

Six Literacy Experiences Children Should Have Every Day

(Originally titled “Every Child Every Day”)

In this important *Educational Leadership* article, Richard Allington (University of Tennessee/Knoxville) and Rachael Gabriel (University of Connecticut/Storrs) present six high-quality experiences they believe all children should have every day if they are to become successful, engaged readers. These experiences are especially important for struggling readers – but tragically, they’re least likely to have these experiences.

- *Every child reads something he or she chooses.* “The research base on student-selected reading is robust and conclusive,” say Allington and Gabriel. “Students read more, understand more, and are more likely to continue reading when they have the opportunity to choose what they read.”

- *Every child reads accurately.* This means reading material at the “just right” level of difficulty. Spending more time reading doesn’t help unless students are reading at 98 percent or higher accuracy. “When students read accurately, they solidify their word-recognition, decoding, and word-analysis skills,” say Allington and Gabriel. “Perhaps more important, they are likely to understand what they read – and, as a result, to enjoy reading.”

- *Every child reads something he or she understands.* Comprehension is the goal of reading instruction, say the authors. “But too often, struggling readers get interventions that focus on basic skills in isolation, rather than on reading connected text for meaning. This common misuse of intervention time often arises from a grave misinterpretation of what we know about reading difficulties.” Struggling readers aren’t “wired differently”, as some brain research implies. Their brains benefit from high-quality reading instruction with engaging and comprehensible content. The bottom line: more authentic reading develops better readers.

- *Every child writes about something personally meaningful.* “The opportunity to compose continuous text about something meaningful is not just something nice to have when there’s free time after a test or at the end of the school year,” say Allington and Gabriel. “Writing provides a different modality within which to practice the skills and strategies of reading for an authentic purpose.”

- *Every child talks with peers about reading and writing.* Research shows that conversations with classmates improve comprehension and engagement with texts – students analyze, comment, and compare, thinking about what they read. “Time for students to talk about their reading and writing is perhaps one of the most underused, yet easy-to-implement, elements of instruction,” say the authors.

- *Every child listens to a fluent adult read aloud.* Listening to a competent adult modeling good reading helps students with vocabulary, background knowledge, sense of

the story, awareness of genre and text structure, and comprehension – and yet few teachers above first grade regularly read aloud to their students.

“Most of the classroom instruction we have observed lacks these six research-based elements,” conclude Allington and Gabriel. Here are their two suggestions:

- Eliminate virtually all worksheets and workbooks and use the money to expand classroom libraries.
- Ban test-prep activities and materials from the school day. There’s no evidence that they improve reading or test scores.

“Every Child Every Day” by Richard Allington and Rachael Gabriel in *Educational Leadership*, March 2012 (Vol. 69, #6, p. 10-15), <http://www.ascd.org>; the authors can be reached at richardallington@aol.com and Rachael.gabriel@uconn.edu.