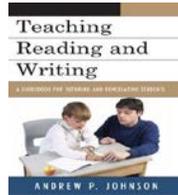


A BALANCED READING PROGRAM

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This is an excerpt from my book: [Teaching Reading and Writing: A Guidebook for Remediating Students](#) (2008), published by Rowman and Littlefield Education

Reading programs need to be balanced (Cunningham & Allington, 2007). This means that it's not all just one thing (like all phonics instruction, or all reading, or all writing, or all anything). Instead, there's a little bit of this and a little bit of that. You may not have noticed, but children are not standardized products. Children learn differently, in different ways, and at different rates. Thus, in learning to read, some children need a little more of one thing while others need bit more of another thing. Trying to push all children through the same reading program will result in the slowed growth of some and the frustration of others. This practice is called teaching the program and not children. Effective teachers teach children. Factory workers teach the program. Whenever possible, strive to be a teacher, not a factory worker.

What Does a Balanced Program Look Like?

A balanced reading program has the following characteristics:

- 1. The number one priority is to help children fall in love with book** (described above). After this, reading instruction is easy.
- 2. Conditions are created to enable students learn to read.** We don't teach children to read as much as we create the conditions whereby they can learn to read. Some children learn to read in spite of what we do to them. Instead of calling it reading class, why don't you call it reading practice? Remember, reading is creating meaning with print. It is **NOT** sounding out letters. It is **NOT** pronouncing words (see below).
- 3. You teach multiple ways to recognize words.** Remember, phonics is just one of six ways to recognize words. And it is the least efficient in terms of thinking space used. These six work recognition strategies are:

- **Context clues.** Figuring out what the word is by looking at what makes sense in the sentence.
- **PSR/morphemic analysis.** Figuring out what the word is by looking at the prefix, suffix, or root word.
- **Word analysis/word families.** Figuring out what the word is by looking at word families or parts of the word you recognize.
- **Ask a friend.** Turn to a friend and say, "What's this word?"

- **Skip the word.** If you are still creating meaning, why stop the process to figure out a word?
- **Phonics.** Using minimal letter cues in combination with context clues to figure out what the word is.

4. There is lots of reading practice. Would you expect to get better at playing golf without practicing? Certainly not. In the same way, all humans get better at reading by practicing it. Time set aside for silent reading, is one of the best things you can do to promote and enhance reading (Cunningham & Allington, 2007). How much time should you set aside? You might start with the following generally guidelines: 15 to 30 minutes in primary grades; 30 to 60 minutes in intermediate grades, 40 to 90 minutes in middle school and high school. Earlier in the year, younger children might only be able to focus for 10 to 15 minutes. Once they learn that reading is something they'll do every day and that it is a pleasurable experience, they become will be able to read for longer periods of time.

5. Children are invited to choose easy books. As adults, we don't always choose "challenging" material to read; we choose pleasurable material to read. Inviting children sometimes read easier material reinforces the pleasurable aspects and enhances reading fluency. Children need to be able to practice reading by choosing easy books to read (Zemelman, Daniles, & Hyde, 2005).

6. Students are allowed to make choices about reading material. Can you image, as an adult, if you could only read what people assigned you to read? What would it be like if you couldn't go into a library and look for a book that interested you? Choice is one of the most powerful motivators for reading and needs to be included in any reading program (Zemelman, Daniles, & Hyde, 2005). However, this doesn't mean total choice all the time. Rather, there are three continuums of choice: First, a choice within a sample. Example, "We've got five books we're going to read this week. You can choose the one that you wish to read." Second, choice within a category. Example: "This month we're looking at historical fiction and historical nonfiction. You can select any book related to the Civil War. Third, total choice. Example: "Find a book that you would enjoy reading."

7. Reading practice sessions (classes) have more reading than skills work. Constance Weaver (2002) suggests the following formula: *70-80% authentic reading. 20-30% skills work.*

8. Authentic literacy activities are used most often – not contrived basal skills worksheets. There's nothing wrong with a worksheet, as long as these aren't the only thing you use. If you look through a basal teacher's manual you'll notice that a lot of the worksheets have absolutely nothing to do with enjoying the story or helping students to create meaning with text. Part of your responsibility as an intelligence and creative teacher of reading is to save your students from these contrived sorts of activities. (These alternative activities and assignments comprise the majority of this book.)

9. Teachers are allowed (by their district and principal) to make choices about their students. There's a movement today for more top-down mandates by state and federal governments and by school districts. These entities, who do not know you or your children, want to tell you how to teach, what to teach, when to teach it, and how long to teach it.

Our schools need creative and intelligent teachers, yet these teachers are often denied the ability to use their creativity and intelligence in designing learning experiences. When teachers are allowed to make decisions related to teaching and learning, student achievement is enhanced (Sweetland & Hoy, 2002) and schools become more effective learning communities (Detert,

Louis, & Schroeder, 2001). However, with freedom comes responsibility. Teachers must then be responsible for making sure they know what a body of research says is effective related to teaching and learning.

10. Seat work is not used to simply keep students busy. In the old days (and sometimes in the new days), students were given seat work to keep them busy while the teacher worked with a small group. This sort of busy work was often meaningless and had more to do with measuring students and keeping them silent (passive) than helping them enjoy good books or create meaning with text. In an effective literacy environment students spend most of their time reading, writing, and talking about literacy.

11. Voluntary reading is promoted. Voluntary reading is the reading children do at home or when on their own when they are not required to do so. This is related to helping children fall in love with reading and to providing lots of reading practice (opportunities for sustained silent reading [SSR]). The amount (volume) of reading children do is related to fluency, comprehension, and achievement (Allington, 2006).

12. Round robin reading is avoided. Round robin reading is the practice of going around a circle or room and calling on children to read sections out loud. This is a silly practice that does more to discourage and humiliate non readers than help them. Also, it slows down the reading process and decreases comprehension. But most importantly, this is not what real life readers do. (I have yet to go into a library and see people sitting around a table taking turns reading out loud.)

“Well how do I know the student is reading the assignment?”

Story maps, book talks, double journal entries are just some of the ways.

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During a balanced reading program there is always some whole class teaching that typically lasts from five to ten minutes. The teacher instructs the whole class on a skill, strategy, or habit that students need to learn and use during independent reading. The mini-lesson connects to a previous lesson, ongoing unit of study, or student work or experience. The teaching point is stated clearly and demonstrated or modeled. Mini-lessons may precede a Read Aloud, take the form of a Shared Reading activity, or be incorporated into a Guided Reading activity. Shared Reading In shared reading students s Teacher reads book children have not read before to a stopping point. They read silently to the stopping point; completing worksheet along the way. All discuss. Shared Reading. Teacher reads aloud to the students and periodically asks questions about predictions, connections, etc discusses as reads to them. Reading workshops. focus on a teaching skill in reading and have them practice it. directed writing. you have to choose relevent details from a passage to meet a specific need, illustrate a particular argument, make a certain case, ect. You will also be told about the audience that you a...Â balanced reading program. focusses on both reading each word accurately and comprehension. process writing.