowing students to independently acquire meaning from self-selected texts, both print based and digital (Moss & Young, 2010; Reutzel, Jones, & Newman, 2010).

In my visits to schools as a professor of reading, I have found that independent reading is often a vital missing ingredient in many school districts’ literacy curriculum. The



Karen P. Walker is an assistant professor at Rockford University, Illinois, USA; e-mail Kwalker@rockford.edu.



The department editor welcomes reader comments. Fenice B. Boyd is an associate professor at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York, USA; e-mail fboyd@buffalo.edu.

nationwide movement toward the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) requires districts to rethink their literacy curriculum and what instruction will entail. The designers of the CCSS assert that for a student to be college and career ready, they must demonstrate proficiency in literacy by the end of high school. The English language arts (ELA) standards state: “To build a foundation for college and career readiness, students must read widely and deeply from among a broad range of high-quality, increasingly challenging literary and informational texts” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 10). Further, students are expected to comprehend complex texts from a variety of genres to acquire “a reservoir of literacy and cultural knowledge, references and images (p. 35). Students’ independent reading is foundational to achieving high levels of literacy proficiency and academic success, which is the ultimate goal of the standards (Allington, 2001; Krashen, 2004).

Nonnegotiable Literacy Policy: Independent Student Reading

If adolescents are to become better readers, then one approach is for school districts to establish a nonnegotiable policy that requires students to participate in a structured independent reading program during secondary school years. Literacy educators have argued consistently that “students who read independently become better readers, score higher on achievement tests in all subject areas, and have greater content knowledge than those who do not” (Cullinan, 2000, p. 2; see also Krashen, 2004). Recently, as part of the 2011 national reading assessment, high school students were asked about the amount of time they spent reading for fun. The study revealed that 17-year-olds who read more for fun scored 11% higher on average

than those who did not read for fun (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

If we want students to become lifelong readers, then we must provide them with encouragement and support to read during the school day. A survey of adolescent readers shows that an important support is classroom access to diverse reading materials (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Donalyn Miller states, “I have observed that my students are more likely to read a book at home that they have started reading at school” (Miller, 2009, p. 51), and Anderson, Fielding, and Wilson (1988) assert that when students are encouraged to read a book in school, they are more likely to continue to read outside school than students who are never encouraged to begin a book in school. We must be cautious, however, because there are many challenges associated with traditional sustained silent reading (SSR); scaffolded silent reading (ScSR) is a much more effective literacy practice to implement with adolescent readers (Reutzel et al., 2010).

Scaffolded Silent Reading (ScSR)

The term *scaffolded silent reading* is often used synonymously with *sustained silent reading*, but in fact these literacy practices are not the same. SSR has often been criticized for a “lack of teacher guidance to assist with students selecting appropriately challenging texts to read; poor control of the time allocated for reading practice; little or no teacher interaction with students around reading texts; no feedback to students about the quality and quantity of their reading; and no student accountability, purposes, or goals for the time spent in reading practice” (Reutzel et al., 2008, p. 195). In contrast, ScSR “redesigns silent reading practice conditions to deal affirmatively with past concerns and criticisms surrounding traditionally implemented SSR....ScSR is intended to provide students with the necessary support, guidance, structure, accountability, and monitoring so they can transfer their successful oral reading skills to successful and effective silent reading practice” (Reutzel, Jones, Fawson, & Smith, 2008, p. 196). For adolescents, an

ScSR provides students with support so they can transfer oral to silent reading practice.

effective ScSR program should include the following components:

- An accessible, organized, leveled classroom and/or school library
- Appropriate matching of students and texts
- Student- and teacher-led book talks
- Quarterly reading goals set by students
- Consistent time to read independently
- Active teacher instruction, guidance, interaction, and monitoring of students
- Teacher facilitation of regular book conferences with students
- Independent student reading log and response portfolio
- Book response opportunities
- Recognition and feedback for students’ independent reading

Implementing an ScSR program will require changes in the daily instructional practices and routines of all secondary teachers and students. Many content area teachers do not see themselves as connected to or responsible for students’ reading development. To shift this way of thinking, all teachers (not just the ELA faculty) should implement an ScSR program. Such change can produce anxiety and frustration among all stakeholders. A beneficial response to anticipated challenges related to the implementation of a policy is to provide high-quality, long-term professional development (PD). PD associated with implementation of an independent student reading policy cannot be the traditional one-shot session at the start of the school year, with no support and follow-up. Instead, there should be a minimum of a two-year job embedded PD plan to ensure valuable implementation of an adolescent structured independent reading program. PD sessions should enable teachers to acquire an understanding of how to

- create an accessible, organized, leveled classroom library
- support students’ self-selection of reading materials by administering and analyzing students’ reading-interest surveys
- facilitate consistent book talks and scaffolding the task to students

- facilitate a book conference with students
- create, use, and monitor independent student reading portfolios for assessment purposes
- build students' metacognitive skills by scaffolding comprehension instruction from shared and guided reading into independent reading

High-quality PD is a necessity for implementing a structured independent reading program such as ScSR. The success of ScSR depends on identifying and supporting a person or group who can assume a leadership role in facilitating the practice in order to establish policy. The principal and teacher leaders should receive the initial training so that they can serve as instructional models and advocates for ScSR to ensure that all classroom teachers receive training and support.

ScSR Leadership

Progressive school leaders prioritize independent reading and establish it as a nonnegotiable component of a comprehensive literacy program. The primary goals of an independent student reading policy are to improve literacy achievement among adolescents and cultivate a lifelong habit of reading a variety of genres (e.g., graphic novels, fiction, poetry, and informational), as well as digital texts (e.g., e-books). Strengthening independent student reading practices in middle and high school requires a strategic, systemic plan that has a laser focus on (a) building principal and teacher capacity to facilitate ScSR practices, (b) supporting teacher growth and progress with ScSR implementation, (c) increasing parent and community awareness and involvement with ScSR, (d) implementing systemic professional development on ScSR, and (e) implementing a system for monitoring progress and evaluating student outcomes of a ScSR policy. Accomplishing the goals of the policy will require specific actions from district leaders and building administrators.

District and building leaders will need to identify a critical mass of teachers who can become promoters for ScSR in their buildings, particularly among grade-level colleagues. Policy will have greater sustainability as leadership capacity is developed among teachers so that they become a leadership team for independent student reading. This team should be made up of critical stakeholders who carry a considerable amount

Take Action

STEPS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION

Literacy is synonymous with liberty. If a district desires its adolescents to be successful individuals who can matriculate to college and career opportunities, then as educators we must emphasize quality literacy instruction that includes a policy for independent student reading. Policy advocacy goes beyond the personal decision making of one individual; rather, it is a social and political activity that requires analytic work (Bardach, 2009, p. xv). To lead a successful implementation of an independent reading policy for adolescents, advocates should:

- ✓ **Speak up!** Clearly articulate the goal of independent student reading. Goals that are specific, effectively communicated, and understood can energize and motivate stakeholders to complete necessary action steps. (DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008).
- ✓ **Do the homework!** Think deeply about the benefits, challenges, and possible response to challenges that may occur with the implementation of a ScSR program. Establish a clear understanding of why and how the policy will benefit the entire school community.
- ✓ **Get the team together!** Organize a critical mass of supporters. The success of ScSR includes the involvement of administrators and teachers who will leader others in adopting a new literacy practice.

of political force along with passion and knowledge regarding independent student reading. Participating teachers' leadership capacity will be expanded in buildings, with support, allowing them to become instructional models for ScSR among their colleagues.

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