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Research Road

Catching Up or Staying Up: Bridging the Summer Reading Gap Is Vital For All Students

Warm air embraces their skin, diminutive attention spans grow shorter, and heavy backpacks are eagerly discarded. Students are ready for the three-month break. Unfortunately, research shows that some children cannot afford to take such a long recess. Regardless of other activities, the best predictor of summer academic loss or gain is whether or not a child reads during the summer. One summer can sometimes mean a whole school year of struggling academic performance.

According to an article written by Anne McGill-Franzen and Richard Allington (2001), two top researchers in education, the research on the summer reading gap highlights several issues related to learning losses over the summer:

- A 1996 University of Missouri study found "an annual reading achievement gap of about 3 months between students from middle- and lower-income families." The middle-income children's achievement remained stable or increased.
- In the elementary grades, "a summer loss of 3 months accumulates to become a gap of 18 months by the end of 6th grade. By middle school, summer reading loss... produces a cumulative lag of two or more years in reading achievement, even when

effective instruction during the school year is available."

- Another study illustrated that "Children with a history of less successful reading experiences simply aren't as interested in voluntary reading..." and that often "Lower-achieving readers are typically asked to read books that are too difficult."

- Building on student interest can stimulate voluntary reading, even among lower-achieving readers.

- According to the National Reading Panel's 2000 report, hundreds of correlational studies suggest that "the more children read, the better their fluency, vocabulary and comprehension." (p.12)

Teachers play an integral part in reinforcing the importance of independent reading during the break. Several instructional strategies are imperative in the success of motivating students to read during the summer, and many of the strategies can be implemented throughout the school year.

- **Book Talks**—teachers (and students) prepare short and focused "advertisements" for a book they have read. See the Secondary Literacy Website www.visalia.k12.ca.us/literacy for more ideas on Book Talks.

- **Independent Reading (SSR)**—teachers provide students regular time in class and assign time out of class for students to read books that are self selected and in their appropriate independent reading range.

- **Book Conferences**—teachers confer regularly with students about what they are reading independently. Teachers also provide students time to talk in class to their peers about the books they are currently reading.

- **Back to School Reading Activity**—teachers set reading guidelines and plan instructional activities that reinforce what students read during the summer. (i.e., Book Conferences, Book Talks, Reflection Project)

As students hit the door on the last day of school, leaving a strong impression that learning does not take a sabbatical is essential. In addition to the effective instruction that teachers offer their students during the school year, young readers need more time to practice reading. Summer is the ideal time for students to pick up a book and read.



Instructional Interstate

Post-Assessment Data Informs Instructional Practices

Dreading the Saturday afternoon of grading that will follow a unit final exam, should be the exception not the norm. Teachers obtain valuable information about their choice of instructional strategies for a unit of study through the formative and summative assessments they give their students.

Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins, leading researchers in the field of instructional planning and authors of Understanding By Design, purport that teachers must first decide what students will need to understand and how they will assess that understanding. Then teachers plan instructional strategies that support that. Simply teaching and then waiting until the final exam to find out if students truly "understand" what was taught is not enough. Taking the time to consider what students understand or do not, and using

the information from assessments will provide educators with valuable information about their students and the learning that transpires in the classroom. Assessment data will also help determine if the instructional strategies teachers use to teach concepts are appropriately aligned with standards and assessments. Student data will, moreover, enlighten teachers' reflections for next steps in teaching.

Assessments at the end of unit are essential in informing decision making. So are end of the year reading assessments. Many teachers administered one of the following informal reading inventories at the beginning of the school year: Botel Word Opposites, McDougal Littell Reading Placement Test, and the Globe Fearon Secondary Reading Assessment Inventory.

Teachers should administer the same assessment—perhaps in the post version—in the last few weeks of instruction.

Information garnered from the post-assessment can be compared to pre-test scores. Students will be interested in their scores and how they have improved or reached a plateau. This opportunity for students allows them to reflect on themselves as learners, and teachers receive more information about what they can continue to reinforce in their instruction.

Taking the time to reflect on learning and understanding requires careful study of assessment data and student work. The discovery of what works in instruction and incorporating that information into careful planning will inevitably provide students with success in literacy.

Strategy Street

Indelible Strategies Improve Student Engagement



“Cross over if you believe that parents should have a say in who you date,” announced Mrs. J as her students participated in pre reading activity prior to reading *Romeo and Juliet*. The students are lined up in two lines, facing each other, and across the room. As Mrs. J reads a statement pertaining to the theme of the Shakespearean play, the students stay in place or move, depending on their point of view. The students do not talk during the activity, but they will.

“I can’t believe that you would consider that parents should have a say in who you date. I would never let my parents set me up,” remarked one student to another, as they left for the day.

Mrs. J has her students participate in engaging activities like “cross over” regularly. She allows time at the end of the activity for students to debrief the activity in small groups first and whole group as necessary. Her students like the novelty of these activities and appreciate the connection she makes to the unit of study.

Current brain research suggests that students who have been actively engaged in cooperative and experiential learning are better able to retain and make use of content knowledge. When students explore information in multiple ways and are challenged to use this information in new and appropriate contexts, both the depth and the breadth of their understanding are increased. Additionally, a number of potential classroom management difficulties can be minimized simply by implementing learning activities that require all students to move about, interact with their peers, and make productive use of their imaginations.

There are a number of engaging instructional activities that teachers can implement with their curriculum. A few of these activities are summarized in this chart:

Cooperative/Engagement		
Strategy	Description	Classroom Application
Make an Appointment Clock Day/Night Partner Season Partner	Students make an appointment with peers then they meet with that particular appointment partner when the teacher directs during a formal instructional situation.	Provides students the opportunities to solve problems Answer questions Complete tasks assigned by the teacher
Four Corners	Teachers select four categories or choices for students, then each individual student moves to the area that they believe most closely corresponds to his/her response. Discussion of student positioning is imperative.	Activates prior knowledge Investigates the perspectives of opinions of groups and individuals Stimulates the thinking of students engaged in small group or individual projects Review material prior to a test
Think-Write-Pair-Share Think-Ink-Link	Teachers pose a question or a situation, students write their response, then meet with partner and share their response. Whole group debrief is recommended.	Includes all students in discussion or processing information Interaction in a lecture Students solve problems Look for similarities and differences in answers or responses
Grouping	Students work in teacher assigned or student selected groups (4-6 students) to complete assigned work. Each student is responsible for a particular role in the group.	Stimulates the thinking of students engaged in small group or individual projects Flexibility allows for students to interact, compare answers and solve problems with a variety of learning strengths
Planned Physical Movement	Teachers plan for students to get up and move during a cooperative learning activity at least once during a period.	Provides novelty—meeting with different peers Movement from one area to another aids in retention of information Students see how the perspectives of other students compare with theirs
Give One, Get One	Students write their answers or responses for a particular assignment independently, then they meet with a partner or small group, and give an answer they believe is correct, then get an answer they did not previously have.	Activates prior knowledge Review prior to test Implemented in guided activities
Partner Reading	Students read assigned text (in small chunks) with a peer. One student reads out loud alternating the reader role, or both read silently and stop to discuss before reading on.	Shared reading strategy Provide opportunities for multiple readings

Literacy Crossroads Staff
 Editor/Chief Contributor
 Alice Patterson
 Secondary Literacy Coach
 Production Manager
 Stacey Curschman
 Curriculum Coordinator 7/12

- Topics for Next Year**
- Revisiting Effective Assessment
 - Integrating Balanced Literacy Model
 - Best Practices
 - Collegial Support



“Raising Expectations”